



**Virtual Coaching for
Football Report**

2021

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01 RESEARCH EXPLAINED

The Pandemic has hastened a number of important changes in all areas of our lives: we have used—and will continue to use—online tools more frequently.

It would be therefore illogical not to maximise the use of online tools in encouraging youngsters to be active during the lockdown and continue to use online tools as the lockdown eases. The use of such tools would appear to have started as a 'workaround' during the lockdown in various countries but seems to have been incorporated in post lockdown engagement with players.

At Sports Path, we decided to research the increasing use of remote coaching at home and on-demand which we have entitled 'virtual coaching'. We use this term in particular to describe the way players—of all ages but mainly youngsters—can access coaching directly online from apps or videos. The key aspect is that the coaching content—largely video—is delivered directly online to the player. (This is known in marketing terms as 'Direct to the Consumer' - DTC).¹

For this paper Sports Path conducted the following research:

- Several hours of discussion on ClubHouse (the audio social app) with the help of Samuel Siew (Train Effective), and Harry O'Riordan (Proformance Global)
- Interviews with Yael Averbuch (Techne Futbol), Saul Isaksson-Hurst (My Personal Football Coach), Daniel Agnew (Colorado Rapids Youth Soccer Club, Denver, Colorado) Darel Russel (Heat FC, Las Vegas, Nevada) Bill Richardson (Famer)
- An online survey with over 100 Coaches in Europe, North America and Asia with experience of virtual coaching: this was promoted via the Sports Path newsletter and LinkedIn
- Comprehensive desk and internet research: I am particularly grateful to Dr Laura Finnegan,² Lecturer, Waterford Institute of Technology, the Republic of Ireland for assistance in finding some of the research quoted

¹ <https://mediaradar.com/blog/understanding-the-direct-to-consumer-dtc-market/>

² <https://talentdevelopmentinirishfootball.com/>

When I wrote ' Soccer Coaching and the Web: A Guide to Support Player Development'³ in 2013, I would not have predicted such a growth in the use of the web for player coaching.

Virtual coaching was present before the pandemic but has clearly grown during the pandemic and our research would indicate it is most likely to continue to grow as lockdowns ease as an adjunct to face to face coaching—not instead of it.

Bill Richardson at Famer⁴ stated that 'Leveraging technology in education leads to better outcomes and sports are no different. Virtual coaching and digital training is becoming a fundamental aspect of player and coach development, and everything we see leads us to believe this will only accelerate post-Covid'.

To obtain a free digital copy of the book mentioned above, see video examples of virtual coaching and review the comprehensive archive of resources on virtual coaching please click here: <https://sportspath.typepad.com/sports-path-e-learning-bl/virtual-coaching-references-resources-.html>

Robin Russell
www.sportspath.com

³ <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Soccer-Coaching-Web-Support-Development/dp/1493689371>

⁴ <https://www.famer.us/>

02 WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Players have been able to access thousands of hours of coaching on YouTube before the pandemic so what is new about 'virtual coaching'? The overall purpose is the same: to maximise participation and improve player development. As Bill Richardson CEO of virtual sports coaching company, Famer, said in our interview with him that the purpose of virtual coaching is, "To extend and enhance on-field training".

These are some of the changes which we have identified in the last 18 months magnified by the pandemic lockdown:

- 1** The ability for the coach to provide individual personalised programmes for each player (e.g. goal setting, challenges, planning, monitoring and feedback).
- 2** With the increased use of apps and Zoom, the ability of the player to position their SmartPhone/Tablet to allow the player to showcase and display their attempts at skills back to the coach either in real time or recorded and sent to the coach.
- 3** Thus the opportunity for the coach to provide feedback to players again either in real time or recorded.
- 4** A club can integrate virtual coaching as a blended extension of their face-to-face coaching sessions thus including the players usual club coach in the loop.
- 5** As part of a team or training cohort, players can engage socially with each other.
- 6** Live coach led sessions—the coach can demonstrate techniques, use one of the players to demonstrate or use a pre-chosen video for a demonstration. Ball mastery—a combination of turns and dribbles in confined spaces are the most popular.
- 7** Coaching sessions presented as whole sessions with a beginning, middle and end not just a collection of drills.
- 8** The coach can establish challenges, tests and tasks.
- 9** Gamification: with the increasing use of esports, players of all ages are all more tech-literate operating apps which allow them to practice when they want to, engage in feedback loops and can record their own engagement on an app using performance clocks, loyalty schemes, performance dashboards, participation leaderboards etc.

- 10** Some apps link performance of tests provided online but performed at home to Talent Identification e.g. AiSCOUT with evidence from an English Premier League Club and a similar programme in Italy.⁷
- 11** The coach can create 'player led' sessions by asking players to demonstrate their own techniques.
- 12** The coach with a team of coaches could potentially provide coaching virtually to hundreds/thousands of players globally.
- 13** Using simple apps, the coach is able to monitor the usage by the players - time spent on the app, at what times of the day/week and the most popular activities.
- 14** The use of apps allows the player to access coaching anywhere and anytime.
- 15** In addition, coaches can provide 'Tutorial ' sessions using video and PowerPoint in a range of topics including nutrition, analysis, position-specific requirements, strength and conditioning.

The key changes would therefore appear to centre around personalisation, feedback and club customisation. Virtual coaching can be delivered live or recorded and may be provided via platforms like YouTube, Zoom or via dedicated apps.

Simply stated by Yael Averbuch CEO & Founder of Techne Futbo, virtual coaching through her company's app is "A player development resource which provides everything for the player they can do by themselves."

Throughout history, the best coaches have always attempted to use whatever audio-visual resources were available at the time. At the beginning of the pandemic there has been some scepticism as to the value of coaching via the internet but as Academy Coach and author of 'Gold Dust: How to Become a More Effective Coach Quickly', Keith Mayer stated, "I was initially sceptical of the value of virtual coaching, I quickly changed my mind when I saw how popular it became with our players".

⁵ <https://www.aiscout.io/>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/55633864.amp>

⁷ <https://www.oneofus.it/>

⁸ <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Gold-Dust-Effective-Quickly-communicator/dp/1709301805>

⁹ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/keith-mayer-66a23b7a/>

03 HOW BIG ARE THE CHANGES?

Some examples:

- In the overall area of online education even before Covid-19, there was already high growth and adoption in education technology, with global edtech investments reported to have reached US\$18.66 billion in 2019 and the overall market for online education projected to reach \$350 Billion by 2025. Whether it is language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, or online learning software, there has been a significant surge in usage since Covid-19.¹⁰
- The Aspen Institute,¹¹ well-respected research, educational and leadership organisation in the USA, reported in March 2020 that, "Virtual training of youth athletes explodes during Covid-19 shutdown".¹²
- MaxOne surveyed 450 Youth Sports Organisations during the pandemic and 60% reported that they had launched some form of virtual programming and 15% claimed they were about to do so. MaxOne¹³ claim 270,000 athletes use their app, but there is no indication as to the % of these which are soccer players.¹⁴
- Sky Sports in the UK reported on the role Saul Isaksson-Hurst whose app, the My Personal Football Coach app is being used by academy staff at the clubs of Wolves, Arsenal & West Bromwich Albion FC. John Hunter head of Academy Coaching at English Premier League Club, Wolverhampton Wanderers said, "We had to look at which parts of our training programme we could actually replicate".¹⁵ The app acts as a means of developing ball mastery and technical skills and features hundreds of drills, in video format, which can be replicated by players from home then uploaded and shared with teammates and coaches who can track progress and give feedback. "Arsenal, for example, signed up before the last lockdown and used it with their U8s and U11s," says Isaksson-Hurst. "What I did was go into their academy and film their U11s, who are a very good technical group, doing loads of different skills and exercises. Then, each week, we released one of the challenges for the players to do at home."
- TopYa! reported an 865% increase in new daily users, including 1,100% new coach users and 1,745% new parent users. Player video submissions via virtual coaching have increased by 6,333%.¹⁶

¹⁰ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/>

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspen_Institute

¹² <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/coronavirus-and-youth-sports/reports/2020/3/24/virtual-training-of-youth-athletes-explodes-during-covid-19-shutdown>

¹³ <https://maxone.ai/coaches-resources/3-reasons-zoom-is-insufficient-for-virtual-sports-coaching-2/>

¹⁴ <https://maxone.ai/>

¹⁵ <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11095/12213513/how-lockdown-has-impacted-academy-players-coaching-apps-mental-health-hurdles-and-painful-zoom-calls>

¹⁶ <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/coronavirus-and-youth-sports/reports/2020/3/24/virtual-training-of-youth-athletes-explodes-during-covid-19-shutdown>

- HomeCourt provides an interactive personal trainer via videos on an app with NBA and Nike endorsement for basketball players¹⁷ and, as a measure of usage, it was reported by the Aspen Institute that in March 2020: "It was ranked No. 1 on Apple's free sports apps. To put that in perspective, a basketball training app is now ranked higher than ESPN, NBA and NFL apps. Techne Futbol, Rack Performance, SmartCoach Basketball Training, TopYa! Soccer, DribbleUp Soccer and DribbleUp Basketball are other training platforms that cracked Apple's top 35."¹⁸
- Jeremy Goldberg, President of LeagueApps (an app which manages registrations, payments, schedules & communications) reported that "50% youth sports organisations quickly added virtual training and another 15% had at least expressed interest; in all, LeagueApps noted a 4,000% increase in digital programming registrations."¹⁹
- In March 2020, it was reported that Techne Futbol, which features guided curriculum, progress tracking and competitive elements like leaderboards, climbed to No. 6 on Apple's sports app top charts: it reported that usage was "up 30 times what it was before the push to social distance and minimise group activities"²⁰. HomeCourt, a basketball app that uses iPhone and iPad cameras to capture and analyse athletes play to help them train, and TopYa! Soccer, an app that hosts instructional videos and encourages users to share videos practising the skills, both cracked the top 15.²¹
- Famer, a virtual sports coaching platform reported that "usage of its app doubles almost every day at the beginning of the pandemic." Even before social distancing swept the country, the platform reported steady growth, resulting in about 5000 users. But within one week in Spring 2020, Famer reported that it had already surpassed its monthly projections before the month even started.²² Quoting independent research which Famer had seen indicating that 74% of parents who had been purchasing virtual sports coaching during the pandemic claimed they would continue with virtual coaching after the pandemic conditions had eased.
- In US Sports and increasingly in soccer there has been the rise of individual trainers and coaches for players. As a cheaper and socially distanced alternative in Basketball, eCoach has provided 1000+ videos on an app.²³ Rich Hempel, who started eCoach seven years ago, said the pandemic has meant a big uptick in interest and adoption of this type of technology and content. "What we've seen from the pandemic is this notion of online sports coaching go from what was a good idea at the time, to all of a sudden now it's mission-critical," he said.

¹⁷ <https://www.homecourt.ai/>

¹⁸ <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/coronavirus-and-youth-sports/reports/2020/3/24/virtual-training-of-youth-athletes-explodes-during-covid-19-shutdown>

¹⁹ <https://www.sporttechie.com/youth-sports-pandemic-covid-19-access-to-coaching-technology-connectivity>

²⁰ <https://frontofficesports.com/sports-training-apps-coronavirus/>

²¹ <https://frontofficesports.com/sports-training-apps-coronavirus/>

²² <https://frontofficesports.com/sports-training-apps-coronavirus/>

²³ <https://ecoachsports.com>

04 RESULTS OF SURVEY

4.1 Why are coaches using virtual coaching?

A number of reasons were given, the top 3 were as follows:

1. To keep the players engaged in football and physical activity.
2. To maintain a connection and communication between the players, the coach and the club.
3. To provide personalised learning programmes and personal feedback for each player.

Other reasons stated were:

- It's safe and supervised
- Adding value to the existing club programme, creating our own online curriculum
- Developing an online community of our players—a psycho/social tool to help players' mental health.
- The content was of high quality from a trusted source.
- The coach can revise previous sessions and preview future sessions.
- Out of lockdown, the coach can prepare the players for the next face-to-face session.

24

The leading Soccer Camp provider in the USA- Challenger highlighted 10 reasons they believe that "training at home is here to stay".

Simply put by Yael Averbuch of Techne Futbol - "there is now no reason for ever cancelling a training session because of bad weather - just move it online!"

4.2 How do coaches use virtual coaching?

A number of reasons were given - the top 3 were as follows

1. Encourage the players to view the expert demonstration of skills
2. Set up Tasks and Challenges
3. Set Homework for the players

Other reasons stated were:

- Established a leaderboard based on player performance on tasks and challenges
- Encouraged players to post videos clips of them completing tasks and challenges
- Highlight skills are shown in Match videos (e.g. via YouTube)
- Set up our own YouTube Channel

²⁴

<https://www.challengersports.com/challenger-blog/why-training-at-home-is-here-to-stay/>

- Developed quizzes
- Provided ' masterclasses ' with Q and A
- Monitored the use of the app or content by the player

Most coaches when coaching ball mastery operated after the demonstration of a technique followed by player activity of 45 seconds activity followed by a rest of 15-30 seconds.

Techne Football provided a list of ²⁵ '5 Strategies for Soccer Coaches to Stay Engaged with Their Players During COVID-19'. Which is a useful guide and have a video guide here.²⁶

4.3 Which tools do coaches use?

Players nowadays have the tools available to coach themselves. Players also have a variety of options to obtain virtual coaching. Any coach anywhere in the world can provide virtual coaching so the competition is intense.

Coaches surveyed claimed to used a variety of video platforms and apps. The most popular video only platforms were Zoom and YouTube.

A number of apps were listed, the top 4 representing 60% of the apps mentioned were as follows:

1. My Personal Football Coach: <https://mypersonalfootballcoach.com/>
2. Techne Football: <https://www.technefutbol.com/>
3. Train Effective: <https://traineffective.com/>
4. Famer: <https://www.famer.us/>

Other apps listed were:

- My Soccer Trainer: <https://mysoccertraining.com/> (in conjunction with Beast Mode Soccer)
- Liverpool FC's eAcademy: <https://eacademy.liverpoolfc.com/>
- Chelsea FC's Perfect Play app: <https://perfectplay.com/>
- Top Ya!: <https://topya.com/soccer/>
- Box to Box: <https://box-to-box.app/>
- My Coach Football: <https://www.mycoachfootball.com/en/>
- Rise: <https://risefutbol.com/>
- MaxOne: <https://maxone.ai/sports/soccer/>
- Box to Box: <https://box-to-box.app/>
- Online Soccer Academy: <https://www.onlinesocceracademy.com/>

²⁵ <https://www.technefutbol.com/blog/2020/4/15/5-strategies-for-soccer-coaches-to-stay-engaged-with-their-players-during-covid-19>

²⁶ <https://youtu.be/dwXU1euhDtY>

- Grow Football: <https://www.grow.football/>
- Vision Training: <https://www.visionsoccertraining.com/Online-Small-Group-Training.htm>
- Heja: <https://inside.heja.io/train-at-home-with-your-team-using-heja-8dffdb443bfe>
- Soccer Mindset Academy: <https://www.soccermindsetacademy.com/>
- Dotcomsport: <https://dotcomsport.nl/us/>

Research by MaxOne of the 450 Youth Sports Organisations using virtual coaching shows that 60% indicated they were using Zoom or other web-based platforms, 30% using social media (Facebook, Youtube, Instagram) and 10% sending training and workouts via email.²⁷

MaxOne makes the argument here that Zoom is a 'Great Resource for one to many broadcast communications'²⁸ but claim that Zoom is not an effective virtual coaching tool as an app for these reasons:

- Zoom is not built for 'live' and engaging coach to athlete coaching
- Zoom is not sufficient as a standalone communication platform
- Zoom does not support sustainable program growth
- Zoom doesn't provide video replay, annotation, leaderboards, cohort training, an archive of skills or on-demand coaching

“We used Facebook Group and Telegram for players to send their video training and also Zoom Live Training “

Venta Sabone Technical Director at ISI-Dangkor Senchey FC, Cambodia

“ I used YouTube and Dotcomsport system. We made videos of exercises, technical skills, game situations with questions and videos of own training sessions with questions and feedback (from before pandemic)”

Jasper de Muijnck Dutch UEFA Pro coach Formerly Technical Director PFC Beroe Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

²⁷ <https://maxone.ai/coaches-resources/3-reasons-zoom-is-insufficient-for-virtual-sports-coaching-2/>

²⁸ <https://maxone.ai/coaches-resources/3-reasons-zoom-is-insufficient-for-virtual-sports-coaching-2/>

“ We developed our own material and introduced zoom sessions on a weekly basis. It will become part of our delivery to certain areas and age groups.

Derek Broadley, Technical Director, Charleston Battery SC, Charleston, South Carolina, USA

“ I used YouTube videos from professional clubs/players with physical workouts during Pandemic Lockdown.

Michael McArdle Assistant Manager Ayr Utd , previously Head of Coaching at St Mirren Academy, Scotland

A recurring aspect in all interviews and discussions regarding virtual coaching in the home was the need for safety and to ensure all activities which are recommended emphasise keeping the ball on the ground. Tom Byer is a great advocate for 'Soccer Starts at Home' and his safety advice and archive of recommended videos in the project with MLS club Houston Dynamo²⁹ are worth reviewing.

4.4 For whom is virtual coaching most popular?

Research indicates a wide range of players being exposed to virtual coaching but the most popular ages appear to be 9-11 year olds.

4.5 Who uses virtual coaching?

Coaches coaching players in National Associations, grassroots clubs, academies and holiday camps. For example:

- National Associations Hong Kong FA and FA of Malaysia case study³⁰
- Academies and grassroots clubs: see Colorado Rapids Youth Soccer Club, My Personal Football Coach and Techne Futbol in case studies
- Holiday courses and camps: see Proformance Global in case studies and Challenger Sports have established a separate brand for 'virtual training programmes'³¹

For more examples of virtual holiday programmes see here.³²

²⁹ [https://www.houstondynamoacademy.net/page/show/5736014-soccer-starts-at-home-](https://www.houstondynamoacademy.net/page/show/5736014-soccer-starts-at-home)

³⁰ See Case Studies here <https://sportspath.typepad.com/sports-path-e-learning-bl/virtual-coaching-references-resources-.html>

³¹ <https://www.challengersports.com/virtual/>

³² <https://sportspath.typepad.com/sports-path-e-learning-bl/virtual-coaching-references-resources-.html>

4.6. What do coaches coach in virtual coaching?

A number of other examples were listed. The top 5 were as follows:

1. Ball mastery
2. General health and welfare
3. Decision making
4. Self-analysis - helping the player analyse themselves
5. Strength and conditioning

Other aspects listed were:

- Nutrition
- Mental skills
- Goalkeeping tasks
- Self-analysis - helping the player analyse themselves
- Live tutorials and classroom sessions
- Analysing video game footage and decision making
- The importance of life skills
- Engaging parents e.g. Techne Football provide a parents guide ³³

4.7 We asked: "If your players are accessing content from the web or apps, what do you believe your role is? How do you as the coach fit in?"

Via the web, players now clearly have more tools to teach themselves and learning can become a more self-sufficient process.

The most common responses to the question we asked therefore highlighted changing the role of a coach to guide, facilitate, signpost, recommend, reinforce, mentor and increase self-awareness. Some examples are quoted below:

I want to be able to give players feedback on different aspects of game situation & provide role models for the players for their self improvement.

Maxi Opondo-Mbai Technical Director at PASS ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates

There is a lot out on the web as a coach, I would steer the players in a direction that would fit our game model.

Boris Apsitis: Program Head Coach at Niagara Region Soccer Program; Assistant Director of High Performance at Niagara FC, Canada

³³ <https://www.technefutbol.com/blog/2021/3/17/how-to-be-a-great-soccer-parent-2>

“
My role is to explain how this unopposed training or activity is relevant to the real game.

Lee Christie, Director of Coaching, Phoenix Rising FC Youth Soccer, North Valley, Phoenix, Arizona, USA

“
As a guide to help them discover and own the task themselves.

Chris Blake , Coaching Manager IF Gnistan, Helsinki, Finland

“
Ensure it's safe and appropriate for each age group.

Bobby Lennox, Manager, Grassroots Soccer Development at The Ontario Soccer Association, Canada

“
My role is to to inform, involve and inspire.

Gary Williamson, Director for Player Development & Coaching Education, North Texas State Soccer Association, Olympic Development Program at NTSSA

“
Assistance to create an environment where an ecological dynamics approach and perception-action coupling is still possible in the home setting.

Alex Beare: Coach Andy Chen Academy, Taipei, Taiwan formerly Director of Coach Education Chinese Taipei Football Association

4.8 Online Skills for the Coach

We asked: "What assistance would you like to become a more effective online coach? In other words, how would you like to use apps more effectively? Which technological skills would you like to improve to support your players more effectively?"

The responses were varied but centred on the use of online tools. For example:

- Reporting, evaluating, monitoring: easier player monitoring. Assistance in tracking player skill development as they navigate through the program.
- Organising, planning and designation to be able to link the "homework" to the session/practice.
- Access to a forum to see what has worked for other coaches for players of different ages and which videos and content are the most engaging.
- How to monitor usage and gain insights from this.
- The ability to record-review-provide feedback better.
- Apps that all the team can see each other's progress so it is not so individual.
- General health and fitness tools to support self-assessment.
- Help with the production of inspirational virtual or recorded content: basic editing & IT skills/templates.
- Helping players analyse themselves.
- Making it more accessible to parents, players and other coaches.
- Provide my own tutorials.

I'd like to see a training course or webinar on how coaches can better utilise these modern apps to promote player development.

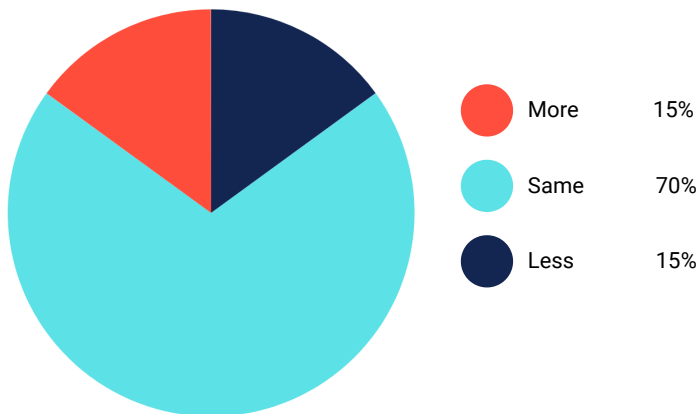
Joseph Tibbs, Head Men's and Women's Soccer Coach at Talladega College, Alabama, USA

Help training in designing online programs and taking best advantage of the web to support players' development would be helpful. At best, even with 3 in-person training sessions per week, there's never enough time to do all of the work to develop players to their full potential.

Peter Menyasz, Head Coach, U13 Girls Regional, Ottawa South United Soccer Club, Ottawa, Canada

³³ <https://www.technefutbol.com/blog/2021/3/17/how-to-be-a-great-soccer-parent-2>

4.9 We asked: "Will you continue to recommend the use of content or apps to your players when the pandemic eases?"



“
74% of parents who had been purchasing virtual sports coaching during the pandemic claimed they would continue with virtual coaching after the pandemic conditions had eased.
”

Bill Richardson CEO of Famer quoting independent research in our interview

4.10 We asked: "If players use apps and video to practice unopposed at home—and continue to do so after the lockdown—how will you adapt your actual face-to-face practice with teammates?"

“
I see it as an add on, as most of the app use video footage would of been done in doors or garden. The re-enforcement of these skills unopposed with the added pressure of peers and in more of a football environment will only help them use them more confidently in a match.
”

Phil Hill , Development Coach, Cambridge United FC, England

“
I see anything unopposed as homework but even then the opponent is the player themselves, e.g. Can they beat a previous score? I always try to have as much free play and opposed practices as possible within a session.
”

Dan O'Donnell, International Technical Director, Tranmere Rovers FC, England

“
The focus on face to face training will be on more free play and decision making.

Danny Laws AFC Sudbury, England
”

If players can be guided to undertake non-opposed practice at home via an app or Zoom then it surely makes sense to devote face-to-face practice time towards decision making and free play in small-sided games e.g. 2v2; 3v3 etc. The use of virtual coaching at home would certainly question the value of players.

4.11 We asked: "Is it a problem for your players to have accessibility to the internet or affordability to have the devices to access apps or video content?"

“
10-20% of our players have accessibility issues.

Mario Bono Director of Coaching Fairmount Soccer, Founder of United Philly Soccer Philadelphia, USA
”

The responses varied but the average was 20%. It should also be noted as highlighted by Kelly Erickson & Turnnidge that "In a lockdown context, young athletes whose living arrangements offer greater space, both inside (e.g. bedroom) and outside (e.g. backyard or garage) may be better able to continue participating in a wide range of sports activities. Conversely, young athletes in higher density physical environments (e.g. high-rise buildings) may have less indoor and outdoor space to participate in sport."

05 CASE STUDIES

5.1 My Personal Football Coach (MPFC)

<https://mypersonalfootballcoach.com/>



The company was established by Saul Isaksson-Hurst who spent 10 years coaching in Premier League Academy Football, 4 years at Chelsea FC's Academy and 6 years at Tottenham Hotspur FC's Academy. He has also been a personal football coach for over 18 years. Saul has transferred this expertise to an online version in two versions: the Club Programme and the Virtual Academy.

The Club Programme is taken by over 100 grassroots/youth soccer clubs in Europe, Asia and North America and used by the Academies of Arsenal FC, Wolverhampton Wanderers FC, West Bromwich Albion FC, several EFL clubs (e.g. Middlesbrough FC, Reading FC) as well as LA Galaxy and Seattle Sounders in the MLS.

The club programme is a 'white labelled' product. For the professional club partnership, Saul visits the clubs, design and then film their players. Players can upload their own videos for peer and coach review. Parent sessions are provided for partner clubs and academies: training in how to use the app is also provided for partner clubs.

For the virtual academy,³⁵ Saul provides three classes per week for players around the world with live or recorded sessions with Saul and guest coaches from around the world. Players can upload their responses and feedback provided by email.

The content provided by both versions aims to include all aspects of the English FA's '4 Corners'³⁶ of a player's development: technical/tactical, physical, social and psychological. This is achieved via tutorials and sessions including 'mindset', tactical analysis and physical development. Players are encouraged to analyse themselves.

5.2 Train Effective

<https://traineffective.com>



Train Effective is an online learning platform that allows players to train physically and mentally like professional footballers anytime, anywhere.

Some of the key features in the platform comprises more than 150 custom-built workouts to improve skills, built-in tactical analysis to further build game intelligence, easy to use training planning and scheduling tools, classroom content by world-class athletes on different topics and aspects to develop mentality.

With 700,000 followers today on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, their personalised mentoring programme 'Elite Experience' provides personal access to Effective's top coaches and mentors to ask questions, learn from and get 1-on-1 personalised advice on developing as a player.

Train Effective also organises In-Residence Camp in London for young aspiring players to get the opportunity to train and develop their skills, building their football resume and get effective feedback from top European academies coaches and scouts. Former England International Rio Ferdinand is an investor in Train Effective.

³⁵

<https://sportspath.typepad.com/sports-path-e-learning-bl/virtual-coaching-references-resources-.html>

³⁶

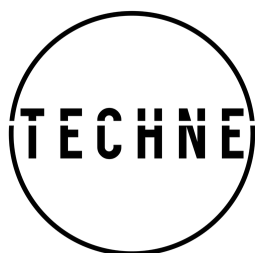
<https://thebootroom.thefa.com/resources/coaching/the-fas-4-corner-model>

³⁷

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevemccaskill/2019/11/08/rio-ferdinand-wants-more-tech-investments-after-launch-of-train-effective-coaching-app/?sh=1bd9e5485782>

5.3 Technefutbol

<https://www.technefutbol.com/>



The Techne Training System was designed by former US Women's National Team professional soccer player Yael Averbuch in 2016 and simply described by Yael as "A Player Development Resource which provides everything for the player they can do by themselves."

As Yael explains, "So what I've done with Techne was put together all the things I've been shown over the years or made up, or been challenged to do in session with the wonderful coaches I've been fortunate to have and put that into a blueprint for other players to follow."

In our discussion, in April 2021 Yael highlighted that she and her team of 6 staff working on the app had achieved 61,000 active users on April 14th 2021.

Yael sees the app as both a self-sufficient programme for players to work by themselves and/or as a supplement that a Club Coach can add to a Club Curriculum. Techne has, for example over 200 academies, clubs and high schools signed up to one of its college, team or club plans.

These plans allow the coach to assign personal programmes to players, track team and player usage and provide individual feedback.

Yael would cite the major 5 benefits of the app for the club plan:

- Empowers players to train on their own with access to over 2,500 activities
- Supplements in-person training
- Elevates the culture of player accountability for their own development
- Enhances the support provided by the club for the player
- Encourages Competition within the club and within all those using the app in over 100 countries throughout the world

One of the ways this is achieved is through time trials on the app—simple tasks against the clock—from which leaderboards can be developed to show the player's performance on these tasks compared against players for the same age in the team, club, country or globally.

All subscribers are part of the Training Sock System, similar to the belt system in martial arts. The more they train, the further in the system they can progress and are rewarded with new sock colours.

5.4 Proformance Global

<https://www.proformanceglobal.com/soccer-academy/>



Harry O’Riordan is a Co-Director of Proformance Global, which offers an advanced football development programme across the South East of England for talented individuals aged 5-18 years. At the start of the pandemic, Harry started providing virtual coaching sessions via Zoom.³⁸ examples of video other resources are also available here.³⁹

Regular classes via zoom were offered live or recorded with staff demonstrations for players across the world. If provided live Harry and his team of 3 or 4 coaches would view the players’ performance. and provide feedback to the players. Activities are graded by difficulty - Bronze, Silver or Gold. Players were also singled out to provide a demonstration. The major emphasis was on ball mastery with a combination of movements e.g. a turn, a dribble + a turn. Examples of Harry’s sessions can be seen on video here.⁴⁰ Sessions on Goal Setting and Planning are provided. Harry emphasises the value of personal feedback during sessions (name-checking players) and innovative games like the ‘Wheel of Fortune’ where he spins the wheel and players (or staff) must perform a technique.

Harry’s sessions attempt high levels of interaction and engagement using a number of methods:

- Asking the players if they have a combination of moves to show the rest of the class
- Asking the players to put titles on their moves e.g. Ronaldo or Neymar
- Showing game footage in a classroom session, pausing it and asking players questions
- Quizzes

All players are asked to complete an online survey so that Harry and his staff are more aware of the background of the players they are coaching and a customer satisfaction survey at the end of a series of sessions. All players get a final progress report Harry does provide classroom sessions for players on analysis, nutrition, decision making, position-specific responsibilities, a ‘club affiliation’ programme and also presents sessions on virtual coaching to parents.

The story of how Harry has delivered over 150 zoom sessions is shown here.⁴¹

After the lockdown eased Harry continues to provide the popular Zoom sessions.

³⁸ <https://www.proformanceglobal.com/soccer-academy/training-with-proformance/>

³⁹ <https://sportspath.typepad.com/sports-path-e-learning-bl/virtual-coaching-references-resources-.html>

⁴⁰ <https://sportspath.typepad.com/sports-path-e-learning-bl/virtual-coaching-references-resources-.html>

⁴¹ <https://youtu.be/Usp5KgGpvjs>

5.5 Colorado Rapids Youth Soccer, Denver, USA



Daniel Agnew is the U11-U14 Boys Director of Coaching at the Colorado Rapids Youth Soccer Club. When the lockdown started he began to provide virtual coaching opportunities for players via Zoom from his apartment. Sessions were set up to be completed from home, with players joining from their bedrooms, lounges, basements and garages.

Daniel worked to plan his sessions to include the following aspects:

- Weekly Technical Theme - Dribbling, Turning, Ball Control, Awareness and Ball Mastery.
- All exercises were roughly 45 seconds and were repeated 2 to 3 times, allowing players to follow along easily and build upon their previous set.
- Exercises ranged from intermediate to advanced levels, for example using different surfaces in an escape turn, to the ability to incorporate ⁴⁰deceptiveness into a particular skill.

To maintain safety at all times, the ball remained on the ground when completing exercises. Players had their camera on but were muted so that Daniel was in full control of all participants. This was particularly important due to the number of age groups and players on each call, with single sessions growing to over 300 players. At certain times throughout the session, Daniel selected an individual player who demonstrated the exercises well and spotlighted them for everyone to view. This can be seen using the video link below.

Zoom Technical Series - Video Link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JUdiQIF_Bn2RF9PZWUEEoRDzN8a46rS6/view?usp=sharing

5.6 Heat FC, Nevada, USA

<https://www.heatfcnevada.com/>



Darel Russell is a former player with over 500 professional games in England and North America now coaching at Heat FC, Nevada, USA.

During the lockdown, Darel used YouTube and Zoom to provide live and recorded sessions for players at his club.

⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darel_Russell

He highlighted that he felt the use of Zoom was the catalyst to maximise virtual coaching but the need to be live he then believed inhibited the access his players could achieve.

To solve this problem, he is now developing his own app (DNA Soccer Lab) using a company Uplift⁴³ which provides coaches and clubs to set up their own personal training class website and app to include the ability to record clips at normal speed or in slow motion, for real-time playback and live coaching tools, including interactive drawing tools over live video. Clubs and/or coaches can use the Uplift white label template to provide personalised programmes for their players, customised with club branding and include a live class option. The video can be generic or uploaded by the club coach.

Darel believes the benefits of the app & virtual coaching include:

- As a supplement to provide increased time with the ball for the player
- Assistance to parent coaches
- More effective use of the coach's time: the coach can interact with one player of a group
- A cheaper option for parents than a face-to-face individual coach
- Feedback—as the players can send in video of themselves performing

DNA Soccer Lab is due to launch as an app in 2021.

5.7 Famer

<https://www.famer.us/>



Famer was launched at the end of 2019 just before the pandemic. It provides a platform for clubs and organisations to share video content with their coaches, players and parents. The overall aim as highlighted by Bill Richardson (CEO at Famer) is “to extend and enhance on field training.”

Famer's key services revolve around a platform for Clubs and Organisations to distribute their own video content rather than provide pre-packaged content: this video content can be shot and edited by Famer or using the club's own video content, whether captured professionally, through user-generated content or curated from sources across the web like YouTube.

All content sits on a sub-community for the club/organisation within the Famer platform that can be accessed by the club members and coaches via the Famer app.

Famer also recently launched Famer Live, powered by Zoom. Famer Live allows coaches and organizations to host live sessions with players and staff fully remotely in real-time.

⁴³ <https://uplift.ai/>

Famer's current market is therefore Club/Organisation centric and through the club/organisation, players, coaches, and parents receive access to the platform. Famer also serves independent coaches and skills trainers but it's not a major focus at the moment.

The purpose as outlined by Bill is engagement between the Club/Organisation and its members (Coaches, Athletes, Families). Coaches can use the Famer platform as follows:

- Create video content with high club customisation e.g. unique club content (individual skills/drills, team sets/formations, film study, mental approach), branding, players in club shirts, club-specific phraseology, the well-known coaches of the club
- Provide an on-demand library of club-specific training content for athletes to review and perform on their own time
- Assign personalised programmes for players, teams or age & position groups
- Provide individualised feedback providing the player uploads video of themselves performing the tasks
- Keep parents informed of their child's progress and tasks provided for them - this helps keep parents engaged in their child's development

To assist clubs in making the most of the virtual coaching experience, Famer recommends the club or organisation appoint a 'Digital Director of Coaching'. Famer then can mentor this person (or persons) to use the virtual tools most effectively.

Famer has seen a 50X increase in video content that encompasses holistic training, beyond simply skills and drills. Mental health, motivational content, game clips, nutrition, and anything that coaches typically don't have time to cover in practice/training sessions. Famer has also seen coaches distribute content that they would want athletes to review and perform on their own like injury prevention and Pre-hab, so as to not spend as much precious in-person training hours covering these important but time-consuming topics.

While Famer's core offering is to empower grassroots clubs, coaches and trainers, Famer also works with some larger organisations like The Alliance Fastpitch (the national governing body for elite girls softball) and their 10,000 members. Here ⁴⁴ is a video put together highlighting their work together. There is both a Player and a Coach channel on Famer to educate both players and coaches nationwide (from the top coaches/pro players).

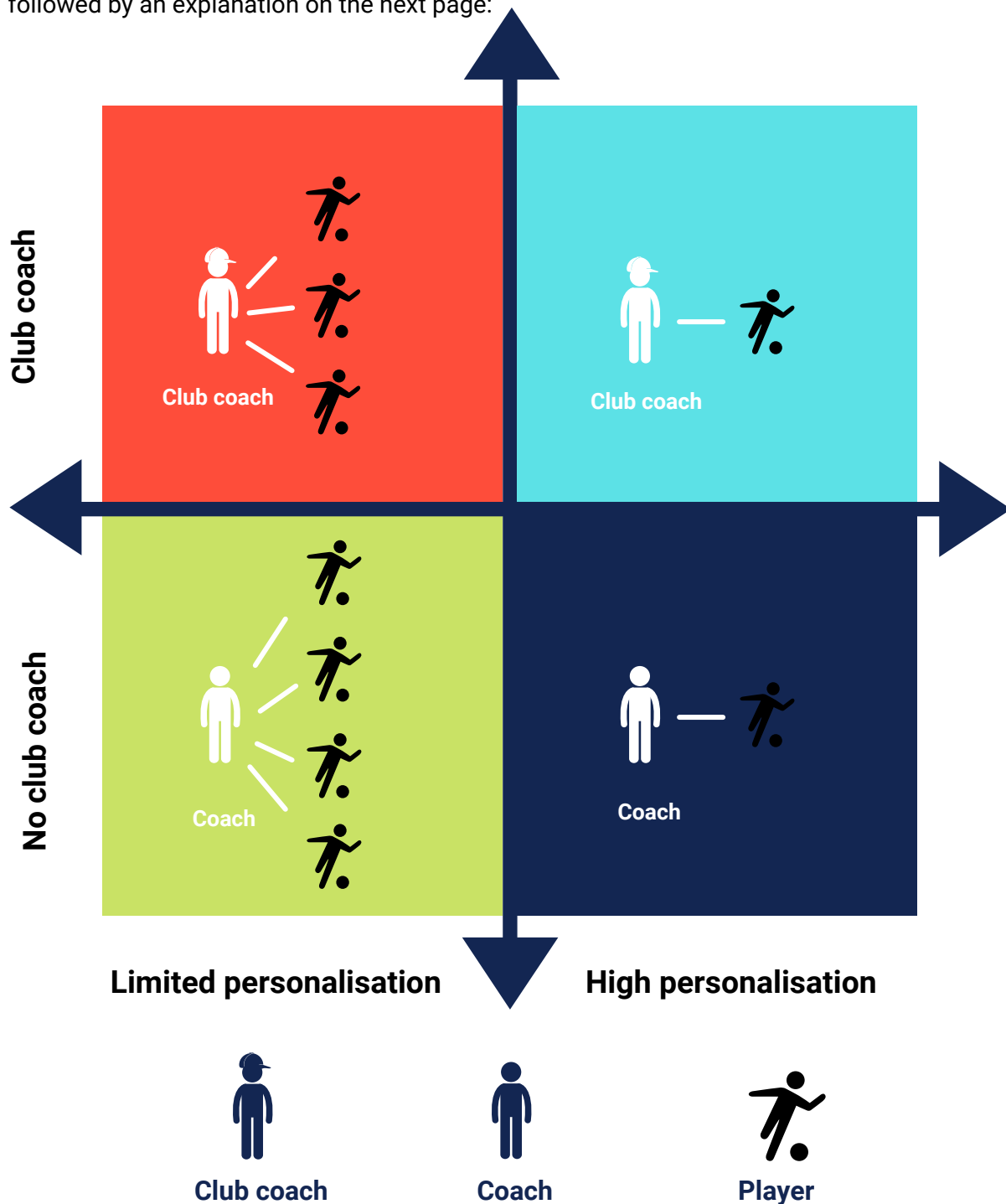
As a separate Case Study in virtual coaching, it is also worth looking at the National Professional Basketball Players Association Training Ground channel, which was developed on Famer. The channel allows professional players, pro skills trainers and grassroots coaches to create and share custom personal training videos and communicate with kids for free. The NBPA channel on Famer features basketball skills training as well as strength and conditioning workouts and mental performance tips giving players the opportunity to learn from and train with the best players and trainers in the world. For further details please see The NBPA Training Ground <https://nbpa.com/grassroots/digital>

⁴⁴ <https://youtu.be/mcrmCfiBTGc>

06 THE VIRTUAL SOCCER COACHING MARKET

6.1 Market segmentation

We identified 4 Segments of the virtual soccer coaching market in the graphic below, followed by an explanation on the next page:



1. High personalisation + high club context:

“The club or team coach interacting directly with the player & their teammates” e.g. My Personal Football Coach, Techne Futbol, Famer & Top Ya!

- Personalised programmes with video
- Players performance seen by his/her own team coach
- Individual feedback provided by coach

2. High personalisation + low club context:

“A coach interacting directly with the player” e.g. Train Effective Premium Service, MPFC Virtual Academy & Proformance Global

- Personalised programmes with video
- Players performance seen by a coach
- Individual feedback provided by a coach

3. Low personalisation + high club context:

“Content directly to all players in the club” e.g. Daniel Agnew’s work at Colorado Rapids Youth Soccer Club

- Customised club/team programmes with video
- Players performance seen by club/team coach
- Generic club/team feedback provided by the coach to all players in that team or club

4. Low personalisation + low club context:

“Content directly to everyone” e.g. Liverpool eAcademy & Chelsea’s Perfect Play

- Limited Club Customisation
- Generic Programmes with Video
- Limited Personalisation or Feedback provided

6.2 Number of soccer players

- FIFA estimate there are 240 million active soccer players in the world.⁴⁵
- The Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) of the USA reported in 2018 that there were 6.4 million soccer players in the USA aged 6-17 years of age with a total including players 18 years and above of 11.9 million. SFIA also reported that 53% of all soccer participants in 2018 had a household income of over \$75,000 per year.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ [https://www.fifa.com/who-we-are/news/fifa-survey-approximately-250-million-footballers-worldwide-88048#:~:text=FIFA%20Survey%3A%20approximately%20250%20million%20footballers%20worldwide,-\(FIFA.com\)&text=A%20wide%2Dscale%20survey%20launched,directly%20involved%20in%20the%20game.](https://www.fifa.com/who-we-are/news/fifa-survey-approximately-250-million-footballers-worldwide-88048#:~:text=FIFA%20Survey%3A%20approximately%20250%20million%20footballers%20worldwide,-(FIFA.com)&text=A%20wide%2Dscale%20survey%20launched,directly%20involved%20in%20the%20game.)

⁴⁶ [https://sfia.medium.com/soccer-participation-in-the-united-states-92f8393f6469#:~:text=There%20are%204%2C420%2C000%20children%20participating,the%20ages%20of%206%E2%80%93312.&text=There%20are%202%2C454%2C000%20Soccer%20\(Outdoor,the%20ages%20of%2013%E2%80%9317.](https://sfia.medium.com/soccer-participation-in-the-united-states-92f8393f6469#:~:text=There%20are%204%2C420%2C000%20children%20participating,the%20ages%20of%206%E2%80%93312.&text=There%20are%202%2C454%2C000%20Soccer%20(Outdoor,the%20ages%20of%2013%E2%80%9317.)

- Statista reported in 2020 that the total number of soccer players in the USA was 11.4 million with “More teenagers playing soccer in the U.S. than ever before. The number of participants in U.S. high school soccer programs recorded an all-time high in the 2018/19 season.”⁴⁷
- Other country by country examples include:
 - The English FA reported in 2015⁴⁸ that there were 11 million football players in England of which 3.65 million were 5-15 year-olds.
 - It was reported in 2020 by the Football Federation of Australia that there were 1.95 million soccer players in Australia.⁴⁹

6.3 Youth soccer market

- Time Magazine in 2017 estimated the whole Youth Sports Business in the USA was worth \$17 billion.⁵⁰
- In 2019, Wintergreen Research estimated that the global Youth Sports Market was \$24.9 billion and estimated to grow to \$77.6 billion by 2026. Worldwide 2018 \$28.7 billion youth sports markets are poised to achieve significant growth after the pandemic has abated. The market size which was at \$24 billion in 2018, \$28.7 in 2019, dropped to \$6.7 billion in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.⁵¹
- From the data provided by SFIA a conservative estimate would be that 15% of this is generated by soccer in the USA, thus \$2.5 billion.

6.4 The virtual coaching market for soccer

- Whilst the pandemic and resulting lockdown would be identified as the major macro trend driving the virtual coaching market other identified drivers would include:
 - Increased interest in health and fitness
 - Parental desire for children’s physical and mental health
 - Technological innovation
 - Increased provision of personalised programmes and club customisation⁵²
- Statista estimated in 2021 that, “As of January 2021 there were 4.66 billion active internet users worldwide—59.5% of the global population. Of this total, 92.6% (4.32 billion) accessed the internet via mobile devices.”

⁴⁷ <https://www.statista.com/topics/2780/soccer-in-the-us/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.thefa.com/news/2015/jun/10/11-million-playing-football-in-england>

⁴⁹ <https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2020-03/2019%20National%20Participation%20Report-%20High%20Res.pdf>

⁵⁰ <https://time.com/magazine/us/4913681/september-4th-2017-vol-190-no-9-u-s/>

⁵¹ https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/5189499/youth-team-league-and-tournament-sports-market-utm_source=dynamic&utm_medium=GNOM&utm_code=jtmhh8&utm_campaign=1336630+-+Youth+Sports+Market+Projected+to+Reach+%2477.6+Billion+by+2026+-+Comprehensive+Industry+Analysis+%26+Insights&utm_exec=joca220gnomd

⁵² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/#:~:text=How%20many%20people%20use%20the,the%20internet%20via%20mobile%20devices.>

- There has also been a noted increase in Online Master Classes in Sport. Companies like MasterClass⁵³ are benefiting. The company told CNBC that after the pandemic hit, subscriptions increased tenfold over the average in 2019 and engagement increased nearly two times more in total minutes per month. In May, MasterClass raised another \$100 million in funding.⁵⁴
- Sports Tech estimates that “2020 is projected to be the biggest year for investment in SportsTech in North America and Europe exceeding \$3 billion.”⁵⁵
- In August 2020, it was reported by Research and Markets that, “The sports coaching market is poised to grow by \$4.14 billion during 2020-2024.”⁵⁶ Commenting on the report, an analyst from the research team said: “The latest trend gaining momentum in the market is increasing online presence of sports coaching vendors.” **According to the report, one of the major drivers for this market is the technological integration in sports coaching.**
- In 2019 Research and Markets reported that: **“The worldwide Youth Sports Video Apps market is a \$228 million market in 2018 and is expected to reach \$3.4 billion by 2025.”**⁵⁷

07 ANALYSIS AND OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 A market has been created

The world has changed and clearly, a nascent virtual coaching market has been given a boost as a result of the pandemic and resulting lockdown.

Greater Interaction using a variety of web platforms and the imagination of coaches have established what Clayton Christensen terms ‘Market Creating Innovation’, the virtual soccer coaching market.^{58, 59}

Christensen emphasises customers purchase product and service to ‘get jobs done.’ Why then are customers hiring virtual coaches for soccer? What job do they want to be done?

⁵⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/15/coronavirus-leading-to-growth-of-virtual-coaching-platforms.html>

⁵⁵ <https://sportstechx.com/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/5145604/global-sports-coaching-market-2020-2024>

⁵⁷ <https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/4746621/youth-sports-video-apps-market-shares-strategy#relb0-5189499>

⁵⁸ <https://hbr.org/2019/01/cracking-frontier-markets>

⁵⁹ <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/prosperity-paradox-clayton-christensen/#:~:text=Clayton%20Christensen%2C%20a%20professor%20at,and%20services%20affordable%20and%20accessible.>

Our Analysis would suggest these reasons:

- Organised play
- Programmed Physical Exercise
- Maintain contact with Coach and teammates
- Increase the player's time with the ball
- Individual guidance provided by the coach
- Help for parents
- Offering training sessions that can be done anywhere and at any time, with minimal equipment.
- Putting development back into the hands of the players.
- Repetition leads to retention and transfer of skills.

These services can be provided as virtual classes or prerecorded but the biggest scaleable growth would appear to be in apps.

In addition, high levels of personalisation (to provide individual programmes and feedback), as well as high levels of club customisation (interaction with the player's own club coach), would appear to be the most popular developments. It would appear illogical to develop a market strategy in virtual coaching without a club customisation option i.e on only a stand-alone version

7.2 Barrier to entry

The barrier to entry into the market are low:

- The cost of customer acquisition is low.
- The speed to market is swift and the route to market sales appears from all research to be through social media (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok) with associated 'freemium' options.

There are a number of app providers and these may increase as a result of the relatively low cost to create and launch an app but as any market develops and expands the market would coalesce to reveal a fewer number of market leaders. The key as in any similar market will be to retain customers and avoid high churn rates.

7.3 Macro factors and target markets

Whilst the pandemic and resulting lockdown would be identified as the major macro trend driving the virtual coaching market other identified drivers would include:

- Increased interest in health and fitness
- Parental desire for their children to undertake exercise
- Increased usage of apps
- Technological innovation
- Increased urbanisation
- Increase in one-child families
- The likelihood of further pandemic waves

Thus areas in the world with high app usage, young population & high interest in soccer (especially for boys and girls) would appear to be the most promising for growth, e.g. SE Asia and North America. North America seems especially attractive when one considers existing participation levels, the comparison of app prices vs. individual training fees and especially considering the FIFA 2026 World Cup in the USA and Canada.

7.4 Expected Developments

- **Search & review:** As for a number of tech applications it is expected that the apps that can provide a search function to allow the player to find the best recommended individual practices to address weakness and some review of the activity by other users will provide popular. To include enhanced personalisation to allow the player to highlight their favourite moves, player(s) and team(s)
- **Data:** Virtual coaching apps collect data on player usage. Indeed virtual players can provide more data than physical ones! Data which indicates most popular activities and challenges, geographical location, when accessed etc. Like all data, this can provide useful insights on which to enhance the user experience.
- **Technique tests:** We have already noted the success of Techne Futbol's time trials, Top Ya!'s tests and online challenges tests from a newer app Soccer Profile. The German Football Association (DFB) highlighted their successful tests 'The DFB Badge during the lockdown (<https://www.fussball.de/newsdetail/fubazchallenge-zuhause-kreativ-werden/-/article-id/214889#!/>)
- The app endorsed by English Premier League Club Burnley AiSCOUT links performance in tests to Talent Identification. AiSCOUT claim that a Random test with only 50 Players aged between 16-19 delivered the following results:
 - 1(Never previously scouted) Player Signed for AFC Bournemouth
 - 1 UK Player called up to u19 Republic of Ireland Squad
 - 2 UK Players called up to the Sri Lankan Men's National Squad
 - 1 UK Player selected for Sri Lankan u19 trial National Squad
 - 1 Player signed for National League
 - 3 Championship trials
 - 6 Premier League trials
- **Upselling potential:** Techne Futbol sell socks as an additional item (related to proficiency) and a Youth Soccer Club FC Fredericksburg provides guidance to erect a rebound wall. Having access to parents allows app providers to sell up if they wish to. As reported by Team Insight in June 2020 "Stay-at-home has meant an uptick in sales of backyard goals and nets." DMC Sports have developed their business to provide very popular 'Parent Packs' to support children's sport at home.

⁶⁰ <https://topya.com/soccer/>

⁶¹ <https://www.soccer-profile.com/about-us/>

⁶² <https://www.aiscout.io/>

⁶³ <https://www.fredericksburgfc.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1004105>

⁶⁴ <https://www.formula4media.com/articles/setting-goals>

⁶⁵ <https://dmcsport.com/our-clients/>

- **‘Super apps’ and platforms:** It is not uncommon in other app markets to see the emergence of ‘super apps’ which provide a variety of services and indeed platforms that act as a shop window for apps e.g. Spotify⁶⁶ an e-commerce platform for online stores and retail point-of-sale systems. Indeed one Californian startup Edspora⁶⁷ has created a platform for clubs and associations to use their platform. It is not inconceivable to imagine similar platforms being developed for all virtual coaching apps to market their services or the creation of a price comparison site to compare the cost/service of virtual coaching apps.
- **Technological integration:** As reported by Sports Techie⁶⁸ in 2020 “The youth sports management platform SportsEngine will integrate virtual coaching platform MaxOne into its registration and rostering system and offer a three-month free trial to all of its customers.” This is the latest in a series of partnerships for MaxOne. It has teamed with CoachUp, a marketplace for instructors; KickID, a German soccer skill evaluation tool; and the Art of Coaching Volleyball, an instructional resource clearinghouse for that sport. More technological integration between virtual coaching apps and providers of player registration and club management systems would be expected.

7.5 Market Size

Given the research we have undertaken, Sports Path would estimate conservatively that over 500,000 soccer players will experience some form of virtual coaching in 2021 and that the Global virtual soccer coaching market in the period August 2021 - July 2022 to be worth between \$50 and \$100million.

08 PROPOSED 10 POINT ACTION PLAN

For national football associations, clubs and holiday courses to maximise the opportunities of virtual coaching

It would appear that there is a clear trend for grassroots football and player development programmes to integrate virtual coaching into their activities. Sooner or later most Academies, Clubs, Soccer Camps and National Football Association player programmes will include a virtual coaching component so it would be prudent to develop a simple virtual coaching action plan to provide added value to player registration or holiday course fees.

⁶⁶ <https://www.spotify.com/uk/>

⁶⁷ <https://edspora.com/>

Suggested virtual coaching action plan

- 1 Audit** which apps are being used by players at the moment, for which reasons, how often and which functions are most valued by players, parents and coaches—a simple online survey would find this out.
- 2 Partner endorsement:** based on the audit, decide on which app(s) are most compatible and negotiate which app(s) to endorse and with which to partner.
- 3 Pilot:** who will be the first National Association to provide free access to an app for ALL of their key groups e.g. 5-7 year olds as a Pilot? Or the first grassroots club to do similar? Some Pro Club Youth Academies in England already do this.
- 4 Brand:** initiate a virtual coaching brand for the Association, Club or Holiday Course as challenger sports have done.⁶⁹ Obtain sponsorship for this new virtual coaching brand to feature in # 5-10 below.
- 5 Promotion:** maximise the benefits of virtual coaching:
 - to attract new players
 - to re-engage with lapsed players
 - to retain existing players
- 6 Education and training:** there would appear to be an opportunity for App providers and National Football Associations to add courses on 'Digital Coaching' and 'Directing Digital Coaches' - integrating and blending virtual coaching into face-to-face coaching.
- 7 Online tests:** more apps are including technique tests that young players can practise at home and test themselves. There is an opportunity linked to Talent ID as shown from the example from the English Premier League⁷⁰ and Italy.⁷¹ We have previously reviewed some tests here⁷² but with the growing use of virtual coaching and the technology available this would surely seem to be a major opportunity for Apps, Clubs and National Associations to develop tests for players to work on at home and then compare results with other players in their team, club, region, country and globally via leaderboards.
- 8 Recognition:** a great example is shown here from the Philippines Football Federation⁷³ who in 2021 initiated an award for the 'Best Virtual Project'. Great opportunity for National Associations to start similar awards per region and nationwide e.g. 'Best Virtual Coach', 'Best Virtual Club' (such awards could easily attract sponsorship).

⁶⁹ <https://www.challengersports.com/virtual/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.aiscout.io/>

⁷¹ <https://www.oneofus.it/>

⁷² <https://sportspath.typepad.com/sports-path-e-learning-bl/soccer-skill-tests-.html>

⁷³ <https://sportspath.typepad.com/sports-path-e-learning-bl/pff-virtual-awards-.html>

- 9 Communication:** maximise the use of social media and launch an annual online virtual coaching conference to share good practice and showcase the work of the Award winners.
- 10 Research:** confirm that virtual coaching assists participation retention and player development. Does engagement in virtual coaching retain players' participation? Does repetition of techniques improve test results?

If your National Association, State Association, Regional Association, Club or Holiday Course Programme requires assistance to develop a virtual coaching action plan please contact Sports Path (details below).

09 CONCLUSION

Sports Path would agree with the quote from Bill Richardson of Famer "I believe all successful programmes will have a digital component to extend and enhance on-fieldwork and provide additional value to their coaches, athletes and families."

To stay updated on virtual coaching register to 'The Sports Path Quarterly Virtual Coaching Newsletter'.

Please go to www.sportspath.com > Virtual Coaching

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