





Fooled by Football's Imposters

It's very evident to the world and certainly to the people in America that the game of soccer is growing at such a tremendous pace. It is fantastic to see this amount of kids playing the game; more and more interest from the 'other' bigger sports' fans and most encouraging of all is the amount of live games covered on US TV from all over the world. I can watch more ninety minute, live English, Spanish and Italian games now; than I could when I lived over in England, thanks to the likes of ESPN, Gol TV and of course the Fox Soccer Channel. This great sport that the world is in love with, is taking over America.

By: Anthony Hudson

But let's not be fooled by what we are seeing, and even more so by what we are hearing. The glitz, the commercials, the talk shows and the ads are all over the place and people love them. But let's face it, they are not the game. And all these gimmicks and bright lights overshadow a deep seated, un-earthed and unlooked-at problem that threatens to turn this young, novice, 'rookie-like' (as they say Stateside) and slightly naïve nation into a very dark footballing hole....one that my home nation finds themselves in right now, as we see the 'great' England team headed home early from South Africa to leave the world's greatest competition to the real footballing nations.

So what is this problem? I'll give it to you in one sentence: The people in the media who are at the forefront of the game in the USA, the people that the whole nation hear on a weekly basis, the 'expert' opinions that are thrust into our living rooms everyday are under qualified, lack real football experience and have connections in the game that make their commentary and opinion bias, weak and hopelessly false. And if that's not enough, any real personality or character is very much, few and far between. These are the people that are educating this great nation on the principles of the game of soccer, when the country is in such a fantastic, yet critical moment in its development.

On a much smaller level, here's how it compares; asking a 16 year old kid to teach you how to drive; hiring a man with no experience in the field of food and cooking, to open and run your restaurant that you have your whole life's worth of investment in; a football manager asking his wife on a Friday night to help pick his team...hmm...that one might not be so un-common. Only this is a whole country, not a car or a single business....the whole country's future in the game being shaped by a handful of sub par, supposed 'experts'.

In America, 370,000 people watched Man Utd's 3-1 win over Arsenal in January last season on the Fox Soccer Channel. That's a lot. And here's another one - 23.4 million people watched the 2010 World Cup final, setting records for a game of soccer on TV in the States (according to Nielsen data). It is growing! And with growth, comes huge responsibility.

The Chosen Ones (why....I'm not sure?)

I feel sorry for any kid that may happen to turn on the TV and catch the Fox Football Phone In, a show presented by two Englishman, Steve Cohen and Nick Geber. I am 100% positive that these two gentlemen would never be allowed anywhere near a show over in Europe to comment on football. Both sit and give their strong opinions on the game and

neither of them have ever kicked a ball in their lives, and I wouldn't be surprised if they've never really watched one, judging by what they come out with. And yet, the following day, people who don't know any better hear what they say and regurgitate the same old nonsense in their own footballing circles. It's dangerously contagious.

Nick Webster is a regular, and it seems whenever you get comfortable to watch a game, he's right there, like clock work, telling us what is happening, what needs to be done, why this manager is doing things the wrong way and this player is not doing what he supposed to be doing and on and on. Mr Webster, another Englishman whom I don't think would get anywhere near a football show in his homeland, is the Head Boy's Soccer Coach of Windward High School (the height of his football experience). Now, there is nothing wrong with this at all, I'm sure he's great guy and he does a fantastic job with the kids. But, please, he has the power to affect the whole of the USA every time we turn on the TV to watch a game of football. Is this the best there is? A high school coach? And what type of standards are being set?

Been There and Done It

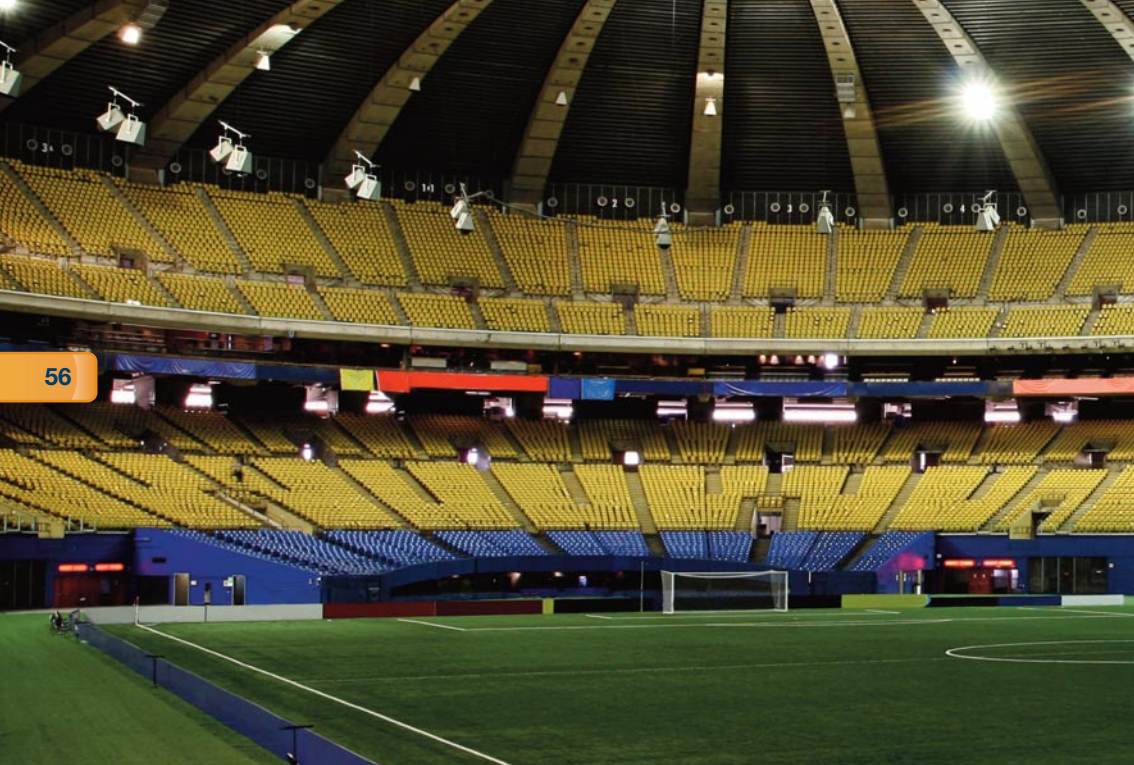
When you look at other sports, let's say Tennis or Rugby for example; they always seem to have top ex professionals as

pundits. People that have performed at the very highest level of that sport and have been successful. They've been there and done it. They have weight, experience and value in their opinion. The highest footballing achievement of the former pundits I've mentioned, is what, a Youth Tournament, or a high school championship maybe, at best. Is that good enough? Is that good enough to be presenting and commenting on soccer, to this country? Why don't we have real experts on TV?

So we look at soccer in America, and for the life of me, I cannot find anyone who has been there and done it at the very highest level. The best I could offer, at a real stretch, is Alexi Lalas, whom I think we can all flat out agree is not one of those. Christopher Sullivan played 52 league games in a ten year playing career for clubs most of us have never heard of, yet commentates weekly on most games, talking like he was Maradona! Keith Costigan played in the United Soccer Leagues, second tier of American soccer, with the highlight of his career being a trial with the LA Galaxy, yet Mr Costigan is at the forefront of punditry on TV. I could go on and on. Is this good enough?

And Where's the Character?

They all seem so afraid to say it exactly how it is, and exactly what is going on. It becomes quite obvious when you start

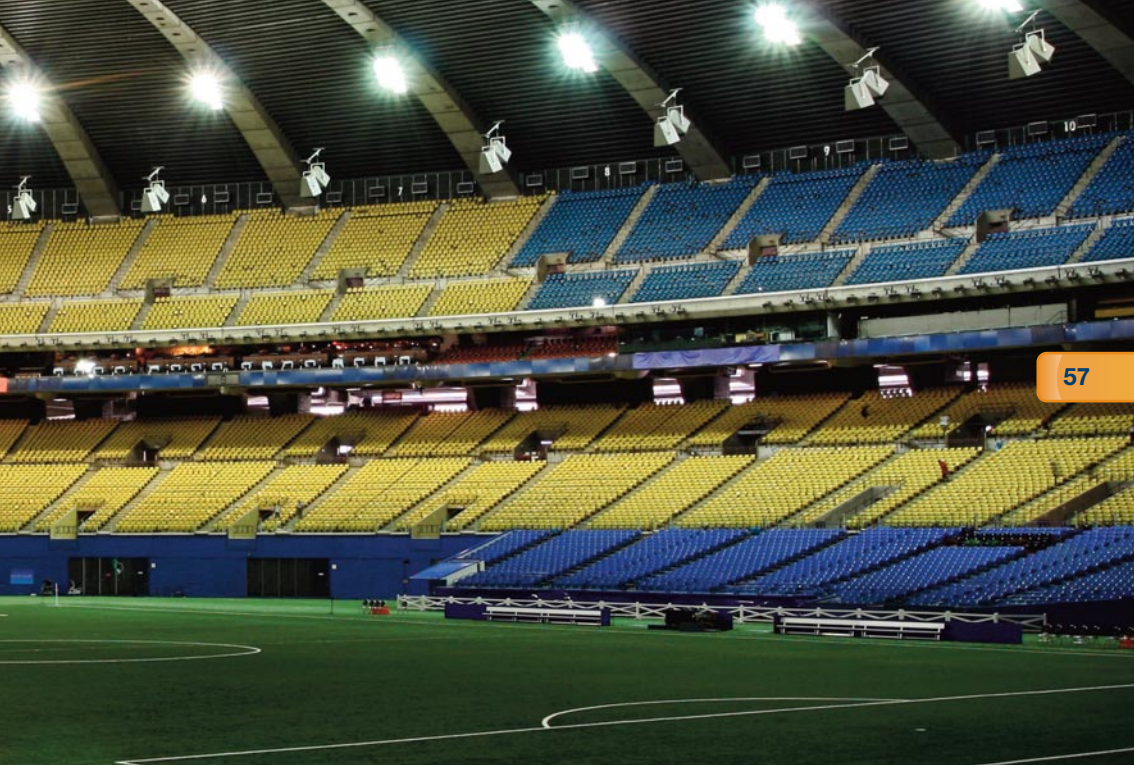


listening to these guys and you soon notice, not just that they are incompetent when it comes to their subject, but what friends they have in the game. There's no way they'll say anything against them, whether players, coaches, clubs or whoever.

Shouldn't we see pundits who know what they are talking about, that have experience? And not those who are afraid to say what's needed, because they might upset someone, or they may bump into them at a party or a game the following night.

These are the chosen ones that are the face of soccer in this country and are educating everyone about the game in its youthful development at such a grand level.

Now for me, Brian Clough is one of my heroes and there's no way any of the names above should even have the right to be in the same article as this legend, but I have to say this. What he did as a manager was out of this world. Now there's your experience. And as a football pundit, he was phenomenal. He said it how it was. He saw things the way real football supporters saw



them. People could relate. And he had personality. You learned about the game when he spoke. You learned about life when he spoke. He was honest. Clough was a one off; but we're not even getting anywhere close with where we are now. In fact, we're moving in the opposite direction.

Imposters in The Game....

When I first came to America, I was amazed at how, and I don't want to say ignorant, but it's the only word I can find to describe it; maybe uninformed, or lacking in knowledge is easier to stomach; but this was the

response I got from the majority of people I spoke to surrounding the game – based purely on the fact that I had an English accent and therefore I 'knew what I was talking about'. It was, and is, amazing. Scarily amazing and yes, I have to say it...unbelievably ignorant! This naivety has almost caused an epidemic in the game out here.

Thankfully, Americans are more educated and are wising up to it now, but what I saw and still see is people on TV, coaches in clubs, working there way into nice little,

cushy set ups, based upon the fact that they are from a different country and speak in a way that most Americans, blurt out 'oh he's from England, or Holland or Brazil, so he must know what he's talking about.' It is a disgrace that so many are draining the money out of the game, taking from uninformed, none-the wiser, bosses, parents and clubs. I know if you're a coach and your reading this, your either one of those and this makes you feel very uncomfortable right now, or you know many of these people taking from the game and it has to frustrate you too. This is getting away from the subject, only very slightly and it's a whole separate problem that, if I get started I may get myself into trouble, but the country seems to be blinded by it. Whether on TV or on the training ground, just because you are from a country like England, doesn't mean that you know more about the game than people in this country, but unfortunately, that is how it is right now.

Too many people in the game, too many imposters, do nothing but take from it. And if we are in the game for the right reasons we have a responsibility to say something.

So, what gives me the right to say all this? I'm certainly no expert when it comes to TV punditry. Why don't I just leave the US if I feel this way? Well, because I care about the game. I am a young professional football manager making my way in the game. I

don't yet have a list of statistics under my managerial record or big trophies and medals, but I can assure you - very soon I will! But, the most important thing is, I care enough about football to want to voice a concern that I feel so very strongly about. I'm passionate about the game and on top of that I know what I'm talking about.

If I had a child growing up in America, and he loved the game the way I did as a kid, I would be very concerned about what he was hearing whenever he turned the TV on to watch a game football. I'd also be concerned with the qualifications and experience of the people doing the educating out on the field. And that's not good for the future of this sport in America.

If only we could see a little further down the line, I wonder what direction this blinkered-going about our own business-type attitude, could take us in the years to come.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of SoccerCoachingInternational nor its publisher Sportfacilities & Media BV.