

Wilcox lays out plans after landing Man City Academy job

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Wilcox joined Man City five years ago

WRITTEN BY SIMON AUSTIN — OCTOBER 12, 2017

NEW Manchester City Academy boss Jason Wilcox says challenging players will be more important than winning on his watch.

The 46-year-old, who took the role on an interim basis when Mark Allen left to become Director of Football at Rangers in June, has now been made permanent.

City have carried out research showing that 83% of players in the quarter-finals of the Champions League over the previous 10 years had played first-team football from the age of 17.

This has been a major problem at City since the takeover by Abu Dhabi United Group in 2008, with hardly any Academy players progressing to the first team during that period. Indeed not one Academy player has been handed a league debut since Pep Guardiola became manager last summer.

Wilcox says the club's partnerships with New York City, Melbourne City, Yokohama and Girona - all part of City Football Group (CFG) - and NAC Breda - with whom CFG announced a partnership last April - provides a solution.

"We've got some really good players and sometimes I don't think we've quite had the appropriate challenge," Wilcox, who became head of Academy Coaching last summer, admitted.

“What we’ve not had is the benefits of the player pathways we’ve now got, in terms of the NAC Bredas, the Gironas. We’ve got this development arena and pathway, where Under-23s can go to [train with] our first team, like Phil [Foden], Brahim [Diaz] and Tosin [Adarabioyo] have done, and the other pathways of going into New York, Melbourne, Girona, NEC Breda. That’s the most important part of our evolution so far.”



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Wilcox said winning at Academy level had been important in the past, but less so now.

“We had to develop a winning brand,” he said. “One of my key aims is to really look at an individual approach and get the right challenge for our boys.”

“You learn by failing. When I’ve looked at our winning % across the board in 2015/16 and 2016/17 they’ve been above 80% at all the age groups. I don’t think we’re preparing the boys for professional football. My emphasis is firmly on developing players and winning is a by-product of that.

“It takes courage to make change and take risks. To lose matches is not a big problem when it’s put into context and we’re challenging the players.”

Brian Marwood, the Managing Director of City Football Services, agreed.

“We did some research last year and discovered that in the last 10 years 83% of players who featured in the quarter-final stage of the Champions League had all played first team football at 17,” he said.

“Seventeen of our loanees could play in our Elite Development Squad. However, a decision was made to have them playing first team football somewhere and I believe it’s the right thing.

“Recently, we’ve had some great recent examples of development. The five with Breda played in front of 50,000 at Feyenoord. Pablo Maffeo man marked Lionel Messi and

Douglas Luiz played really well against some of the best players in the world against Barcelona.



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“We’ve also seen New York’s Jack Harrison called into the England U21s, while Aaron Mooy’s story has been well documented over the last 12 months. All our players will have different journeys because they need different experiences and it’s important for us to decide at what point they need testing beyond what we can offer them here in Manchester or any of our teams within the City Football Group.

“We have to combine the two to create a finished article so, if they are needed, our Head Coaches like Pep or Patrick [Vieira] can feel comfortable that they can cope in the Nou Camp in a Champions League semi-final, or an MLS play-off final.

“We have many clubs in the City Football Group now, so there is a pathway for all our young players, which we feel is quite unique because most coming through the academy system will generally only have the outcome of the club they’re at. Our model gives opportunities elsewhere.”

“Pep [Guardiola] and Txiki [Begiristain] both go to as many EDS and Academy games as they can and they are fully aware of the players coming through the system and both Patrick in New York and Warren Joyce in Melbourne are equally passionate about giving young players opportunities.”