



## STREET SOCCER

### Street Soccer and the influence of Johan Cruyff

Johan Cruyff, arguably one of the top footballers of all time, was a big proponent and had a great love for street football. He spent hours and hours in Betondorp, the Amsterdam neighborhood he grew up in, playing football in the adjacent quote indicates. Cruyff joined system on his tenth birthday. While friends frequently played in their was spotted by Ajax youth coach Jany lived close by. He immediately talent and decided to offer him a place formal trial.

*I trained about 4 hours a week at Ajax as a boy but I played 4 hours on the street every day. Where do you think I learned to play football? – Johan Cruyff*

streets as the the Ajax youth Cruyff and his neighbourhood he van der Veen, who noticed Cruyff's at Ajax without a

Cruyff credits this free play in the streets as one of the main contributors to his expertise and creativity that he displayed while playing for Ajax Amsterdam, Barcelona, LA Aztecs, Washington Diplomats, Levante, Feyenoord and The Dutch National Team. He won the Ballon D'Or, the worlds best footballer award, 3 times, in 1971, 1973 and 1974. He was a big proponent of attacking and attractive football within the Total Football concept that was introduced to the football world by Ajax and The Orange (Dutch National Team) in the early 70s under the



Retrieved from RTVKatwijk.nl, December 2020

leadership of coach Rinus Michels. Cruyff maintained his passion for that style of play as a coach, for Ajax and Barcelona, as well. He was a football purist who would not compromise his belief that the game he played and coached were to be attractive with an emphasis on attacking. The game needs to be entertaining he would often state. Somebody that has a move named after him, the Cruyff turn, must

know what he is talking about. At the end of Cruyff's playing and coaching days, he devoted a lot of his time to his new passion, the Cruyff foundation. In this role he has facilitated the development of over 200 Cruyff Courts. In 2003 the first Cruyff Courts were constructed and at the end of 2007 there were 70. In 2016 there are 208 of which 35 outside of Cruyff's home



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country. Countries outside the Netherlands with a Cruyff Court include Belgium, Spain, Poland, Great Britain, Morocco, the United States, Surinam and Japan. Cruyff Courts are generally developed in cooperation with local recreation authorities, clubs, professional footballers who are keen to get one in their home town, and other organizations. The development of special courts for children with disabilities has led to the opening of close to 35 of them. Cruyff Courts are safe places to play street soccer and sometimes other street games. They are situated in the middle of family, and mostly diverse, neighborhoods, easily accessible for kids. They are surrounded by friendly looking blue fences and have a surface of artificial turf. The goals are painted orange. The field is typically 42×28 meters and much smaller than a regular size football field, a perfect size for small sided games.



Cruyff is not the only professional player that credits a lot of his early development to street soccer. Many others, including Neymar, Messi, Marta, Rooney, Alexis Sanchez and Luis Suarez, to name a few, have also paid homage to the street game that had so much influence on them getting to the top of the beautiful game.

## HOW TO KEEP STREET SOCCER ALIVE



*Retrieved from internet*

There are still places where street (sand, beach) soccer continues to thrive, including Brazil, Uruguay, various Central American and African countries and also in, for instance, the suburbs of Paris and Amsterdam. In Amsterdam, and several other places in the Netherlands, they have held street football championships for elementary school kids for many years. The finals in Amsterdam are played at Dam square in the center of the city. A fantastic event, but also one that shows that nowadays street soccer has often become an adult led event instead of a spontaneously emerging game by several random kids on some square or street. To be fair, while watching the finals in Amsterdam one year, I noticed, that many of the accompanying adults that led the teams on the Dam square, refrained from coaching and encouraged the kids to



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organize themselves. Possibly these were adults that had played street soccer themselves and understood the spirit of the games that were on display.

Another expression of street soccer is the Homeless World Cup. The Homeless World Cup is an annual football tournament organized by the Homeless World Cup Foundation, a social organization which advocates the end of homelessness through the sport of association football (or soccer). The organization puts together an annual football tournament where teams of homeless people from each country compete.

The 2008 tournament was the first to include a women's competition. From 2010 onwards, all tournaments have featured both men's and women's teams. The Homeless World Cup organization was co-founded by Mel Young and Harald Schmied in 2001 to advocate for a global solution to homelessness. The first annual football tournament for homeless people took place in 2003 in Graz, Austria (retrieved from Wikipedia, the free internet encyclopedia, December 2020). Street soccer has come a long way, now including social causes and official championships.

With suitable places to play in the streets shrinking, the automobile population continuing to explode and the increasing appeal of technology to kids, we have to fear losing the unbridled emergence of street soccer games in random neighborhoods. How can we, as coaches, facilitate the power, the spirit and the benefits of street soccer, specifically while coaching young players from 6 to 13 year? Below are several suggestions that may aid in the creation of magical environments that have similarities with the street soccer game.

*Reframe our language* – As mentioned earlier in the book, we as coaches can contribute to a different feel when we talk to the players not about the next practice, but about the next time that we come together to play is Tuesday at 7pm. Clearly this will only work if the majority of our get together is focused on a playful approach, using game-based learning.

*Provide unstructured time* – Earlier in this chapter I referenced Bob Bigelow who, in every practice, builds in some time for the players to have unstructured play. This can be done in a variety of ways and is worth experimenting with.

On the next page there are a few examples what that could look like, but obviously there are many other ideas out there, so just go out and try some.



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*Initiate home challenges* – We as coaches can only do so much and young players should be encouraged to do things on their own. Even if it is not in the form of actual street soccer games, we can challenge them every week with a new skill, the Neymar scoop, the Cruyff turn, the Maradonna spin move, the Hocus Pocus... In a few days, when we get back together to play, players can show their progress and show each other.

*Extended periods of time of no-coaching* – I've experimented many times with being silent during parts of the time together after framing up a certain game and explaining the task. Sometimes I do it when I introduce something new to encourage discovery and other times I do it when I bring something back that they have done before and then we can use it as an evaluation how well something has stuck, using it as a quiz if you will. Initially this is a challenge for any coach that is eager to fix everything that is going "wrong."

*Flexibility as it comes to player solutions to posed problems* – As coaches we often have certain solutions in mind when we pose problems through conditioned games to players. It is liberating to allow players to experiment more with the problems and let them potentially come up with

Some classic Cruyff quotes | also original in how he put things

"I compare the development of a footballer with driving a car. First you are very conscious and tense while driving, then you develop the automatisms and lastly you start anticipating, looking 2 or 3 cars ahead"

"What is speed? Look, if I start moving slightly earlier because I see it quicker then I seem faster."

"Insight is the most important of all. I could change the tactic by just adjusting my position when the situation changed."

"Playing simple is the most difficult."

"I am of the opinion that everyone should be able to play all positions."

"Chance is logical"

"I really dislike it when somebody moves, but has no clue where to move and why."

come up with the decision. It is seldom that I have to step in as the judge, but it does happen, specifically with groups that are fairly unfamiliar with this approach.

*Players organize their own fair teams* – A good way to promote leadership and perception. Put different players, at different times, in charge of making equal teams. Some are very good at

novel solutions; a wider scope with multiple options is freeing for players and coaches alike.

*Players call their own fouls in games* – This, for me has become second nature.

Players call their own fouls, decide if the ball has gone in touch, whose ball it is and so on. If there is disagreement, I use the 5 seconds argument rule, a time that players can use to



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organizing teams, others initially need some help. It is also something that they do not have to do all the time.

*Make development of skill competence (technique and savvy) our main focus* – Always play to win, but focus on things that we have worked on, played with, to evaluate real success.

*Games with non-matching numbers* – Just like with street soccer, it is totally fine to be more flexible with how games get organized. As an example, an underload promotes dribbling.

*Street soccer corner* - Clubs can, in the corner of the training field, reserve an area for kids, of different ages and from different teams, that come early to set up their own scrimmages, soccer tennis games. Initially this can be promoted by two of three coaches, who coach different age groups, to combine their groups and set up small sided games tournaments every once in a while. A great way for the younger players to learn from the older ones and for the older ones to model, show leadership and mentor ...



Illustration by Kai Choufour

*Internal competitions* - Clubs can promote self-organization in age groups where kids often quit sports, 14-17, with internal 6 v 6, 7 v 7 or 8 v 8 co-ed competitions, run by and for these kids. It will take away extensive travel and promotes spending time with friends, playing with and against them. With a bit of initial support, initiatives like this could thrive and keep more kids in the game, keep them playing.

The above are just a few examples how we can incorporate the richness of the street football environment into our daily best practice. Once this becomes more of a focus for yourself as a coach, I am sure that you will come up with other ways as well. We can long for days past and complain that kids do not play in the streets any more or we can take some of those best experiences and implement them with our teams, sometimes allowing for a more unstructured, player led environment. I have used many of the above samples in my coaching practice and they can really improve the joy and engagement of the players.

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