

INTERVIEW

BY ANDY ROXBURGH,
UEFA TECHNICAL DIRECTOR



ROY HODGSON, THE CURRENT MANAGER OF FINLAND'S NATIONAL TEAM, HAS BEEN A PROFESSIONAL COACH FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, AND HAS SPENT THE BULK OF THAT TIME OUTSIDE HIS NATIVE ENGLAND. HE STARTED HIS COACHING CAREER IN SWEDEN WITH HALMSTAD BK, WINNING THE TITLE TWICE IN FOUR YEARS. THEN, AFTER TWO YEARS AT BRISTOL CITY FC, HE COACHED SWEDISH CLUB ÖREBRO SK TO THE SECOND DIVISION CHAMPIONSHIP. A MOVE TO MALMÖ FF RESULTED IN A PERIOD OF EXCEPTIONAL SUCCESS WITH FIVE SUCCESSIVE CHAMPIONSHIPS AND TWO CUPS BEING ACCUMULATED. AFTER WORKING FOR NEUCHÂTEL XAMAX FC IN SWITZERLAND, ROY TOOK OVER THE NATIONAL TEAM OF THAT COUNTRY AND LED THEM TO THE 1994 WORLD CUP FINALS AND EURO '96. FC INTERNAZIONALE ACQUIRED HIS SERVICES AND HE ADDED A UEFA CUP SILVER MEDAL TO HIS COLLECTION. SPELLS AT BLACKBURN ROVERS, GRASSHOPPER-CLUB ZURICH, FC KØBENHAVN (HE WON THE CHAMPIONSHIP WITH THE DANISH CLUB), UDINESE AND THE NATIONAL TEAM OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES THEN FOLLOWED, BEFORE HE WAS ENTICED TO TAKE CHARGE OF FINLAND'S NATIONAL TEAM. WITH EURO 2008 AS HIS TARGET, ROY HAS MADE AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT, AND THE FINNS HAVE HIGH HOPES OF QUALIFYING FROM A VERY DIFFICULT GROUP. NO MATTER THE OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN, ROY WILL SURELY PROVE ONCE AGAIN THAT HE IS A COACH OF IMMENSE QUALITY. HE IS ENGLISH, HE IS AN OUTSTANDING PROFESSIONAL, HE IS...

ROY HODGSON

1 • As the head coach of Finland, what are the main challenges you have faced?

There have been no major problems because the squad was composed of many tried and tested players, with a lot of experience. But, of course, in all new jobs you face some challenges. These could be summarised as the need to make a good impression on the players and the staff, the importance of convincing everyone about your coaching ideas and methods, and establishing a good working environment. These have been essential factors here but would, of course, be important anywhere. But I have to say, there have been no dramatic issues to deal with.

2 • In your view, what is the difference between managing a top

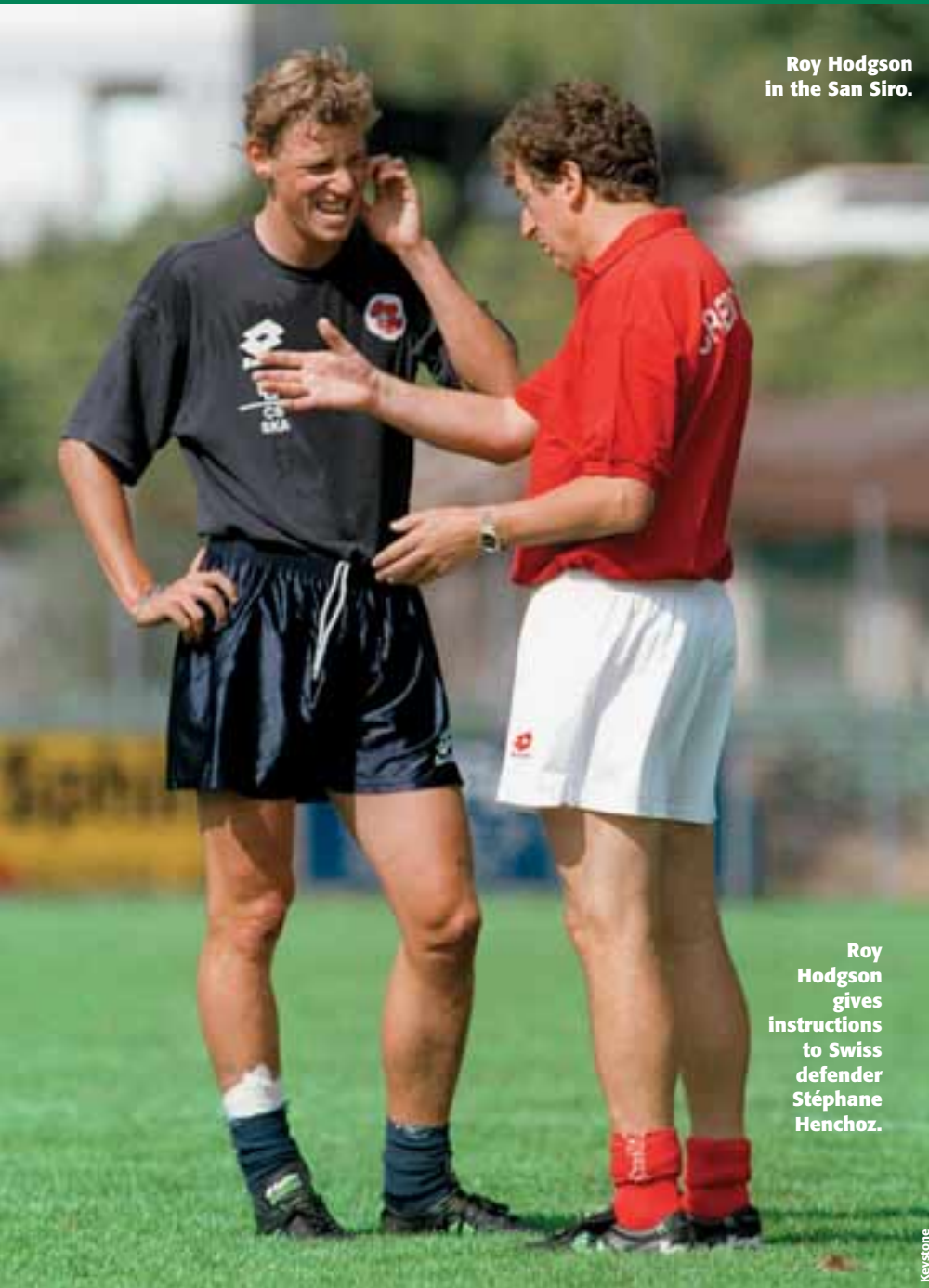
club side and coaching a national team?

The obvious answer is time. The time spent with players and your ability to work on team play is much more limited with a national squad. There are fewer matches with the national team, but each one carries an element of prestige and pride for your country. On the other hand, you avoid the club management situations like dealing with agents, negotiating salaries, buying and selling players. Both club coaches and national managers, however, can be faced with conflict when it comes to the release of players for national team duty. The players are unfortunately stuck in the middle of this debate. Finally, the image you

project is probably even more important when it comes to national teams because you are representing a nation's football – this is very important for the national coach to remember. At club level, you can be a little more parochial. You can fight for your club's agenda and sometimes you may even anger others or create jealousy in the country. But the national coach must be aware of his responsibility for the way football is perceived in a country, and that is an important aspect of his particular role.

3 • How would you describe your style of management?

It is not always easy to describe oneself, but I would like to think that my style could be considered as studied,



Roy Hodgson in the San Siro.

Roy Hodgson gives instructions to Swiss defender Stéphane Henchoz.



Keystone

of working day in and day out. We want to avoid wasting any training sessions because time is precious. You try to produce an instant gelling of the group and you need to be adaptable to cope with the inevitable call-offs and enforced changes. The more club-like you can make the team, the more security you can give the players, the better. This is especially the key when you are working with a small country. Each player needs to feel part of a stable squad of maybe 20-25 players. Very few nations in the world can field two different teams of top quality. Therefore most have to blend together the small group of players who are capable of playing international football.

5 • How has the coaching job changed since you started?

Thirty-one years of coaching is a long time, but I resist taking the view that 'distance lends enchantment'. But, unquestionably, there have been significant changes in the staffing of football clubs. Today we have everything from nutritionists to high-tech specialists. For example, when we were in South Korea recently, they had video analysis at half-time. There is no doubt that a lot has been done to give the coach more tools and to make the job easier. But, the crux of the job, i.e. standing in front of players and trying to persuade them that your ideas, your methods, your way of working are worth following, this hasn't really changed. Whatever kind of help the coach gets from the psychologist and the fitness trainer, he will still have to convince the group in front of him that he has something to offer them. When I started, there was only my assistant and myself, but today many coaches have a staff of 20 to 30 people. There has been an enormous development in terms of support, à la American sports organisations. But I still think the face-to-face communication with the players and the basic coaching haven't changed much over the years.

player-orientated, and with an emphasis on preparation and tactics. Because you take on leadership responsibilities, inevitably you have to be somewhat authoritarian. The game of football doesn't lend itself to true democracy. Certainly as I get older, I have become more aware that you can delegate certain things. For example, the players' opinion can be useful when discussing training times or deciding travel schedules, etc. Indeed, most things to do with the players' preparation can be open for discussion. When it comes down to the major issues, for example, team selection, how you are going to conduct your training sessions, what you will emphasise, and how you will deal with any conflict situation which might arise, I don't think there is any room for a democratic approach

when dealing with these matters. Players expect you to take the lead, because that is what you are paid for. But I think it is good to involve them in things which make a big difference to their life but don't compromise your position.

4 • What do you emphasise when preparing the national team?

Tactical preparation is crucial and I try to make sure that each player knows his role and is prepared for any challenges which he might face. That can, of course, be specific to the opposition which we will encounter. I try to make it clear to the players that the time we have together is very limited and we need to make efficient use of it. The goal is to be like a club side – to be as well organised as possible without the benefit



**HANSI MÜLLER,
ANDY ROXBURGH AND
ROY HODGSON AT THE 2007
UEFA GRASSROOTS
CONFERENCE IN HELSINKI.**



6 • As someone who has qualified for previous European Championship and World Cup final rounds, what are the important difficulties a coach faces when preparing for such events?

In the qualifying rounds and 'the final phase' the task is to produce a consistency of performance, so that the coach knows that his team are not going to let him down. You need to work very hard to avoid extremes – for example, last month your team was compact, this time you were all over the place. This is particularly significant when working with a national team where the result creates either euphoria or disaster, and has consequences for the players' morale and public expectations. As a coach of a national team you have to avoid extremes, either getting carried away because of a good result or becoming pessimistic after a loss. When you go into a final round you must be aware of what it will mean for the players to be fully concentrated for the duration of the event. Also, they are away together in a different, sometimes claustrophobic environment. The Italians can usually handle this better than most



After his stint with Internazionale, Roy Hodgson had another Italian experience, with Udinese.

because they are used to living in training camps for extended periods of time. Most players don't have this type of experience. Making sure that the players can keep some sort of perspective and a reasonable level of enjoyment in their lives is vital during a final round. You need to lighten their load because they will be under pressure, with all sorts of demands on them. Normally, the football and coaching side is the least of your problems, but the care of the players on a human level may require a lot of attention. The teams which consistently qualify have a wealth of experience in dealing with tournament play and this is their advantage.

7 • As someone who has been on both sides of the fence, what would you do to improve the relationship between club and national team coaches?

The only way to improve this issue is through communication. Both partners need to show empathy for the other's problems. All coaches agree that it's not a good idea to put the players into a bad situation. Yet, we consistently do, because each side is thinking about their own needs. Having said that, the coordinated calendar has made a big difference. Certainly within Europe it has helped, but clubs with South American or African players still have major problems. However, the one thing I would like to see is some discussion about the number of dates for official matches and for friendlies. If you are in a big qualifying group like ours, then you need to use some friendly dates for official games and this can be a disadvantage. In summing up the club versus country debate: give and take, common sense and the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes would go a long way to bringing harmony amongst the coaches.

8 • In your opinion, what are the significant trends in top-level European football, from both a tactical and managerial perspective?

From a managerial perspective, the trend is for a coach to be judged more

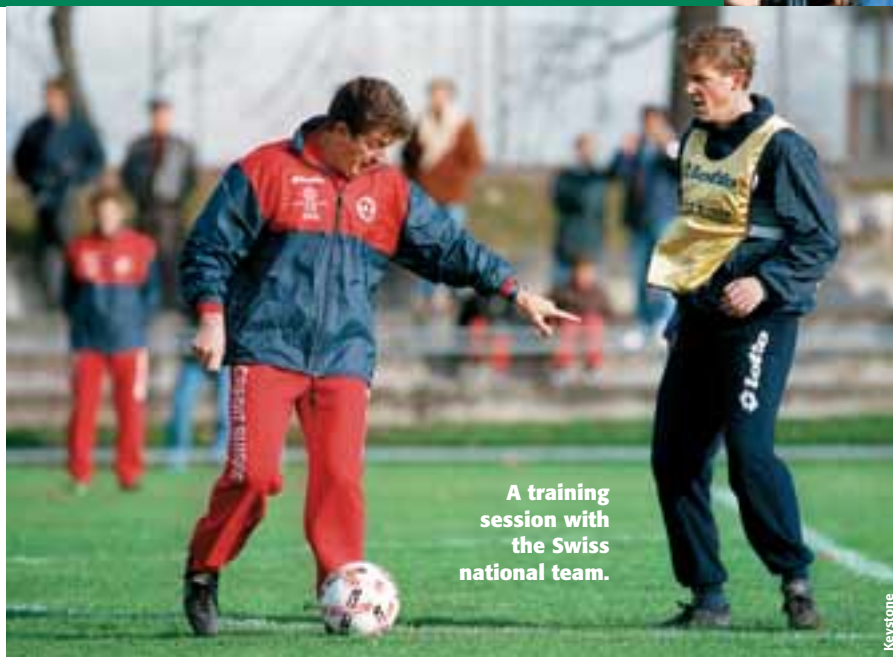
quickly and more harshly than in the past. Because of that, there is little scope for a coach to develop his philosophy or his management style because he might not get the results quickly enough to give him the time. What it has meant, at the highest level, is that the ability to spend money and buy the right players, and to get them to fit in, has become more important than it was in the past when more time was given to the manager to develop the players at his disposal. Today he is being judged more on the quality of his buys than on the standard of work being carried out on a day-to-day basis. From a tactical viewpoint, we could talk about a lot of things but I'll content myself with three. Number one is the importance of the counter-attack and the ability to profit from the turnovers. Secondly, the improvement of athleticism and pace throughout the team. There is no doubt the game is faster and the selection of players reflects this. And thirdly, there is less high-intensity pressing from the front and in advanced areas. This is partly because concern over the interpretation of the offside law has led teams to play deeper. Sides are still compact, but this is mainly in their own half of the pitch.

9 • Having worked in a number of different football environments (e.g. England, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, etc.), what are the biggest challenges you have faced in adapting to each new culture and approach to the game?

I must say that I have been lucky and I haven't encountered too many problems on my travels. The language has got to be a key factor. If you can master the language, this is of enormous benefit. This, of course, helps you to communicate, but it also sends out a message to the country that you are not there just to profit from them, but to take part and to contribute. In addition, I think it is very important to be open-minded. The worst mistake you can make is suggest that you have all the answers and your way is the only way. It's necessary to keep an open mind and not to dismiss things that are

**THE HEAD COACH
OF FINLAND.**

**ROY HODGSON
AT HIS FIRST TRAINING
SESSION WITH
GRASSHOPPERS ZURICH
IN 1999.**



A training session with the Swiss national team.

part of the culture of that country. In a new environment, you often have to work even harder on new relationships – this includes the media, the public, the directors. The playing side of it is often the easiest part because football is a universal language and the players will quickly recognise if the coach is any good. The players will forgive problems in communication skills and manner if they think you know your stuff.

10 • During your long, varied and successful coaching career, what has given you the greatest satisfaction?

There have been three key moments for me. The first championship at Halmstad BK in Sweden – to avoid relegation in the first season and then to win the title the next was very special. The fairytale nature of this first success is an indelible memory, albeit a long time ago. The five successive Swedish championship titles and the two cup triumphs with Malmö FF added up to a major success, because it doesn't matter which league you are in, it's difficult to win it year after year. And then the two qualifications with Switzerland for the World Cup and the European Championship would have to rank the highest among my achievements. Apart from the results, you also get a lot of satisfaction from being recognised by your peers, and being accepted into the elite football family. You can't

always be winning trophies and medals, but you can be acknowledged by your colleagues as a good coach, and this brings its own contentment.

11 • Can UEFA's top competitions be improved in any way?

I'm not sure that there is room for much improvement. Looking from the outside, I must say that things are going remarkably well. I'm sure minor modifications are being considered all the time. But, for me, the major and decisive move was made when the UEFA Champions League was introduced in the early 1990s. There was a danger back then of American-style competitions, with their franchise system, being imposed on the European game. The idea that teams can never be relegated and just play on year after year, no matter what the results, was never part of our football philosophy. The UEFA Champions League, fortunately, eliminated the threat. Today, any subtle changes are made by UEFA in close collaboration with the major clubs, and that's good for the game.

12 • What are the key qualities which a coach requires to be a success?

Briefly, I would say a successful coach needs leadership skills, a talent for reading the game, a gift for communication, a capacity for detailed preparation, a

likable personality, a strong character, a sense of perspective, and humility. Books could be written on each of these aspects of management – some already have. And when we talk about these qualities, I remember reading a quote from the American John Wooden, who said: "Talent is God-given; be humble. Fame is man-given; be thankful. And conceit is self-given; be careful."

13 • What is your best quality?

Two qualities which I prize most in other coaches are energy and enthusiasm, and fortunately I think I have both. If you are going to be a top coach, you need to have those core qualities. Of course, there are many other attributes which we could discuss, but without energy and enthusiasm a coach will struggle, and I hope nobody will ever accuse me of lacking either.

14 • How do you see the future of international football?

It is certainly a battle to protect international football. I hope that the glamour of a few clubs will not have a negative impact on the national teams, or indeed on all the football being played around the world. It's very important that the leagues are healthy in the medium or small-size countries, as well as in the major markets. Here in Finland, the first league needs to be thriving – any involvement clubs have in the UEFA Champions League, no matter which country they are from, must be considered as the 'icing on the cake'. International football, in particular, needs to be protected because it combines passion for football and a pride in your country. It would be suicidal to take away the interest and excitement which the European Championship and the World Cup generate. These competitions surely complement the glamour of the UEFA Champions League and don't detract from it. We need to show the necessary perspective, clubs and national associations, and be aware of each other's needs. The only way we will have a problem is if some people become too greedy and want everything for themselves.