

## **Anthony Limbrick**



### **Football Manager/Head Coach**

**Name**

Anthony Limbrick

**Job title**

Football coach/manager **Qualifications**

UEFA Pro Licence 2017/18 Cohort - English FA

UEFA A Licence / Diploma - English FA

UEFA B Licence / FA Level 3 Certificate in Coaching Football

FA Level 2 Certificate in Coaching Football

FA Youth Award Module 4 - 'Advanced Youth Award' FA Youth Award Module 3 – 'Developing the Player'

FA Youth Award Module 2 – 'Developing the Practice'

FA Youth Award Module 1 – 'Developing the Environment'

## **Introduction**

Anthony Limbrick was manager at non-league Woking F.C. during the 2017-2018 season and in summer 2018 he became assistant manager at Grimsby Town F.C. Originally from Australia, he came to England to become a professional footballer but at a young age he sustained a serious injury. He wanted to stay in football so decided he was going to become a coach but found himself without any coaching qualifications or coaching experience. Anthony has worked in a range of coaching roles, including working with future England internationals at the fabled Southampton F.C. academy and managing a National League club.

## **How has your career developed?**

My coaching career has been very different to most people's as I do not know anyone who has had such a vast array of coaching jobs. I am not sure I'd necessarily recommend it as some of the things that I have been through have been difficult.

People often think that to become a coach you will go to university and get a degree and some coaching qualifications and then fall into a football academy job and start working with some of the best players in the country. But for me it just did not work like that.

I started playing football in Australia, but I always knew I wanted to move to the UK. In Australia we always followed English football and my family would stay up and watch matches, such as the F.A. Cup final, and follow the major tournaments. I thought I was a good player when I was 18 or 19 but when I got to England I started to realise how difficult it was and how tough it was playing in the lower leagues. I travelled around England, Wales and Scotland and could not find a club that would have me. I ended up playing semi-professional football but then I broke my leg.

I did recover and played again but decided to retire from full-time football and become a coach with the aim of coaching at the top level. I am not fully sure why but I think it was because I had always been a student of the game without realising it. I would study each position on the pitch, what each player did, and the demands placed on them. I also studied nutrition, psychology, and other aspects of sports science. I realised I had knowledge that I could put into practice through a coaching career.

My first job was at a company called Active Planet, who ran after schools' sports clubs in primary schools. This involved teaching multi-sports and it was my first experience of coaching. I had no real idea about what I was doing, and often thought 'how can I make the leap to coaching top football players from working with young children here?' But I went in with the mentality that every session was a challenge for me to motivate these young people. When you are working with four- or five-year olds you still have to motivate them before you can teach them anything. That is no different to the work I do now with first team players or the work I did at Southampton working with England internationals. I learnt very early on to make every session the best session whatever the challenges.

If you want to get into coaching any sport you've got to do as much coaching as you can to develop experience. Some people will coach for four hours a week and then observe other coaches for 10 hours and think they are improving. You can watch other coaches all you want but you've got to go and deliver yourself. I've coached at many different levels and have done so many hours taking the same session a hundred times over to change it and make it better. It may sound obvious, but you've got to keep delivering to get better. If you are a piano player, you don't spend all your time watching other piano players - you practice yourself. Watching other coaches is important in learning but maybe the ratio should be 10% watching and 90% doing. Many coaches think you've got to watch the best coaches to become better but, in my opinion, you've got to do it yourself.

## **After working for Active Planet where did you go next?**

From there I went to Borehamwood Football Club in North London to work with players on their college scheme. During the day I would coach players who hadn't made it in the professional game and had gone back to college to complete their education. By this point I had got my F.A. Levels 1 and 2 coaching qualifications. I was very fortunate that when I did my coaching courses I learnt a lot from them as I did them at the right time in my career. Some people go on the courses just to collect their badges and often think they know more than they are being taught. I didn't really know much so I learnt a lot on the Level 2 course due to the stage my career was at.

At Borehamwood I coached older age groups for the first time so learnt a lot from that. I was playing semi-professional for Wingate and Finchley and became the first team coach and then assistant manager there. I was only about 23 at the time and I could hardly fit the time in - I was coaching at Borehamwood during the day and then working with senior men at Wingate and Finchley in the evenings. I would easily coach over 10 sessions a week as well as playing two or three times. It was hectic, and because I'd never coached senior men before I had to adapt to coaching these men some of whom were 10 years older than me and had played a lot more football than I had. I had to somehow get them to buy into what I was trying to do. I had some terrible coaching moments there thinking 'what am I doing here?' But it taught me that if you can motivate a plumber who has been at work since 5 am then it is easy to coach professional footballers because they are solely focused on learning and improving their football.

After leaving Borehamwood I got a job with the Football Association (F.A.) working on their Skills Programme. It was interesting because at Borehamwood I had moved away from coaching junior football and was now going back. I decided to take the job because it was with the F.A. and I knew I would be able to do my UEFA A licence coaching qualification and find out about learning and development. While I knew a lot about football I didn't know how to apply that knowledge to players or the best methods of coaching. Going to work for the F.A. and discovering about coaching and pedagogy and learning from other people was the best kind of education I could get. Particularly finding out about how children learn and develop, and how to use differentiation in sessions was so valuable.

I gained my UEFA A license at this time as I felt that to gain credibility as a young coach who had never played professional football I needed to get qualified early. I was 27 when I passed which is quite young. I knew that was the stepping stone I needed to work in Academy football. I didn't see how working in non-league football would take me where I wanted to go quickly enough, and I had always wanted to work in academies and work with the best players I could. Now I was qualified and was doing well on the Skills Programme the opportunity came up to work at the Southampton Academy as full-time under-14 coach.

At this point Southampton were employing full-time coaches in their academies even though they were in League One at the time. I was fortunate to see Southampton progress to the Premiership during the four years that I coached there. I had also completed F.A. youth modules 1 and 2 that sit alongside the A and B licences and along with my A licence and coaching experience I got the job at Southampton. I never thought I was going to get the job as my CV showed I lacked any experience coaching at an academy. The interview process was made up of two parts with an interview followed by a coaching session and I was confident because I had so much coaching experience.

During the interview I was grilled by the director of football about my lack of experience and how I had never worked with top players so when it came to the coaching session I just thought I'm not going to get this job, but it will be a good experience to work with these top players for a day. But I got the job and talking to the director of football afterwards he said that when he saw me coach he thought 'we can work with him because he can deliver coaching'. Getting jobs is not always about using your contacts as at some point you've got to be able to deliver what is needed or else you are going to get found out.

### **How long did you work at Southampton for?**

I was there for four years, which was two years with the U14s, one year with the U16s and one with the U18s. During that time, I was fortunate to be able to also work with the U21s during the day as the younger age groups trained in the evenings. I worked with future England internationals, such as Luke Shaw, James Ward-Prowse and Calum Chambers who were in the U18s. I got a broad range of experience by coaching across all age groups and I think this really helped me develop as a coach. When you become a higher profile coach you also get involved in things like talking to the media and I had to pretend to know what I was doing when I really didn't.

I have also been lucky to have had senior managers as mentors. Nigel Adkins has offered me tips and advice now I am a manager myself. It was also great to watch Mauricio Pochettino working with young players as he is one of the best coaches I have seen. I still watch a lot of football, more to analyse play than for pleasure. I'll record a Sunday match and watch it throughout the week and maybe analyse how midfielders break forwards and then apply it to my own coaching.

After working at Southampton, I went back to Australia for a while to deal with some family issues and take a break because life had been hectic. I came back to England and got a job at West Ham Football Academy where I worked with the U15 and U16 teams.

### **When you were manager at Woking what would you do on a typical day?**

I would get up at 5 am and travel to the Woking training ground to be there for 7 am. It is an early start but I needed to start the day with a planning meeting for the staff. We'd already prepared the training session the day before and we'd meet so that everyone would know what they were doing. We would discuss what was happening with the injured players and what each player would be doing in the session. The players came in at 10 am but we would have set up by 9.30 am so everything was ready when the players arrived. We wanted to be professional and so everything was ready for the players. When the players came in I'd always have a chat with them or meet with three or four players if there were things I wanted to go through with them or show them some video to give them feedback. At 10.30 am we would have a meeting with the players and maybe go through some video footage or we would start training then. The sessions generally ran from 10.30 am until midday and we'd then have lunch. Sometimes we would do another session from 2 pm to 3 pm but that often just with individuals; for example, taking the full backs to do some work on their crossing.

After training I'd go back to my office and maybe have another meeting, speak to the board of the football club and get my plans sorted out for the next day. I'd make sure I saw everyone at the club, so I'd go and see the secretary, talk to the people who do the cleaning and see everyone involved at the club. It's so important to speak to everyone in the club no matter how big or small their role is at the club. Then I'd prepare my plans for the next day. I'd also spend a lot of time on the phone. I never realised, until I became a manager, that everyone wants to talk to you – agents want to talk about their players, players want to call you. No-one ever wanted to speak to me before and now I am a manager everyone does.

By the time I got home it could be as late as 10 pm. Also, there may have a midweek fixture and I wouldn't get home until 3 am and then have to be back in work for a meeting the next day at 9 am. The hours are long if you do the job properly. You could get away with finishing at 1 pm but I've never been able to do that. Even when I worked at academies the hours were long because I'd get in at 8 am, work with the academy players during the day and then coach younger age groups in the evening until after 8 pm.

As a coach the hours are long, and that impacts on social life and family life, so it is a big commitment. It also takes a special person, my wife, to support that commitment. Especially in the early years when the hours are long and pay is poor. Not many people can hold out until things improve, especially if they have a family. If you work at a professional club the pay is better, but the job is less secure as you could be fired at any time or your club could be relegated. I had little choice as I dropped out of high school and had few formal qualifications apart from my coaching awards, so I had to make it work otherwise I would have had nothing. A smart person would study and get a degree, so they have something to fall back on if their coaching career didn't work out.

**What advice would you have for people who want a career in coaching?**

Just spend as much time as you can coaching. I've worked in so many different types of environments – coaching three and four-year olds, multi-sports coaching, in a classroom, working with troubled teenagers, men's football, women's football. All those sessions helped me to be more adaptable as a coach. For example, at Southampton I might be half way through a session and the manager tells me they are taking five or six players from my session. I must adapt the session to make up for the loss of players and I think I could do that due to the different experiences I had had before. Even if you are coaching seven-year old players you can use what you learn and apply it to coaching adults or professionals.