

# Coaching Girls and Women

**TED COPELAND**

The physical demands of the game are no different for men and women, but if I must make comparisons, then the obvious differences are that the men's game demands more strength, power and pace.

This is evident in the way that the women's game is played, when generally women do not have the strength and power to play long forward and long diagonal passes, switch the play in one pass and shoot from long range.

Women are also not as accomplished as men in heading the ball, either due to the fear factor or due to poor technique.

At the highest level, there are differences from country to country but in the main the above factors do affect the way in which the women's game is played and the coach may have to mediate his way of thinking and coaching in order to accomplish and resolve these problems.

It is also interesting to note that the current England Women's Team Goalkeeper recently trained with a Premier League Club and compared favourably with a number of their goalkeepers with regard to technical ability and understanding, but lacked the physical strength and power that the male goalkeepers possessed.

Women in general:

- are smaller in stature
- lack the strength and power to deal with situations that arise in the penalty area
- have difficulty in kicking long distances
- have difficulty in dealing with back passes and distributing the ball over distance with speed.

Coaches must be aware of these difficulties and develop a style of play and plan their coaching accordingly.

Generally, fitness levels are lower in women than in men and although women are potentially more flexible than men, this may not be the case and depends on their fitness regime and exercise programme. Work commitments have a considerable effect on the availability of women to train and this obviously impairs on their general fitness levels.

When comparisons are made with other countries where their women players are able to train every day, and sometimes twice a day, then the coach needs to review the training programme and plan for the best quality training in the time available.

At International level in England women are, in most cases, doing extra training sessions themselves and have to take on a greater responsibility than that of the male



professional players, without any financial rewards or recognition. They have enormous commitment and dedication to the game which the coach must be aware of and help whenever and wherever possible.

It is evident that in countries such as the USA, Germany, Norway and China, where some of the above problems have been resolved through subsidising the players and sponsorship, International success is the reward.

It is also evident that in countries, which are successful internationally, their players have physical attributes of height, strength, power, pace and high levels of fitness.

One of the main differences a male coach will experience in women's football is that at certain times prior to and after the match, there is no access to the dressing room. This in itself presents problems, but with the close co-operation of the female medical staff, many of the problems can be dealt with.

The emotional side of women in football is one of a number of problems in which the male coach will have little or no experience. The emotional state of the players may be governed by hormonal changes relating to the monthly cycle, when at any given time 25% of the players may be experiencing period problems. These can manifest themselves in a number of different ways all affecting a players performance including:

- mood swings.
- poor co-ordination.
- loss of concentration.
- loss of functional ability.

Therefore, the coach needs to be sympathetic and understanding, and these problems are best dealt with by the female medical staff.

Although girls and women are generally more aware of the needs of a good diet and that nutrition plays an important part in performance, often the amount and quality of food taken on board by the players does not always meet the needs.

This situation needs careful monitoring and the male coach needs to be aware that any reference to body shape and dieting can result in eating disorders. If the coach does encounter problems in this area, the best course of action is to refer the player to their doctor for specific medical advice and counselling.

The occasion of injuries is no more significant in women's football than men's, although recent evidence from the USA, suggests that the anterior cruciate ligament is damaged more in women than in men. To assist in the process of dealing with problems, the use of

female medical staff or similar, as the first point of contact, has enormous benefit and cannot be valued too highly. Girls and women are more willing to discuss issues and what men may regard as a weakness, is the norm for women.

Women players do, however, find it more difficult to accept criticism than men players and often regard it as a personal attack, which is not intended. Therefore, it is important for the coach to discuss these issues with individuals and the team in order to resolve the problems. A point worth noting, from my experience, is it is wise for the male coach to have a female member of staff with him at all times when discussing problems with an individual player.

The male coach may also find that girls and women behave differently when in a squad than men, and tend to form into small groups. Efforts must be made by all members of staff to integrate all the players. This may take some time but will pay dividends in the end. Girls and women, in general, do not have any preconceived ideas about the game and at the present time, most have a limited football background which may result in lack of



understanding of positional play, the rules of the game and, to a degree, football terminology. Girls and women are, however, open-minded, very positive, willing to learn, committed and dedicated with a great thirst for knowledge.

If a male coach enters women's football with an understanding of some of the problems and issues, and is well prepared, then coaching girls and women can be very worthwhile and rewarding.

*Ted Copeland  
Manager, England Women's Football Team*

*Ted Copeland is the F.A. Regional Director for the North Region. Before joining The Football Association, Ted worked with Sunderland Borough Council as a Football Development Officer. He also coached in the Saudi Arabian Premier League and for the Saudi Arabian Football Federation on Youth Development.*

*Ted has been the manager of the England Women's Football Team since 1983 and has just been appointed Manager for the newly-established England Woman's Under 18 Team  
Issue 1 - Volume 1 Autumn 1997 ( 29 )*