

Soccer Starts at Home

By Tom Byer

With Fred Varcoe

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FOREWORD

By Professor John J. Ratey, M.D.

Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry

Harvard Medical School

T HIS BOOK IS A REVOLUTION. Tom Byer's approach to coaching soccer is a game-changer. It focuses on two of the most important points that I teach in relation to physical and mental exercise:

1. The mastery of a skill that stimulates the functions and development of the brain, and is important in building self-confidence, or what we call a 'good self-concept';
2. The importance of fun and free will in imitating and interacting with parents, in learning new skills that children can develop with older, higher-level children and, at a later stage, coaches.

Tom's belief that in order to improve a class or team, you must raise the lower level rather than develop the high achievers is wisdom I never expected to find in a book about soccer. Part of my job as a psychiatrist is to instill confidence in people – men, women, children. Many of these people feel inadequate or inferior, but they aren't. Society sometimes pushes them down, but everybody has a talent and ability that should give them something to push back with. It doesn't have to be a highly developed skill, money-making ability or earth-shattering discovery; it just has to be enough to know they are *not* inferior, they can be accepted as equals, and have a capability of rising to new levels.

Tom's example (see below) of Little Chen, as he calls him, is heart-warming and profound. Apart from the emotionality of this story, it shows how we have talents and abilities that we, ourselves, don't believe we have. Even Little Chen's mother couldn't believe it. It's a story that every parent should discover.

What Little Chen's mother didn't know was that Tom's contribution as a soccer coach was also helping to develop her son's mind and brain functions. You don't have a brain for math and a brain for soccer skills; it's the same brain, and one discipline helps the other. They're like siblings helping each other to move along in the world.

I will explain more as to how this works in the *Afterword* that Tom has kindly asked me to contribute.

For now, let me just say this: The acquisition of skills – math skills, piano skills, soccer skills – and the encouragement to acquire skills is absolutely fundamental in the development of the brain, and the development of children. What Tom Byer has done is to focus on soccer skills. Through his own experience as a coach and through the experience of his own children, he is transforming how soccer skills are acquired and can be taught. His is a brilliant insight.

Not only is it a revolution, it is a revelation.