



My trip to Football Club Barcelona - Mickey Kydes

From February 12 – 21, 2011 Coach Allan Zuniga and myself traveled to Barcelona, Spain to observe the Football Club Barcelona (FCB) youth system and training methods. FCB is considered by many to be the best youth development club in the world.

Eight players from the world's famous senior team starting eleven, six players from the Spanish World Cup National team starting eleven, and the three top 2010 Footballer of the Year Candidates came for the FCB youth system (Messi, Xavi, Iniesta)



David Oertli, who is in charge of Lazz Sports, and books international trips for youth teams, was responsible for getting us permission to observe FCB youth system training. All youth training sessions during the week are closed-door. Very few are granted permission to watch, although we did meet a few youth coaches from France, Brazil and Spain who were there observing as well. On weekends the complex is open to the public to observe all FCB youth matches.

We had a few treats that we did not expect during the week that I would like to share with you:

- The week started for us with the Sunday night La Liga tickets to match between Espanyol vs. Real Madrid, and ended the following Sunday with tickets to the La Liga match between Barcelona vs. Athletic Bilbao at the Nou Camp Stadium. Watching two of the best teams in the world, Real Madrid and Barcelona, and two of the best players in the world, Ronaldo and Messi, with a stadium ambiance that cannot be replicated in the United States (in any sport) was an incredible experience.
- A friend of mine, Kuko Zigande (former La Liga coach for Osasuna), who visited Beachside two years ago and observed our U17 practices for the month of March, was able to arrange for us to observe the FCB senior team training session. The FCB senior team training sessions are all closed-door and it is very difficult to get permission to observe them. This was something we never expected and were grateful to Kuko and his contacts for this special treat to see Messi, Xavi,





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Iniesta, David Villa, Pique, and the gang up close. We also had the chance to meet and briefly talk to the World's greatest coach: FCB's Pep Guardiola.

- We also had the opportunity to watch Espanyol senior team practice on Tuesday as well, which was an open to the public practice.
- A tour of the city of Barcelona and a visit to the FCB museum which is in the Nou Camp stadium. The FCB museum tour is a must see if any of you are ever in Barcelona.



FCB's U18 Captain

While these special extra treats were an experience in



their own right, the *real* joy both Allan and I experienced was watching the FCB youth teams train every night, Monday to Friday, 5:30 – 8:30 pm at the FCB soccer complex, and then watching them compete on the weekend. I learned more about training young players in one week than I could have in several years in the United States. Both Allan and I were excited about this opportunity, but this week long trip in fact developed into the educational experience of a lifetime. We gained so much knowledge: but here are my three most

striking observations: (FYI: I noted over 100 comments.)

1. Everybody, I mean *everybody*, at FCB is humble, down to earth, respectful, sharing, helpful and very approachable. You see it in their senior players and coaches, youth players and coaches, parents, security guards, etc. It is evident this is an important piece of their culture.
2. The quality of their youth players is vey high indeed, especially technically - this improves the effectiveness of everything they do.
Note: players are not big – just like their senior team
3. Everything they do revolves around their system and philosophy of the senior team's play. There is one system, one philosophy, one culture. FCB starts to implement it at U-7!



At every age, FCB teams use the same pre-game ritual



..and players grant post-game interviews



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Finally, while we cannot for several reasons implement everything FCB offers, we can take the knowledge we acquired and training methods we observed and start applying them to our programs in an appropriate manner.

I am very proud of what our programs have accomplished over the last 17 years. But after this experience, I can assure you that over the next year, you will see methods systematically implemented that will take all of our programs, players and coaches to an even higher level.



That is my goal. I am so thankful to FCB for this opportunity which will help redefine our already highly regarded soccer programs and raise them to a new level. Just as FCB has opened their doors and shared with Allan and I their philosophy and methods, I too look forward to sharing this new journey with all of you.

“FCB has been a 25-30 year project”

- Albert Piug, FCB Youth Program Coaching Director.

