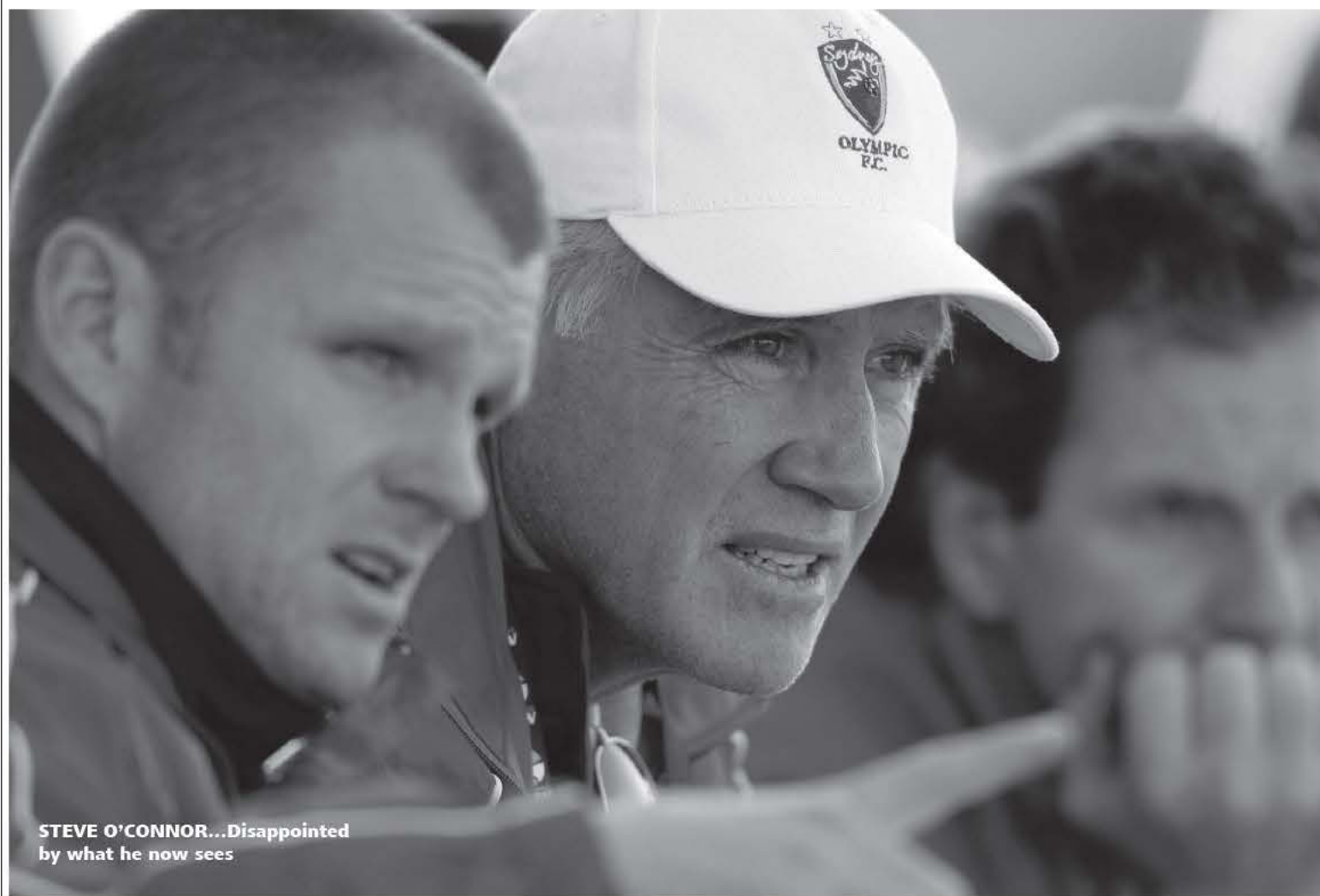


news

## Steve O'Connor ... 'Someone Must Answer For Joey's Failure'

Former AIS head coach Steve O'Connor has criticised the direction of Australia's elite football development saying something is "definitely wrong" following a string of sub-par performances by national youth teams.



STEVE O'CONNOR...Disappointed by what he now sees

O'Connor, who is now technical director for the Hong Kong Football Association, said supporters of the game were entitled to question the speed of progress under National Technical Director Han Berger.

**H**is comments follow the Joeys 5-1 drubbing by IR Iran in the AFC U16 tournament last month which ruled them out of the next year's FIFA U17 World Cup. Australia's Olyroos also failed to qualify for the London Olympics.

O'Connor said the removal of experienced coaches, the trashing of player identification systems and a failure to appreciate Australia-specific challenges had contributed to the problem.

Speaking from his base in Hong Kong, the former Socceroo told au.fourfourtwo.com: "Someone's got to answer questions"

"They keep trotting out the same lines and saying 'Well, give us 20 years and we might produce something'.

"But the fact is we've started from a reasonable base already so why suddenly have we gone backwards?"

"We've been to an U17 World Cup final which we lost to Brazil on penalties. We've obviously qualified for the World Cup and we've done well in U20 World Cups and U17s.

"It's not like we've started from ground zero. There's some-

thing definitely wrong."

O'Connor labelled attempts to blame Australia's poor results on a move into the Asian Football Confederation a "smokescreen".

"A lot of people might say, well in the past you only qualified through Oceania - well yes - but we also qualified and we also did well in the World Cup when we got there," he said.

"If anything it was probably more difficult because Oceania was so easy that once we got to the World Cup we faced a big jump in the quality of teams we had to play."

Players such as Mark Viduka, Craig Moore, Lucas Neill, Mark Bresciano, Vince Grella, Brett Emerton, Josip Simunic and Josh Kennedy all came through the AIS under the previous administration.

**UNDERNEATH THE CLIP HE POSTED:  
"MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE POSSESSION  
AND CONTROLLING PLAY, PLAYING OUT  
FROM THE BACK, SHORT PASSING GAME,  
KEEPING THE BALL MOVING, PLAYERS  
FINDING SPACE, SWITCHES OF PLAY,  
PLAYERS FACING FORWARD WHERE  
POSSIBLE, MAKING FORWARD PROGRESS  
IN A CONTROLLED MANNER TO THE FRONT  
THIRD."**

He became so exasperated with the denigration of pre-Berger programs that he took the unusual step of HYPERLINK "<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jOu9rSzy9k>" \t "\_blank" posting a video on You Tube.

The clip shows AIS boys taking part in a 2003 tournament against Bayern Leverkusen (Germany), Chievo Verona (Italy) and Panathinaikos (Greece) youth teams.

Underneath the clip he posted: "Maintaining effective possession and controlling play, playing out from the back, short passing game, keeping the ball moving, players finding space, switches of play, players facing forward where possible, making forward progress in a controlled manner to the front third."

O'Connor said he wanted to counter the myth that in the past "we only picked big strong players that played long ball".

"I was trying to make a point to Han Berger that we've been able to play out from the back and keep possession for years. That was a possession type game."

He said it was particularly disturbing to hear reports that national youth teams were unable to compete physically with their international counterparts but said it was understandable given the "physical aspect" of past programs had "pretty much been lost".

"Obviously we worked very much on the technical side, to develop good technical players as well, but we had the combination of both (technical

and physical)," he said.

"At a top level these days, if anyone says you don't need to be a good athlete, they're absolutely kidding themselves.

"They've gone younger (with players) and when you go younger it's harder to identify players that have the potential to go on and play at top level, because there's too many physical changes in their bodies.

"It's a competition out there. You've got to be good technically, yes. You've got to be able to effectively maintain possession, yes. But you've also got to be able to battle for the ball in the one-on-ones and be able to play at intensity for 90 minutes.

"When the Asians start dominating us physically I think there's a problem. The Asian teams have realised that you have to get physically stronger. They have good programs now where they look at that side of it. It doesn't mean they can't play technically, of course they can."

O'Connor said the wholesale adoption of a Dutch system ignored the fact that The Netherlands had up to 70 professional clubs developing players. In contrast the local game had limited finances to compete with three other codes.

"You've only got so many players and you have limited funds so we had to be good at trying to predict players who we thought could go on and play at international level," he said.

"We tried to explain to (Berger), me Ronny Smith and a few others, that Australia's not the same as Holland - it's a different kettle of fish.

"We had a very good way of doing things that was developed over 20 or 30 years. All that, I think, got thrown out in the garbage bin when we left the AIS."