



3 THINGS WE LEARNED: YOUNG MATILDAS V THAILAND

The Young Matildas are like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're

NOW, FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

To come straight off the back of a dispiriting, embarrassing 5-1 shellacking from North Korea and turn it immediately into a fiery, determined 3-1 win against Thailand in front of noisy home supporters is a trait that will take these girls to their rightful place among the world's best.

It might take a while, but they will get there eventually. Credit to Leah Blayney, whatever she said after the opener was there to see all over that pitch tonight.

As we said against the Koreans, the individual quality is just too strong to ignore, it's the overall implementation that appears to be the problem.

Against both Thailand and the PRK, the Young Matildas were immediately aggressive. They reared out off the blocks with a point to prove, but unlike against the Koreans - where they were forced into submission by the quick reactions of their opposition - the Thais were too shellshocked to get a grip on the game.

This ultimately comes down to Thailand's preparation and football-intelligence, but it's not an approach that's unreplicable against top-quality opposition. The secret lies in consistency.

The Young Matildas actually took the lead against the Koreans, before immediately dropping the tempo, conceding, and failing to ever recover that dynamism. Against the Thais they retained the pressure,

The passing remains an achilles heel. At this level, on this pitch, it's too much to ask for tiki-taka but it remains the major unsettling factor that reduces our ability to retain possession and wear the opposition down.

If you can't keep possession, you can't attempt a high-tempo, aggressive style for 90 minutes. But if we can find a way to maintain that intensity for long enough, performances like these show that we can do the damage early on.

GET PHYSICAL

Get angry, get physical, get hectic...whatever you gotta do, you just can't lose sight of that natural advantage Aussie footballers have over our Asian rivals.

We saw against the Bangladeshis with the Junior Matildas, that even the minnows in this confederation possess a level of pace and precision that we find it very difficult to counteract otherwise.

As we lost focus after taking the lead against the Koreans, so did we after Courtney Nevin's cracking free kick to make it 3-0. Thailand then slowly worked their way back into the match through delightfully weighted through balls.

The issue then becomes our unnaturally high-line, which we rightly stick to in order to maintain our positional dominance, but quickly becomes a gaping chasm for talented midfielders to send bullet-fast wingers through.

Here's where physicality once again becomes so important. We relent from tough aerial challenges, cheeky shoves and slide tackles when they really matter: when the opposition is growing in confidence and beginning to form momentum.

That's when we need to slam the door metaphorically in their face. This squad are possibly just a little bit too nice for their own good yet, but give 'em time. Female sport is no place for the feint harked.

HOW GOOD IS MARY FOWLER?

If Ronaldo was a petite 16-year-old Australian girl rather than a 45-year-old overweight male Brazilian, this is what he'd play like. In fact, stuff Ronaldo, that first goal was Michelle Heyman-esque. Now we're talking.

Not sure if we've seen her pass the ball yet, but we're sure she'd be great at that too. There's a lackadaisical nature to Fowler's play that you only see in truly exceptional technical abilities.

They're the kids in the playground that luxuriate on the ball, the one's you swear you're going to get this time, moments before they flick the ball between your legs and send you sprawling on the asphalt.

It will be very interesting to see her debut W-League season at Adelaide United this year. As Ivan Karlovic said, "every team wanted her" for a reason.

We'll be almost sad to see her develop this languid style into the explosive weapon she'll almost certainly become. But it will be a privilege to watch nonetheless.

It wasn't just Fowler though, Shadeene Evans was an absolute monster down that right-hand side with a raw aggressive intimidation factor that we haven't seen since Cheryl Salisbury.

Massive individual talents. Can they can become a team? We'll have to wait and see...

