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“You need both quality and results. Results without quality is boring; quality without results is meaningless.”

- Johan Crujff -

A wide-angle photograph of the AFC Ajax training ground and stadium. The foreground shows a green football pitch with white lines. In the background, there is a long, modern building with large glass windows and a prominent white tower structure. The sky is overcast.

**MAIN GOAL: TO HAVE THREE PLAYERS
MAKE IT TO THE FIRST TEAM
EVERY TWO SEASONS**

Club Name	AFC Ajax	
Infrastructure	Training Centre	De Toekomst (140'000 m2), Amsterdam
	Club Foundation	18 March 1900
	Number of Training Pitches	8 (4 natural pitches, 4 artificial turf)
Recruitment Policy	Admittance of spontaneous candidacy	Yes, boys can submit an application form. They are then tested during "talentdagen".
	Number of Scouts	50 in the Netherlands, 5 in the rest of the world
	Zone of recruitment	50km around Amsterdam
	Desired skills	Ball control, position play, movement habits, mindset + (T.I.P.S) Technique, Intelligence, Rapidity and Personality
Team	Number of teams	12 plus the first team
	Number of players	+/- 200
	Origin of players	95% have Dutch nationality (of which 50% have non Dutch origin)
Coaches	Required characteristics	The ideal coach is an ex-player with lots of experience at high levels (exception: coaches of the Under 10 teams)
	Number of Coaches	13
	Responsibilities of Coaches	Coaches have substantial influence on talent development. Nevertheless AFC Ajax has a personal style of playing which has to be adopted by coaches
Training	Formation	4-3-3
	Start of the Tactical work (as from y.o.)	12
	Work with weights	non mandatory 1/2 hour max per day
	Number of training sessions	3 per week until 12, 4 per week after 13 2 hours training
	Type of matches	8:8 as from 7, 9:9 between 8-9, 11:11 as from 10
	Exercices	The same for every team, always with the ball and at high tempo. E.g. ball possession, 6:6, 3:3
Particularity	In house facilities	With selected families in Amsterdam
	Prohibitions	No caps before matches
Costs/Year	€ 6 m	

BACKGROUND & MILESTONES

- Situated in the shade of the famous Amsterdam Arena stadium
- AFC Ajax is listed on the stock exchange in Amsterdam but 73% of shares stay in private hands and are not publicly traded.
- AFC Ajax play the 4-3-3 system; the so-called 'Total Football' approach invented by Rinus Michels
- AFC Ajax became a 'talent factory' at which a lot of famous Dutch football players started their careers. In the last few years the club from Amsterdam has trained great football players and sold them for large amounts of money. Many great ideas on youth development originate from AFC Ajax.

KEY FACTS

- A total of 220 players at the academy
- Of all first team players in the top division in Holland, 30% will have, at some point in their development, attended the AFC Ajax Academy
- Annual costs of the Academy = € 6 m
- The real success of the youth academy is measured by the number of players who really add value to the first team

AFC AJAX'S YOUTH TEAM HONOURS

- **Beloften Eredivisie:**
1994, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2009
- **KNVB Reserve Cup:**
2003, 2004

VISION & PHILOSOPHY

Everyone involved in football has heard of the 'De Toekomst'. Any place must be truly special to produce talent of the calibre of Johan Crujff, Marco Van Basten or Dennis Bergkamp. However, it is not the infrastructure that makes it stand out – it is the club's ideology. Immediately noticeable is that everyone involved with AFC Ajax uses the word 'we' to describe the club. This highlights the significant collegiality within the organisation. Another pillar of the ideology is that of offensive football. According to the AFC Ajax way of thinking, results without beauty are boring, and beauty without results is senseless. A third important element of the AFC Ajax ideology is that the academy is regarded as the source of players for the first team. The club does not buy players (unless there are no suitable candidates in its ranks) and it promotes on average three new graduates to the first team every two seasons. The basic premise of the system is that there is the complete average transition from the child player to the star player under the guidance of the AFC Ajax academy. The most talented youths are virtually guaranteed first-team status even at the age of 16 or 17, if they show enough promise. Modern football economics, however, has taken its toll and nowadays the club also sees itself as a player factory; it produces its own graduates, retains them for several years to further enhance their quality and then moves them on at top-level status to clubs that prefer to buy their own players rather than to develop them.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Generally, the facilities are extremely functional and centred on the main office building. There are 14 hectares of various grass and artificial grass pitches, a stadium for reserve and youth games, and a full-sized, covered artificial grass pitch. The indoor dome, built in 2011, is the latest addition to the complex and houses not only the pitch itself, but also a full array of measurement instruments which are designed to take the AFC Ajax method to the cutting-edge of scientific development. Here, 13 teams use the eight playing fields and 14 dressing rooms.

With land in Amsterdam being at a premium, there is no wastage of space whatsoever. Even though AFC Ajax is naturally a very big club, there is no great formality inside the academy – access to the grounds is not

restricted and spectators are allowed to watch the training sessions of youth teams. The only areas that can be off-limits are the indoor pitch and the first team training area but, overall, the atmosphere is quite relaxed inside.

TECHNICAL APPROACH

Age group's focus, goals and role of coach

AFC Ajax adopted an innovative organizational structure in which there is no traditional Head of Academy, nor a departmental structure based on teams (age groups), where traditionally team trainers are managers of a specific cohort of players. Instead, the organizational structure follows the biological process of human development and consists of 5 departments (called "wheels"):

- wheel "Onderbouw" (age group 7–12), with Technical Manager
- wheel "Middenbouw" (age group 13–16) with Technical Manager
- wheel "Bovenbouw" (age group 17–20) with Technical Manager
- wheel "Operations" which takes care of all the administration at the academy
- wheel Technical Management which consists of the three technical managers plus a liaison between the First Team and the academy which protects AFC Ajax's culture

The wheel Technical Management is the control organ of the academy. This control structure resembles more a modern organizational principle of design (like business process redesign and Mintzberg's organic structures) rather than a traditional Fordian/Tayloristic hierarchical bureaucracy.

The focus of age groups, goals and the role of the coach

The AFC Ajax academy includes all age groups; there are teams with five-year-old children up to the U19 and Reserve team level. They are taken through the various stages of player development, encompassing individual athletic, technical, tactical and social development. There is no big emphasis on promoting academic education for players; the training process is incorporated into the daily schedule of the children who are picked up from school and bussed to the academy

with homework clubs and teaching assistance being provided by the club.

To summarise, traditional academies have a trainer who trains a group of players, whilst AFC Ajax promotes the idea that a group of trainers trains an individual player.



Dennis Bergkamp

Coaching and training sessions

When boys start their training in the academy, they become exposed to AFC Ajax's ideals – the seniors in the academy and the more than 50,000 spectators attending matches are all still present in this magical world of football due to the academy's innovative type of play. It was developed in the 1960s and became known as 'Total Football' (Very strong tactical organisation and a very rigid system of ball circulation which has always underlined the AFC Ajax discipline).

One of the elements of training in 'De Toekomst' which is very beneficial for young players is the lack of overtraining; 12-year-old boys only train three times a



Innovative football equipment at AFC Ajax

week and on weekends they play a match. AFC Ajax coaches believe that even this is a lot for such young players. The coaches believe that children have their own lives and families and they should not be taken away from their daily lives, families and social environment for too long. When they are not training, young academy prospects should play on the street with their friends; this can be crucial to a player's development both as a person and a football player. Under these conditions, they can play with no one is telling them what to do and they can be totally free. It is this very freedom that enhances and encourages their creativity. Since AFC Ajax's very specific system of play needs time to be understood and integrated by the players, foreign recruits stay at the club for at least two years. This allows them to better understand the system of play, the language, and the Dutch culture.

EDUCATION

AFC Ajax academy is not a boarding school. The players live approximately 35 km from Amsterdam and the longest journey to training would take around 1.5 hours. Some players have moved to the area to

Age Category: Under 8

4-3-3

- 4:4 30 x 20 m field 3 x 1 m goal
- Focus on passing, movement and finesse, with confidence on the ball always the priority

Age Category: 8 to 12 years

Team spirit building

4-3-3

12-year-old boys train three times a week.

- U 9: 6 v 6 (5 + goalkeeper), 40 X 30 m, 4 X 2 m
- U 10: 8 v 8, 50 x 40m, 5 x 2 m
- U 11: 9 v 9, 60 x 50m, 6 x 2 m
- U 12: 11 v 11, full-sized field
- Focus on passing, receiving, technical training, positional play, heading, finishing on goal.

Age Category: 13 to 16 years

4-3-3

- 15-year-old boys train five times a week.
- The training largely consists of short games and running exercises or training in passing the ball over short distances. In the AFC Ajax academy, most important is training with the ball. It is a Dutch style. Accurate and aggressive.
- Focus on positional game play (functional training), and games with many variations.
- Player Evaluation starts.

Age Category: 17 to 20 years

4-3-3

- During training, 16-year-old boys are required to do 30 m sprints with sensors which register the players' times over five metres. In real games, this is the distance over which acceleration occurs most often.
- Focus on skills vs. habits and ball control

Age Category 18 and above: A YOUTH (U18 - U19)

4-3-3

T.I.P.S.:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Coordination training | 5. Finishing |
| 2. Kicking, passing and throw-in | 6. Position play |
| 3. Moves to beat an opponent | 7. Position game play |
| 4. Heading Coaching and training sessions | 8. Small sided games |

“I never look at the results. I mean, which player scored the most goals, and even which one runs the fastest. These factors can only have meaning according to the relevant stage of progress of the young player. I mostly watch how the players run; for example, whether he runs lightly. Creativity with the ball is also important and, of course, the willingness to play as well as the love of the game. I think that those factors are crucial in forecasting how a player will present himself in the future.”.

- Wim Jonk – AFC Ajax’s Head of Youth Academy -

attend the academy. AFC Ajax has 20 buses for the transportation of players. Parents don’t have to pay anything except for the insurance fee which amounts to € 12 per annum. The other costs are covered by the club: salaries for 25 coaches, travel to tournaments, equipment for the players and all other costs associated with running such a big facility.

Transition: factor of success

AFC Ajax keeps records of every player from the time he is admitted to the academy. Coaches aim to develop players through a specific culture and philosophy. It shows them, in general terms, how AFC Ajax wants to play football. Players who have already played in the same system for many years are at an advantage in their progress towards the first team. If a player gets accepted to the academy, it means that he has passed only the first of various difficult stages. AFC Ajax puts the new players in the ‘encirclement’, in which they have to compete and develop themselves. It certainly is not an easy environment for a child to be in but it helps to differentiate those who have what it takes to play at the international level in the future from the ones who are merely just talented.

At the beginning of each year, the players of the AFC Ajax academy receive the preliminary announcement of their status. Some players are told that they are safe and will continue to progress in the club; others are told that they are at risk at being ‘sent home’ the following spring. Come spring, the youth players are very anxious as to whether they will be retained at the academy. Over time, the boys toughen up both mentally and psychically. The intention of AFC Ajax is to train young football players and help them to adjust to their first squad as soon as possible. The idea is then to transfer them for a big fee. Indeed, AFC Ajax is forced to sell its players simply because it needs the

money for the salaries for first team players. This is understandable and it is realistic to declare that the youth academy is a business which generates crucial revenue.



AFC Ajax indoor training centre

Adidas MiCoach

The academy has a very strong partnership with its technical sponsor, Adidas. The sponsorship is primarily directed towards scientific research and development of products for the sport science market such as the new Micoach system. This is achieved with the help of a third partner, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Amsterdam Free University), which acts as the main research partner. There are academic staff embedded within the club at the sports science level.



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“Nature has given to us a gift such as evolution through learning. As humans we develop ourselves by learning from our mistakes and it is important that when we stumble, it should happen when we are still learning. For us FC Barcelona is not a business, it is a feeling.”

- Sandro Rosell, President FC Barcelona -

**MAIN GOAL: MAIN SQUAD
WITH PLAYERS
FROM THE ACADEMY**

Club Name	FC Barcelona	
Infrastructure	Training Centre	Ciutat Esportiva Joan Gamper (137'000 m2)
	Club Foundation	La Masia (1979)
	Number of Training Pitches	8 (5 natural pitches, 3 artificial turf)
Recruitment Policy	Admittance of spontaneous candidacy	Not admitted - selection done through observers and clubs selected by FC Barcelona
	Number of Scouts	25 overall
	Zone of recruitment	Catalonia, Andalusia
	Desired skills	Technique, Speed, Vision of the game
Team	Number of teams	15 plus the first and the second team
	Number of players	+/- 250
	Origin of players	70% Catalan, 20% Spanish, 10% foreign
Coaches	Required characteristics	Coaches are usually very young and do not necessarily have past experience at high levels
	Number of Coaches	36
	Responsibilities of Coaches	They must field a team with a 4-3-3 formation imposed by the club
Training	Formation	4-3-3
	Start of the Tactical work (as from y.o.)	8
	Work with weights	Not before the age of 17
	Number of training sessions	3 per weeks until 13, 4 per week after 14 1h30 training
	Type of matches	7:7 from 8 to 12, 11:11 as from 13
	Exercices	The same for every team, always with the ball and at high rythm. Intercepting and passing drills
Particularity	In house facilities	Centro Oriol Tort - La Masia
	Prohibitions	no tattoos, colored hair, earrings, shirt out of short
Costs/Year	€ 10 m (this does not take account of the cost of formation of the U19 and FC Barcelona B)	

BACKGROUND & MILESTONES

- The success of FC Barcelona is due, without any doubt, to its academy. The youth academy has seen the development of world-class players who form part of one of the top teams in world football. More than in most other clubs, the success of FC Barcelona comes mainly from its youth academy.
- The success of the FC Barcelona model was highlighted in 2010 when the Catalan club, which won 12 out of 15 possible competitions and the podium for the FIFA Ballon D'Or, had Lionel Messi, Andrés Iniesta and Xavi Hernández as part of the team, all three being prominent graduates of 'La Masia'.
- For a long time the club looked for players for their squad. In today's football world, FC Barcelona has achieved its self-defined model where players are made for the system. FC Barcelona's academy 'alumni' boasts a long list which includes Ramon Caldere, Albert Ferrer, Josep Guardiola, Victor Valdés, Carles Puyol, Gerard Piqué, Xavi, Andrés Iniesta and Lionel Messi.

KEY FACTS

- 220 players in the youth academy and 45 players divided over the U19 FC Barcelona B
- Annual costs of the Academy = € 20 m including the cost of formation of the U19 and FC Barcelona B
- Seven players from the youth academy fielded during the 2010/11 UCL Final in London
- No talks with players' agents before the age of 15
- Senior and youth teams play according to the same system

FC BARCELONA YOUTH ACADEMY HONOURS

- Pre Benjamin (U8) Campeon Liga 2012
- Benjamin C-D (U9) Campeon Liga 2012
- Benjamin A-B (U10) Campeon Liga, Campeon Copa Catalunya 2012
- Alevin C-D (U11) Subcampeon Liga - Campeon Liga
- Alevin A-B (U12) Subcampeon Liga - Campeon Copa Catalunya
- Infantil A-B (U14) Subcampeon Liga Campeon Liga.
- Cadete A-B (U16) Campeon Liga 2012
- Juvenil (B) Campeon Liga 2012

VISION & PHILOSOPHY

FC Barcelona has a very strong ideology related to the progression of players from its youth development programme to the first team. The model that the club works on is essentially about producing players for its first team. Given the fact that FC Barcelona consistently challenges for top honours at both domestic and international level, it goes without saying that the players produced by the Academy have to be world class.

Unlike many other football clubs, FC Barcelona's first team is not the reference for the youth academy in terms of a model for the style of play. In fact, it is the opposite – the first team follows the style of play of the youth teams of the club, which means that all the players who have come through the development system have been educated and trained to perform at senior level and the transition becomes as seamless as possible.

There is also a very strong Catalan element to the club, with local players forming about 80% of all youth squads. The motto of FC Barcelona is *més que un club* - more than a club – and this creates a strong identity and spirit within the group. However, there is also a very strong regional Spanish and international flavour to FC Barcelona (Andrés Iniesta, Lionel Messi, the arrangement with the Samuel Eto Foundation, which allows the club to attract young African players. Ultimately, the language of football transcends all other considerations and, in identifying a particular style of play as being the most important element of its identity,

the club has secured its position as a truly recognisable structure, not only in its core region but also globally. In addition to its ability to recruit pretty much any player for the youth system, an unexpected result of the success of FC Barcelona has been its ability to recruit first team players who have not grown up as part of the club's youth development system but who identify themselves with the values and the style of play of the team, often to the detriment of their own financial benefit. In this way, the Barcelona Academy is clearly having a major impact not only on maintaining the ideology of the club itself, but also on the operation and squad management even at first team level.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The origins of the training complex date back to 1989 when the club purchased land in the St Joan Despi area in the west of Barcelona for future development. The project was launched in 2000 with the placing of the first stone which saw the beginning of various stages of development. The youth development part of the club moved to the facility in 2006 and the first team followed in 2009. The latest stage of development was the opening of the 'new Masia' building in 2011. It can house up to 120 children from all the sports sections of FC Barcelona, but primarily the football section. The complex is conveniently located just off a main road in a suburban residential area, a few kilometres away from the main club buildings at the Camp Nou.

TECHNICAL APPROACH

Focus of age groups, goals and the role of the coach

The football structure at FC Barcelona operates two parallel sections: professional football and formation football. The professional side incorporates the first team, B team and the oldest youth category (U19 level), whilst the formation side includes the earliest organised age groups to the U18 level. The sides are a mirror image of each other with a sport director and coordinator in each programme, plus a full complement of coaches.

Intake starts at U8-U9 level. A limited number of children are accepted into this group which includes both ages and has only one team. From then on there are individual year age groups, each team being

directed by two coaches. Currently, a total of 43 coaches work on the development side of the club; those who work with the older youth groups come in on a full-time basis, even though the children mostly train in the early evening. Competition starts early for the children at the FC Barcelona Academy; all age groups up to U12 take part in 7:7 matches in local leagues, whilst from U13 they begin playing a full 11:11 at regional and national levels.

One of the interesting aspects of being located in Catalonia is that, per capita, there is an extremely high number of registered young players, which means the youth football here is vibrant and competitive. With



Lionel Messi



Youth Residence at FC Barcelona

FC Barcelona being the reference club, competitiveness sets in early, as all other clubs want to do well against FC Barcelona teams at any level.

The transition process into the professional teams starts early for players who stay in residence, with some coming in at 11 or 12 years of age. At the start of the 2011/12 season there were 73 children staying in the La Masia residence, of which 52 were involved in the football section and the rest in other sports such as basketball, hockey, etc. Of the 52 boys in the football programme, 16 are from Catalonia, 16 from the rest of Spain and 20 from abroad. FC Barcelona has an interesting and fruitful relationship with the Samuel Eto'o foundation in Cameroon, which means that ten youth players in the system come from that country, with some having already been at La Masia in the development programme for five years or more. All the players at the academy go to the same public school and further education is strongly encouraged: 11 players in the Barcelona B team are actually studying at undergraduate university level!

An important element of the FC Barcelona academy is the philosophy of treating all players with the same care and attention given to first team players. The concept behind this is quite simple: club management believes that even someone joining the system at U8 could be a future first team regular and deserves this level of attention. At the same time, that does not mean that the younger children do everything the first team players do; specialised physical training for players does not really start until the children are in the U16 age group. More importantly, though, a lot of attention is given to teaching young players to both win and lose and to deal with challenging situations such as loss of form, confidence, and injury. The ultimate aim of the

“The first mission of coaches is to help boys with their behaviour; the second is to show them how to be good players.”

- Albert Puig, Head of FC Barcelona Youth Academy -

7 to 11 years (U8 to U12): 'Pre-Benjamin, Benjamin, Alevin'**Teams' training**

- Individual tasks: dribbling, blocking the ball, trap control but all during the match.
- games 5 versus 5, 12 players per game
- half pitch size
- 3 weekly sessions
- General exercises for stimulating the individual technic combined with exercises for development in overall football concepts
- One part of training is dedicated to individual technical exercises. This includes dribbling and driving the ball.
- Possession and possession, showing a steadfast belief in the old mantra that when you have the ball, your opponents can't score.

12 to 18 (U13 to U19): 'Infantil, Cadete, Juvenil'**Technical skills development**

- games 7 versus 7, 18+2 players per game
- half pitch size or one full pitch for the oldest
- 4-5 weekly sessions
- To familiarise and develop skills by field position games and small-sided games
- Special technical exercises for ball control and passing
- Offensive and defensive tactical concepts.
- Strong emphasis on possession, on passing accuracy, on fluid movement between the orthodox delineations of midfield and attack.

club's development system, a long side developing a technically skilful player, is to combine sport, personal development and academic education and to instil in players the firm knowledge that to become an elite sportsman is extremely challenging and to help children fulfil their true potential. The bottom line for the club however, is that if children do not enjoy their work, they will not improve.

Coaching and training sessions

The task of a coach is to create a team with individuality, taking into consideration the nature and particular characteristics of each player. The coach should always keep an eye on the group ambition, which must be stronger than the sum of individualism. Player and coaches are individualists, the difference is that the selfishness of the coach benefits the team. The coaches prepare the exercises for each age group that will shape children's skills and habits. When the session is focused on dribbling for example, the exerci-

ses are different from the ones during the shooting exercise. Practice without the ball is of minor importance. Generally, coaches do not conduct any lessons which are uninteresting, burdensome or unpleasant for children. They do not treat a child as a miniature adult. A nine-year-old child must have fun and understand what he is doing when practicing with the coach.

FC Barcelona's academy is different from other academies because physical preparation is considered to be a matter of secondary importance. Definitely, the most important is the necessity of technique and development of the imagination of the young player. This shows the difference in training fundamentals. The player should be trained in such a way that he can imagine the best solution during the action and have the technique that allows him to implement it.

EDUCATION

Players staying at the youth academy follow a specific school programme. The other players attend classes at public schools. They organise themselves to join the academy for evening trainings. At FC Barcelona, there is a strong belief that players will only succeed if sports training, education and a strong family unit are part of the players' lives. This will help them become well-balanced elite players. Since classes finish at 5.00 p.m., the earliest training sessions begin at 7.00 p.m. and go on until 8.30 p.m.

'La Masia's' Medal Collection

Graduates from La Masia with medals in the last Champions League finals:

2005 *Luis García (winner, Liverpool FC)*

2006 *Victor Valdés, Carles Puyol, Xavi, Andrés Iniesta, Lionel Messi (winners, FC Barcelona), Cesc Fàbregas (finalist, Arsenal FC)*

2007 *Pepe Reina (finalist, Liverpool FC)*

2008 *Gerard Piqué (winner, Manchester United FC)*

2009 *Gerard Piqué, Victor Valdés, Carles Puyol, Xavi, Andrés Iniesta, Lionel Messi, Sergio Busquets, Pedro (winners, FC Barcelona)*

2010 *Thiago Motta (winner, FC Internazionale Milano)*

2011 *Gerard Piqué, Victor Valdés, Carles Puyol, Xavi, Andrés Iniesta, Lionel Messi, Sergio Busquets, Pedro, Bojan Krkić, Thiago Alcántara (winners, FC Barcelona)*