

The 5Cs / Nottingham Forest

Developing psychological health and performance of youth athletes



Written by **Gary Brazil**
Nottingham Forest Academy Manager

Psychology has always been a key element in the development and performance of our young footballers at Nottingham Forest Football Club. As a former player now responsible for youth player development, I know that mental skills matter on and off the pitch and I have always believed that psychological skills can be nurtured and trained from a very early age. This is why we continue to work tirelessly in finding new and innovative ways of integrating the 5Cs in our academy.

We recognise that we have the opportunity with our coaches and our parents to create the right environments for engaging the motivation and enthusiasm of our academy players. This is our starting point which leads to the development of other psychological strengths; the ability to remain focused, to manage mistakes and bounceback from adversity, and to maintain belief through rough patches of form. Over time we have grown our 5Cs to be inclusive of being a great team player, and developing those qualities associated with leadership and trust.

We have put great emphasis on building great communicators in the dressing room and on the pitch in their role, to coordinate and manage play, giving their teammates a sense of the people that they can rely upon. It's for this reason that we adopted a focus on the 5Cs at our club and have done so for over 10 years. We inherently believe that we can develop the psychological strengths of our players using a simple, user friendly framework that players, coaches and parents can readily understand.

For us using the 5Cs brings sport psychology into the coach's home – the club training environment. It enriches the coach with relevant knowledge and practices that will help them to 'coach' and shape these critical psychological skills in their players at every training session. We focus heavily on helping coaches to put mental skills on the map for young players and raise their awareness of the role of commitment, of concentration, communication skills, self-control and confidence. We also place an emphasis on challenging our coaches to reflect on they actually integrated mental skills into their session content. What did we actually do in today's session that might shape the



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psychological skills, attitudes or approach of our players?

In support of our coaches we have used several different approaches to help develop our coaches understanding of mental skills. These have ranged from frequent coach education workshops to intervention programmes, focused on improving the confidence they possessed in delivering a training session. All of this sought to influence the psychological development of our young players. We then support our coaches at each step.

To support our players a large part of our initial work included the development of a 5C match reflection logbook consisting of a 5C behaviour-rating page, a section for goal setting, and a 'positive lessons' reflection sheet for follow-up comments by the player. Our coaches were encouraged to collect the logbooks and write a supportive and positive comment in the coach-comment section.

We encouraged the parents to support their child in completing each match review with positive and progressive reflections, but only to guide or assist where absolutely necessary and at the player's request. Alongside this we supported our parents with a full and comprehensive parent education programme.

We feel the 5Cs are valuable and an excellent way to include psychology into our training programme.

