

European Coaches Education Tour - Spain – 2011

November 28, 2011 – Blog #1

Today as I took my seat on the Lufthansa plane heading to Frankfurt and then on to Amsterdam, I could not help but look back to my first trip to Europe.

In 1982, I first travelled to Germany as a 12 year old boy with my brother Marcus (then 17), Benjamin (then 11) and Christopher (then 7) to visit Opa Ziemer (our Dad Herbert 's father). Since our father Herbert fled to England with his mother before WW II and later to the US, he wanted us to meet his father and that was the purpose of our trip.

Having already made the goal of being a professional player, the 2 month stay in Germany during “World Cup Spain 82”, only further ignited the flame for the World's Game. Staying with relatives near Koln in what was then West Germany, we watched every minute of the World Cup on TV and even caught the last Bundesliga Game of the season – 1FC Koln vs 1FC Kaiserslautern.

Today, almost 30 years since that trip and countless voyages to Europe later, the love that myself and my family have for soccer is even bigger. Our love for soccer continues to grow alongside the sport. As we have grown older and the sport as evolved, I have to remind myself how lucky I am and to have gratitude for the experiences and memories. All because of Soccer, Fussball, Voetbal, Futbol, Calcio.

Our father was a school teacher and growing up in the country without a T.V. was the biggest advantage that we had. Whatever we did, we were taught to do our best the Ziemer parents created a loving (but critical) environment and as a result, we learned to look at what we could do better to reach that next level in whatever we did.

Having four brothers who all played soccer and a dirt field in our yard also was a huge benefit which kept us in and out of trouble. After those two months in Germany, we talked with our parents and all four of us set our soccer standards on Europe, not on America.

Being an American Soccer Player during the 70's and 80's was like being in a cult. It was so new and different, not like today in which every boy and girl practically plays in a league when they are young.

A huge highlight for the Ziemer Family and their friends was College Soccer and the North American Soccer League. Players that migrated to the U.S. to play college soccer would be pro players today, but smaller countries in Europe, African, Central and South America could not make a living in those days, so they came to the U.S. to get an education. Later our generation had the chance to play with those players on amateur and professional teams and are coaching colleagues with many today.

Every other week, we drove two hours to watch the San Jose Earthquakes and see the world's best players in action. Many players came to the U.S. to help build the game and we saw amazing players such as : Pele, Eusebio, Beckenbauer, Cubillas, Chinaglia, Cruyff, Neeskens, George Best, Carlos Alberto and more...

The style of play in College and NASL was beautiful and each league had a few immigrants who coached as they had played the game before coming to the U.S. Kids had more time on their hands then and the common message that we heard from every coach was that we had to "Master the Ball". The Ziemer Family did this while playing Backyard Soccer.

Coming back to 2011, after 50+ trips to Europe and Central America, we are still as hungry for knowledge as we were in 1982.

In the last 10-15 years, despite soccer growing, our view has been that there is too much emphasis on speed and size and not enough on skill and tactical intelligence. Also that in youth soccer there is too much emphasis on winning and too much parent involvement and therefore a high drop out rate.

Since the 70's, Ajax Amsterdam and the Dutch have played and developed players in a way of playing called Total Voetbal. This attacking , possession style is risky and exciting for the fans.

In 1994 while attending a 4 month course with the KNVB (Royal Dutch Soccer Federation) and playing in Holland, my brother Marcus and I met with Frans Hoek who was coaching at Ajax. The Ziemer family started to bring him and other Dutch Youth Coaches over to the U.S. to help ourselves and anyone else who wanted to learn.

After several years of coming over to Holland and later Spain as Frans transferred to FC Barcelona from 1997-2003, I finally convinced Frans in 2001 to organize a tour in which coaches could get an inside look on how European Coaches worked. The Ziemer family had been able to get this opportunity and wanted to help provide this for others and in turn advance the game.

Since that 1st European Coaches Education Tour in 2001, Frans and I have organized tours and travelled to the following countries : Holland, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Austria, Finland, Portugal, England and Greece.

If you are up on your history of European Soccer, you will know that the Ajax and Dutch team of the 70's was coached by Rinus Michels and led by player Johan Cruyff. Later both Michels and Cruyff went to FC Barcelona and developed that same "Total Football". Cruyff later became coach and was then followed by Dutch coaches Louis van Gall and Frank Rijkaard.

During those years, Cruyff picked a player out of the youth named Pep Guardiola who is the current coach of FC Barcelona.

Frans was the Assistant of Louis van Gall and at FC Barcelona for 6 years. During that time, they helped to structure the FC Barcelona Youth Development like they had previously done at Ajax Amsterdam. Pep was then a player.

In the last 5 years, Barca has dominated World Club Soccer with the majority of the players being homegrown. The Spanish National Team won the last European and World Cup. The Spanish coach Del Bosque a Madridista could not help but adopt the FC Barcelona Way of playing and choose 8 FC Barca players in the starting 11. All the Spanish Youth teams are dominated with FC Barcelona Youth Players.

From December 2 - December 12, thirty-two coaches from the U.S. will study Spanish Soccer at FC Barcelona, CF Espanyol and Valencia CF. The tour is led by Frans Hoek and Andrew Ziemer and attended by 12 College Coaches and 20 Youth Directors and Coaches.

Claudio Reyna, the USSF Youth Technical Director recently unveiled a Vision on Youth Development and Way of Playing. The two biggest influences in the new curriculum were Ajax Amsterdam and FC Barcelona.

The new U.S. National Team coach Juergen Klinsmann is preaching that we need to play better soccer in the youth and take the emphasis off on winning etc.

Our family, because of our ambition and desire to learn and grow as Soccer Educators have been travelling to Europe and bringing Europe to the U.S. for closer to 30 years. Now again we will be in Spain and will try and give you a glimpse into the Spanish Futbol. I hope you will enjoy the blogs to come.

I will be in Holland for three days to visit Ajax and pre-organize the Spain Tour with Frans Hoek. Friday, December 2, thirty-two passionate U.S. Soccer Coaches will embark on a 10 day journey into Spanish (Dutch) Futbol.

Until next time.

Andrew Ziemer
European Coaches Education Tour Organizer
Futbol Mad American