TAKING OVER

Taking charge of a new team mid-season – the challenges of replacing another coach/manager and the qualities the new coach/manager needs, with a comparative commentary of management practices from the commercial business environment

By

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Introduction

Fred Everiss managed West Bromwich Albion (UK) for over 46 years (1902 – 1948) without any interruption. Dario Gradi has been associated with Crewe Alexandria for over 30 years and in the Premier League (also UK) the careers of Sir Alex Ferguson (27 years at Manchester united) and Arsene Venger (currently in his 20th season with Arsenal) are exceptional not only for their respective successes, but the length of their management at one single club.

However, such loyalty by a professional club to its coach/manager is very unusual in professional football. Frequently, the usual response to a continuing series of recent lost matches is to dismiss and replace the coach, often within a current season or competition.

In this presentation, I will look at some of the causes of coaches departing or being relieved of their contractual duties at a professional or semi-professional football club and subsequently the challenges facing the incoming coach/manager mid-way through a competitive competition. Supporting this is literature from academic and peer-reviewed studies on the effect of dismissing a coach/manager mid-season. This document that I present also questions the approach the new coach/manager takes and attempts to gain insight from professionals who have experienced these challenges.

Additionally, the topic I have selected will look at the circumstances that may facilitate the departure of a coach/manager, investigate the approach a coach/manager may undertake when replacing a fellow professional, the time pressures for achieving improvement in performance and match outcomes and the skills required to manage the changes introduced to the football club.

This presentation includes comments from interviews conducted with experienced professional coaches and managers who have been in the role of taking on a new coaching position in mid-season to gain some insight on their work, attitudinal perspectives, challenges, successes and failures. The interview questions are listed in the 3rd section of this paper, while the responses and comments from these interviews will be interspersed in the general commentary of this paper where appropriate.

Dismissing a Coach - Literature reviewed.

Football organisations typically begin each season with elevated expectation. The previous season's performance (be it good, bad or indifferent), new player acquisitions and at times a change in managerial or coaching positions tend to raise anticipation of the upcoming campaign. As all teams in any one competition may also share similar aspirations of success, it follows that for some football clubs these expectations are realistic, while for others they are not.

Consequently, as the season evolves some teams will be meeting or exceeding their expectations while some will be failing to meet their own targets and achieve their perceived potential. Those that fail often look to the manager as the reason for a lack of success and should the team continue to underperform, owners may make changes, replacing their manager mid-season with a new coach.

Some of the literature that I have reviewed and will discuss within looks at whether a managerial change does affect performance and whether a team will play better after the manager is dismissed and replaced.

Researchers at the University of Muenster examined from over 40 seasons to determine if coaching changes do indeed positively affect a team's results. The investigators looked at data from Bundesliga matches covering the period 1963 through 2009 representing a total of 14,018 matches. During this period, there were 361 mid-season coaching changes.

The determinant measure on the analysis of the team's performance (and in combination, or by default, the coaches' ability) in this study was goal differential (GD). The researchers discussed using points earned per game (comprising 0 points for German professional team

records a loss, 1 for a draw and 2, then 3 points for a win – the Bundesliga adopted 3 points in 1995) but argued that GD was a more sensitive and stable measure of team performance. To determine if the mid-season coaching change results they examined the GD of 10 matches preceding the dismissal of a coach and 10 matches after his dismal. In all, 154 teams played at least 10 matches prior to and 10 matches after dismissal of the manager. For each dismissal team, a control team was selected from the same season. Control teams had the same GD for the 10 matches played prior to the date of the dismissal team's manager sacking, however, their coach was not dismissed. Therefore, the dismissal and control teams showed roughly the same performance during the matches leading up to dismissal date.

The results of the analysis reveal three key points:
First, the GD over the course of the season varied very little. For teams that retained their manager for the whole season, the GD remained constant at about -0.50 per match. The same held for the teams that sacked their manager.

Second, the researchers found that changing a manager in mid-season had almost zero effect on team fitness. With a new manager in place, GD improved by at most 0.08 per match – a negligible and insignificant margin.

Third, the researchers noticed that there was a noticeable drop in GD during the two matches prior to the coach dismissal (which may have prompted the dismissal). Immediately after dismissal, the GD returned to its previous level, but not an improved level. One could contend that the new coach reversed the downward trend in form. However, the researchers compared this trend to other teams that showed a similar drop in form.

Essentially, many of the teams in the analysis showed similar declines in team fitness and rebound after a two-match drought. Thus, it is unlikely that changing coaches accounted for the improvement in performance rather it being a general representation of the normal ups and downs in a season, opposed to a change in coaching personnel.

Similar findings were found (Weel,2006), who analysed managerial turnover across 18 seasons of the Dutch premier division, the Eredivisie. His research reviewed the results of teams who sacked their manager when performances (points earned) were not to expectation,

compared to teams that faced a similar slump in form but who stood by their coach/manager to work through the negative sequences.

He found that both groups faced a similar pattern of the swing between declines and improvements in form after a forced managerial change.

Ter Weel's interpretation of the data he collected was that both the manager characteristics and decisions and firm outcomes are directly observable and show that manager turnover is not followed by significant improvements in firm performance (i.e. the team's results) and that manager quality does not seem to predicted manager turnover.

His main findings show:
In the first instance, that team performance is time-invariant. Data from multiple Eredivisie seasons show that points obtained per game when expressed as a season moving average remains relatively constant – though ter Weel excludes teams that bounce in between the premier and lower-tier league. Even when managerial and playing rosters are changed the team's performance, on average, does not alter remarkably. This may indicate either one of two things: that the club's management replace one manager with a similar one, or, that the influence of the coach in a competitive, professional league is less important than the quality of the players and the depth of player resources that the club can acquire.
Next, that manager turnover has a very short-term effect. One match, is the average measure revealed by this study. Ter Weel's results showed that for teams whose managers have replaced a fired one mid-season, there is an increase in performance immediately afterward — perhaps easily thought of as the shock effect — but it regresses back to pre-sacking levels by the following game.

The ability to turn around a team has nothing to do with manager's experience or playing career. Ter Weel's research also dispels the myth that good players make better coaches or longevity as a professional coach is the key to success. When ter Weel creates the dummy variables of: career as a soccer player, national team player, and experience as a manager, his study finds that the performance difference outcome in function of the club(s) he serves is nonexistent.

Time served on a contract and the number of players recruited will also influence a club's willingness to fire its manager. Consequences on this are discussed at length by ter Weel. He noted that teams whose managers have been actively involved in the transfer market are more likely to be replaced when results are not to expectations as a result of the club's demand for success from a financial commitment. Alternatively, the greater the period remaining on a manger's contract the less likely a club is willing to sack him if results go bad because of the amount of money invested, both in the players (acquired by the coach), and the coach himself. While it is possible to recoup an investment on a player by selling him, the same is rarely said of a coach/manager.

And finally, ter Weel's research shows that expectations of team performance weigh heavily in a club's decision to sack a manager. Ter Weel extended his analysis with variables for the average team performance in a league and the difference between actual team performance and average performance over the previous three seasons. He found that a significant drop in performance relative to past performances increased the probability of a turnover in the coach/manager.

Returning to the research conducted at the University of Muenster, their conclusions were also that dismissing a manager in mid-season seems to have almost no effect on the team's performance. Also, replacing him between seasons seems to have little impact. The study does not say that replacing a coach cannot impact a team's play as there are many instances where a team will show marked improvement in results after a coaching change. What their research uncovered was that on average, across nearly 45 years of Bundesliga seasons, dismissing a coach has had little influence on a team's performance.

If empirical data shows that sacking a manager has such little impact on team performance (on average) then it may also lead to the question of the importance of the manager in context of success. Are managers important? If it is assumed, for example, that all managers in the elite professional leagues are highly qualified then given equal resources one may do as well as the other. Conclusions from University of Muenster research nominate the immediate impact of a coach as a "fitness producer" is very small. Compared to other factors such as the team's wage budget and the quality of playing personnel, they estimate that a new manager's influence is on the order of 15% or less. That said, football is a team sport and it could well be that the collective talent of a squad may (in theory) supersede the positive influence, or

not, of a coach/manager. In a study by Bill Gerrard, "Analysing Sporting Efficiency Using Standardised Win Cost: Evidence from the FA Premier League, 1995-2007", *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching, 2010* (Gerard, 2010) data shows that on average the Big Four sides in the English Premier League (EPL) spent 28% more than the baseline league average in player's salaries in order to win a league point. That said, football is a team sport and it could well be that the collective talent of a squad may (in theory) supersede the positive influence, or not, of a coach/manager. In a study by Bill Gerrard, "Analysing Sporting Efficiency Using Standardised Win Cost: Evidence from the FA Premier League, 1995-2007", *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching, 2010* data shows that on average the Big Four sides in the English Premier League (EPL) spent 28% more than the baseline league average in player's salaries in order to win a league point. If statistical inference on the value that a coach delivers over and above the talent of a football club's playing staff (cited at 15% as a "fitness producer" by the University of Muenster) can be accepted as a constant and reliable indicator of the positive value a coach delivers to the football club, then it gives some perspective an inverse perception that the coaching input is the critical factor for team success.

The coach/manager occupies a key position at a professional football club and to whom the threat of dismissal is constant in the professional arena. However, if the evidence from Bill Gerrard is considered, then it is the value of salary paid to the (best) players that is a stronger indicator for success.

Another critical point that is revealed from a review of over 14,000 Bundesliga matches is that the difference between success and failure is minimal. At the date of publication of the research (2011) the average number of points earned by the 15th and 16th place teams in the Bundesliga (the relegation position) for the previous five years was 33.2 and 31.6, respectively. That equates to a 5% difference in performance between relegation and survival. The smallest of influences to generate a positive impact can therefore have a sizeable effect on outcomes.

Therefore, when comparing studies, the German paper with an identification of goal difference as a metric of team performance that precipitates coaching changes, and the Dutch example of points obtained in a season concurrent to managerial changes, the results are very similar. They both establish that team performance remains somewhat constant across their

respective competition, and that manager changes result in little change in the team beyond the first match after the switch (and possibly the second).

The common link between both sets of data and commentary is that mid-season changes in the club coach/manager are not very likely to cause significant changes in the team results. Positive results will be short-lived, and the team's real performance will return to the level at which it's playing staff can achieve given their ability. The only situation where a managerial change might be beneficial would be in a club fighting against relegation, as a 3-5% change in performance — one to two points essentially — could make the difference between staying up and dropping down to a lower division.

What these two studies identify is that (in both a business perspective and for value to club success) there is a requirement for managerial analytics and that for the clubs who invest vast sums of money on the coaches and the players they manage, there is a need to develop a systematic plan for club performance independent of the manager.

However, the view that appointing a new coach/manager has no effect or an adverse outcome on a team's performance is not a position that other research hasn't challenged and found exceptions to previous models. Research by Bridgewater, S. 2009 sustains that an incoming manager will have a positive short-term effect on team results. This study suggests that this is due to the fact that players will be out to try to impress their new manager to ultimately keep themselves in employment. The boost lasts for a short phase of between 12 to18 games after the appointment and then after this period, the positive influence of the new manager disappears. This metric of 12 to 18 games is significantly higher that the data presented by ter Weel who's comments on the very short-term effect of improvements due to manager turnover is cited at one (1) match.

Bridgewater then argues that this does not define that clubs should never change their manager(s), "This research is not suggesting that a club should never change football manager. As in other organisations, sustained decline in performance is often addressed by changing manager – and this may arrest and turnaround performance. The data would suggest, however, that clubs may sack the coach/manager during a minor blip in performance rather than a sustained decline. Moreover, the level at which they do this, and the benefits gained from the switch may be less significant than they anticipate." Likewise, the view that

results for an incoming manager at a football club will deteriorate in the longer term is echoed by Hughes et al. (Hughes, 2010) M., Hughes, P., Mellahi, K. and Guermat, C. (2010) Short term versus long term impact of managers: evidence from the football industry, British Journal of Management, 21, 571–589. Their statistical model suggests that a manager's tenure should not be evaluated on the results of the last 20 matches, but rather on a weighted historical average, such that all the matches in the manager's history at the football club affect his current performance measure, with the most recent matches carrying the greater weight.

Situation analysis – What are the circumstances behind coaching/managerial change?

My approach to this topic commenced with categorisation of the three situations that could typically define why a coach/manager is removed, or, chooses to leave from his or her position before the end of their contracted term and often mid-way or at a critical end-point of a competition.

Though no means exhaustive, the categories listed and briefly discussed below could be applicable to many instances of coaching/managerial changes that are often reported in media and the reader may find familiarity with these scenarios.

Similar to a business environment, professional sporting clubs that are in a successful period would generally not consider change for change-sake, that is, forcing senior management change onto a successful entity without valid scope and planning to reduce the negative effects or a comprehensive understanding of the risk-reward benefits of such change. However, that does not prescribe that decisions to make coaching alterations are at all times logical, based on performance data or an economic perspective. Examples that demonstrate this matter follow in this section.

This matter is of relevance to this paper's theme as increasingly decisions made about coaches/managers, or facing coaches/managers may be related to business operations rather than sporting ones exclusively.

However, as can be seen in the categories listed below, change at a professional football club from a coaching/management perspective can be for both negative and positive reasons.

3.1. Scenarios - Changing the coach/manager

I have defined 3 broad scenarios for review, the first being the most evident.

3.1. a

The club's performances and results are below expectations and requirements. The club may be in a relegation position or out of a knock-out competition due to results and the coach is held solely accountable to the owner and/or directors of the football club.

In season 2015/2016 the EPL club Sunderland FC sacked head coach Dick Advocaat in October after only 8 games; albeit winless. With only 3 points earned by the team when he left – equating to only 0.375 points-per-game – questions were asked on the timing of his dismissal given it was early in the season even though the team was underperforming. Relegation from the EPL would cause massive loss in TV revenue, sponsorship payments and income from supporters.

In 2009, only four EPL managers had held their position for more than 3 years: Rafael Benítez at Liverpool (4½ years), David Moyes at Everton (7 years), Arsène Wenger at Arsenal (12 years) and Alex Ferguson at Manchester United (22 years). The average managerial tenure within the four English professional leagues between 1992 and 2005 was only 2.19 years (Bridgewater, 2009)

This scenario is by far the most overwhelming within which coach/manager replacements occur mid-season. Moreover, the event of dismissal under this scenario inversely affects the third scenario presented when another coach/manager working for a different club is – for

want of a better word – 'headhunted' to fill a vacancy. Certainly, professional football competitions are structured for 'results driven businesses' where current performance and league ranking is paramount. So, while it may be reasonable to understand that club executives are willing to take a risk on appointing a new manager to improve a club's short-term fortunes (especially when under the threat of relegation) their motivation to do so may be driven by a fear that they too may lose their jobs along with the manager in question if results are bad.

While the literature reviewed earlier shows in that for most cases there is no long-term benefit to replacing an incumbent coach/manager, in exceptional circumstances a team's performance can improve based on the 'new culture' a manager instils and a short-term boost achieved. If the trend of the short-term improvement occurs at a critical moment then league position improvement, or survival from relegation may justify the harshness of dismissing the coach/manager.

3.1. b. The team and the competition it competes in may have advanced beyond the perceived capabilities of the incumbent coach/manager.

Watford terminated the contract of Quique Sánchez Flores despite a respectable season that saw them end up in 11th positon of the English Premier League only a year after promotion from the Championship division. Commentators were aghast at the decision taken by the club who did not see Sánchez Flores as the right fit for the club and squad.

German club Mainz sacked manager Jorn Andersen after the Norwegian had guided the club to the top division, the Bundesliga. He had arrived at the Stadion am Bruchweg in the summer of 2008 after Mainz had finished just outside the promotion places in the previous season and the club's management and had their sights set on a return to the top flight. Anderson duly delivered, with the team finishing runners-up to the champions Freiburg. However, before the club commenced their next season Anderson was dismissed – only six days before the opening league game. "We evaluated the situation, discussed it internally and explained in frank terms to Jorn Andersen what the philosophy of the club was," said the club president Harald Strutz. "At the end of these discussions, we concluded that our vision and his were not compatible."

Real Madrid sacked coach Fabio Capello in 2007 only 11 days after the Italian led the Spanish giants to their first league title since 2003. At the time of his dismissal Capello still had two years to run on his contract at the Bernabeu, but had drawn criticism for his tactics, even though they led the team to the Liga winner's position. Commenting at the time, Real president Ramon Calderon told Marca newspaper: "We've laid the foundations, but we need to find a more enthusiastic way of playing."

These examples demonstrate something of the intangible or irrational processes of decision making in professional football vis-à-vis the position of the coach/manager. The expectation of success and the deliverance on targets by the coach/manager is clearly not a guarantee for job security. In some instances, human intuition or the weight of media hype on fan's perceptions may encourage a club to dismiss a successful manager. This is the opposite of what is the normal occurrence is, as was discussed in the opening scenario of this section, and runs counter to what is reasonable in terms of 'good businesses for a results-driven entity.

3.1.c

A coach may request to leave his or her position - even when the club is experiencing a successful moment - as they have secured a better position with another more successful or higher-ranked football club. Subsequently, the change is forced on the club by the departing coach.

Bob Bradley left Frech Ligue 2 club Le Harve for Premiership Swansea City after they dismissed coach Francesco Guidolin in October 2016. The attraction to leave his position with Le Harve was clearly motivated by the opportunity to succeed in one of the world's toughest leagues, despite Swansea's precarious position and poor results that preceded his arrival.

English Premier League club Hull City sacked their manager Mike Phelan after 3 months of the 2016-2017 season and replaced him with Portuguese Marco Silva. Silva was uncontracted at the time of his appointment but had requested to leave his previous job as coach of Greek champions Olympiakos for 'personal reasons'. His reputation and market value had been assessed by commentators as suiting a better, more demanding league environment and his availability and willingness to take on the Hull City job on the basis that an extension would be offered once league survival for Hull City was secured.

Given that Silva (above) has taken on an arduous task with a tenuous short-term contract with a club that was situated in last place, he may do well to understand an analysis by Hope (2003). Within this paper, Hope describes a 'honeymoon period' within which time the new manager is exempt from being sacked, set against the 'trapdoor', representing the average number of points that needs to be won per game if the manager is to avoid dismissal.

It is presumed that any manager will receive a 'honeymoon period' on appointment, however following this time a manager will be fired if their performance drops below the club's desired points target. Using data from Premier League seasons 1996/97 to 2001/02, Hope deduced that putting a weight of 47% on the last five games made the model most efficient. With this weighting, a manager should gain an average of at least 0.74 points a game in the last five match weighted model, and at least 56.81 points over the course of a season to reasonably guarantee job continuance.

Once the decision is made that there will be coaching/managerial change at the football club, or, as explained in the third scenario (when change is forced by the coach on to the club) during a competitive season, the incoming professional is faced with multiple challenges to achieve short -term goals that bring stability and improved results to the football club – or – in the instance that change has been forced on the club as the coach/manager leaves of his/her own accord, that at least parity of performance is achieved, if not improvement.

The qualities that the incoming coach/manager must display and the methodologies he (or she) employs may not necessarily follow their standard approach or coaching/management philosophy when undertaking a new project and commencing with a pre-season to prepare. Clearly in the majority of circumstances this is because negative results have forced a club into changing the coach/manager and immediate improvements are expected, and demanded by the pressures of failure.

The personal qualities and the decision structures taken are what the following section attempts to briefly review.

4. Interview questions

Within this section, the coaches are represented by their initials in the responses to the questions.

Paolo Tramezzani – **PT**

Mario Petrone – **MP**

Howard Wilkinson – **HW**

Roberto Martinez – **RM**

4.1. The structure of the questions

Given that this thesis is focused on the qualities required of a coach/manager taking on a new team having not had the opportunity to commence the (pre)-season or competition with them, nor to build or acquire members to the playing squad and, in consideration of the commercial nature of football, the questionnaire presented to these experienced managers/coaches -

In the first instance:

Part 1 - Business management decisions at the new club:

- Looks at how a coach decides on sporting decisions that may create an immediate positive impact on the results of the football club

- Highlights similarities or differences of the decisions by different coaches to the questions

- Analyses whether the coaches answer with purely sporting decisions or whether their responses imitate familiar, traditional business decisions

These questions often have a connection to the commercial nature of the football club – and this is commented on following the responses. This section is subtitled.

Part 2 - Attitudinal and experience questions:

- Examine the importance of the inter-personal skills that are so important for a sports coach
- Look at the impact of 'attitude' of the coach to succeeding in a new environment mid-season

These questions reveal more of the emotive side to the coaching/management role in taking over a team mid-season. This section is subtitled

4.1. (Part 1) - Business management decisions at the new club:

4.1.1. Staffing

Change management in both sports and business is central to human resources. When a new coach/manager enters the football club they are bringing their human capital and intelligence to benefit the organisation. The second part of this question has a commercial cost. If the new coach/manager retains existing staff then no redundancy payments are required. If he/she brings in new assistants then this loads the club with expenses. In some instances, this decision may not be the prerogative of the new coach.

PT - When I am engaged to take up coaching responsibility of a new club I would propose my own technical staff, which would consist of assistant coach and goalkeepers' coach of whom I have an extreme trust; I know them both well and close relationship at work. Naturally, there has to be all the suppositions to guarantee my staff with any agreements made before.

MP – I have replaced another coach on three occasions. On two of these occasions we needed to avoid relegation while on the other we had the technical and physical qualities to compete for the championship*. The first thing I did was to gather as much information on both the team and the club as possible so I would know from the onset that there was a serious and professional organisation throughout the club. Of course, the impact with the team and the atmosphere has to be direct. In my case, in all three experiences it was very decisive in reaching the club's goals.

HW – The ideal situation before entering a new club is to research and evaluate whether the staff there can do the job you require of them and if it is the case they are capable then I see no reason for change for the sake of change.

The culture of coaching and the interpersonal staff-coaching relationships that are forged in this profession are unlike other business relationships between colleagues. The notion that the collective of personality and competence of a coaching 'team' compliment the organisation (club) that they work for is not an uncommon convention in professional football club management. That said, **HW** is critical of change for the sake of change and appears prepared to evaluate the existing competence of the staff before committing change management upon the organisation. On this issue I would dare say he would be in a minority amongst his contemporaries as coaching 'teams' are often dismissed and engaged within the professional club structure – even when the financial costs of doing so are high.

What is critical for the manager entering the mid-season take over scenario is however cleared stated by **HW**: that an understanding of existent competencies of staff at the club is required. In this aspect **HW**, though in a minority, is more attuned to traditional business methodologies than other respondents. **PT** and **MP** have what might be considered as a more structured perspective that their 'human capital', if you like the intellectual protocol of their coaching abilities, that are applied to the club they join mid-season.

As has been discussed in earlier sections with the concepts of the 'honeymoon period' and the 'trap door' (assuming that the coaching change has evolved because of poor results) then the pressures for immediate improvement may also motivate **PT** and **MP** to ensure familiar and trusted staff are with him such that implementation of their respective programmes can be implemented at with greatest efficiency. Certainly, the circumstances within which clubs and new managers find themselves may also lend weight to the ability to negotiate whether an incoming coach can bring his staff; associated penalty costs for the outgoing and increased wages for the incoming, included. The club will find their position of influence on the incoming coach factored on whether they have initiated change or had change forced upon them (i.e. the first and third scenarios). The appointment, or the dismissal of a manger can be extremely expensive with compensation packages tied to a coach/manager's 12.

4.1.3 Tactics

Tactical - do you have a new system of play to address the team's situation, or do you refine what is already there?

In some instances, the 'style' will be the determining factor when a club seeks to employ a coach to take over mid-season. For example, a coach with a record of producing defence-orientated teams could be the solution for a side conceding too many goals, whereas a coach with a record of offensive football could be the solution to a squad well off the pace in the league or competition they compete in. What this question attempts to reveal is when does a coach makes the decision to alter the systems of play of his/her new team and the orientation of objectives i.e. win the game Vs don't lose the game.

PT - Every coach has his own tactical philosophy and his own principles and concepts of play already in place. It is clear that an intelligent coach should be able to understand the team's capabilities, even those acquired with the preceding coach and use them to his favour, integrating and supporting these with the players.

MP - It is very important to understand something before answering this question – it is important and fundamental to know your team. Before deciding on whether to change the module or not, in my opinion, you have to know the characteristics of every element, technical-tactical-physical and in these cases, the motivating aspect is very important. Then there would come the time to talk about tactics, whether you should change or not.

HW – I think the new manager has to look at what is there, look at what they have been doing, and then make the decision about what way the team plays – bearing in mind the competition they're and the quality of opposition and very much keeping in mind the quality of your own players. There are so many factors to consider in settling on a way of playing making sure that the players' qualities lend themselves to chosen way of playing and then adapting it, where necessary; even game by game if necessary and especially adapting for different opponents.

RM - First of all a coach needs to adapt to situations. As a coach you need to know what coach you want to be. As coach, you need to know if you are going to be a defensive coach,

an attacking coach or manager (in England) or you stay away from the training pitches and allow your staff to do the training, thus it is important that you have clear ideas of what type of coach you want to be. You need to highlight the strengths of the team you are coaching and improve on that. And that is what I have done with all the teams that I managed so far.

Recognising that managing change and evolution are constant themes in football is central to the approach that these professionals advocate when taking on the challenge of coaching/managing a new football squad mid-season. The common thread in all responses is that recognising the capabilities of the squad is of primary importance before imposing change. PT reiterates in his opening comments that a coach/manager will have a direction that he prefers to introduce but needs to comprehend the talent he has and what the previous coach was trying to achieve. PT's secondary point on reviewing the work that the previous coach had implemented was something that I had not factored in with my assessment of the question. RM is also a sponsor of the notion that adaptability is central to the coaches' responsibilities. He also clearly defines the role of coach and manager from his period in the UK with the manager ceding the 'training' to his assistants while he takes a more supervisory role as a director of duties. HW reiterates the flexibility required to coach successfully even if this requires adjustment on a gam-by-game basis, while MP stresses the need to fully comprehend both the qualities of the squad and to comprehend what changes, if any, are required. In MP's method statement, change for the sake of change is guarded against.

Transfer Window

The facility for a football club to buy, sell or trade players during specific periods during a season are an important way within which the coach/manager can improve his or her squad. Depending on the policy of the football club, the responsibility for the selection of new players and even the retention of existing squad members may be at the sole discretion of the coach/manager, or may be through a team of other managers at the club concerned with player acquisition. What is well known is that

PT - When the club asks the coach on any players that he would want to reinforce the team, I think that the coach should limit himself on those sections of the team where the player obtained would make a difference without changing the equilibrium of the dressing room.

MP - The transfer window is important, but it is more important to know your players, both singularly and as a team before going to the transfers. It is important to intervene in those sections where the team is not functioning well. You have to understand that the club cannot always buy players, therefore you have to make sure that any player coming on loan, as indicated by your question, would come to your club full of motivation.

The game of football is a team sport. The cohesion of the team is dependent on its components (players) operating in function of the team's needs, not those of an individual. I can assume (because of its prevalence) that the reader of this paper can call to mind many examples of when a player's demeanour or personality disrupts the harmony of a squad and judgements are made on retaining the player that are irrespective of his/her footballing abilities. The inverse of this situation is when a coach introduces new playing staff that damage the team's fabric of awareness of shared responsibilities. Squads' that are in a negative moment may not be suffering lack of talent but lack of focus and application on the playing field and the role of the new coach is to understand the priorities of what to correct, and when.

MP and PT opinions whilst not against the concept of a transfer window to improve squad depth or quality, cite a similar theme; that harmony within a squad is (or could be) as important as the talent of the incoming player.

In February 2017, the Financial Times (FT) published an article on their analysis of the accounts of 69 clubs over four season from a database compiled by the auditing group KPMG, which reveals that big spending on players does not always guarantee success. According to FT, Atlético Madrid is the Europe's "smartest" spending club, based on the key measure of success based on wages to points accrued. Between 2011 and 2015, the Spanish club outperformed the league points total it would statistically be expected to win, based on the size of its wage bill and relative to others in the same national league. This club wins more games than its rivals, relative to the amount spent on players.

-Dealing with the media

A coach/manager is expected to communicate with the media – often on a constant basis. Increasingly this is a requirement of the position and not an option for the coach/manager. Additionally, media now includes social media in the communication plan of football clubs that is integral to their commercial success. Club websites dedicate resources to promote the club in the community and beyond, informing supporters on news and results, selling tickets and merchandise, as well as profiling the players themselves. What this question attempts to reveal is how the new coach sees his responsibility in shaping what the he/she as the club's representative as well as the players communicate to their wider social media groups or followers, if at all.

PT - In my opinion the media policy of the club is not part of the coach's competence. On the other hand, the coach should always be prepared to cater for any situation created by the media, especially during any critical moments during the season. Above this, in a world of social media, the coach has to be very careful in his choice of words when his is speaking publicly as this would be used and read by everyone, including the team's players, opponents, the media, supporters and all society.

MP - Keeping in contact with the media is always important. If you have replaced someone else, it's very important to know your team and know how they are. For example, if they are fragile psychologically, you have to defend your players from the media. That is why you need to know your players immediately so that you can defend them from any media attacks.

HW – I think these days that the media in all its forms – and there are many with social media being particularly influential – the coach cannot ignore such an important element in the club's wellbeing. Therefore, I believe that there should be a strategy when dealing with the media. If I was managing in an ideal world, I would have my own media person informing me on what everyone would be saying about the club, players, manager etc.

While PT and MP recognise their obligation to have good communication lines with the media, their response does not reflect HW's who links the media plan to the club's wellbeing. The notion that MP expresses, that he will 'defend' his players from the media is obviously noble, particularly if one player is singled out for criticism – however, the media plan and a new coach/manger's responsibilities extend further than loyalty. PT does note that caution is required as a representative of the football club as it is easy to misinterpret statements or that social media can be selective of what it obtains from a quote, or image.

4.2

Part 2 - Attitudinal and experience questions:

4.2.1. Taking over

The expression, 'failing to plan means you're planning to fail', succinctly emphasises how well-defined plans and structures are used by successful enterprises – both sporting and commercial ventures. Within this context there is the element of how a plan is constructed and how it is executed, what we might call the remit of the football coach/manager. Without the time to plan and build for a new season, an incoming coach/manager may feel that he or she is working with an incomplete or flawed structure.

PT - Undoubtedly, the differences are many. When a coach starts from the beginning of the season with a team, he can indicate to the club where, in his opinion, the club should reinforce with new players. He can also prepare a tactical plan from the beginning even during the pre-season training on which he would have plenty of time to have the players adjust to such tactics. On the other hand, when a coach joins the club midway through, in my opinion has to first work on the players' mental aspect and after on the tactical side of the team trying to insert his work methodology.

MP - Having the opportunity to start with your project from the beginning of the season is very important because you would be able to create a team who would understand right away your ideas and would be able to see the everyday progress. Joining a club while the season has already started is never easy. It's always a risk. You never know when this chance comes along. If this chance comes after the transfer window is closed, you have to go along with the set of players that you have, and you have to try and arrive to your and the club's objectives without the help of the transfer window.

In the review of literature on the effects of sacking a coach (section 2) historical data displayed that aside from a short-term increase changing a coach mid-season had no more than a $3 - 5$ % result of a positive benefit and in other instances a negative effect. Based on this, it may be summarised that the majority of coaches would be in agreement on the

advantages of having the opportunity to commence a season with a clear and well-considered plan in place as opposed to arriving mid-way through a season.

However, coaching opportunities like this also offer the scope for renewal and change which is a challenge and one that can deliver success and plaudits to the right coach/manager. Seeking reassurance that a job is difficult does not produce results in a football club, it merely reinforces any stigma that may be prevalent. Successful coaches and managers understand the nature of the role, understand how to maximise resources, and should be prepared to think of short-term achievements that can bring about immediate improvement.

PT and MP are consistent with the supposition that commencing a season with a squad and preparing all of the facets required to be best equipped for the season is more advantageous than entering at some mid-point when all efforts are on match results as opposed to squad and tactical development. PT also points out that a coach entering a club experiencing a difficult moment may sacrifice technical work to develop mental stability and robustness within the playing squad.

Mistakes made during a take-over

The speed at which any organisation identifies errors, poor service or faulty strategies are intrinsic to its long-term success. Business operations are as prone to human error and miscalculation as sports teams – the speed of recovery and the management of the negative outcomes are what will define the successful businesses from the failing ones.

There is a power balance within the hierarchy of a professional football club that places the coach/manager at the apex regarding the team's on-field performances. In this respect the coach/manager needs to be immune from external criticism when evaluating his/her errors and have some degree of exposure with the technical staff so at least there is some forum where honest appraisal on the coaching performance can be discussed.

MP - I cannot answer this question, as I already indicated in the first question, I have always arrived at my objectives, making happy the clubs I was with and getting the reward of my choice.

HW – Mistakes? Ha! How long do I have to answer…? I suppose my biggest error was moving out of a position with the English FA and into a job at Sunderland without giving it as much thought and consideration as I had done in every previous change of employment. And I paid for that. From the time that I accepted until when I commenced work I wasn't able to do what I had done in every previous job which was thoroughly research the club and evaluate what I would find such that I could deal with all of the issues that need to taken care of by the incoming manager.

This was the first of the attitudinal questions that did not deliver the type of response that I was expecting – perhaps it would have been better to rephrase the question to a more positive aspect and focus on 'How did you minimise the chance of making errors that would define your relationship and influence?'. The objective of the question is to gain attitudinal insight into the qualities and personality of the coach. Only **HW** seemed to take some direction that gave me benefit from this question but then his answer (I believe) is shaped by his technical role in teaching and mentoring coaches.

Elements of success in a take-over

There are no 'silver bullets' in business, just as there are none for managing sports teams. However, experienced businessmen and women understand that good business practices need implementation by employees and it is often not the tactic that defines the winner, but the way in which the directives are communicated and reinforced.

A key word in the sporting mix for leaders is 'personality.' Support staff can add vital skill sets to any manager/coach but the identity and personality behind the message and how this is transmitted can make, or break seasons. What I was looking for in this question was some depth into how a coach self-evaluates the methods of communication that are successful and can be repeated.

MP – During season 2005/06, in November and after 11 games played I was called to substitute the coach of Nuorese club, a good club, built with players of very important characteristics to win the championship. At that time the team was in the 12th place, 13 points away from the first team. Watching the team play I had this sensation that they already possessed what it takes to arrive to what the club planned for in the first place. The club was solid and professional, during the transfer window we acquired three good players, who one of them was a classical attacker embraced very well the change in tactical positioning from 1-4-3-3 to 1-4-4-2. At the end of the season, we won the league, going from amateurs in Serie D to professionals in Lega Pro. In the following season, we made another good participation in the league arriving to the play-offs.

PT - My last football satisfaction was certainly the qualification to Euro 2016 in France with the Albanian national team. This work was the fruit of four years which started in 2011 as an assistant coach. It was very demanding and intense but at the same it enriched my profile in every aspect: as a man, a footballer and at work.

HW – I believe that at all of the clubs that I coached and managed, except one, I was lucky; I was lucky that I had long term goals for the club and therefore the time to work and improve on all areas. Notts County, Sheffield Wednesday, Leeds United…each one gave its own satisfaction because I wasn't building walls, I was laying a road, and I knew where that road

was going and it was a question of putting the stones in place and the nice thing is that you're looking forward all the time.

This was the second of the attitudinal questions that did not bring the value I had hoped for. In the interview structure, all coaches except for **HW** filled in a written form (some in Italian) and this did not permit me the opportunity to question them in depth. Although **HW** adds a different perspective than the other coaches, his too is based on a vision (i.e. long term planning) rather than transferrable, repeatable knowledge that I can gain insight from. In this instance, the question did not give me an understanding that was central to this paper's themes.

Transfer of knowledge

Boundaries of cross-code knowledge for sports development have followed the same lines as businesses that succeeded internationally discovered decades earlier. I would assume, and only from personal observation, that in previous times different sports codes were guarded about how others trained and prepared for matches or events and perhaps there was almost a form of snobbery that existed around the cultures of different sports codes and perhaps even the nationalities considered fit to coach and manage these same codes.

Since I started the UEFA Pro License I have heard many new and interesting perspectives on coaching – not just within the course work on technical aspects or methodologies – but the ideas of my colleagues who have different experiences and information from various arenas; not just football.

HW – Yes, this is very simple. As a manager, you have to be thirsty for knowledge and you have to look outside your own narrow field of operation and seek out best practice – and if you find a new tactic that can be applied to football then you use it.

HW spoke at some length on this topic and the answer that is reflected above is a very short summary of his response. Though he is the eldest of the coaches that I interviewed, his perspective was certainly the most enlightened and I think that having a readiness to improve

is central not only to coaching/managing in general, but particularly necessary when coming into a new sporting challenge mid-season.

Criticism about changes made

Large companies face shareholders and business managers regularly face owners. This is where the similarities of business and football end however. Professional football clubs are 'followed' by supporters in a manner that defies any comparison to a market force like 'brand loyalty.' Businesses do not have fanatical support and nor do the staff of companies have people follow or idolise them. Sport, and in particular football, has a fan culture that is unique and very, very expressive of opinion.

I am a football fan myself and therefore feel conflicting emotions around the teams, coaches, and players I support and like, vis-a-vis my own football experience and the new skills and knowledge that I have acquired on this UEFA course. I feel empathy with both the coach who is criticised and the comprehend the frustration of a fan who wants success.

PT – In my line of work, criticism is the order of the day. Whatever I do or say would normally be criticised and was always in the middle of a discussion. Therefore, it is always important to learn from the criticism and understand more to better yourself without being restricted in your work.

MP - Critics were all positive. From the media to the players themselves and even the club's officials. Naturally these were all positive because our objectives were reached.

I know that coaches/managers of professional clubs work under immense pressure, even the most successful ones. Few accountants finish work and then have to deal with criticism of how they performed their trial balance or have articles in the media or TV shows discussing their fiscal management of a company. A football coach/manager is always in the news and he or she must learn how to deal with the criticism which matters most, and unfortunately that is easier said than done.

Effects of a take-over

In bad financial periods, failing businesses can become successful in profit terms by selling assets or though diversification to spread risk. Football clubs do not have the same options. Typically, the largest fixed asset of a football club is the stadium (very few clubs have players as their strongest asset) and to sell it without a better replacement would disenfranchise fans and the concept of a 'club'. Nor is diversification an option. A football club cannot change to become a Rugby club or a Baseball team.

MP - In all my experiences, I always made a positive impact. In my opinion, you can be successful if you have a group of real gentlemen. These would always be responsible, motivated and belief in the technical project. They would behave in a professional manner, within and out of the field of play. Therefore, to conclude, your choice should be first of the man before choosing the player.

PT - I believe that although these statistics relate to real data, are always debatable, in that in a team where the coach has just been released of his duties and is replaced by a colleague has problems related to various aspects: quality of players, a limited number of usable players, negative results, financial club problems, problems with the supporters. Therefore the change in the coach would create a psychological effect but which would return when everything has settled down. I don't really think that there is a formula to invert the situation but if I am engaged as a coach when the season has already started, I would immediately work on the psychological aspect of my new players, trying to get any information regarding the season so far with regards to the previous coach in order to have a clear picture of what was happening. This will help me work to improve anything which is not functioning and to reinforce what is already in place.

HW – Well, my perspective is that the manager or a coach is not in isolation at a football club - there is a committee and a board of directors and professional administrators whose decisions precede the arrival of any manager. Many clubs are run by successful businessmen and in their professional employment practices they draw a profile of the required competencies, look at the specific demands of the role, then appraise the profile of the candidate thought to best suit the role – and in that way they see a better way of succeeding commercially. So, if ten years of results and performances are analysed by these same people

that run failing clubs, then they had better first look at themselves rather than a new manager. Will that happen? I hope so, but I'm not optimistic. The manager is the easiest and most visible pressure point for a club to release. A club never sacks a whole squad of players mid-season. When a manager is sacked and a new one introduced, the club avoids criticism….for a short time.

All respondents would recognise the element of criticism as intrinsic to their profession. Whether it is fair or just seems secondary to the fact that it exists, in many forms. However, I think that the final part of **HW**'s statement perfectly encapsulates the results of some keys points that this thesis has investigated. "When a manager is sacked and a new one introduced, the club avoids criticism….for a short time." **MP** on the other hand is quite emphatic with the results that he has obtained throughout his career when taking over a team mid-season. This is of course up for scrutiny by independently examining records, and, on another basis, by examining for what reasons he may have then departed the club(s) where he was employed i.e. whether he implemented or forced change or whether his departures were forced on him. **PT** appears to acknowledge the phenomenon that studies have shown on the incidence of marginal improvements as opposed to continuing decline of teams that swap managers mid-season and notes that the mental durability of the squad is something to be targeted and developed. Finally, **HW** makes a very interesting and valid point that the coach/manager is not in isolation at the football club although he/she may often appear as the point upon which success or failure is dependent. The specific demands of the coaching role need better investigation and accordingly a better metric to assess the validity of the coaches influence on the results obtained.

5. Summary and Recommendations

Through this topic presented I have attempted to learn and gain self-improvement on a situation that many coaches/managers may face in their careers; being sacked, appointed, or moving to a club in a mid-season environment.

Professional football coaches (at all levels) face huge pressures to succeed and achieve the objectives of the organisations they are employed by and satisfy the supporters on whom business depends. In between the successful results and failures by which club owners and club supporters judge a coach on, are the players. If football was only a business and a manufacturing process, for instance, then success could be attributable to investing in superior machinery or ownership of a technology that lowered production costs to increase profits. The investment in a machinery or technology has a ratio of risk against reward that can be predefined and produce a predictable outcome. However, football is a sport, not a business process and the nature of a competitive event that puts two sides in contest produces regular and irregular outcomes.

Investing in the human capital required to produce a successful football team however, produces no such certainties and this is amply proven in statistical analysis of data on how clubs spend their revenues on player's wages; the Financial Times analysis on points won as a ratio of player-costs is one such recent insight on how investing in what is 'considered' the best talent does not guarantee an automatic right to success. So, if it can be accepted that buying the most expensive players does not guarantee success for a football club then likewise tactics, similarly, are not interchangeable pieces of equipment or technology that could instantly produce more positive results. And although it may be seen to be obvious to state these as fact, it is important because football is a business and the success and failure of a coach is twinned with the business of the club he/she is employed by.

Given the significant costs involved with changing managers and the disputed effects that such a drastic step has on a team's results, it is perhaps surprising that there are so few studies that investigate whether there is an optimal time to fire a manager, if ever there was, given the data that indicates overwhelmingly that it is not conducive to obtaining long term results. When coach/manager sackings come after declines in team performance and are followed by

improvements in performance then at first glance it would seem that appointing a new manager does improve a team's results. However, repeatedly, studies examine the clubs in reference to their competitive set i.e. other teams in their competition, and not in isolation. Therefore, when compared the performance of similar clubs who did not dismiss their manager, the results of a poorly performing club would have improved quicker had the manager remained.

However, it is often the short-term that is of most relevance in the industry of professional football. At critical moments of a competitive season the decision to sack the coach/manager is taken as the short-term goal is considered as the most important target despite it being neither effective nor efficient in terms of improving team performance.

My role in a coaching or management position is many and varied. I'm always seen as the leader, sometimes an instructor, continually an assessor, trying to be a good mentor and a facilitator of learning and looking to support my players in their careers with my team. I'm also a fact finder, a motivator, an organiser, planner and strategist and I hope that I am gaining the skills to clearly communicate to the player what is required for our journey over the season. I see my role as a coach or manager in terms of creating the right conditions for the squad of players such that optimal performances can occur. This is of course correlated with the correct tactical approach and, not forgetting, the physical and mental state of the player who is required to be attuned to the game time requirements – and is this very last point that I believe is central to a current theme within this paper.

The mental state and fortitude of a team was a repeated theme that was noted by the coaches interviewed for this topic. When entering an environment mid-season and especially in the most prevalent scenario where negative results have prevailed, their priority in arresting the decline commands them to consolidate the team and instil some form of confidence in the individual and collective prior to implementing other solutions.

Perhaps it would be better to describe this as 'judgement', however the three main respondents concur on their assessment of developing attitudinal fitness, prior to physical improvements, tactical and organisational amendments or player additions to the squad (if, or when available). It is also worth repeating an observation that time and resources placed on the development (or recovery) of mental preparedness come at an opportunity cost of other

routes to improvement. Time focused on one aspect of the player and team development comes at a sacrifice of another opportunity. Again, the term 'judgement' is apt to describe how these experienced coaches validate their opinions on what is prioritised and what aspects of their coaching role must be deferred.

My core set of beliefs of how I would approach the challenge of taking on a coaching/management role at a club mid-season have in the main been reinforced by the work that I did with interviewing the participating coaches and by reading the published articles that examine the likelihood of success when a coach/manager is sacked and replaced. Additionally, this exercise of attempting to clearly communicate what qualities an incoming coach requires demanded that I turn a 'feeling' into a statement that I can write and communicate such that my opinion accurately represents what I understand my action(s) would be. Then, I am reminded by Howard Wilkinson that a good coach is always ready to change his/her opinion and position when better practices are revealed and that he/she should be actively challenging their held beliefs. But then, as can be noted, football and competition between two teams in a stadium are not defined and settled by which coach/manager has the better ideas or even which coach/manager has the better technical qualification or talented players. At best, according to the research quoted earlier by University of Muenster, the immediate impact of a coach as a "fitness producer" is very small. Compared to other factors they estimate that a new manager's influence is on the order of 15% or less.

While some might find an assessment of a maximum of 15% influence either insulting or, alternatively, humbling, it is indicative at least that some baseline has been though of for understanding the weight of a coach/manager's influence on a match. Given the high incidence of within-season managerial change in many football leagues, team or club owners that are gambling that simple variance in coaching staff may help produce an improvement in performance sufficient to stave off the threat of relegation undermines the value of the 15% potential.

In conclusion, until such time as more evidence that sacking a manager seems to be neither effective nor efficient in terms of improving team performance becomes relevant to club owners, then the systematic chopping and changing of coaching positions at professional football clubs does not appear likely to desist in the foreseeable future. Certainly, what this profession requires are solid and dependable managerial analytics and that for the clubs who invest vast sums of money on the coaches and the players they manage, there is a need to develop a systematic plan for club performance independent of the manager.

"VINCERE NON È IMPORTANTE, È L'UNICA COSA CHE CONTA"
GIAMPIERO BONIPERTI
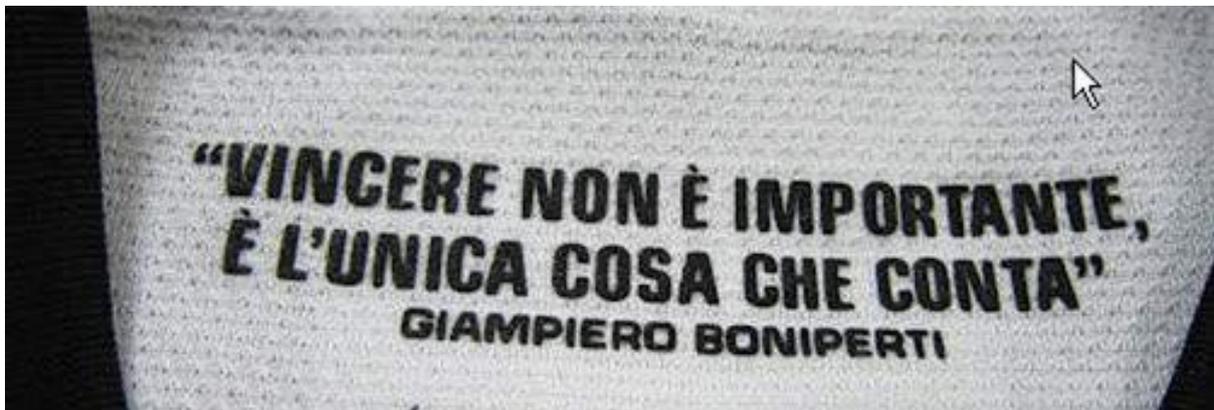
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