



## CUBS CATEGORY



*Imagination, creativity, exuberance, passion, sweetness, loyalty, are typical characteristics of childhood.*

*The age group that goes from 8 to 10 years old can be a golden age for learning, a fertile period characterised by a high motor and intellectual availability.*

## 9 THE PSYCHO-MOTOR PROFILE OF THE 8-10 YEAR OLD CHILD AND HIS RELATIONSHIPS



The objective of teaching football to children can be summed up in the following sentence: *to move - with technical/tactical competence - with other team mates - to reach common objectives - by having fun.*

If this is the prospective in which teaching football is inserted, there are a few operational consequences, which, if applied may be helpful to the actions of the coaches and the adults that interact with the children.

### 9.1 WHAT CHILDREN ARE LOOKING FOR IN FOOTBALL



The motivations that characterise children in this age group are the following: to take pleasure from athletic actions, to move and think, knowing that they take calculated risks and knowing how to live as a group. To take pleasure in athletic actions is extremely important as it satisfies one of the motivations that determine athletic involvement: that of enthusing, of having fun and of spending energy through movement. Football allows them to satisfy this motivation through training sessions in which there is an adequate variety of exercises, some that are easier to carry out, others that are more difficult, in which the boys are constantly committed, reducing the pause and waiting times to a minimum. To move while thinking means to learn how to use ones thought during play. To have football players that are psychologically independent on the field should be the objective of every coach, this means that in the most high-pressure competitive moments they are able not to loose their minds and to continue pursuing their game objectives. This attitude must be built in young people right from their childhood making them carry out exercises that force them to make decisions, reinforcing not only the correctness of their choices but especially their ability to make those choices. Therefore the child must not only be taught to act according to the instructions they receive from the coach, but they must also be able to solve game situations independently.

The concept of moving while thinking, is well linked to the knowledge of how to assume calculated risks during the game. We often hear coaches state that young players rarely shoot to goal and do not know how to dribble. From a psychological point of view, these are risky situations for the individual, in which it is possible

to make mistakes and to be seen as an egocentric or as being too individualistic. Surely to play a team sport requires a group spirit and the ability to work for the team, but it also requires creative expressions and the ability to take on individual responsibilities (even making a wrong shot). The role of the coach is essential in facilitating the affirmation of this mentality. The child will take some risks if he knows that the coach appreciates this course of action and does not only praise correct actions and those who have been prepared beforehand with the team. It is therefore necessary to maintain the balance between individual risk and collective play and the training sessions are there to teach the children how to act this way. The last dimension to develop is the ability to live in a group. The feeling of being part of a certain social context, in this case the football team, satisfies a primary need and, therefore, knowing how to abide by the rules of the group, cooperating in a competitive environment, learning how to set personal objectives above those of the team are among the key elements of the education of each individual.

## 9.2 THE RULES

**I**n relation to their peers, children aged 8-10 years prefer those who show cooperation and reciprocation. At this age, favourite children are not only chosen according to their strictly individual characteristics (for example, the mastery of the game or physical strength), but also on the basis of their interpersonal skills, such as loyalty and reciprocal acceptance. Training should be structured so as to incentive the cooperation among players, this way it facilitates the affirmation of the ability to see things from another's point of view, putting a limit to the individualisms in play that are only cause of disagreements in the team and that could only be solved by the children by applying the laws of reciprocity: "You didn't pass the ball, now I won't either". The sense of belonging to the team group has an essential role in the development of the ability to cooperate and the more sense of friendship the children can develop, the more the cohesion on the field. On the contrary, the less interpersonal relationships there are, the more will be the tendency to break the established rules and less will be the acceptance of other people's behaviour. Regarding the rules established by the coach, the children of this age interpret them less as arbitrary methods of control and they understand their motivation and use. If in the preceding age group they were more



used to thinking that the coach imposed the rules “because he is a grown-up, because he is stronger, because he knows when we are telling lies”, now the children think that they must obey “because he knows what is more useful for us and because he is more of an expert”. Therefore, children accept the rules that the coach establishes and they understand the advantages they offer and, at the same time, the coaches, in order to maintain this positive condition, need to act coherently with what they have established. In fact, now the children know when adults do not respect the rules and they demand explanations, which must obviously be provided.

### 9.3 ACCEPTING DEFEAT OR MAKING OBJECTIONS TO THE REFEREE OR THE COACH



**A**dults (parents, coach and chaperones) have a fundamental role in providing the young boy with a system to interpret what happens during the match. Still all too often, we hear coaches shout from their benches against the children who do not carry out instructions or against the referees (even louder if she is a woman!), or parents who want to substitute coaches or insult him because he is not letting their son play. In these cases the objective is to express ones passions, without worrying about the effects it produces and in any case with the intention of offending the person on the receiving end. In this regard the indications to follow are the same as those used in football at an international level and that regard fair play, the so-called sportsmanship. In this regard, the parents must sustain their children, by showing affectionate comprehension towards them, listening to their football experiences, sustaining the enthusiasm the children demonstrate and by asking them if they are having fun. As far as the coaches are concerned, the favourites are those that are able to: reinforce, encourage after a mistake, appreciate commitment, organise activities precisely and maintain discipline. On the contrary the least preferred coaches are those who most frequently provide: punishments, technical instructions provided in a punishing manner after a mistake and that cannot maintain discipline. Basically children want to learn and improve their athletic competence in an environment that is regulated by precise rules and in which they feel psychologically sustained.

Finally, if we want the children to learn to be responsible, brave, work as a team and maintain a high level of commitment we cannot let them learn from adults to give the blame for their mistakes or those

of the team and defeats to the referee or to other external factors. The more adult behaviour explain encountered difficulties in terms of blame, the more probability of the children not developing the abovementioned psychological characteristics. For example the children will feel authorised to object to the referee's decision if they have seen the coach (or other adults) do so.

## 9.4 HOW TO EXPERIENCE THE MATCH

**C**hildren before a match feel a sensation of strong curiosity towards what they are about to do, they want to win, have fun, show how good they are and can not wait to start. The objective of the adults, from the chaperone to the parent and the coach, should be that of supporting this positive environment that is full of psychological energy, without transforming the game into a final of the World Cup. The coaches will have to convey to the children the conviction that the whole team, through collective commitment, will succeed in satisfying each of their motivations. Furthermore, the game should be used to understand how every child experiences mistakes; as something to hide or justify or as the only chance of improvement? An evaluation of what attitude and reaction is determined by the mistake would allow the coach to train the children to take on a more correct approach. A suggestion: before putting this process into action the coach should ask himself: "am I aware of how I experience my mistakes and how I react to the mistakes of the team? Is there something I want to do to improve myself?"



## 10 PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF THE 8-10 YEAR OLD CHILD

The children at this age have passed the egocentric phase that has characterised their behaviour in the preceding years. They begin to acquire a pre-disposition to cooperation and to decentralise the quality of their locomotor actions, which are inserted in a collective play context; in other words, the needs of the team begin to take on a non subordinate hierarchical position compared to individualism, which was at the centre of their behaviour in the past. This pre-disposes the didactical plan to conceive technical teaching in an applied context, where the relationship with the ball is regulated on a cognitive level by situational afferences. The nature of the proposed exercises will be characterised by a



continuously evolving environment, space and time parameters will have to solicit continuous adaptations.

The behavioural keys to technique, available to create efficient adaptations, will not be given as they were years ago on an exclusively biomechanical level, but will have to be functional, in a dialectic process where the quality of the move and the applicability of the latter interact and are integrated. This means that, even if the didactical plan provides for times in which the pupil will have to pay attention to how to carry out a technical move, the situational kind of training will prevail. The example shown in FIGURE 16, defines the technical behaviour of a pass in an extremely simplified game context, where the player in ball possession will have to be careful not only of **how** he carries out the technical move, but also to **when** to pass and **where** to pass, according to the movements of his team mate to get free from cover and to the movement of the defender placed on the line (simplified situation).

## 10.1 BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING IN THE CUBS CATEGORY



**T**he plan that we will build, will have three big parameters as references, which interact in a game's performance: technical, tactical, and physical.

On a technical level, the great objectives to obtain regard the fundamental technical behaviours, essential operational instruments that help to solve tactical problems during the game. To favour a better technical behaviour means that the training itinerary will not have a development that is exclusively aimed at the acquisition of a precise model, but it will have to undergo solicitations where "obstacles" of a coordinative nature will imply continuous adaptations. In the same way the execution of the various moves will receive solicitations of a spatial-temporal nature, referred to the search for speed, the presence of the opponent, in a situation of greater or less complexity, according to the degree of acquired ability. The tactical aspect strictly linked to the technical environment, and it could not be otherwise considering the nature of the game, will tend to build cooperative behaviours, which, in the phase of ball possession and non possession, are fundamental regulators of collective behaviours. We refer to for example the concepts of support, assistance, wall passes or defensive positioning, coverage of space and movement towards the opponent in ball possession.

All these behaviours will have to be solicited through a continuous





“AT THE FEDERAL FOOTBALL SCHOOL OF ACQUACETOSA IN ROME, THE CHILDREN EXERCISE WITH DOUBLE-LAYERED RUBBER BALLS”

research that will develop through the game, where the intervention of the coach will have the purpose of generating enthusiasm, curiosity, exploration; the child will have to, in an independent form, find efficient solutions by soliciting his cognitive “plant” and generate continuous solutions. We must not make up stereotyped solutions for him, and continuously suggest what actions to carry out, but we should contribute to the formation of the autonomy that will be fundamental for him to be able to find effective solutions during a competition. As far as the development

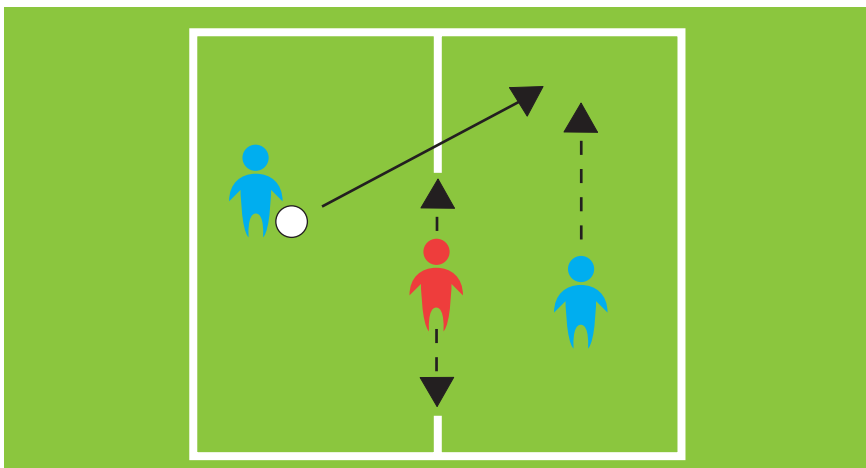


FIGURE 16 - Simplified game situation to carry out unmarking (the tackler)

of the physical component is concerned, we absolutely must not think about the athletic preparation of adults; often one tends to imitate what the grown-ups do by proposing physical exercises that risk doing damage to the skeletal system of the growing child. Definitely we must propose games of rapidity, giving particular attention to the frequency of movements, being attentive to exercises where the child will have to respond rapidly (reaction ability) to stimuli of a visual or acoustic nature, the aerobic component will have to be solicited through play, avoiding too much idle time within the lesson (excessively long and useless explanations, long waiting lines). The annual working plan will have to be conceived through a segmentation of time where it is clear how the various links of the training process are organised hierarchically in order to build and solicit technical and tactical behaviours that are appropriate at that age. The instructor, from a methodological point of view, more than direct and impart orders, will have to observe to eventually modify the content and the method; his task will be to create an environment that is rich in motivation, and stimulating the children's pleasure and interest in training. He will not have to use disapproving behaviour to correct reiterated mistakes, this produces anxiety, in-confidence, and deactivates every naturally present impulse in the child to improve. Vice versa, in the correction of mistakes, he must praise the good part and then move on in his intervention to correct the part that was done badly. Furthermore we must not consider the boy as a miniature adult and, coherently to the propositions of a training session, also the model of play (5vs5 and 7vs7), will be structured in reduced areas and number of players, "like clothes that grow with the person that is wearing them", also the structure of the game should change coherently with the psycho-physical availability of the child. An adequate space and number of players allows greater involvement, a higher number of contacts with the ball, a greater dynamism between phases of possession and non-possession, a greater number of goal conclusions.

## 10.2 THE DIDACTICAL OBJECTIVES



**A**s the game structures change, so the didactical objectives and the training pathways have an itinerary that conforms to the needs of the child. In Table 12 we illustrate a summary of the didactical plan proposed in the course of the three years of cub activity. The movement repertoire acquired will allow the young



player to effectively measure himself against a group of his peers, will allow him to express himself in a creative and personal way, placing him at the centre of the didactical plan. Such a plan will be able to guarantee to each child the possibility of completely expressing his potential, not forcing him to become a champion but at the same time not denying him the dream of maybe, one day, becoming one.



## 11 THE ASPECT OF REGULATION AND THE DIDACTICAL RULES OF THE GAME IN THE CUBS CATEGORY



In the Cubs category the matches are disputed through games that have 5,6 or 7 players per team. Naturally, as we will see, the modalities of the game have been pin-pointed by considering various aspects, first of all the abilities and the cognitive, physical, and technical-coordinative requirements of the children in the various age groups, proposing a “model of football that is custom-made for the child”.

Another aspect that should not be left unattended regards the fact of letting all the children play more. To actuate this principle the clubs are invited to organise, during the same competition, more than one match at the same time, with the consequent possibility of letting all the children available play, at the cost of playing matches with a minor number of players compared to the expected (for example 4vs4) or to compose “mixed” teams, should one of the two clubs have more players on the list than the other. Therefore, in this category, it will be possible to organise two, three, four or more matches at the same time. But it does not end here. In fact, the determination of the score will be different: every half-time of the game will be a match in itself, therefore the following half will start over again at a score of 0-0 and the new entries will have the opportunity of playing with intact motivation, even if the preceding fraction of the game has ended in disadvantage.

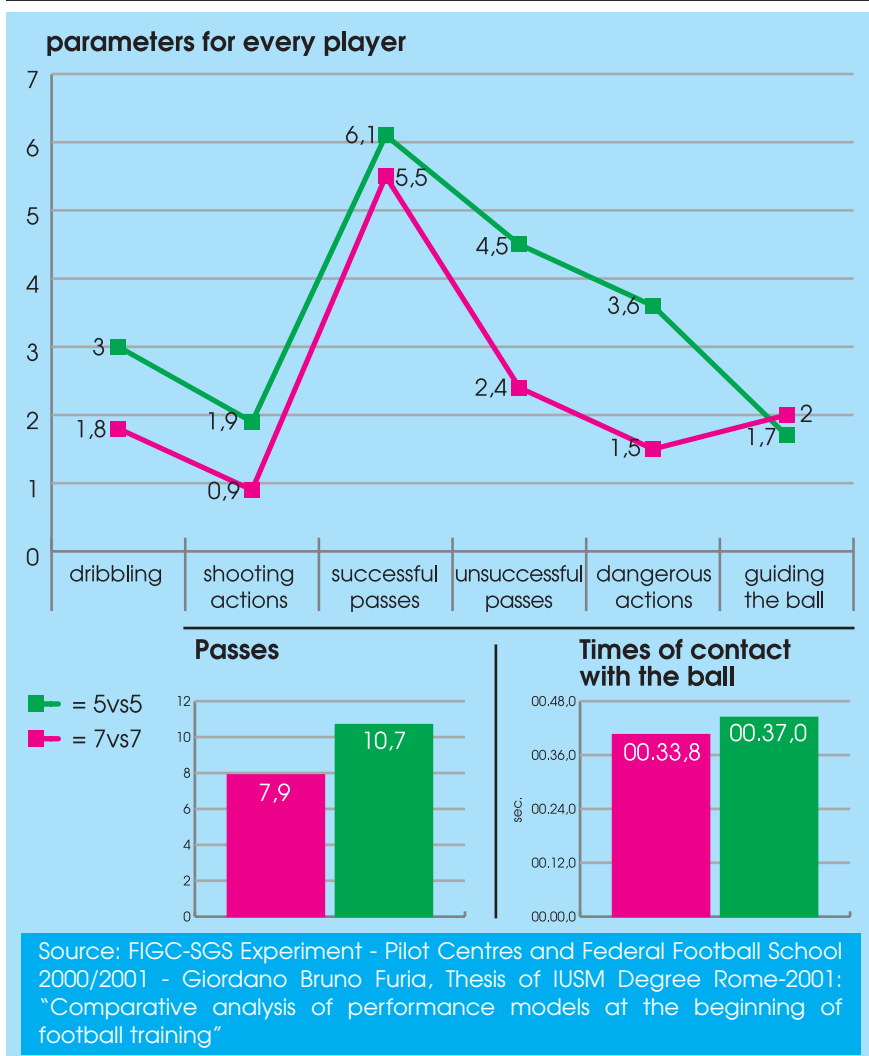
The final score, therefore, even if there are not any classifications and publication of results, will no longer be the sum of the goals scored, but the number of game fractions that the team has won. It is now appropriate to deal with the regulatory aspects characterise the specific match models of the Cubs category, which can be further studied in the Official Bulletin n°1 of the Juvenile and Scholastic Sector, available on the website: [www.settoregiovanile.figc.it](http://www.settoregiovanile.figc.it)

## 11.1 5 - A SIDE IN THE FIRST YEAR



It is the last variation of the rules introduced in the Cubs category in order of time. The need was brought on by the necessity to guarantee a less traumatic passage from the Little Friends category into the competitive activities of this category to avoid children of a 3-year age difference playing against each other. This activity was experimented in 2000 and the eventual differences that emerged compared to the traditional model (7vs7) with children of the same age (8 years) were then observed. It is however vital to make some important considerations on the matter:

1. the 8 year old child comes from the Little Friend category in



GRAPH 2 - Comparison between the 7vs7 and 5vs5 playing models in 8 year old children

which matches happen in the form of an event, with confrontation games, popular games and a large number of children participating; therefore the activity has multilateral, socialising characteristics from many different sports;

2. the child is about to come out of the egocentric phase, and must be guided to face a new cooperative social situation;
3. the particular aspects of the child and the experiences he has gone through in the various years of activity with the Little Friends category prove how he arrives in the Cub category with the ability to play with maximum 5 players a side.

The analysis of the aspects we have illustrated so far, and data of the enrolment in every season indicate that many children approach football at 8 years old; this brought about the adoption of a model that could favour a technical-tactical improvement (the results of which are absolutely positive and evident in GRAPH 2) and the participation, keeping organisational problems in proper consideration. Therefore we have the possibility of involving a higher number of children in the matches so that they have the opportunity to play at the same time. This allows the club, of five-a-side or 11 a side football, to enrol more teams and summon all the children that are enrolled, therefore organising a proper "party" or a small event: so we can divide the playing field into more than one field to play with 5 players with the further opportunity of inviting several clubs to the match at the same time.

## 11.2 6 - A SIDE

**T**his model is one of the last to be inserted among playing modes in this category. Firmly withstanding the necessity of letting the child play in matches where fun is the prevailing element in his training, in particular in the basic categories, this type of match allows the fulfilment of two important objectives:

1. permits a gradual passage between the various models, competing in gradually larger spaces and with more players (2 more kids overall compared to the 5vs5 model), providing for a different distribution of players on the field;
2. develops the child's ability of orientation in space referring to his own position in the rectangle of play and the position of his team mates. In fact, in this game mode, the child begins to widen his spatial knowledge, not only paying attention to the four fundamental (and essential) positions of the area: forward, backward, to the right, to the left, instead he will have to occupy intermediate positions in the



field, like, for example, “to the right of...”, “behind...”, etc., consequently having to solve cognitive and tactical tasks in relation to the position and the movement of his team mates. In the following phase, in which the child will compete in 7 a side football, the change will surely be more simple, considering in any case that, at the beginning of the graduation, even in 7vs7 there will be some new difficulties to overcome linked to various factors.

### 11.3 7vs7



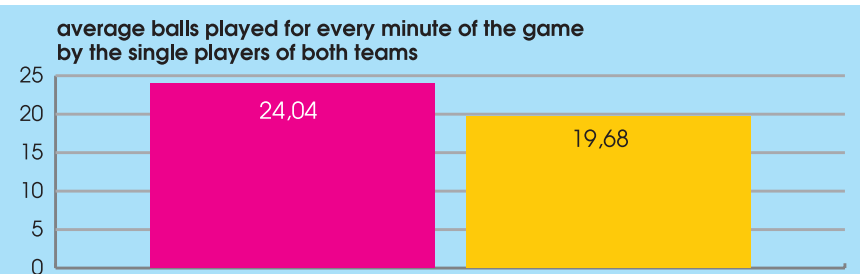
**T**his first regulatory variation, was introduced in the 1992/93 season, when, experimentally, a competition was proposed among 7 players in a smaller playing area. This experiment showed how children were more involved, having more possibility of contact with the ball, goal conclusions and dangerous actions (see GRAPH 3). The goal keepers had more possibilities of intervening in the match because they were more involved and especially had more opportunities of showing their ability with goals that are better adapted to his morphological and structural characteristics. All of this obviously favours a better itinerary in the training and learning process, with the consequent increase of the information for the child's baggage of technical and locomotor experience relating to the game of football. The experiment, that was inspired by European contexts that already use this model, proved to be so valid that it was immediately inserted as an official game model in the Cubs category.

### 11.4 THE “SEI BRAVO A... SCUOLA CALCIO”

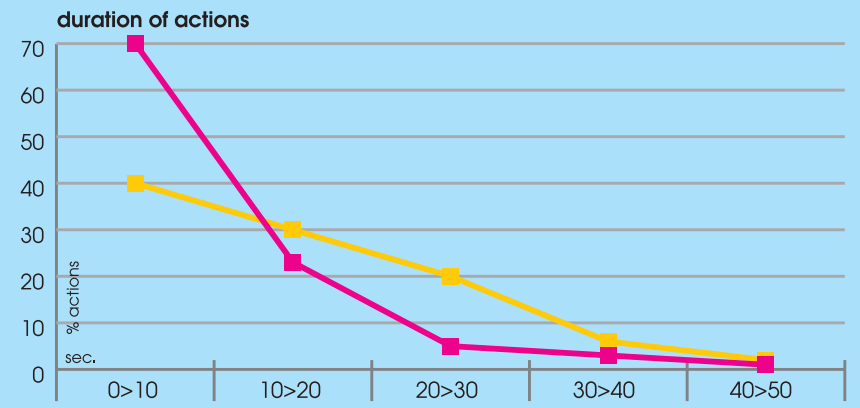


**I**f we analyse the performance of the player, at any level, we notice that some of his characteristics are constant. For example, in the attempt of coming up with a general definition we can state that: ***“Football performance is expressed in an athletic game discipline, of which the technical coordinative component and degree of ability represent a limiting factor to performance. It is expressed according to a tactical-cognitive project of the single player and of the team, in order to elude the opposing action project of the opponent, in conditions of relative physical intensity, and referring to the precise and transitory situational context of the game” (D’Ottavio 2005).*** Accepting the indications that this definition proposes, analysing the various meanings contained in it, we think it is useful to highlight the various aspects of it, one by one:

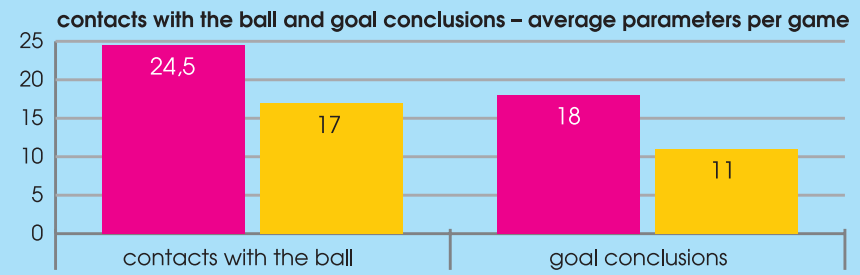
- **ATHLETIC GAME DISCIPLINE:** locomotor activity of **competition** in a **playful** context.
- **TECHNICAL-COORDINATIVE COMPONENT:** interaction between the processes of **regulation** and **control** of the technical move and the **ergonomic** models (economy and functionality) that distinguish



Source: Federal Football School, 1992 - V. Russo, ISEF Diploma Thesis, 1991/92 - S.D'Ottavio, The performance of the Young Football Player, SSS - Rome 1999



Source: Capranica, L., Tessitore, A., Guidetti, L. and Figura, F. (2001). Heart rate and match analysis in pre-pubescent soccer players. Journal of Sports Sciences, 19, 379 - 384.



Fonte: Scuola Calcio Federale, 1992

■ = 7vs7   ■ = 11vs11

**GRAPH 3 - Comparison between 11-a side play on regular field and 7 - a side on a reduced field**

the various technical abilities of football (fundamentals);

- **TACTICAL-COGNITIVE PROJECT:** relation between execution of the technical move and the **mental processes** involved in the action (anticipation, intake of perceptive information, decision making, regulatory and interpretative feed-back on the concluded actions);
  - **OPPONENT'S ACTION PROJECT:** the constant presence of one or more opponents determines operational strategies that are characterised by **rapid processing, decision making and technique**, feinting actions, and basic tactical rules;
  - **SITUATIONAL CONTEXT:** the sequence in which the game actions follow each other are characterised by **variety** and **unpredictability**, especially, of the degree of intensity (spatial-temporal position and ratios between the active subjects of the situation), of the degree of danger of the action, on the impressed force, etc.);
  - **COMPETITIVE LEVEL:** actual and biological age, years of training, type of tournament and championship, technical qualification (level).
- A definition, which can sometimes seem like pure theory, really is useful because by analysing attentively for example the illustration of the above points, we can link ideas and suggestions to each of them to plan the related training proposals. It is no coincidence that the one of the main assumptions that are most used by athletic training theorists is. *"Every specific performance model must correspond to a related training model"*. I believe that even in the future we will not be able to do without accepting such a specific **relativity** principle that must always be at the base of the training project.

#### 11.4.1 A BIT OF HISTORY



The "Sei Bravo a...Scuola Calcio" events have been alive from more than seventeen years, since when, at the Federal Centre of Acquacetosa, we began to experiment new didactical solutions with the children. We found a solution that to this date still does not seem to have lost significance. In 1989, on the Journal "Didactics of Movement" edited by the Sport Press Company and then on the journal of the Federal Technical Sector, an article was published by S. D'Ottavio entitled: *"Exercises and competitive games for the development of technical rapidity in football"*.

Basically since then so-called **competitive games** have entered the habitual lexicon of juvenile instructors and coaches have represented the cultural and didactical basis to date of the Event "Sei Bravo a... Scuola di Calcio" (You are good at... Football School"). Compared to the definition of the performance model



mentioned above, which are the technical parameters and observations from which the project was triggered, which was initially set up with the Technical Sector of the Federation?

- First of all the main primary motivations that attract and keep the children in football and in sports in general: the **game** and **competition**;
- **the presence of the opponent** so as to create the assumptions of a relative competition (athletic confrontation), but especially in involving other factors that are present in the performance such as specific coordination, mental processes, **technical rapidity**, etc.;
- the specific didactical organisation of the exercise that entailed the simultaneous execution in combination of the two types of exercises: **“The clock game and the score-counting game”** from which the outcome of the competition is determined.

After a few years of operating a review of the partial objectives and the relevant didactical content of “*Sei Bravo a...*”, we believe it is useful to induce the little players that participate in the exercises, to respond in technical terms to the stimuli from the surrounding environment. These limits were conceived to “*disturb*”, or even better, to “*attract*” in the subject also towards a form of **visual control** of the technical execution, and not exclusively **kinaesthetic and proprioceptive** (internal sensations coming from the muscles, articulations, etc.). The main theme then was: “**attention**”, with particular reference to external attention that represents one of the fundamental characteristics of performance in a team sport. Also in this case, a more coherent analysis of the premises of performance brought us to give a great didactical objective to the event, which was then articulated in the choice of exercises (see ILLUSTRATION 1).

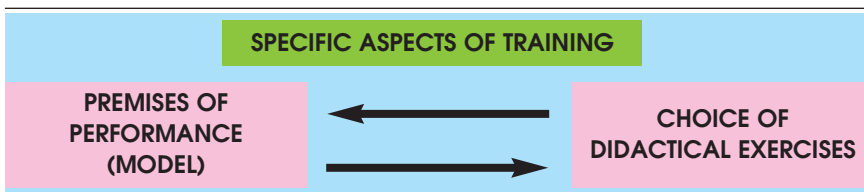


ILLUSTRATION 1 - functional interaction between the performance model and teaching/training model (D'Ottavio, 1989)

The version regarding one of the last proposals, as it had also happened in the ones before, probably took one of the most important aspects of football performance into consideration: **un-marking and consequently, playing without the ball**. This “tactical” fundamental represents a necessary condition for the game to

have a proficient development. Through movements of the ball possessor's team mates, we can give continuity to the action and solve the condition of "support" to the team mate. However this tactical project, that evidently can express itself in the phase of attack as well as in defence once the ball has been recovered, will always and in any case be subject to the actions of **opposition** practiced by the opponents.

In conclusion, a "strong" recall must be made beginning from a consideration that we think regulates and disciplines the football performance in its totality, at any level, and consequently the relevant training programmes:

THE PRESENCE OF THE OPPONENT DETERMINES THE SO CALLED "OPPOSITION REGIME". THIS CHARACTERISTIC REQUIRES THE PLAYER: TO CARRY OUT HIS ACTIONS WITH RAPIDITY, MENTAL AS WELL AS TECHNICAL, TRYING TO RAPIDLY FIND EFFECTIVENESS (PERTINENCE) OF THE SOLUTIONS TO THE SITUATIONAL PROBLEM

#### 11.4.2 THE FORMULA



The technical-organisational project of "Sei Bravo a....Scuola di Calcio" has a particular formula with which the activities are carried out. The overall result of the competition is determined by the sum of the scores obtained in the realisation of a competitive game and the match.

#### 11.4.3 THE ORGANISATION OF ACTIVITIES



The tournament, organised nation-wide and reserved to the Recognised and Qualified Football Schools, is in fact the official activity of the Recognised Football Schools (for which participation is compulsory), and therefore constitutes one of the fundamental requirements to obtain recognition as a Football School. It is appropriate to specify, however, that participation is also opened to Basic Football Centres, upon request.

Initially, the activity is carried out locally and/or provincially, and organised by the relevant Committees and supported by the Technical Officers of Basic Activities, who determine the most appropriate way to carry out the activity in their territory. Therefore, the Committees may organise activities during mid-week, or on dates coinciding with the official tournament of the Cubs category. Effectively, in some provinces, this organisation has allowed all

Clubs that participate in the Cubs tournament to participate in “Sei Bravo” at the same time. This way, the activity is not only reserved to one team per Club (i.e. Cubs in the 3rd year), but tournaments are organised for each age group, involving all teams of one Club in the formation of the classifications.

Naturally, in this case, provincial fairs at all levels will be organised. The Tournament is therefore divided in various organisational phases: from a first local phase, to a provincial phase to which the best Football Schools on a specific classification will have access (*see formation and reading classifications*). Later, competitions will be organised, to which four or more teams will participate, in the form of proper fairs, first on a provincial level, then an inter-provincial level until the regional fair, which will decree, for each region, the team that will participate in the National Event, which is normally organised at the Federal Technical Centre of Coverciano in Florence.

#### 11.4.4 DIDACTICAL PRINCIPLES AND PARTICIPATION METHODS

In order to let the most Football Schools as possible participate, by involving the coaches and Football Schools more in the organisational phase of the provincial activities, various ways of proceeding have been suggested.

The events can be organised (from the local/provincial phase) from the autumn phase, by inserting days dedicated to “Sei Bravo a... Scuola Calcio” in the Cubs Tournament, for example with a ratio of 1:3-4 (every 3-4 days of the calendar of the Tournament you insert a day of “Sei Bravo a...”). On such occasions 4 clubs can meet on the same field at the same time. This way the clubs will have the possibility of participating in the activities with a different spirit.

Experience in this sense has shown more “active” participation of the clubs themselves and the coaches that guide the boys in this age group, improving the quality of the technical-didactical proposals during the training sessions and the awareness of the role that each person plays in the training project.

In this regard new competitive games have been elaborated with three different situations, linked by a sole theme (*the dominating technical-tactical theme*), to propose to the clubs every trimester, following a sort of didactical programme. Therefore, during the course of the season, the “competitive” game is changed, making the learning process more varied and with a better quality.



## 11.4.5 FORMATION AND READING CLASSIFICATIONS



The classifications of merit of the event take various parameters into account which, overall, determine the winner in each phase. In fact, various requisites are taken into consideration regarding technical-organisational **general aspects** of the Club (i.e. ratio between number of qualified coaches and memberships, number of enrolled teams in relation to number of memberships, participation in information meetings for coaches and managers etc.) **more specific aspects** regarding each competition (further to the technical score of each match we also consider, for example: girl participation, salute at the beginning and the end of each match, etc.) and **possible negative aspects** that penalise the event (disqualifications or inhibitions of managers, non-observance of rules that regulate the activities, etc.).

Naturally, also in this case, the headings and criteria to form the classifications are adapted to the local context in which these activities are carried out. The sum of points obtained in the general aspects and in the specific ones (as well as the possible penalisations) will determine the final classification of the Football School with the most merits and the participation to the final events of "Sei Bravo a..." at various level. These aspects, clearly, will be proposed by paying attention not to penalise the Clubs that have the least organisational possibilities (i.e. demographic aspect, etc.).

## 11.5 THE EXTRA PLAYER



In the activities of this category a rule was introduced several years ago, which entails the insertion of an extra player in the teams with a five-goal disadvantage. This regulation, used in other European contexts, was presented in one of the UEFA conferences for grassroots football, which took place in Cyprus in December 2001). This way we can intervene with an appropriate variable (that we define as quantitative), which facilitates the task of the team with less "experience" and makes it, on the other hand, more difficult for the team with more "experience", favouring the training process of each.

	Little Friends (6/8 yrs old)	Cubs (8/10 yrs old)	Beginners (10/12 yrs old)
Advisable goal dimensions	4,50x1,60	5x1,80	5,50x2

TABLE 9 - Ideal goal dimensions for each category (D'Offavio in Technical Sector Bulletin n°6 - November/December - 1996)

## 11.6 THE MEASUREMENTS OF THE FOOTBALL FIELD AND PENALTY AREAS, THE BALL AND THE DIMENSIONS OF THE GOALS

As far as the means and material that is used is concerned, we must highlight that these tend to favour the fulfilment of specific technical-tactical and cognitive objectives according to the age of the pupil. Furthermore, attention is given to quality, security and organisational simplicity standards. Therefore the parameters considered for the football (weight, dimension and material), for the goals (dimensions, material) or for the dimensions of the playing field, refer to the peculiar characteristics of the child in each age group, which are explained in TABLES 9 and 10. Likewise, for example, the goals of reduced dimensions will provide the possibility to find the right balance between the defence of the goal by the goalkeeper and the possibility of realisation for the strikers (for further information refer to paragraph "didactical material").



## 11.7 COMPULSORY PARTICIPATION TO THE COMPETITION

All the children have the right to participate in the game and have fun. Since a few years ago the Juvenile and Scholastic Sector has made it compulsory for all children enrolled in the



	Cubs 1 <sup>st</sup> year (8 yrs old)	Cubs 2 <sup>nd</sup> year (9 yrs old)	Mixed Cubs (8/10 yrs old)	Cubs 3 <sup>rd</sup> year (10 yrs old)
Competition	5:5	6:6	6:6	7:7
Game times	3x15'	3x15'	3x15'	3x15'
Field dimensions (m)	45x25 op. appropriate space	50x30	50x30	60x40
Goal dimensions (m)	4x2 op. 3,60x1,80	4x2 op. 3,80x1,85	4x2 op. 4,50x1,90	4x2 op. 5,50x2
Ball dimensions (n)	4 rubber or leather	4	4	4
Rule variations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passing back to the goal keeper is allowed</li> <li>• No off-side rule</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No off-side rule</li> </ul>
Various Indications	Two, three, four or more games at a time			

TABLE 10 - Technical-organisational characteristics of the competitions in the Cubs category



“SUPER-LIGHT GOALS WITH COVERED FRAMES GUARANTEE THE SAFETY OF THE LITTLE GOAL KEEPER”

competition list to participate. This is because the participation itself to the competition is a very important element for the child's training. Furthermore the gained experience in competitive situations definitely provides more motivations and above all provides the young boy with the opportunity to express his qualities in particularly rich moments under an emotional and relational aspect.

## 11.8 THREE TIMES OF PLAY



One of the emerged problems, with the compulsory participation of all the children enrolled on the list, was the limited time that each child has to play during the course of the competition. For this purpose, a different set-up of the match was studied, which took into consideration this aspect and that also facilitates the communication between the coach and the players with the two phases of interruption of the game. With this division of the game, in fact, each child (if only one game is contemplated and should the game be carried out with the right criteria and substitutions..) may have the possibility of playing in two thirds of the game instead of half, in the division into two times. In conclusion: all the children should participate to at least one of the two game times and a large part of the third, as highlighted in the CU n°1 of the Juvenile and Scholastic Sector.



## 11.9 CHANGE DRIVER - QUICK SUBSTITUTIONS

The change of driver fully respects the above-mentioned purpose, giving the possibility of carrying out substitutions without interrupting the game, and therefore avoiding useless wasting of time, considering the number of substitutions that need to be carried out.



## 11.10 TIME-OUT

Time-Out was introduced with the specific purpose of further improving the communication between the coach and the children which, with the two interruptions provided during the three times of play, sub-tends in an obvious way a more positive methodological and didactical approach. Unfortunately, in many occasions on the football fields we notice coaches and managers that shout against the children in order to give their pupils indications. This happens in particular when they are referred to those on the other side of the field. Many other athletic disciplines use this “didactical” method even if they are close to the athletes: football, especially in the learning phase, probably needs this more, therefore, in order to accustom the coaches to use it correctly (which obviously must not be finalised to aspects linked to game patterns), for a few years the request for time-out, lasting 1', was compulsory.



**Among the other regulatory variations we must not forget the rules that simplify the participation of the child to the competition, such as for example the possibility for the goalkeeper to receive a kicked back-pass from his team mate with his hands or the absence of the off-side rule (which comes into play at the beginner level).**

## 11.11 THE “GREEN CARD”

A recent introduction is the so-called “Green Card”, a green card which, with the yellow card (booking) and the red one (expulsion), is used to praise the positive gestures of the players that participate in the competition, or the actions that the referee deems to be symptomatic of honest and correct play (Fair Play) or of a nice and fun play (Fun Play), which in the latter case highlights the execution of particular and unusual technical moves.





The "Green Cards" assigned will be noted on the referee's records, specifying the type of assignment (Fair Play or Fun Play), whereas the particularly significant Green Cards for Fair Play, which are deemed as such by the coaches and managers of the participating teams, will have to be pointed out, describing the situation and motivating the assignment. Only these "Green Cards" can be inserted in the classifications of the grass roots categories, upon ratification of the relevant Provincial Committees.

- Beginning of de-centralisation phase: flexible attention and projected on more elements; he is able to analyse the situation; he considers other points of view to organise his space of action;
- Beginning of flexible and reversible mental operations;
- More adaptation to new situations;
- Widening the action space (social);
- Development of psycho-semantic attention;
- Abilities that are functional to the task;
- Automation of the abilities (even if they are still subject to disturbance factors);
- Phase of fine-tuned coordination;
- More controlled movements;
- Combination of several elements;
- Self-esteem in their capacities;
- Confrontation, cooperation and acceptance of the rules;
- Greater aspiration to a result (external motivation).

TABLE 11 - Psycho-motor profile and general characteristics - Cubs category

## 11.12 THE FIGURE OF THE MANAGER - REFEREE

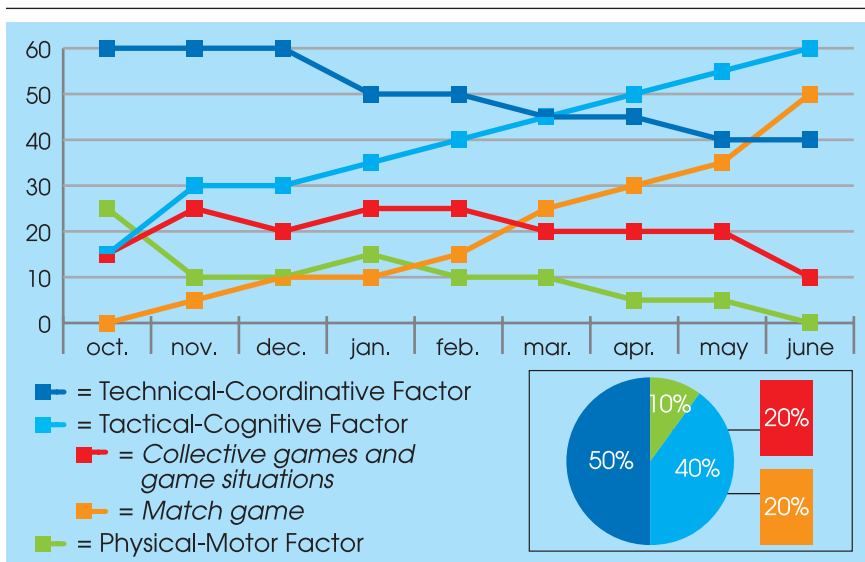


**A**lso the figure of the referee becomes very important, as it is very important to have the appropriate dimension that the game needs to have, protecting the child as much as possible from possible "stress" agents that can involve him. A competitive dimension without exasperation, with the possibility of learning the rules of the game even making small mistakes and receiving an adequate explanation, facilitates the acknowledgement of the existence of precise rules. For this reason it is appropriate for the referees of the matches to be technically qualified staff that are aware of the dynamics that are related to the teaching process of the game of football or for the managers to have participated in courses for managers-referees that the Sector organises in cooperation with the AIA. An essential new element in the season 2002/2003 is that the game can be refereed by managers or coaches of the guest team; this opportunity in fact has been positively experimented in some regions and adopted with enthusiasm.

## 11.13 CONCLUSIONS

To conclude it seems appropriate to repeat the fact that in grass roots categories, like in the juvenile categories in general, the game must necessarily be an integrating part of the didactical programme and the training process of the young player. Therefore the competition in these age groups is also in itself a specific didactical unit, in which the following are specified:

• Objectives:	knowing how to play in 5, 6 or 7
• Teaching methods:	use of intervals between playing times and time-out, participation of all children enrolled in the list
• Means and materials:	balls, reduced goals, dimensions of the field and three game times
• Content:	playing in 5, 6 or 7
• Variables:	use of numerical advantage or disadvantage, introduction of the back-passing rule



GRAPH 4 - Annual Didactical Programme - Cubs Category

	Technical-Coordination Factor	Tactical-Cognitive Factor	Physical-Motor Factor
<b>General Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stabilisation of basic movement patterns</li> <li>• Refinement senso-perceptive channels</li> <li>• Formation and development of coordinative abilities</li> <li>• Technical learning: search simple functional automatons</li> <li>• Favour a proprioceptive control in managing technical behaviour</li> <li>• Making the technique stable in a regime of rapidity</li> <li>• Maintaining an adequate technical control in a situational context.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widening of tactical abilities in simple situations</li> <li>• Favouring the decentralisation and organisation of the movement in relation to spatial-temporal parameters</li> <li>• Knowing how to relate in 5vs5, in 6vs6, in 7vs7</li> <li>• Knowledge and application of simple collective behaviours</li> <li>• Disposal of multiple action responses in the same context</li> <li>• Development of cooperation in offensive/defensive phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinative and conditional improvement</li> </ul>
<b>Specific Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Running:</b> to guide the ball, to jump the opponent</li> <li>• <b>Hitting and receiving:</b> frontal and diagonal passes and stops by standing still and in movement; receiving a low ball in movement, frontal and diagonal; shooting with a diagonal run-up, frontal and lateral;</li> <li>• <b>Combination of movements:</b> you prepare the following action (stop in a sequence, triangulations) in a regime of rapidity.</li> <li>• <b>Header:</b> initially from a standstill and then in movement</li> <li>• Reaching a fine coordination of technical moves, maintaining an executive stability in an unstable environment in time/space coordinates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Moving:</b> recognition of situations of attack-defence; analysis of the function of marking and un-marking (more individual than collective responses)</li> <li>• Understanding of concepts of some game actions through verbalisation</li> <li>• Concept of support and backing</li> <li>• Awareness and understanding of the concept of active and passive zones</li> <li>• Search and creation of numerical advantage</li> <li>• Concept of defensive help, making time and positioning</li> <li>• Moving to insert laterally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favours the development of the ability of resistance</li> <li>• Improvement of the speed-strength and rapidity</li> <li>• Maintenance of articular ability</li> </ul>

Content		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Privileging a 1:1 ratio between little boys and the ball</li> <li>• Providing a technical training environment that is mainly playful</li> <li>• Ball control exercises</li> <li>• Guiding exercises with the ball continuously varying the direction and form of movement;</li> <li>• Guiding exercise with the ball in the presence of a slight situational disturbance i.e. the opponent that defends a line;</li> <li>• Guiding exercises in a regime of rapidity i.e. relay games</li> <li>• Passing and receiving exercises executed in a dynamic form, varying the trajectory of the ball;</li> <li>• Reception exercises executed after a run, combined with an action of pass or shoot</li> <li>• Shooting exercises varying the direction of run-up initially with a still ball, then with the ball in movement;</li> <li>• Technical exercises proposed with temporal pressure induced by the opponent and with cognitive solicitations (competitive games, games with handicap, games in confined spaces)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity with the presence of the opponent;</li> <li>• Game situation with combinations of 3-4 players;</li> <li>• 1vs1 development of various ways of dribbling</li> <li>• Search of free space</li> <li>• Section games in numerical advantage and disadvantage</li> <li>• Games with jolly or free zones (substitutions...; introduction of the wall game; give and go etc.)</li> <li>• Games with numerical advantage/disadvantage (3vs2, 4vs2, etc.)</li> <li>• Themed games with reduced number of players 3vs3, 4vs4 etc. games of ball possession, territorial games</li> <li>• Games in line with compartment roles (overlapping, give and go, triangulation etc.)</li> <li>• Study of some situations of inactive ball</li> <li>• Game situations with change of front (active/passive zone)</li> <li>• Games with reduced number of players (4vs4, 5vs5, 6vs6, 7vs7)</li> <li>• Games with numerical advantage/disadvantage 5vs7, 7vs5</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Situational games for improvement of aerobic potential</li> <li>• Relay games with or without the ball</li> <li>• Games and activities with the ball to solicit the mobility of the various articulations (sensitivity)</li> </ul>

TABLE 12 - General, specific objectives and content to pursue in the annual didactical programme of the Cubs category