

# THE INSPIRATIONAL METHODS OF HORST WEIN

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*“When you do what you have done always, you will never reach any further*

*Horst Wein*

In 2001, I was fortunate to come across the work of Horst Wein. The Arsenal manager, Arsène Wenger, had advocated the German expert’s teaching methods for the development of younger players during an interview in FourFourTwo magazine and I was keen to learn more about his work.

At the time, I was looking for a new approach to coach younger players at the 1v1 Soccer Academy. I had left the provincial program (coaching at the U14/15 level) and wanted to ensure that the development methodology that we used would be successful in developing skilled and intelligent football players at the younger age levels. As luck would have it, Wein came to Canada that spring and I was able to attend his coaching clinic and write an article for Inside Soccer magazine about his methodology.

**What I liked most about Horst’s methods was that they were built around kids, and how they learn naturally.** In his work he uses many proven techniques used to teach kids school subjects such as mathematics and languages. **In Horst’s development model, the difficulty and complexity of simplified small-sided game activities are increased over time to match the natural physical and intellectual development of the players.**

Kids thrive during competition and on playing tag games (after all, it’s what they do from a very young age) and we know that, until their teen years at least, they have the inability to concentrate for long periods at once. They get bored from time to time, just like adults.

**So why not provide them with variety - something new every 15 minutes - and incorporate competitions and multi-lateral games (the fancy name for tag) into their training to improve co-ordination?**

These are not necessarily new ideas at the youth level. However, **what separates Horst's model from others is the differing roles of the coach and the players.** Of course Wein's methods are complex, and he has filled several books and lectures in explaining them but they can be summed up briefly as follows:

- **Take a more holistic approach**, incorporating training and learning that will enhance all aspect of a young player's life - not just their skills.
- **Develop co-ordination, leadership and tactical awareness in addition to just technique.**
- **Train via a logical progression** of development based on intellectual and physical capabilities of players.
- **Follow a 'menu' of activities** during one session, **changing activities every 15 minutes.**
- **Build bridges** between learning a subject and correctly applying it. Within this approach, training and competition are considered one unit, and not two distinct developmental aspects.
- **Focus on how skill should be best applied:** when, where and why.

Within Wein's methodology, the coach:

- **Places the player as at the centre of learning environment.**
- **Uses questioning to prompt players.** He or she guides them to "self-discover" the best way.
- **Assigns players roles and responsibilities to develop leadership**
- **Uses 'nature' to understand** and allows kids to take breaks and come back to practice when they are refreshed (play on swings or go swimming).

And here is how Wein views the role of the player:

- **They are the main participant in learning process.** They receive, process and give information to the coach and fellow players.
- **They're challenged to think through football-specific problems and discover solutions.**
- **They are encouraged to take initiative and demonstrate leadership** (i.e. set up drills).

**That clinic I attended with Wein changed the way I approached coaching. I began to facilitate rather than instruct. I started creating situations where the players were allowed to solve their own problems by thinking through the best way to succeed and trying different solutions until they discovered the correct approach. My players were given more responsibility to set up their own activity stations in order to teach leadership and responsibility.**

In Ontario at the moment we are in the process of implementing a **Long-Term Player Development Model (LTPD)** which is a **philosophy for young players to play small-sided games at the younger ages and take away the competitive element of scores and league standings.** These ideas were central to Horst Wein's work over ten years ago. Indeed I remember a very important comment that he made at the coaching clinic I attended: **"Even if young players want to play 11v11 at an early age, then why are we letting them? You wouldn't give a 10-year-old the keys to your car; they are not ready."**

Horst Wein is a pioneer with respect to youth development. Considered a coach for the world's best coaches, he has consulted for top clubs such as FC Barcelona, Arsenal, Inter Milan, Athletic Bilbao, Bayer Leverkusen and Schalke 04. He has also worked with the

National Federations of England, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay and Colombia.

One of his football books, Developing Youth Football Players, became the official textbook of the Spanish Football Federation - the home federation of the 2008 and 2012 European Champions and the 2010 World Cup Winners - and the Football Federation of Australia.

**The bottom line regarding my experience with people like Horst Wein who stress motivation and innovation above all else is this: as coaches, parents, and in fact anyone involved with this game we love, we need to seek out people like this who challenge the traditional methods of coaching.** Learn about their work, try it on the training field and observe the results.

**Keep pushing the boundaries in your coaching and challenge both yourself and your players in training.** That will ensure that you are staying on top of your game and your players will gradually improve