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## How will English football develop?

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By [Jonathan Stevenson](#)

### "Unless you change your whole approach to football, nothing will get better."

Carlos Alberto, a man who once scored a goal so exquisitely-crafted it could have been made in heaven, is not in the habit of mincing his words.

His finest moment - the sublime last goal in Brazil's 4-1 thumping of Italy in the 1970 World Cup final - means he knows how to succeed at the highest level and what it takes to get there.

Such a damning verdict on the English game gives the World Cup-winning captain no pleasure at all, but he, like many others, fears that unless things change, England will get left further behind.

**The most important thing that can happen to English players is that they improve their technique**

Brazilian Carlos Alberto

The shambolic, failed attempt to reach Euro 2008 that ended with the humiliation of a 3-2 defeat by Croatia at Wembley was followed by the oft-repeated criticisms directed at the English game - namely a lack of technique.

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It comes as no surprise then, that it takes Carlos Alberto only 19 seconds into our interview to mention the word that seems to be casting a shadow over the English game once more.

"The most important thing that can happen to English players is that they improve their technique," the 63-year-old tells BBC Sport.

"Technical skills like dribbling, good movement, the ability to pick a pass are key to breaking teams down, but you just don't see it when England play, their style is always the same.

"They never changed, they never improvised and they never improved. They put the high ball into the area and try to head it in, but they need to focus on more technical skills.

"I also have the feeling that the England players need to change their mentality, the spirit with which they play football.

"Sometimes they play as if they do not feel the game. I hope they understand these things and try to change because every other country changed a long time ago."



Carlos Alberto captained Brazil to World Cup glory in Mexico in 1970

Fabio Capello has admitted that one of his biggest challenges as England coach will be to overcome the "up and at 'em" philosophy that is so prevalent in the Premiership.

At his first news conference as England manager, he was asked how he might change a style based primarily on pace and intensity.

"This is something he says he is going to have to work on," Capello's interpreter said.

Sir Trevor Brooking, the director of development at the Football Association, believes England lags behind because the players are not learning these technical skills early enough.

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"We need to start earlier," Brooking told BBC Sport. "Anybody emerging from the 5-11 age group has to be comfortable on the ball.

"Can you get this ball under control? Can you kill it instantly? Have you got the know-how to make decisions? Do you know how to use it and select the right pass?"

"Now if you can't do all that when you get to 11-a-side situations in the 11-16s, you're going to struggle desperately. You won't be able to cope if that basic stuff isn't there."

What is becoming increasingly evident is that if the technique of English players is going to match that of the best countries in the world, the FA must get its coaching structure right.

**Why are we putting under-nines under the pressure of getting results?**

Sir Trevor Brooking

Carlos Alberto, who also managed the Nigeria, Oman and Azerbaijan national sides, fears that by the time kids join academies, the skills they need later on in their careers have already been lost.

"It must start with the very young children and they must get the best coaches coaching these kids," he added.

"When the kids are so young, it is not time to think about winning, to think only about winning as you do.

"You have to develop them, teach them how to pass a ball, how to control a ball, how to control a game, how to cross, head and shoot.

"It is not important to tell the kids to win - you must instead teach them the skills that will help them to become winners.

"Most of the time when you are young, you should be playing with a football. Give a ball to each kid, tell them to go home and look after the ball and sleep with it even!"

Brooking says important changes are already underway at grassroots level to help improve the development of core technical skills.

"We want to take the intensity out of it, especially in the younger age groups," said Brooking. "So we do more individual ball work and concentrate on technique.



David Beckham watches on as kids practice at his academy in London

"With the younger groups the philosophy is about fun and just letting youngsters play, we have to take away the pressure of results.

"There are one or two pilot schemes where we've scrapped the leagues for under-nines - why are we putting them under the pressure of getting results?

"We're not allowing them to express themselves and it takes the fun out of it because of all the pressure from the sidelines.

"So the adults have to sign a code of conduct and are roped

off in the corner. There is no hollering at their children, just someone in charge who supports them and makes a few little comments.

"We're trying to give them a lot of small-sided playing time, getting them playing so they get as much contact time as possible."

Brooking argues that one of the major problems in England is a lack of defenders who can start attacks in the manner that right-back Carlos Alberto did so successfully in his 53 games for Brazil.



Brooking has identified an English shortage of attacking full-backs

"I don't think we have enough defenders who are comfortable on the ball in attacking areas - creativity is a worry," continued Brooking.

"A lot of international sides see that now as a way of getting width and getting in behind defences but we don't have the depth, that is our challenge.

"Full-back is a clear problem - we have had one or two jumping three age groups in the development teams because of a lack of depth and that could be worrying in a few years' time."

Carlos Alberto also believes that England's big clubs must give more opportunity to homegrown players in order for the national team to benefit.

"They must change the rules of football in England to give chances to English players, not only bring foreigners into the Premier League," said the World Cup-winning skipper.

"The big teams like Arsenal and Chelsea must allow English kids to play so they can improve their skills at the highest level and concentrate on their improvisation.

"Unless all these changes are made, it is clear that the England national team will not improve."

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