

FA Psychology Level 4 Crystal Palace Ladies FC



An excited group of 24 coaches assembled in the classroom to learn from the specialised FA tutors whom deliver the Psychology Level 4 programme, a four day residential course based at the home of the national Football Association.

St George's Park is a beacon to development of both coaches and players and a long planned ambition and investment to secure success by the national team. Grouped around our tables, we began networking to identify the commonalities we shared from our diverse backgrounds as coaches, academics and players from across the UK and beyond.

Day One

The tutors introduced to the structure of the course and fed back the questionnaires that were sent in advance, sharing common issues and interest of our players. We were introduced theories and defined terminology to relate to our current coaching experiences around the five elements: Communication, Confidence, Concentration, Control, Commitment.

In the afternoon, we were afforded the opportunity to observe a local grass roots team training at the venue and later, interact and lead their training sessions to test and challenge our understanding of the theories introduced in the classroom and careful analysis thereafter.

As a unexpected bonus, I met pitch side the departing course director, Dr Matthew Pain whom delivered my Level 3 course, and ably assisted Dr Andy Cale, the originator for the FA Psychology programmes and learning resources. A wonder reward to complete the circle of my Psychology journey.

Day Two

After an early start, we continued all day with case studies, learning techniques to support players and identify their needs and having squeezed so much in, enjoyed a quick meal before returning in the evening to analyse the European Championship match Italy v Spain in the classroom to compare success of attacking a defending of two giants on international football giants and perhaps the best examples of their respective styles of play.

We reviewed our analyse to highlight the specific elements and understand with good examples observed from the observing the match together and tutors' comments throughout our discussion.

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Day Three

We began with a review of the previous day before we were treated to a rare and private interview with the U19s England Coach and Manager, Aidy Boothroyd. His team of coaches and players were preparing for an international tournament in Germany and generously shared access to his training session and opportunity to analyse individual players during his technical session.

We returned to the classroom to review the events from the session and reflect using the models and structure of the theories discussing individual performance and apply the theories and understanding recently introduced to demonstrate their effectiveness and relevance in a elite performance environment.

Day Four

An opportunity to play on the indoor pitch at St George's and in our groups, work together to deliver a pre-planned session and receive comments from our peers. Finally a review of the course on the last day help understand how far we have come, learning new techniques and greater understanding to the issues, both from a player perspective and support effective planning for coaches to sessions, and match day activities both on and off the pitch.

The newly appointed course Director was keen to get involved so observed and feedback to the class her background and vision. The improved value of interacting and application of the vast resources, to watch players, interview coaches and analyse live training sessions opportunities available only at St George's Park.

On reflection

Since we have parted, we speak almost daily on Whatsapp, share long conversation exchanging ideas and testing theories and reunion planned for both the next level course and publicised events to promote each other's roles and responsibilities across the UK.

This is, by far, the most beneficial course I have participated and enjoyed. The lack of ego, collective support and encouragement (indicative of the subject matter) and diligent hospitality provided a unique learning environment, to ignite our passion for the subject and forge lasting friendships that have stretched beyond football.

On my return to our squad, I have continued my desire to allow our players to make their own decisions, stepping back from shouting and direct instructions and supporting their development with a "butterfly" approach, to offer minimum information rather than dictate instructions from the side of the pitch.

We have a schedule of topics to include throughout the season and asked parents permission to provide activities away from the football pitch to further their development on the pitch and beyond.

We ask many questions of our players, often reflecting their own answers to challenge their understanding. The objective is to build a trusted environment to ensure each player feels safe to make mistakes vital to build the self-confidence and resilience to learn and discover for themselves.

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I thank all trustees sincerely for this precious opportunity to meet, grow and advance my coaching ambitions. I have met some fantastic coaches, built some valuable relationships and shared and developed some exciting ideas, all thanks to the trust shown in my application.

Sincerely,

Matthew