

## Ramblings From The NSCAA Convention

Just got back from Baltimore where the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) held its annual convention and, as usual, it was well attended (thousands of of idiot soccer lovers like me in one place!) and well organized by the NSCAA (they do an incredible job of making sure this thing runs smoothly and it usually does).

There were the usual field clinics and various seminars which makes scheduling your day quite a task. And of course, the biggest event is the opening of the vendor exhibit, with thousands of companies, from the giants (adidas, Nike, Puma, Kwik Goal, Diadora, et al) to small business ventures looking to network. There's free beer and free soda and (my favorite) free Gatorade (I am a Gatorade-aholic!).

But something strange, incredible, horrifying (take your pick) happened during the convention. Nearly all the vendors in the exhibit give away free items. Soccer America magazine for example had its latest issue -- January 2008, Vol. 63, No.1, Issue 1625 -- out on its table for all the coaches and visitors to pick up.

All well and good. Soccer America is the bible of soccer in the USA and I look forward to my issue every month. But the latest issue had a column in it, written by the dean of soccer writers in this country Paul Gardner. Nothing unusual there. Gardner always has a column in the magazine, and he is usually ripping something or someone.

But his latest column ripped the living crap out of the NSCAA Convention, the NSCAA in particular.

The headline to his column? Try this: "NSCAA blind to the future".

The first line in his column? Try this: "Pathetic."

Line two? "That is the only word to describe the program of clinics and lectures at this year's NSCAA Convention."

You see, Gardner has thing about how soccer in this country -- both the style of play and the coaching philosophy -- is going the wrong way in that there is way too much of an English flavor. He is dead on about. But his rage this month was that the NSCAA doesn't schedule enough -- any? -- Latin type coaches. Gardner likes the Latin soccer flavor, as do I. And we do need more of a Latin coaching influence here.

Problem is, Gardner was right.

And he was wrong.

The NSCAA did schedule some Latin coaches. In fact, the main reason I decided to attend the convention (actually this was my seventh year in a row) was the Thursday, 9:30 am session: "Offensive Tactics and Finishing at the Highest Level: The Brazilian Women's Team Approach in the World Cup", conducted by Jorge Barcellos, the Brazilian Women's National Team Coach. Holy Pele, Batman, that's a clinic that can't be missed.

Alas, it was. Seems Barcellos couldn't get his work visa in time, which makes you wonder exactly when he applied for it!

And then there was the Friday, 9:00 am session: "Offensive and Defensive Development in a 1v1", conducted by Carlos Leonel Truco, Director General de Futbol del Club Pachuca, hosted by the Latin American Soccer Coaches Association. Get the Batmobile Robin, we're going to samba in Baltimore.

Well, the samba was more like slow dancing to a looping "Color My World" by Chicago.

Director General Truco, a former World Cup player for Bolivia by the way, was introduced to the big crowd in Exhibit Hall C/D and proceeded to speak....

....in Spanish!

Holy Spanish 101 Batman, we need a translator! Oh, we got one. Cool. No big deal to me. I understand Spanish. I can pick a lot of words having worked in the construction business for a while. Besides, soccer is a sport that does not need a lot of speech. You can see what a coach is trying to do.

OK! I'm still in my seat. Like most coaches he started his session with a warmup. This, of course, is a big waste of time to me since the clinicians have only 1 hour, 15 minutes to feature their topic. Truco put his players into a game of Keepaway -- three defenders inside a big circle with the outside players restricted to 1-touch.

OK, I'm beginning to get restless. I know keepaway. All soccer coaches know keepaway. Kindergarten rec coaches play keepaway. Kids HATE keepaway.

People started to leave Exhibit Hall C/D, moving the 100 yards or so over to Exhibit Hall A/B where John Shiels was conducting a session called "How Does Philosophy Transfer to the Playing Field". Zzzzzzzzzzzzz! Shiels by the way is the Head Coach of the Manchester United Soccer Schools (the English way!)

I began doodling in my notebook. I drew up a new corner kick play that I will be teaching to some of the teams I train.

More people left. It was now 9:30 am. And he was still in the warmup session.

Basically, what was happening on the field was this:  
Kick-kick-stop! Truco talk. Translator talk. Kick-kick-stop. Truco talk. Translator talk.

I left. Went to the Starbucks in the Convention Center and got a Tazo Green Tea with Ginger.

Back to Gardner. He had a blast with this one. You see, when the NSCAA begins promoting the convention they usually begin with who will be their featured clinicians.. This year's top billing went to Steve McClaren, the head coach of the English National team. Wow. That was a good get.

Except that McClaren was fired when England did not qualify for the 2008 European Championships. McClaren showed up though and ran a clinic on defending. Can't say if it was or not since I did not attend it. And the NSCAA, to its credit, did list McClaren as "former" coach of England in the updated schedule book.

I am still wondering how NSCAA officials felt about the Gardner column. The NSCAA officials are good people. They work hard. They work long hours. They are all quick with a hello. They help when you need it. They do put on a good show. I attended some great clinics and seminars and some bad ones this year. But that's the chance you take when you attend such a big event. This year's convention was no better than the previous six. Nor was it worse than any of the previous six. You get out of it what you want.

In all, I also think the NSCAA is doing its best to serve coaches in this country. Their motto -- Coaches teach players, we teach coaches -- is what it is all about. It's not the NSCAA's fault if a Brazilian coach does not get his visa in time. But it is their fault when one of their sanctioned

associations hosts a clinic by someone who needs a translator and then proceeds to play keepaway for a half hour. And it is their fault for scheduling coaches from Man U, Everton, Arsenal, Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers, all English clubs.

So Gardner was right in that aspect. Too much English influence.

But he was wrong not to point out the fact that there were French and Brazilian and Mexican coaches. And that the Black Soccer Coaches Association hosted a clinic. And the Women's Soccer Coaches Association. And the Latin Coaches Association. And American college coaches.

And he is right to say that we need a coaching revolution in this country. We need to add more Latin influence into our coaching philosophy.

But he was wrong to write that the NSCAA is "failing in its duty to give a strong lead to American coaches."

Each year they add more non-English/European coaches. They just need to work on getting visas and translators in order.

And to get coaches to STOP PLAYING KEEPAWAY!!!

Overall grade for the 2008 NSCAA Convention: B-