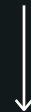




# USER STORIES

How our arenas transform our customers needs.

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# FC BARCELONA.

FC Barcelona have a motto: Més que un club (More than a club). Few outside of Madrid would question the merit of such a statement. They're not just a club; they're a football superpower.

From the mercurial brilliance of Johan Cruyff to the record-breaking exploits of Lionel Messi, Barcelona have consistently raised the bar for Europe's elite teams in the modern era, delighting fans and neutrals alike with an attractive style of attacking play, built on quick passing, relentless pressure, and technical excellence.

To the delight of everyone at ESA, Barcelona were one of the first elite clubs to take an active interest in our approach. Right away it seemed like a natural fit. The club's technical development programme is based heavily on the idea of deliberate practice; perfecting skills through intense repetition, with immediate expert feedback. All of our products are developed around the same philosophy, aiming to recreate the key moments a player faces during a match, and provide coaches with a platform for analysis.

Head of Physiotherapy, Juanjo Brau and his team first started to experiment with the ICON as a way to manage return from injury.

"My team likes using the ICON for the later stages of rehabilitation as it allows players to build up match sharpness, without exposing them to the danger of full-contact training.... it's been a popular addition to the programme."

The team were soon asking us what else we could do. We were introduced to Raul Blanco, Head of Technology and Innovation, who wanted to experiment with new ways to refine technical skills at the club's prestigious academy. We ended up building a custom 12M ICON - the biggest we've made to date - to facilitate longer passes, and more multiplayer options.

But we didn't stop there. Working with their coaching teams, we developed the first version of the wireless circuit; a series of specialised modules that coaches can use to build unique drills, and track the participating player's performance over time. The pass-through and pass-over panels were originally developed as custom add-ons for the Barcelona coaching staff, and are now available as part of the standard package. If you want to see the circuit in action, tune into a Barcelona game before kick off to see the players using the wireless modules to warm up.





# YANNICK BOLASIE.

*100% I'd recommend it to other players. A lot of them have been asking where I got it!*

Veteran winger Yannick Bolasie left Crystal Palace in 2016, joining Everton in a deal worth £25M, however just three months into his debut season, he sustained a serious injury to his anterior cruciate ligament during a 1–1 draw with Manchester United.

Devastated and keen to get back to match fitness as soon as possible, Bolasie got in touch with ESA to see if we could help. We ended up building a personalised 4M ICON for him to use at home during his recovery.

*"For me it worked perfectly when I was coming back from injury. It's done a lot more than I anticipated to be honest. Things start coming naturally to me in games, and I know a lot of it has come from doing it in the ICON in a small space. Movement, opening up my hips, adjusting to where the ball is gonna be... it's been indispensable."*

Beyond just physical recovery, Bolasie credits the ICON as a key factor in building up the mental strength to get back on the pitch:

*"Everything comes with confidence. So If I'm confident in my basic touch and passing, that feeds into a game where I've got to take one touch and spin off, or take a touch and pass it quickly... it just feels natural now."*

The ICON has continued to be an invaluable training tool for Bolasie, especially during the pandemic:

*"In the lockdown I was minimum three times a week in the ICON. Now, when we have late training sessions, I like to go in there in the morning and get the highest score possible. It gets me all my touches on the ball so I have that feel good factor around my feet, so that when I go into training, it's like a second session."*

Sadly he was unable to take it to Portugal while on loan at Sporting.

*"When I was in Portugal I really missed it, it gets you your sharp touches, moving sharp, feeling sharp, on my toes... Those little cues you need to be feeling in a game. After the winter break, I came back a bit sluggish. If I'd have had the ICON in that period I would have carried off from where I was."*

Now 32, Bolasie is currently playing for Çaykur Rizespor in the Turkish Premier League. We wish him all the best and hope he's been able to bring the ICON along this time!







# FOOTGENiX.

Mo Salah is probably the best player in the world right now. With fourteen goals in sixteen Premier League games at time of writing, the Egyptian King looks on track to win his third golden boot in five seasons, also topping the assist rankings with nine.

Salah is one of just three Egyptians currently playing in the Premier League, alongside Arsenal's Mohamed Elneny, and Villa's Trézéguet. Only Omar Marmoush of VfB Stuttgart joins them in Europe's top flight, with no Egyptians currently playing in La Liga, Serie A, or Ligue 1.

That seems like a scant return for a passionate footballing nation, with a vibrant club culture and proud history. With more African Cup of Nations wins than any other nation, including an incredible three in a row from 2008 to 2012, fans of the Pharaohs are often left wondering why the conveyor belt of Egyptian talent continues to stutter.

The answer is complex. The Egyptian football pyramid is structured very differently to most European nations. Academies are often not attached to clubs, and talent can get stuck in limbo. Grassroots football receives little central funding, and is often blighted by poor infrastructure. In turn, a lack of governance makes it hard to provide quality coaching below the elite level.

Located in downtown Cairo, Footgenix is a world class training facility whose owners are trying to change that. They want to nurture the next generation of Egyptian talent, giving young players the chance to unlock their true potential, while encouraging wider participation throughout the community. Their approach is all about providing the best possible platform for development, giving young players access to the same training they would get in top European academies.

The founding team first saw our equipment in action on a business trip to the UK back in 2019, and ended up making a return visit to our HQ in Poole to take a closer look later that year. The cognitive aspects of ESA training were of particular interest, notably the ways in which our training programmes are built around honing specific attributes, with a focus on the intense repetition of core skills.

We were able to supply them with multiple ICONs, as well as a precision wall and a wireless circuit. Feedback so far has been excellent from players and coaches alike:

So what does the future hold for Footgenix? Ultimately the teams want to provide 360 support for budding athletes, including physios and nutritionists. While community work remains the lifeblood of the business, the ultimate measure of success will be producing quality Egyptian professionals; and hopefully a few that can take Europe by storm a la Mo.









# IPSWICH TOWN.

## Problem

When it comes to investing in youth, Ipswich Town have a long and proud history of punching above their weight. Distinguished alumni include two former England captains (Mick Mills and Terry Butcher), and more recently the likes of Kieron Dyer, Darren Bent, and Connor Wickham, to name but a few.

Their academy maintains a coveted Category One status, awarded only to clubs that meet the highest standards of coaching, training facilities, and player welfare. It's an outstanding achievement, but they have no intention of resting on their laurels. The club continues to invest heavily in youth, improving their training facilities, and experimenting with new ways to unlock potential.

It was this pursuit of excellence that first brought them to ESA. The coaching team wanted to:

- Engage their young players by introducing a fresh competitive edge to training sessions.
- Give their coaches better tools to communicate ideas, and allow them to set challenges for players that replicate real match situations.
- Accelerate their player's return from injury, building match fitness without the dangers inherent to full contact training.

We were able to help by introducing them to the ICON. Competing on the preset training programmes like pass maestro, the academy players have been able to benchmark their ability against the rest of the squad. The leaderboard has proved a huge hit, motivating players to get back in and beat their score, before and after training. Meanwhile the coaching team have relished the opportunity to put their player's technique under the microscope, highlighting weaknesses and suggesting improvements.

**Academy chief Lee O'Neil has been delighted with the results:**

*"It's totally different to anything we've done in the past. We've been using the ICON to enhance the coaching programme, in particular the technical development programme. It's a great way of integrating modern technology into everyday practices. It's really helped to engage the players' thought process around their technique - passing, receiving, awareness, etc. It's been really eye opening."*

*"Using the ICON they're able to work on their first touch, their ability to see things over the shoulder, their awareness of what's around them, their ability to hit a target and their passing skills - they're all transferable skills to training and the game."*

The coaches have also been getting creative with the ICON set up:

*(The panels) can be broken down, taken apart and used*





*independently to produce different drills.... It's up to the coaches to be creative with it, and find a way of engaging the players that's a bit different.*

## Rehab

The academy team have also been experimenting with using the ICON as a rehabilitation tool, with promising early results:

*"We're experimenting with new ideas around rehabilitation. We have five stages of recovery here, and in particular for stages 4 and 5 we've been using the ICON. It's great for getting a feel of the ball without having to go back into full time training."*

Academy starlet Andre Dozzell (now playing in the Championship at QPR) broke into the first team aged just sixteen, however following some impressive performances and a call up to England youth setup, his fledgling career was dealt a serious blow as he tore his cruciate ligament. Facing a spell on the sidelines, Dozzell was one of the first players to make use of the ICON for rehabilitation:

*"It's been great. Before I got injured I used to use it a lot after training, work on my first touch, reaction times, vision... Years ago an injury like that could end your career, but now there's so much technology to help us get back to full fitness, and quicker as well."*



# JC SPORTS.

Soccer is the fastest growing sport in the US. While the beautiful game still lags behind the big three (baseball, basketball and American football) in terms of total viewership, it has tripled in popularity over the last decade, (overtaking ice hockey in the process).

Although the game's profile has benefitted from a medley of superstars gracing the MLS in recent years, much of this rise can be put down to high youth participation. The soccer mom phenomenon is real; with more than 6,000 registered youth teams, over 3 million kids are estimated to play soccer in the US. The recent dominance of the US women's soccer team is somewhat explained when you consider that 48% of these young players are female.

Much of this success is driven by the passion of coaches at grassroots level. We first met Cesar Coronel back in 2019 when he was looking to expand and enhance the coaching programmes available at his academy in Houston, JC Sports.

Texas is probably more associated with American football, yet interest in soccer remains high, with an estimated 250K youth players in the state. Cesar wants to provide quality coaching for these kids, and he's not afraid to start them early. Programmes begin for two-to-three-year olds, teaching basic motor and ball skills, going right up to more sophisticated programmes for teens and young adults. Crucially, he can feed any talent of note into the Houston

youth soccer system, giving young players a tractable route into the professional game. Most recently he has established a partnership with La Liga's Villarreal, becoming an official overseas academy for the club.

**Early on in his youth coaching career he realised technology was the way to go to coach this new generation of youth players.**

**"Kids don't really respond to laying out cones; they'll just switch off. It's about creating engaging experiences for the participants, letting them have fun, while they're also getting a serious training session."**

**Above all, Cesar wants to produce creative and well-rounded players, and he combines many approaches to that end, including VR, and ESA's wireless circuit.**

**"The great thing about these platforms is that they provide instant feedback. Kids can see what they're doing well and what they need to improve. We have several ESA Soccer Training tools at JC Sports Houston. I love the flexibility of the wireless circuit as I can change the layout of my training sessions and move the panels to my liking. In one session, with one tool, we can work on passing, receiving, accuracy and then switching to dribbling, turning, attacking and finishing... Do not get me wrong, I love the other tools too, but the wireless circuit is a great training tool with many applications."**





In addition to their work in Texas, Cesar and his wife Jennifer also started Harvest 8, a non-profit focused on empowering communities through sports:

“We are passionate about sports and fitness, but also about building community through sports. We have created sports programs in Haiti, Kenya and Laos, in addition to providing thousands of dollars to schools in our Neighbourhood. We don’t only provide equipment but also a curriculum for the volunteers or teachers in those communities so that they can teach sports to the kids just like we do in Houston.”





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