Preparing coaches to face the realities of their profession has been a common denominator at UEFA’s coach education events and is the subject of an article which appears later in this issue.

The day-to-day realities, however, are constantly evolving. The challenges which confront modern-day elite coaches during their quest for survival and success seem to be steadily expanding like an oil stain spreading over water. Until relatively recently, few people would have paid much attention to – or even heard of – the third-party ownership of football players. Today it has become a worrying trend – to the extent that UEFA’s Executive Committee has taken a firm stance on the issue and has fully endorsed the recommendation by the Professional Football Strategy Council that it should be prohibited.

The UEFA President has commented that “ethically and morally it is not good” that the economic rights of players might be owned by third parties, who are only interested in profiting from this particular “trade”. There are also deeply worrying integrity issues, including the understandable fear that third parties might seek to influence team performances or, at least, might be perceived in the public eye to have had such an influence.

This is when the coach sits up and takes notice. What is the impact of third-party ownership in the dressing room? Front-line technicians reluctantly accept it as part of the job when agents or representatives grab the phone to demand better treatment for their protégés. But how are team building and team spirit potentially affected when the “owner” of a player is a third party company which only stands to reap a dividend from its “investment” when the player moves to another team?

It’s easy to imagine worrying scenarios. Players themselves might not know the identity of the third parties who own their economic rights. The coaches may not know either. A coach might not know if the economic rights of other players in the squad are owned by the same third party, or if and when a third party attempts to exert influence for a player to move to another club.

This lack of transparency is hardly conducive to relationship building between coaches and players. An even more sinister situation, in the context of the coach’s working environment, could be created if the third party made direct representations to the boardroom. If a third party decides when a player may be sold, for how much and to whom, this will inevitably undermine the relationship between coach and player. Players may also find that (unknown to them) decisions about their destiny and sporting future are being influenced by an outside party that has no real interest in their training and further development but is solely driven by the profit motive.

This is just one of the number of elements which can contribute to the high casualty rate in the coaching profession and there is evidently a lot of educative work to be done in preparing coaches for a reality show in which, if they are not careful, each episode will end with the same person being asked to “leave the house”.

Ioan Lupescu
UEFA Chief Technical Officer
THE INTERVIEW

The footballing stature of the UEFA President casts an impressively long shadow. But the organisation’s staff list also features a man who wore his country’s No. 5 shirt at EURO ’96 and the 1994 FIFA World Cup, the No. 21 shirt at the 1990 World Cup in Italy and No. 15 during EURO 2000, as he amassed a total of 74 international appearances as an attacking midfielder. To his chagrin, the two World Cup campaigns were ended by penalty shoot-outs and, although he netted his spot kicks, Romania were eliminated 5-4 by the Republic of Ireland in the last 16 in 1990 and by Sweden in the quarter-finals four years later. His club career took off with a first division debut for FC Dinamo Bucureşti at the age of 17 and peaked during eight seasons in the German Bundesliga with Bayer 04 Leverkusen and VfB Borussia Mönchengladbach. He earned his Pro licence in Germany but his desire to see the wider picture of the game took him beyond coaching and into the administrative sphere. That broad background made him an ideal candidate to continue the good work of Andy Roxburgh, who stood down last September after 18 years as UEFA technical director. It is right and proper for the UEFA technician to introduce the man whose official title is UEFA’s chief technical officer. He is

IOAN LUPESCU

First of all, talk us along the route from grassroots football – which is now one of your responsibilities – to international star, coach and administrator.

Well, I started playing in Austria when I was five or six years old. Part of my childhood was spent there because my father was also a footballer and played in Austria for five years at the end of his career. When we returned to Romania, I joined Dinamo when I was 11 and stayed till I was 21. After the revolution in 1990, I moved to the Bundesliga and spent eight years in Germany – six at Leverkusen and two at Mönchengladbach. Then I went back to Dinamo and had brief spells in Turkey and Saudi Arabia. I finished my career in 2002 and in 2003 I did my Pro licence in Cologne. I did my studies – six months – under Erich Rutemöller, who was the DFB’s head of coach education at the time. Then I returned to Romania to start coaching. But after six months I quit because I could see things that made me feel really uncomfortable. Then in 2005, Mircea Sandu – who’s now a member of the UEFA Executive Committee – was standing as a candidate in the elections for the presidency of the Romanian national association and asked me to come and join him in the administration. We had a couple of days discussing the things I would like to change, and we drew up a plan of action. He won the election, so I started a career of five-and-a-half years as CEO of the Romanian FA – which was a fantastic time for me because I had to learn a lot of things. I was in charge of the national teams; I was responsible for market-
ing; and there were other things to organise, like the congress. There was a lot to do. In the meantime I worked for five years as a member of UEFA’s Disciplinary Committee and a UEFA match delegate. At the same time, I was a member of FIFA’s Technical Development Committee, so I learned quite a bit about the structures of the two organisations.

Going back to the grassroots level, you were recently on stage at UEFA’s grassroots workshop in Oslo with Fernando Hierro and Stig Inge Bjørnebye. They both said that they’d been told, as teenagers, that they weren’t good enough to make the grade. Did that happen to you?

No, but I had a different situation to cope with, because my father, Nicolae, was also a professional player and an international. He played at a World Cup in 1970 and people were always ready to say that I was only in the team because I was the son of Lupescu. I know of other players who have had the same problem and were never really judged on their footballing abilities rather than their ancestry – and some of them were good players… Fortunately, my father never really intervened in my career, even though he obviously had a great influence on it. He just said that if I really loved the game to go ahead as far as I could and that, in any case, the secret was just work, work, work… You could say that my father was my best coach during the grassroots years, not so much because of what he gave in skills or ability but rather the attitude I had to the game. I believe that parents sometimes push their kids much too hard. It’s sad to see that they go to training or matches and spend their time issuing instructions or something worse. It’s a bad mistake. That’s why I fully support the youth development clubs and national associations who draw up clear guidelines for parents.

During your playing days, who were the coaches who influenced you the most?

I have to say that I had a lot of different coaches and I wouldn’t like to say whether that is a good thing or a bad thing for a player. During my eight years in Germany, I had nine coaches – and quite a few, like Hannes Bongarts, Bernd Krauss, Norbert Meier and Friedl Rausch during my two seasons at Mönchengladbach. But I would go back to the coach who took me into the Dinamo first team at 17: Mircea Lucescu. He is a very, very good coach, especially when it comes to promoting young players. He made a big impression on me and I think he was similarly successful in Turkey and during his seven or eight years in Italy. His record during the last nine years in Donetsk is remarkable. I think he has been league champion every season except one and has made club history by winning the UEFA Cup and reaching the last eight in the Champions League. He was a big influence in my career. In Germany, I also worked with Dragoslav Stepanovic, Jürgen Gelsdorf, Erich Ribbeck… I learned something from all of them. I think it’s also important to capitalise on the negative parts of your career because you learn from them as well.

When did you decide to do a coaching course?

I had the idea of going into coaching about six or seven months after I finished playing. I think that probably 95% of players, when they reach the end of their careers, think “I want to be a coach”. This is OK, but we need to face the reality that there are a limited number of jobs. I believe that many players would benefit from taking a wider view and exploiting the fact that there are many other aspects to the game of football; that there are a lot of rewarding opportunities in the grassroots game or youth development if you are prepared to learn a bit. But so many former professionals just focus on going straight into a first-team coaching job in the first or second division without thinking too much about these other opportunities. So I think we have an educational role in terms of encouraging former players to look around and maybe to look a bit further.
By the way, I have to admit that when I stopped playing at the age of 33, I thought I knew a lot about football. But when I began my studies and started to take on board the theoretical aspects of the game, I realised that I only knew about 10%. That was my personal experience and I’m sure other people feel the same.

**What do you mean by the theoretical aspects?**

Things that can sometimes seem boring. But when you’ve finished the course you realise how much you have benefited from studying different aspects. When you move into coaching, you have to make a big adjustment in that you are responsible for 25 players and 25 different characters. If you can find common ground and common sense between all of them and help them to work as a unit, you have achieved about 60% of your objective. Today, you have to try to do this against a backdrop of external pressures, such as the media, agents and club presidents, who can make the job of coaching a lot more difficult. You need to acquire different skills in order to achieve this.

When I did my Pro licence, I was fortunate to be in a group of 25 or 26 people, most of whom had been colleagues of mine. Some had been team-mates during my playing career and others had a university background. So the mix was very good. Those of us who had been footballers listened to what the university guys were saying about the theory and they learned from us when it came to the practical side. That’s why I am such a firm believer in the value of meeting and exchanging. Other valuable aspects for me were the psychological part and media training. I learned how to speak in front of other people and how to communicate with the media. We had the chief writers from publications like Bildzeitung or Sport Bild to talk to us about the philosophies of their newspapers. That helped to understand exactly why they push in certain directions and helped us to avoid falling into traps. It was good education.

**You mention a university background – you also obtained a university qualification, didn’t you?**

Yes, I was also interested in the administrative and educational aspects of the game so I did a master’s in international relations at university when I finished playing and I attended sports university courses in Bucharest. This was important for me because I could add more concepts to the experience I had gathered as a player.

**Did this broader background help you when you joined UEFA?**

I think so. I had received an initial approach to join UEFA at a time when Mircea Sandu had health problems. He was out of the office for more or less a whole year, and somebody had to take care of things at the association. It wasn’t the moment to walk away. In 2011, I had a second approach and accepted. It was a good start because I was acting as an advisor within the national associations division. Then I was informed that the technical director, Andy Roxburgh, would be leaving and I was invited to step into his shoes. After five years in administrative roles, this was something a bit new for me. But it was positive because it made me brush up on the learning I had acquired eight or ten years previously.

**How did you set about the job?**

The first thing to stress is that it’s a nice challenge to carry on where Andy Roxburgh left off. He was at UEFA for 18 years, did a truly fantastic job and set extremely high standards. Our objective is to maintain those standards with,
obviously, a slightly different approach. I say “obviously” because, when you come into a job, you don’t set out just to imitate what has gone before. We had already begun dialogues on how we proposed to organise ourselves in the future and the sort of programmes that we wanted to undertake. Frank Ludolph, our head of football education services, joined me in long discussions with the UEFA President about the directions we proposed to move in. We talked for almost four hours and then the President said “let’s get to work”. It was good, because he has a lot of ideas and he has experience as a player and a coach, so he gave some good advice – and we also had valuable input from our General Secretary, Gianni Infantino.

Can you sum up your prime objectives?
It’s difficult to do so in a few words. One of the prime aims is to establish working partnerships between UEFA and the top experts in each field, with a view to passing on information of high quality and real relevance to what the national associations are trying to achieve in different fields. Let’s take coach education as an example. In many of UEFA’s member associations, we have fantastic coach education structures. Fantastic. So the opportunities to learn are right there. One really positive move that UEFA made was to introduce the Study Group Scheme. I think that it has made a real impact and it fits in perfectly with my view that national associations should work together and exchange their knowledge and experience. We have to accept that we have tremendous diversity. A few weeks ago, for example, we staged a Pro licence student exchange event in Nyon involving students from four national associations. One of them was Spain. And, in their presentation, I learned that their coach education system dates back to 1944! That is quite something. Obviously not every national association can match that sort of tradition, which is why it is so important, in my view, to pool our resources and use our “strongest players” to strengthen the team as a whole.

I would say that the vision is simply to involve more and more national associations in UEFA’s projects. We are discussing various ways of designing a conference or a workshop, for example. I believe that we have a lot of very good people in our national associations and that they should be encouraged to participate more. Every time we try to establish a working group – whether it’s coach education, grassroots football or anything else – we will hold planning meetings before the event and get the top specialists involved in designing the programme. I think that “involvement” is the key word. If you wanted to sum up the policy very briefly, you could say that all our future events will be, basically, “exchange projects” involving all our member associations. Football, after all, is a team sport.
COMMITMENT TO COACHING

February marked the 20th anniversary of the last meeting of a working group set up by UEFA with a brief to “upgrade standards of coach education; to protect the coaching profession and to facilitate freedom of movement within European countries in line with international law”. It’s not exactly common practice to commemorate a farewell.

But when that group of technical directors and experts from various national associations met for the last time, they were lamenting the death, in the previous November, of their Chairman, Vaclav Jira. When a fully fledged UEFA commission for coach education met for the first time in 1995, the adoption of Jira’s name was a tribute to his pioneering work.

The quick rewind serves to highlight that, if we bear in mind that The Football Association is currently commemorating its 150th anniversary, attention to coaching and coach education is a relatively recent element in the history of the game, even though a very select few member associations can trace their coach education structures back to the 1940s. The rewind also serves to emphasise how much has been achieved in a short period. Regular readers will be aware that all 53 of UEFA’s member associations have become signatories of the UEFA Coaching Convention with the result that, by March of this year, 161,560 UEFA-endorsed coaching licences had been issued – 5,907 of them at Pro level.

While UEFA has remained unerringly committed to the development of coach education, the parameters of that commitment have evolved with great rapidity – and the diversity of the projects currently under way can be gauged by the fact that, at the most recent meeting of the Jira Panel in Bucharest, there were more than 60 items on the agenda. Many of them corresponded to the continual process of evaluating, re-evaluating and offering support to the coach education courses run by national associations. Others, however, were related to projects which have been steadily gaining momentum during 2013.

The specialised goalkeeping, fitness and futsal courses, for example, which are being added as branches to the coach education tree. The former was launched when some 160 coach educators attended four pilot seminars staged in Belgium, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland and Sweden during the 2011/12 season. The success of the pioneering events triggered the further development of the programme, via courses staged between March and May in Serbia, Belgium, Moldova and Scotland. One of the main course instructors, former Irish international keeper Packie Bonner, comments: “UEFA’s aim is for these seminars to provide national...”
There is no shortage of general physical education courses but, as explained by Andreas Morisbak, the Norwegian member of the Jira Panel, appointed to lead a specialised working group, “the aim is to create clear football-specific guidelines and to help associations to integrate fitness topics within their coach education programmes.” The first tangible result was a Fitness for Football seminar in Oslo in early March, where coach educators from member associations were brought into direct contact with leading experts in the fitness field to discuss how best to ensure that fitness coaching is an integral part of the overall training process.

UEFA’s new international development programmes have also become an integral part of the overall coach education programme. The idea of offering international experience at Under-16 level has been translated into 13 tournaments for boys and 11 for girls, with UEFA assigning a technical observer to each event with a view to discussing training methods, tactics and match play. Vanessa Martinez, one of the observers appointed for the girls’ tournaments, remarks: “This promotes the development of coaches and referees as well as talented young players. For coaches, it’s an opportunity to test more players in a competitive environment and to experiment with team tactics and the playing positions of individuals, in the knowledge that the focus is on development rather than results.”

In the meantime, UEFA’s Study Group Scheme is into its fifth season, during which approximately 1,800 technicians will have got together at venues in 31 member associations for 52 seminars, 13 of them dedicated to grassroots football, 15 to elite youth football, 10 to women’s football and 14 to coach education. Delving deeper into the latter, two of the four UEFA Student Exchange seminars scheduled for the calendar year have already been staged in Nyon, involving Pro licence students from France, Hungary, Italy and Spain (in April), followed by groups from Albania, Armenia, Greece and Montenegro (in May). The aim is to add international ingredients and input from UEFA tutors to the Pro licence courses run by member associations – and feedback indicates strongly that this objective has been achieved.

At the same time, programmes are being designed for the UEFA Elite Club Coaches Forum, to be staged in Nyon in September, the UEFA Coach Education Workshop which will take place in Budapest in October, and the UEFA Conference for Women’s National Team Coaches to be held in Nyon in December – all of which will be covered in future issues.

All this adds up to a clear statement of UEFA’s commitment to coach education – and a spectrum of activities which the Jira Panel, when it first met in Paris in March 1995, could not have dreamed about including on its “action list” for the future.
By the time the ball started rolling in the knockout rounds of the UEFA Champions League, eight head coaches had been replaced. Regrettably, it was not exceptional for one quarter of the "workforce" to lose their jobs during the short time span between the beginning of the group stage in September and the start of the new year. In many domestic leagues, four out of every ten coaches are dismissed during an average season. During the last decade, the average tenure of coaches in Europe’s major leagues has been practically halved and can be more easily measured in games rather than seasons. Poor results – possibly derived from errors in coaching judgement – provide the traditional route towards the exit. But “failures” can also be tracked back to issues such as loss of control, breakdowns in communication, fractured relationships, negativity in terms of the coach’s image or even plain bad luck.

A dismissal, however, is not always a momentary setback. The participants at a coaching forum recently staged by England’s League Managers Association were disturbed to learn that over half of the coaches who are dismissed from their first job never get a second one. In other walks of life, it is unlikely that a qualified professional would be similarly obliged to seek an alternative line of employment after one solitary chance to show his or her worth.

The real concern within the coaching profession, however, goes beyond the prevailing conditions in the labour market. Time and time again, discussion at UEFA events has underlined the feeling among coaches and coach educators that there are generalised shortfalls in terms of prestige, image, recognition and, above all, respect.

It’s interesting to recall that, as a talking point, UEFA’s technical report on the 1999/2000 season commented: “The club president has become the overlord – an omnipotent force who shapes the image of the club and often controls the careers of those on the club’s payroll”. The concluding message was that “with power comes responsibility and the presidents/owners of Europe’s elite clubs have a massive responsibility for the future of the game”. Thirteen years later, it might be another pertinent talking point to wonder whether they have all assumed and reacted positively to that responsibility.

There is enough evidence to argue the point. In an environment where presidents and owners freely admit to signing players off their own bat and openly announce to the media – and the dressing room – that coaches have been hired on an interim basis, almost everybody in the coaching profession has stories to tell and opinions to voice. Some of them are extreme. For example, a former international midfielder who has gone on to become an alert and dedicated member of the coaching profession recently revealed in a newspaper column: “During the half-time interval, bearing in mind that we were 3-0 down, I ordered two substitutions. But the changes were never made. The president came down to the dressing room and vetoed them. He then sat on the bench during the second half.” On a scale of zero to ten, how does that rate as a demonstration of respect for the coaching profession?

Fortunately, not all technicians are subjected to such belittlement. But it is a reminder to coach educators that their students need to be prepared to face harsh realities in conditions where their status in the dressing room might be seriously undermined by external influences. In this respect, a widely accepted theory is that former top professional players backed by careers in the
dressing room might be better equipped. Although they might start with a marginally better balance in the credit column, statistics tend to give the lie to this theory. Having been fast-tracked into coaching, former pros are just as likely to be fast-tracked out. The fundamental premise, which is not always readily accepted by those hanging up their boots, is that coaching is a different profession from playing. As Sir Trevor Brooking, The Football Association’s director of football development, commented at a recent UEFA event: “Some players still think that a coaching badge is unnecessary, but these days, the only way to ensure a job is on the basis of a good coaching education”.

Even so, it can be argued that a carefully sign-posted career pathway is a far more reliable route to survival and success than a sprint to the top. In this sphere, a recent coaching forum in England provided fuel for debate by drawing parallels with theories on the concept of “expertise”. According to research by the Swedish psychologist Anders Ericsson, it takes 10,000 hours of practice to achieve expert status. At the forum, it was argued that, in footballing terms, this can be translated into a time span of 250 matches, which would normally signify approximately five seasons of coaching work. Evidently, a vast majority of front-line coaches fail to reach that milestone and two out of every three lose their jobs before they are even one-third of their way along the route to “expertise.”

Sir Alex Ferguson is among those who therefore advocate a more patient approach, based on a thorough grounding with reserve or youth teams before the rookie coach is exposed to maximum-risk situations in the front line of the profession. The counter-argument is whether human nature would allow a coach to turn down a well-renumerated front-line job if the opportunity came along. As a talking point, it could be asked whether a lengthy spell of work experience at a lower level, based on a time span or a certain number of games, should be a mandatory part of studies for a UEFA Pro licence.

In the meantime, many of football’s hirers-and-firers continue to see life through a short lens. The 2012/13 season has had, like those before it, a full quota of “quick-fix” appointments by clubs who have been flirting with relegation. “What’s wrong with that?” you might ask. Those who see nothing wrong with short-term appointments could point out that, in the 2011/12 season, Roberto Di Matteo emerged as a UEFA Champions League winner after barely 11 weeks in charge – although it has to be underlined that he had been a member of the Chelsea FC coaching staff for the entire season.

The devil’s advocate might therefore try to provoke further debate by asking if it is time to question the whole concept of coaching as a long-term team building exercise and to begin to educate students with a view to coping with a job that, according to the statisticians, is likely to last little more than one season.

But, irrespective of the duration of contracts, the underlying theme remains. It was an American supreme court judge who remarked: “The only real source of power is the respect of the people”. The sentence, however, can also be translated into footballing terms. What more can be done to prevent the power of the coach from being undermined even further? And what more can be done to earn the coaching profession the respect it deserves?
THE GERMAN FACTOR
THE WOMEN’S TROPHY IS ALSO LIFTED BY A BUNDESLIGA CLUB

One of the end-of-season talking points was whether the 2012/13 club competition campaigns had signalled a change of direction. After a period dominated by the benchmark football of FC Barcelona and the Spanish national team, discussion was triggered by the presence of two Bundesliga clubs at Wembley in the UEFA Champions League final – and by the victory of another German club, debutantes VfL Wolfsburg, in the final of the UEFA Women’s Champions League played at Stamford Bridge, where they defeated the defending champions, Olympique Lyonnais, 1-0.

The men’s final traditionally features prominently in the annual UEFA Champions League technical report – and will continue to do so this season. On the other hand, the women’s final receives less attention – which is a pity, as the match at Stamford Bridge raised some interesting coaching points.

Olympique Lyonnais travelled to London for the club’s fourth successive UEFA Women’s Champions League final – and the fourth against German opposition. They made the trip when the team was one match away from completing a league campaign of 22 wins in 22 matches, with 132 goals scored and five conceded. They also travelled on the back of a 120-match run without a defeat over 90 minutes of play. Their head coach, 51-year-old former full-back Patrice Lair, therefore had to address motivational issues and try to isolate his players from a mood suggesting his team were “at least three goals better” than the opposition.

Ralf Kellermann, 44, faced challenges of a different ilk. The VfL Wolfsburg coach went into his first final with an absence in each line: Verena Feisst in defence (ill), Viola Odebrecht in midfield (suspended) and top-scorer Selena Wagner (injured) in attack. He gambled on fielding attacker Alexandra Popp at left-back, even though she had barely trained with the group during the run-up to the final. On the other hand, he relished the underdog label and exploited it to refuel the strong team ethic which had already taken the “She-Wolves” to a domestic league and cup double. Although it was the club’s first UEFA final, a backbone of experience was provided by Popp, Josephine Henning, Nadine Kessler and lone striker Connie Pohlers, all of whom had been champions of Europe with other clubs.

“To the outsider, Wolfsburg could appear to have been fortunate to win,” comments Béatrice von Siebenthal, who was at Stamford Bridge as UEFA’s technical observer. “Lyon had more ball possession and goal attempts. They dominated during certain periods of the game. But, tactically and mentally, Wolfsburg were very well prepared and they concentrated from start to finish...
on adhering to their game plan.” As Ralf Kellermann said afterwards: “We set out to play deep, sit back and then go for it on the counterattack. We defended well and grew in confidence – and that’s what made the game plan work.” Ivonne Hartmann was the outstanding performer, leading the Wolfsburg back line with exemplary positioning and good anticipation. For the Lyon attackers, it was hard to find a way past her.

The Wolfsburg set-up was a 4-4-1-1, with two central midfielders dropping close to the back four to switch to a compact 4-2-3-1 defensive formation. Olympique Lyonnais lined up in 4-2-3-1 formation with Elodie Thomis and American international Megan Rapinoe in wide starting positions on the flanks.

As Béatrice highlighted, Wolfsburg’s approach was to focus on disciplined defending and the delivery of some “pinpricks”, as she put it, with some penetrating fast counters – many of them stemming from a long pass by goalkeeper Alisa Vetterlein to the halfway line. “The priority was to get nine players behind the ball as quickly as possible and to start defending from the halfway line. The emphasis was on forcing Lyon wide in the build-up phase and then to press the ball-carrier very hard on the flanks. When Lyon succeeded in passing through the central area, the recipient of the pass was immediately put under fierce pressure from both directions to prevent a goalward turn or wall pass.” The French team adopted a different defensive strategy with, when possession was lost, one player harrying the Wolfsburg ball-carrier and seven players dropping into defensive positions.

Patrice Lair’s side took the upper hand in terms of territorial domination and ball possession, building from the back, opening play to the wide areas, where the wingers were supported by overlapping full-backs. Approach play was based on the pace of the wide players and attempts to play wall passes through the central area. However, as Béatrice pointed out, “they always seemed to be outnumbered in the final third and only created clear chances when they threw seven players into that area.” Lair agreed: “We lacked a bit in the final third and we should have put our foot on the ball a little more.” Wolfsburg’s strategy was not to be lured into overstretching in attack, limiting their resources to four players in the final third and keeping six outfielders behind the ball. During periods of the game, Wolfsburg found it difficult to break out of their own half because of the efficient defensive work of the Lyon midfield – quick to intercept long passes from the back and also to dominate the second ball.

The key areas were in front of the defence lines. Louisa Nécib started as the more advanced of the Lyon midfielders, but switched with Camille Abily after half an hour to take on the screening and playmaking role. She was available to receive back and efficiently ushered moves from the back into and through the midfield.

Wolfsburg’s key player operated in the same zone in front of the back four. Ralf Kellermann admitted that, had he been able to select his team from a full squad, Lena Goessling would probably have started in the back four. But, as screening midfielder, she performed well enough for Von Siebenthal to select her for the UEFA Player of the Match award. “She was very important in her team’s attacking and defending,” Béatrice explains. “Defensively, her positioning was excellent and she pressed hard with enormous desire to win the ball. And when she had possession, she was prepared to drive forward with the ball to open up spaces for team-mates; or to play threatening through passes into the final third.” As Kellermann concurred, “she dictated the tempo of the game and did a great job. But we were a real unit – and that’s what won us the match.”

The title-winning goal stemmed from a counter which culminated in a cross – and a penalty for handball, which was powerfully converted by Wolfsburg midfielder Martina Müller. Lyon’s response was to up the tempo of their ball circulation and their pressure on Wolfsburg’s ball-carriers. However, the French team’s finishing was not outstanding – and the German team’s goalkeeper was. “When you don’t score, you can always be punished,” Patrice Lair lamented afterwards. “We tried everything: we played with a defensive screening midfielder, an attacking screening midfielder, two players out wide, two strikers instead of one when we had to push forward and equalise. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. We didn’t really get enough players into the penalty area. It’s usually one of our outstanding characteristics, but we didn’t really get it right in London.”

The result says that VfL Wolfsburg got it right on the night – and the fact that they lifted the UEFA Women’s Champions League trophy for the first time was a tribute to the efficiency of their defend-and-counter strategy. © Olympique Lyonnais goalkeeper Sarah Bouhaddi seems to be going the right way, but Martina Müller’s powerful spot kick hits the middle of the net to clinch the UEFA Women’s Champions League title for the debutantes of VfL Wolfsburg
Talking of modified formats, this season heralds a new approach to UEFA’s technical reports on the final rounds of the men’s and women’s Under-17 and Under-19 competitions. They will now be published exclusively in online format – which allows them to appear in many more languages and to incorporate links with video material, including interviews and coverage of the most significant features of these tournaments.

The UEFA technician traditionally salutes the coaches who have successfully led their teams into the finals of UEFA competitions. Although there is a wide range of tournaments still to come during the summer, here are the coaches who have already stepped on to the podium during 2013.

**UEFA Futsal Cup in Tbilisi**

MFK Dinamo – Kairat Almaty 3-4  
Gold: Ricardo Camara Sobral (Cacau)  
Silver: Tino Perez

**European Under-17 Championship in Slovakia**

Italy v Russia 0-0  
(4-5 in penalty shoot-out)  
Gold: Dmitri Khomukha  
Silver: Daniele Zoratto

**UEFA Europa League in Amsterdam**

Chelsea FC v SL Benfica 2-1  
Gold: Rafael Benitez  
Silver: Jorge Jesus

**UEFA Women’s Champions League at Stamford Bridge, London**

VfL Wolfsburg v Olympique Lyonnais 1-0  
Gold: Ralf Kellermann  
Silver: Patrice Lair

**UEFA Champions League at Wembley Stadium, London**

Borussia Dortmund v FC Bayern München 1-2  
Gold: Jupp Heynckes  
Silver: Jürgen Klopp

At first sight, it might seem ungracious for the UEFA technician to not add to the plethora of tributes that have been paid to Sir Alex Ferguson. UEFA, with its President, Michel Platini, at the forefront, has certainly sung his praises – and presented him with a special award during the dinner which was staged after the UEFA Congress in London. Sir Alex’s totals of 38 trophies and 190 UEFA Champions League games in not far short of 27 years at Manchester United FC have set benchmarks for coaching colleagues all over the world.

For the UEFA technician, however, this is by no means the end of a road. Sir Alex was one of the founder members when the UEFA Elite Club Coaches Forum was launched in 1999 and, now that he has stepped away from the front line, it’s to be hoped that his involvement will become even deeper in the future. For example, the format of the forum is now being modified and Sir Alex has agreed to lead the next event (more of this in the next issue) to be staged in September. In other words, Sir Alex has not said his last word to his colleagues and admirers in the coaching profession.