

Chelsea hope Bruno Demichelis's 'Mind Room' will produce results

Didier Drogba is lying on a reclining chair at Chelsea's training ground, watching a replay of himself missing an easy chance.



Appliance of science: Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti has set up a Mind Room at Chelsea's training ground with assistant Bruno Demichelis Photo: AP

By Jason Burt

7:00AM GMT 28 Oct 2009

He is hooked up to a device which monitors his psychological state - and his stress levels. Naturally his muscles tense and blood pressure rises as he watches the ball sail over the crossbar at Stamford Bridge.

Drogba is in the 'Mind Room'. Or, at least, how the Mind Room would be if Carlo Ancelotti and his assistant, Bruno Demichelis, have faithfully copied the facility they used so successfully at AC Milan.

Chelsea do indeed have a Mind Room, a specially-constructed space which can accommodate up to six players at a time, but its exact nature and how it works remains a secret, even if it is the largest such facility in Europe. It may not even be an exact replica of the Mind Room in Milan.

But its principles are important to Demichelis, a sport psychologist. In Milan, the aim was to

train the players to reach a meditative state in which they can watch themselves make a mistake — a missed chance, a mistimed tackle, a botched penalty — without their heart rates increasing.

He wants to achieve the same at Chelsea although the club, and Demichelis, are loath to discuss the details of his work.

But the idea is that when the player then goes out onto the pitch and is presented with a chance to score, or to stop the opposition, he will be so focused and mentally-prepared that he will succeed.

At the same time, the player will have been trained so well by Demichelis that he can bring down his heart rate when he does not have to run so that he can conserve energy. And he will also be able to do this without thinking.

Unsurprisingly Demichelis is a pioneer in this area. He first started to do this kind of work at the revolutionary MilanLab, the state-of-the-art training and monitoring facility that is attached to Milan's training complex, the Milanello.

It has had a profound effect on the careers of players such as Paolo Maldini and Filippo Inzaghi. Demichelis helped set up the lab and arrived at Chelsea in the summer along with Ancelotti, who he has worked with since the latter was a player.

The Mind Room is Demichelis's big idea. He works on other holistic methods to try to prevent injury and examine the overall well-being of players — it was Demichelis who discovered that David Beckham's back troubles were linked to a tooth problem — and he works in areas such as kinesiology and homeopathy.

It is all about trying to prevent an injury from happening, rather than simply treating one when it does occur.

But it is the Mind Room that is the most intriguing and which provides evidence that many of the apparently physical problems that players suffer from are, in fact, linked to their psychological state of mind.

The Chelsea players are encouraged to go for sessions lasting up to 20 minutes after training and sit in ergonomically-designed loungers. In the room miniature electrodes would be fitted to their head, chest and fingers which send out signals to a computer that measures

brainwave activity, muscle tension and sweat response.

The players are then guided into a meditative state by Demichelis, after which they are shown soothing images and then short video clips from matches. Demichelis will work on training them on how to remain in the same state no matter what they see — and how many mistakes they are shown making. This process is repeated until there is no reaction.

A lot of the work in this area was initially used to help stroke victims to recover and to treat other medical conditions but it was soon discovered that it could be applied to elite sportsmen. It also helps them recover from strenuous training sessions and matches.

Demichelis, who speaks perfect English, having worked in an English-speaking glass blowing factory in his home city of Venice before studying in the United States, and who also acts as an unofficial translator and sounding board for Ancelotti, has been reluctant to talk publicly about his work at Chelsea — he doesn't want to deflect attention from the manager — but he has confirmed that a Mind Room has been created at Cobham.

“At the training ground, we installed a laboratory room with six seats,” he said. “The mind room allows the players to improve their resilience through mental training.”

The 59-year-old larger than life character who has been nicknamed “BB” (Big Bruno) by the Chelsea players is having an effect — just as he did at Milan.

When Milan faced Liverpool in the 2007 Champions League final, two years after the traumatic defeat in Istanbul, Demichelis is credited with helping reduce their anxieties and stresses, and fears, about a repeat performance.

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2013