**Indirect Effort**

So much of what happens on the football pitch is instinctive. Decisions taken, reactions made, skill shown. It is all done in the split second and the result of instinct and conditioned reflexes. And something we call talent, skill or giftedness.

Even the referee, with his split second judgements, is often working from instinct.

The training done midweek, added to the natural aptitude of the player and the skills learnt from a very young age, is in many cases what we in the trade (the other trade: pastoral ministry) call indirect effort. This is where work done in one area produces a benefit elsewhere.

Let me give you an example. If you are in the habit of yelling at your wife and children, and come new year decided you didn’t want to be the sort of person who yells at your family any more, it won’t work for you if you just decide to try harder next time you get very angry not to yell. You may clench your buttocks and bite your tongue all you like but in my experience that yell will emerge anyway. So what to do? Well a bit of indirect effort is needed, in the self-control department. Build up your self-control muscles through simple exercise of restraint. If you are part of my God Squad you may also sit in quietness and ask Jesus to change your heart and make you more like him, and maybe deal with some of the anger issues in your life. Often anger is a response to pain, and Jesus is very good at bringing healing to life’s hurts. I tell you, the benefits of knowing Jesus are amazing and far reaching, and I don’t know how anyone manages to do life without him.

But I digress. We are talking about indirect effort. Also recommended are activities that bring peace and contentment and remove stress, because the typical wife and children yeller atter – and I know because I have been there too – is suffering from an unhealthy overflow of stress and negativity which isn’t the fault of the wife and children but they cop it all the same. Which isn’t fair on them.

So that is indirect effort explained, and you can see how it can be applied to the football pitch. A lot of the great stuff that goes on on the pitch is an indirect result of work in the gym, training pitch routines, even team building exercises and sports psychology. But then it all boils down to the split second instinct of the player in the moment. Such an unpredictable and unmeasurable quality which is often the difference between success and failure for a player, and sometimes a team. It is what creates the magic and the joy as well as the frustration and the pain, and it’s why we keep coming back for more, hoping, wondering, if this is going to be our season.

Talking of seasons we are entering the time of year that, whilst not being the most comfortable, is definitely the most memorable IMHO. I remember being frozen half to death on the terraces with my dad, in the gloom of a dark winters late afternoon, the floodlights illuminating the pitch, trudging back to the car and defrosting whilst sitting in traffic and listening to Sports Report. You can’t beat it, and it reminds me that Home Park is one of the best grounds in the country. It has the history, the character and the atmosphere that beats most of the Premiership Identikit Stadia hands down. Yes we’re all looking forward to the redevelopment, but in the meantime in the gloom and fog of a cold February afternoon even the old grandstand has a certain appeal.