

# 'Our identity is intensity. It comes back in every drill'

Liverpool's Pep Lijnders on playing paddle tennis with Klopp, designing training and why preparation pays off

Arthur Renard

Long before Liverpool reached last season's Champions League final, preparations for a possible showdown in Madrid were being made by Pepijn "Pep" Lijnders. The semi-final against Barcelona had not been played but Jürgen Klopp's assistant was already contemplating the ideal preparation. He thought about inviting a team who could mimic Ajax's or Tottenham's style, to give Liverpool an idea of what they could expect if they overcame Barça.

The location was decided. Marbella's weather was similar to Madrid's and it would be relatively easy to fly a team there secretly. "I really wanted to organise a game because otherwise it would have been three weeks without any competitive action," Lijnders says. "I wanted us to play a similar team to the opponents we could face in Madrid. The idea was to privately invite a team to train three to four days in the way we wanted them to play us in the friendly."

Lijnders' efforts proved well worth it after Liverpool overcame a 3-0 deficit to reach the final. "Benfica B came over and everything remained secret," Lijnders says. "We gave a presentation to their manager about how they had to play. It had to be like Tottenham, with their set pieces, footballing intentions and defensive organisation. We played that game behind closed doors. We even built higher shields so no one could see anything. The match took place exactly one week before the final and we prepared everything like we would do during the day of the final."

Liverpool, who defeated Benfica B 3-0, secured the Champions League by beating Spurs 2-0. When watching the buildup to the early goals in both those games there is a recognisable pattern, with Liverpool winning possession on the halfway line and playing a long ball to Sadio Mané. "In both moments you could clearly see how we positioned ourselves to be able to dominate the second-ball game and directly searched for Sadio into the free space behind the last line."

Lijnders is speaking at the Melwood training ground. Dressed in a club jumper featuring six stars symbolising the European



**'People say Liverpool are good at this or that but the main thing we are good at is that we are always together'**