

# **THE FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY IN SHADOWS OF MARCELO BIELSA**

Written by  
Jed C. Davies

Foreword by Michael Beale

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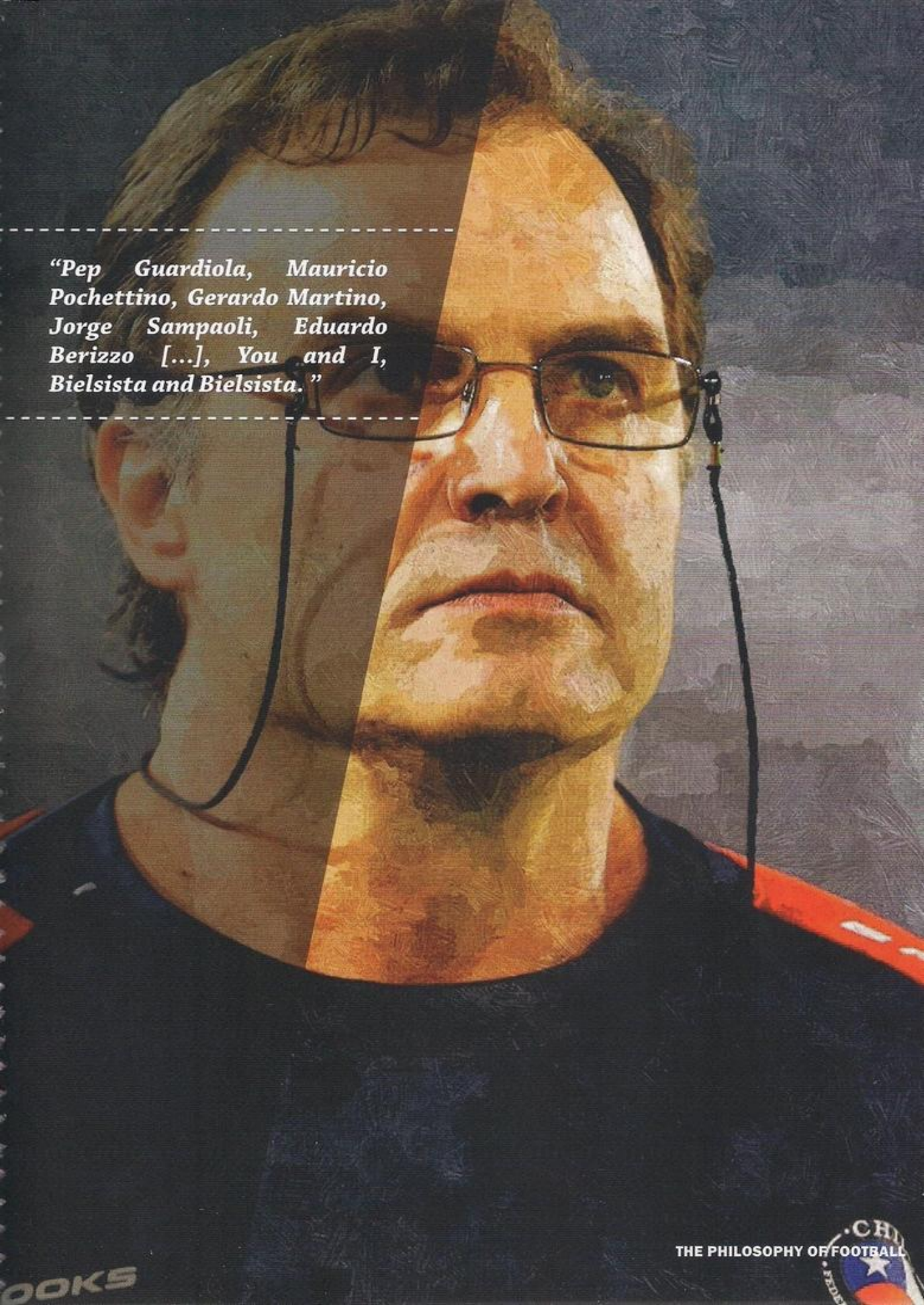
## CONTRIBUTORS

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*“Pep Guardiola, Mauricio Pochettino, Gerardo Martino, Jorge Sampaoli, Eduardo Berizzo [...], You and I, Bielsista and Bielsista.”*

BOOKS

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FOOTBALL







## BOOK DEDICATION

Stevie Davies 24th May 1967

This book has been dedicated to 'Stevie' (not Steve or Steven) Davies, my father. Stevie lost his battle with cancer at just 48 years of age, leaving behind him my lionhearted mother and five children (of which I am the oldest, spanning exactly twenty years and two days between the five of us). Stevie was a man that deserved more time, more than anyone else I've ever known. A man who lived a life full of love and full of passion in all corners of his life, cutting none.

Although my Dad probably didn't know who Marcelo Bielsa was, as his footballing interest never ventured too far from Cardiff City (through the good and the bad) or his children's games, I know that my fascination with those who stand for purity in a greater vision came from my dad's liberal views and vision of life, one that is to be lived on the pure values of being free, high-principled and thoughtful. Always. Never thoughtless.

...unless laying in a hammock with the sun-setting on a colourful sky and dogs running along the beach after footballs. Then, if you can, we can be thoughtless for the moment.

## Dear Dad...

I always pictured you sitting in a rocking chair and if I try hard enough I still do. In those moments I ask "How am I doing Dad?", just once in a while. With a glass of red wine in your hand, all I would need in reply is for you to smile, maybe even raise the glass once in a while and nod. And from your rocking chair you could inspire a thousand years of dreams in me. From your rocking chair you could have me believe I could land paper planes on the moon. Without words you powered all of us so often.

You've left behind five very proud children: Myself, Jay, Jess, Tobie and Mae. Each of us so different, each of us chasing impossible dreams with our absolute devotion.

And Mum. Mum's growing stronger with every day that passes. Together we reminisce with hilarity and admiration regularly.

For eternity and no less

- 27th August 2015



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*"A man with new ideas is  
mad until he succeeds"*

- Marcelo Bielsa



## FOREWORD

“Bielsa has inspired so many coaches. For many, Bielsa is less well known than the coaches he has inspired with his vision of the game. But for students of the game, Bielsa is held with great respect and love for his ideas and inspiration”

- Michael Beale, Liverpool FC under-21 Manager



Jed Davies is a brave man for he has taken on a task of unravelling the most mystical coach in the history of football.

Marcelo Bielsa has inspired so many coaches. For many, Bielsa is less well known than the coaches he has inspired with his vision of the game. But for students of the game, Bielsa is held with great respect and love for his ideas and inspiration.

Never one to chase media attention, he is completely for the development of his players and teams. This is another unique trait that he is adored for in the coaching world – but also makes it hard to really understand the genius of his ideas due to the lack of interviews he has given on his philosophy.

Therefore, I was intrigued to read Jed's book.

I have known Jed for the past two years and without doubt he is a student of the game, he has a unique eye for fine details and is obsessed with how he analyses the game in order to seek the latest trends in football. This book offers you the insights of this obsession.

It is a fascinating read with each chapter offering you a new insight into various coaches and how they add their own ideas to that of Bielsa's style.

As a developing coach, the ideas are something that in many ways are an inspiration to me and I would like to share my own thoughts with you for consideration when coaching.



Football is a beautiful game, there is no debate on this, but do the children and players you coach have a beautiful experience? Or are they confused and stifled by too many drills or practices that are trying to recreate the game rather than playing it?

So the questions I am posing "Is training beautiful? Or is it just the game that is beautiful" and therefore do players fall in love with training or just playing the game?

This is a key consideration for anyone looking to become a coach. The players are everything and the experiences you give them must enhance their love and passion for football.

As I grow and develop as a coach, my knowledge of the game has improved without doubt. But, the single most important development I have made is in my knowledge of people and how to manage, develop and inspire them.

The term "There is no I in team" is a saying that we have all heard. I completely disagree with this quote and believe that this is where the biggest mistakes are made in the development of young players and also the motivation of senior players.

In fact, the quote should read "There are eleven I's in a team" for I believe wholeheartedly that individual development equals team development and both should be developed at the same time.

In fifteen years experience at Chelsea FC and Liverpool FC working with players from u6 through to senior professionals I have learnt that If you raise the level of each individual (improving their identity and focus as players) then as a result your team will become much stronger.

Therefore, the role of a coach in any sport or discipline is to lead their athletes in one direction: Improvement.

Coaches must take on the role of a life coach to their players and become a strong guide in order to develop their full potential. They should promote "you vs yourself" as a model for development and understand that the game is made much easier by having players who are able to demonstrate 1v1 domination (the ability to outplay opponents in your own unique way).

## IDENTITY

Each person has his or her own unique personality as a human being. I believe the same applies to each player on a football pitch. The aim for coaches is to help a player develop their football personality "Identity" as they grow through the age groups.

A player who is able to develop a strong identity is then able to structure their training and therefore, giving themselves a huge amount of focus. Combining these things will surely lead to improvement and a greater mindset compared to their peers, it will also allow for the player to audit their personal performance.

To give this idea some clarity I am able to share with you some of my favourite quotes from the top coaches in world football.

*"The person comes first. 99.9% of clubs don't care enough for the person. Its not about how talented someone is, its how that talent is handled"* - Johan Cruyff

*"Football is a human science"* - Jose Mourinho

*"Training must not be occupational therapy, it must be focused on improvement. All players have talent - they often don't know which. The coach is the medium to help the players manifest this"* - Louis Van Gaal

*"The art of 1v1 is now more important than ever, Seek first to understand then to be understood"* - Carlo Ancelotti

*"Look for players you can go on a journey with, Show interest in them as people, not just footballers"* - Arsene Wenger

*"Don't impress me, impress yourself"* - Jurgen Klopp

Once a player has this identity its then a case of decision making within the game in order to problem solve and become successful.

Therefore, the biggest advice I can offer is that developing players to excel in 1v1 situations and problem solving in 2v1, 1v2 moments is the key to player effectiveness inside the 11v11 game.

*"Coaches paint pictures, simpler the better"*

Michael Beale, May 2016

# PRE:

WITH JED DAVIES CONDUCTED BY  
PAUL GRECH, EDITOR OF  
BLUEPRINTFORFOOTBALL.COM

"The book demands some work from the reader in certain areas as I have left some theoretical solutions in their 'application and subjective form' from case studies"

**PG:** Jed Davies is one of those special coaches who never stays still. His curiosity fuels a desire to look closely to why certain ideas and coaches work better than others. His first book on Tiki-Taka delved deeper into the system than anything else that was written on it, dealing not only on the coaching of the system but also its evolution and the philosophy behind it.

Now he has turned his attention to Marcelo Bielsa. One of the most influential coaches of the modern game, Bielsa is widely respected as a visionary and a coach whose ideas have a wide reaching impact. Davies will analyse these ideas in an upcoming book (*The Philosophy of Football: In The Shadow of Marcelo Bielsa*) and spoke to Blueprint for Football over why he felt that the Argentine manager deserved so much attention.

**Paul Grech : What brought about the idea of this book?**

**Jed Davies:** As with my previous book 'Coaching the Tiki-Taka Style of Play', the idea to write a book is the idea to commit yourself to learning. Everything else is secondary.

I was left dissatisfied after my previous book with the idea that I had leaned towards a style of play that is often misinterpreted and associated with maintaining possession over the duration of a game.

That bothered me and I found my questions I was asking mentors, colleagues and friends were often around the misguided perception that possession 'for possession's sake' and how that was to assert your dominance over a game through ownership of the ball – not always true to the idea of having ownership over the game.

I owe my research's intentions and messages to many who were generous with their curiosity. Guys like James Nash in Milton Keynes who would ask 'what is the value of a pass?', a question I attempted to answer knowing I'd never fully satisfy James' curiosity. Other questions such as 'what is the purpose for this rotation or that rotation?' and 'how can you evaluate team communication and decision making?' led me down a very philosophical route in trying to theorise the game.

This very same process is one Marcelo Bielsa has spent years making conclusions on and inspiring others to do the same: Mauricio Pochettino, Pep Guardiola and many others have travelled the same paths, paths often laid out before them by one man: Marcelo Bielsa.

**PG: How long have you been working on it? And what was the process like?**

**JD:** I've been working on this book since 2013 and I'm still finding hundreds of new angles to look at the same idea today, but the time is now right to place a freeze-frame around the current document and have it published. I've always promoted the thought that the book is a snapshot of a certain time frame rather than the definitive answers to football.

The processes of learning involved in this book have been significant opportunities to reshape how I see the game and think about theorising in general. I've taken flights around the world to Argentina and other countries to meet coaches or players who have worked either directly with or played under Marcelo Bielsa, and then stepped one further away and applied the same research methods to those who have played under or worked with those who represent the



'school of Bielsa' such as Pochettino, Dario Franco, Gerardo Martino and many others.

The objective was to zoom all the way out and look at football from a philosophical standpoint and then zoom in on Bielsa and each of the common ideas that have become synonymous with Marcelo Bielsa: verticality, structures, rotation, movement and so on.

While Bielsa is one of the toughest men in world football to get into contact with for an interview (trust me I've tried!), he has such a diverse group of followers who have been influenced by Bielsa that the task to research the ideas of Bielsa was accessible, at least in Marcelo Bielsa's shadows anyway. Hence the title of the book 'The Philosophy of Football: In Shadows of Marcelo Bielsa'.

**PG: Why is Bielsa so special? After all, he hasn't won a lot of trophies?**

**JD:** Mauricio Pochettino, Gerardo Martino, Dario Franco, Diego Simeone, Jorge Sampaoli, Pep Guardiola - all have taken direct inspiration from Marcelo Bielsa's way of thinking either in strategy or methodology. Indirectly hundreds and hundreds more unknowingly employ principles that were ignited by Marcelo Bielsa.

At Athletic Bilbao, Newell's Old Boys and Chile in particular, legacies were left behind him. Newell's Old Boys even named their stadium after him 'Estadio Marcelo Bielsa' and have since hired from a managerial pool of those that represent the same school of thought as Marcelo Bielsa.

To paint Bielsa's portrait with numbers and lists of achievements would be wrong for this doesn't consider the knock-on effects in football and it wouldn't give power to ideas that can transform how an individual can think about the game. Those who have worked with or closely to Marcelo Bielsa are unified in their opinion - Bielsa has a way of convincing others that there is a right and wrong in football, at least in the processes of bringing an idea to life.

*"Watching Bielsa's games is like listening to Beethoven's 9th symphony So perfect & harmonious that it becomes genius"*

- Jan Van Winckel

(Coach under Marcelo Bielsa at Marseille 2014-15)

**PG: What is his philosophy?**

**JD:** The first angle to attack this type of question is to ask 'what is THE philosophy?'. People use 'philosophy' to refer to their own individual subjective preferences over how the game should be played, educated and thought of. Rarely do people try to address the objective philosophy of the game.

So if we look through the objective lens and make an attempt to theorise football on the pitch, we come to a set of broad undeniable and factual conclusions.

The highest order of objectives when in possession is to score a goal, the 'next best' action is to assist goals. After these two objectives, we are looking at 'assisting' the assist. That is to say, we can use examples of playing players through into areas we can make assists from (wide areas within the box among others) or set the ball back to someone who can put someone through to score.

After those three more obvious objectives, I find that many football coaches slip in and out of grey areas and start to fill in the order of objectives from a subjective angle.

I would propose after a deep study into Marcelo Bielsa's thinking that we're looking at the topic of 'breaking lines' - which in literal terms is to get into the following spaces with the ball:

1. Behind the opposition central defenders
2. Behind the opposition full backs
3. In front of the opposition central defenders
4. In front of the opposition full backs
5. Behind the opposition central midfielders
6. Behind the opposition wide midfielders

Each of these spaces provokes a different response from each opponent. This alone is an under-analysed area in football analysis.

Should we not be able to (a) score, (b) assist, (c) assist the assist and (d) get into the key spaces, we are now looking at creating the conditions to achieve the objectives listed above. Simply put, we would find it difficult to achieve the objective listed in priority 'd' (see above) for one or more of three reasons:

1. The opposition are compact horizontally
2. The opposition are compact vertically
3. The opposition are layered in between their midfield and defence (or beyond).



The three processes listed above (to spread the opposition out vertically, to spread the opposition out horizontally and to remove the layers of the opposition) should make up the vast majority of your philosophical content. These three processes can be achieved through different levels of communication.

Communication refers to the verbal and non-verbal interactions between two or more players on the football field (team level, unit level and group level). An example of group level communication might be to have your central defender drive out with the ball to attract one of the opposition midfielders, this moment then communicates to your team mate(s) where space may or may not have opened up now the opposition central midfielder is pulled out of his position (therefore removing compaction or layers).

In this moment, we can think about communication in its simplest form as a two against one (your central defender and a player behind the opposition midfield line against the opposition midfielder who has been pulled towards the ball and out of position). Of course this can grow and become more complex as other players can be involved in this moment. Your striker may want to run behind the nearest central defender, to prevent the central defender stepping forward to defend behind the central midfielder pulled out of position for example.

Should none of the previous options be available to the player on the ball (objective A-E), then switching out of the area to another area is often considered as a way of finding new angles into the opposition block AND to move the opposition from one area to another. The final objective in possession is to retain possession and know that each new pass in the sequence returns to the highest orders of the objectives.

Where Marcelo Bielsa thrives most, is in implementing the pictures and patterns for players that fit within this framework of objectives. In Bielsa's own words, verticality, movement, rotation, concentration and improvisation (breaking the order of objectives) make up Bielsa's implementation of the philosophy of the game. Bielsa is simply the mediator between THE PHILOSOPHY of the game and the players – different to other managers who start with 'preferences' as their starting point.

Of course, Bielsa has his own set of preferences for how he implements the philosophy – but this is on the level of application of THE philosophy, not the other way around.

**PG: Bielsa's concepts need players who can think about the game. First off, do you agree with that statement and secondly, how do you foster that?**

**JD:** Bielsa is famous for saying "if football were played by robots, I'd win everything" and has a clear methodology which involves building around key languages of the game. On the other hand, Bielsa also once said:

*"Totally mechanised teams are useless, because they get lost when they lose their script. But I also don't like ones that only rely on the inspiration of their soloists, because when God doesn't turn them on, they are left totally at the mercy of their opponents"*

It is clear that this is an area of great interest for the Argentine and an area he has explored well.

Taking the first quotation into consideration (re: robots), Bielsa is referring to the human elements that bring about errors on a football field, or as Dr Raoul Oudejans would say (an associate professor at the Faculty of Human Movement Sciences at the VU University Amsterdam) "changes in attention which lead to a performance decrement".

Changes in attention can often be as a result of increased anxiety (which in turn comes about from responses to different levels of pressure). Marcelo Bielsa is someone that others would consider a 'master in human motivation' and coaches like Sampaoli have even admitted to going jogging while listening to recordings of Bielsa's interviews and team talks.

One method to reduce the impact of 'changes in attention' can be to channel these moments towards detail. That is to say, we can create a series of checkpoints to focus on during any high pressure activity.

Let's take a penalty shot for the simplest example, we can take the whole activity as a process and just be part of that process and allow for us to 'just be there' and experience the moment as it is as we run up to take the penalty.



Alternatively, using a method that many use for different actions across many disciplines, we can break the action into a series of mini-checkpoints: put the ball down, take exactly seven steps back and stand in line with an imaginary marker two yards past the far post and then as striking the ball with the instep to shoot across goal we should feel the sensation of the knee coming up to the balancing arm as our body remains compact during the strike of the ball.

The checkpoint process allows for our attention to be placed into areas where our technique is important in this particular example, leaving no room for anxiety to creep in. In a similar way of thinking, it is possible to use the 'languages of the game' (or specific patterns) to bring together a collective set of minds during a more structured part of the game that might otherwise rely on the individual's level of attention and decision making.

So from this particular viewpoint, we can say that Bielsa would prefer players to play 'without thought', automatically. Bielsa also uses tools such as clear 'roles and tasks' for individuals on a football field, areas to place your focus.

Then we move onto Bielsa's second quote where he clearly expresses his dislike for totally mechanised teams that follow a script. So there is a balance here, between Bielsa and the players. A player who goes against the script or a player that improvises is a clear component that Bielsa not only encourages but plans for from a higher level of planning.

The idea is to create clearly unique player identities within a team and in doing so, creating a better platform for communication (verbal/non-verbal agreements) to succeed in a game of football. Players are not equal, not in personality, not in technical expressions, not in game understanding and so on.

Some coaches exist on either end of this scale, some are strict in their scripts and models of the game (Louis Van Gaal) while others allow for player ownership over their game and ideas, but within an agreed style of play (Arsene Wenger). Bielsa is constantly sliding up and down this scale, somewhere between the two, somewhere in the grey area of Bielsa's scripts and the resistance of player improvisation.

To foster such an environment, the players must know the script before then can move away from it with freedom,

players must know their own player identity and how that fits within the bigger picture – players must understand the game. Not all players will understand the game on the same level of understanding, that is to be accepted and some players need more to be moulded around them and their intuitive preferences. It's a question of human management.

Luckily for Bielsa the game isn't played by robots, because it's part of the game that Bielsa clearly finds fascinating and challenging. Through our struggles we learn most.

**PG: What is the biggest lesson that coaches can take from him? In particular coaches at either youth level or who coach for the fun of it?**

**JD:** The biggest lesson I have taken is the ability to theorise the game from an objective level and work my way backwards from there – knowing that the philosophy and application of the philosophy are two entirely separate things.

From an implementation standpoint, I think we can all learn how to better mediate between the philosophy and your players more. You, as the coach, can zoom out and step out of the situation in your coaching. Bielsa's training methodology is both very simple and often directly relates to the philosophy of the game – creating automatism (action without thought: automatically) in areas but then allowing for individual improvisation to break these rules within the game. Better than that, demanding that of your players.

I think if coaches thought about the game as their starting point along with creating better player identities we'd be far more successful in what we do. Too many have other objectives held on a higher level than those two components.

**PG: How will the book be structured? Will it be simply coaching sessions or will there be more to it?**

**JD:** The book is heavily theoretical but then followed up with over 50 related training sessions that absolutely will not work without the coach's prior understanding of the objective of each session and how it fits in with the bigger picture. I would say to anyone looking to just find training sessions to implement – turn away now and do not buy my book.



It's designed to provoke thought from the reader and hopefully create a reaction of acceptance or rejection. I would be disappointed if anyone read the book and agreed with absolutely everything I've written – especially as large parts of it discuss football philosophy within the context of application.

The book demands some work from the reader in certain areas as I have left some theoretical solutions in their 'application and subjective form' from case studies.. I have also included very little on the famous #1-3-3-1-3 formation or defending (pressing) as I felt it would be more effective to detail the 90% and leave the reader to come to their own conclusions for the final 10%. - these two components are actually very straight forward once the principles have been fully understood.

Bielsa employs principles that are not exclusive to him alone, they are part of football and examples of his philosophy exist within so many teams. This is especially true since Bielsa's starting point of study was 'football'. So for this reason I've looked at how other e teams employ the same principles, for example how Wales under Gary Speed used their full backs to get their best players on the ball in the best spaces to showcase their individual player identity (receiving the ball with the defender in front to run at). The last thing I wanted was for coaches to read a book that both theorises the philosophy Bielsa follows and then copy his application of the philosophy.

The idea is to promote thinking about the game like Bielsa and then look at your own opportunities and barriers of implementation within your own level of application. Therefore, creating something meaningful.

I want coaches to be better theorists and to form their own approach within their own skilset as a coach – all within the objective framework of the game that Bielsa has spent a lifetime theorising.

**PG: Have other coaches helped in the writing of this book?**

**JD:** To write a book like this in isolation is impossible. I have reached out to many and sat them down to discuss football on a philosophical level to try and theorise each individual and tie them to the structure of thinking I've

outlined previously. I received so much information of how to better create conditions to then penetrate between lines for example – these same coaches may not be aware of their bigger picture but they certainly have many great ideas and examples of application.

Unfortunately, the few most influential people I spoke with were not able to put their name to their words, however, they were very open with helping me tie together my thinking. We have to respect those who are in this position and yet they still choose to educate others and better than that, explore with you their thinking as they haven't yet made sense of it all yet.

I've always believed that we should learn from the best teachers we have around us. That is to say if we have an expert on 'creating teams' within our reachability we should learn from that individual, if we have an expert on 'food' then we should look to learn from them and take away what we can for our own field. Not enough people do this.

I'd implore you today to think about any world leading expert in any field you have around you – someone that eats, sleeps and breathes their expertise and oozes with passion – ask to meet them and get a window into their way of thinking about achieving excellence in their profession. If you can't take something away from that person, then you've failed.

My book has been influenced and had the help of more than just football coaches. But everything has been put back under the reference of 'football philosophy' and within Bielsa's way of thinking.

**PG: Finally, you're going through Kickstarter to crowd fund the printing costs for the book: why is that?**

**JD:** Going through Kickstarter hasn't really been done before, as far as I know, for this type of book, which is insane given the social media explosion of coaches and analysts over the years. I believe that by opening this door for crowd funding books, we'll hopefully see others follow and write the books that we all want. Many of the most popular coaching books to date follow the same guidelines – this is a real opportunity to do something different.



I'm now able to format the book and showcase information in the way I see best to achieve the book's objectives. Going under any publisher means making sacrifice and making more of a consideration towards maximising profits or fitting within their current 'this is how it is done' way of thinking. This isn't to have a dig at any of the publishers out there but it is a way of finding freedom as an author to keep the message pure – to commit myself as the author to learning and keeping everything else secondary.

I'll be backing projects on Kickstarter I see in the future that I think have made a real commitment to learning on a higher level. No questions asked. Within the first week we've reached nearly 90% of the overall funding needed to print the number of books we wanted to. This has been pleasing and shows it can be done! I'm sure it won't always work out and I fully expect a future project of mine to fail done this way, but that's ok – since the purpose of writing the book in the first place wasn't to profit from it anyway!

I've been thinking a lot on the subject of implementing ideas and the process of coaching lately – how we can install change, how we should manage change, how to plant seeds in the minds of players so they grow into firm beliefs and so on.

This is without a doubt my next area of obsession, whether that materialises into a book that succeeds or not we'll have to see but I've already made my commitment to learning on this and starting meeting coaches who are world leaders in this field. With Kickstarter we have a future platform for the idea to grow – for anyone who loves 'ideas', Kickstarter is a wonderful resource.

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This interview was conducted by Paul Grech and published on the website [www.blueprintforfootball.com](http://www.blueprintforfootball.com)

Jed Davies can also be found sharing his thoughts on similar topics on the Just Kickin' It Podcast on Episode 54 with hosts Brian and Josh at the website [www.justkickinpod.com](http://www.justkickinpod.com)

You can find Jed Davies on Twitter at @TPiMBW. TPiMBW is an acronym for 'The Path is Made By Walking', a line from Davies' favourite poem written by Antonio Machado.

*"Wanderer, your footsteps are  
the path, and nothing more;  
wanderer, there is no path,  
the path is made by walking.  
By walking one makes the path,  
and upon glancing back  
one sees the path  
that never will be trod again.  
Wanderer, there is no path --  
Only wakes upon the sea."*



# 01 BIELSA: THE LEGACY

“The original is unfaithful to the translation”

- Jorge Luis Borges

Every time I think of Marcelo Bielsa and the impact he has had and continues to have upon the game, I remember a poem that I know by heart: “Definitions with Which to Await My Death”, by the great Argentine lyricist and poet Homero Manzi:

*“I know that my name will resound in the ears of  
my loved ones  
as perfectly as a picture.  
And I also know that sometimes it will cease to  
be a name  
and will just be a pair of meaningless words.”*

The poem strikes a special chord with me because throughout the history of football, a number of influential figures have been the force of change within the game. Football has always followed the impulses of imitation and rejection, in a constant state of change, a constant state of progress.

Chilean author Roberto Bolaño speaks of progress and change in his own field and says *“as a general rule, human beings either imitate or reject the great monuments they experience, rarely do they acknowledge the small, nearly invisible treasures”*.

It's not very likely that the coach who formed The Philosophy for so many other coaches will ever become “a pair of meaningless words”, but this verse placed next to a person whose shadow actually grows with the passage of time takes on new power if you consider Marcelo Bielsa is yet to win much in his career, and for many this expresses contrary, some might say meaningless, things about himself. He remains to those who don't know him, and some who do, a mystery. To some he is considered to have contributed to

the game on a monumental scale, to others he's merely a nearly invisible treasure.

This book has been written to give an interpretation of The Philosophy and I believe the content of this book will either be rejected or upheld by the reader as a significant driver for the greatest change to the lenses the game is viewed through. To be rejected or imitated, but never ignored or meaningless. Never meaningless.

This book and proposed philosophy best represents the framework for football coach and player education within the football structures of Marcelo Bielsa, structures that have been adopted through imitation, or have provided inspiration for many elite level head coaches: Mauricio Pochettino, Gerardo Martino, Jorge Sampaoli, Eduardo Berizzo, Pep Guardiola, Mariano Soso, Diego Simeone, Darío Franco, Juan Manuel Llop, Roberto Martinez and many others; each a disciple of Bielsa, termed and popularised by the media as a Bielsista. Bielsa has left long-term legacies with the corridor country and Chile national team as well as Argentine powerhouse Newell's Old Boys, whose Stadium is now named 'Estadio Marcelo Bielsa'.

*“What I am quite certain about is that Marcelo Bielsa has not only had a great influence on the game on a tactical level, but we see many coaches today using similar methods of training, coaches like Pochettino, Simeone, Berizzo...”* – Eric Tenllado, Coach at Espanyol

This chapter has been subtitled: *“The original is unfaithful to the translation”*, a statement made by legendary Argentine short-story writer Jorge Luis Borges when praising Sam Henley's 1786 modified and English translation of William Beckford's 1782 original French



gothic novel *Vathek*. Marcelo Bielsa and *The Philosophy* are products of studied, adapted and imitated preceding philosophies of many others.

*"I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library."* - Jorge Luis Borges

Marcelo Bielsa is often said to own the most expansive library of football videos and literature, an anatomy of the game, thoughtfully analysed and theorised. From Francisco Maturana and Los Cafeteros (Colombia) of the 1990's, Jimmy Hogan and Hugo Miesl's great Austrian team of the 1930's, Gusztáv Sebes' Mighty Magyars (Hungary 1950's) through to Johan Cruyff, Rinus Michels, Viktor Maslov, Valeriy Lobanovskyi and Cesar Luis Menotti [...], Bielsa treats each precedent as if they were wise philosophers, learning something new from each one.

Then there are the nearly invisible treasures such as Chilean coach Arturo Salah, little-known Italian Ezio Glerean, Zdenek Zeman and Ricardo La Volpe that have added to Bielsa's theoretical thought processes and anatomy of football, each rejected and imitated. Each translated into Bielsa's anatomy of the game, a Paradise, contributing to *The Philosophy*. Bielsa, the translation of many. Improved upon so many others that have come before him.

Louis Van Gaal has perhaps added to that Paradise more than any other coach in recent years leading some of the world's biggest clubs: Bayern Munich, FC Barcelona, Ajax and Manchester United as well as taking a much unfancied Dutch National Team to third place at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. On paper (Manchester United aside), it would seem that Van Gaal had mastered the art of guiding the world's best teams to domestic and international titles. However, the success of Ajax (reaching two consecutive Champions League finals and winning one) was one of the least likely triumphs given the squad was made up of inexperienced teenagers. Accompanying this achievement, Van Gaal took a smaller club from Alkmaar (AZ) to the most improbable Eredivisie title in 2009, fending off the challenges of Dutch giants Ajax, PSV, Feyenoord and FC Twente.

Marcelo Bielsa watched the UEFA Champions League final between Ajax and the Italian Goliath, AC Milan, in 1995 over and over, and over. I'm convinced of it. Again and again [...], in perpetuity. There's an alluring symmetry

between the Ajax system of play used in the Ernst Happel Stadium (hosting its fourth Champions League final match in history) and the non-conforming freedom Bielsa has applied to the formations and positional slots in recent years with the Chilean National Team and Athletic Club Bilbao.

In an idea later adopted by Bielsa, both Edgar Davids and Ronald de Boer were expected to operate as central midfielders ahead of Rijkaard in midfield in a #1-3-3-3-1 formation (never forgetting the goalkeeper). The back three of Ajax (Frank de Boer, Michael Reiziger and Danny Blind) were formed as two central defenders and a traditional sweeper, instructed to maintain a narrowness as the defensive unit in the team.

Conventional thinking would assume the wingers/wide midfielders in such a system of play to track back and defend the deeper spaces between the back three and the touchline, or at least one of the wingers would drop back and the unit would shift across (an asymmetrical solution that Roberto Martinez would often demand of his Wigan FC side). Louis Van Gaal however, composed a system in which the two central midfielders (Davids and R. de Boer) would track the opposing wingers back into the deep wide spaces and the back three were to remain narrow.

There is simple and logical rationale to why such a system of play is still considered unique today: as two of the three central midfielders vacate their central positions, you are left to defend with only one to general the central areas of the field where a large majority of the goals assisted from. Louis Van Gaal then regained numbers in the centre by instructing Jari Litmanen (playing in the central attacking midfield role, No. 10) to fall back as part of a two-man central midfield (with Rijkaard) when defending.

From #1-3-3-3-1 to a #1-5-4-1, from central-midfield to wingback, from precedent entered into the Paradise.



AJAX ATTACKING FORMATION vs. AC MILAN (24th May 1995)



AJAX DEFENDING FORMATION vs. AC MILAN (24th May 1995)





Altering the position-slots (the area of the field a certain position is expected to cover during the game) is within itself an interesting concept, one I helped materialise with Oxford University's Development Squad in recent years during a former-role as the Development Squad's Head Coach: a journey recorded and told later in this book, revealing the learning outcomes of a team (including myself as the Head Coach) that went on to experiment with football in ways many never will have the opportunity to do so. Learning to change our lenses of which we view football and think about trust.

The ideology and tenets of Marcelo Bielsa have formed the content of this book more than any other person, but since this is my interpretation of The Philosophy it is most appropriate to note the many of the examples given in this book will be examples I have been fortunate enough to be close to. I have actively travelled around the world to sit with people who have worked with, under, around or near Marcelo Bielsa and his most loyal followers - not to gossip about Bielsa but to talk about football and de-construct the foundations for such a style of play to exist

It is important that I acknowledge I have invented nothing mentioned in this book and no idea mentioned in the book belongs to me. I may have packaged the ideas together from many coaches working on the same objectives, but nothing here is new.

The journey through this book reveals a personal set of experiences in uncovering and understanding the key concepts explored.

*"I am not sure that I exist, actually. I am all the writers that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the women that I have loved; all the cities I have visited."*

- Jorge Luis Borges

The conversations that have taken place are often theorised and/or drawn back to teams not related to the messenger to support and protect the privacy of those that have supported the study of The Philosophy. This book is fundamentally interested in the ideas discussed rather than the people spoken about. This is a book aggressively about football and that alone, it is not a book about the celebrity status of the individual delivering the messages.

I am confident that this book far outweighs any body of work that I've put together in my life time and succeeds in achieving its mission. You, the reader, will either reject the ideas and concepts outlined or you will uphold this book as the greatest driver of change in the lenses for which you view the game through, uncovering the nearly invisible treasures underpinning The Philosophy of Marcelo Bielsa and his followers: Pep Guardiola, Mauricio Pochettino, Gerardo Martino, Jorge Sampaoli, Eduardo Berizzo [...], You and I, Bielsista and Bielsista.



# 02 THE COMMON IDEA

## “Football is a game of 2 vs. 1’s”

- Ayrton Sargusingh

“*Football is a game of 2 vs. 1s*” ignites Ayrton, a former coach and parent of one of my coaching colleagues, as we sit down in a restaurant for dinner. I’m immediately intrigued and lean forward upon sitting down somewhere in the cold of Canada. I was previously curious as to the purpose of this dinner, but now I understand, I’ve met my match: someone that finds enjoyment in theorising the game and wants to be challenged. I’m at home, lost in a world of ideas that want to change your mind about everything you believe to be true. It’s the first time I’ve felt truly at home in a country obsessed with a sport on ice with helmets and sticks.

“*Go on...*” I respond quickly, not wanting to give myself any time to build any thought to dismiss such a claim or bounce back with something he’d have already considered when forming such a proposal. What follows is two and a half hours of sketching out situations, talking principles, putting up counter-arguments and scenarios that would require Ayrton to stand up and perform various technical demonstrations amongst a busy restaurant. Neither of us anywhere but on an imaginary football field; we’ve not a care in the world for the couple sitting next to us, filling their hours with small talk for what must have been a first date, but ruined by the distraction of the constant movement of Ayrton and I.

Movement: “*I always tell my guys that our playing style is about movement*” says Marcelo Bielsa before further detailing “*movement, rotation, concentration and improvisation*” as the four cornerstones to his footballing philosophy, but the common idea (also known as the core idea) is movement to create opportunities for penetration.

The common idea is a form of non-verbal communication, a belief system that underpins the choices we make on a football field and in our training environment. Marti Perarnau writes in his brilliant book ‘Pep Confidential:

The Inside Story of Pep Guardiola’s First Season at Bayern Munich’ that Pep Guardiola views the core idea as “*the essence of a team and its coach...the synthesis between a particular belief system and its group’s stated mission*” (pg. 55). The most obvious example would be Johan Cruyff’s ideology where “*the idea is to dominate with the ball*”, a common idea explored in great depths in my first book ‘Coaching the Tiki-Taka Style of Play’.

During my active research over the last five years (combining both books), the common idea I have entrusted my ideas in has evolved and developed; the evolution of this common idea is one best explained through three quotes, from three influential managers. From the beginning many coaches adopt Common Idea 1.0 as part of their personal preferences for how they wish to develop the playing style, few move on to Common Idea 2.0 and give purpose to their possession; fewer still discover what the game is really about: not just the movement of twenty-two players and the ball, but also to facilitate penetration by understanding the different spaces and scenarios on a football field.

### Common Idea 1.0

“*I’ve always worked along the statistic, that if you can dominate the game with the ball you have a 79% chance of winning a game of football.*”

- Brendan Rodgers

### Common Idea 2.0

“*The objective is to move the opponent, not the ball.*”

- Pep Guardiola

### Common Idea 3.0

“*It is not about the opponent, it is not about the ball, it is about the space the ball may be played into and the opponent that may come into it.*”

- Louis van Gaal



If we are to consider the implications of each of the common ideas, we are brought to different lenses of which we can view the game and devise a game model from.

How exactly Brendan Rodgers has calculated his statistic depends on how he has quantified 'dominate the game', perhaps he is referring to very particular spaces on the football field? More likely however is the idea that to 'dominate with the ball' is specific to the team and its players, for Swansea those players may have been Leon Britton, Nathan Dyer and Scott Sinclair, and therefore to dominate the game for Swansea means to dominate with the ball through these areas of the field with these key players. Liverpool on the other hand, would dominate through Suarez, Sturridge and Coutinho's areas of the field with these key players; a very different type of domination, specific to the team's strengths.

Only those who helped designed Rodgers' formula for what 'dominate the game with the ball' means. I know from my experiences with being involved with the strategic decision making processes with Magnus Pehrsson of the Estonia National Team, that to dominate the game with the ball against Slovenia looks very different to dominating the game with the ball against San Marino, Finland or Iceland for example.

To fully understand Common Idea 3.0, we will return to this idea at a later stage in this book because without the context of Louis van Gaal's principles (similar to those underpinning Marcelo Bielsa's in some areas) the words appear meaningless; without the blueprint to The Philosophy, Marcelo Bielsa's common idea too appears to be both sweeping and hollow.

*"Football is a game of 2 vs. 1's"*, Ayrton fires up again to solidify his common idea after a discussion based on the traditional values that *"Football is a game of 1 vs. 1's"*, values expressed at the foundations of Roberto Martinez's philosophy among many others.

*"Take this 2 vs. 3 scenario, [Ayrton draws out a flat 3 against 2 players, one either side - see figure 2.01] it's still a 2 vs. 1"*. Ayrton goes on to detail that only one of the three players in the flat three is active and the objective of player A is to transfer the ball to player B, to penetrate, to think 'vertically'.

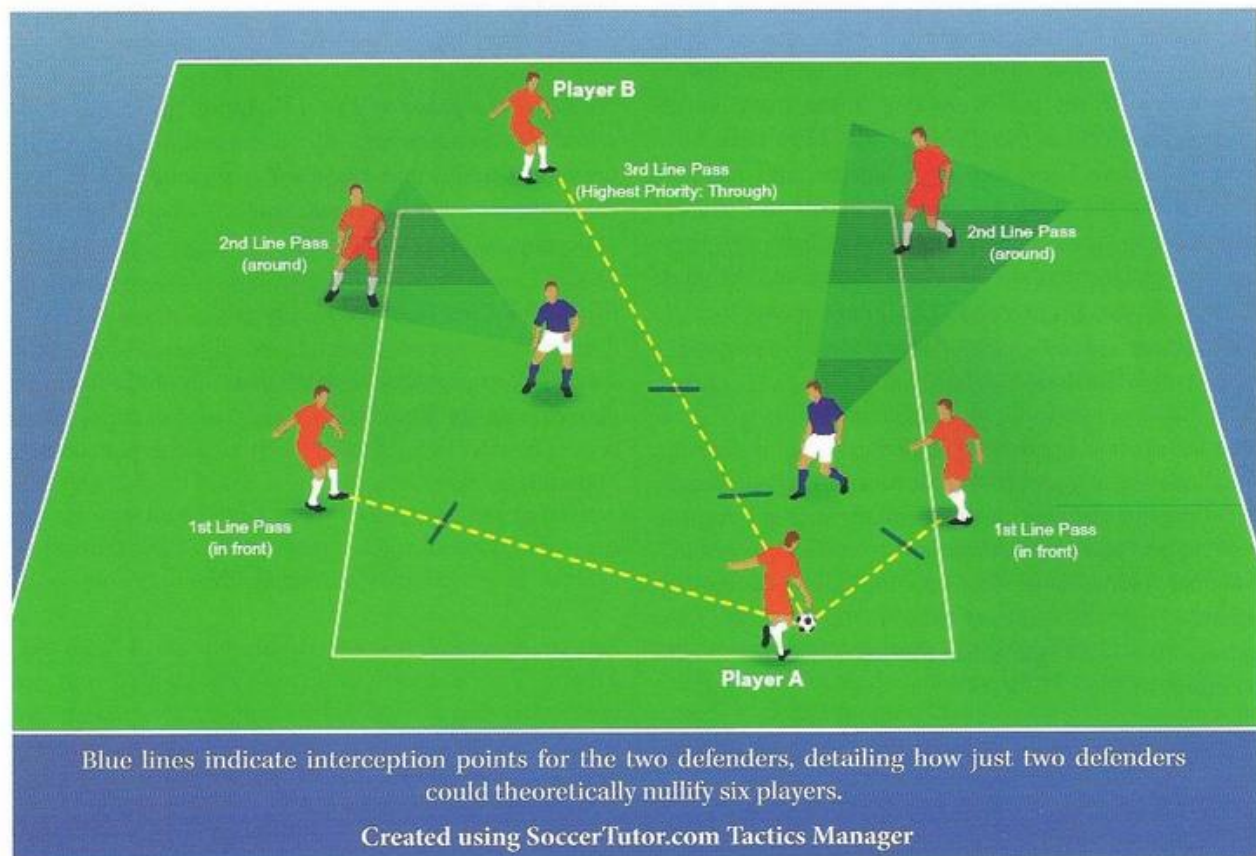
Figure 2.01



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Immediately I think back to the principles of defending the third line pass in a 6 vs. 2 rondo. I then strike up what I felt was a damning response to Ayrton's theoretical thinking "OK, but what if the midfield take up better shape and aren't flat? Because no midfield should be happy getting beat with one pass like that".

I draw out the basis of the 6 vs. 2 rondo and detail the various types of coaching detail within it



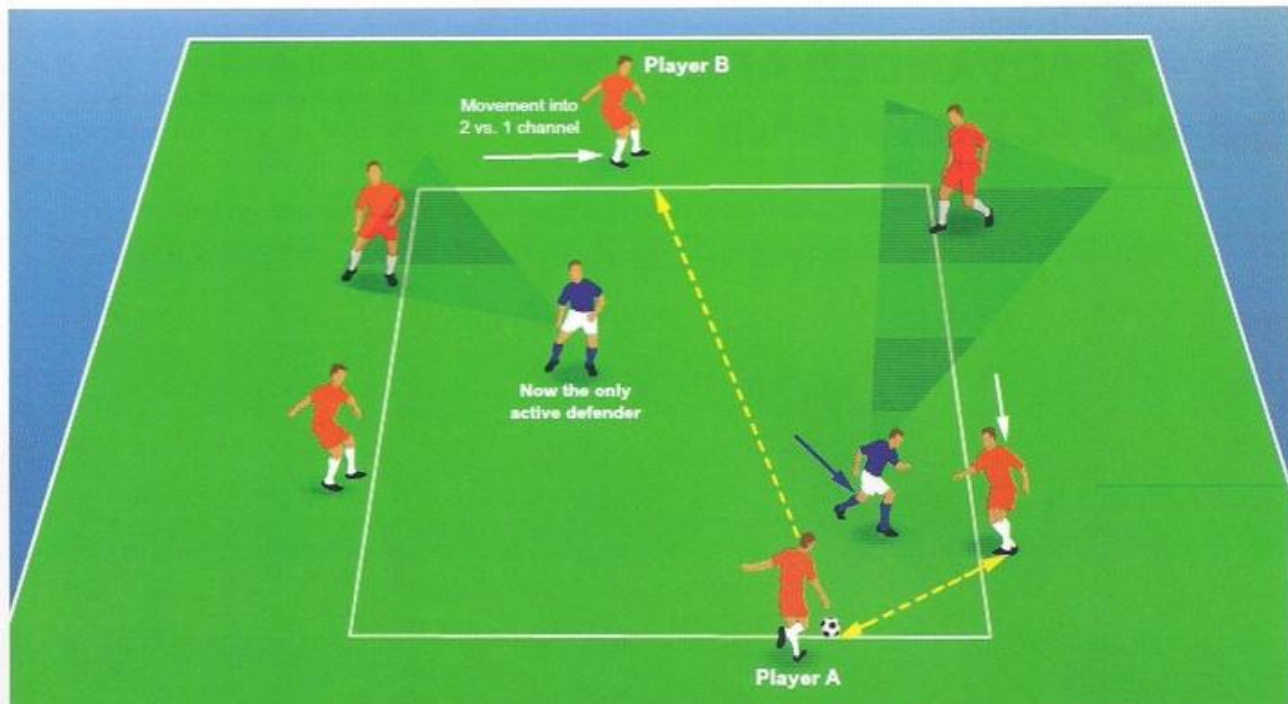
In the 6 vs. 2 rondo the defenders should be positioned off-set (on two different lines so they are not flat) and if possible they should look to try and block any 2nd line passing option (to play around). In the perfect theory, the defenders are positioned in a way that they invite a third line pass (the most desirable option for the attackers) but do so with two interception points due to the angles they are off-set from one another. If possible the defenders can also be positioned to intercept any 1st line pass as well.

If the above theory and scenario presents itself then the defenders, despite being only two, can beat six players in a rondo. It is this theory that suggests Ayrton's flat midfield three would be undesirable for the defensive players.

I'm then hit for six by the final swing of Ayrton's theoretical thinking. I don't remember exactly what was said or what was drawn but I know I was left with a lightbulb that was perhaps already there, but not yet switched on as I returned to Common Idea 2.0, a belief I had deeply rooted in much of my methodology and way of thinking at the time: *"the objective is to move the opposition, not the ball"*.

With the theory from the 6 vs. 2 rondo we can analyse that there may still be a potential 2 vs. 1 scenario as Ayrton outlined if the two defensive players are flat or too far apart. However, to achieve one of those two scenarios we must look to use our movement (of both the ball and our players) to move and control the positioning of the two defenders.





The near supporting player in red drops down and bounces ball back off of his left foot. This 1st line pass invited the first defender to try and intercept, thus moving him from his original position and removing him from being able to affect play (creating a 2 vs. 1)

Created using SoccerTutor.com Tactics Manager

After several days of obsessive exploration, new ideas surfaced and new lenses were discovered up from the simple idea: "football is a game of 2 vs. 1's". This was by all means only the beginning of a process that later arrives at the same conclusion as both Louis van Gaal and Marcelo Bielsa. A necessary and significant step in our structures of understanding the game both as players and coaches, a necessary step in giving meaning to words that are anything but sweeping and hollow.

*"A player like Gary Medel sees the 2 vs. 1 when playing out from the back in a way that the more natural central defenders don't. That for me is why Bielsa saw value in playing him deeper in the build-up play as a central defender instead of in his more natural position in centre midfield"* – Chris Davies (former Liverpool FC coach and Head of Analysis, now Celtic FC Assistant Manager)

*"Marcelo Bielsa tended to play the attacking players in deeper positions because a player with attacking mentality gives you consistency in the attack and improves the output of the ball. He did it with Javi Martinez at Athletic Bilbao."* – Pep Clotet (Assistant Manager to Garry Monk at Swansea and then Leeds United for who Marcelo Bielsa is his mentor)

This book details how Bielsa's structures look to create qualitative (superiority of stronger versus weaker players when matched 1 vs. 1), numerical and positional superiorities. Just as "not all 1 vs. 1's are a situation of equality" (Paco Seirul-Lo), not all overloads are equal and The Philosophy outlined in this book details where 2 vs. 1's are most valuable.

*Not all 2 vs. 1's are equal.*

## TERMINOLOGY

**Qualitative Superiority** - one player is better than another player in the specific scenario in terms of player identity (technical, physical, psychological, insight). The requirements of the scenario are to be considered

**Quantitative / Numerical Superiority** - one team having more players than another team in the given scenario

**Positional Superiority** - one team having taken up better positions in the given scenario to meet the objectives of that scenario (taking into account the priorities of the game as detailed throughout this book)



## 03 ADVANCED AREA ACTIONS (AAA)

“It is not about the opponent, it is not about the ball, it is about the space the ball may be played into and the opponent that may come into it”

- Louis van Gaal

James Nash, a coach I consider to be one of the brightest minds quietly working in world football, once told me during one of our eight hour conversations in a Starbucks somewhere in Milton Keynes that he would pose the question to his players: “what was the value of that pass?”. James’ way of thinking is so often thought-provoking and challenging on a personal level, he has a way that often leaves you driving away feeling both inspired and yet exhausted from all the introspection and analysis he forces upon any ideas presented to him.

‘What was the value of that pass?’, was a phrase that struck me because the idea of quantifying football actions (a pass) is one generally considered to be so subjective that from time to time, it devalues the idea of passes that would later go on to part of a third or fourth man movement. However, the intended message was one I found insightful.

Some years later, I reviewed several training sessions where Marcelo Bielsa was the coach, driving intensity of action and commenting on every execution of pass; every detail has meaning:

*“There are 36 different forms of communicating through a pass”* – Marcelo Bielsa

There are hundreds of different ways to theorise communication through a pass and how exactly Bielsa has chosen to do so when determining that there are thirty-six forms of communication is known only by Bielsa and his inner circles. The structures of his theory aren’t known even to his players, but the appropriate forms of communication are revealed to those that each form is appropriate for. That is to say that a striker and a central defender are given

different detail on what forms of communicating through a pass they should be expected to demonstrate during games.

What we do know is that the communication that shines brightest for Bielsa is the form of communication that facilitates ‘verticality’, the idea to penetrate the opposition lines.

When Marcelo Bielsa took over as the new manager of Marseille in 2014, one of the first issues the Argentine chose to address on the training field, in his second session at the end of June, were the various techniques players could use to pass the ball relevant to the position on the field, moment of the game, direction of pass and speed at which the pass should be played at.

When reviewing footage of an Athletic Club Bilbao training session, I noticed several markings on the field in an unopposed pattern practice. Before querying the markings on the field I recognised the passing pattern being practiced, a form of non-verbal communication that will be detailed (along with many other key non-verbal communication languages) in the following chapters, this particular pattern is well-known worldwide as an ‘up-back and through’ [detailed in chapter 10].

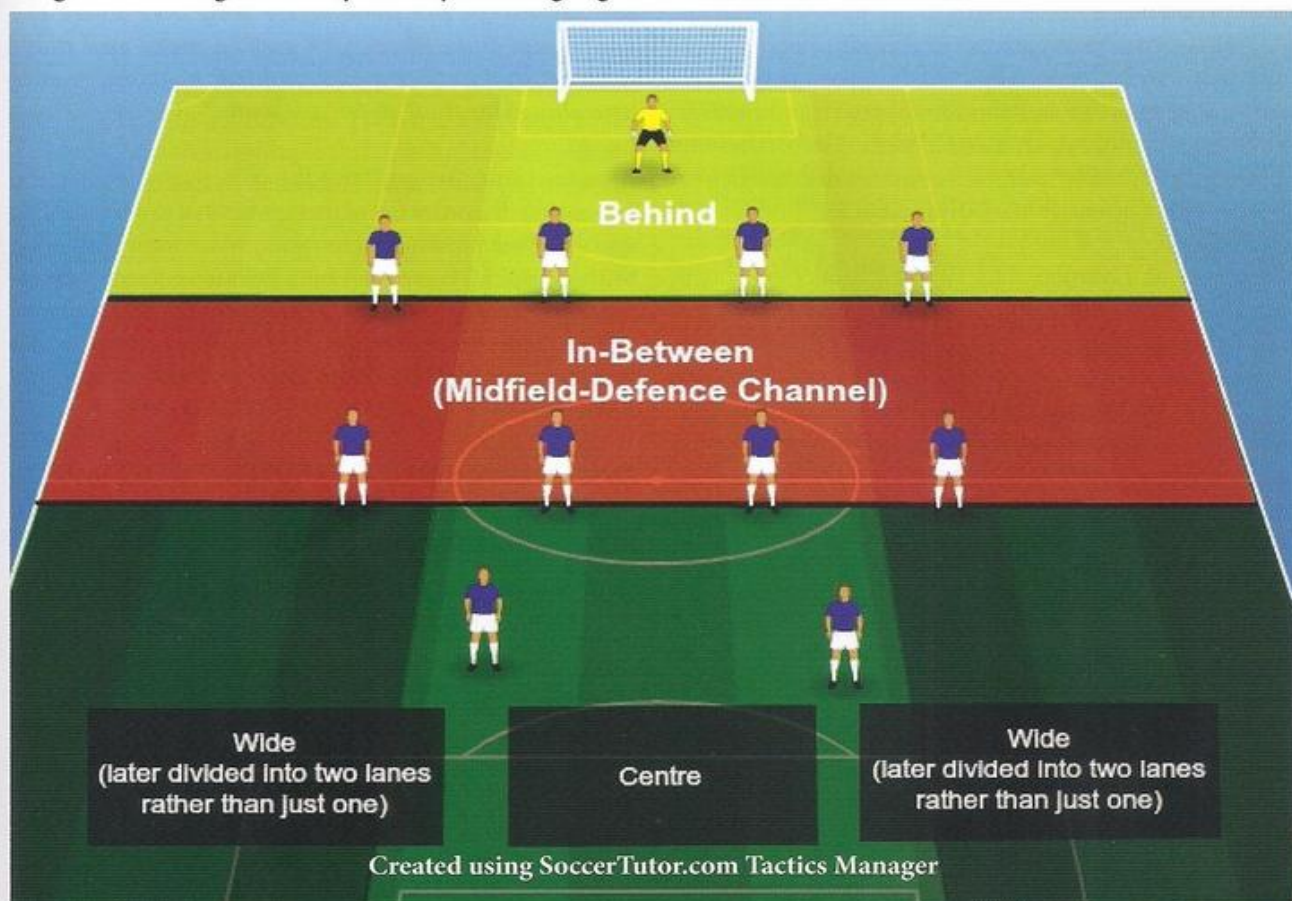
On further analysis and research, I later learned that I had stumbled upon significant detail that on any other day I may have overlooked; the positioning of the air body inflatables were laid out on the field so that they were to outline the theoretical positioning of the opposition midfield and defensive lines in a #1-4-4-2 formation.

The two horizontal lines of air body inflatables were



accompanied by four cones to divide the field into three vertical channels. In this session, I was probably looking at the most fundamental markings whereby all movement was referenced within for Marcelo Bielsa. I didn't know it yet, but this training session for only a few members of Athletic Bilbao's first team squad was to be the building block I needed to make sense of seemingly unconnected information collected on an alternative set of principles of play.

**Diagram detailing the theory and key areas highlighted in the Athletic Bilbao session**



'Advanced Area Actions' (AAA; 'triple A; Advanced Areas), the term suitably given to any pass or dribble (take on) that enters into or takes place within the midfield-defensive lines of the opposition (in-between) and those that go beyond the defensive line (behind). An AAA can include any crosses and shots from within a desired area set out by the team's strategies employed. I want to be clear at this point that AAA is used throughout this book but is language aimed for the purposes of coaches, not necessarily for players. This language has been created to develop a placeholder for the information in this book and approach to football philosophy. - it isn't perfect and that's for the reader to consider when planning for application of theory.

*"Football is a complex game, so the most important goal is to be very clear"* – Pepijn Lijnders

Taking influence from Jan Tamboer's action theory (from the book *Football Theory*, 2016), the theory that the father of total football, Rinus Michels, called the "mother theory" of football, we can now look to analyse the game through the objective lenses of Advanced Area Actions. That is to say that the measure of AAA per minute is one whereby we can assess the processes in attacking performance of a team, beyond the measure of shots on target. We as coaches are presented with a framework of which to better the communication between players on a football field - a framework the action theory to fit within.



My research on Advanced Area Actions has taken me from Argentina, Chile, England, France, Spain and Portugal through to the Canadian Women's National Team where I have discovered coaches employing very similar ideas, each guarding their breakdown of the game within their inner circles. For example, the term 'Advanced Platforms' (ADVP) is defined as any player with the ball, facing forwards (a platform to play forward from) in the following spaces on the field: in between the opposition striker and midfield (Platform only, not an Advanced Platform), in between the opposition's midfield (Advanced) and defenders and behind the opposition defensive line (Advanced).

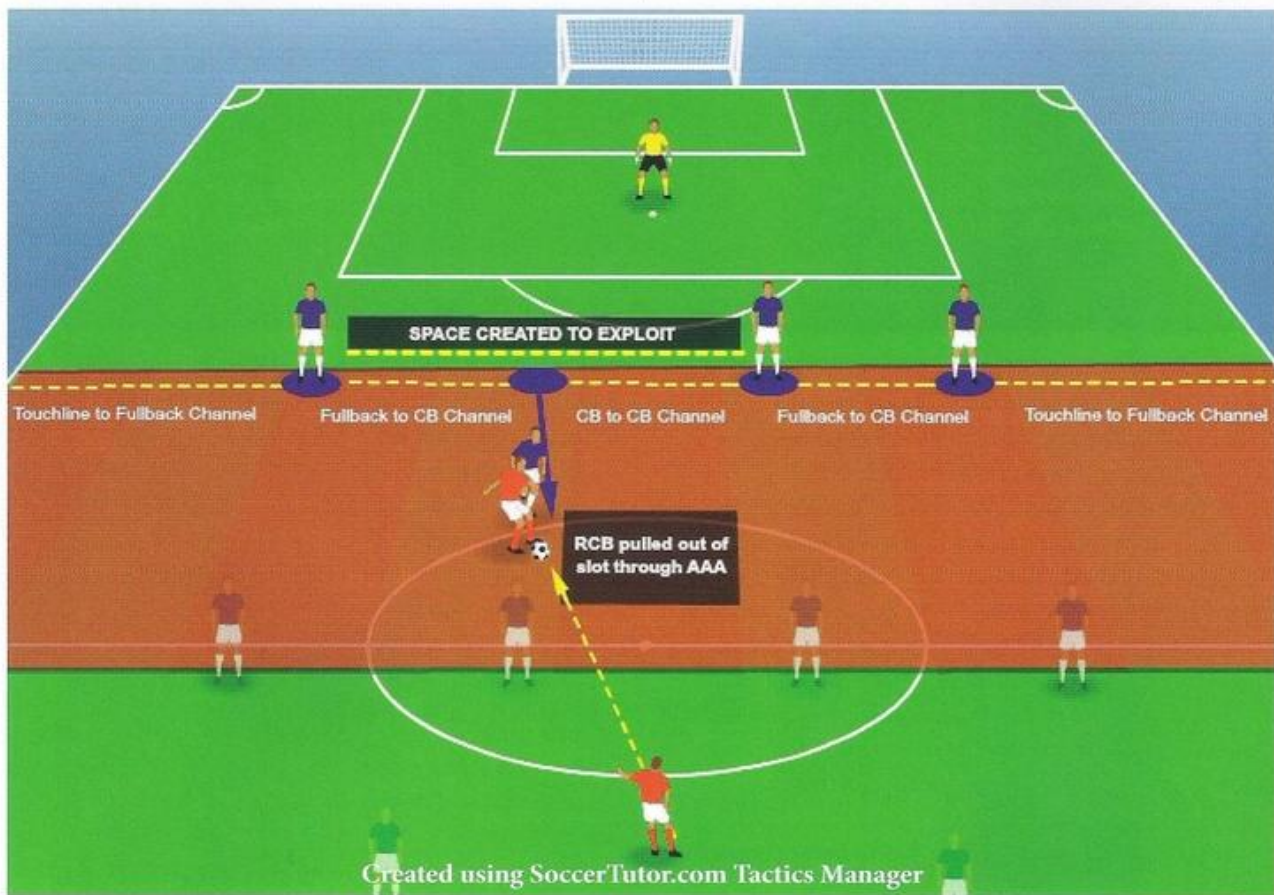
Elsewhere, at Liverpool FC, Pepijn Lijnders took with him the idea of 'initiatives' with him from Porto and PSV. Initiatives are to account for any pass that occurs in between the opposition midfield and defence or behind the opposition defence. While the measures of ADVP and Initiatives are deemed useful and appropriate to fit within the common idea of those implementing the approaches, there are various differences in the objectives and language used when defining its purpose. There are many clubs,

coaches and analytical companies using different language to achieve the same message: to encourage penetration over possession.

*"Organisations of teams are improving, they protect the middle of the field better and take away the space and time faster...It's getting more and more difficult to create chances, to push back opponents and slaughter their defensive walls"* – Pepijn Lijnders

Advanced Area Actions have the objective of moving the opposition defenders out of their positional slot (increasing space between defenders) to create space for a teammate to then exploit, therefore by its definition, credit can be awarded to a pass whereby the player receiving the ball is not forward facing. Advanced Area Actions now brings about meaning to Louis van Gaal's common idea expressed in the quote:

*"It is not about the opponent, it is not about the ball, it is about the space the ball may be played into and the opponent that may come into it."*





No model researched on this topic has been perfect. ADVP doesn't give credit for players not facing forwards. Initiatives credit a horizontal pass in between the opposition midfield and defence where a through ball might have been available.

Bielsa himself uses a model to assess individuals (not teams) and their own performance in relation to the number of players a pass goes past as a way of encouraging the same message, but once again this methodology is not successful when it comes to the measuring of team level success. We can have one scenario here that highlights the problem of expanding Bielsa's individual player analysis to team analysis.

Imagine your team has the ball with a central defender and he plays to an attacking midfielder between lines (beating four players across the width of the pitch) but then the attacking midfielder plays the ball back out to the central defender to find a new pass into the block. Again that defender plays a pass into the block (again beating four opponents across the width of the field). You may have a team performance of '8' in this scenario as you have played passes beyond eight players when we combine the two penetrating passes. This sequence could continue and we would find a positive score as the opportunities to pass beyond many players keeps returning without real rewards.

Now take that same scenario, only this time the central attacking midfielder plays a horizontal pass in between lines (not credited since it did not go past a player). In playing this horizontal pass we pull out the opposition central defender and we can then play a through ball to an attempt at goal.

In both scenarios using the method of counting the number of players the pass went beyond we may receive the same amount of team points. However, the second scenario is far more beneficial. The Initiatives model is the only one that would credit that entire sequence of actions as positive.

Criticisms aside, **these are all tools for the coaching process to implement The Philosophy.** Useful tools in the coaching process, but imperfect in their current form for the purposes of absolute statistical analysis. It is for these reasons that this book has proposed an alternative model that considers the coaching process and yet still employs the same overarching message that many are placing emphasis on: Marcelo Bielsa, Pepijn Lijnders and Canada Women's National Teams (among many others who have made efforts not to be considered in the public's attention).

If we are to use the references laid out in this chapter on Advanced Area Actions (AAA), there are a number of different implications and questions put forward:

- How many AAA per minute is considered to be Best Practice for a team? Should this even be an objective?
- How many AAA per minute is considered to be Best Practice for each position in the team (if we consider each pass into the area as one AAA point)?
- What is considered Best Practice for the completion rate for total AAA attempted (team / position)?
- How does the opposition structure and formation affect AAA (per minute / completion rate)?
- How should we look at incorporating AAA theory to the development of young players?
- What are the methods employed to increase the number of AAA per minute for a team (rotations, movement etc.)?
- Do the best players in the world achieve the highest number of AAA per minute?
- Can we use AAA per minute as a tool for identifying and assessing players' performance?
- How does the understanding of AAA theory promote communication in a team?
- Which Advanced Areas are more valuable than others against this opponent, with these players in this moment?

Note that 'per minute' is used to highlight the idea that a playing style is calculated as a certain type of actions per minute and 'football fitness' is defined as maintaining the playing style over the duration of a game. It is a worthy exploration for anyone to consider analysis of 'football fitness' of opponents and our own teams with a similar thought process and methodology. Could we conclude that a team is less 'football fit' than the average team after three minutes of an increase in explosive football actions and therefore we can adopt an approach to take advantage of this moment? Could it be that we conclude a team's playing style is less successful at certain times during the game based on this type of analysis?

The Advanced Area Action model differs to others mentioned because it places significant focus on recognisable scenarios and patterns between lines. Advanced Area Actions doesn't attempt to be anything other than a model for the coaching process of players.

The remainder of this book puts forward a model for the coaching process and some queries into further usage; a model not invented by the author, but theorised from hundreds of hours researching the methodology of Bielsa and his followers.



# 04 PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

“The solution is an alternative plan? No. The solution is to improve and deepen the resolution of the plan that we have”

- Marcelo Bielsa

At the heart of Bielsa's ostensibly romantic philosophy is brutal logic, a decision making order whereby penetration is of the highest order, followed by various structures that enable your team to communicate in a language that facilitates penetration.

If “*top players find a way to play forwards 61% of the time*” (Tim Lees in the book *Developing an Elite Coaching Philosophy*), then it is safe to say that anything less than this figure is below the threshold.

In football, every action has two elements: the technical execution of action and a decision making element. The majority of football coaches recognise the value of promoting a ‘common idea’ that underpins the belief system of the team and within that belief system, are a set of principles of play to help shape decision making at a team level on a football field, but decision making itself is a complex field of study that should not be an area under-researched.

In the book ‘*Streetlights and Shadows: Searching for the Keys to Adaptive Decision Making*’ by Gary Klein (2011), we are introduced to the concept of different situations whereby we can make decisions; at the highest level, we can have complex decision making situations and well-ordered decision making situations:

- Well-ordered decision making situations are those that rely less on external factors, more predictable and often reoccurring with relatively low levels of differentiation.
- Complex decision making situations on the other hand, rely on subjective experiences rather than a set of rules and procedures to perform successful decision making due to the high number of external factors.

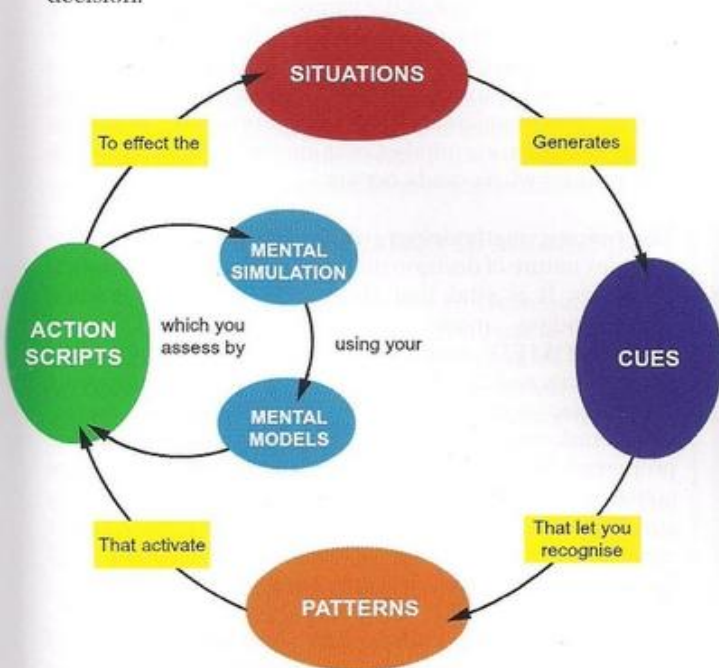
Throughout most literature relating to our brains (conscious and sub-conscious), we are presented with the idea that part of our brain is responsible for logic, rational thinking and plan making, and another competing part of our brain is responsible for emotional decision making, creativity and acting quickly (intuition). Methods of self-management such as Dr. Steve Peters’ Inner Chimp model are nothing but management tools that understand how these two parts of the brain compete. This book will not cover these areas in too much detail but there is plenty of literature that supports such a model of understanding the brain. What this book will consider is how the theory detailed in this chapter relates to decision making on a football field and how that may affect the playing style.

One of the big claims Klein tackles in his book ‘*Streetlights and Shadows*’ (2011) is that “Teaching people procedures helps them perform tasks more skilfully”, a claim that is reflected in so many systems of teaching and training around the world, across a myriad of disciplines. The claim suggests that by breaking down a skill into its rational processes we can transfer these processes and learn them consciously. This methodology is in keeping with the ‘1. Unconsciously incompetent > 2. Consciously incompetent > 3. Consciously competent > 4. Unconsciously competent (> 5. Unconsciously competent with the ability to reflect)’ model of learning, one whereby we are consciously taught procedures that later are so well absorbed we are able to execute the skill without conscious thought, through intuition.

The Dreyfus Model of Decision Making suggests that intuition and tacit knowledge cannot be captured in rules and procedures but learning can begin by doing so and that later we must move beyond rules to achieve mastery in a



skill (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988). Through research and study of decision making in fire fighters, oil installation crisis managers, navy technicians and U.S. pilots landing planes in scenarios whereby a plane crash seemed most likely (case: Hudson River 2009, U.S. Airways flight 1529) we have analysed the need for improvisation to go beyond procedures that the individual has become unconsciously competent at performing skilfully. Each discipline listed above has a variety of decision making situations, both complex and well-ordered. During the study of decision making under the pressure of complex situations, research has shown 80-90% of all the actions from fire fighters and other professions (Klein, 2011) follow the Recognition Primed Decision Model (RPD model: Klein, Calderwood and Clinton-Cirocco, 1986) which combines intuition with analysis (combining both the conscious and sub-conscious) in making a decision.



The RPD Model details a combination of both conscious and sub-conscious structures that lead decision making in disciplines that require a blend of intuition and analysis (such as football). Action Scripts are intuition based; action scripts in football are the techniques required to pass, shoot, cross, dribble, run with the ball through space and so on. These Action Scripts at a team level must therefore allow for improvisation to take place: actions that deter from the prescribed actions in the playing style.

*“Totally mechanised teams are useless, because they get lost when they lose their script. But I also don’t like ones*

*that only rely on the inspiration of their soloists, because when God doesn’t turn them on, they are left totally at the mercy of their opponents.”*

– Marcelo Bielsa

Marcelo Bielsa’s understanding of decision making in football is one that follows the structures of the RPD Model, one where there are cues in situations which have various solutions through action scripts. Bielsa has worked with various techniques to bring about successful action scripts on a football field but one of the biggest hurdles to overcome is that of ourselves as human beings: our fear, our lack of discipline or any other undesirable human quality that can affect decision making.

*“If football were played by robots, I would win everything”* – Marcelo Bielsa

One of the strategies employed by Bielsa to overcome poor decision making on a football field is to address the issue of our fear growing (in our subconscious) and masking any good intuitive or conscious decision.

*“The player, like any person who deals with great pressure, has what I call a ‘temor escénico’, a fear of failure. How can you neutralise that? By mechanising; by letting the player do something he is used to doing, something he practiced repeatedly and allowing for a very slim margin of error”*

– Marcelo Bielsa

Mechanising play for Bielsa is about recreating the situations that players will be in over and over again, with each situation revealing various cues and therefore action scripts to be employed. In repeating the action scripts (such as the languages of the game) over and over, the player would eventually be able to execute these actions with intuition and feel comfortable in a situation that would otherwise feel uncomfortable with great pressures on the player. Many of Bielsa’s session formats are specific to only those attending, sometimes the attendance for a session includes only four or five players whereby the session information includes concentrated information for those players only. These sessions will often be set up with inflatable air-bodies that are set in position to recreate the situation in terms of opponent positioning and the spaces on a football field.



Dr. Raoul Oudejans, an associate professor at the Faculty of Human Movement Sciences at the VU University Amsterdam, is considered to be one of the world's leading experts in 'training and performing under pressure' and looks at one of Bielsa's four key elements in implementing his football philosophy: concentration.

Oudejans believes that high pressure scenarios bring about an increase in anxiety and therefore result in changes in attention, leading to a performance decrement.

**High Pressure + Increase in anxiety -  
Changes in attention = Performance decrement**

The increase in anxiety is a subconscious reaction to the high pressures a player can be under in a game of football, but it is the changes in attention or concentration that result in a lesser decision being made. Oudejans looks at attention as the process of choosing which information to retain, and those with expertise in attention are able to detect between important information and irrelevant information using what Oudejans calls 'the filter'.

There are two well-known training method approaches that help players become better at retaining the right information when performing under pressure:

- Train under pressure and recreate many of the same sensory experiences the player may come under during performance. Therefore, attempting to present the player with 'the situation' as close as we can to what will be experienced in the game. When observing Bielsa in his training environment, one of the first things noted is Bielsa's methodology of driving intensity and pressure in his sessions through his animated coaching style. Perhaps better suited to training elements where complex situations occur.
- 'Quiet-Eye Training': that of breaking the action script into procedures or key checkpoints or cues so that the player can move away from the subconsciously controlled decision making part of his brain and towards a rational mindset that focuses on the process of the action rather than its end product. The Inner Chimp model of self-management works in a very similar way, bringing about a conscious separation and awareness from unwanted emotional influences and the desirable qualities we would want to demonstrate. This is very applicable to well-ordered situations whereby the situation reoccurs often.

We are once again addressed with the two situations we can experience in a game of football, those that are complex and those that are well-ordered. Klein later writes that *"In complex situations, people need judgement skills to follow procedures effectively and go beyond them when necessary"*, meaning that in complex situations we must promote an element of improvisation and freedom to break the procedure if necessary. We must allow for the 'other 10-20%' of actions that do not follow RPD Model.

Bielsa's approach is not one that looks to create players who can calculate and follow procedures on a football field

but instead one with the objective of creating players who see the situations. This approach can only be taken when players have experienced the situations, cues, patterns and action scripts over and over again. It is for this reason that Bielsa prefers to take sessions with only four or five players participating from time to time. Delivering sessions with a focus on concentration (as detailed in this chapter), movement and rotation.

The other 10-20% of actions that do not fit the RPD Model are often included in sessions whereby most of the squad is in attendance, where there are many external factors in achieving any action scripts that players have learned. In developing players who can excel in the other 10-20% of actions successfully, we must educate players to become continuously aware during the game, installed with the understanding of the situations, cues, patterns and action scripts written into their playing style. Mark Sampson of the England Women's National Team talks about the game being broken into 'grey areas and black and white areas'. The grey areas form 20% of all the game's scenarios and in these moments Sampson employs guidelines that look to alter the focus of decision making in this 20%: are we playing with a counter attack mindset or are we playing with a build and play mindset? England will go into a game with an emphasis being placed on one mindset over another, providing a guide to players for where doubt occurs.

The training methodology within this book reflects the complex nature of decision making and the implementation processes. It is vital that there is a clear distinguished understanding made between **COMPLEXITY** and **COMPLICATED**: complicated refers to the individual components and the thousands of roles those components should play, complexity on the other hand refers to the simple task restraints and interaction resulting in emerging properties through a 'constant state of inquiry without conclusion'. That is to say complicated deals with a very specific scenario with one or two key images (and is reliant upon many factors), complexity deals with the dynamism of the scenario and is responsive to change.

*"Understanding requires not just a moment of perception, but a continuous awareness, a constant state of inquiry without conclusion"* – Bruce Lee

The remaining content of this chapter will reveal the principles of play remodelled into principles that facilitate the playing style for The Philosophy. Typically, the principles of play that are taught on various coaching courses around the world follow the same wide-ranging and non-specific principles: 1. Penetration, 2. Dispersal (provide width and depth), 3. Movement, 4. Support, 5. Improvisation

These five principles can be set about in a hierarchical structure: how can we penetrate, if we cannot, then do we have the dispersal to help facilitate penetration, if not then can we facilitate penetration through movement, if not can we support the person on the ball and failing that then can we use improvisation to facilitate penetration. The principles



are also designed to be overlapping and provide a diversity of choice within the structures.

Many do not take an understanding of these five principles to serve penetration at the top of the order and instead are left with a watered-down understanding of the game, one that was not intended with those that drew up the adopted principles of play. These principles now serve coaches and players with a framework of how we can play the game. They provide us with situations, cues and patterns within principles and suggest action scripts in guiding our decision making on a football field.

However, this book offers an alternative: a set of principles specific to the playing style that brings about clarity and purpose to the principles. While I do not disagree with the principles of play adopted worldwide, I think better clarity could be brought about through reinterpreting these principles and being more specific to the playing style. The following principles, for the most part, actually do fit within the structures of the principles of play adopted world-wide.

These new principles require concentration of situations, cues and patterns, they require movement and rotation to help achieve the principles and to change the situations, and lastly they require improvisation to act on the 10-20% of actions that are necessary to take in complex situations.

#### PRINCIPLES OF PLAY: SITUATION TO ACTION SCRIPT

1. If possible, the highest order is to create an effective Advanced Area Action, often through a pass to feet (note: for 'control' to be present) or dribble. Control is defined as having the conditions present to complete the next desirable action – it does not necessarily require us to take a 'controlling touch'.

2. If AAA are not possible then does the opportunity ask you to use one of the structures that enable one of the following three processes:

(a) Spread the opponent out horizontally (create gaps to play through)?

(b) Spread the opponent out vertically (create AAA space between the opposition midfield and defence or behind the opposition)?

(c) Draw the opposition to be positioned in straight lines or create the scenario whereby the opposition are positioned in straight lines in one direction?

3. If principles 1 and 2 are not possible, is the situation one whereby a switch of the ball (+2 lanes) to change the angle of attack and the picture of play for the receiving player, will allow for the creation an Advanced Area Action? (note: the term 'lanes' is used in this book to refer to the vertical corridors or channels that make up the division of the field)

4. If none of the above are possible, then the situation requires you to retain and "play your way out", with each new pass in the sequence offering opportunity for principles 1-3.

Now armed with a set of principles of play specific to the playing style, the following chapters will look into each of the four principles in much greater depth, detailing how rotations and movement play such a key role in the attacking principles of Marcelo Bielsa's philosophy.

An understanding of decision making and how we can develop the playing style should be something the coach thinks about regularly, always. We should always be looking for ways to deepen our understanding of these principles and our tactical solutions should use the same lens: how can we create more Advanced Area Actions? How can we best employ principle 2 to increase the number of AAA per minute?

*"The solution is an alternative plan? No. The solution is to improve and deepen the resolution of the plan that we have"* – Marcelo Bielsa

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This book heavily places focus on attacking. I would challenge the reader to create the opposite for the priorities while defending.

Scoring goals, assisting goals, 'assisting the assisting of goals' are the three highest priorities when attacking. Then we work our way down the principles of play outlined on this page.

What then is the opposite of each of those for defending? The opposite of scoring goals, assisting goals, assisting the assist and then each of the four principles that make up the content of this book. Before reading on below this sentence make an attempt at answering these questions

You likely thought of one of two priorities at the highest order. 'To win the ball back' or 'to prevent the opponent from scoring (taking shots from goal scoring positions)'. You must remember that the objective of the game is to 'score more than the opponent' and that same argument can be made for the objective for all areas of the game.

I would argue we should prioritise 'preventing goals', 'preventing assists' and then 'preventing the key pass to a scenario from which we can then assist from'. After that we are creating opposites for the principles of play on this page. Winning a ball back can be argued as a byproduct of defending well and getting the priorities right.

'To score more than the opponent' is and will always be the highest objective of the game. But our approach to defending can be interpreted in one of two ways.

It isn't unthinkable that between Bielsa, Mourinho and Zeman we would have a variety of attempts in answering this very question - each with a strong case.



# 05 ADVANCED AREA ACTIONS: FURTHER DETAIL

“We want to dominate the game between our midfield and our attack, and we want to dominate the game [in these spaces] to get behind their defensive line...it is always about that attacking style and finding the right spaces to penetrate”

- Pepijn Lijnders, First Team Coach at Liverpool FC (Formerly FC Porto)

Previously in this book, Advanced Area Actions have been introduced to package all space between the opposition midfield and defence, or beyond the opposition defence as spaces of equality. If we consider the space in front and behind each of the opposition back four then we can map out strategy and analysis that is both specific and valuable, or as Lijnders says ‘the right spaces’.

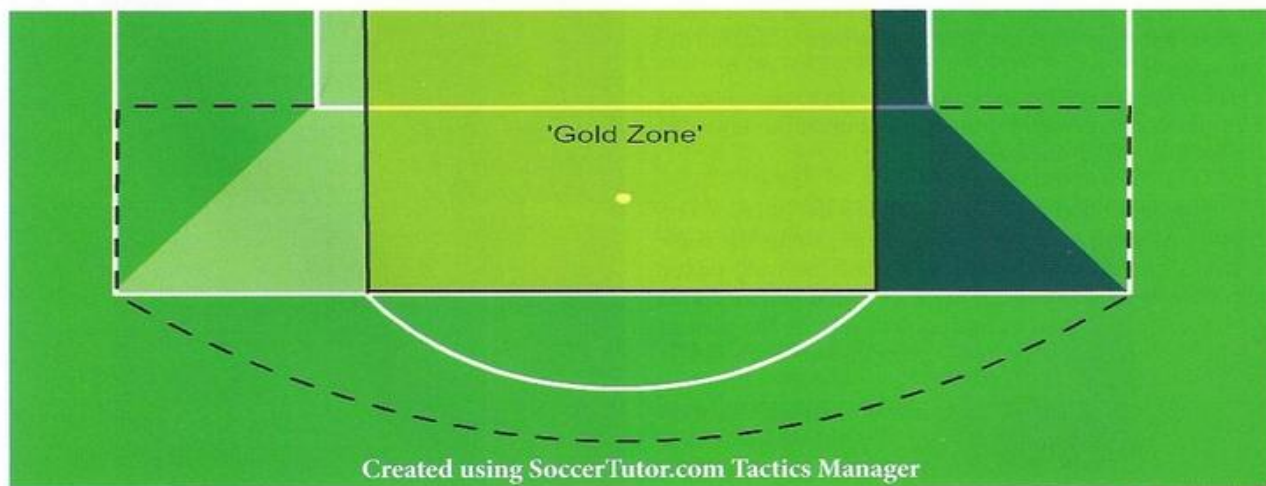
*“Before we attack the goal, we attack the game”*

- Pepijn Lijnders

The purpose of all AAA is to create clear cut goal scoring opportunities to score goals in *clear cut goal scoring opportunity* areas of the field. The 18-yard box and its surrounding spaces are typically considered appropriate for clear cut goal scoring opportunity areas of the field: in

the following diagram ‘The Castle’ approach to dividing the spaces up in the box has been used (white, yellow and blue combined). Depending on the research paper you study, 80-92% of all goals are scored from within ‘The Castle’ with most of the remainder scored in the outlined area (dotted line) around ‘The Castle’. During the 2014 World Cup, Germany scored 88.2% of all their goals from the ‘Gold Zone’ alone (Usher and Bilton 2014).

The white and blue areas (highlighted in the diagram below) have a 20-25% chance of going into the goal for every shot on target, while 15-30% of all shots on target result in goals scored from the outlined area (within the dotted line, excluding the highlighted areas). In the ‘Gold Zone’ the chances of a goal from a shot on target increase the closer to the goal we get, ranging from 40-50% around 18-yards from goal to 60%-85% within the 6-yard box.





If we work our way backwards from these positions and consider three of the key spaces on the field, we can bring about a framework for which the remainder of this book serves within a framework of 'superiority'.

### A. IN FRONT OF THE OPPOSITION CB's

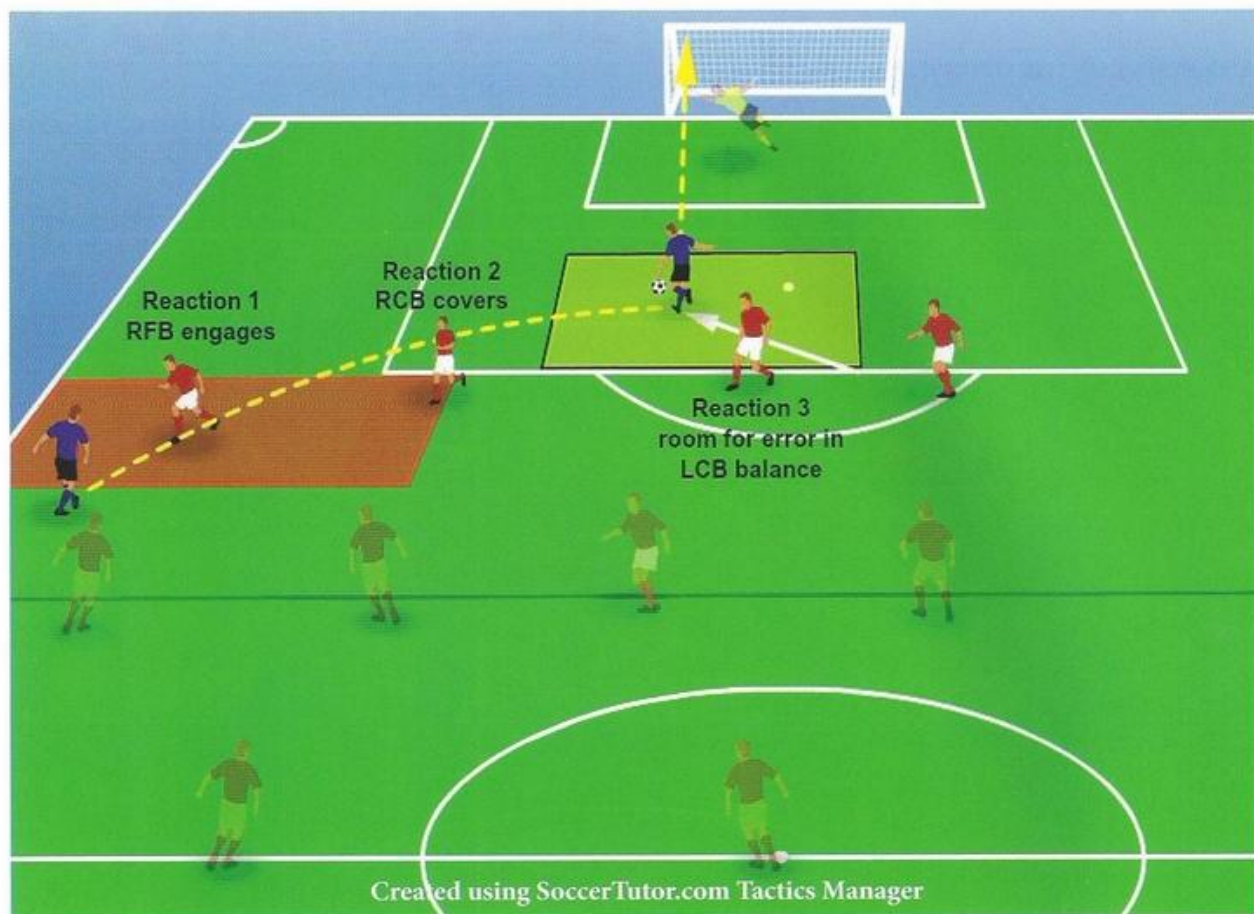


If the objective of the space in front of the opposition central defenders is to lead towards creating clear cut goal scoring opportunities, then we must consider the dynamic response we might get by getting into this position. One response is for one of the central defenders to come towards the player on the ball, out of slot, and in turn creating space that is now available to exploit. This space can be exploited either by the player on the ball if he should beat the central defender in his 1 vs. 1 scenario (defender behind), or this space can be exploited through movement of his team mates (as shown in the diagram above). Applying the theory of the 'up-back-through' language (mentioned later in this book in chapter 10) we can see how third man movement can exploit this space after pulling a central defender out of slot.

*"If we can go in the final third and we are playing between our midfield and our attack, so between their defence and midfield. We have to dominate in that space there and see how their defensive line is opening up or closing down so there is no space. It is about the calmness in turning and playing inside this space"* - Pepijn Lijnders



## B. IN FRONT OF THE OPPOSITION FB's



In my analysis of 'chains of reaction', upon the fullback moving forward to put pressure on a player ahead of him, the nearest central defender comes across to cover the fullback should he get beaten in a 1 vs. 1 scenario. The next logical step in the chain of reaction is for the next central defender to come across and cover the space left by the other central defender (to provide balance). However, even at Premier League level, there are weekly examples where the third reaction in this chain is either delayed or inadequate.

Jamie Vardy (23:25, Leicester vs. Manchester United 28th November 2015) and Batetimbi Gomis (65:15, Swansea vs. Manchester United 30th August 2015) provide perfect examples of how best to exploit this chain of reaction upon inviting the fullback out of slot. Both strikers move over onto the weak-side central defender and wait for the other central defender to move across to cover the fullback. In this moment, the space between the two central defenders creates an opportunity for exploitation.

### TERMINOLOGY

**Strong-side:** sometimes referred to as 'ball near' or 'near side'. The strong-side is the side of the field whereby the defending team have concluded is the side to organise and defend against (the side with the ball). Strong-side has been used throughout this book to refer to differentiation between positions. For example, your strong-sided central defender will often be the central defender who is nearest the side of the field that has the ball.

**Weak-side:** sometimes referred to as 'ball far' or 'far side'. The weak-side is the side of the field that the opposition are not necessarily organised to defend against and is often the side without the ball. A 'weak-side central defender' is simply the central defender furthest away from the strong-side of the field (in relation to his partnering central defender)



## PRECEDENT: JAMIE VARDY GOAL vs MANCHESTER UNITED (28th November 2015)



Jamie Vardy's record breaking eleventh goal in eleven games was a result of a common AAA scenario: engaging the fullback, provoking the supportive relationship with his nearest central defender and as a consequence creating space between these two players and the off side line.

Vardy moves across behind the weak-side central defender who sets the offside line and moves into the space he can clearly see between the off-side line and the marking defender who is often reluctant to cover across with much commitment, particularly with other forward running players attacking the central areas.

This common AAA scenario is one that should be explored with the often predictable pressure and cover patterns that exist between the fullback and central defender relationship.

There are many great examples of goals and attacks that can be found to follow this same predictable behaviour from the opposition.



### C. BEHIND THE OPPOSITION FB's

Upon getting behind the opposition fullback, we pose a problem for the opposition of who will come to pressure your player. There are many ways to get behind the opposition fullback, through winning a 1 vs. 1 scenario, a player overlapping or underlapping, through an attacker running into the space behind the fullback and so on. After successfully getting beyond the fullback there are typically two responses from the opposition.

#### Response 1. The central defender moves out to put pressure on your player



When the central defender moves out we again refer to the chain of reaction sequence and look at who will cover and balance the scenario. In this scenario we also need to consider the qualitative superiority and who we have moved out of the central defensive areas. If the central defender we have moved out of the box is the opposition's strongest player at dealing with crossing scenarios then we have reduced the ability of the opposition to defend such a scenario.

#### TERMINOLOGY REMINDER

**Qualitative Superiority** - one player being better than another player in the given scenario due to specific objective of that scenario. For example: an excellent winger who excels in isolated one vs one's due to his Player I.D. which might be made up of excellent dribbling ability (technical), agility, speed (physical) and confidence (psychological) compared to opposing defender's ability to nullify those attributes in the scenario



Response 2. The defensive midfielder moves back to put pressure on your player

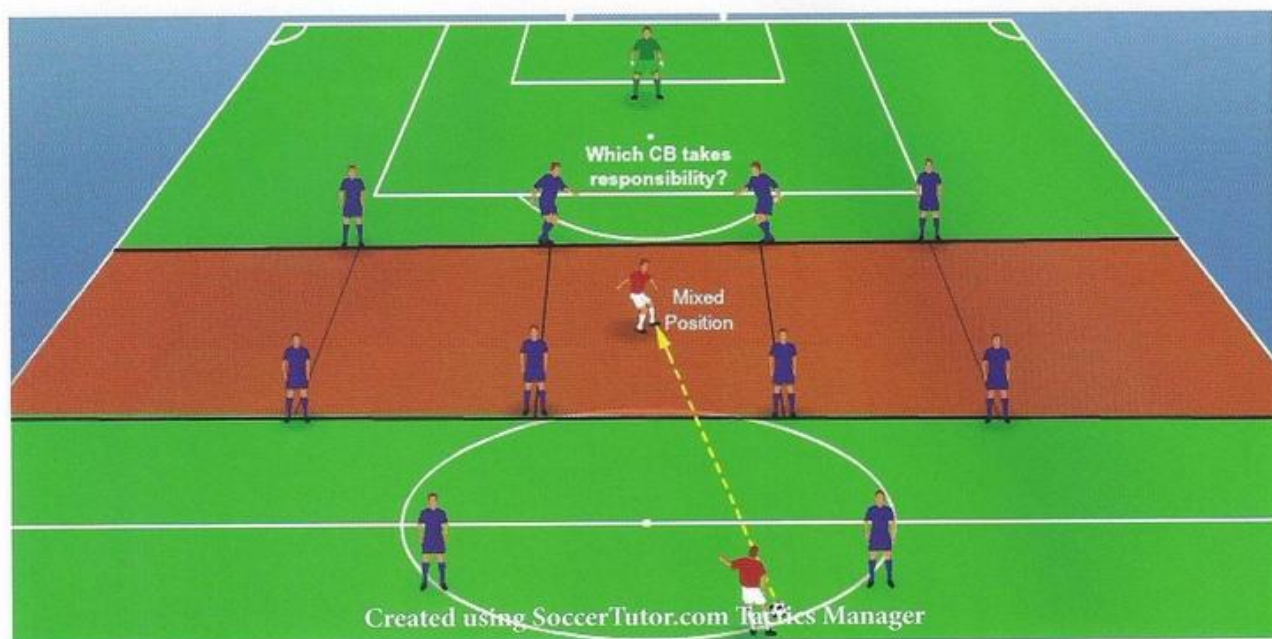


In the second scenario, the cover and balance in response to getting behind the opposition fullback is one whereby the defensive midfielder may come out to cover this wide area and the central defenders stay central. However, in doing so the opportunity for a cut back type cross increases. The cut back type cross is by far the most successful type of cross statistically at leading to shots on target and if the quality of the cut back allows for a first time shot, the objective of creating clear cut goal scoring opportunities has been achieved. There is a trade off in decision making for the opposition defence upon getting behind the opposition fullback that highlights the value in working out the best strategies in achieving such a scenario. The same scenario can be created (shown in the diagram above) should the central defender decide to go out wide and the defensive midfielder fills in for the central defender.

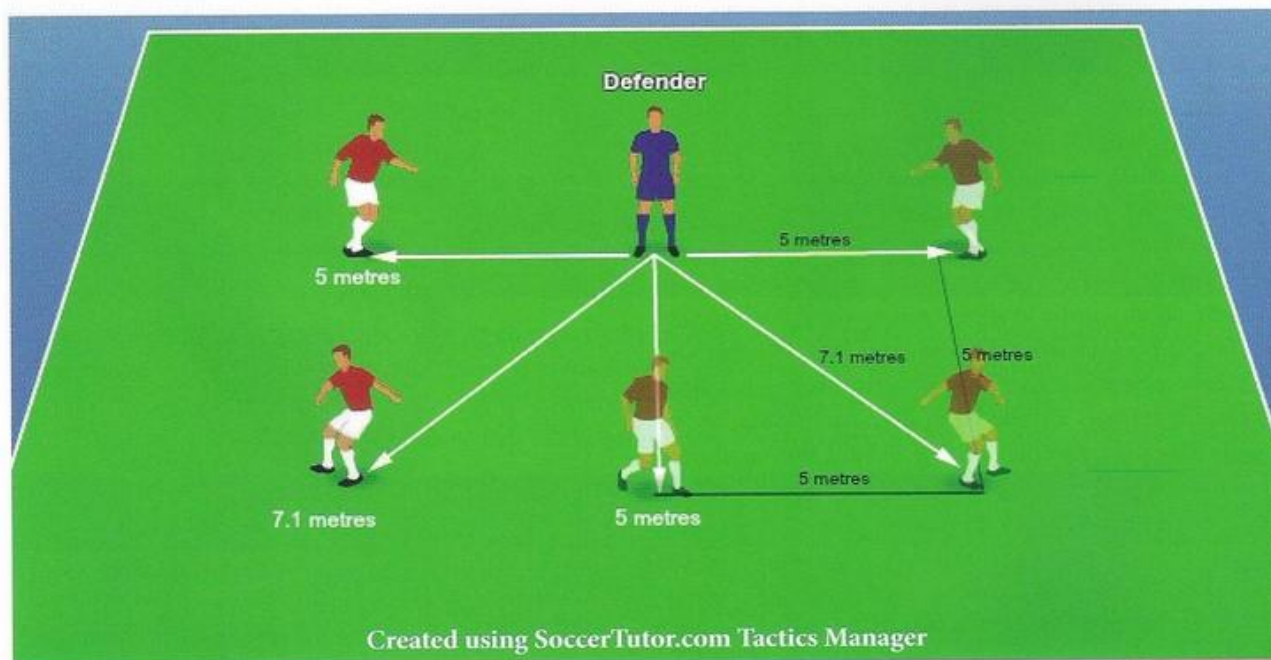
Research by analyst Samira Kumar details “*statistically by increasing the distance between two defenders we increase the opportunities of scoring goals*”. Kumar goes on to add that if we can find methods to draw the defensive midfielder away from covering the space behind the fullback then we increase our chances further still.



Adin Osmanbasic (MLS Analyst) wrote in December 2013 ([www.adinosmanbasic.wordpress.com](http://www.adinosmanbasic.wordpress.com)) about the use of 'mixed positions' to draw opponents out of position. A 'mixed' position is defined to be any position taken up between opponents at an angle. The simplest way to think about this might be to consider an attacking player picking the ball up between two central defenders in between the opposition midfield and defensive lines.



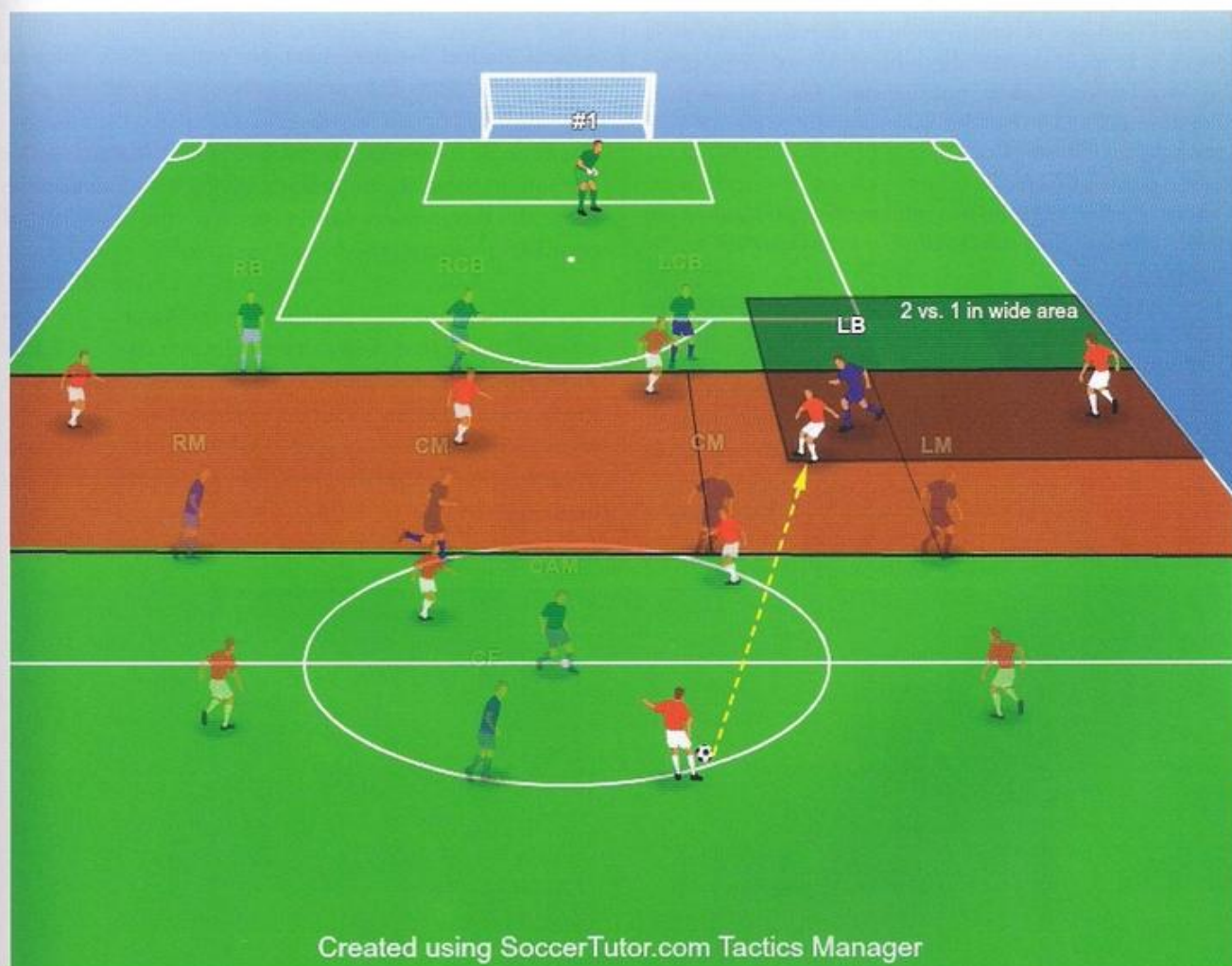
Osmanbasic argues that by moving away from a defender diagonally, a player may gain space. Using Pythagorean Theorem we can highlight that by moving into angled space we increase the quality of action in Advanced Areas (in a 5 metres x 5 metres box we find an extra 2.1 metres if we take the mixed position). A player may now increase the opportunity to turn upon receiving the ball and see the pictures to exploit ahead of him.





*"Moving into a mixed position has various implications on the opposition. Whatever player gets dragged by the mixed position player to leave their zone will be unbalancing the defence in some way, providing an advantage somewhere on the field"* – Adin Osmanbasic (Analyst for Columbus Crew)

Osmanbasic refers to methods for drawing out opposition fullbacks through players taking up 'mixed positions' on the field and in turn creating superiority in wider areas, often as a method to get behind the opposition fullback.





Research conducted by Louis Lancaster (an English Pro License coach) zooms out and looks at the link between AAA and winning football matches. Lancaster put forward the equation of 'Player + (Kill Zone + Torture Zone + Hostages) = Value'. To detail Lancaster's language: the Kill Zone is the name given to the space behind the opposition defensive line, the Torture Zone is the name given to the space between the opposition defensive line and midfield line and Hostages is a term given to all passes into these spaces. When questioned about his choice of terminology, the Pro License coach put forward his argument to underline his belief that the game should be played with aggression as if it were war.

***"There are two types of player: one that just plays the game and one that adds value"*** – Louis Lancaster

Lancaster has devised his own point scoring system around actions in Advanced Areas. Scoring a goal gives you 5 points, assisting a goal and shots are given 3 points and all hostages are given 1 point only (receiving and releasing are both given 1 point each). In the research supporting such an approach, teams with more value (as recognised by Louis Lancaster's point scoring system) are more likely to win games.

### Case study examples from Lancaster's research:

1. Bayern Munich 5-1 Arsenal, November 2015. Value in points: 223 – 109 (+114 to winning team).
2. Watford 0-3 Arsenal, November 2015. Value in points: 67 – 217 (+150 to winning team).
3. Real Madrid 0-4 Barcelona, November 2015. Value in points: 149 – 222 (+73 to winning team).

The examples of research from above shows that the higher the points scored, the more likely it is the team has won the game and this message carries across for the remainder of Lancaster's research.

Joey Lombardi of the Canadian Soccer Association, who is heavily involved with the implementation of ideas within the girls programmes across Canada, works with the Advanced Platforms model. Lombardi's own research is consistent with that of Louis Lancaster in showing that the team that makes the most Advanced Platforms wins football matches.

**Figure: Barcelona (2014/15) AAA Research carried out by Jed C. Davies**





During my own research conducted on AAA, Barcelona (2014/15) over a fifteen game period averaged 42% of all their passes (626) in Advanced Areas with a 75% success rate. The following data includes passes and dribbles into (or past a player) as an Advanced Area Action only. Shots and crosses were not included due to the distortion in information (crosses have a lower success rate and drive down AAA success rates).

The following supporting data also includes a twelve match study of Bielsa's Marseille (2014/15), there are some differences between Bielsa's Marseille #1-4-2-3-1 / #1-4-3-3 and Barcelona's #1-4-3-3 as noted:

GK: 30-38 passes per game and 5 AAA attempts, meaning one AAA attempt every 6-6.5 passes.

CB: Barcelona central defenders averaged around 60 passes per game with 12 AAA attempts. This results to one AAA attempt for every 5 passes. Marseille on the other hand have one ball playing central defender and another supporting central defender. The ball playing central defender averages 57 passes per game, of which 20 were AAA attempts; once every 2.9 passes. The supporting central defender averages 48 passes, of which 7 were AAA attempts, resulting in a similar AAA attempt per pass record as the Barcelona defenders.

FB: Barcelona fullbacks averaged 70 passes per game, of which best practice shows 30 were AAA attempts; once every 2.3 passes. Barcelona fullbacks give aggressive height and often drop into inside lanes underneath the ball (information on 'lanes' is given in chapter 7 of this book, page 75). Marseille fullbacks however averaged 60 passes per game, of which 16 were AAA attempts; once every 3.7 passes.

Deep Midfielder: Barcelona's DM averaged 60 passes per game, of which 15 were AAA attempts; once every 4 passes. Marseille's DM averaged 55 passes per game, of which 17 were AAA attempts; once every 3.2 passes.

Supporting CM's: Barcelona averaged 65.5 passes per game, of which best practice shows 40 (40 and 20) were AAA attempts; once every 1.6 passes for one and once every 3.2 for the other. Marseille on the other hand played with a No. 10 and an 8 (LCM and RCM) and averaged 31 passes and 44 passes per game respectively, with 25 (number 10) and 14 (number 8) AAA attempts per game. Once every 1.2 (number 10) and 3.1 (number 8) passes.

Wingers: Barcelona wingers average 62.5 passes per game, of which best practice shows 40 AAA attempts per game, once every 1.5 passes. Barcelona wingers have around 25% of their passes going backwards out of the AAA zone. Marseille wingers average 28.5 passes per game and made 19.5 AAA attempts per game, once every 1.4 passes. It should be noted here that Leo Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo have recorded the highest score of AAAs in any game analysed to date (more than 60 AAA).

Strikers: Barcelona's striker makes an average of 20 passes per game and 20 AAA attempts. Marseille's striker makes an average of 21 passes per game, 16 AAA attempts and 1.3 passes for every AAA attempt

At the Liverpool FC Academy players are to work off a 70-75% success rate in their 'initiatives' (actions between the opposition midfield and defence or beyond). Like Louis Lancaster's model of player value, Liverpool Academy use their 'initiatives' model which is specific to their own playing style and development philosophy.

Alongside the initiatives model used at Liverpool FC Academy is the requirement that 70% of Liverpool's possession should be inside the opposition half, therefore the space to make a high number of initiatives is decreased (a constraint-designed approach) and the opposition is locked into their organised medium-low block. There are a variety of mechanisms used at Liverpool FC to encourage the opposition to fall back into a low-block and keep them in such a condition with the view of increasing the difficulty of playing between lines for the purposes of youth development.

In all examples given (Liverpool FC Academy, Canadian Women's Youth National Teams, Louis Lancaster and others) implementing such an approach as a tool for player education is to celebrate and highlight penetration over possession.

*"Consecutive forward passes change the game"*

– Mark Sampson



## 06 PRE-ADVANCED AREA ACTIONS

“People get it wrong. Playing from the back shouldn't be a gamble, there shouldn't be a mistake. If there is a mistake or a gamble, you haven't done something right. There are very clear structures when playing out from the back: you force the opposition to make a decision - do they press you high up and then gaps appear in the middle or do they allow you to have it and you can control the game straight away?”

- Roberto Martinez, Everton FC Manager

It was this quote from Roberto Martinez in a lecture I presented for the World Football Academy, at the Expert Meeting in South Africa 2014, that left Anson Dorrance with the urge to be the first to come up to me after the presentation, shake my hand and express an interest in further discussing some of the ideas in the presentation. The presentation was one on my study of Marcelo Bielsa and fortunately for me I detailed a unique tactical innovation I had seen some years earlier by Chile, who would then go on to repeat that tactical innovation against the Netherlands that evening during the World Cup, albeit with little success this time around.

Anson Dorrance is the head coach of the University of North Carolina (UNC) Women's Team and has a win rate pushing towards 95% over thirty-five seasons. Dorrance has also taken the U.S. Women's National Team to winning the 1991 FIFA World Cup. The Tar Heels head coach has achieved his success through implementing a style of football that doesn't promote playing through the thirds, Anson says he believes “there is always a gamble” when referring back to the Roberto Martinez quote above. What fascinated Anson about this quote were the structures that exist in playing out from the back, he wanted to know exactly what they

were and he was, at least in the moment, willing to turn his back on a style of play that had won him so much if I could convince him that there are structures that exist that do not be considered a gamble; a continuous state of inquiry without conclusion.

I didn't have the answers that day, only the scribbles of dozens of rotations and reoccurring ball movements drawn up from watching more than two hundred and fifty football matches where Bielsa had been in charge. I had information but not knowledge in the form of theorised structures.

*“...we don't get frustrated if we can't get it forward immediately, we aim to be comfortable on the ball, and if it's not a case of going forward straight away, we keep it.”* – Marcelo Bielsa

‘...we keep it’ implies so very little and doesn't give us much of an insight as to how Bielsa's teams keep the ball. However, if we agree that the purpose of possession is to move the opposition and still take preference of creating Advanced Area Actions, then we are left with only one conclusion. The purpose of possession during Pre-Advanced Area Actions is to create the conditions conducive to creating Advanced Area Actions.



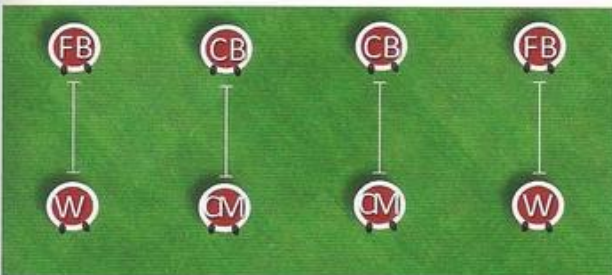
*“Possession as a philosophy is overrated (and often overused). Possession as a tool is underrated (and often underused)”* – Rene Maric, tactical theorist and coach at Red Bull Salzburg

As stated in previous chapters, there are three possible reasons for why you may not be able to create an Advanced Area Action and only three:

1. If the opposition are compact horizontally and have reduced any corridors of space that you may be able to play through, meaning spaces that are now too narrow to play through. If the opposition are too compact, is there a case where you can play around them quickly and get in behind the opposition's block that way?



2. If the opposition have left very little space between their midfield line and defensive line, therefore reducing the space of which we can move defenders into by being compact vertically. Of course in this situation, it could be that the defensive line of the opposition is very high and any moment they fail to keep pressure on you is an opportunity to find passes that go beyond the opposition defensive line.



3. If the opposition have 'layers' in midfield and therefore have good balance and cover in the key areas, making it difficult to exploit such areas.



Upon identifying the situations as described above, I went through a period of re-watching many of the two-hundred and fifty games I had previously analysed with a new lens; instead of watching Bielsa's teams I would watch the opposition and pose the question for any moment a penetration pass was not played by one of Bielsa's teams: what structure(s) have the opposition put in place that have prevented Bielsa's teams in penetration and what did Bielsa's teams then do in response to that structure?

My conclusion was that the three situations have a multitude of solutions and interpretations but ultimately lead to three simple processes (simply defined):

1. Can we spread the opposition out laterally and therefore create gaps/corridors that we can play through?
2. Can we spread the opposition out vertically and therefore create a larger midfield-defence channel/pocket for which we can exploit?
3. Can we either:
  - a. Remove the layers of the opposition midfield and find ways to pull the opposition flat into straight lines?
  - b. Find pockets of space to move into for which the opposition midfield are flat in a specific direction?

This chapter will look at these three processes in detail, exploring some of the effective solutions to achieve any one of the processes and therefore facilitate the creation of Advanced Area Actions. The aim of this book is to invite further inquiry from the reader, for the reader to come to solutions that fit the framework of the principles of play to suit the resources available to them (time, players, stage in player development, quality and quantity of assistant coaches and so on).

The remainder of chapter six is structured using case studies and theory in the following sections:

**Section 1.** Looking at three areas of spreading the opposition out horizontally and therefore creating gaps/corridors that teams can play through

**Section 2.** Looking at three areas of spreading the opposition out vertically and therefore creating larger quantities of space between lines to exploit

**Section 3.** Looking at ways to either (a) remove the layers of the opposition midfield and finding ways to pull teams into straight lines or (b) looking at finding pockets of space to move into for which the opposition are flat in a specific direction.

**Chapter Conclusion**



## CHAPTER SIX: SECTION ONE

### SECTION 1.

Can we spread the opposition out laterally and therefore create gaps/corridors that we can play through?

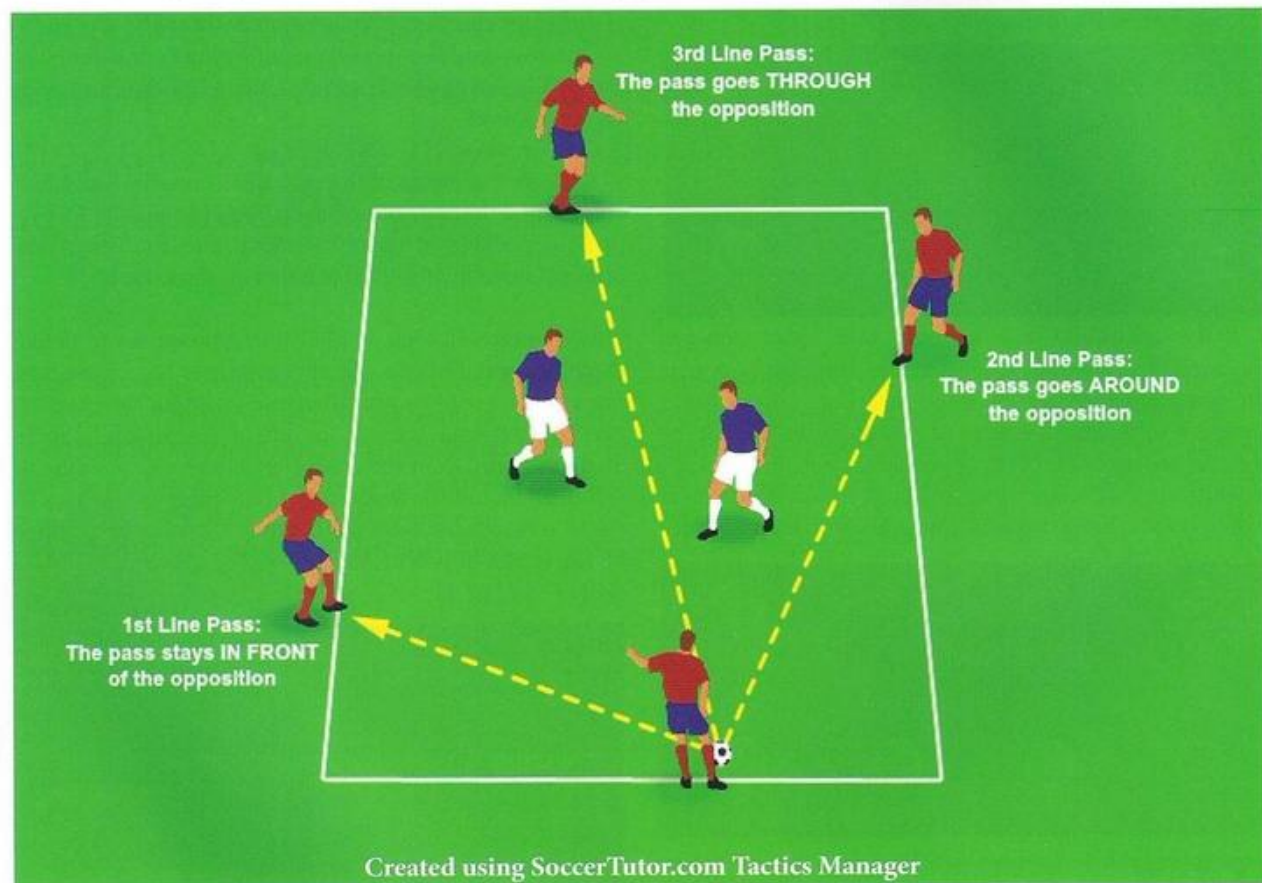
There are a variety of methods used to look to create passing channels and I believe that the 'correct answers' to which methods you employ depend on the players you have available, the areas you wish to use your qualitative superiority (player vs. player) and the tendencies, strengths and weaknesses of the opponent.

The first section of this chapter will concentrate on three methods: the principle of the diamond, a case study

detailed a tactical solution from the Chile National Team and an exploration of a methodology employed briefly at The Oxford University Football Team.

### 1.1 PRINCIPLE OF THE DIAMOND

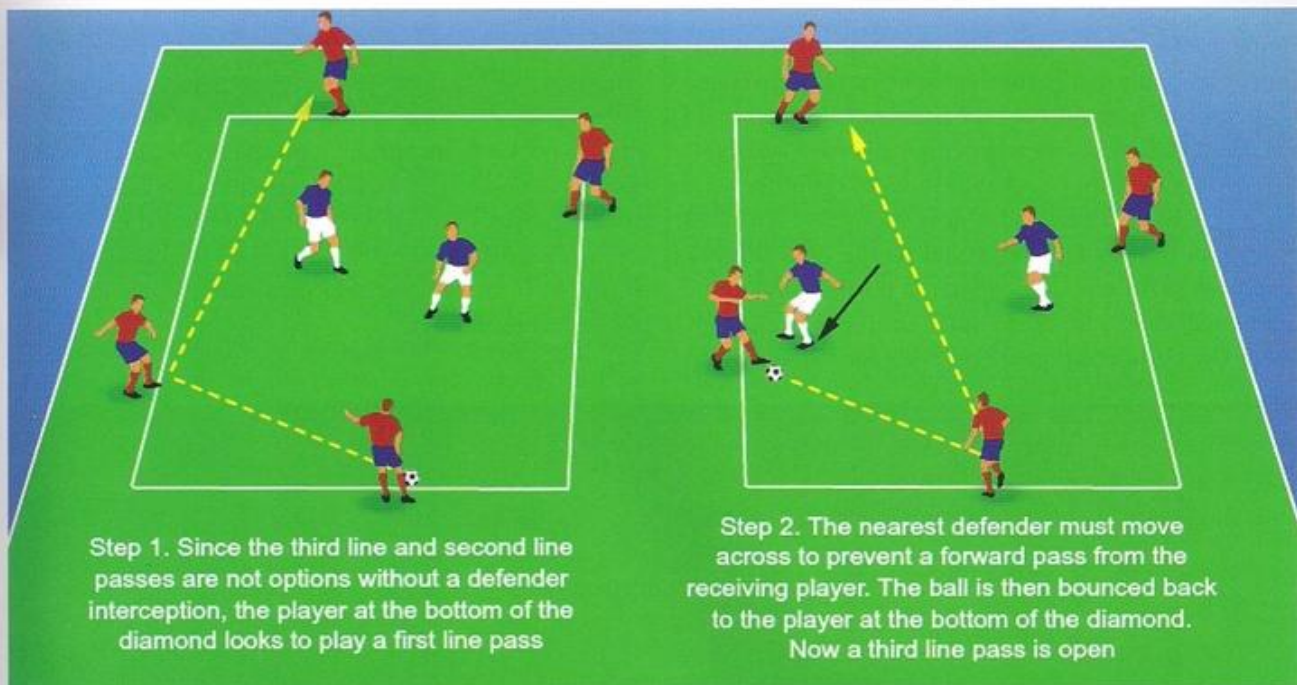
The principle of the diamond was introduced to me through 'rondos theory' during my time working under various coaches with expertise in Spanish methodology and research during the writing of my first book: *Coaching the Tiki-Taka Style of Play*.



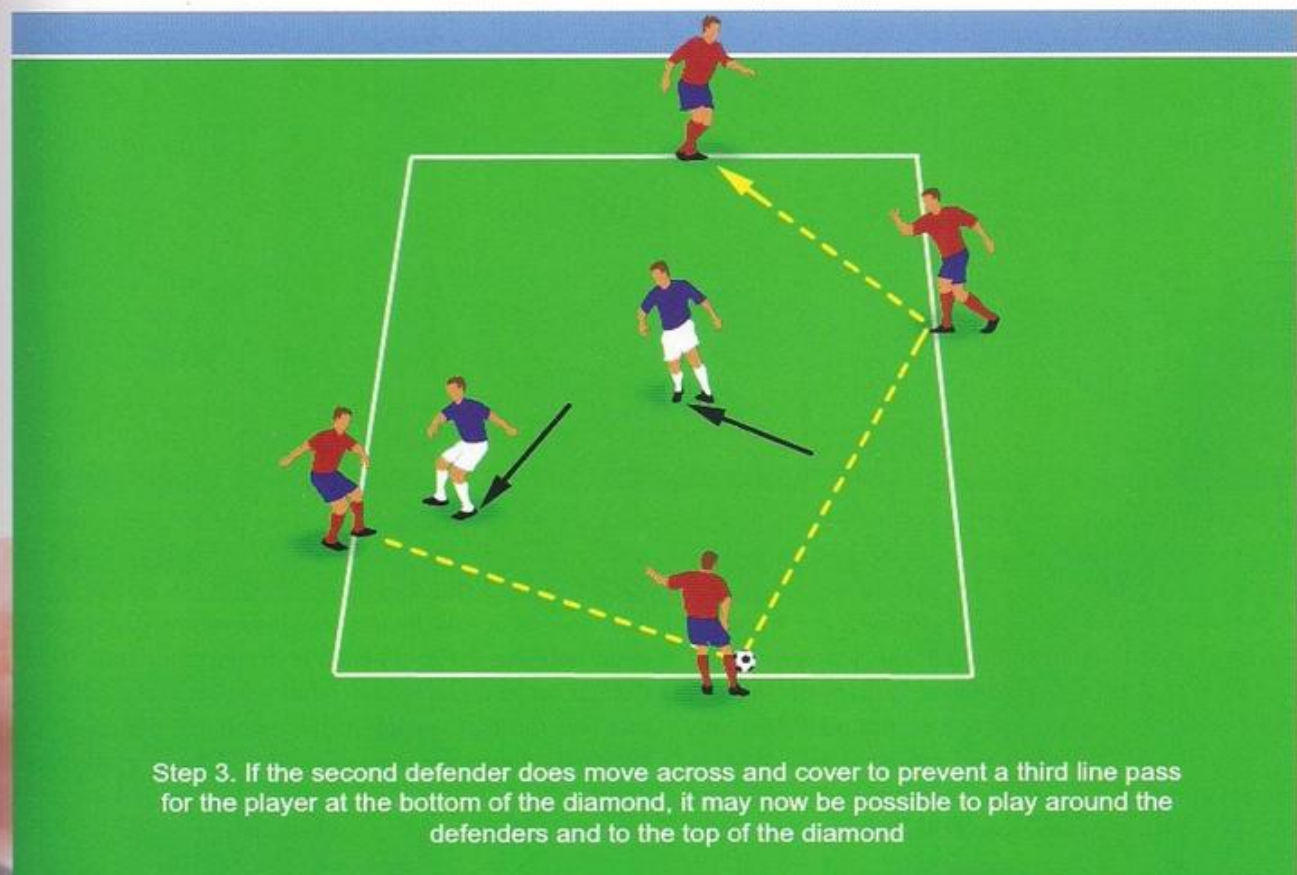
Taking the scenario out of its context and into a simplified training language, we have a basic four against two scenario. The theory is simple: the most desirable pass is the one that penetrates the two defenders, sometimes referred to as a 'third line pass' in Spanish training methodology literature or a 'split pass' or 'three-point pass' by others. We can go through the opposition or we can go around the opposition to get to the player at the top of the diamond; however, if the two defenders are responsive as they should be, you

will initially not be able to penetrate through and upon looking to play around, the two defenders will shift across and prevent a forward pass from the wide player too. It is what happens next that provides a theoretical backbone to the inclusion of 'the principle of the diamond' as a structure to use pre-penetration.





Upon shifting the ball back to the player at the bottom of the diamond, it may be possible that a gap has opened up to now play through and if not, we can look to shift the ball out to the other wide supporting player and then around. After all, the ball moves faster than the players.





## CHAPTER SIX: SECTION ONE

Placing the theory into context we can isolate patterns that occur in the game that fit the theory, we can start to create recognition of situations, cues and patterns for players to aid their decision making. One way of thinking about situations may be to consider the player at the bottom of the diamond as a ball playing right-sided centre back, the right-sided wide player in the diamond would be the right fullback and the left sided supporting player of the diamond as the central midfielder who drops into a deeper pocket. Many ask fullbacks to be positioned 'high and wide' without much

further consideration to the context for which they do this. The player at the top of the diamond might be a winger who has dropped in off the line, or a striker who has dropped into the pocket or an attacking central midfielder who has taken up a position behind the opposition midfielders (the two defenders). The players need to be aware of the situation created and details as small as where on the field you have set up such an exercise help paint the picture for your players during training.



The principle of the diamond is a structure that can include a variety of players in different formations when looking to penetrate beyond the opposition midfield. It is also a worthwhile consideration to zoom back out from the theoretical structure and consider the movement that takes place to achieve the structure. Perhaps the fullback is positioned high initially and the central midfielder only falls back in upon the centre back receiving the ball again, perhaps we consider the complexity of movement and which player may be at the top of the diamond (any player

positioned behind the opposition midfield), or perhaps the player at the bottom of the diamond isn't a centre back at all, but instead he is the deep lying midfielder; it is important that you as a coach and the players are not fixated upon applying theory in such a structural or static way. Complexity and player understanding should be built up over time through a variety of methods on the training field. Within the training session section of this book, there are a variety of formats to help educate players for the theoretical concept of 'the principle of the diamond'.



## 1.2 CASE STUDY: Chile vs. Switzerland 21st June 2010, Group H: Marcelo Bielsa

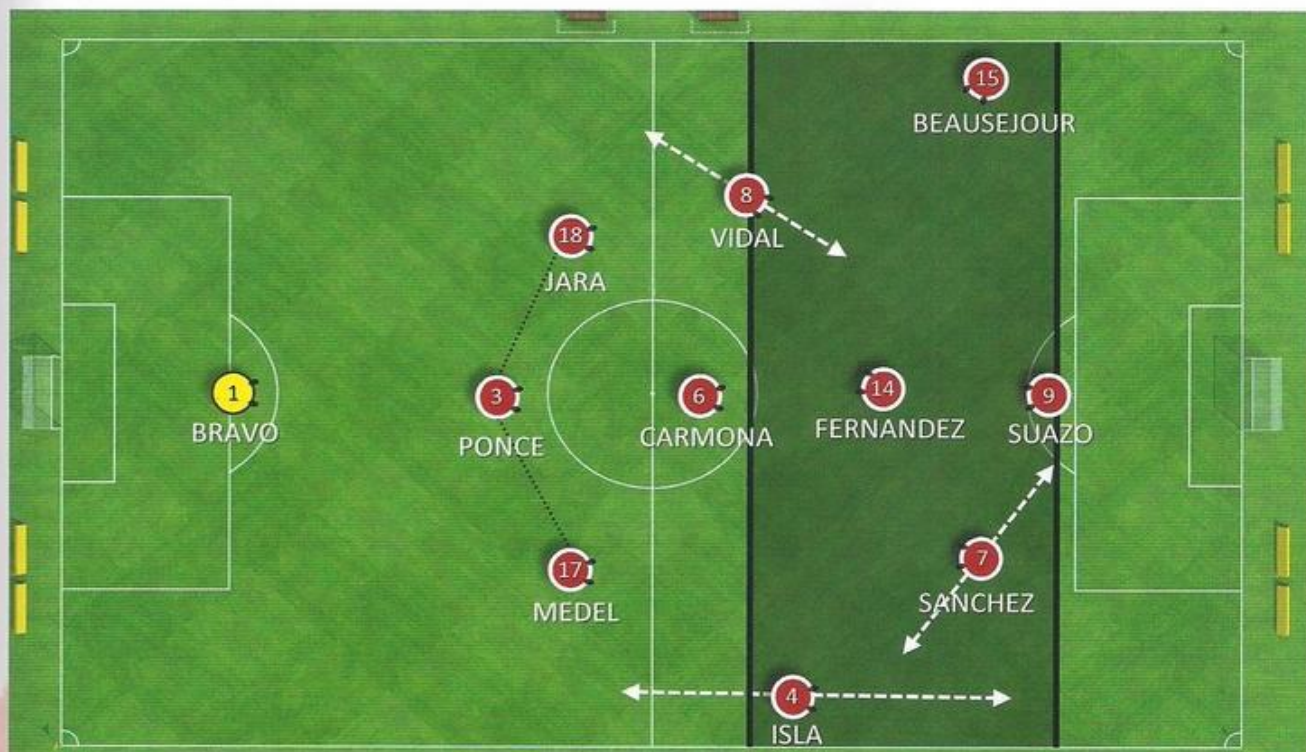
I once asked a player what the most memorable tactical innovation they had experienced as a player was and while this player wishes not be mentioned, he was kind enough to provide a deep insight into some of the ideas he had come into contact with as a player. The following example given in this book highlights the same idea drawn out to me over a coffee shop table, an idea I've seen repeated only on a few occasions but provides a fascinating foundation to work off of.

Ottmar Hitzfeld's Switzerland had just beaten Spain in their opening match of Group H and now faced Bielsa's Chile in the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium, Port Elizabeth in front of

nearly 35,000 fans. Chile too had won their opening fixture against Honduras thanks to a Jean Beausejour goal. Chile now faced Switzerland in the second match of Group H, a match that could put one of the two sides on six points and in a great position to qualify for the last 16.

Early in the first half Switzerland's Valon Behrami was sent off and Switzerland were reduced to ten men, setting their deep defensive block further back. With Chile finding it difficult to break down Switzerland's disciplined and compact deep block, Marcelo Bielsa made an unusual structural change to La Roja's formation.

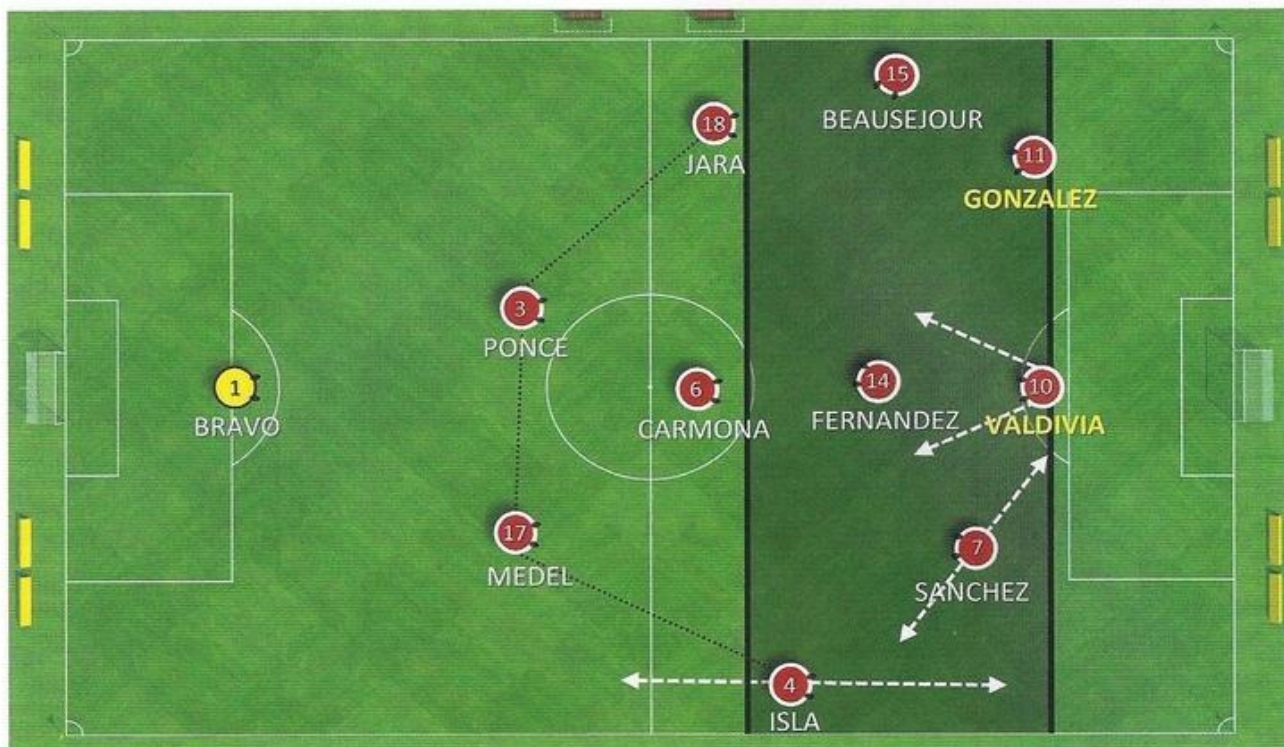
### Chile Formation: First Half





# CHAPTER SIX: SECTION ONE

## Chile Formation: Second Half



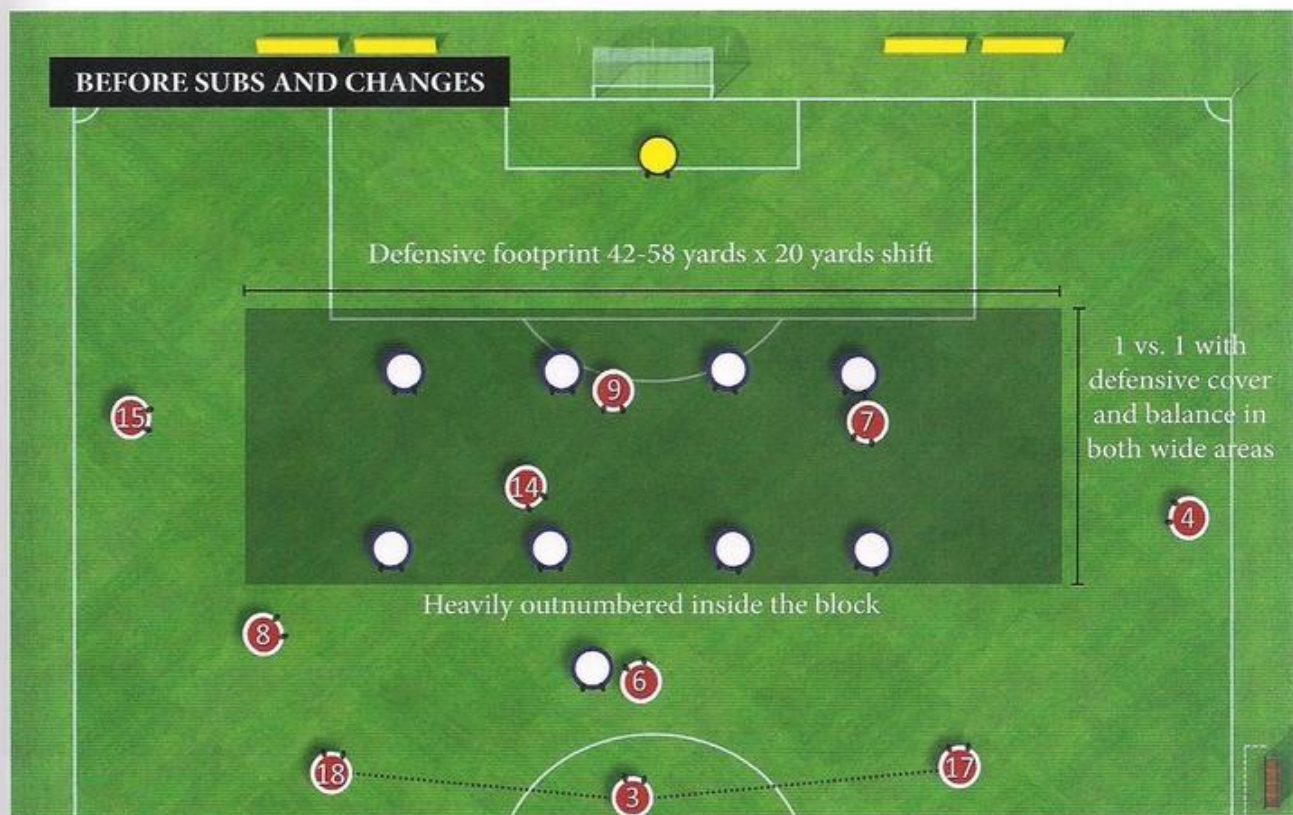
### Key Player Profile Change Considerations:

1. (18) Jara; right-footed left fullback who can play on the left of a back three or as fullback in a back four. Jara moved out from a wide central defender into a more traditional fullback role (albeit less attacking than Isla on the other flank).
2. (8) Vidal; right-footed midfielder who can play anywhere in midfield or defence. Vidal operated as a wingback with license to move inside and had more emphasis on playing inside rather than around.
3. (11) Mark Gonzalez; left-footed quick winger who likes to get in behind with pace. Gonzalez came on and formed part of a trio that looked to overload the left hand side of the field, operating in the most advanced role of the three.
4. (9) Suazo; a traditional striker who likes to play off of the opposition defensive line.
5. (10) Valdivia; an attacker who likes to find space in between the opposition defence and midfield with plenty of unpredictability and flair. The change from (9) Suazo to Valdivia allowed for more movement in key areas. Alongside the diagonal movements of (7) Sanchez and (14) Fernandez floating in and out of spaces between lines.

Prior to changes made by Marcelo Bielsa, Switzerland covered a 42-58 yard shift from left to right when defending in their low block, covering an area of 42 x 20 yards often outnumbering Chile by eight to four in this area. The pitch at the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium is 74 yards wide and the Switzerland back four rarely ventured more than twelve yards from their nearest second defender.

The problem described above (shown in the image on the following page) was tackled by structurally overloading one side of the field with a left winger (11. Mark Gonzalez), a wide left midfielder (15. Jean Beausejour), and a left back (18. Gonzalo Jara), Chile now asked more questions of Switzerland down the one side of the field. Switzerland would now cover 52-68 yards in their horizontal shift, increasing the distance that their disciplined defenders would need to cover as they then raced across to the other side of the field to deal with (7) Alex Sanchez and the ever-overlapping right wing back (4) Mauricio Isla upon any horizontal transfer of the ball, now that the threat of the right flank was far greater than before given the increased amount of isolation and space.





After the structural changes made by Bielsa, there were 3.5 times more horizontal shifts of the ball from Chile and an increase of 400% of those shifted from left to right, from Overload to Isolate, once every 51 seconds of open play in possession.

However, this wasn't the objective of such changes; the objective was to increase the number of penetration attempts between the five channels of Switzerland's back four. Chile's number of penetration attempts increased by 67% through the five channels (the five channels: 1. touchline — right fullback, 2. right fullback — right sided centre back, 3. right sided centre back — left sided centre back, 4. left sided centre back — left back and 5. left back — touchline).

There weren't just more attempts of penetration, but the success rate of each attempt too went up by 30% and 'the centre back — left back channel' now had a 50% success rate, one in every two attempts would reach its intended target. From Overload to Isolate, with the frequently disguised ball being threaded through the widening channels of the Switzerland back four.

### THEORETICAL MESSAGE

By increasing the threat in wide areas, we ask the opposition to defend across the entire width of the field.

By asking the opposition to defend across a greater footprint, we increase the possibilities to penetrate centrally.

If you are playing against a disciplined low block, it might be advisable to have wingers that look to stay wide and threaten in wide areas to ask these questions of the opposition.



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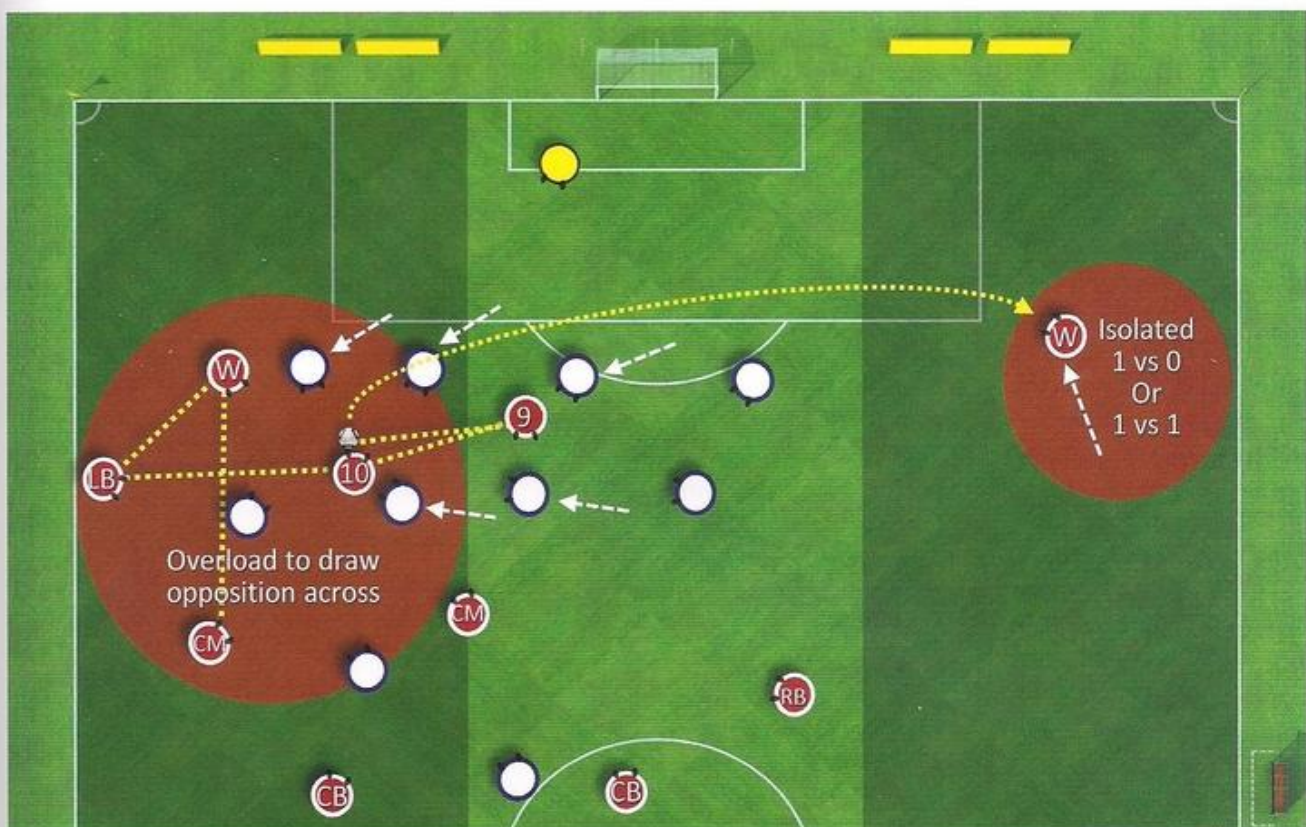


The changes made by Bielsa were done so with the lens of 'penetration of the Switzerland block', by structurally overloading one side of the field and drawing the Swiss further across in both directions (to deal with Chile's overloaded left flank and then to the right to deal with the increased danger on the opposite flank). By increasing the distance that must be covered by Switzerland, we now increase the possibilities to penetrate through their midfield and defence.

The basis of Bielsa's applied theory is one called 'Overload and Isolate', to overload one side of the field and look to isolate a 1 vs. 1 on the opposite flank, preferably of qualitative superiority or to an overload of 2 vs. 1 and quantitative superiority. Pep Guardiola has also applied the same language (Overload and Isolate) at Bayern Munich, a principle we see Guardiola educating his players on during the Bayern Munich winter training camp in Doha (Qatar 2014) where parts of the message delivered by Guardiola in such an animated style have been translated in the following section of text:

*"We will find Mario Götze with a switch but only after five or six passes" instructs Guardiola, referencing the overload in one of three areas: wide right, central or wide left. "When the opponents come and there is pressure here...go to the other side!" to the area the opposition have left least protected, after making a commitment in numbers to the area of Bayern's overload and five or six passes (attracting players to the pressure area), "...in contrast to the defence".*





The way in which this language has been employed by Chile (under Bielsa) was in response to a tactical problem, one where the opposition demonstrated discipline by remaining compact so that Chile have found difficult to break through. Jorge Sampaoli would later employ the same strategy against the Netherlands in the 2014 World Cup Group B fixture.

During the first half of the 2014 Group B fixture, the Netherlands restricted Chile to lots of possession and very little penetration due to the low block Louis van Gaal had employed. It seemed van Gaal was waiting, waiting for Sampaoli to make a tactical change that would make Chile vulnerable should the Netherlands decide to push further forward and attack. Sampaoli made the very same tactical change Bielsa had made some four years earlier, structurally overloading the left flank, only this time as soon as the tactical switch was made the opposition transformed from a team sitting in a low deep block, to one that would push further forward and create more chances in the second half. The tempo and attitude changed, changing the situation of the game and Sampaoli's tactical solution was a solution to the problem that no longer existed.

The language of Overload and Isolate asks questions of the opposition to deal with the overload by committing more players across to one side of the field and therefore opening up opportunities to switch to an unprotected opposite flank either through qualitative (1 vs. 1) or quantitative superiority (2 or more vs. 1).

However, Paul Power of Prozone and the man behind Prozone's Game Intelligence model poses an alternative approach with the same outcome. Power puts forward the theory of Underload to Overload, the principle of playing the ball into an underloaded area on one side of the field, only to come quickly back out of it and switch to the weak side within four or five seconds.

One of the universal pressing triggers that teams employ at the top level is one that Pep Guardiola has again made publicly famous: *"The touchline is our best defender"*. This defensive principle is one now employed by many youth academies and first teams world wide as a primary defensive strategy, one whereby we look to force teams to play to either the left or right flank and then trap them against the touchline.



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The pressing trigger recognised by the defending players is one where 'we have a numerical (quantitative) superiority over the opposition in an area of the field. Therefore, we should look to flock and press with our numerical superiority'.

If we revisit the argument that Paul Power puts forward, we can now understand that in areas of the field, it may be beneficial to play quickly into an underload and then come out of it, with the purpose of moving the opposition through their own defensive pressing triggers and strategies. The training field work then becomes about strategies to ensure we have structures in place to play out of such a scenario, to break the opposition's subsequent press.

***"You can have numerical inferiority but have positional superiority"*** – Kieran Smith (CE Europa Coach)

Whichever strategy you employ depends on the analysis done of the opposition, the tactical problem that you may find yourself in and the strengths of the players you have. Opposition analysis will inform you how the opposition responds to dealing with overloads and underloads in wide areas, then with this information you are able to determine how best to approach such a problem for the duration of the match; perhaps you notice trends that occur at different moments of the game and you employ both but at various *moments* of the game (time on the clock, after a certain *moment* of the game, different score line situations, the number of players playing and so on).

***"Football is made up of your players, the opponent and the moment"*** – Chris Davies (Celtic Assistant Manager)

When conducting my analysis of England during their qualification of EURO 2016 I identified that one of England's strengths was that they were very capable of defending with their central defenders moving vertically out of their slot (in between the midfield and defensive lines). However, England weren't as capable when defending should a central defender move out of their slot horizontally when defending. One way this can be achieved is through switching into a 2 vs. 1 with a strategy that looks to overload one side of the field and switch to the other. The two players are typically a wide attacking player that attracts the attention of the opposition fullback, then a second runner in behind the

fullback. England's solution to such a problem is to send out a central defender to create 2 vs. 2 in the wide area, only now England's primary structures for defending crosses has been ruined and the effectiveness at dealing with crosses is now reduced. This case study clearly identifies the requirements we must have on ourselves as analysts (and coaches) to identify which of the strategies to best employ.

***"Attack the game before we attack the goal of the opposition"*** - Pepijn Lijnders (Liverpool Coach)

### STRATEGIC OPTIONS

The understanding and implementation of this strategy can therefore be taken in one of three ways:

1. To overload and isolate with the intention of taking advantage of the qualitative (1 vs. 1) or quantitative superiorities (2 vs. 1) on the opposite side of the field
2. To overload and isolate with the intention of increasing opportunities for central penetration through the increase in ground covered by the opponent in their deep block
3. To go from an underload to an overload with the intention of taking advantage of the opposition's defensive strategies and pressing triggers (and then maybe even going back across to provoke a third response)

Each of the three strategies above have the same lens: how can we create penetration channels/corridors (horizontally) and get beyond the opposition's defence and midfield.

The exceptional teams will understand when and why to use each of the three strategies and will have all three as options in their locker, as well as an understanding of how the area of which such a strategy is employed affects different types of opponent: does this strategy take place in front of the opposition midfield? Does this strategy take place in between the opposition midfield and defence? Does this strategy have to take place high up in the opposition half and which strategy works best in which area of the field? There are many variables to the way we can apply this strategy, much of that depends on how the opposition responds to the way we provoke them.



### 1.3 CASE STUDY: Oxford University Development Squad 2013/14 (Application)

Upon accepting a role at the University of Oxford which included a role as Head Coach of the Development Squad, I knew I was presented with a special and unique opportunity. I knew I would inherit a team with a learning environment and a thirst for learning greater than anything I had experienced within the competitive levels of football before, I just had to seduce the idea of it. These were after all, Oxford University students. The idea of wild experimentation and a learning process that would bring together some of the most brilliant minds and people I have had the pleasure of working with, was one that would propel me into a real discovery period of my own learning.

I went in with one idea: to be part of something unique and fail in the best ways possible. A science experiment conducted on a football field.

I was fortunate enough to have worked with Jon Collins, with the Oxford University Centaurs (and youth coach at Bournemouth FC), a coach with great knowledge and expertise in Spanish training methodology after years of study but more importantly, a coach with a fascinating methodology in the creation of 'team' and the management processes that go along with implementing a style of play. I also occasionally had the opportunity to work with Mickey Lewis, who would go on to be the first team manager of Oxford United that year too, a coach with tremendous rapport with his players and a real personality on the training field. Learning from both, I looked to install the learning environment within Jon's building of team and development of the playing style but also by looking to develop my own personality as a coach within the course of the season. There was no way I was going to be able to develop what I wanted without earning the trust from my players and having them buy into such an ambitious project.

All the work we were to do was in preparation of our varsity fixture against Cambridge University and I had arranged several games against various opponents that included an under 18 team made up of recently released players from professional clubs such as Swansea, Aston Villa, Crystal Palace and Porto. The game was played in front of a number of professional league football scouts.

Proudly, we drew against a team of players hoping for a career in the game, 3-3.

**PLAYER PROFILES** (imperative consideration during the application of theory and an idea)

After assessing the players that were available to me I had noted a number of conclusions about the **player profiles**. The most damning to me was that we had very few players that were capable of playing fullback and we did not have the capacity to press man to man for large spells of the game due to fitness levels. I did however, possess players that wanted to play a passing game on the floor and a few capable of little pieces of magic when picking the ball up in advanced areas: Milan Arambasic (wing), Sam Gomarsall (central attacking midfield) and Fergus Morgan (wing) in particular. I then had two strikers who could strike a ball from all distances well and that liked to drop off the defensive line in Tom Brown and Dan Brown, as well as another that liked to run in behind with pace (Ola Akintola).

In Nathan Riddell I had a leader who had remarkable high levels of discipline, which meant he would perform in just about any way asked of him on and off the pitch; over time this would become key to what was to be achieved. In defence I had big Henry Smith, a towering and vocal centre back typical of that produced by the grit of the English game and then, four intelligent players who were comfortable playing out from defence in Pablo Kerblat, Jonny Beech, Joe Fowles and Chris Bennett, however none of which were to be considered physically dominant. Only Kerblat perhaps possessed the mobility to truly get up and down the flank as a fullback but perhaps lacked the positional discipline to act quickly enough on the transition.

Alongside Arambasic, Gomarsall and Morgan in midfield, I could add Ed Alun-Jones, who had shown flashes of ability to dominate in midfield and control the game, and Danny Mills who had the capacity to link up well during combination play and a passing range to switch a ball well.

Lastly in goal I had the availability of 6'4" Ben Szreter, a fine shot stopper and great organiser of his defence, a player that everyone in the team looked up to and trusted to make two or three saves a match that no goalkeeper has the right to make.

Given the key attributes of the players I had available to me to use against Cambridge, I had narrowed down some of the player profiles to roles I had wanted them to fulfil. I knew we had to fall back into a medium block given our lack of



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capacity to press man to man all over the field for ninety minutes. I also knew we were effective on the counter attack and this was reflected in the decision to leave three men forward when defending corners (given our dominance with aerial balls in our own box with Szreter and Smith).

We needed to find a way to gain numerical superiority when playing out from the back, qualitative superiority for Arambasic and Morgan out on the wings and a structure that allowed for Gomarsall, Tom Brown and Dan Brown to pick the ball up in between the opposition midfield and defence. Our priority of learning, once building out from the back was established, was one of a Overload and Isolate language (detailed later in chapter 10) for large parts of the season, to release Morgan or Arambasic in wide areas. Against an under-18 side from Bristol some weeks before our much anticipated fixture against rivals Cambridge University the players recreated the text book goal, one whereby we overloaded the left flank through Mills, Akintola and others, only to switch the ball to Morgan who would go on to score the winning goal. A non-verbal language practiced over and over in training sessions.

During the defensive phase of the game, we adopted a strategy inspired by Wigan under-16s and their former coach Tim Lees, an approach that suited our strengths on the counter attack and allowed for us to breakdown the #1-4-3-3 formation that every team we faced would employ. The #1-4-4-2 diamond with strikers sitting in wide areas between the opposition's fullbacks and central defenders (during the defensive phase), allowed for us to force the ball in centrally into our diamond and from there we acted on the point of reference to counter attack behind the opposition fullbacks after initially inviting them forward, an idea Roberto Martinez exercised to full effect against Manchester City in the 2013 FA Cup final through Callum McManaman and Arouna Kone.

However, it was the structures put in place during the attacking phase of the game that are of interest to this chapter (when in possession of the ball).

With no height being offered from our fullbacks, we opted to employ a central *libero* (an attacker central defender) at the heart of defence. During the defensive phase, our *libero* would actually stay and sit in defensive midfield unless one of the two fullbacks had to deal with anything in wide areas,

where then he was expected to fall back into central defence alongside Smith.

The two fullbacks were to be tucked in as part of a back three when in possession, giving touchline to touchline width in our defensive line.

Our attacking width came from the two wide players either side of the diamond, who would split wide to the edges of the field, asking questions of the opposition midfield: were they to follow these players out or allow them to find space around their midfield? Often we would find the opposition's midfield would track these two players, even if for a few moments and as a result, they'd open up penetration channels for any of the five players playing underneath the ball (three defenders and two deep in midfield) to penetrate through to either of the strikers or for Gomarsall who should be floating around in-between lines.

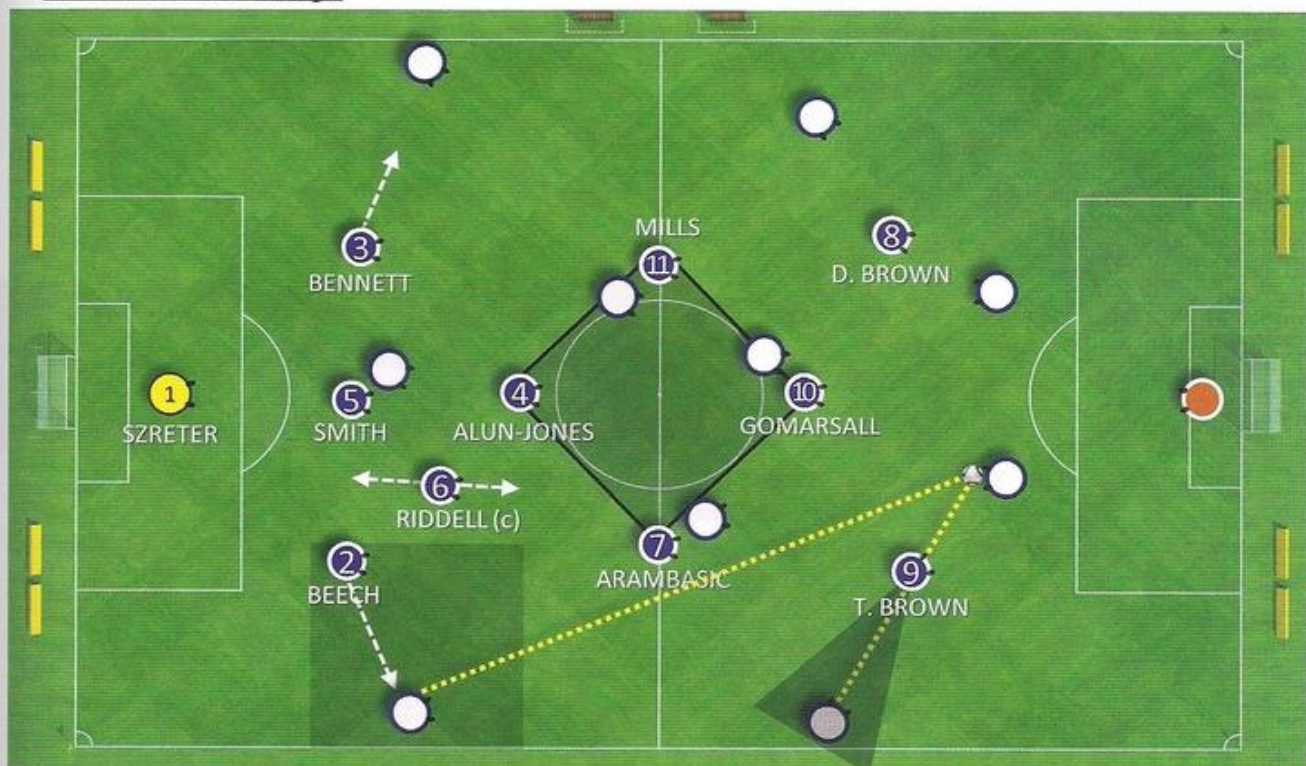
While defending, the defensive shape and objective was to force the opponent into playing long balls or trap them into playing into traps set up where we had numerical superiority. The two strikers players had the sole objective of preventing any passes out to fullbacks or across the back four once one of the opposition's two central defenders was on the ball, forcing one of two options for the opponent: to play long into the wide players or to play into the midfield traps.

Upon any pass into a midfield trap players were instructed to double up on the receiving player and the remaining players (inclusive of Riddell, our *libero*) were to hop on to the nearest position or free man. It was the job of the midfield diamond to prevent the opponent from playing forwards, out to wide areas and then double up on the ball. If instead, the opponent looked to play the long pass into a winger, then the nearest defender was instructed to deal with the winger while Riddell fell back into the central area to cover.

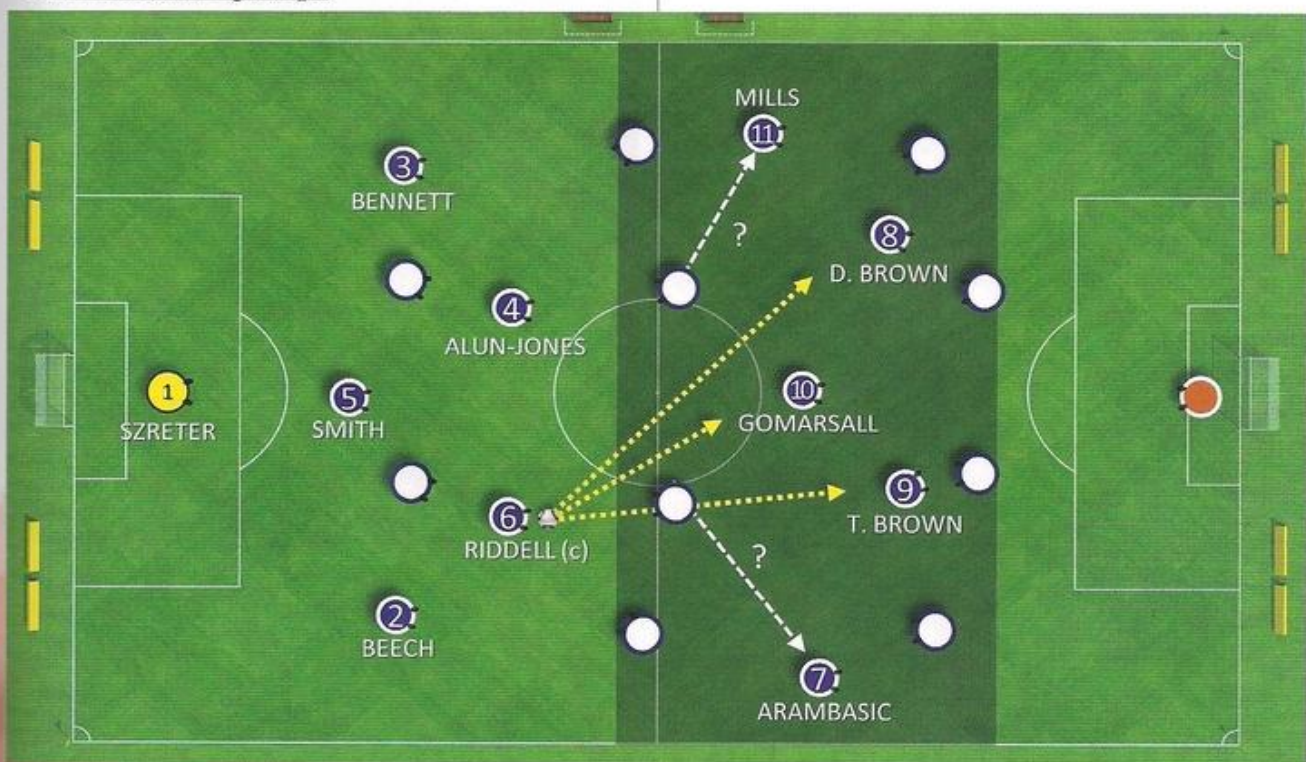
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## Oxford Defensive Shape



## Oxford Attacking Shape





## CHAPTER SIX: SECTION ONE

The nature of the position slots of our midfield, libero and fullbacks allowed for us to manipulate the opposition in a way that was conducive to penetration in-between the opposition midfield and defence (by often pulling players away from central areas). From #1-3-1-4-2 diamond to #1-3-2-3-2, a unique science experiment conducted on a football field that failed in all the best and worst ways possible. Cambridge University 2, Oxford University Development Squad 1 (in extra time).

Some months later, I would review the footage and dissect where we had failed. Due to the domination of possession, very little of the game allowed us to take advantage of the transitional moments, moments that had proven key to winning previous games and on top of that, the structures of positioning had become static in our #1-3-2-3-2 shape without much secondary movement to help facilitate penetration. We were left relying on attempts to implement our trusted Overload and Isolate strategy. However, our trusted Overload and Isolate strategy consisted of only one variation, that of overloading one side of the field and looking to switch to our 1 vs. 1 specialists on the other wing, specialists who struggled to find the opportunities they had been finding so regularly in previous games. The long grass at Cambridge's ground (or the players' conscious recognition of it) slowed our game down and resulted in both our build up play and speed at which to switch the ball to become both high in risk and ineffective in purpose. A lack of flexibility cost us. A lack of adaptability and variability in methods to create penetration brought about very little success in chance creation and very few Advanced Area Actions. I had implemented complicated structures and I had not designed for complexity (remembering the difference between the two). When you design in a complicated manner (rather than in a complex way) you design for a very specific set of circumstances, you design with a narrow lens that is sensitive to any change in circumstances, increasing the likelihood of failure if something unexpected occurs.

When writing up the conclusion to such an experiment I realised I had to go away and analyse the complexity and diversity of structures that exist within the game, to help bring about opportunities for Advanced Area Actions and increase my knowledge of what it means to communicate on a football field in a non-verbal capacity in a variety of ways.

I learned what it meant to be part of a learning process at the competitive level with Oxford, I learned what it meant to believe that you've been part of something unique in

football and most of all, I learned I needed to go away and research and develop a further understanding of how best to define, monitor, adapt for and create penetration for all situations. To those Oxford players, I owe the contents and research in this book. You opened my eyes to the fact I was so very far away from where I wanted to be as a coach with an understanding of the game. I could have asked for nothing more, for all our failings led me to uncover the principles of play and so much of the theory now proposed in this book.

### CONCLUSION (FROM 1.0 - 1.3) Can we spread the opposition out laterally and therefore create gaps/corridors that we can play through?

In the three areas of precedent written about before this conclusion, we are exposed to three simple ideas: the principle of the diamond, overload and isolate and lastly positional movement or 'animation' (transitional formations) to open up penetration channels. The most important aspect of each of these is that variability and understanding of each structure is expressed by the players.

These three solutions fit within three categories of solutions:

- 1. Sectoral Communication** with the ball between a sector within a team (RCB, RFB, RCM and RW for example - as detailed in the principle of the diamond).
- 2. Team Level Communication** with the ball - a strategy the whole team works together such as 'Overload to Isolate' or other languages of the game detailed in this book
- 3. Animation of the team** creating possibilities to penetrate. The example given in this chapter was from a defensive shape to an attacking shape that pulled players horizontally out of slot to create a passing channel. We can consider all rotations here too - but animation refers specifically to the movement from one recognisable shape to another within the team's system of movement

The three solutions offered in this section are not intended to be the full list of solutions, but three that offer insight and diversity into the types of solutions we can come up with to create horizontal spaces for which we can create more Advanced Area Actions through, should the problem be that the opposition are compact to prevent any balls through.



**SECTION 2.0.**

Can we spread the opposition out vertically and therefore create a larger midfield-defence channel/pocket for which we can exploit?

A situation whereby the pockets of space between opposition lines are too compact to play into requires a different set of tactical and technical skills to create space to exploit. The first question to be asked is if the opposition's defensive line is at an advanced height for it to be exploited beyond easily. Should the situation presented to you be one whereby the ability to play beyond become a game of chances and possibility rather than probability, then there are a variety of possible solutions to create space in front of the opposition defensive line, facilitating Advanced Area Actions.

This process of pre-Advanced Area Action situations is detailed in this section through individual and team actions, understanding opponent defensive actions and then an insightful case study, a fond memory of mine a lot closer to home.

**2.1 Individual and Team Actions**

We return to the question posed by James Nash: "What is the value of that pass?" and look to give credit to the simple pass, a first line pass (the pass that bypasses no opponent), those passes that seem so often to be 'for the sake of passing'. When I first heard James ask that question, I had an exact situation in mind that I couldn't yet formulate within a structure of Advanced Area Actions, a situation whereby many short passes in front of the opposition midfield look to invite pressure to particular areas on the field before the team in possession looks to snap in behind the opposition midfield as soon as the space has opened up.

For short first line passes to be considered valuable, they need to be done within a non-verbal communication structure whereby players understanding that as soon as a space has opened up, that space should be exploited through movement of the receiver and any future players for passes made thereafter. Another one of James Nash's thought provoking questions exists in the form of piecing together these future passes: "if you are player A, who is player B in the sequence and then player C...?" the sequence carries on into the unwritten future.

I remember asking a group of remarkably educated youth players, players who had absorbed much of this book's theoretical structures: how many passes can we think ahead? "Five", shouts a voice confidently from the corner of the classroom as if he had already thought about it. "exactly five" he cements. The ball playing central defender stood up and then mapped out the sequence of passes he had experienced in games over and over at his stage of development on the Subbuteo board at the front of the class: he would be in possession of the ball in his centre back position (7 vs. 7) and not able to create any Advanced Area Actions or be in a situation to create one through any of these pre-AAA structures (to the best of his knowledge), but he could switch the ball to his partnering central defender. The central defender receiving pass one, would then play pass two into an AAA space to a striker taking his marker with him (who started high up the field to stretch the space he now runs into), he would then lay the ball off to a forward facing supporting player. The fourth pass would be a through ball (through the gap created by removing the marker of the striker) to a winger making a diagonal run towards goal. "And the fifth pass?" I ask, "then he will play a pass to a team mate in a cut back position to score from in front of goal".

"And you can really see the player scoring that goal in the moment you have passed the ball to your partnering centre back?" I say, trying not to look impressed at the level of understanding for such a young player who was still at a stage of his development where 7-a-side was the format of fixtures. "Yes and maybe I am that player on the end of the cut back!" he says with a smile on his face as if to say he has conquered me. I walk past him laughing and only then realise he was certainly serious. I know he was serious as I saw him make that lung bursting run a few games later after the exact sequence took place as he described, only this time the shot missed the goal! He jogs past me on the touchline back to his central defender position after, with his head held down to the ground due to disappointment of missing the shot, and I could only think to ask again "And you can really see the player scoring that goal..." with a smile on my face, reminding him that he had indeed conquered me.

The next chapter of this book will look into play-rounds and switches in more detail, but the very question posed at the beginning of this section is answered with the suggestion



## CHAPTER SIX: SECTION TWO

that the pass from centre back to centre back, while bypassing nobody, could be answered “potentially the most valuable pass before our next goal!”

It may be possible that a similar situation requires the centre back to drive with the ball, directly into a space that pulls an opposition midfielder out of his slot and releases a teammate to exploit the space now opened up. In another situation, the solution may be to put your foot on top of the ball and not move at all, a signature move and choice infamously known as ‘La Pausa’ by players and coaches in Spain. The variables available to players in front of the opposition midfield are those executed with the knowledge that it isn’t about you and the ball, but about the opponent, the space being opened up and the movement to exploit such a space.

It may be possible that in another scenario a player is able to beat his man in a dribble, such actions are invaluable at changing the situation of the game and causing the opposition to adapt and make choices around leaving their position, leaving space behind them as they are now tasked to deal with the player who has beaten his man and driven into space.

*“I am an admirer of dribbling. Two dribbles together change the content of a game, they clear things up, supply fresh oxygen, make the match healthier”*

– Marcelo Bielsa

In the paragraphs above a few individual actions have been explored within a team context, which should be considered in a variety of situations for all players in front of the opposition midfield. A short list that follows summarises them and explores one or two more similar solutions that can be built up on by coaches and players. This list is not exhaustive:

1. 1st line passes to draw the opposition out and create a bigger midfield-defensive channel gap to exploit. This can be linked in with the numerical superiority that can be created in front of the opposition midfield and allowing for the first progression to be clean. A similar theory can be attached for the idea of going backwards before coming forwards again: to pull apart the vertical compaction of the opposition.
2. Driving with the ball for purpose of creating space for another team mate
3. La Pausa, to invite pressure and allow for time to change the situation
4. Exercising your right to play beyond the opposition defensive line, should the opposition defence leave space behind to be exploited out of high probability success rates, not possibility.
5. Dribbling past a player to change the situation and drawing others to you
6. The positioning of strikers to ‘stretch the field of play’ and ensure the opposition defensive line is pushed back
7. Rotation and movement (explored in future chapters)
8. Provoking the opponent by presenting the opposition with a general pressing trigger, such as taking a ‘false touch’ (detailed in section 2.2).

### 2.2 Pressing Triggers: Understanding the Opponent’s Defensive Actions

Pressing triggers exist in the form of theoretical procedures that are often taught to teams for when they should leave their disciplined and compact shape, from a organised defensive block to pressurising in packs. Typically pressing triggers bring about pressure from one or more players.

Pressing triggers exist within four categories:

1. **The attacking team are not yet organised** and have yet to transition from their defensive structure to their attacking structure (transition).
2. **The conditions for ‘control’ are not present** or the attacking player is yet to create these conditions. Control is defined as ‘the conditions that allow for the next desirable action to take place’ such as a shot, cross, pass or a dribble.
3. **Set pressing traps:** non-verbal structures that players have learned as an objective to shape and manipulate the opposition’s passing into an area or situation desired.
4. **Pressure in relation to risk:** the situations whereby a high press does not bring about high risk, taking into consideration the positioning of the ball, the opposition’s options on the ball and amount of support you may have to cover and balance the situation behind you.



For pressing trigger **category one**, many use the 'six second pressing' rule, whereby you are to press with intensity for the six seconds after losing the ball. The thinking behind such a rule is that it takes six seconds for the opposition to transition from their compact defensive structure to their attacking shape. The attacking shape of course, is more appropriate to ball retention and circulation compared to attempting to do the same in a defensive compact structure with no option to play out of pressure. In understanding this theory, we can look to analyse the opposition and question how long it takes for this process to take place and whether this is the same for all players and spaces on the field. This is particularly effective if the ball is lost in an area where many of your teammates are, proving most effective for teams that play a short passing game in the opposition half. Similarly, Red Bull Salzburg under Roger Schmidt would place an emphasis on playing down one of the two sides of the field once you enter the opposition half, this way if you lose the ball you are in a good position to counter-press (due to the proximity of your players focused on building down one of the two sides). This approach also allows for greater risk to be taken in possession in these areas.

Paul Power at Prozone and the Game Intelligence model have actually produced data that suggests that the first man to put pressure on the opponent, who has just won the ball, has a maximum of 2.3 seconds to do so and the second man pressure has a maximum of 5.5 seconds, bringing about some quantified data to the rule Pep Guardiola and others employ. Accurately, the 5.5 second rule (not the 6 second rule), 2.3 seconds to inject doubt into the opponent picking up the ball and 5.5 seconds to force the mistake through pressure the opponent cannot successfully play his way out of. Therefore, there is a suggestion that our initial penetrative pass to achieve an Advanced Area Action should be done within 5.5 seconds to avoid being in a situation whereby angles have been closed down by the opponent, alternative methods employed by clubs to avoid pressure include that of releasing the ball to the nearest open teammate as soon as the ball is won or intercepted (used by Barcelona). The argument made for the 'open man' strategy is that during the defensive phase, our awareness of attacking options is not yet built (the map of awareness), so unless we win the ball in our stride and drive through space after winning the ball, the strategy argues we should win the ball and give it to the first open player you see (who should have done field ne an immediate scan of the field after seeing his teammate win the ball and gaining insight into attacking options).

Another approach would be to promote 'switching of the ball' to the other side of the field in the attacking transition. This allows for your attacking players to move into their attacking shape and removes the possibility of opponent pressure in the way Roger Schmidt often promoted with his ultra-pressing Red Bull Salzburg team.

**Category two:** 'the conditions for control are not present, or yet created', can be broken down in to a list of situations for players to recognise and react to.

1. Bouncing ball
2. Poor first touch
3. Ball yet to arrive at player
4. Slow and/or long backwards pass
5. The player receives the ball without having checked shoulders and/or receives the ball with 'closed', 'square' or "flat" body shape – meaning they have their back to the direction they want to go in
6. Long floated pass in the air (pressure increases difficulty at bringing the ball under control)
7. Any player looking to receive the ball from one side of the field and 'turn out' to switch the ball or transfer the ball to the other side of the field (similarly to others, the shape of body is one that requires the player receiving the ball to turn with the ball and often look down at the ball during the receiving moment)
8. Pitch or weather conditions increase difficulty for control
9. The player on ball has ball positioned on weak foot (opposition analysis based)
10. The player has a tendency to take a poor first touch (opposition analysis based)
11. The player has a particular receiving scenario they aren't competent in (opposition analysis based)
12. Square short-medium passes

*"The hardest thing about an easy match is making a weak opponent play bad football. A poor player isn't poor because he tends to kick the ball in his own goal. It's because when you put intense pressure on him, he loses control. So you have to increase the tempo of the game and he'll automatically give the ball away."* – Johan Cruyff

From the list of pressing triggers given, we (as the attacking team) can identify a few that perhaps give opportunity for deception and allow us to invite pressure and therefore increase the pockets of space we can penetrate in to.



## CHAPTER SIX: SECTION TWO

*“Don’t mark a player, cover the space between two players. The opponent thinks he’s unmarked, making pressing easier”* – Pep Guardiola

Guardiola’s quote gives hint towards **category three**: set pressing traps, an option orientated pressure strategy, an approach whereby ‘half of a space’ is offered to the player on the ball, another example might be the pressing trap of leading players to the sides of the field to employ the principle of ‘the touchline is the best defender’; this involves pressing play into set areas of defensive superiority. Those that fit within the fourth category may include quantitative superiority situations or 1 vs. 1 match ups in the final third.

Some of those triggers listed in category two and the text that followed give insight into deceptive methods we can employ (based on player strengths or opponent analysis) to invite pressure and as a result create space to exploit behind players leaving their compact structure.

### 2.3 CASE STUDY: Wales 2011, Gary Speed (Head Coach) and Raymond Verheijen (Assistant Head Coach)

In 2011 Wales were FIFA’s most improved under Gary Speed. This fantastic achievement was accomplished through many major cultural changes in the environment of the national team and some simple fundamental messages that served as non-verbal communication for the team on the field. Later in this book (chapter 12) the link between the environment and communication (tactics) will be explored in further detail.

Before Speed took over as head coach of the Welsh national team, Wales were on a steady decline with very few clear elements within their playing style and playing for Wales or being part of the team wasn’t something most players were committed to or motivated for. Players would attend the training camps and decide to spend the remaining of their contact hours at home with family, rather than together developing a sense of being of team. For some, to be called up for Wales meant to take a break from professional football at their clubs. Through several stages of designed development not covered in this book, the national team grew both off and on the field.

On the field, there were structures being put in place that allowed for Wales to use their qualitative superiority over many of their opponents: Aaron Ramsey, Joe Allen, Craig Bellamy and Gareth Bale.

One of the first decisions was to change the out-of-possession shape to #1-4-1-4-1, to allow for key players to thrive in the attacking transition and when attacking. This decision was made to allow for Bale and Bellamy to have the space to dominate the ball from deeper positions and find space to exploit in between the opposition midfield and defence through running at the opposition, rather than playing with their backs to the defensive line. Alongside the decision to change formation was a requirement to play out from the back, to control where Wales’ key players would pick up the ball. The idea was to dominate through qualitative superiority and ensure the first progression of the ball was clean, achieved through the control of positioning on the field.

*“Positional Play consists of generating superiorities out of the defensive line against those who are pressing you. Everything is much easier when the first progression of the ball is clean.”* – Juan Manuel Lillo

To fully take advantage of the key spaces, one of the strategies employed was one to draw the opponent’s wide midfielders out of the space they filled, opening up more space for Bale and Bellamy but also reducing the numbers in the opposition midfield to play through.

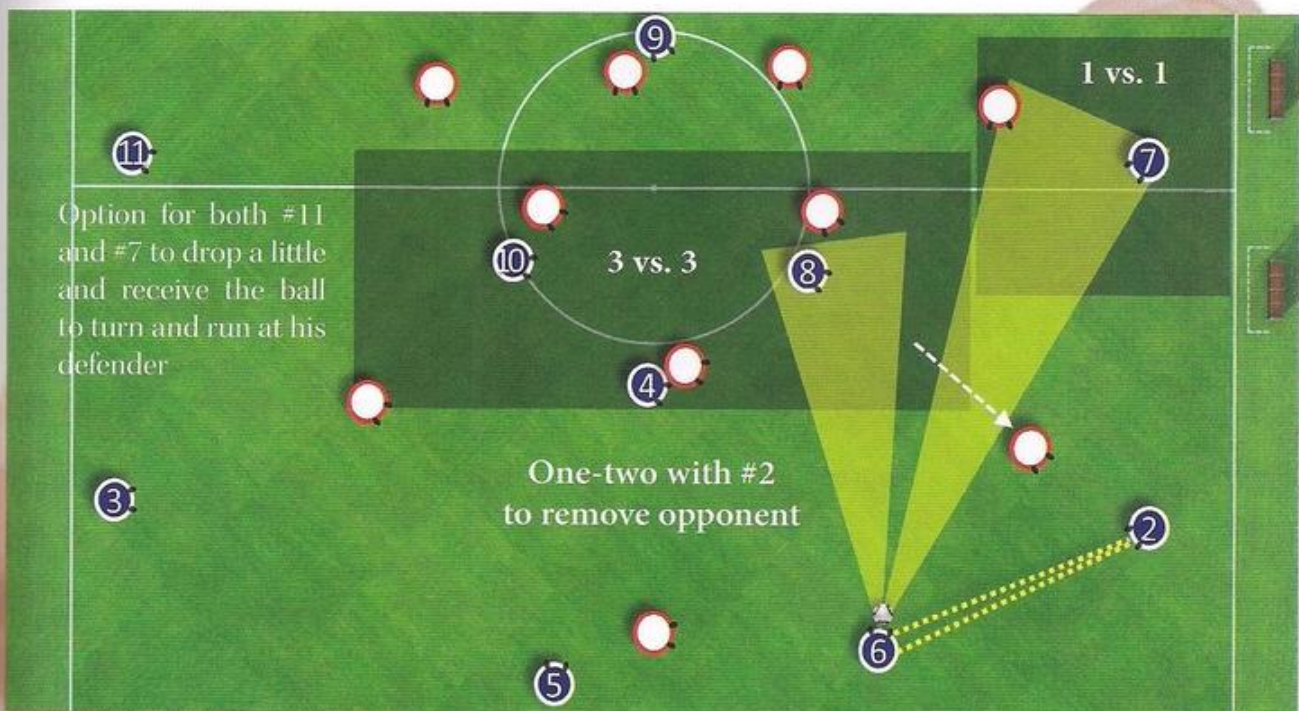
The typical #1-4-3-3 based formation would ask for fullbacks to position themselves high and wide in possession, however there are two key outcomes that come along with that decision: (1) We reduce the space for the wingers to fall back into (since the fullbacks take a midfielder with them), and (2) We force them to become compact in response to our shape and we create a midfield line of five against five to play through, where it is possible we could create a 3 vs. 3 scenario instead. Our key players are not in scenarios conducive to take advantage of qualitative superiority (1 vs. 1 in high areas).





*"It is not about the opponent, it is not about the ball, it is about the space the ball may be played into and the opponent that may come into it." – Louis van Gaal*

By holding the fullbacks in a deeper position during the pre-Advanced Area Action phase of attacking, Wales were able to create 3 vs. 3 scenarios and sometimes better still, a 2 vs. 2 scenario in midfield areas (Ramsey and Allen) and had opened up spaces in wide midfield spaces for Bale and Bellamy to find opportunities to pick up the ball and run at their opponent.





## CHAPTER SIX: SECTION TWO

During Speed's time in charge, the number of Advanced Area Actions achieved per game was growing game by game, as results also improved game upon game. The influence of the then captain Aaron Ramsey (CM), Gareth Bale (RW), Craig Bellamy (LW) and Joe Allen (CM) was growing as the players further understood what was asked of them. To draw out the opposition midfield players and create space for the key players to exploit these key areas.

***"Weak points or holes in the opponent's position must be occupied by pieces, not pawns."*** – Siegbert Tarrasch

The Wales case study is one that forces us to think about how best you should penetrate given the player profiles available to you. Not all types of penetration and methods to penetrate are equal, of course.

The idea of using fullbacks in deep positions to facilitate penetration is not a unique solution, there are many examples of this being employed. Marcelo Bielsa looked to employ the same strategy often with Athletic Bilbao, only when the central midfielders get on the ball would the fullbacks look to get ahead of or in line with the ball. The role of the fullback pre-Advanced Area Actions is an important one that should not be ignored. The role of the fullback is one that should be considered with great detail.

When Pep Guardiola asked his fullbacks to take up central positions when in possession at Bayern Munich (altering the position slot of a fullback, a precedent Bielsa and others had set some years earlier), there may have been scope to believe part of the rationale behind Guardiola's requests were done with similar thinking to that of Wales 2011 and Oxford 2014 (through Guardiola's own unique set of precedents).

With the fullbacks travelling inside, their movement would not be tracked and they'd find numerical superiority in central areas, but they'd potentially also create space for the two wingers to be given license to drop deeper (between the opposition's wide midfielder and fullback) and furthermore, it allowed for the more creative central midfielders such as Thiago to concentrate on picking the ball up in Advanced Area Action space between the opposition midfield and defensive lines. This theory would of course be complete if the movement meant that one of the opposition's central midfielders was to leave their slot to deal with one of the

fullbacks who have moved inside. A flurry of movement designed to create a better usage of the pockets of space between the opposition defensive line and midfield line.

***"Pep's idea of putting the fullbacks high and inside... It has been both intelligent and strategic... He wants control in the middle of the pitch and for that he needs superiority either in ball possession or the number of players there. He can therefore only attack down the wings, with one man on each touchline. For that he's got Robben and Ribery and that's enough...His tactic has ended up not only giving Bayern superiority in the middle of the pitch, thanks to Rafinha and Alaba, but also allowing the two creative midfielders in that line of four...it's a winning, intelligent, aggressive tactic which I must applaud"***

– Roman Grill, Lahm's agent, on Pep Guardiola's innovative tactics (Pep Confidential: Inside Pep Guardiola's First Season at Bayern Munich by Marti Perarnau)

Pep Guardiola goes on to add further detail to the positional structures he employs to manipulate the opponent structure and create space for AAA:

***"Playing out with three men from the back is very useful because it conditions the response of your rival. Even if they press you, it'll be with the centre forward and second striker, obliging them to move into a #1-4-4-2 shape and you can therefore over-run them by achieving superiority"***

Guardiola's ability to manipulate the opposition into #1-4-4-2 and reduce the opposition into the simplest form of which to penetrate through is of the highest order, and the simplest example of understanding how positional structures can facilitate the creation of a desirable situation to execute Advanced Area Actions.







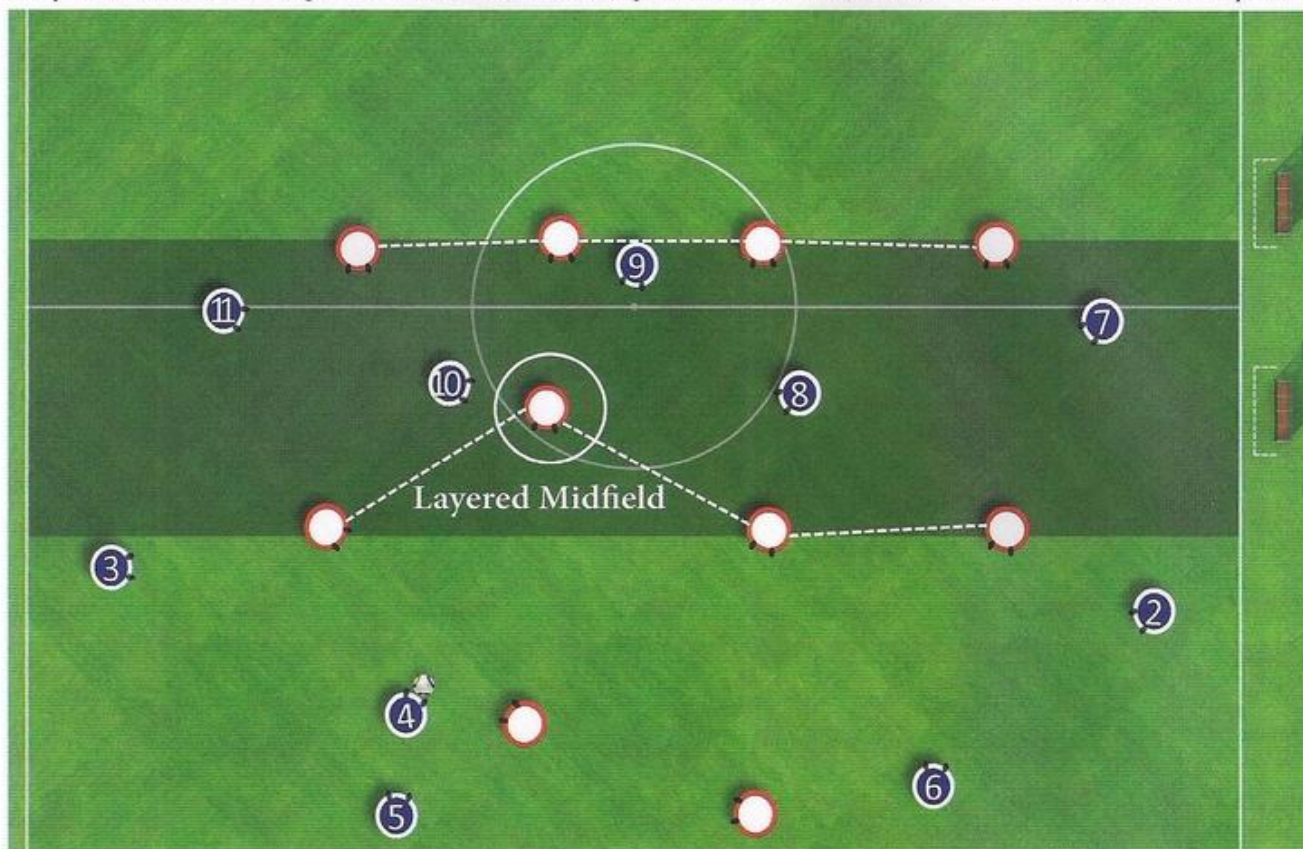
## CHAPTER SIX: SECTION THREE

### SECTION 3.

Can we either:

- Remove the layers of the opposition midfield and find ways to pull the opposition flat into straight lines?
- Find pockets of space to move into for which the opposition midfield are flat in this specific direction?

Process three proposes that there are two approaches to solving the problem of facing a team that set up with good balance of layers in their midfield to protect the defensive line, the space detailed in this book as the Advanced Area Action space.



In the image illustrated above, we see the situation for which players should look to solve through cues, patterns and action scripts. This section of the book will detail two possible key solutions that directly address the issue.

#### A. Removing the layers of the opposition midfield and find ways to pull the opposition flat into straight lines

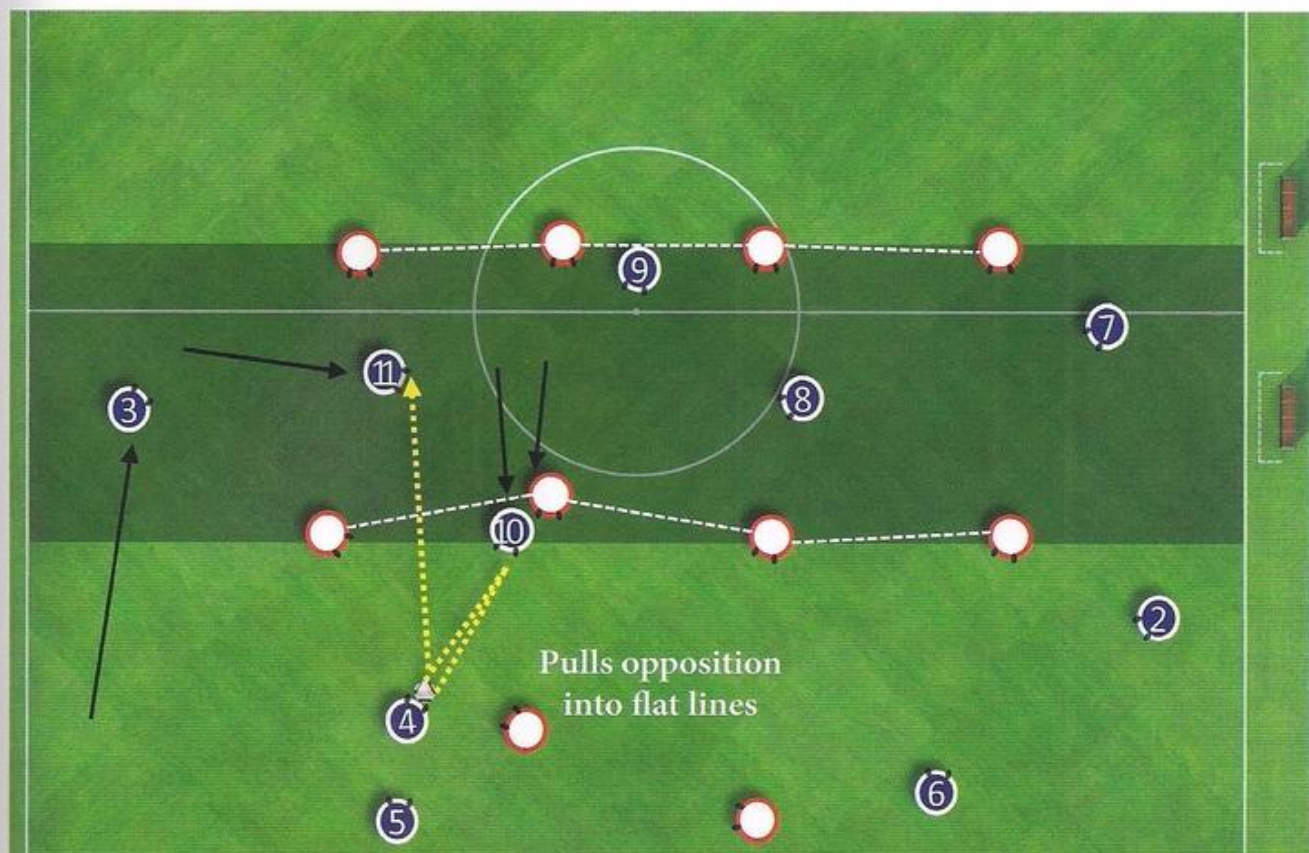
When looking to remove the layers of the opposition midfield we can do this through off-ball movement alone, movement that results in players drawing away and targeting the players creating layers. Another and possibly more successful method is done by inviting pressure from this player and again, targeting the individual from the opposition responsible for the layered structure.

There are four ways of achieving the removal of layers: (1) attracting and targeting the player from the opposition responsible for the layered structure by receiving the ball within a pressing distance from the player, through a wall pass for another team mate to then receive the AAA pass, (2) the same scenario only the player playing the wall pass must then make the immediate movement behind the opponent, back into the space created and exploit the newly



created space himself, (3) the same scenario once more, only this time the player is able to beat the defender (moved out of layered position) on the turn and dribble into the advanced area between the opposition midfield and defence and (4) lastly, we can achieve the same displacement of the opponent through off-ball movement and threat alone (without receiving the ball until moving back into the AAA space).

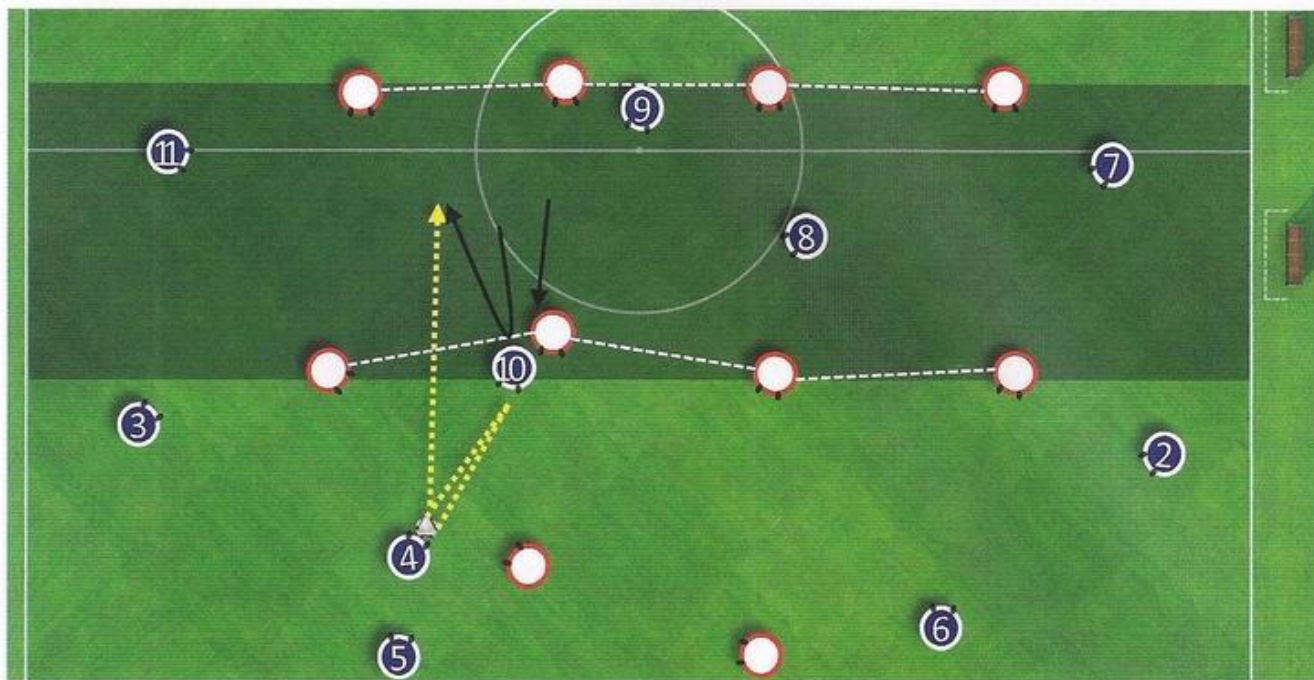
An Example of Removal of Layers: (1) 'wall-pass for another team mate to exploit the space'





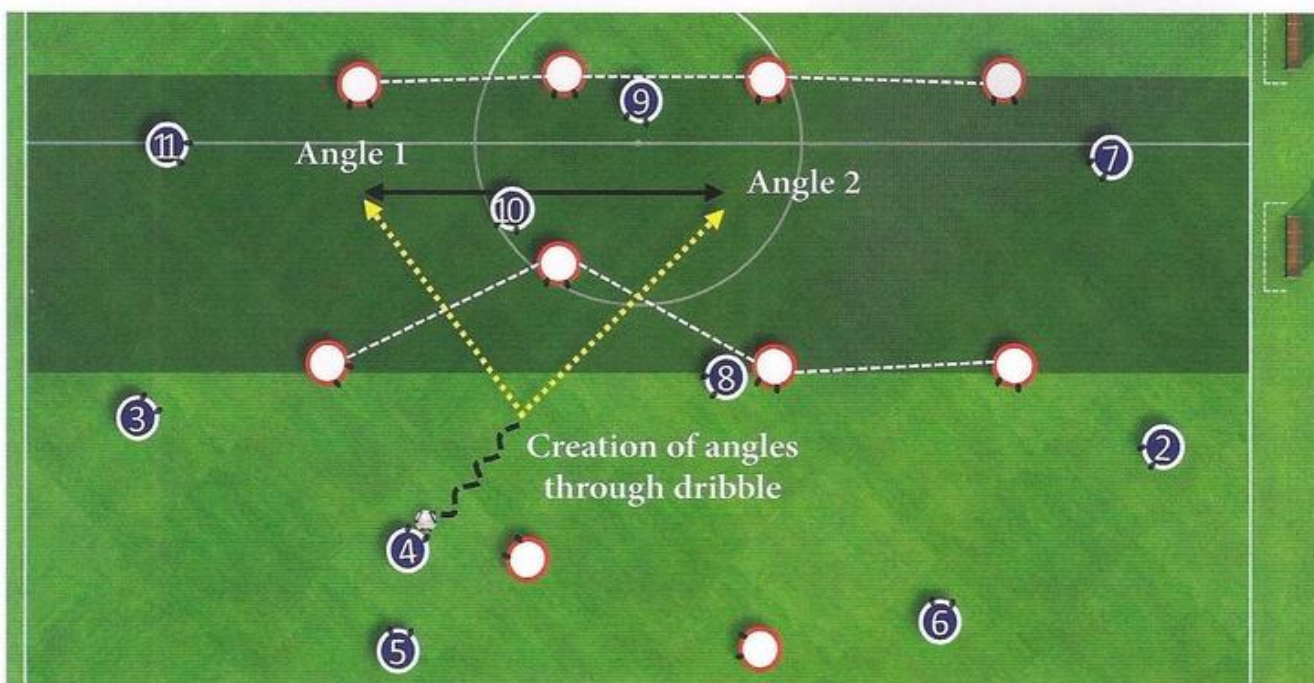
## CHAPTER SIX: SECTION THREE

An Example of Removal of Layers: (2) 'wall-pass and then spin back in behind'



B. Find pockets of space to move into for which the opposition midfield are flat in this specific direction

Another approach altogether may be to exploit the pockets of space behind diagonal lines, finding the pockets of space that may still be considered AAA, still attracting one of the defensive players out of his slot. This is achieved via the creation of angles from the player on the ball in the pre-AAA space and the player looking to receive the ball in the AAA space. 'You are always flat in one direction, one way or another'.





### 3.1 CASE STUDY: Analysis of Slovenia's #1-4-2-3-1 2014/15, EURO 2016 Group E qualification stages

During my analysis of Slovenia as a future opponent for the Estonian National Team (for whom I work as a consultant to Magnus Pehrsson, the national team manager) my job was to not only identify the key weaknesses and strengths of Slovenia along with all that is expected of an opposition analysis scouting report, but also to suggest a variety of proactive strategies that Estonia could adopt in facing the opponent.

After viewing several games, I noticed a common theme of teams looking to create platforms and penetrate from wide areas (lanes 1, 2, 4 or 5), and in particular in lanes 2 and 4. For Switzerland that player was Valon Behrami, who would look to pull out to where his right fullback would normally be (pushing on Switzerland's right back, Stephan Lichtsteiner) and get on the ball on the half way line in lane 4 as often as possible. Should there be pressure on Behrami, Switzerland would use a play-round to play across to their left hand side before coming back across to Behrami (who against Slovenia, would now always be free after this ball movement). Behrami would now look to create Advanced Areas from this position beyond the Slovenia midfield (65% of all Switzerland's Advanced Areas entry came from this particular zone and player).

In the England vs. Slovenia match, there was again a common theme of central midfielders acting as wide area platforms, only this time that player was Fabian Delph and this time on the left hand side of the field. England had less success in their approach as Slovenia sat deep and penetration became difficult for the England side.

Lithuania vs. Slovenia however detailed some promising information, but a lack of execution meant most would have overlooked a possible strategy that perhaps even Lithuania did not intend. Lithuania demonstrated a strategy employed to remove the layers of Slovenia's #1-4-2-3-1 and turn it into a #1-4-1-4-1 with lots of space behind the line of four midfielders and what excited me most about it was the simplicity of the approach – albeit an approach Lithuania actually failed to capitalise on after their initial good work.

The ball would often start at Lithuania's centre back (this time on either side) and be played wide to a fullback or

central midfielder who had pulled wide. This pass would engage Slovenia's wide attacking midfielder, leaving his position as before and Slovenia's central attacking midfielder did not shift across to fill that space. Lithuania would then look to pass the ball inside to a player who had now moved into the previous position of the opposition wide attacking midfielder of Slovenia and as that ball travelled, one of Slovenia's two holding players would race out to put pressure on this player. This pattern of movement then began to jump out to me in many other games on a second viewing. Pass the ball wide, back inside (or just the threat of it) and then through for the Advanced Areas, all by removing the layers of Slovenia's midfield and forcing Slovenia into flat lines in certain areas of their midfield. These movements best create the conditions to invite Slovenia's slow central defenders out of their slot vertically, removing their layers of protection in front of them.

#### TERMINOLOGY

**Both 'Lanes' and 'Platforms' are given detail in chapter 07 on page 74.**

**Lanes** - 'lanes' refer to the five vertical corridors that run down the length of the field. We have two 'outside lanes', a central lane and then two either side of the central lane in between the central lane and the outside lane. These lanes are labelled one to five from left to right.

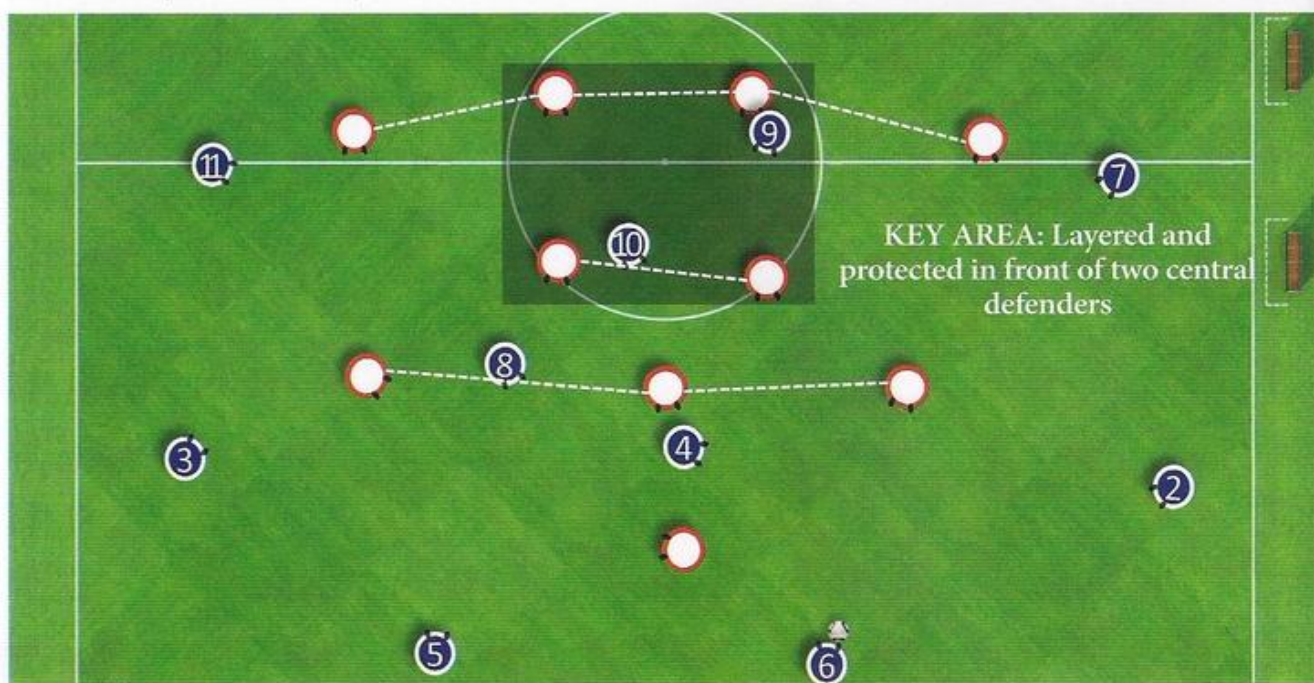
These have been called lanes throughout the book to avoid confusion with the term 'channel' which has a variety of meanings. 'Half-space' and other terms have not been used as the aim of such a language is to produce player friendly explanations and clarity.

**Platforms** - these are the different areas of the field where teams often dictate possession from. We have a low, a medium and a high platform (for the purposes of simplicity). The low platform is around your own 18-yard box, the medium platform is around the half way line and the high platform is in response to when the opponent falls into a low block on the edge of their own 18-yard box. These are sometimes referred to in the professional game as 'Launch Pads'



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Problem: #1-4-2-3-1 provides cover in front of two central defenders who are vulnerable when defending out of position in between lines (Slovenia in white)



Solution: By playing wide you attract the wide attacking midfielder (to prevent you from playing around to your winger), then you should look to play inside (via movement of receiving player) and now you attract the nearest defensive midfielder out of slot. By following the processes written about before you will then force the opposition into a #1-4-1-4-1 shape and free up space to exploit in front of one of the central defenders.





### CHAPTER SIX SUMMARY: Pre-Advanced Area Actions

The contents of this chapter were presented to you to be simple and at the most basic level they are simple. However, the reality of implementing such an approach within the RPD model (detailed in chapter 4) is one that requires more than a season of education to a level of excellence. A complex planning, monitoring, analysis and adaptation model is required to successfully put principle two in place:

#### Principle Two. If we cannot achieve an Advanced Area Action then...

1. Can we spread the opposition out laterally and therefore create gaps/corridors that we can play through? [process one]
2. Can we spread the opposition out vertically and therefore create a larger midfield-defence channel/ pocket for which we can exploit? [process two]
3. Can we either:
  - a. Remove the layers of the opposition midfield and find ways to pull the opposition flat into straight lines? [process three]
  - b. Find pockets of space to move into for which the opposition midfield are flat in this specific direction? [process three]

To best summarise the case studies revealed to us in this book we can break process one down into three sections: the principle of the diamond, the overload to isolate variations and the positional structures that bring about horizontal movement from the opposition and create gap/corridors that we can play through.

Process two is further detailed into three parts: the individual actions to bring about pockets of space we can penetrate into, understanding the responsive defensive actions of the opposition so we can purposefully provoke pressure and lastly the positional structures that achieve the desirable state of the opposition.

Process three is considered, at the theoretical level, the simplest to break down: removal of the player creating the layer through targeted displacement and the creation of angles to achieve the objective of Advanced Area Actions.

In future chapters we explore the role of rotations and play-rounds play in facilitating AAA.

The structures when playing out from the back and the structures to facilitate penetration are diverse and require an understanding of the objective by the players on the field.

*“People get it wrong. Playing from the back shouldn't be a gamble, there shouldn't be a mistake. If there is a mistake or a gamble, you haven't done something right. There are very clear structures when playing out from the back: you force the opposition to make a decision - do they press you high up and then gaps appear in the middle or do they allow you to have it and you can control the game straight away”*

– Roberto Martinez

Which Pre-AAA structures you employ depends on the analysis of the opponent (both pre-match by the coaching staff but also by the players while on the field) and analysis of your own strengths and weaknesses with qualitative, quantitative and positional superiority in mind. It's about finding the best way for your players in each match within your formation and structures of positioning. As touched on several times in this book so far, nothing in football, no two players, no two one vs one scenarios and no two methods of penetration are of equality.

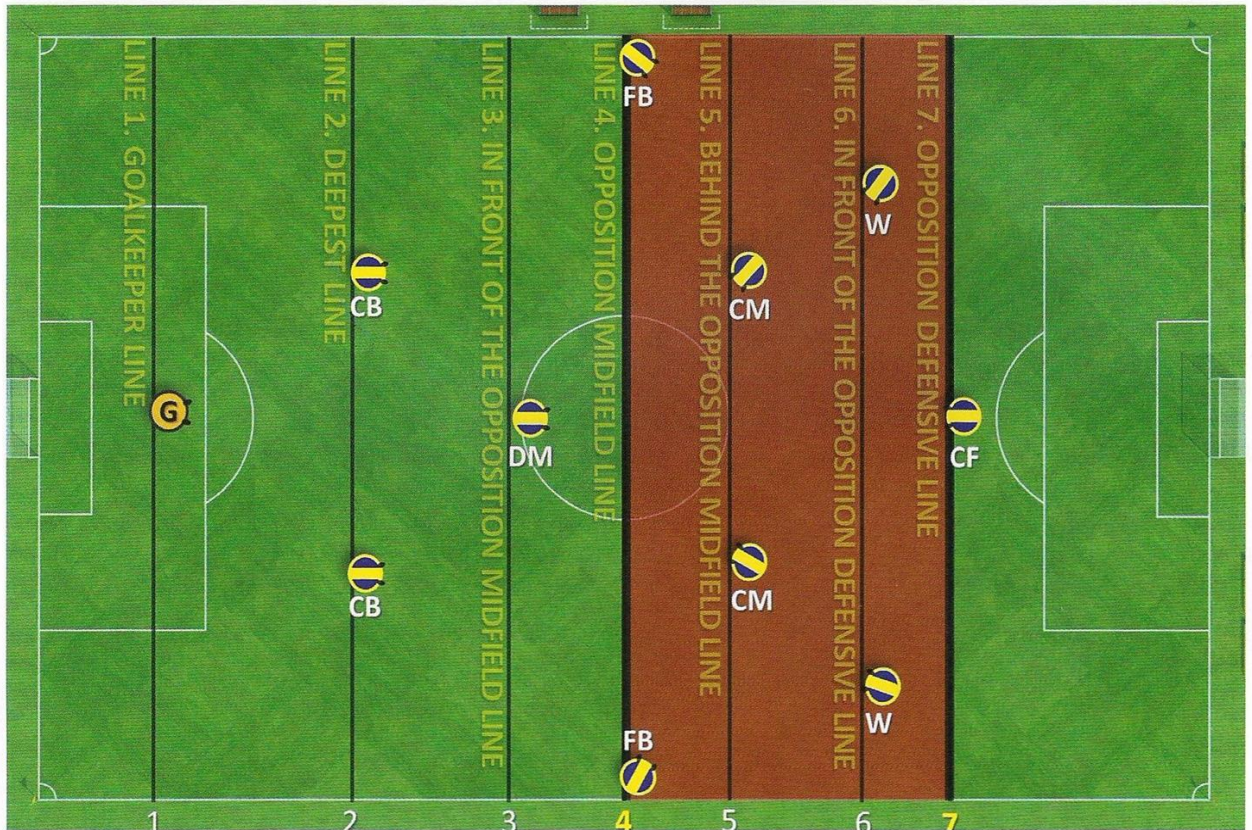


# 07 CHANGING ANGLES OF ATTACK

## "Switch and Slice if you can"

To divide the pitch up into spaces is nothing new, coaches have done this for many decades from Arrigo Sacchi through to Pep Guardiola and way before then, way into the game's earliest days. In my first book, 'Coaching the Tiki-Taka Style of Play' I presented detail on the 7 lines of play commonly used by coaches grasping an understanding of positioning on a football field in a theoretical context (supporting image follows).

However, it was only once I flipped the lens and started to think about the field in vertical sections through the lens of penetration and positioning did the three dimensional value come into place.



Some coaches will refer to 'four lines' instead of seven lines of play. The four lines are simply the opposition midfield line and opposition defensive line, then one line between them and one line in front of the opposition midfield line.

However, it is important to distinguish between being just behind the midfield or just in front of the defence because it changes who is responsible for you from the opposition.

To simplify our thinking we can say that we have the opposition midfield line, the opposition defensive line, then +1 and -1 either side and work off of this format instead if preferred.

Louis van Gaal gives a fantastic interview with Pedro Daniel Sousa (May 2009) where he details his approach to the seven lines of play, available on the internet with a simple search on a search engine. Feel free to contact the author of this book on social media to find this document if you have no such luck finding it.

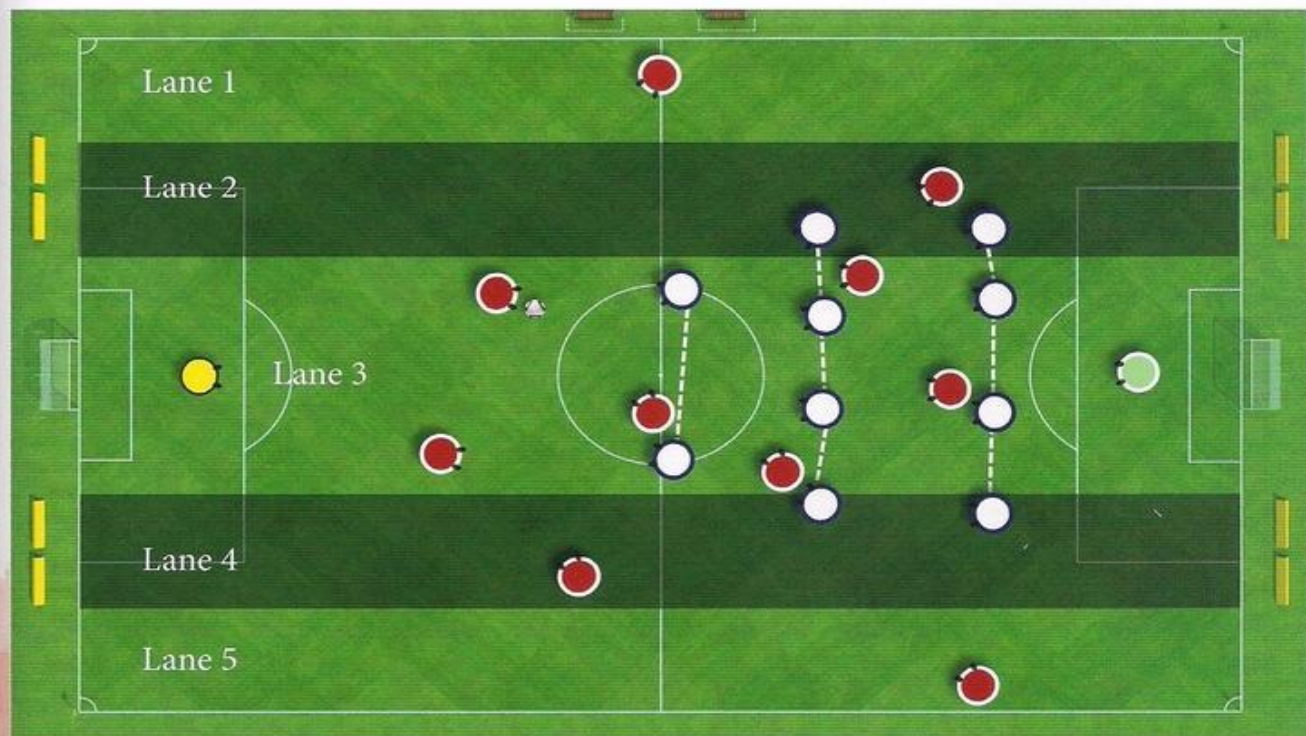


I started with an idea based on two training sessions I had seen on tape with Bielsa delivering the session. The first session showed an up-back-through (detailed in chapter 10), from a centre back up to an attacking midfielder who had peeled off behind the opposition midfield line, but later in that session the centre back was instructed to switch the ball to his partnering centre back before the movement as before was repeated. My question was this, why add in the switch unless it served some value?

I then saw one of the assistant coaches correcting the positioning of centre backs as the ball moved, to ensure the receiving centre back was receiving the ball in the correct vertical channel of space outlined by markers at various intervals along the length of the field being used. This led me to my next question, why were there five lanes? Why not just three, which made more sense to me within the structures of play I was being introduced to (wide, centre and wide), just as Louis van Gaal uses.

"Why are there five channels in many of these tapes?" I asked the South American coach who had allowed for me to borrow the footage to further develop my own understanding of the game, to which he replied "you will not be able to see why from these sessions, they're unopposed". I didn't feel he had helped me, at least not at first and was left with yet another small answer.

Then, midway through one of the hundreds of matches being reviewed, a Chile match to be more exact, I saw it. The ball would shift from five spaces throughout the game in front of the opposition midfield and in each space I would freeze the frame and take a snapshot of it, each wide space, the central space and each space in between the centre and wide space (commonly known as a 'half space' in German coaching literature or 'the inside channel' in other cultures). With each space came a different situation, came a different set up from the opposition. The need for two extra lanes (compared to the theoretical structures used by Van Gaal) becomes clear if we begin to assess the opposition's response to where the ball is.

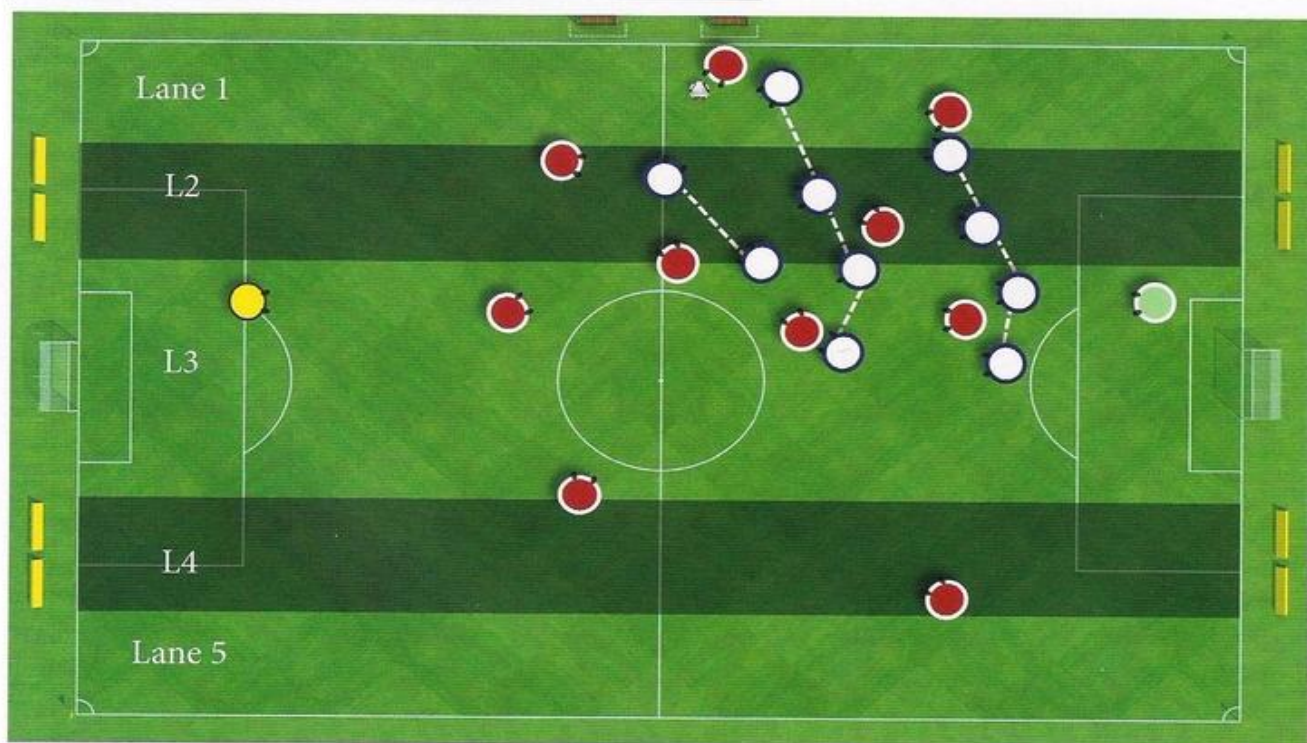


Theoretical response to the ball being in the central lane





Theoretical response to the ball being in lane 2 or 4



Theoretical response to the ball being in lane 1 or 5 (wide)



Each movement of the ball introduced the players to a new situation, a new structure of pressure. Of course the idea of switching the ball from left to right in front of the opposition midfield isn't a new one, it was the framework that it was to fit within that brought about significance. John Cartwright, one of the greatest coaching minds English football ever ignored, brought about many forward thinking ideas in the 1990's that would not be proposed until the mid-2000's, theorising the game through different lenses to those being proposed by football associations elsewhere. Cartwright has written on several occasions on his website (<http://www.keeptheball.wordpress.com>) about the use of play-rounds in football, that of moving the ball horizontally on the field. "There are four" (and exactly four, not one more) Cartwright writes without further explanation but absolutely making it clear that play-rounds are of significance in football strategy and commonly misused and misunderstood.

John Cartwright's four play-rounds are structured as followed:

1. Deepest Level: horizontal circulation in and around own 18-yard box, often through your goalkeeper (often vs. high block of the opposition)
2. Back Level: horizontal circulation of the ball through the defensive players in your own half (often vs. high block of the opposition)
3. Mid-Level: horizontal circulation around the opposition half (often vs. medium block of the opposition)
4. Forward Level: horizontal circulation around opposition 18-yard box (often vs. low block of the opposition)





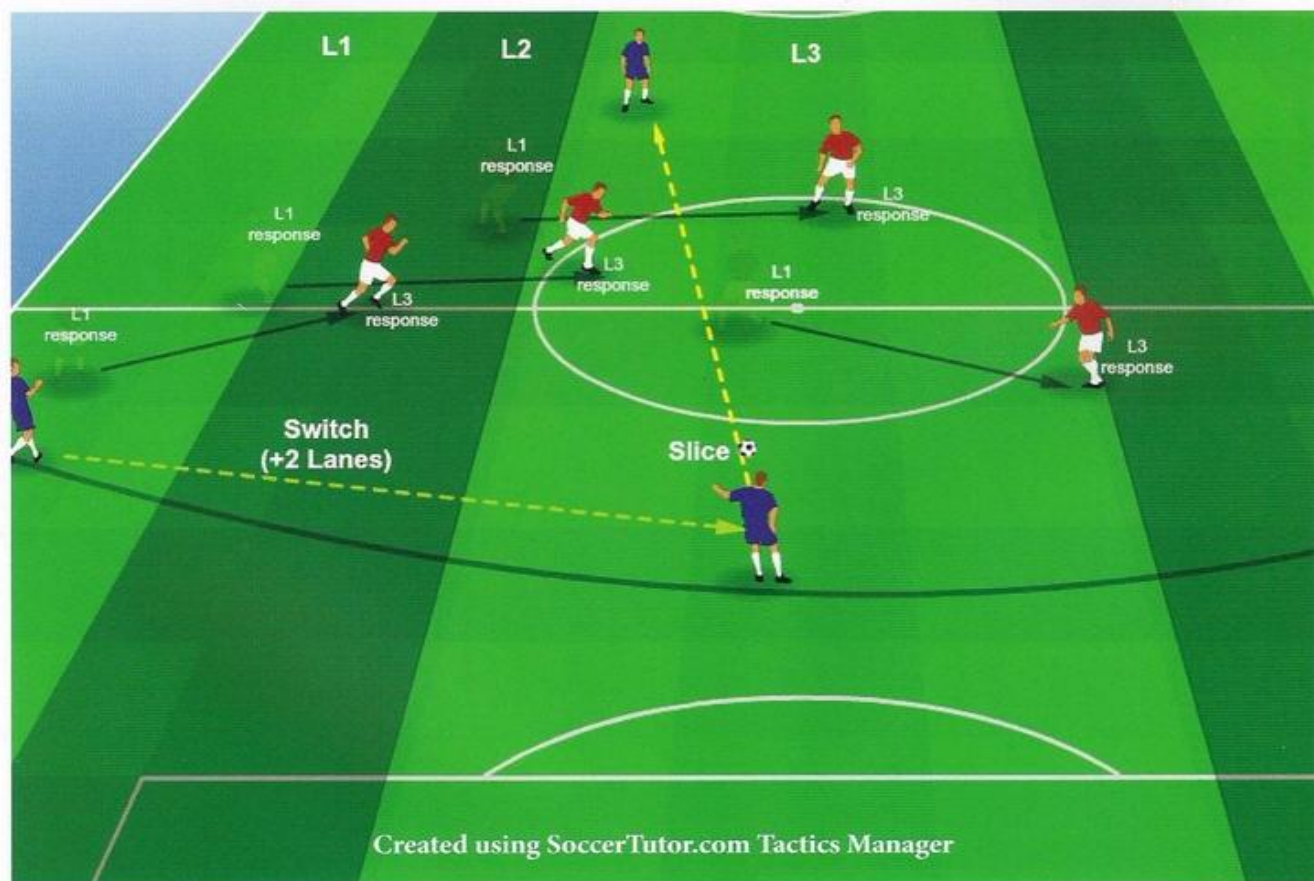
Gerard Jones, a Premier Skills coach (Cartwright's coach education company) adds *"the key with play-rounds is keeping the ball by playing around the opposition pressure in order to 'penetrate' and break lines where possible – so there is a purpose"*.

I posed the question to a Postdoctoral Research Assistant at the Mathematical Institute, University of Oxford and put forward a theory, 'how far does the ball need to move horizontally to typically find new angles against a compact opponent so we can penetrate?' a question that I knew would be hard to answer with much objectivity or certainty, but a question that would start the research of distances, speeds and angles.

If we assume a football pitch to be 75-yard-wide and we divide that pitch into five lanes of equal size (for purposes of simplicity), we are left with five lanes each 15 yards in width. The theory put forward was one that declares the

ball must be moved at least a full 15 yards before such a scenario presents itself, whereby the situation in front of the person on the ball is significantly different to that of the original person on the ball. Fifteen yards minimum to change the picture and create new opportunities to achieve AAA. A theory that fits within the structures used in several observed training sessions, where the partnering centre back was asked to receive the ball at least one full lane away from the ball as a minimum.

My own studies done with elite U-16 players have shown that on an 11-a-side field (given the qualities expected from an elite U-16 player) the ball should be moved more than one full lane before guaranteeing the receiving player an opportunity to achieve an AAA upon his first or second touch: **'switch and slice'**, a term created by a young player I had previously coached; to switch the ball and then look to slice through the opposition upon your first touch if possible, if not then as quickly as the situation demands.





The image on the previous page shows the response the opposition midfield block may give to a ball being positioned in lane one and then the distance they are to cover to get into position to give a response to the ball being located in lane three (centre). If we consider the response the opposition can give in lane one and then the relatively easy transition into a response to lane two, each lane further away then asks a more demanding question in terms of how far players are to cover to provide the appropriate response. The 'Switch and Slice' theory suggests the bigger the question, the more likely it is we may be able to find faults in any response from the opposition. By this logic, a more direct switch that allows for a first time penetrative pass is more valuable than any aerial or slow transfer of the ball.

With a theory proposed that we must play more than one full lane horizontally before the strategy of switch and slice becomes more successful, we can propose that all ball movement done within the lane you are in and the neighbouring lane to fit within the principles of the three processes to facilitate the creation of AAA (see chapter six).

With this proposal in mind, the central space (if it wasn't already) now becomes a key area for choice and domination for your players during the pre-AAA stages of attacking. Rene Maric of Red Bull Salzburg speaks in great depth of the value of breaking the field into half spaces (Halbraum), wings (Außen) and central (Zentrum) areas and suggests that perhaps the division of spaces should not be equal, as the value of the half spaces and central lane are higher than that of the wing lanes.

Maric goes on to counter-argue how due to the central lane being usually heavily occupied, there may be less time on the ball to make decisions, coupled with the high risk elements of losing the ball in this space, it may even be that the half spaces are to be considered the most valuable (if we are to consider the implications of losing the ball and the subsequent negative transition). The considerations of such spaces heavily influence the player profiles for each position but more than that, how best to play against an opponent that is particularly dangerous with counter attacks from certain lanes.

When looking at the different variations of play-rounds in front of the opposition midfield we can come up with three basic types:

1. From strong-side to weak-side directly from player to player (across more than one full lane)
2. From strong-side to weak-side through a bounce pass off a deep lying midfielder (or any advanced player ahead of the ball for platforms higher up the field)
3. From strong-side to weak-side through the goalkeeper (or any player underneath the ball for platforms higher up the field)

Each variation of horizontal circulation has different implications on player movement and suggestive player rotation. The most desirable type of horizontal circulation would be that of the most direct, from player A to player B (from centre back to centre back) and in a passing form that allows for control to be present upon arrival, allowing for the option of a first time penetrative pass: switch and slice.

The next most desirable, could be argued to be that of the bounce pass (should the direct option not be available). The bounce pass allows for the transfer to take place, but also allows for rotation and movement to take place as well as allowing for immediate execution of action from the receiving centre back. The bounce pass through a defensive midfielder (who can be marked) often allows for the defensive midfielder to drop in between the two central defenders and take his marking player with him, therefore inviting the opposition into a flat #1-4-4-2 and a more penetrable shape.







Lastly, the horizontal circulation that requires the route through the goalkeeper, the slowest type of play-round that invites common pressure from the opponent to often force the goalkeeper to go long.

The transfer of the ball through the goalkeeper also then requires for the receiving player (perhaps a central defender on the weak-side) to take up an open body shape and often demands the player takes a touch before being able to play forward effectively on his first touch. Many would consider the attempt to transfer through the goalkeeper as a 'reset' pass, which then demands numerical superiority to be created by your players to ensure a platform to play forward from when building out.

The themes of rotation and platforms are covered later in this book (chapter 11) when exploring non-verbal communication on a football field, but is a theme heavily intertwined with the idea of horizontal circulation as we try to change the picture of the game and find opportunities to penetrate in-between the opposition midfield and defence or better still, beyond the defensive line with probability and control.

Depending on the stage of development of the individuals or team, the role of horizontal circulation should be considered carefully. For young players, the opportunity to switch the angle of attack (switch across lanes) is an opportunity to play away from pressure and not practice pre-AAA structures or any form of improvisation under pressure. It may be a consideration to remove the option or restructure the order of the principles of play depending on the stage of youth development. A balance of freedom from and freedom to should be well planned.

During the competitive level, training sessions offer an opportunity to be flexible and vary between any rules or constraints put on players. Some teams may start with removing principle two (pre-AAA structures) and slowly build in set structures, while others may take an alternative approach. The implementation of such theory requires careful planning unique to the phase of implementation you are in.

Make no mistake about it though, there is purpose behind horizontal circulation: to discover a new situation with different pressure from the opponent. To facilitate penetration and increase the number of AAA:

Switch and slice... if you can.





# 08 RETAIN & 'PLAY YOUR WAY OUT'

“Sometimes a piece of music in the score isn't effective. When a score is too well finished with too many elements, sometimes it's too much.”

- Alejandro Amenabar, Chilean writer, composer and director

In football there are a variety of schools of thought with regards to the development of creativity, improvisation and a skill set that allows for players to find solutions in difficult and tight situations on a football field. There is no denying the fact that a player who can dominate his one vs. one can change the picture of the game.

## 8.1 METHODOLOGY: Developing players who can dominate one vs one

The demand to develop these types of players from managers and coaches asks a question that is responded to in many different ways. During Mark Sampson's time as a youth academy coach at Swansea City under Roberto Martinez, Sampson asked Martinez what he was looking for from the academy programme, to which Martinez responded: *“keep it simple and just make sure they can dominate their one vs. one's. I can teach them where to stand in a few months, but it takes years to develop a player who can dominate his one vs. ones”*. A similar strategy was employed at Wigan Athletic where Tim Lees was now being asked by Martinez what the academy philosophy was and a poster was put up in the classrooms used by the academy that said *“Football is a game of 11 one vs. ones”*.

In the book 'Developing an Elite Coaching Philosophy in Possession' written by Tim Lees, much of the approach to player development at Wigan Athletic was detailed. The one vs. one scenarios that exist within the game of football are broken into six different scenarios:

1. Defender in front
2. Defender behind (*“75% of receiving scenarios in elite football are defender behind pressure”* – Tim Lees, Developing an Elite Coaching Philosophy)

3. Defender to the side
4. Defender who is approaching you on a recovery angle
5. No defender (due to movement)
6. Aerial scenarios of the above

These different one vs one scenarios underpin much of what Tim Lees implemented at Wigan Athletic under Roberto Martinez. A framework for which session outcomes and match analysis worked from.

Pepijn Lijnders is worldwide renowned as one of the best coaches for developing technically advanced players having formerly implemented his ideas at PSV, Porto and now Liverpool FC. Lijnders' model of development is designed into two phases: phase one and phase two.

Phase One: Concentration on the five development stages to develop an all-round attacking technique

The five development stages are as follows:

1. Controlling body and the ball
2. Learning to protect the ball and learning to get free with the ball
3. Learning to outplay opponents and dive into space / holes
4. Learning to find the goal by shooting, heading, volleying
5. Initiaves (AAA (Excellence between Lines))

Phase Two: Concentrate on game development (AAA focused). There are three stages in this phase:

1. More and better ball possession (Individual, Cooperative and Collective expressions)
2. Creating more chances (Individual, Cooperative and Collective expressions)
3. Score more goals (Individual, Cooperative and Collective expressions)



As noted, according to Lijnders there are three types of expression in the game which form the layers and approach to Lijnders' coaching model:

1. Individual expression (how does a player play with and without the ball)
2. Cooperative expression (between sectors or groups of players)
3. Collective expression (of all the players)

***"I strongly believe that the individual should serve the team, and the team should serve the individual. The reciprocal objective is to banish insularity and individuality, to empower and promote the team and to create cohesion and togetherness...The team training session (cooperation) helps the individual to develop and the individual training session helps to develop the collective."*** – Pepijn Lijnders

If we are to take Lijnders' model and loosely apply the framework to much of the information in this book, we can begin to build a development model that is driven towards producing technically able players who think about the game in many of the ways detailed in this book.

From the limited footage available to us online, we can see that Lijnders' methodology is driven towards outplaying your opponent in your one vs ones and then creating various two vs. one scenarios.

***"I am an admirer of dribbling. Two dribbles together change the content of a game, they clear things up, supply fresh oxygen, make the match healthier"***

– Marcelo Bielsa

Dan Micciche however, is far less likely to employ such a structured way of thinking in developing players who can retain possession and outplay their opponents. Players like Brendan Galloway (Everton), Dele Alli (Tottenham Hotspur), George Williams (Wales and Fulham), Sheyi Ojo (Liverpool) and Danny Collinge (Stuttgart) have all undergone the MK Dons programme that Dan Micciche designed before moving onto to become part of the England youth set up as U16 manager. At MK Dons, the youth players are challenged to express themselves and to exploit their weaknesses; if a player lacks discipline or the ability to be creative then they are put into positions that will ask those questions of them.

To the eyes of many coaches, Dan Micciche coaches 'less' than others and leans towards the idea that we can use the game as a tool for player education instead. The infamous indoor pitch at Milton Keynes Academy is marked out to be forty by sixty yards in size and I have witnessed full 11 vs. 11 under-16 matches in such an environment. There is no doubt about it, this is an extremely different approach to developing players who are creative and can outplay their opponents. The strategy of changing pitch size or even shape for the development and or education of players is no new one. Thomas Tuchel (the manager who replaced Klopp at Dortmund) is said to use pitches shaped like diamonds or H-shaped areas, pitches that are long and narrow or wide and short and so on. Ralf Rangnick has stated he sees the benefit of using a narrow or even banana shaped pitch for the purposes of improving the vision of a player to look 'vertically'. Rene Maric and Marco Hensel cover the use of different pitch shapes in their book 'Fußball durch Fußball' (Football through Football).

Going back to a young part-time academy coach Mark Sampson, some years before his England Women's Manager appointment, at a Swansea Academy (that only had three full time youth coaches in their youth academy sharing a tiny office), Sampson and his colleagues began to delve deep into the development methods of developing players who can dominate their one vs ones. One of the more radical responses to such a question was to match their formation up with their opponents man to man, #1-2-4-4 against the opponent's #1-4-4-2 or more likely, #1-3-3-4 against a #1-4-3-3. At other clubs such as Liverpool Academy (Inglethorpe) and Athletic Club Bilbao we are seeing the return of the #1-3-4-3 diamond used as a tool for development, for similar reasons as those Sampson and his colleagues used a formation not widely employed in football (precedent does exist in the form of little known Italian Ezio Glerean with his #1-3-3-4 formation).

To go beyond formation as a tool for development we can begin to combine the premise of the ideas from all the coaches mentioned above: match day rules and a platform for players to explore their one vs one domination skills. Moving forward into the future and linking together the content of this book, the rules that can be employed to bring about development of players who are skilled in Advanced Areas, rules to make the conditions for Advanced Areas as difficult as possible for your players. This strategic approach



to development appeals to those in youth development but at a theoretical level, the strategic approach applies to all years of learning from the youngest age groups right through to the competition levels of football (at least in the training environments). What match day or training game rules could be employed to create the conditions for your team and players to be challenged in such a way depends entirely on your vision for player development and qualities of players you have, this book doesn't look to provide downloadable information for implementation, but the theory for practitioners to ponder over and design their own strategies. That is to say that the information provided in this chapter has been considered vital to player development and time needs to be spent on arriving at your strategic approach to develop players who can dominate their one vs ones and become experts in Advanced Area Actions. The principles of Advanced Area Actions always come before the emphasis of technical performance of individual actions.

*"Principles are much higher than technique, they produce techniques instantly"* – Ido Portal

## 8.2 METHODOLOGY: Rondos (multi-directional possession box formats)

Another fundamental part of the development plan for young players and for players in competition (especially during the change management phases of implementation), is that of small area ball possession with the objective of each new pass in the sequence going through the principles in this book ("Can I achieve an Advanced Areas Action? No, well then is there a Pre-Advanced Area structure?" And so on..., subconsciously of course). The term 'rondos' has been applied by many to mean any small box possession exercises and not just for the pre-match rondo Barcelona have made famous.

In my previous book, 'Coaching the Tiki-Taka Style of Play', a variety of rondos were detailed from those at the most basic on a theoretical level through to those observed at Melwood where Mike Marsh and Brendan Rodgers led the sessions.

As touched on before in this book (chapter two), in the theoretical rondo we have three types of pass: a first line pass, a second line pass and a third line pass. The simplest

definitions for each pass is one where a first line pass is to be any pass that doesn't bypass the opposition, a second line pass to be one that goes around the opposition and the most desirable third line pass, that pass that splits the opposition and goes through them. Some use a point scoring system within this structure and time each rondo; for example, you may have two minutes to get thirty points (driving intensity). Others employ a competitive cauldron around rondos where teams win points for each individual in the team upon achieving thirty points, the individual's points are then added to a table and at the end of a set period of time (one month) prizes are awarded for first, second and third.

The element of intensity is fundamental in these rondos as they can be designed to replicate some part of the game, often thought as the part of the game where the opposition have numbers around the ball and you're left either in a tight advanced area or being pressed high up the field. All of this of course, depends on which part of the game you are looking to replicate and how big the space the rondo is designed for.

If we step away from the direct use of rondos (as seen in the training session sections of this book), the use of rondos can be periodised and progressed over time. From the most basic 3 vs. 1 rondo, through to the 6 vs. 6 + 3 rondos, we can slowly build up complexity and introduce a variety of coaching principles such as body shape and manipulation of the defenders, learning to use overloads. A programme might go from (a) 3 vs. 1 to (b) 4 vs. 2, (c) 5 vs. 2, (d) 3 vs. 3 + 3, (e) 4 vs. 4 + 3 and so on. The length of time spent on rondos should account for the stage of development of your players (note: players aged 12-18 go through various psychological growth spurts that directly affect our ability to concentrate. Reference: Paul Holder) and we can structure the progression of rondos based on whether the coaching principles begin to be demonstrated by players during training games or matches, some will spend approximately a month on each rondo before progressing (as part of a whole session plan).

The buildup of player understanding in each rondo exist in the evidence of understanding in the learning outcomes of each rondo included. These rondos are generally considered position specific and look at exploring principles of pre-AAA and learning to play within a set structure.



If we again refer back to our match day rules and strategic approaches to develop the conditions for our players to best develop during match days or training matches, it may be appropriate to add in rules to your rondos, rules that manage the transition for example, perhaps we want to turn our lens and focus on breaking down an opposition low block or time of possession in set areas of the field (achieving many Advanced Areas against tough conditions), so we employ Guardiola's rule of making a certain number of passes before looking to attack again.

It is vital that we do not begin to make training methods an objective within themselves and ensure any learning progresses onto the game. This **fourth principle** is one that looks back to the **first principle** with every new pass and sessions related to the fourth principle should include one of the first three principles as a way of advancing from the scenario of not being able to apply one of the first three principles.

Pass A to pass B through to pass C..., with every pass asks the same questions of each new player receiving the ball: are the conditions set for effective Advanced Area Action - remembering the objective of Advanced Area Action is to destroy and exploit the opponent's structure in our quest towards the opposition's goal, not simply to penetrate, but much more than that.

"...can I achieve effective Advanced Areas?"

Over time, these questions and elements are erased and replaced with intuitive action. Actions without thought. Thousands of hours of learning performed in moments made up of milliseconds upon milliseconds, upon milliseconds, on a football field.

## PRINCIPLES OF PLAY & ORDER OF PRIORITY

1. If possible, the highest order is to create an effective Advanced Area Action, often through a pass to feet (note: for 'control' to be present) or dribble. Control is defined as having the conditions present to complete the next desirable action - it does not necessarily require us to take a 'controlling touch'. [first principle]

2. If AAA are not possible then does the opportunity ask you to use one of the structures that enable one of the following three processes:

(a) Spread the opponent out horizontally (create gaps to play through)?

(b) Spread the opponent out vertically (create AAA space between the opposition midfield and defence or behind the opposition)?

(c) Draw the opposition to be positioned in straight lines or create the scenario whereby the opposition are positioned in straight lines in one direction? [second principle]

3. If principles 1 and 2 are not possible, is the situation one whereby a switch of the ball (+2 lanes) to change the angle of attack and the picture of play for the receiving player, will allow for the creation an Advanced Area Action? (note: the term 'lanes' is used in this book to refer to the vertical corridors or channels that make up the division of the field) [third principle]

4. If none of the above are possible, then the situation requires you to retain and "play your way out", which each new pass in the sequence offering opportunity for principles 1-3. [fourth principle]



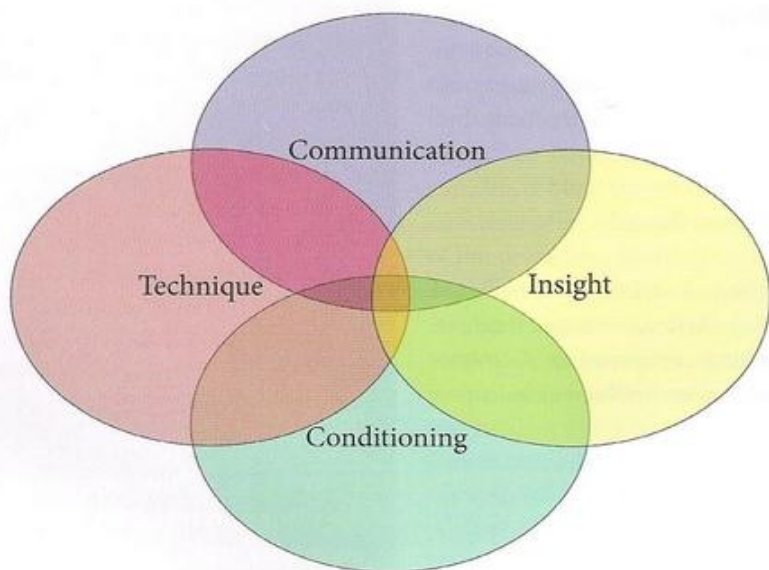
# 09 COMMUNICATION

"We work on AREAS OF PLAY to better our non-verbal communication and this is what allows us to change our formation from game to game, if that is what is required"

- Mark Sampson, England Women's Manager

Raymond Verheijen of the World Football Academy, the world's most advanced coach education company, outlines the hierarchy of football on every course. Football is made up of:

1. Communication: verbal and non-verbal communication on a football field, often thought out in terms of football strategy and tactics
2. Insight: the individual decision making in line with game understanding
3. Technique: the execution of a decision
4. Conditioning: football specific fitness relating to the execution of actions in a game of football



Despite being considered one of the world's leading coaches in the field of football fitness, Verheijen agrees that conditioning of our bodies (including the brain) and football fitness is of the fourth order in the hierarchy, a component of the game that serves the three components of higher order.

Verheijen then talks about technique in terms of 'functional technique', rather than 'ideal technique'; functional technique being one that focuses on the outcome of any action rather than what it looks like.



*"In football, technique is the execution of a decision. In gymnastics, technique is the execution of a technique"* – Raymond Verheijen

Communication in football can be determined in a number of ways. On an individual level, we interpret, provide and receive the information around us on the field to determine our choices: the movement of the ball, you and your teammates and the opposition. Our team playing style can be viewed as many individuals who communicate on a football field through a set of preferences. It is our preference to dominate games through possession, our preference to play through the central players or our preference to use our target man. A playing style can be improved over time through experiencing the set of preferences outlined by the team, improving upon the non-verbal communication or clarity of any roles and responsibilities. The playing style is often linked to formation(s) used by a team because movement of teammates becomes more familiar.

"If a playing style and formation supports and promotes communication within a team, how can you justify the flexible approach towards both formation and playing style as well as the free rotation of players in your squad?" I posed this question to Mark Sampson during a sunny afternoon meet sitting outside a coffee shop, an interview that also consisted of several wasps looking to listen in on Mark's ideas. The England manager doesn't even pause to think as he responds *"We work on areas of play to better our non-verbal communication and this is what allows us to change from game to game (during the 2015 Women's World Cup), if that is what is required"*

Mark's reply suggests to me that there was plenty of prior thought and consideration into the flexible approach England had taken with them to the most recent World Cup and the argument put forward by me was one he used as a starting point. Sampson did go on to detail that each formation used by England at the World Cup (#1-4-2-3-1, #1-4-4-2 diamond, #1-4-4-2 flat, #1-3-4-2-1 and so on) had been practiced for around eight to ten times each if we include training matches and any competitive fixture. Much of the England approach was set up in a way that suggested to me that communication (using the definition outlined in this book) was one of the core considerations that underpinned the approach prior and during the World Cup in Canada for which England finished in third place.

Thinking back over the previous pages of this book we can consider much of it to be nothing more than communication for players on a football field: a common idea provides players with a theme or lens for which they view and interpret the game; the clear principles of play give each and every player a framework to think two or three steps ahead of the opposition; the pre-Advanced Area Actions give depth to understanding for what is needed in any moment of the game whereby achieving Advanced Areas is not yet an effective choice we can make.

*"Communication is key, there is no need for managers yelling instructions at the players from the sidelines. Instead create a coaching language that the players can use to guide themselves on what to do, that underpins everything you believe in as a manager"* – Rinus Michels

Communication (tactics on a football field) can be theorised and split into different areas of work:

1. Verbal Communication
2. Non-Verbal Communication
3. The Environment: The Being of Team (across different climates: fans to coach, fans to player, coach to fans, player to fans, player to player, player to coach, player to parent\*, parent to parent\*, parent to coach\*)
4. Player identification and self-awareness of the individual
5. Team identification and self-awareness of the team

The verbal communication of players on a football field cannot go undervalued and the common language between players and coaches should be carefully selected. Much of the terminology used throughout this book has been presented to you after being developed in the classroom sessions I ran alongside children aged nine to fourteen years of age. It was in fact a nine-year-old that renamed the vertical spaces on a football field into 'lanes of attack', terminology that carried more meaning. At Futuro Soccer Academy in Ottawa the players and their proposal for language not only rewrote many of the pages in this book but formed many necessary processes that support the development of players. The term 'Forward Opposite Near and Communicate' (FON + C) was formed after reviewing work done by Clive Woodward and the England Rugby team, where Woodward employed Crossbar, Touchline and Communicate (CTC) as visual checkpoints to further



the vision of players specific to a playing style. The sport of Rugby is advanced in the skill of verbal communication in relation to strategic choices made during the game and we can learn much from the sport.

E.O.N + C was introduced to support the development of player awareness within the principles of play outlined in this book.

Before receiving the ball we should look **FORWARDS** at the scenarios ahead of us and the ball to see if either the player on the ball can penetrate or you can penetrate should you receive the ball at this given moment.

We should then look **OPPOSITE** away from the ball at the weak side (the side where the ball is not located) to see if any switch in lane of attack would allow for more success.

We should then look **NEAR** the ball to see if we can offer better angles of support if neither of the first two are of good choices.

Lastly, we should verbally **COMMUNICATE** our pictures (verbally or non-verbally) to those on the ball and those away from the ball. We will see this information and player awareness tool outlined in many of the session plans proposed in this book. The strategy of 'Switch and Slice' proposed earlier in this book (chapter 7) follows the rules outlined above.

The above methodology isn't to suggest players are consciously calculating the scenarios around them, but instead instantly picking up on recognisable patterns and cues they have become familiar with from your training methodology. This methodology also promotes the scanning of the scenarios around you. Studies have shown that players that scan more often are able to play forwards 73.2% of the time compared to those that do not scan at 38.2% (Jordet 2008). The top players scan their surroundings once every 0.33 seconds (once every three seconds) in the seconds leading up to before receiving the ball.

The theme of non-verbal communication in relation to the principles outlined in this book and the common idea employed will be continued in the following chapter: Languages of the Game.

Much of the content in this book so far has looked at specific strategic principles that guide our non-verbal communication on a football field, but more can be employed to fit within the specific playing style used by your team. As the head coach of Argentina, Marcelo Bielsa employed a variety of non-verbal communication rules that supporting the playing style desired:

*"The Argentinian National Team always attacks with six players, because if there is anything worth unbalancing the team for it's to attack. Rate the three areas of the field to attack: they are the two wide areas and the centre, something that isn't widely recognised. And after losing the ball, have enough players to recover quickly. They are the three things I use to distribute the players on the field"*

– Marcelo Bielsa

The above quote suggests a belief system that players were guided by in the form of non-verbal communication, rules that are also employed by Dan Micciche of England under 16s:

*"We had a 6, 6, 6 principle which was based on how we wanted to play: try to get over the half way line within 6 passes, win the ball back within 6 seconds or less and have a minimum of 6 players in high areas when we were attacking"* – Dan Micciche

The following few chapters further explore the communication theory for implementing the principles as outlined in this book and look to persuade the reader that the other elements outlined in this chapter are fundamental for creating the conditions conducive to effective communication on a football field: from those considered by most, to the environment (across different climates) and lastly the self-awareness of the individual and the team.

*"Football is a collective sport. The common behaviour between the fans, the manager, the staff and the players...[it is important] that everybody is attacking the game in the same way"* - Pepijn Lijnders



## DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

'Conclusions from coffee table conversations in Rosario'

### A. Developing Player I.D (Continued throughout)

- Technical Development (specific planning of techniques)
- Development of Decision Making (in-line with the principles of play on pg. 35)
  - Physical Development (to better 'football fitness')
    - Psycho-Social Development

### B. Key Scenario Recognition (Ages 11+)

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE (PRACTISING PLAYER I.D. WITHIN CONTEXT)

- Scenarios beyond opposition defensive lines
  - Scenarios between lines
- Scenarios in front of the opposition midfield
- Common languages of the game (encouragement of improvisation)

### C. Scenario Creation within Player I.D. Strengths (Ages 14+)

The individual's ability to create scenarios within team communication that give advantage to the individual based on his or her developing (refining) Player I.D.

**C: SCENARIO CREATION WITHIN  
PLAYER I.D. STRENGTHS (14 -)**

**B: SCENARIO RECOGNITION (COMMUNICATION) (11 -)**

**A: DEVELOPING PLAYER & PERSON IDENTITIES (6 -)**

**"Form players who can get the best out of themselves"**



# 10 LANGUAGES OF THE GAME: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

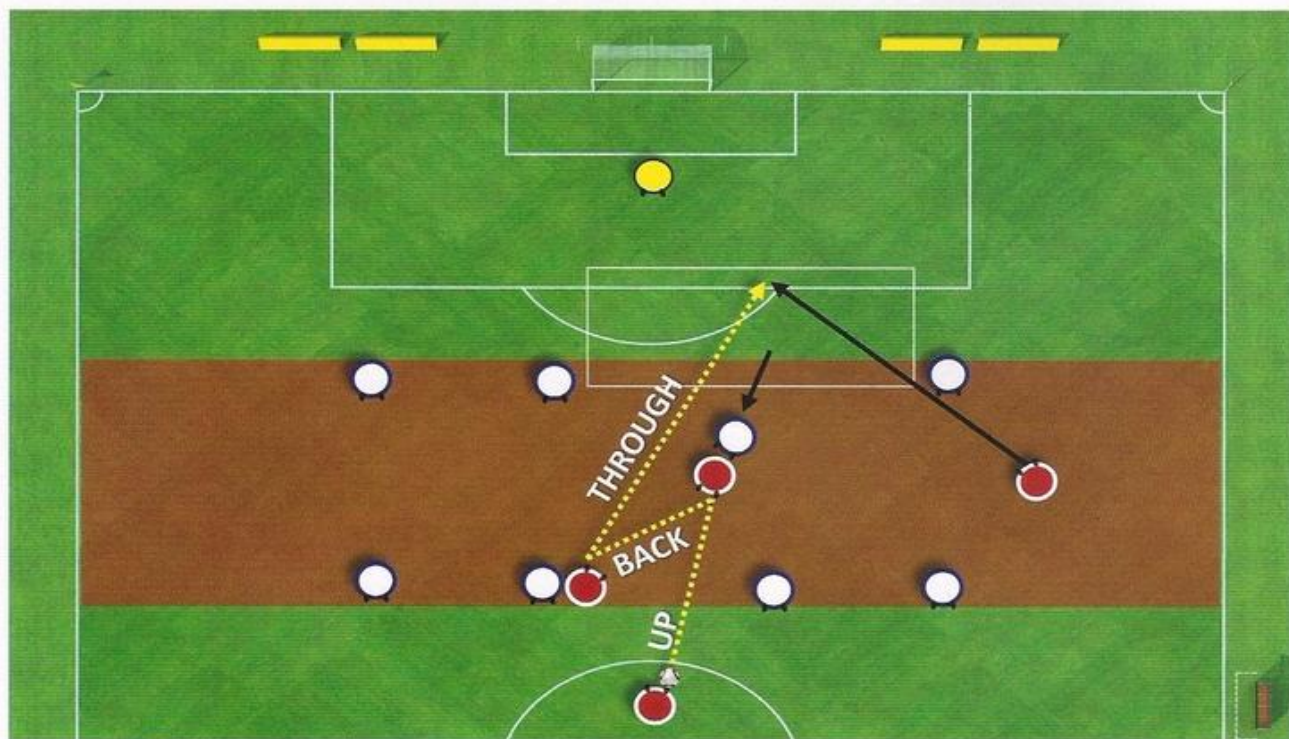
“It is not about the opponent, it is not about the ball, it is about the space the ball may be played into and the opponent that may come into it”

- Louis van Gaal

There are four key languages of the game outlined in this book, each designed to create space to be exploited, each in-line with the Louis van Gaal quote repeated in the pages of this book and each in-line with the principles that underpin the style of play influenced by Marcelo Bielsa.

## 10.1 UP-BACK-THROUGH

“The main objective is for the ball to go to the front line” – Marcelo Bielsa



The first language of the game is one named 'up-back-through', others may have renamed this movement of the ball as 'long-short-short' or 'short-short-long', however these terms fail to distinguish the link between the language of the game and the principles of the game. It is also my view that many practice this language without proper context and providing players with a clearly defined link between the language and principles of the game. The principles in an ideal scenario suggest that we can achieve an AAA entry pass into the feet of a central player to engage the opposition's central defender, the ball is



then played back to a player underneath the ball, who then plays the ball through the space created behind the dragged out centre back to a team mate running through: up-back-through, an essential building block for the game.

The ball played backwards in an up-back-through does not have to be to a player also in AAA space between the opposition midfield and defence, this is not important. What is important however, is that whoever the ball is played back to is in a position to exploit the space created by dragging the opposition defender out of his slot. We are therefore judging the quality of the ball played back (to enable control upon arrival and a first time through ball), the speed of the ball played back (to ensure the central defender is punished for being dragged out of slot) and that the ball is played to a player who is at the correct supporting angle to play through the third man running through the space created. The typical rule for such a supporting angle is that the player is able to play an angled ball through to a straight run or in the other scenario, a straight ball through to an angled run. That said, there are of course exceptions to this rule.

In the ideal and functional up-back-through each pass presents the conditions of control for a first time action, not because it is pleasing to the eye but because it allows for the appropriate speed of action to exploit space created.

Moving away from the movement of the ball, the next focus is to assess the quality of the movement and disguise in the up-back-through. Guardiola used to speak of his favourite pass being one used with disguise that penetrates between the opposition lines:

***“I had to lead the line of five (opposition midfielders) astray – move it about, shake it up, introduce disorder, trick it into thinking I was about to go wide again (in the U shape circulation) and then – boom! I’d split them with an inside pass to one of the strikers... Basically, that’s how I separated my team from others during my career”*** – Pep Guardiola

The movement of the player engaging the opposition central defender out of his slot can be educated within a framework of different ways to momentarily lose his defender. These movements allow for the striker to potentially lose his man and not engage the defender, meaning the striker can

look to turn and face his opponent. The momentarily loss of his man means that any reaction to the action is done with urgency and allows for the subsequent actions to fully capitalise on the space created:

1. Checking away from the ball and back towards it, often with physical contact with the defender (striker)
2. Checking towards and then away from the ball and then back towards the ball. The triple action allows for the threat of ‘towards and then away’ which would require the defender to drop off to protect in behind if he hasn’t taken the bait and moved towards the ball initially (striker)
3. Moving behind the eye-line of your defender and as the defender looks back at the ball, you can then make your movement either side of your defender without being tracked (striker)
4. Checking towards the ball and then away from it. This movement in this scenario may be particularly useful for a midfielder advancing into a space and looking to engage a central defender (midfielder)
5. Moving against the grain of the opposition: as the block moves right, you move left in between lines.
6. Dropping in between two defenders (into a mixed position) and giving the opposition defenders a decision to make. This is typical of a winger who drops into more central lanes.
7. Peeling off your man in midfield should a deeper player drive with the ball towards your marking opponent (freeing you from being marked in midfield)
8. Rotation with players to find space between lines in advanced areas.

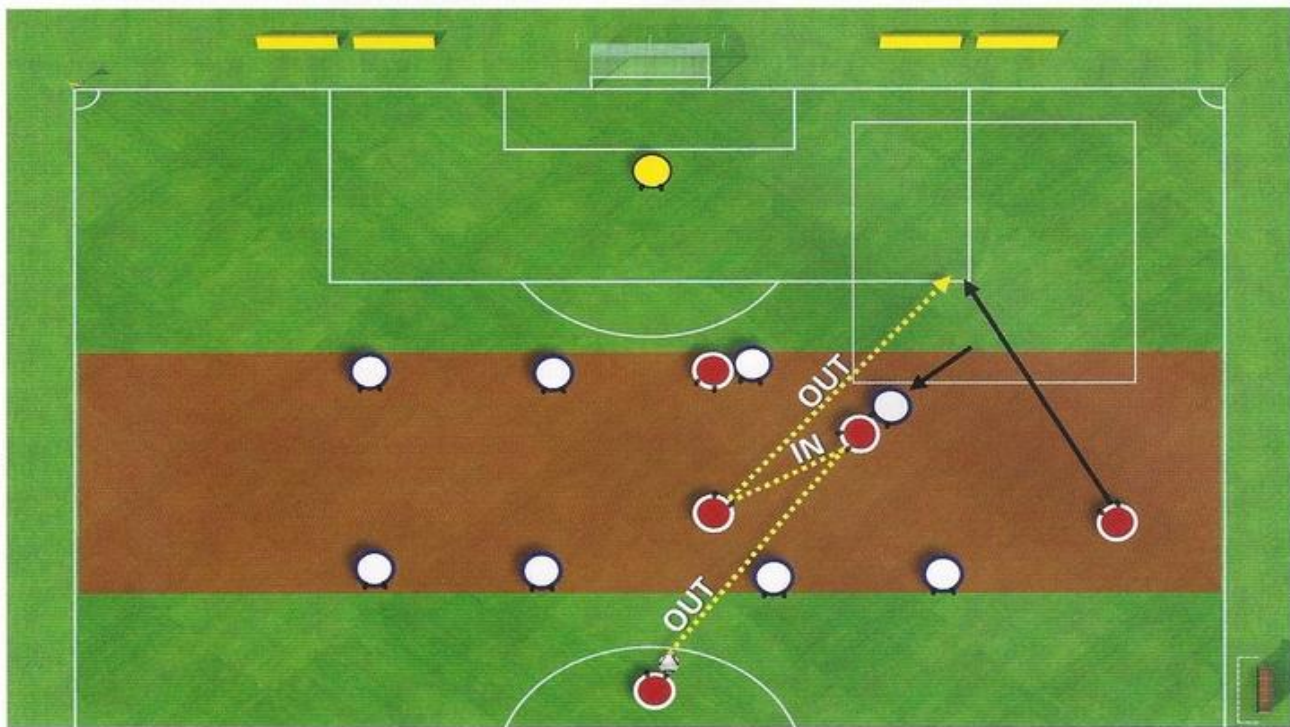
The player who engages the opposition central defender, the player who supports underneath the ball and the player who exploits the space should be creatively encouraged after the idea has been accepted by players. If we consider a typical #1-4-3-3 formation, the player making the run to exploit the space created, the third man runner, could be that of a winger making a diagonal run, a central midfielder running from deep or a striker who has looked to spin upon laying off the ball to the supporting player. Variation in such a movement should be encouraged too, perhaps the striker finds a way to turn and engage a central defender with the ball and from there we see the third man runner exploit the space then created and so on.



## 10.2 OUT-IN-OUT

The necessity to differentiate between up-back-through and out-in-out is one related to which of the opposition defenders is engaged from his slot. In an out-in-out the opponent engaged is often a fullback, creating space to be exploited in wide areas.

Typically, in an out-in-out we are considering the movement of a winger, who moves from the widest lane into one of the more central lanes (lane 2 or lane 4, from lane 1 or lane 5). The player the ball goes out to during the third stage of this language depends on a variety of factors.



In the scenario where your central defender is the one who has played the ball out to the wide player coming inside (and engaging his defender), it is likely that your fullbacks are in a deeper position than they would be if the pass came from a central midfielder (where the fullbacks are often then told to keep either in line or ahead of the ball). Therefore, in the scenario where the pass has come from the deepest line (from a central defender for example), then the third man movement needs to come from a player in a more advanced area and in most cases this player is the striker.

Where the fullback is higher up the field, we should encourage the fullback to be the player overlapping and exploiting the space created for the third pass in this language. We encourage the fullback to be that player because the frequent next stage of this movement is to centralise the ball into a player in a goal scoring position (looking at the common scenario of pulling a central defender out of slot to pressure the wide player).

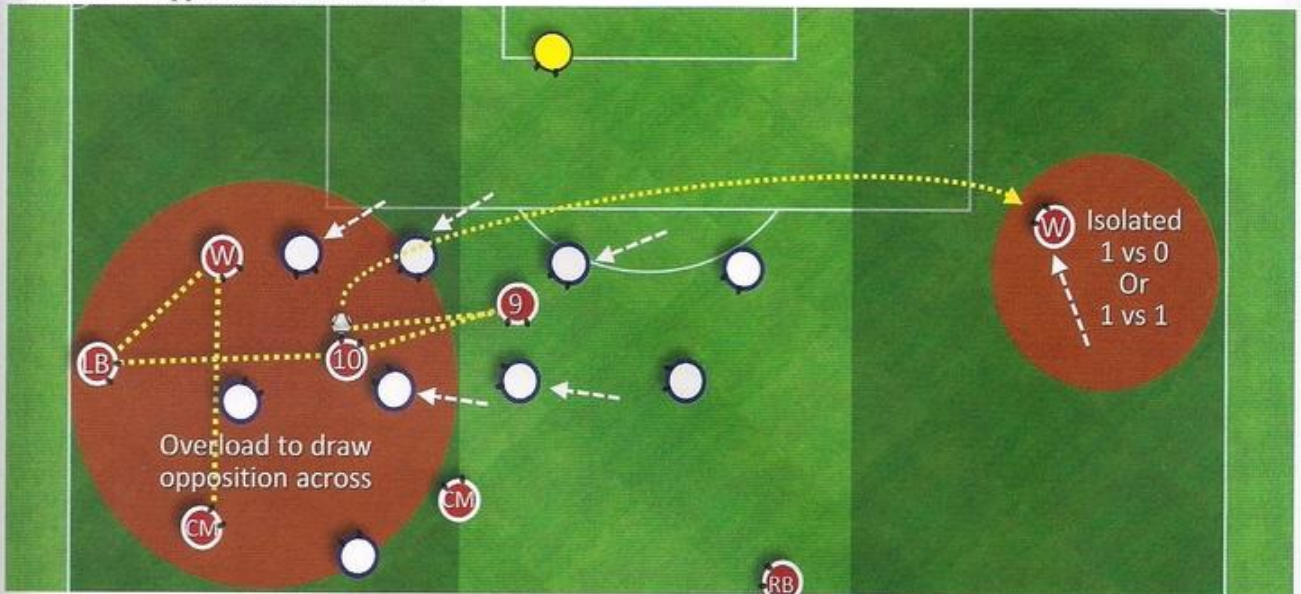
## 10.3 OVERLOAD-ISOLATE

*"The principle idea of Positional Play is that players pass the ball to each other in close spaces to be able to pass to a wide open man."* – Juanma Lillo

The principle for overload-isolate is to engage an opposition block to one side of the field, opening up advantageous scenarios on the weak-side (the side furthest from the ball). In the theoretical perfect, this scenario means we should

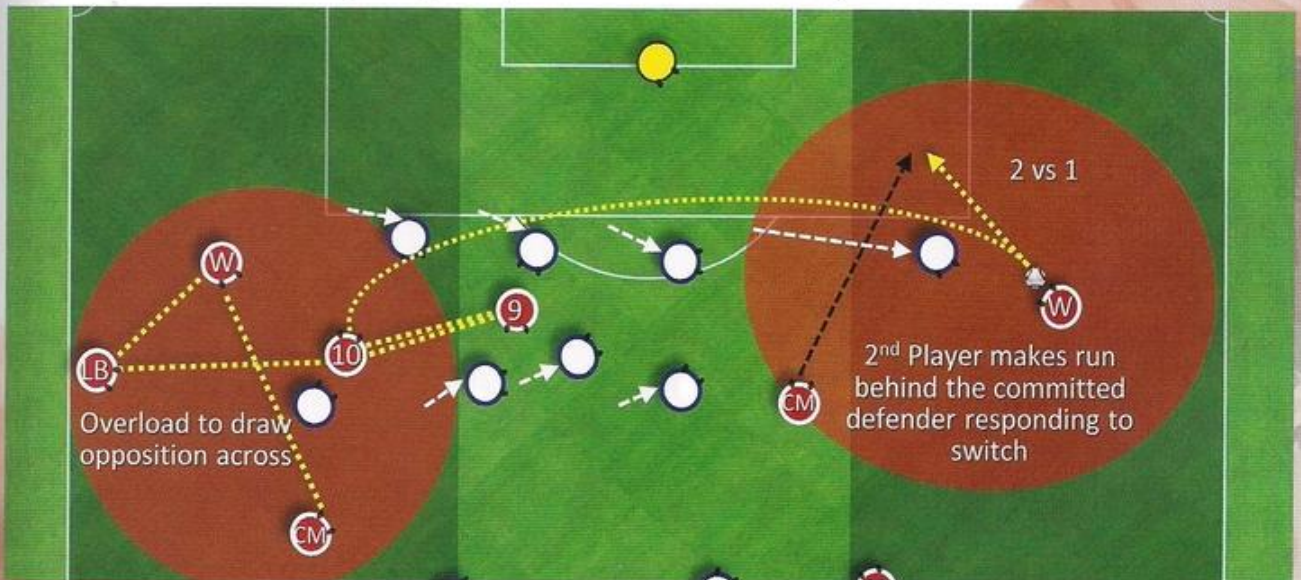


overload one side of the field and make many passes that engage the opposition (passes between lines) before quickly switching the ball to a weak-sided player with the profile to take full advantage of the one vs. one scenario often created. It is often important that the first touch of the receiving player on the weak-side should be positive (forwards and sometimes in behind the opposition defensive line).



As noted in earlier pages of this book (pg.55), Paul Power of Prozone has analysed the scenario of playing into an underload and then switching to an overload to be more successful. That is to play into a pressing trap and then quickly back out of it before switching the ball. In both Overload-Isolate and Underload-Overload the same principles stand, principles that depend on how the opposition respond to any such language of the game.

Should the opponent's weak-sided fullback look to race out to defend your receiving wide player, then it may be advantageous to promote a second runner in behind the fullback. This was a strategy I promoted for Estonia to consider when playing San Marino in 2015 after analysing the response of San Marino fullbacks upon a switch pass. After the 2 vs 1 moment is complete, again we are left with the scenario whereby the opposition central defender will often be pulled out of his slot to defend in the wide area (reducing the superiority in central areas in the crossing scenario).



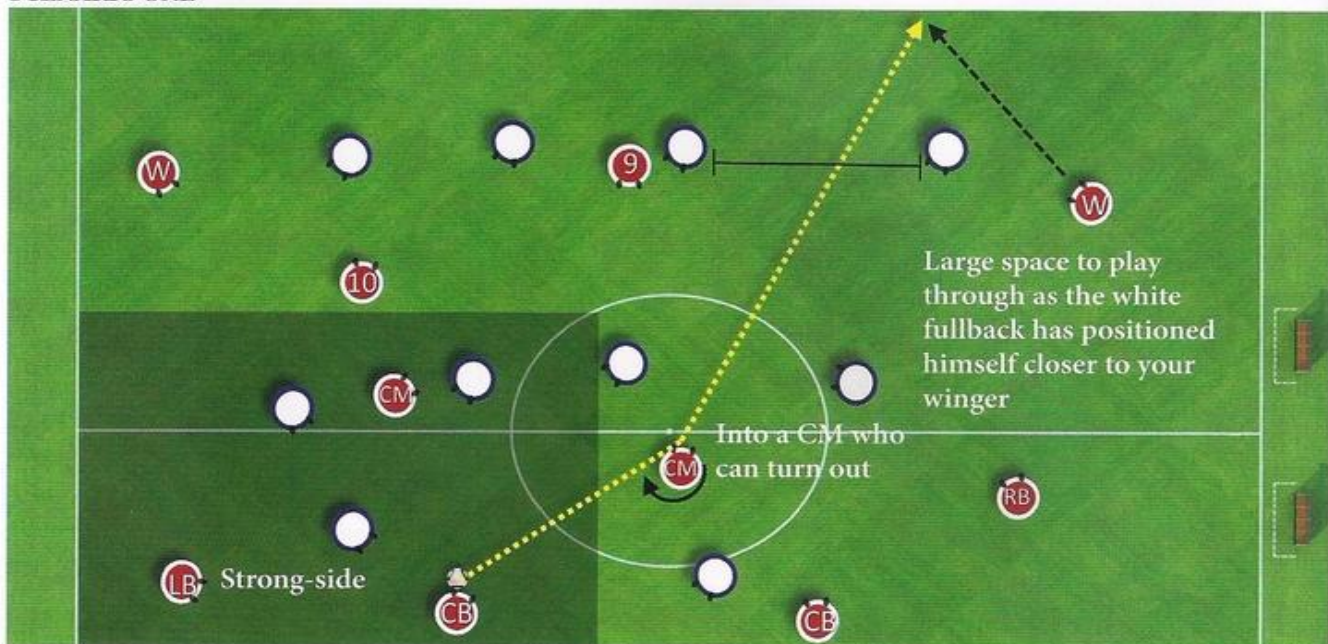
*"Move the opponent, not the ball. Invite the opponent to press. You have the ball on one side, to finish on the other" - Pep Guardiola*



## 10.4 WEAKSIDE FULLBACK

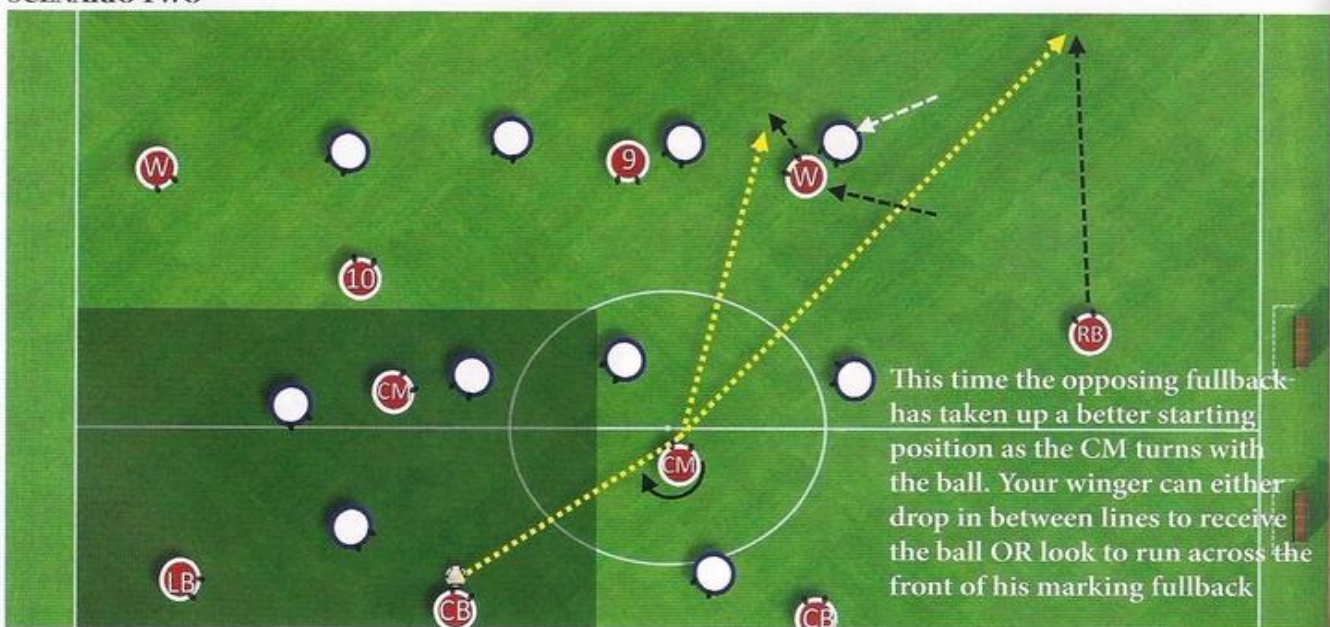
The movement and rules in place for weak side fullback are simple and depend on the movement of your weak-sided winger. If the ball has moved from your left back or any player on the left side of the field into the feet of a central player (central midfielder) who is free and can turn out with the ball, then we are presented with three possible scenarios with the opposition fullback and our winger.

### SCENARIO ONE



In scenario one, the fullback is tight to your weak-side winger (this is unlikely if the opposition has taken up good defensive shape) and if the profile of your winger is one that can exploit in behind the opposition with speed, then perhaps your winger stays wide and waits for the central midfielder to make the immediate penetration pass between the opposition fullback and central defender. Should the profile of your winger not provide you with the ability to take advantage of the scenario in such a way then please review the movement solution to scenario two.

### SCENARIO TWO





In the scenario presented on the previous page, we see the opposition defender has originally taken up good defensive shape and is positioned well to cover for any switch out to the weak sided player. In this common scenario, it may be advantageous for the winger to make a movement inside behind the opposition midfield and offer himself for a central penetration pass in advanced areas (upon the DM receiving the ball), engaging the defender.

As the winger moves inside, then the weak side fullback should advance at pace to exploit the wide space now created. In the image shown on the previous page (scenario two) the winger doesn't make the run in between the opposition defensive line and midfield line but instead looks to run across the front of his opposing fullback giving the central midfielder on the ball two options: to penetrate between the opposition CB and FB or play out to the weak-side right fullback who has made his advanced run.

An alternative to such movement would be for the weak side fullback to make an advanced run more centrally (underlap) to take advantage of your player profiles, opposition weaknesses or to promote unpredictability in a wide area.

### SCENARIO THREE

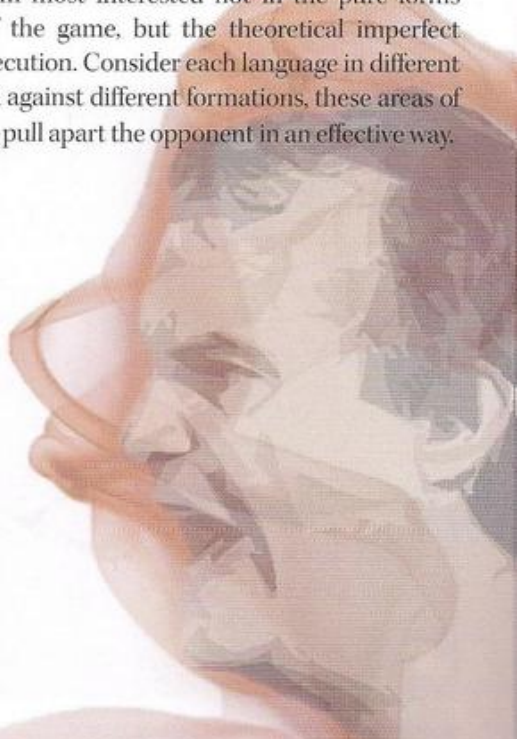
Much like the overload-isolate language, if the winger has been left with plenty of space to exploit himself (no defender from the opposition near) then the winger should look to exploit the space himself, perhaps with a second runner in behind the reacting opposition fullback (as in the overload-isolate 2 vs. 1 picture).

## 10.5 THE LANGUAGES OF THE GAME

In all four of the key languages of the game we should encourage the theoretical imperfect solutions, solutions that are considered to be creative and still take advantage of an opposition defender being engaged out of his slot. When asked what value I placed upon third man movement by another coach, I replied that I felt it wasn't the third man movement or non-verbal communication that was important but for the players to understand the basic principles of the third man run, principles of the languages of the game: engage a defender out of slot and then exploit the space through penetrating runner. There is an absolute value of importance in understanding the space the ball is played into and how that affects the defenders, and subsequently how to then exploit the space that opens up.

These forms of non-verbal communication are considered the moments of beauty within penetration football, moments of purity on a football field. Each language a way of exploiting the opposition, each language representing the purest forms of Advanced Area Actions.

The most fundamental message here isn't the pure forms of Advanced Area Actions, but the unpredictability of various third men who look to exploit the space and the various prior-movement from any player looking to engage a defender, I am most interested not in the pure forms of language of the game, but the theoretical imperfect examples of execution. Consider each language in different formations and against different formations, these areas of play allow us to pull apart the opponent in an effective way.





# 11 ROTATIONS: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

“I always tell my guys that our playing style is about movement”

- Marcelo Bielsa

Observing movement in football engages me and can keep me wired to what otherwise might have been described as a laborious scoreless draw. Movement between players and of the players between moments of the game can ignite a deep curiosity, deep enough to inspire one to write a second book. Bielsa's Athletic Bilbao 3-3 draw against Pochettino's Espanyol, 16th September 2012, is the exact date and game that was to be the birth of this book you're holding in your hands, the book designed to be rejected or upheld as a significant driver for the greatest change to the lenses the game is viewed through. To be exact, the opening ten minutes of that game was the birth of this book.

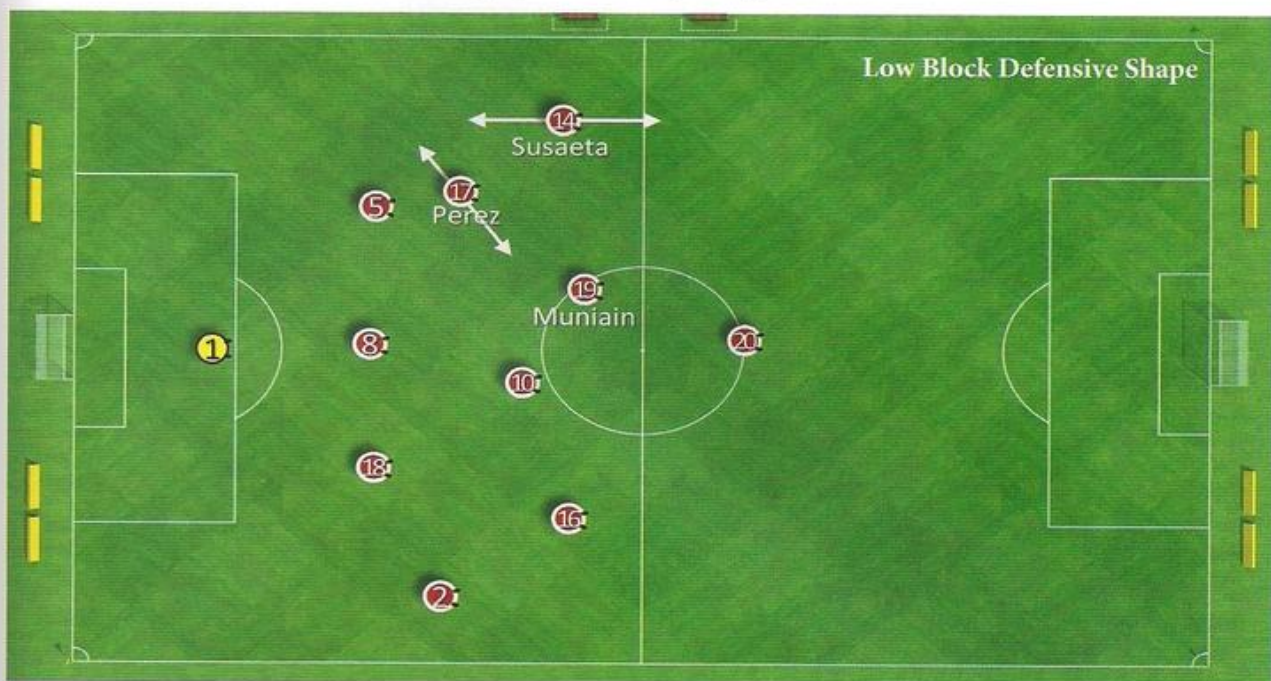
The movement of Inigo Perez and Andoni Iraola within the game moments in the Bielsa-Pochettino encounter back in 2012 changed the lenses from which I saw the game. Much later, it helped form ideas experimented with my Oxford University side, unorthodox ideas, raw and incomplete ideas that some of the country's most intelligent young people trusted and placed belief in. 'Fools' some would call us. Young people impassioned with an idea that we were to succeed or fail with our own ideals and vision intact; unconcerned by how things are meant to be done.

Inigo Perez, especially Inigo Perez, and Andoni Iraola found themselves in roles against Espanyol that were unconcerned by how things are 'meant to be done'. Bilbao set up with a back three, two wingbacks, one natural central midfielder, an attacking midfielder and two wingers behind a striker.





Number 17, Inigo Perez, covered a variety of spaces depending on the moment of the game in a system that considered player profiles to form the dynamic movement of players between moments of the game. Perez responded to the positioning of Susaeta in front of him, if Susaeta was in a deep defensive position then Perez would gravitate towards the left sided defensive midfield position in the centre of the field. If, however, the contrary was true and Susaeta was higher up the field, then the left-wing back slot was Perez's responsibility when defending. This dynamic occurred no less than five times during the short time Perez was on the field before injury occurred early in the game.

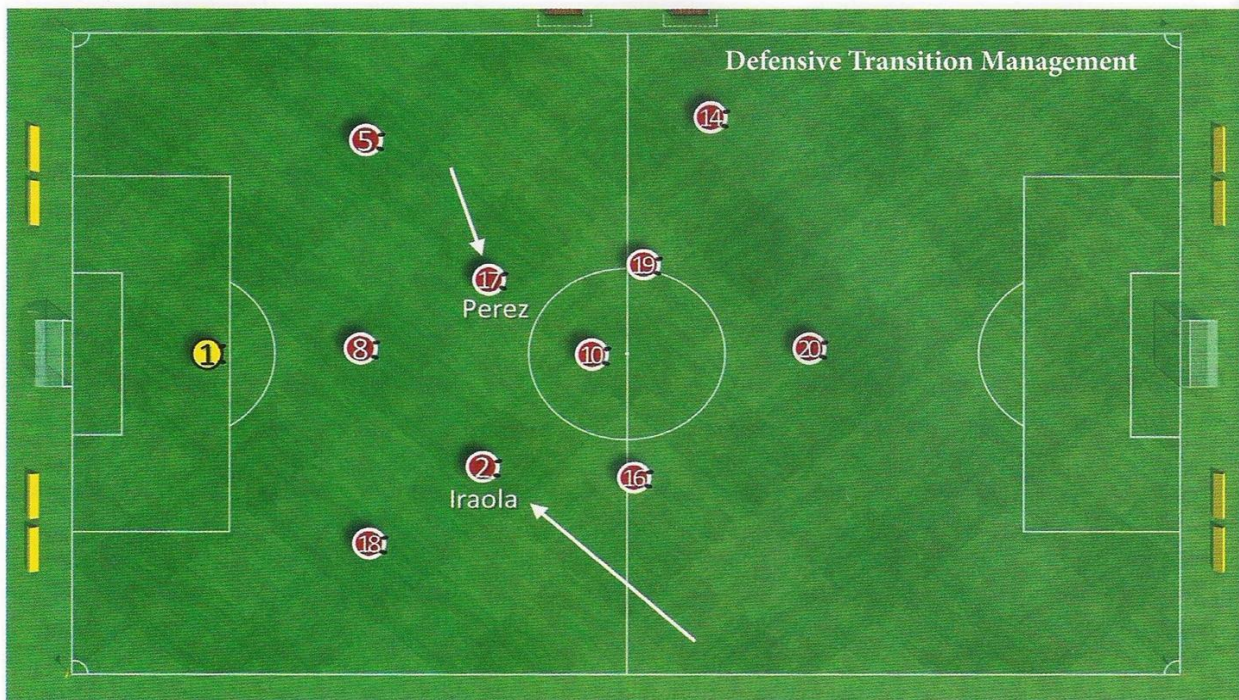


To further detail the complexity of the dynamics within Bilbao's structure, during the in-possession phases of the game where the first progression of the ball from the back was clean (after playing out from the back), Perez would now gravitate towards the centre of the field in a central defensive midfield role after initially offering deep width on the left hand side of the field.





Lastly the microscope is placed over the movement during the negative transition where both wingbacks, both Iraola and Perez, would tuck inside and become temporary defensive midfielders in front of the Bilbao three central defenders. Then once the Bilbao midfield made its way back, the wingbacks would fall back out to become wingbacks (until Susaeta took up a deeper position when Perez would yet again drift inside to defend as a defensive midfielder behind the advanced Muniain (#19)).



The movement of players in such a dynamic and player profile centred system of play responds to what is asked of Bilbao in each moment of the game, rather than what is asked of the individuals. The form of the team responds to the processes the team is going through rather than the functions of positions in the team. ***“Form follows process”*** is a phrase I first heard said by architect Mick Pearce in Newcastle as I attended with my architecture portfolio hoping to get closer to a mind I knew thought outside of the traditional boxes in architecture.

While Pearce is referring to the form of his buildings (Eastgate Centre, Harare, Zimbabwe) following the processes of design, nature and processes of managing the internal temperatures of the building, I sat in the second row next to my younger brother Jay, who was falling asleep right in front of Mick Pearce during his presentations (who I had tricked into accompanying me in a five hour drive to Newcastle with the promise that we would visit Newcastle United’s football stadium) and I allowed for my own mind to wander. Jay’s mind was probably wandering somewhere out onto the pitch at St James’, picturing himself alongside the great Alan Shearer, while my own mind didn’t venture too far from Jay’s, only my eyes weren’t closing. Instead I am looking and listening right through Mick Pearce’s excellent work thinking about the link between the Zimbabwean architect’s unique design philosophy and the movement of players in response to the processes of football. Mick Pearce later confirmed he had seen Jay’s eyes closing, all with good humour as I explained he was my partner in journey in the five hour drive we had taken just to meet with Mick Pearce and hand over my own architectural portfolio, after several emails between myself and my favourite architect.



## ROTATIONS

'What is the purpose of 'rotation' in football?' is a question I remember posing to myself after watching a Chile central midfielder pull out wider than his right sided central defender, pushing the fullback on and the winger inside to lane four of five.

After observing rotation as a theme in analysis, I have noted three reasons for rotation in football:

1. To establish platforms for players to penetrate from (achieving Advanced Areas)
2. To create Advanced Area Actions through opening up passing channels
3. To create a free man or add an extra man beyond the opposition midfield in Advanced Areas.

Platforms, sometimes referred to as Launch Pads, exist in three forms: low, medium and high (as outlined on pg.77). Each form of Platform asks different questions of the team and requires different types of movement. Platforms are areas of the field from which we typically look to create Advanced Area Actions from and typically the opposition will respond differently in formation to each type of platform; each platform will affect the behaviour of the opposition differently.

Depending on your analysis of your opponent, you may wish to then tie in your approaches at each platform to the five vertical lanes on the field. In an earlier chapter, insight was given to an approach proposed to Magnus Pehrsson and the Estonia National Team to promote the use of lane two in the medium platform and to design the low platform in a way that allows for us to get into lane two of the medium platform.

My analysis of Slovenia showed that they were extremely effective at building up on their left and counter attacking on their right, and the reverse to be true that they were poor at counter attacking through their left and good through their right hand side. Slovenia's right back had the player profile that allowed for him to get forward aggressively as the left hand side of Slovenia tilted the opponent for an overload and isolate. Slovenia's central attacking midfielder, Kampl, demonstrated a consistency with good movement in behind the right back of the opposition. On the other

hand, Kampl demonstrated far less effective play from the other side of the field. Therefore, by attacking down Slovenia's right, you nullify their ability to counter attack upon winning the ball (Slovenia's weak-side fullback was a wrong footed player with limited capability going forward), but you also demand that Slovenia's right hand side to be able to build their way out of pressure, something I had little evidence to suggest they were consistent at doing.

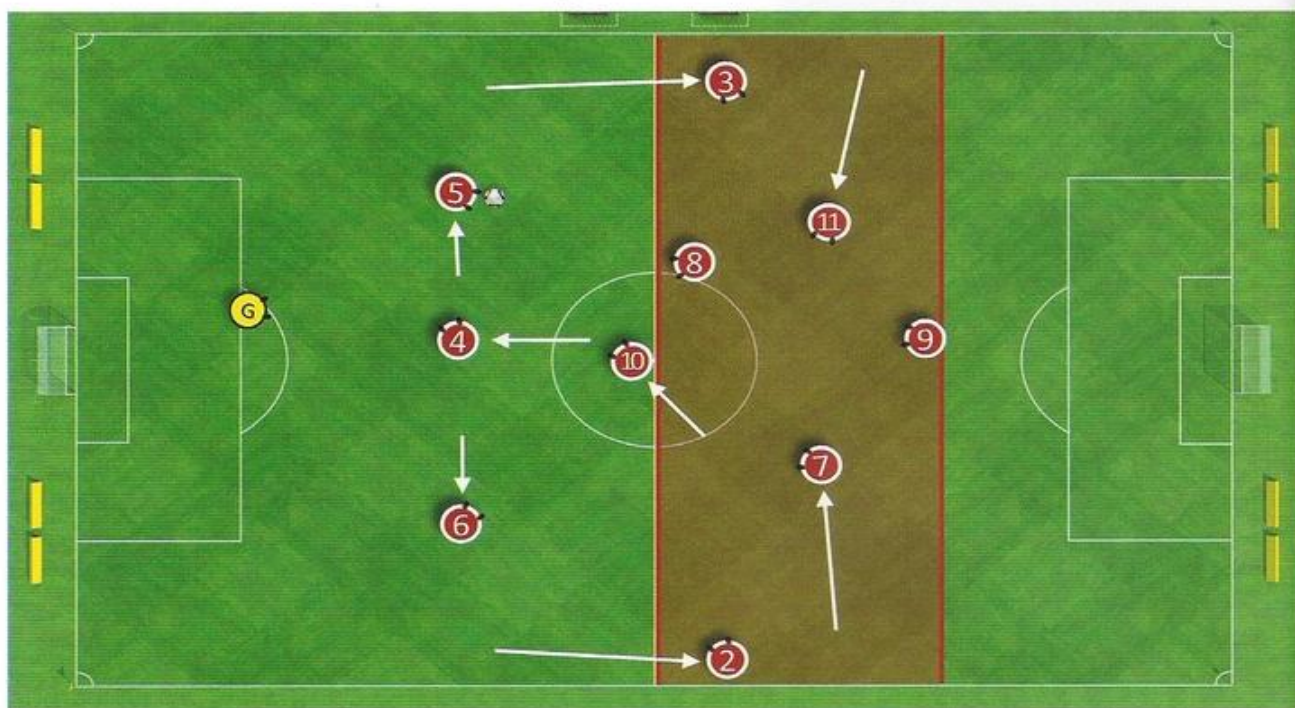
Slovenia demonstrated vulnerability when defending against penetration attempts from lanes two and four at the medium platform level. When considering the whole approach to the game, I felt my analysis and proposals were strong ones with many examples of video precedent. In the video footage there were also plenty of details for ways in which teams had demonstrated how to get into lanes two and four through rotations, rotations that freed up a ball playing player in the key areas: lanes two and four in the medium platform.

This book will detail a few of the most effective rotations, rotations that are considered as 'core movements': (1) a central midfielder falling between two central defenders, (2) a central midfielder pulling out wider than the central defenders on the side with the ball (strong-side), (3) a central midfielder pulling out wider than the central defenders on the side without the ball (weak-side), (4) rotation between central midfielders and (5) a rotation to free up a striker dropping into space.





## 11.1 Rotation (1): the central midfielder falling into the deep line centrally



The movement of a midfielder that drops in between two central defenders won't be a new idea to most and to some it may be a movement that has been over-used without context of what the rotation is for. If we refer back to the principles of play this book proposes, we remember that the first principle, if it can be achieved, is to achieve Advanced Areas.

Take this example: a central defender is on the ball and cannot achieve an Advanced Areas due to the pressure, cover and balance of the opposition. The central defender cannot achieve a pre-AAA and he cannot look to play a Switch and Slice with his partner in central defence and maybe he can't play into any central midfielder in a better position. Before the thought of 'going long and hoping to get in behind' even becomes an option some would want to argue, there are other ways to look to move the ball and remove the pressure, cover and balance that this central defender is under for another player to act as a platform player.

From this scenario we have a variety of options. In the low platform areas, we can look to 'reset' and go back to the goalkeeper and from all platform types we can ask questions of the opposition midfield through movement. One of these movements is for our central midfielder to drop back into the deepest line of pressure, asking questions of the opponent: do we follow this man out of our structure of pressure, cover and balance and now destroy our own organisation? Do we allow for the opposition to add numbers to their platform, giving them an extra dimension in terms of playing angles or even cover to look to drive from the back?

Let's revisit our scenario, we have a central defender who can (a) achieve an AAA, (b) play to any team mate in front of the opposition midfield, who may be used as part of a pre-AAA structure or even achieve AAA himself, (c) to look to switch the ball (far enough to face a different angle into the opponent) or initiate a play-round for the purposes of AAA or (d) to reset, recirculate or regain superiority from the platform.

A central midfielder dropping in between two central defenders should not then be the default movement of the midfielder, but the fourth priority in play, since the third priority requires the ball to move more than two lanes of attack for a good angle into the opponent. It might be that superiority in this platform area is a tactical priority based on analysis of your opponent (if they're particularly vulnerable from lane three penetration in one of the platform areas), but for this movement to be the natural default movement of a player is imitation of what we see without context or understanding of movement.

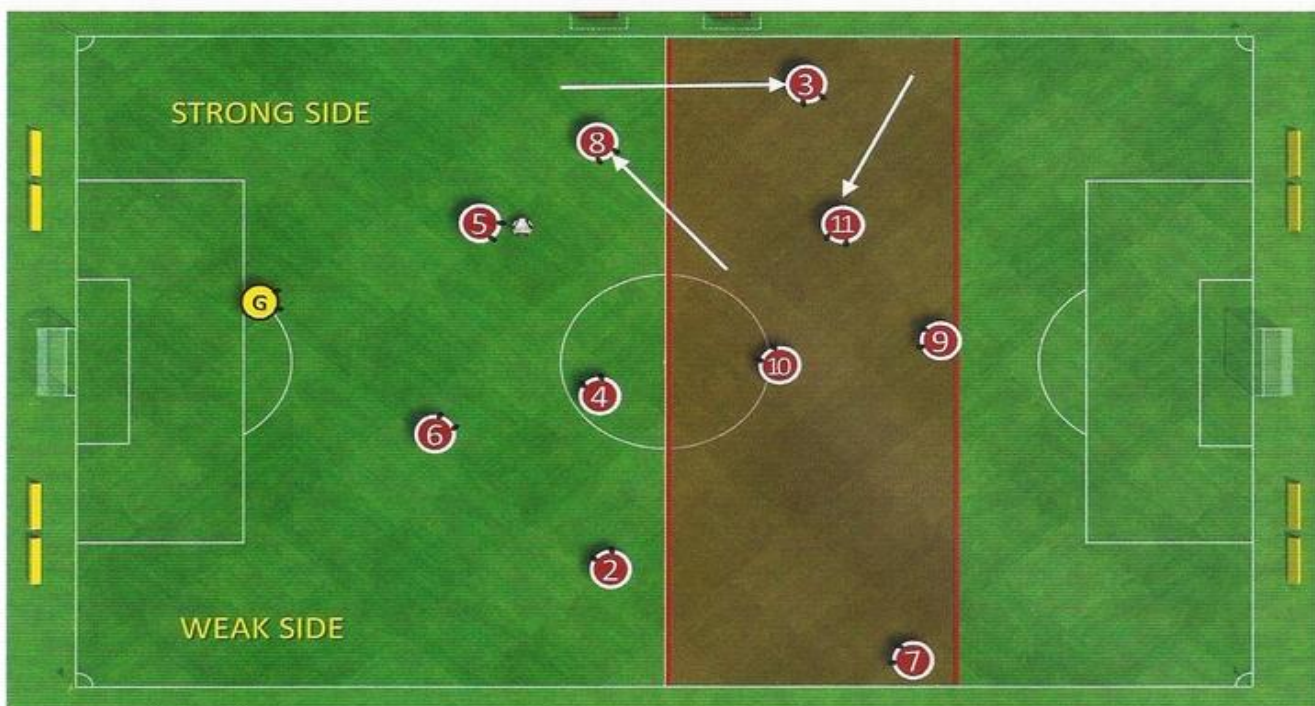
You might argue that this movement allows for our fullbacks to get into higher positions, but then what value is placed on a fullback during pre-AAA moments? The positioning of our fullbacks should not go under thought and neglected, especially during pre-AAA moments of the game if the principle of the diamond is most effective in opening up AAA opportunities.







## 11.2 Rotation (2): the central midfielder pulling out wider than the central defenders on the strong-side



Following the theme of the first rotation in 11.1, it may be more beneficial to have your two best ball players of the three in lanes two and four, rather than in the central lane. If this is the case, then perhaps you have your central midfielder drop to one of the two sides of the two defenders and your weakest ball player of the two central defenders falls centrally (in the example above, #5 might be the weaker of the two central defenders – leaving #8 and #6 to dictate play out from the back). This then allows for your ball players to be in better positions to achieve Advanced Areas. Ricardo La Volpe is famed for his back three formation that has central midfielders dropping in between central defenders into lanes two and four for the same purposes. You may also promote one type of movement from the deepest central midfielder(s) in a low platform compared to the medium platform depending on the objective of play in each area.

Looking beyond this, the rotation of your strong-sided central midfielder pulling out wider than the central defender has a knock on affect that can significantly promote effective Advanced Areas. Should the central midfielder pull out to the fullback slot, the fullback would then typically advance forward and the winger then pushes inside (preferably, both now behind the opposition midfield line).

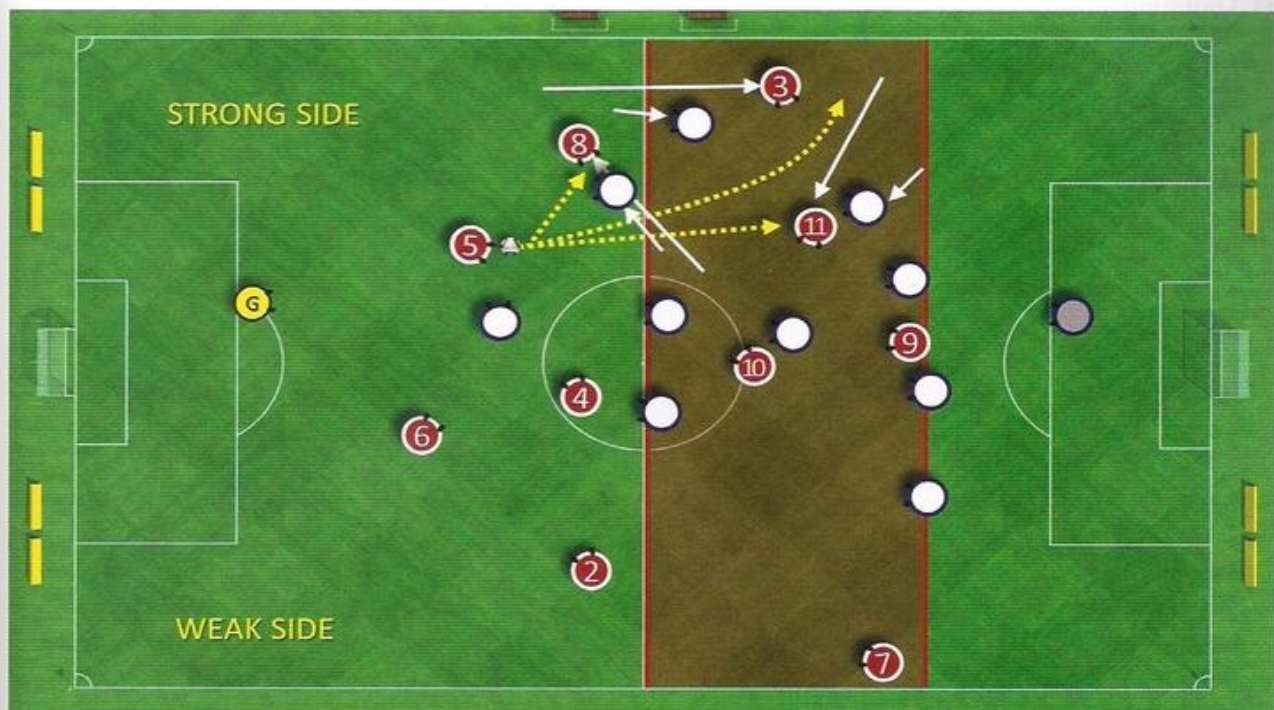
This movement and its knock on effect allows for the team in possession to add a player in between the opposition midfield and defence, therefore increasing the effectiveness of any Advanced Area Actions and increasing the options of which we can take when playing into the Advanced Areas.

*“The idea is to create superiority behind the line of pressure”* – Kieran Smith

If we consider the reactionary movement of the opponent, they are asked a number of questions:

1. Do we follow the central midfielder out into a wide position and therefore leave space centrally to be exploited?
2. Do we leave the central midfielder to pick up the ball freely and look to create a wide area platform?
3. Do we follow the winger who has now moved inside and therefore leave space to be exploited in wide areas by the advancing fullback?
4. Do we protect the wide areas and allow for another player to become engaged in defending the winger who has moved inside?



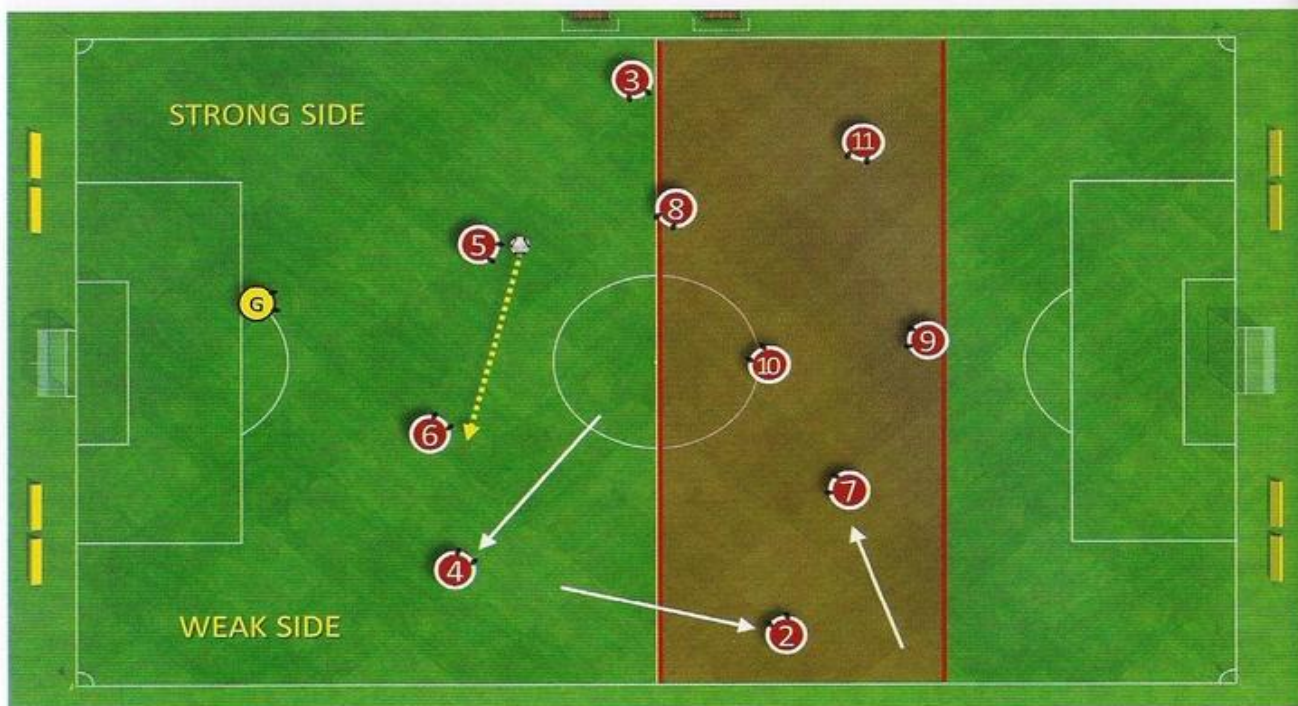


If we consider these movements to be carried out as one of the two central defenders is in possession and forwards facing, then by following the central midfielder out into the wide space could potentially open up a passing channel (if followed) for the central defender in possession of the ball.

The effectiveness of the rotation depends on the response the opposition gives to the movement. Any in-game analysis from players or prior analysis carried out by the coaching staff allows for our team to measure the value of the rotation. Any analysis again, should be carried out at each platform type (low, medium or high), on each side of the field and in different moments of the game.



### 11.3 Rotation (3): the central midfielder pulling out wider than the central defenders on the weak-side

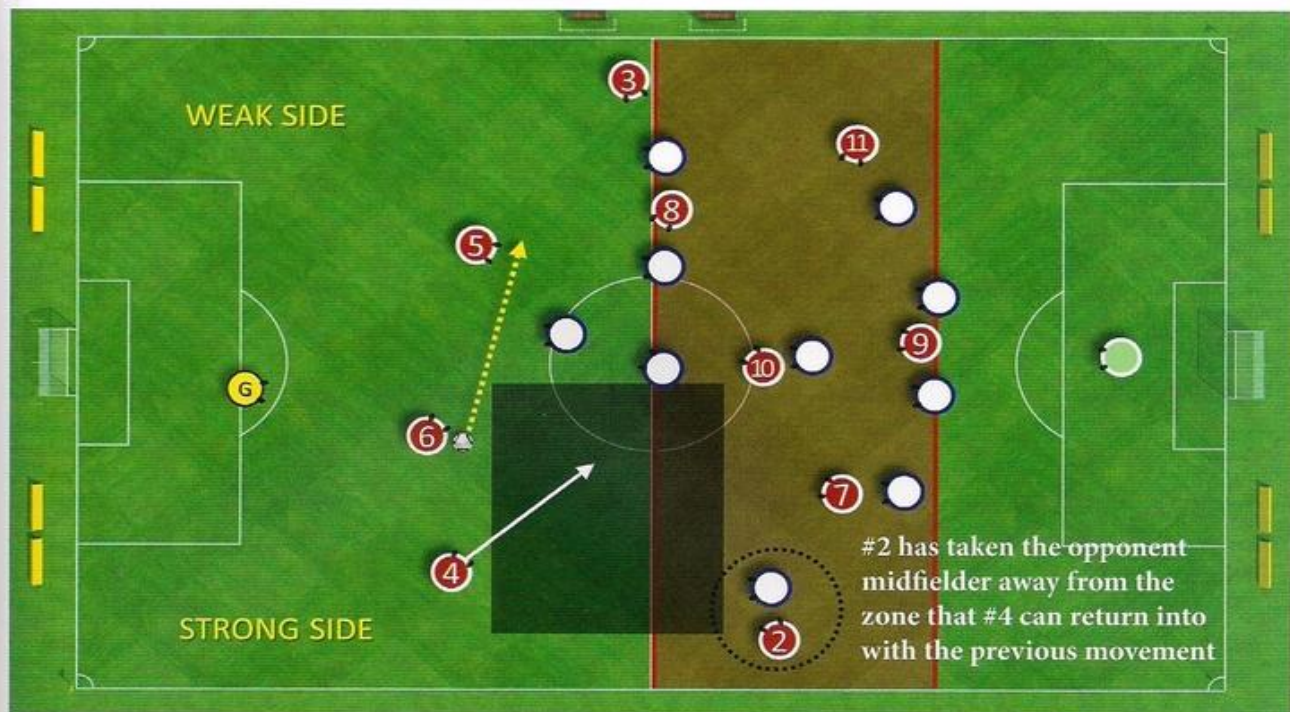


The link between this particular rotation and the weak-side fullback language of the game detailed in the previous chapter is one of positioning (the diagonal pocket positioning of the central midfielder), only this time the ball doesn't travel to the central midfielder who can turn out with the ball. This time, the ball travels from one central defender to the other.

The movement from the weak-side central midfielder facilitates the efforts of central defenders to switch and slice. Once more, questions are asked of the opposition and the movement of the central midfielder can open up greater passing channels to Advanced Areas. As the ball moves from central defender to central defender, the weak-side fullback is asked to push on in expectation that the switch and slice may be possible and the weak-side winger drops inside (but stays behind the opposition midfield line) to provide a passing option in Advanced Areas, an area with a higher likelihood of pass due to the opposition pressure, cover and balance having a focal point for the other side of the field.

When analysing Estonia vs. Slovenia I saw evidence of the weak-side movement from Estonia's left-sided central midfielder, forcing the left back up the field and the left winger inside (Slovenia's right sided midfielder followed the left back). However, as the ball came from right to left in the play-round, Klaven (the left sided central defender) often turned to play back the play-round to the other side of the field. Upon the ball returning, as did the left sided central midfielder, gravitating back to the centre of the field, completely unfollowed and now in a position to dictate with the ball.





The image above considers the same scenario observed for Estonia vs. Slovenia only in keeping with the theoretical image shown on the previous page (from #5 to #6 and then back, from left to right then back).

Therefore, there is tactical scope to which you may wish to reset the play-round with hope to free up the central midfielder to pick up the ball centrally upon his return after rotation had taken place. The resetting of rotation now becomes an area to look at in terms of finding space on a football field; any decision given to the opposition on responsibility of who follows who, is a question asked of the opponent in your quest to find space in key areas on a football field.



#### 11.4 Rotation (4): between two or more central midfielders

The rotation between two or more central players (midfielders, wide players and/or central attackers all included), as with all rotations, can be done for two purposes: to achieve platforms in key areas or to facilitate penetration. This can be highlighted simply through the direction in which two or more (central midfielders in this example) rotate in.

##### Over and Under: Onto the ball

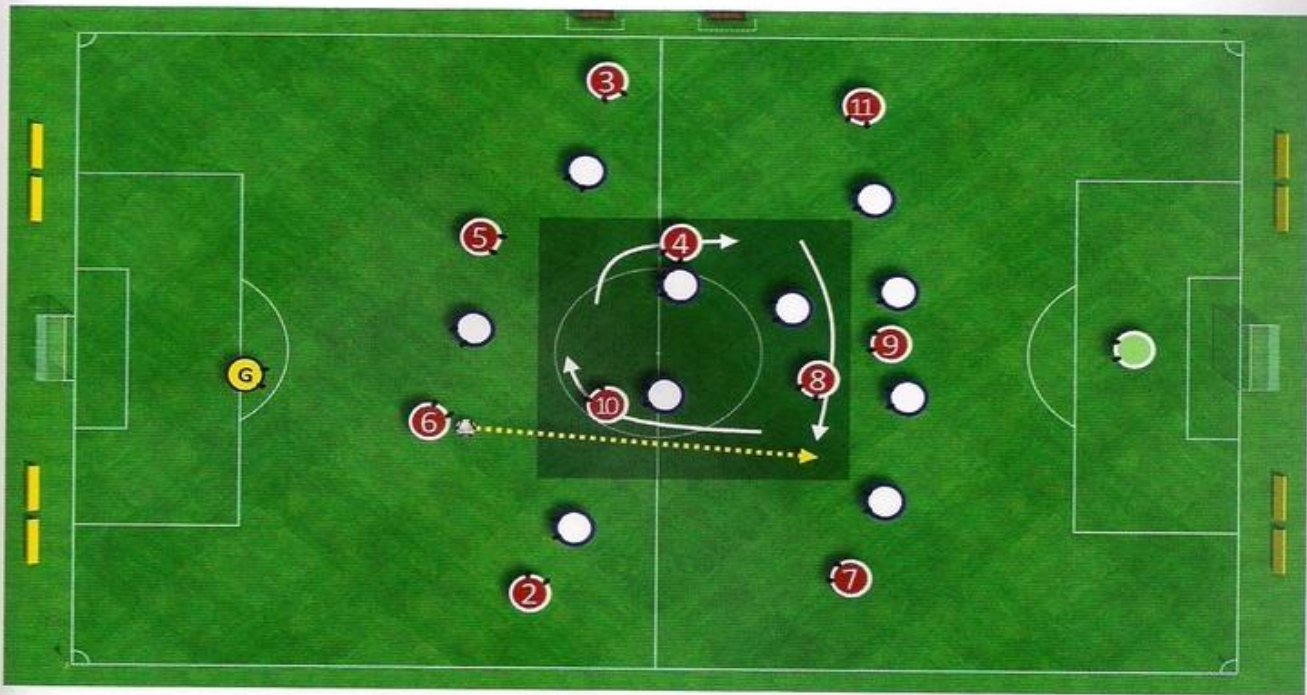


In the above image we have what is called an 'over and under' rotation, a rotation of two or more. This particular type of over and under is one that comes onto the ball with the final movement of the rotation. The midfielder in the deepest position (#4) moves away from the ball towards a linear penetrative Advanced Area, opening up new space underneath for the far-sided midfielder (#8) to come underneath and pick up the ball to act as a platform to play forward from this space. Remember that this image highlights the initial rotation but not the secondary or further recycles of rotation.

The over and under rotation of this nature is best carried out when there may be large space in between the opposition midfield and defence, spaces for the forward running midfielder to potentially exploit should the player on the ball be able to penetrate to the forward running midfielder into space (space created by a laterally moving advanced midfielder as shown in the image - #10).



## Under and Over: Away from the ball



Alternatively, we have the option of 'under and over' rotation, which is different in purpose to an over and under. In an under and over rotation the midfield rotate in a direction that looks to free up congested space ahead of the ball (where as the previous example looked to free up congested space in the platform areas or to exploit open space ahead of the ball between the opposition midfield and defence).

As the vertical midfielder (#10) moves towards the ball and drops to a deeper receiving line, this opens up the opportunity for the other two midfielders (in this circumstance) to find space in more advanced lines of play. It may be necessary to use the player dropping towards the man on the ball as a 'bounce pass' player to move the opposition out of the desirable AAA space.

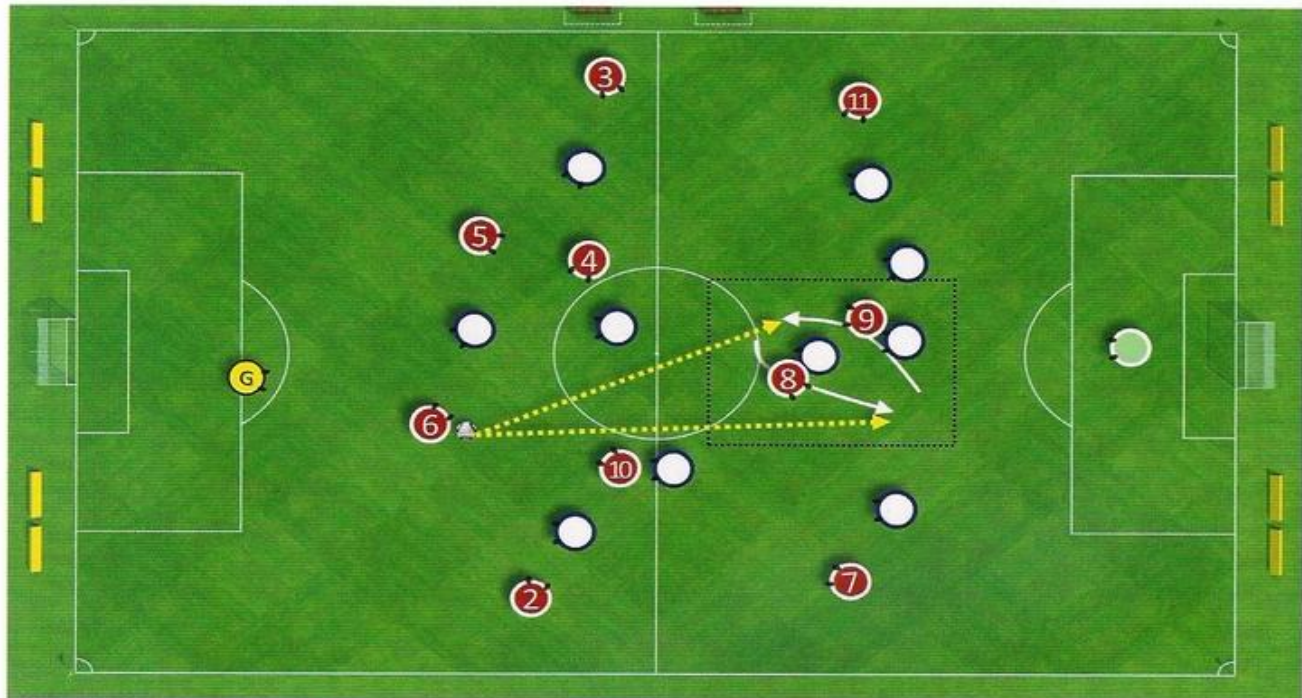
The difference between the two rotations, when carried out by three players as examples show, is one of scenario. Is there little space between the opposition midfield and defence or have they left space for forward runners to exploit? The answer to this question affects the decision making process of players during movement.

Sampaoli's Chile during the 2014 World Cup game against the Netherlands was one of constant rotation between central players of deeper lines and advanced lines: to empty and then fill a space with players. Chile would do so with a set of priorities: (a) can we exploit the opposition with the forward running player or (b) can we create platforms from which we can play forward from.

The rotation of over and under, along with all the variations of any rotation between players of higher and deeper receiving lines can be done between strikers and midfielders, wingers and midfielders and so on. The rotation type is not limited to three players as detailed and can be just as effective with only a two player non-verbal cooperation.



## Under and Over: cooperation between sectors



After observing rotation as a theme in analysis, I have noted three reasons for rotation in football:

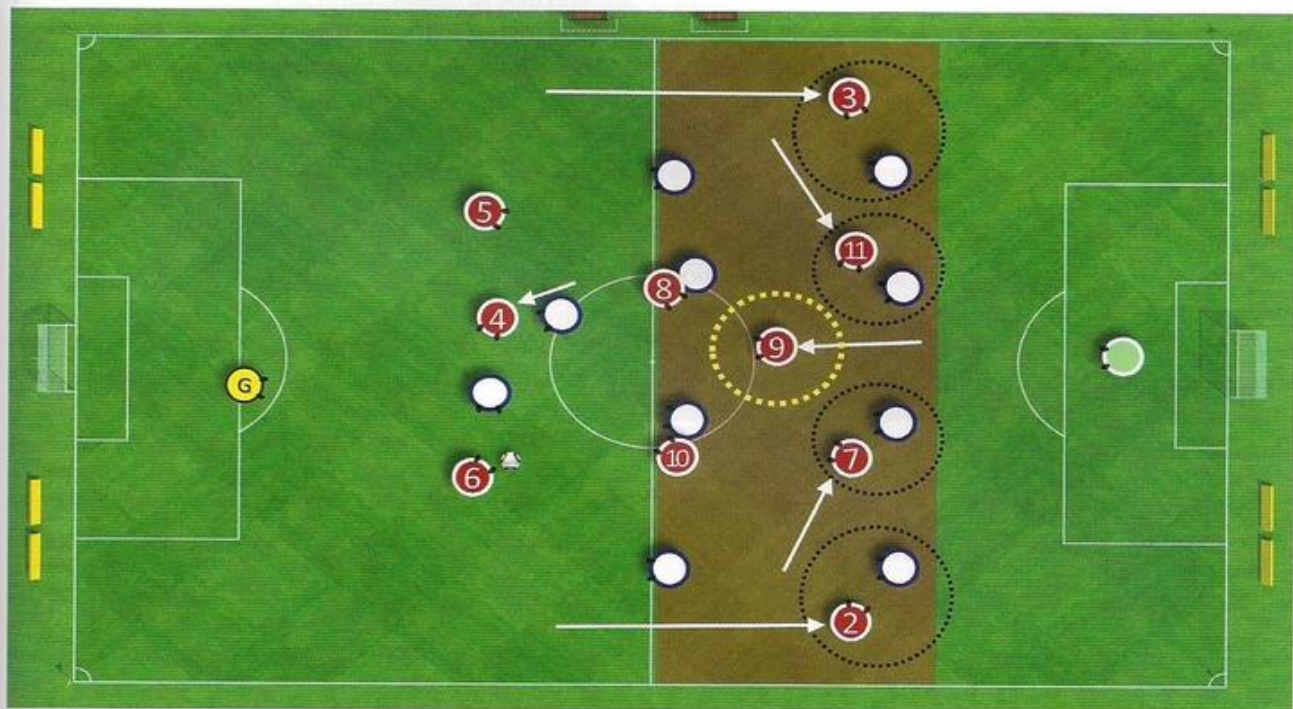
1. To establish platforms for players to penetrate from by finding a spare man who can receive to play forwards (achieving Advanced Areas)
2. To create Advanced Area Actions through opening up passing channels by moving players from the opposition that follow your players
3. To create a free man or add an extra man beyond the opposition midfield in Advanced Areas.

Sometimes a rotation may offer more than one of the above options. A further reason may be to move players from the opposition into unfamiliar areas, by this I mean you may find you move the opposition defender into a midfield area and the opposition midfielder in the a defender area - this could highlight player weaknesses in certain areas of scenarios bringing about qualitative superiority.



### 11.5 Rotation (5): full 'animation' of fullbacks pinned up against the opposition fullbacks, wingers going inside to pin the opposition central defenders and the striker dropping into pockets of space

If the idea is to free up our best players to get on the ball in Advanced Areas while also facing forwards with the ball (time to turn) then perhaps we can consider rotation to free up our striker (should he be the player) by pinning back the four defenders of the opposition. It may be that one of the two wingers is instead preferred as the player to find space in between the opposition midfield and defence and simple alterations can be made to achieve this outcome instead.



The idea is simply that each of the opponent's back four is to be occupied by a player; the opposition are to be pulled into a #1-4-4-2 type shape (provoked through the CDM dropping between the two central defenders or via manipulation through ball movement) and the key player should be positioned between lines. The most effective way to do this is for the key player to move off of a marker who now has to pick up a new player after the animation.



## CONCLUSION: ROTATION AND MOVEMENT

Throughout the five types of rotation given as example in this text, there are non-verbal agreements and understandings between players that allow for AAA or pre-AAA platforms to be created. There are strong links between the positional rules of a structure (formation and cover of spaces on the field) and the fluidity of movement on the football field. The positional rules proposed for several systems of play or formations are detailed in later chapters (#1-4-2-3-1, #1-3-3-1-3 and so on).

During my research of dynamic systems, I have analysed a number of different ways of thought. A paper from Ricardo Duarte et al titled 'Sports Teams and Superorganisms' (2012) researches sociobiology and communication methods of fire ants. The conclusive study into complexity of many sociobiological areas of research (such as fish schools or migrating birds) is that 'simple task restraints', many simple task restraints, lead to what is seen in whole as complexity.

Mark Sampson (England Women's Manager) indirectly tackles tactical complexity in the same global way. Each player is given an 'individual goal tree' with one simple attacking objective and one simple defending objective appropriate for the greater vision of complexity. The England players then meet with their teammates, first within units only (the strikers meet, the central midfielders meet, the fullback and wingers and so on) and during the unit-based meetings discussions take place to mediate between each other's individual goal trees and their individual objectives.

To give a better example we can imagine a scenario whereby we are playing #1-4-4-2 flat and one striker is given the attacking objective of making many diagonal runs into the central defender and fullback channel of the opposition.

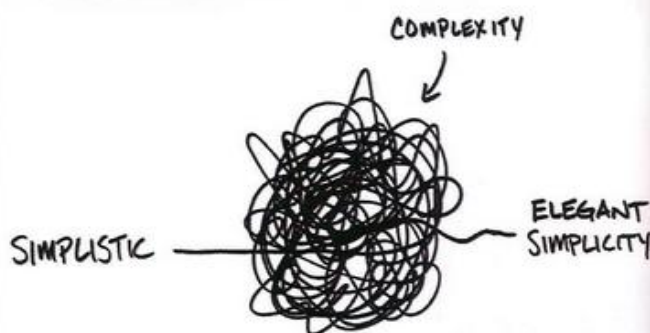
On the other hand, the other striker's individual player goal tree objective is to look to occupy one of the two central defenders and hold up the ball as much as possible. The two strikers would then meet to discuss how they could help one another achieve their individual goal tree objectives and ensure there is little confusion over any grey areas of confliction.

The two strikers would then meet with the wingers and central midfielders, zooming out one step further to have the same purpose driven discussion: how can you help me and how can I help you achieve the individual goal tree objectives?

In this discussion we find out that the left winger has been asked to look to receive to feet often, while the right winger has been asked to try and stay wide, isolate her opposing fullback often and look to make plenty of runs in behind. The left central midfielder has been asked to look many possibilities to play through balls or if not, then combine with players showing towards her before looking to play through balls. The right central midfielder has been asked to play higher up the field and look to make runs beyond the striker often.

The conclusion from the tactical discussion now becomes more refined in the example given. It may become apparent that the game plan for the striker who has been asked to make runs in between the opposition central defender and fullback is supported by the actions of the left winger to draw the opposition right back out of slot. The role of the other striker then becomes clear that the objective is to hold up play for the forward runs of the right winger and central midfielder asked to get beyond, perhaps the striker will look for any flick on passes to the players that are looking to get behind the opposition.

The discussions continue until a coherent game plan is devised, by the players, for the players. However, this complexity has been designed with an end goal in mind to guide the players into better understanding their role within a complex supporting system.





*"For the simplicity on this side of complexity, I wouldn't give you a fig. But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity, for that I would give you anything I have"* – Olivier Wendell Holmes

*"Simplicity is key"* – Tim Lees

Football is not a simple game, despite popular belief. It is however, a complex sport understood through simple blocks of information. We commonly see professional footballers go on to become coaches and while some are fantastic and take all the advantageous experiences they have had into their coaching, some on the other hand have failed to understand the complexity of the game but succeeded as a professional footballer through understanding his or her own simplicity within a greater complexity, but not the other way around. These people go on to demonstrate poor understanding of their role as a coach to players. Due to the complex nature of football, the copy and paste methodology (that of repeating only what you were told as a player) is likely to fall flat.

*"Local interactions (individuals) give rise to global patterns (team) - this is the central claim to the self-organisation approach to collective behaviour. Analysis can be conducted at the local or global level, but must ultimately characterise the links between them ...by manipulating the 'rules' or laws governing these [local] interactions, such simulations can provide insight into the self-organisation of collective locomotion, and help explain how complex behaviour emerges from seemingly simple interactions."*

– Passos, Davids and Chow, 2016

Rene Maric of Red Bull Salzburg, uses Barcelona as a hypothetical example when discussing how simple instructions form complexity.

Maric gives a set of simple reactive instructions to each player, with some supporting roles (to be critical here, he does forget the goalkeeper...):

**RB** Dani Alves: give width, but not always. Sometimes look to stay more central for circulation and open up space for Messi. When both Messi and Rakitic are both central, then you must give width.

**LB** Jordi Alba: look to both underlap and overlap Neymar when the play is switched to him. Give width when Neymar is narrow and if Messi makes a run towards goal from wide right, your job is to get to the far post.

**RCB** Gerard Pique: whenever Dani Alves is deep or Rakitic drops deep, you should look to move narrow centrally. When neither do, then you are to offer width and open central space for Busquets or even ter Stegen (the goalkeeper)

**LCB** Javier Mascherano: support from the left half space (lane 2\*) and open up space for Busquets to drop in between you and Pique as the opposition are pressing high. Look for Iniesta as often as you can.

**DM** Sergio Busquets: if there is space in front of you and two of the three players to your right (Messi, Rakitic, Dani Alves) are deep or wide then you are to advance forwards.

**RCM** Ivan Rakitic: when Dani Alves and Messi are wide right then you should move forward centrally. Should space open up in the wide right positions as Messi and Alves have moved inside, then look to move into the wide right areas (either deep or advanced, depending on what the situation requires)

**LCM** Andres Iniesta: stay in lanes 1-3 unless space opens up to the right hand side (because two of the three players on the right are wide and/or deep)

**RW** Leo Messi: move as you see opportune.

**LW** Neymar: try to position yourself between the opposition fullback and centre back when Suarez is going towards the right. Otherwise, stay on the left and give width when the ball is on the right.

**CF** Luis Suarez: whenever Messi moves centrally and no one is giving width, look to move to the right. Look to drop centrally into pockets if any penetrative passes are available to you.

Rene Maric then summarises that the hypothetical simple instructions given to each player enables Barcelona to play with **at least thirty-four position structures** based on the interactions on the right hand side (Rakitic, Dani Alves, Messi) and various balancing movements of other players.

While Maric's example is hypothetical, there is plenty of parallel symmetry between what Mark Sampson does, what Rene Maric proposes and the sociobiological models of complexity by **Couzin (2009), Kelley and Ouellette (2013) and Duarte et al (2012)**. Therefore, we can look at each element within such movement on a football field and understand it through the lenses of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication that prioritises our decision making around a set of principles and guiding rules that relate to the spaces on a football field. Non-verbal communication that understands the environment of the team and awareness of each personality and profile of players.

*"Form follows process"* – Mick Pearce



# 12 THE ENVIRONMENT

“The character of the team is mainly developed by the character of its coach”

- Pepijn Lijnders

The city of Rosario, Santa Fe (Argentina) has been the birth place of Che Guevara, Jorge Sampaoli, César Luis Menotti, Leo Messi and Marcelo Bielsa. The birth place of the romantic; those that would rather lose beautifully than betray society and the greater vision.

If you take the riddled road to Rosario from Buenos Aires (four hours by bus), you'd see the landscape of football change, not just from Boca Juniors and River Plate to Newell's Old Boys and Central, but from Porteños to Rosarinos. For Rosarinos, football takes on an ideological, philosophical and romantic form where players are no longer seen as football players but representatives of their culture, interpreters of their peoples' every fear, joy and sorrow.

In 2012 Athletic Club Bilbao lost two cup finals, just sixteen days apart: a 3-0 loss in the UEFA Europa League Cup Final against Atlético de Madrid was then followed by a 3-0 loss to Barcelona in the Copa del Rey final. After that loss, Marcelo Bielsa overheard a conversation between players post-match. An exchange of laughter and little care for falling at the final hurdle.

The following day, Bielsa mournfully spoke to the team, highlighting the disconnect between modern day footballers and the cultures they represent, the people they represent:

*“...we couldn't match the expectation we created. It's a scar, a wound; I heard conversations, people laughing yesterday...”*

*I think it's unforgivable, lads, to get people's hopes*

*up and let people down, not being able to match the expectations you create. Because I'm truly ashamed to have let down the Athletic Bilbao fans. Don't lose sight of that fact, lads: we let them down...*

*You can't ignore the fact that you can't let people down, especially loyal people, so loyal that you can be losing 3-0 with an open wound and you give them the smallest thing to cheer about and they applaud you in the 80th minute. They're extraordinary fans, boys, so extraordinary, so extraordinary...and you are an extension of those people. You are those people. You are the same type of person we're talking about. Extraordinary people, but regrettably lads, we weren't up to the task.*

*[...] and I'm aware that you're very young. You're very young and you're premature millionaires; you have no problems, it doesn't matter to you too much what happens because everybody has taken care of that. You can allow yourselves to laugh...”*

The melancholic tone of Bielsa's team talk wasn't a reaction to the two losses but an acclamation that he had lost the most valuable quality of success: the environment of the team. A carefully created and maintained environment in training, education, development and games conducive to the being of team. An extension of people, reality and reason. Bielsa's philosophy and its foundations start with no other consideration: the creation of a high-performance environment conducive to the being of team, conducive to success. Without getting this right, nothing sustainable, whether that be individual player development at the youngest of ages or senior competitive level teams, can truly follow.



*"I have not found anyone in the game that has influenced me more in the way I think about the management of success and failure than Marcelo Bielsa. He understands the process towards achieving many objectives that come together to maintain the environment of the team"*

– Eric Tenllado, Coach at Espanyol

Raymond Verheijen talks of communication on a football field being of the highest order. Communication, as noted, is made up of the verbal and non-verbal messages on a football field but underneath that we have the relationships between players, between the players and their coach and so on. At youth level there is a climate that needs careful management, a climate made up of parent to parent relationships and the relationships between the parent, player and coach too. All these horizontal and vertical climates come together to form what is known as 'the environment of the team' and influence the actions on a football field in a more direct manner than one would think.

Chris Davies talked a lot to me about "The Champion Mentality", an idea whereby *"...becoming a champion and winning is a consequence of this collective environment and individual components of that, not the other way around."*

Across all levels of the game we can begin to theorise 'the environment' into simple areas:

1. High levels of focus from players
2. Players who thrive in what others may consider to be uncomfortable and/or difficult moments (stretching)
3. Players that trust each other, their playing style and themselves
4. Players that play with high levels of intensity of action
5. Commitment from the players to a higher level than winning
6. A pursuit of excellence (a thirst for endless learning and perfection)
7. An environment where players thrive upon reflection (a safe environment for feedback)
8. Leadership qualities demonstrated from players in leading the very qualities listed above

Ian Dyer (Head of Coaching at Coerver UK) delivered a presentation at an Inspire Coach Education event in

London (November, 2015) that looked at the benefits of 'competition' in our training sessions. Dyer's presentation outlined a variety of outcomes from using competition in training sessions, all of which fit within the desirable environment of the team but under different terms. In most presentations and books I've read about elite performance environments or even developmental environments, the same principles are spoken about but using different language.

It is often said that the learning environment and the environment for winning are different, that one should choose one or the other. Pep Guardiola has however demonstrated at the highest levels of the game that there is an overlap and an environment where players do not enjoy learning isn't often a problem with the players themselves (often referred to as the insecurity of the elite) but a problem with the environment they're a part of and how the coach presents himself to the players within that environment.

When Marcelo Bielsa highlighted a lack of care from his players (as they laughed hours after losing) he went on to question the commitment of the players. When Mark Sampson's England team went to Canada they did so with the slogan 'Inspire a Nation'. When Wales qualified from their EURO 2016 qualifiers group and rose to 7th in the FIFA rankings just years after the tragic death of Gary Speed (who had united a broken nation himself), they did so with the words 'Together. Stronger'. When the All Blacks (New Zealand Rugby) rose to new heights after their drop in professionalism in the mid 2000's, they did so with the slogan 'Better people make better All Blacks'. Each with a commitment deeply ingrained in the hearts and minds of the players – commitment to something far greater than winning.

*"If we were to wear different shirts, you would still recognise us"* – Pepijn Lijnders

How one can bring about the qualities outlined in the environment would form an entire book itself. Studying coaches such as Anson Dorrance, Pep Guardiola, The All Blacks and others (across a myriad of sports) can bring about meaningful strategies to help better develop the 'Champion Mentality' of the individuals and the team. The environment is driven from every component in it: the individual players, the coach, the fans/the parents, the relationships between people and so on.



***"Football needs the player to have high self-esteem, but self-esteem leads to vanity and vanity makes you selfish. The coach must learn to control it within a group and find a balance"*** – Marcelo Bielsa

The most ambiguous element in the eight outlined pillars of the performance environment of the team is that of 'trust'.

***"Eighty percent of sporting performance is based on trust"*** – Frank de Boer

Johann Cruyff determines that trust is one third of the formula that leads to successful football team tactics, competing with insight and daring of the division of what forms tactics in football as far as the players are concerned:

***"You can divide tactics into insight, trust and daring"*** – Johann Cruyff

Trust by definition implies that a person be comfortable with risk, risk to rely and depend on others. Humans are typically risk averse, because winning isn't generally reflected on as good as losing is bad. Risk connotes the potential for loss. Many fail to understand trust and define it as an emotion only. However, trust is both a conscious and unconscious process in our neocortex and limbic systems within the brain.

Trust starts in our conscious with a rational decision making process and can be broken down into six factors: sharing integrity (honesty, values and morals), consistent reliability and/or competence, fairness, sharing commitment, empathy and the development of the hormone oxytocin (unconsciously developed of course, but can be consciously created by an external factor/structure).

***"Structure gives logic to thinking and doing and people thrive"*** – Louis van Gaal

***"Passion doesn't make sense if there isn't any structure"*** – Pepijn Lijnders

The question then becomes, are we actively creating structures that allow for players to show one another the qualities that then become useful during competitive games?

I believe that the environment of a team shouldn't ever go neglected at the expense of any other objective, that the environment of the team can tear apart good work or create the conditions conducive to itself. Conducive to excellence, conducive to possessing the 'champion mentality' and like Chris Davies says, as a consequence of all of that you win games and championships.

If we return back to Mark Sampson's interesting ways to implement tactical ideas (pg.110), while at the same time considering how his methods bring about positive qualities for the environment of the team, we can start to think on a more holistic level in understanding how the environment can be managed. As mentioned before, every player before each game is given what is called an 'individual goal tree' that looks at how that individual can influence the game. The players are given one individual attacking objective and one individual defensive objective. An example for a striker might be:

Attacking Objective: England needs me to... make threatening runs in behind the opposition defence as often as possible.

Defensive Objective: England needs me to... force play in one direction and split the pitch in half from the front by stopping the opposition from switching the ball from left to right.

In the moment a player is given his or her individual goal tree, they focus only on the objectives relevant for them. However, they do not realise that the head coach has carefully pieced together a dynamic system that involves complimentary actions or 'focal points' from one player to the next.

The England Women's team would then sit in task group meetings, meeting in their units and then unit to unit. The striker might meet with the other striker and discuss how they are going to help one another achieve their objectives outlined in the individual goal tree. The striker we looked at might meet the supporting striker and find out that the attacking objective for the supporting striker is to 'look to drop into pockets of space often in front of the other striker', looking to pick the ball up in Advanced Areas between the opposition midfield and defence often.



When Thierry Henry joined Barcelona he commented to Pep Guardiola that he was making a lot of runs in behind the opposition defensive line but not getting the ball often. Guardiola never gave Henry a direct answer as to why Henry was instructed to do this so often, but Guardiola did convince Henry that what he was doing was highly significant. After some time it surfaced to the former Arsenal striker how he was a cog in the system, a system designed to get the best players in the most valuable spaces on the field. While Henry was making run after run, he was also taking the defensive line deeper each time – increasing the space between the opposition defensive line and midfield line. After all, the opposition defence had no choice, Henry was very dangerous if you were to allow him space to run into and receive the ball. By increasing the space between the opposition midfield and defence, Henry was increasing the impact Andres Iniesta could have upon the game in these spaces. Henry finally understood it, he was making Iniesta an even better player with his runs behind, he was making Barcelona a better team.

For that relationship to work without envy, Henry must trust the environment he is in and come to some self awareness in how the team can be the best it can be. How a team can get the best out of its very best players.

Mark Sampson presents players at the end of each match with an award for 'The Moment of the Match', the moment that changed the game the most. In Thierry Henry's case, little did he know it but very often the moments he was to make the runs in behind and increase this space for Iniesta, well they were probably the most significant of all anonymous moments in the game. These moments cannot occur without the right environment in place and the right processes to achieve that.

Some teams have bad 'dead behaviours' in training and on a football pitch: hands on hips, negative communication, bad 'next job reactions' (what you do the moment the ball leaves your foot after a pass for example...). These seemingly insignificant behaviours can have the most significant negative impact on the environment you are in and players must be accountable as individuals for the greater environment. Particularly as that very environment is the environment shaping your own development – a cyclical relationship that requires accountability to ensure you're in the very best environment you can be in, to ensure all eight

of the pillars of the environment are being stretched every day. Of course the coach can take responsibility in creating healthy competition and so on, but it comes down to the very components of the grass level of the environment (the players) to make the biggest difference. Self ownership and leadership of the environment is therefore an objective worth planning for as a coach.

Who recorded Marcelo Bielsa's damning team talk after the loss of the environment and then decided to upload it onto the internet? Who abused the trust in the already broken environment? Marcelo Bielsa was right to consider not returning after these losses because once you lose your 'Champion Mentality' environment, it's difficult or some might say 'impossible' to ever rebuild without removing those that are negatively impacting it the most. Make no mistake about it, that team talk was one of great significance. Bielsa was on a mission to fix what had been broken the very next day after losing to Atletico Madrid, but he did so by leaving it in the hands of the players. The players now had the **opportunity** to grow their own environment again.

To start your journey on better understanding how to design for an environment, I would recommend only one book: *Legacy* by James Kerr. No book has further influenced my thinking in how we can better design for our desirable environment.

The remainder of this book looks at the formations and principles while applying the theoretical content outlined in the chapters before, then the practical training formats that look to bring about that very theory. None of that matters without much thought given to your performance environment, in the changing rooms, on the training field and in games. Nothing affects the non-verbal communication of a team more than the content of this short chapter. Nothing matters more, not winning or losing but committing to a process of a greater vision. We must all find the Rosario in us...

...along that riddled road from Buenos Aires to Rosario (four hours by bus)...



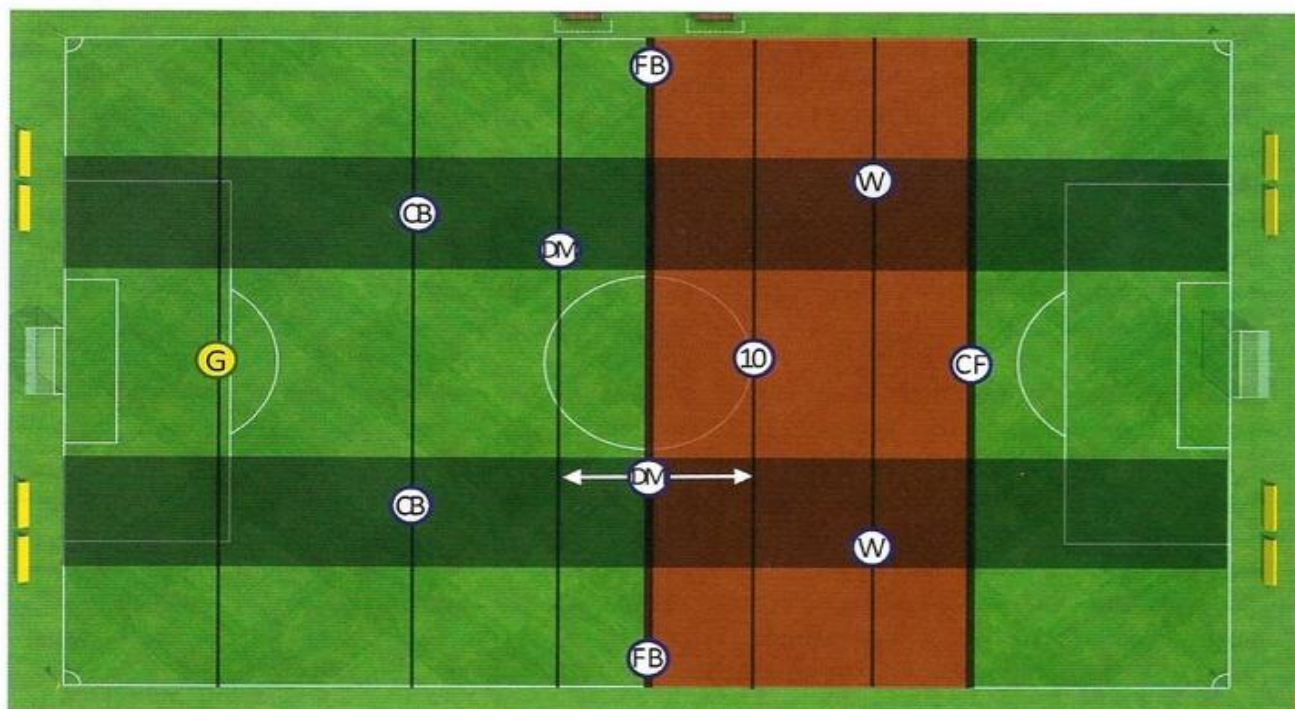
# 13 BIELSA'S #1-4-2-3-1

“It is the ‘animation’ and not formation that is important when thinking about how to set up a team in its shape”

- Chris Davies (Celtic Assistant Manager, Formerly Liverpool FC First Team Coach)

Chris Davies will use the term ‘animation’ to talk about the way in which the dynamic system of players move on a football field. The notion of a ‘formation’ is one that can be found in the shallow depths of football study and once we begin to dig deeper it is the ‘movement’ of a team that holds more value and meaning for analysis. At the Welsh Coaches National Conference (2015) Chris Davies delivered a presentation where he referenced his term ‘transitional systems’, referring to the positional changes between a defensive structure and an attacking structure. The next few chapters will show similar attacking structures through animation, through the movement from the changes from defending to attacking.

These chapters will be brief enough to allow for coaches to form team shape around getting the best out of their best players. Formation isn’t important in the grand scheme of things, movement is. Movement is only important in that it should direct its energies towards getting your best players in the best spaces on the field. The outcome of this book is for the coach to put it down and start with his team, not start with an ideal theory and formation. However, there are some subtle movements in terms of positioning that are worth highlighting as they provide substantial building blocks for the rest to flow from.



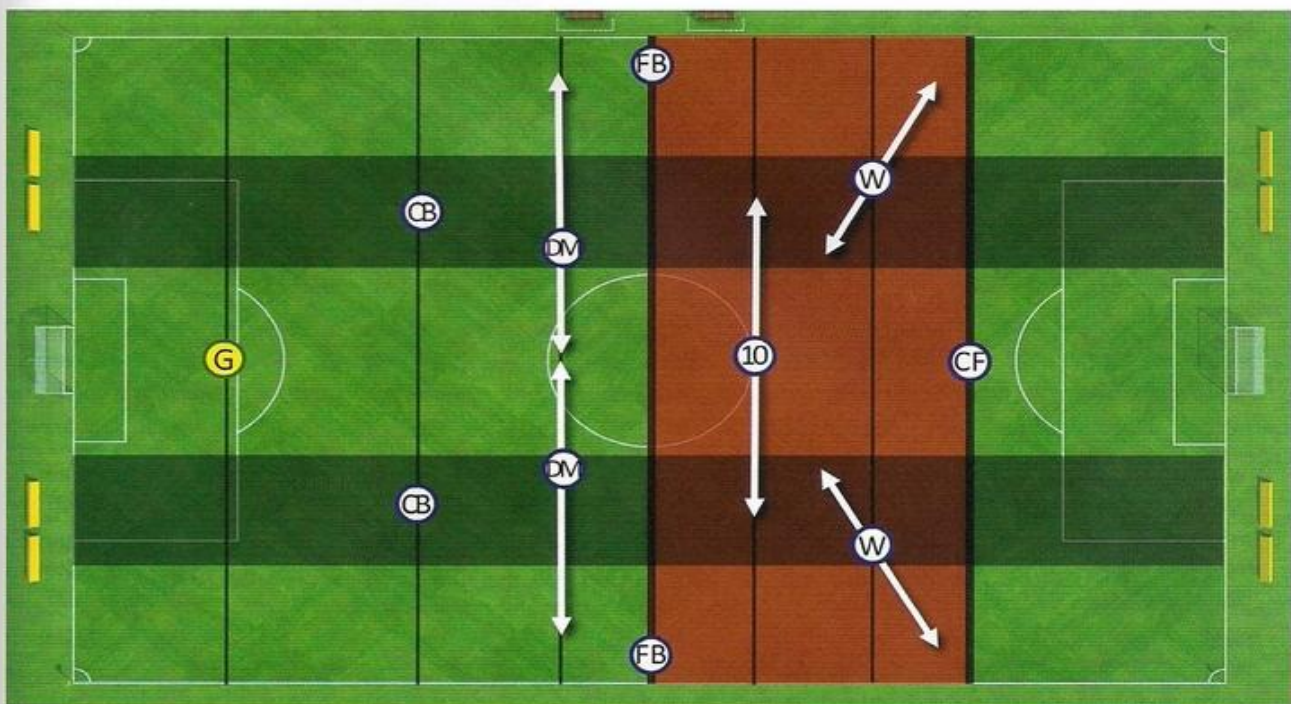


## Attacking Principles

The first clarification to make is that Bielsa's  $\neq 1-4-2-3-1$  formation does not consist of two deep lying midfielders but one. The other deep central midfielder is to play on both sides of the opposition midfield, depending on what is asked of him in the moment with the lens of 'How can I best help the team achieve AAA with my positioning right now?'

### Attacking Principles: $\neq 1-4-2-3-1$ (with two deep lying midfielders in front of the opposition midfield line)

There are positional rules that can be promoted using the 'five vertical lanes' division of space on a football field as widely acknowledged throughout this book.



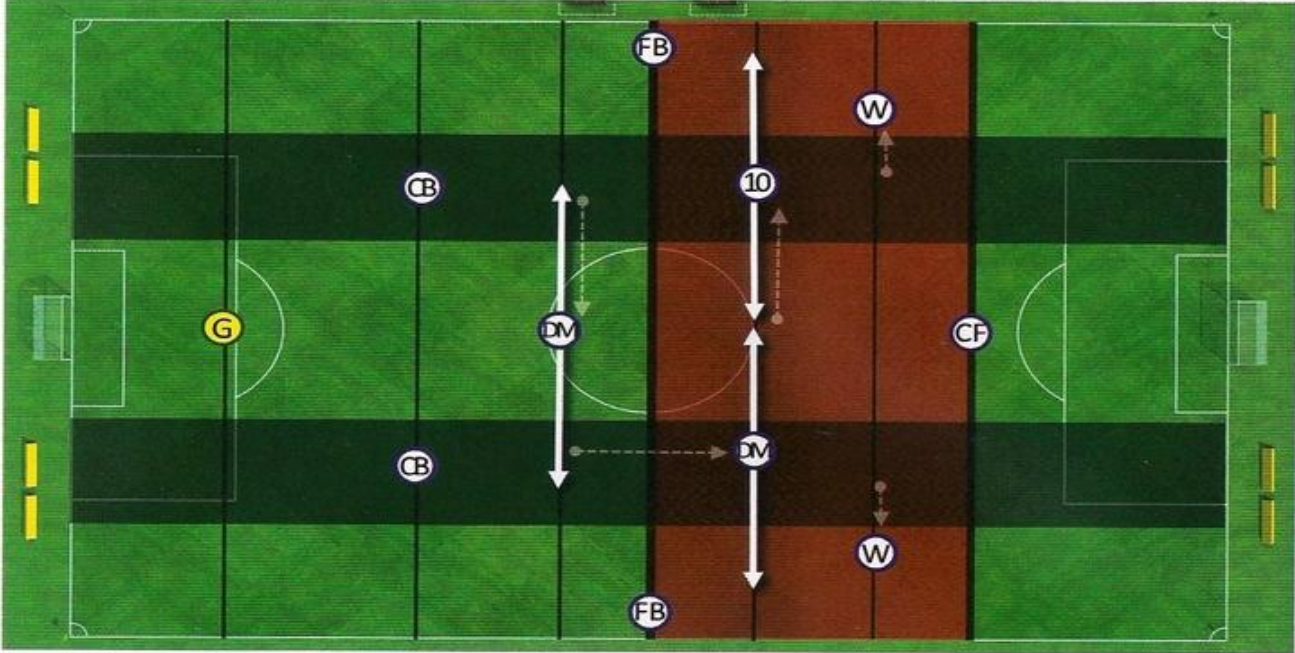
Where the two deepest midfielders are both in front of the opposition midfield line, then there are simple rules that can be promoted to aid not only positioning but the structures of rotation too. When both 'number 4' and 'number 8' (LDM and RDM) are in front of the opposition midfield line, then one should be positioned right and one positioned left. The left sided player should cover space in lane 1, lane 2 and lane 3. The right sided player should cover space in lane 3, lane 4 and lane 5. At no point however, should both players be positioned in lane 3 at the same time. The player positioned at the top of the midfield three ('number 10' / CAM – as the only central midfielder behind of the opposition midfield line) should control spaces in lane 2, lane 3 and lane 4.

In this scenario (of both deep central midfielders positioned in front of the opposition midfield line), the wingers are required to cover the widest lane (lane 1 or lane 5) and the next lane inside too (lane 2 or lane 4). This is particularly important when considering the value of the languages of the game and we will see an increase in opportunities for the 'Out-In-Out' language in particular.



## Attacking Principles: #1-4-2-3-1 (with one of the two deepest midfielders in front of the opposition midfield line)

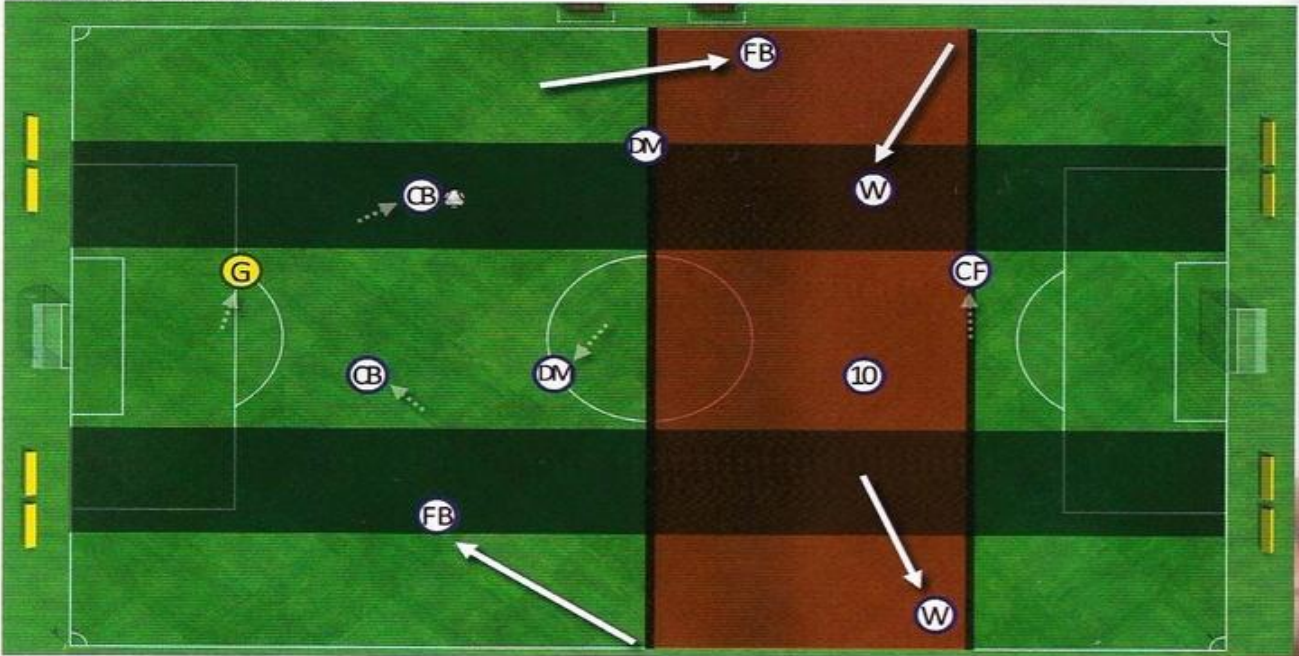
Where only one of the two deepest midfielders is in front of the opposition midfield line, the other must look to try and find spaces either in line or beyond the opposition midfield line. As these changes take place, as do the positional rules in place.



Now the deepest midfielder ('number 4 / LDM') should look to control spaces from lane 2, lane 3 and lane 4, but the players in the 'number 8 (RDM)' and 'number 10 (CAM)' positions must share the full width of the field. Between 'number 8' and 'number 10', one will operate left (lanes 1-3) and one right (lanes 3-5) and never in the same lane at the same time.

In this scenario, the wingers are less likely to fall into central areas between the opposition midfield line and defence line, and more likely to try and get in line or beyond the opposition defensive line. It is likely that the wingers would work in the wider areas if this better suits the profile of these players, this really depends on how you may wish the fullbacks to operate behind them.

### #1-4-2-3-1: Weak-side, Strong-side





The positioning of players has a number of variables, not least the location of the concentration of play (where the ball is located). If we consider the expansive modules of play only in this book, we can draw up a basic design structure for some ideas of positioning depending on the concentration of play.

- The goalkeeper should look to support on the side of play at an angle behind the player on the ball with an open body shape to switch the ball if the ball comes back to him
- The weak-sided central defender (not on the ball) must provide a supporting angle to the central defender on the ball, always.
- The strong-sided fullback (LB in this example) is to give height and look to receive the ball behind the opposition midfield where possible, with the option of coming back deep to support the central defender on the ball if necessary.
- The weak-sided central midfielder (RDM in this example) is to be positioned in the 'diagonal pocket', a pocket of space at an angle from the ball with a clear passing channel located towards the weak-side of the field.
- The strong-side central midfielder (LDM) should look to be flexible in the support he gives and the movement the scenario requires
- The weak-sided fullback (RB in this example) is to tuck inside and position himself somewhere between lane four and five as shown.
- The weak-sided winger should position himself wide and on the limit of the defensive line to give the opposition nearest defender the problem of not being able to forget about the threat of the potential width
- Since the strong-sided fullback has offered height in the widest lane, the strong-sided winger should look to move inside to find passing channels behind the opposition midfield line.
- The striker should look to occupy the defensive line and try to stretch the play by threatening to make runs behind
- The central attacking midfielder (#10) is to hold his position somewhere around the central lane and weak-side areas of the field, again asking questions of the same nearest defender as the weak-sided winger is.

It is important that these rules aren't taken as the absolute governing principles of what is right and wrong. I remember analysing U.A.E in preparation for Iran's Asian Cup potential fixture with them. U.A.E played with 'half field width' (that their weak-sided players would not offer width beyond half the width of the field).

U.A.E's player profiles consist of players like Omar Abdulrahman and Ali Mabkhout (two higher level players who are capable of playing in congestion), but the remainder of the squad leans towards the calibre of players who perhaps best thrive upon attacking the opposition goal within three or four passes. U.A.E's approach to play with half width allows for U.A.E to defend higher up the field upon the scenario of losing the ball. I am of the belief that U.A.E played with half field width to excel in the defensive transition and promote goal scoring opportunities at the same time.

This book will not explore those strategies outlined above but will instead provide basic guidelines for the idea to be built upon.

If we then consider how the languages of the game that involve a weak-sided strategy (Overload & Isolate, Weak-side Fullback and so on) we can then tie together how positioning can create the initial conditions for the languages of the game.



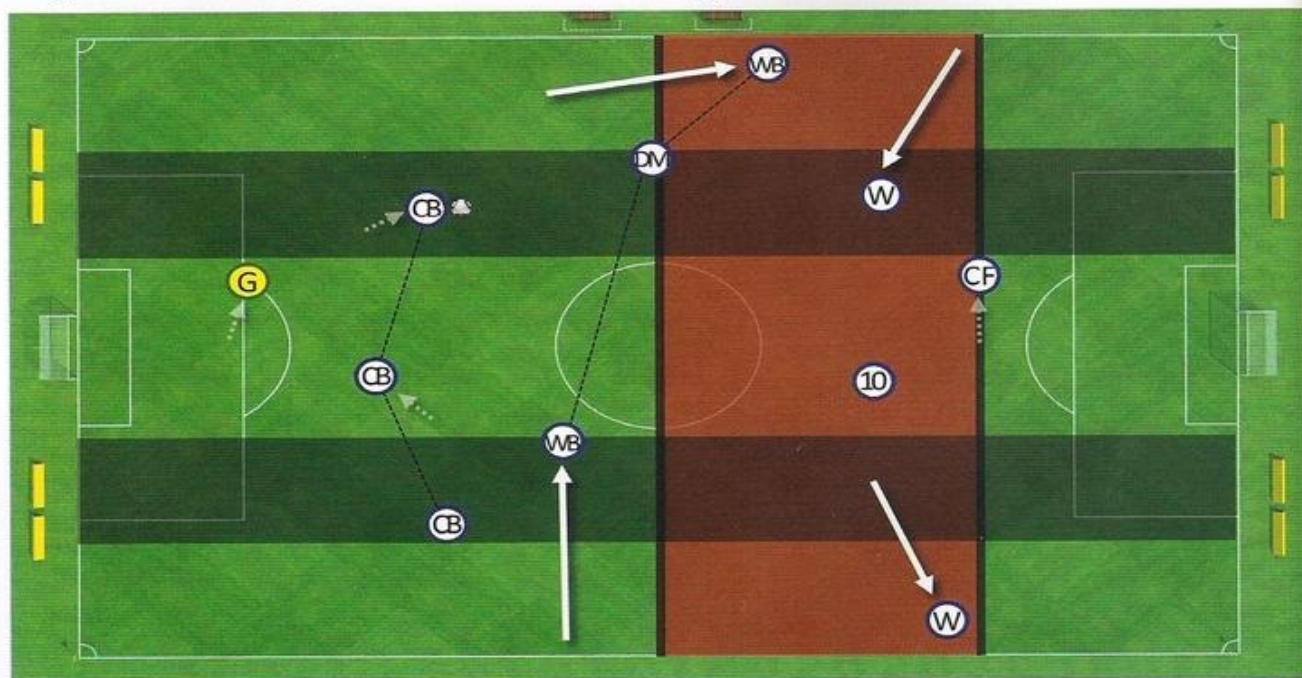


# 14 BIELSA'S #1-3-3-1-3

“I like those who intend to take risks, think about the opposition’s goal and attack without fear”

- Jorge Sampaoli, Chile National Team Manager

Marcelo Bielsa’s reputation from an attacking perspective is often summarised in one of two ways: (a) many vertical penetration actions (AAAs) and (b) with a preference towards a #1-3-3-1-3 formation. The former Chile manager has implemented these ideas since the 1990 with Newell’s Old Boys right through to 2015’s Marseille. For twenty-five years Bielsa’s ideas have evolved, but within the same structures of positioning. Along with the #1-4-2-3-1 formation, the teams led by El Loco have seen very few other structures as their starting point.



## ROLES OF PLAYERS

Of the three central defenders, Bielsa’s teams will always have at least one player who can step out and look to pass aggressively through the opposition midfield line.

*“When we are working specifically with defenders...we are working on passing with power through the lines in combination offensively. We try to let our defenders play with the thought that if the opponent is not well organised then we can take advantage of that. If they are well organised, we then have to play through or round other zones, or find space in other areas. With one through pass, you can beat four, five or even six opponents, effectively taking them out of the game, or that phase of play at least. The central defenders become*



*more important in offense, creating opportunities through open play, learning how to adjust and improvise play to implement these aspects, even if opponents are well organised. Success rates for defenders attempting to play 'offensive through passes,' may bring a focus for coaching. Principally, within our team, principally defenders are classed as supporting then we can penetrate through the lines players, with the midfielders as the playmakers, this way we always have support from the back."*

– Pepijn Lijnders

*"Marcelo Bielsa considers it very important that the development of the game from the initial phases are to be carried out by technically good players with high energy levels. Javi Martinez and Gary Medel at the back allows for the ball to come out of the back not only more cleanly, but through more difficult situations into advanced players in advanced areas of the field."* – Eric Tenllado, Coach at Espanyol

The midfield dynamics are more varied, the deep lying central midfielder is preferred as a player who too can be a bit more ambitious with the types of passes he can pick out. The two players positioned as wingbacks will either play as out-and-out wingbacks or they'll play the role of a 'lateral volante' (a player who'll move horizontally inside for at least one of the phases of the game).

Symmetry isn't something considered a necessity as we've discovered before (Isla and Vidal) but often the role of the winger and wingback complement one another. Should the winger play in the widest positions, then the wingback behind is more likely to move inside alongside as an inverted wingback. Should the winger be more like Alexis Sanchez and move alongside a striker, then we are more likely to see the wingback stay wide and offer width on that side of the field. All of Bielsa's teams play with width. Always. All of Bielsa's teams look to load the box with a minimum of three players upon crossing scenarios.

The remaining players consist of the striker and the player positioned in a 'number 10' role. The player positioned in the 'number 10' role (enganche) is to stay behind the opposition midfield and look to pick up the balls between the opposition midfield and defence, with some license to drift wide behind the opposition fullbacks.

Bielsa's approach is one that seeks superiorities all over the field through movement and provide the most aggressive approach in the negative transition with numbers and flexibility in coverage. The #1-3-3-1-3 formation demands more per player physically and in terms of concentration than any other formation used by Bielsa. Concentration is of the highest order because from the #1-3-3-1-3 shape there are then many variations in terms of movements to achieve the languages of the game (in attack) and then in the many pressing patterns (often requiring players to position themselves 'ball side' rather than 'goal side' of their man around the ball). On an attacking level the formation should be considered a reference point for the team to move from, with the view of pulling the opposition out of their primary organisation and defensive structure. Moving to a back three asks the question of the opposition: will you go to #1-4-4-2 and defend in straight lines?

Bielsa's 'un enganche y tres punta' (an enganche and three strikers) is designed around the idea of stretching the opposition defensive line back and creating a larger space between the opposition midfield and defensive lines. There is of course, movement from these positions – movement to pull the opposition defensive line out of their slot and then exploit the space opened up each time. In the attacking phase where both wingbacks have advanced forwards then it allows for further flexibility in positioning in central areas for the two widest attackers.

If we compare the animation of the #1-3-3-1-3 and Bielsa's #1-4-2-3-1 we can find some similarities, at least in terms of situational positioning.





# 15 ADAPTATION: #1-3-4-2-1 or #1-3-5-2

“Position over possession. Position over possession. Every time”

- Kieran Smith, CE Europa Coach (Formerly of AD Alcorcon)

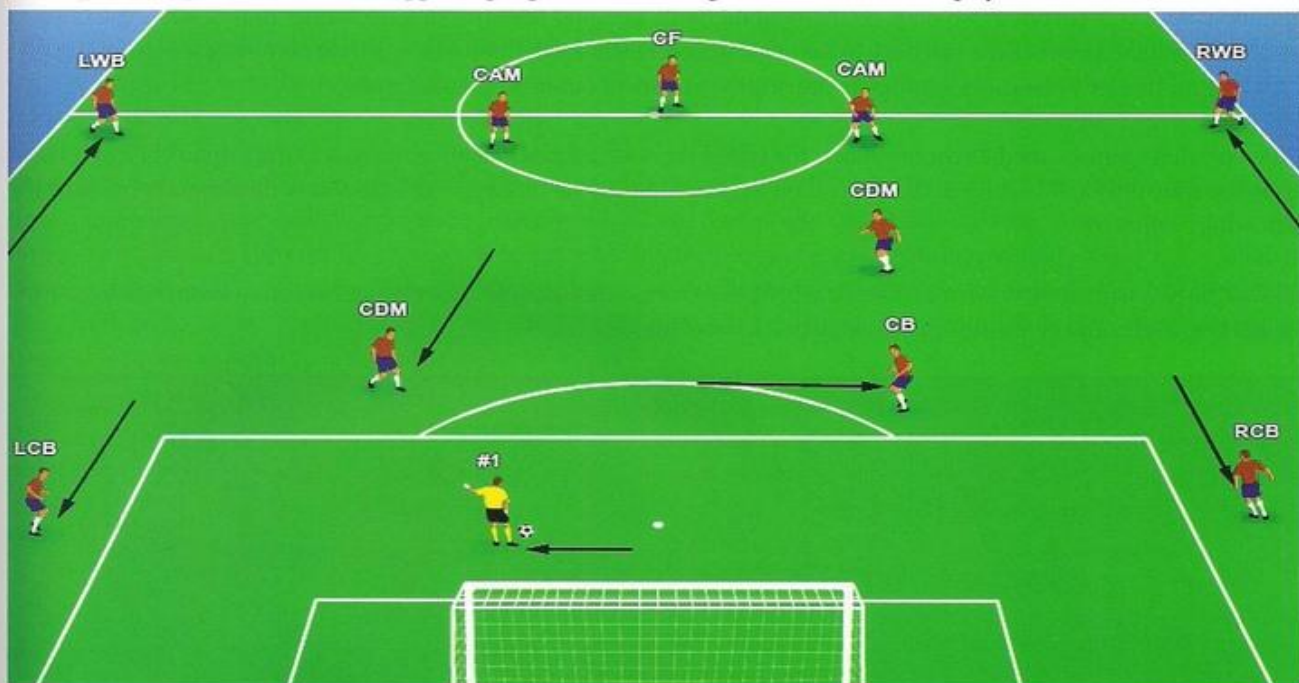
The #1-3-4-2-1 or the #1-3-5-2 with an attacking midfielder and a striker that falls back into pockets of space, both portray similar pictures in-possession. Many teams will work off a structure not too dissimilar to a #1-3-2-4-1 when in-possession, even if they defend in a #1-4-4-1-1 or #1-4-2-3-1 (Paulo Sousa's Fiorentina, 2015/16). The purpose of this chapter is to detail some of the positional aspects and animations we might see in a #1-3-4-2-1 formation through the principles outlined in this book. The formation will be detailed following this section of text in a manner without much consideration of movement between players. There have been many great examples of the #1-3-4-2-1 formation implemented at the highest levels, examples recommended to analyse would include: Liverpool (2014/15), Fiorentina (2015/16), Juanma Lillo's Millonarios (vs. Envigado 20th July 2014, vs. Sante Fe 3rd March 2014).

When playing out from the goalkeeper in the #1-3-4-2-1, the goalkeeper should decide which side he will come out on (left or right) and as a result of this decision, the central player of the back three should offer a supporting angle on the opposite side. The two wide central defenders are to use the width of the 18-yard box as a reference and position themselves three or four yards either side of that. During build up play, the goalkeeper should be used as a sweeper and none of the back three should drop into the 18-yard box and take away the option of using the goalkeeper. The central player of the back three should slide across to support whichever of the two wide central defenders is in possession of the ball.

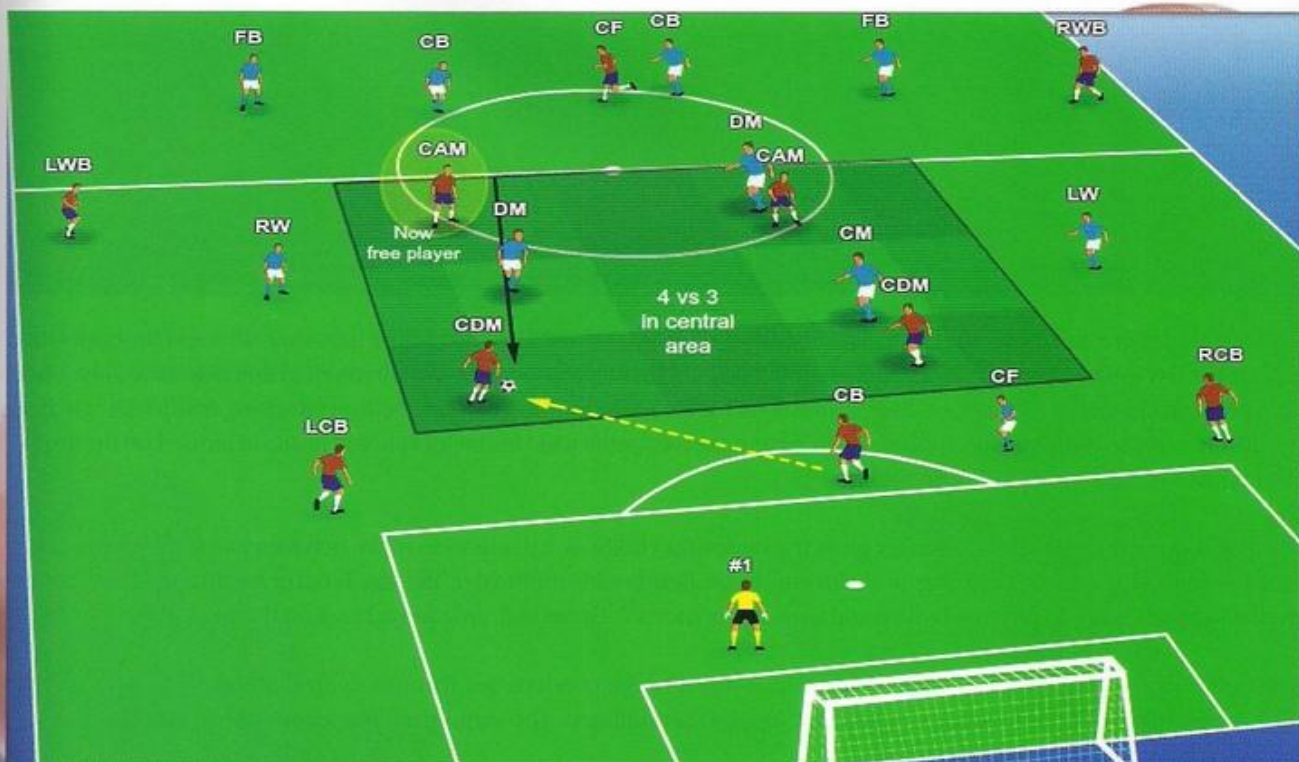




There is scope for one of the two deep lying controlling midfielders to fall back into the defensive line (a Ricardo La Volpe inspired animation) and the midfielder should do so on the same side as the goalkeeper (opposite to the central player of the back three). When one of the holding midfielders falls back in-line with the central player of the back three, both wide central defenders should fall deeper still to provide immediate supporting angles for the holding midfielder and central player of the back three.



The primary principle for the two deep holding midfielders is to control from deep areas with a view of penetrating the opposition midfield into one of the three central players (two attacking midfielders and striker). When we consider the midfield box (two holding midfielders and two attacking midfielders) against a midfield three of the opposition, we are to think about this as a 4 vs 3 with the objective of freeing up one of the two attacking midfielders.





The two defensive midfielders and three central defenders (against a high press) should use first line passes, movement and horizontal shifts of the ball with the view of penetrating beyond the opposition midfield line. A common picture might be one where the central player of the back three passes the ball to the free holding midfielder, who is then pressed by an opponent who was covering two players (the holding midfielder and the attacking midfielder on his side). The holding midfielder will then bounce the ball back to the central player of the back three who will then play a first time pass into the attacking midfielder who is now free (due to moving the opponent out of the passing channel).

When playing against a medium or low block, the role of the wide central defender changes as the responsibility is placed upon the wide defender to drive at the opposition to release one of the holding midfielders or wide players in midfield (by attracting his marker).

Should the play work itself down one side of the field, the strong-side wide midfielder (wing-back) may drop back to provide supporting angles and invite the opposition fullback out of his slot.



During this picture, the striker or strong-side attacking midfielder should look to make a movement behind the opposition fullback and the other should either provide supporting angles between the opposition midfield and defensive line or take up a position against the opposition defensive line on the strong-side. The weak-side central attacking midfielder is to hold his position on the weak-side position on the field and the weak-side wide midfielder should position himself on the limit of the opposition backline as wide as possible.

The positioning of the weak-side winger gives the opposition fullback a decision to make between being more concerned with the weak-side central attacking midfielder or the weak-side wide midfielder. The idea is to try and free up the attacking midfielder with space to pick the ball up and to move forwards with the ball, creating a 2 vs. 1 on the weak-side.

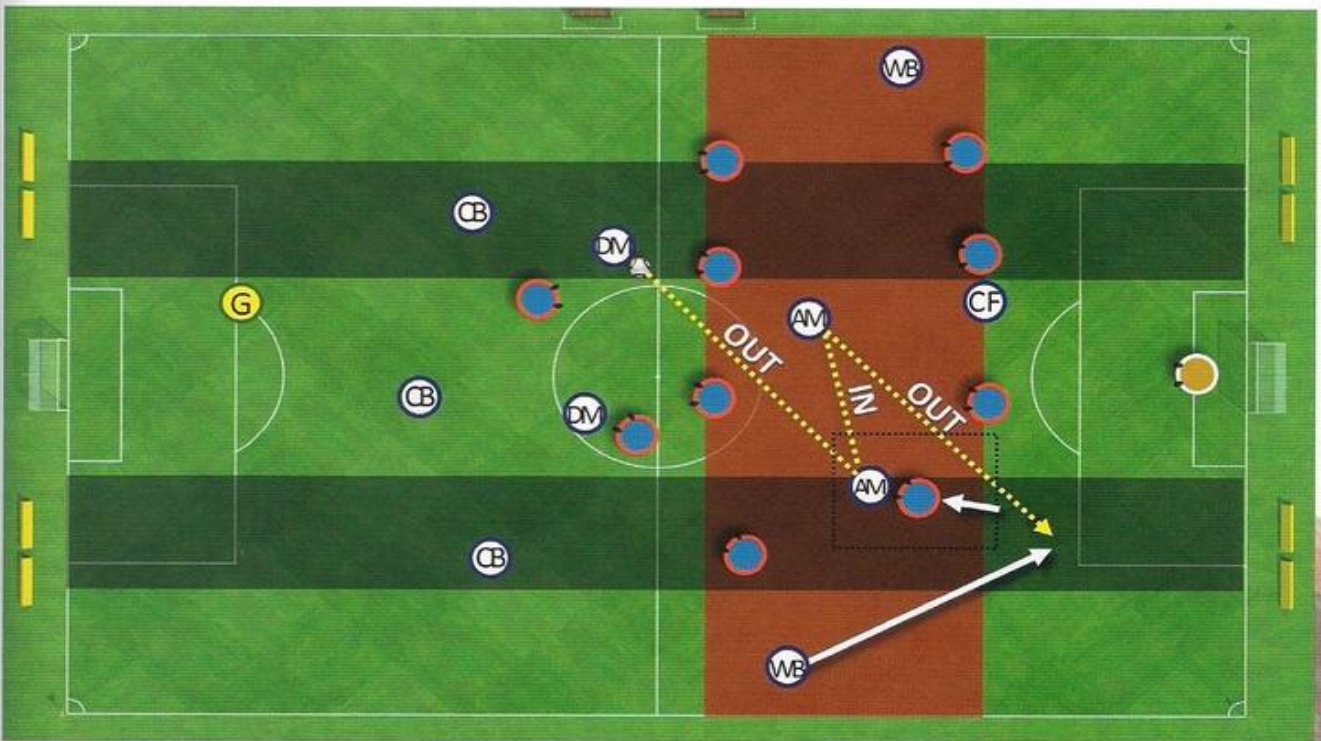
The theme of creating 2 vs. 1 in wide areas is done not through overlaps but through central attacking players making movements diagonally into spaces behind the opposition fullback. The same principles from above can be achieved



through both a  $\#1-3-4-2-1$  and a  $\#1-3-5-2$ . It is important that at least one of the strikers looks to make runs in behind to increase the space between the opposition defensive line and midfield line and in doing so, increasing space for the attacking midfielders.

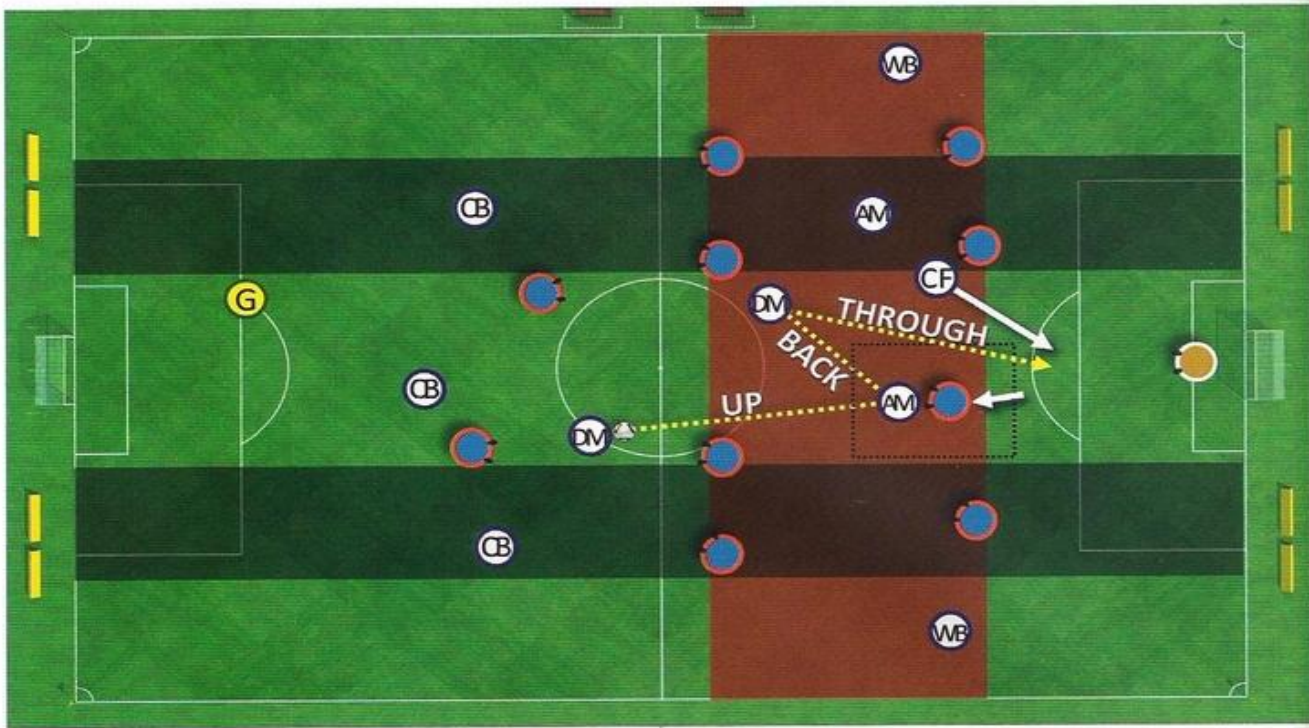
When in attacking positions, at least one of the two holding midfielders must stay underneath the ball and hold his position and often both will keep their shape. The wide central defenders are responsible for supporting underneath the ball when his wide midfielder (or wing-back) is in possession.

Most of the languages of the game (chapter 10) are accessible through the  $\#1-3-4-2-1$  formation. The purpose of the central three players (attacking midfielder(s) and striker(s)) is to invite the opposition central defenders out of their slot either through an 'Up-Back-Through' language or through receiving the ball and running at the central defenders. The value of having extreme width with the wide midfielders (sometimes wingbacks) is to promote the idea of 'Overload-to-Isolate'. The 'Overload-to-Isolate' and threat of the attacking midfielder pulling the opposition central defender out of slot work in tandem with one another.



The position of the attacking midfielders should be so that the opposition fullback is to make a decision between engaging in the attacking midfielder and leaving the attacking midfielder to pick up the ball. Should the opposition fullback engage then an 'Out-In-Out' language is possible as the free player is now the wide-midfielder.





Some coaches will educate players through a similar in-possession shape but through animation. For example, a #1-4-2-3-1 will recreate the shape and principles with one of the wide attacking midfielders dropping inside as the second central attacking midfielder and then the fullback behind the wide midfielder who moved inside is to progress onto the wide-midfielder slot. The weak-side fullback is to cover across and form part of the back three. This is clear when comparing the in-possession shapes from the last chapter to the images in this chapter. Fiorentina under Paulo Sousa (2015/16) have found a similar in-possession formation (from an out-of-possession #1-4-4-1-1) through movement of the left-sided midfielder (into a second CAM position) and the left fullback advancing on as the widest and most advanced left sided player.

Similarly, in a #1-4-3-3 with one holding midfielder, we can recreate the same shape through both fullbacks progressing on as wide-midfielders, both wingers moving infield to become attacking midfielders and the holding midfielder dropping between the two central defenders.

There is scope to argue that animation from a #1-4-2-3-1 or #1-4-3-3 into a #1-3-2-4-1 is more suitable for some teams, particularly at international level due to the familiarity of defending with back four formations.

The study of 'movement' brings about complexity and differentiation between a strong-side and weak-side. There are many variations to achieve a similar positional framework as presented in this chapter and if we consider the implementation of formation, we can consider certain systems to help transition the education of players for using back three formations. If we can find some 'hooks' and similarities, we can accelerate the learning and comfort of players in such a formation (through relational understanding). Tottenham Hotspur under Mauricio Pochettino have experimented with this very idea on a number of occasions, finding balance between Eric Dier dropping in from a CDM position into the central player of a back three and yet being flexible enough to also push on in other scenarios and remain positioned in a line ahead of the two central defenders.



It is the responsibility of the reader to connect the thread from the theoretical parallels between each formation (or system of movement and communication) and the theory that has gone before in this book.

It has been the intention to not over detail sections of this book and to leave various theory in it's application form for the purposes of the reader to develop their own approach to application.

All the necessary information has been included for the reader to develop their own model inspired by Marcelo Bielsa, just as each of his disciples have done, from Pochettino to Simeone and back to Guardiola.

**"Application is everything"**



# 16 #1-4-3-3 THE TEAM'S HAT

“What enables us to be really flexible is to change the hat of the team”

- Michael Beale, Liverpool FC U21 Manager

Michael Beale, Liverpool U21's Manager, is flexible in his approach of formation due to the nature of the U21 player availability. Liverpool U21's training group is *“an open door group: players going to the first team can happen on a daily occurrence, players going out on loan, to the U19...U18 or leaving the club”*. As a result, the players at training each day changes from day to day, let alone the team playing from week to week.

Due to the open door nature of the team, it is important to ensure that any framework that supports the communication of the team remains both flexible and non-complex.

Beale, formerly a youth coach at Chelsea FC, makes no secret that at under-21 level he believes you will achieve nothing by focusing on the team rather than the individual. That said, there must be a framework for which the individuals can flourish in. Awareness of others and yourself as a player are of absolute value at Liverpool FC and players are to develop 'their identity' under the under-21 stages of development.

Liverpool FC Academy channels the session design and tactical design around what they call 'the A players' (the best performing players with the most potential). Michael Beale sees match day formation as “a flexible system to compliment the best players, the A players”.

*“The System has to be flexible: filled with life and the skills of the individuals”* - Thomas Tuchel

Player identity is a theme that underpins the system of play and the dynamics between players. The U21 Manager recognises there to be five different personalities of central midfielder:

**The Energiser** – a player who roams box to box and dominates physically. Examples include Aaron Ramsey, Arturo Vidal and Renato Sanches

**The Passer** – a forward passing risk taker with an attacking mindset. Examples include David Beckham (when as a central midfielder), Andrea Pirlo, Cesc Fabregas, Marco Verratti, Steven Gerrard and Bastian Schweinsteiger.

**The Magician** – a player that plays with flair and creativity in attacking midfield roles. Examples include Coutinho, Juan Mata, Jorge Valdivia, David Silva, Andres Iniesta and Mesut Ozil.

**The Spider in The Web** – a player that functions without directly creating much in terms of risk taking forward passes, without contributing defensively and often plays as a deep central midfielder. Without this player the midfield doesn't function well due to a lack of balance. Examples include Xavi, Luka Modric, Marcelo Diaz, Sergio Busquets and Michael Carrick.

**The Destroyer** – a player who contributes largely on a defensive level, breaking up the possession of the opposition. Examples include Roy Keane, Gennaro Gattuso, Nigel De Jong, Claude Makelele, Gary Medel, Morgan Schneiderlin and Victor Wanyama.

The reality is that a player may well fall into more than one category and the purpose of labelling a player into one of these five types is not entirely for the benefit of the individual but instead for the benefit of the team's balance in midfield. The Liverpool coach does say you should never have three of the same type in midfield, either in a 'one and a two' or 'two and a one' and goes on to add that he believes *“natural movement occurs if you put together different personalities and also it adds to your unpredictability”*.

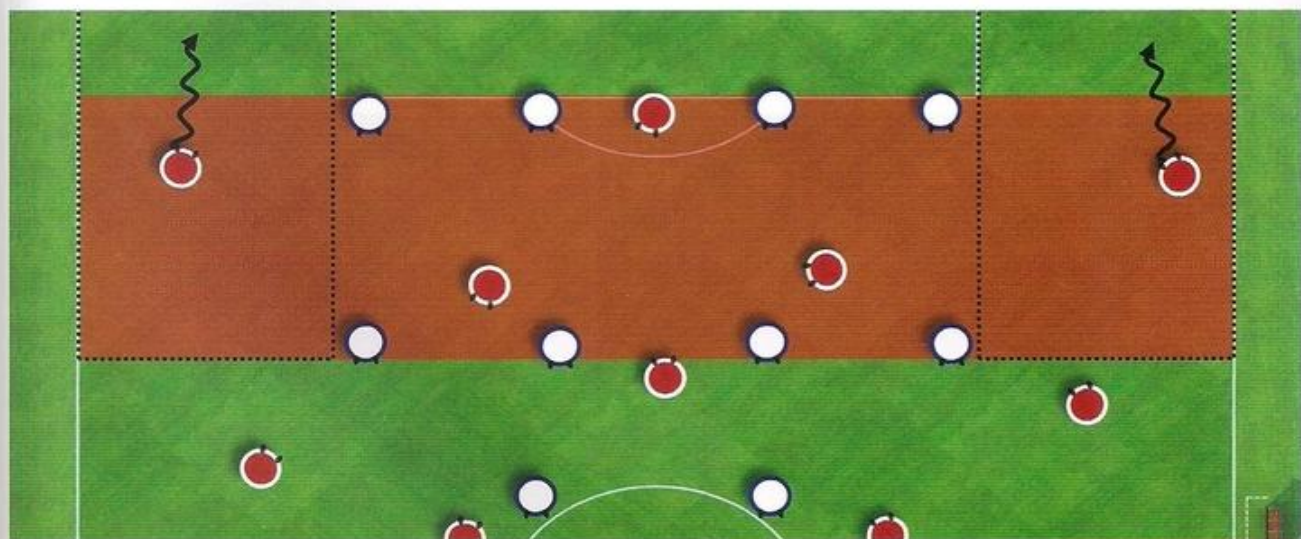


'The team's hat' is a term given to the front three players of the team in a #1-4-3-3 type formation (#1-4-2-3-1, #1-4-3-2-1 and so on). The 'movement' and 'animation' of the team is directly affected by the type of hat the team is to 'wear'.

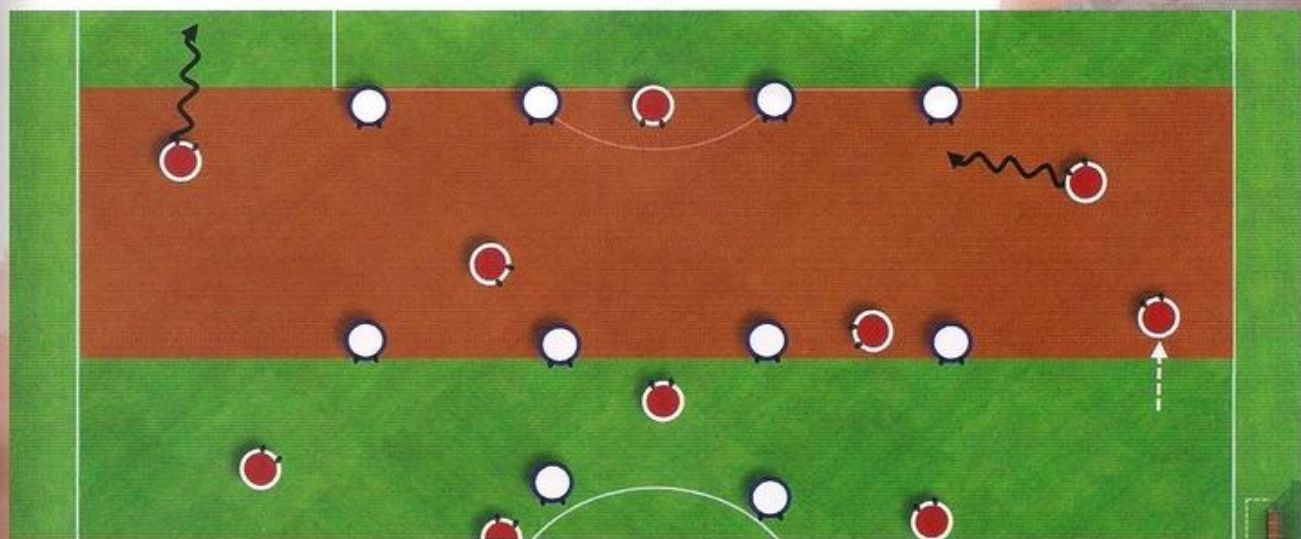
*"What enables us to be really flexible is to change the hat of the team"* – Michael Beale

There are six types of 'hat' that a team can use:

1. Balanced (wingers x2, striker)

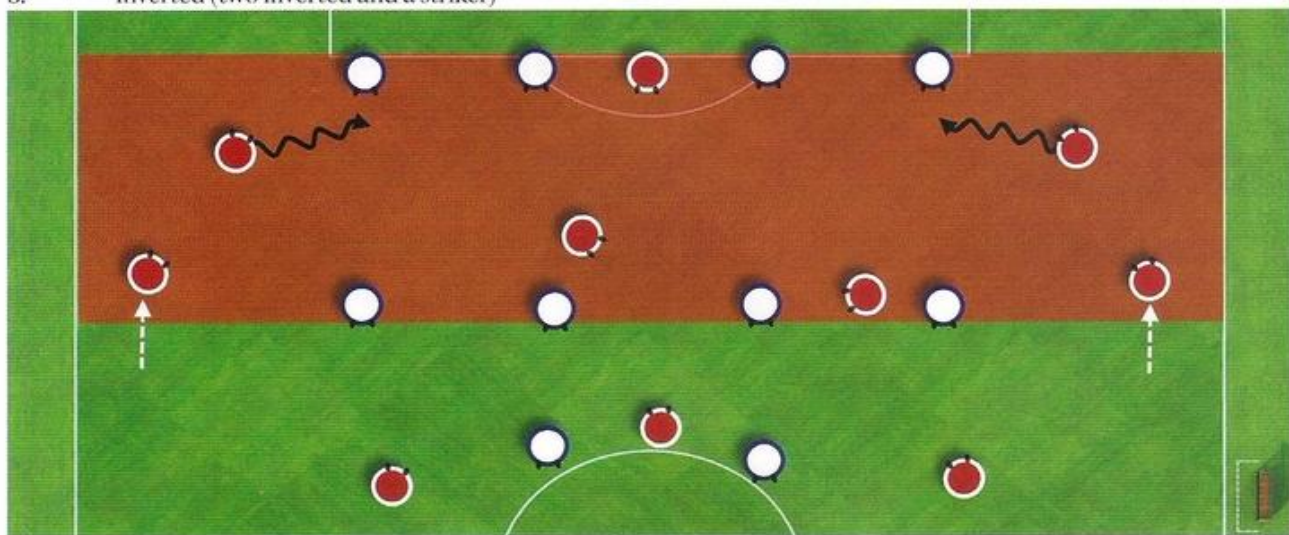


2. Balance/Inverted mix (winger, inverted (cuts inside), striker)

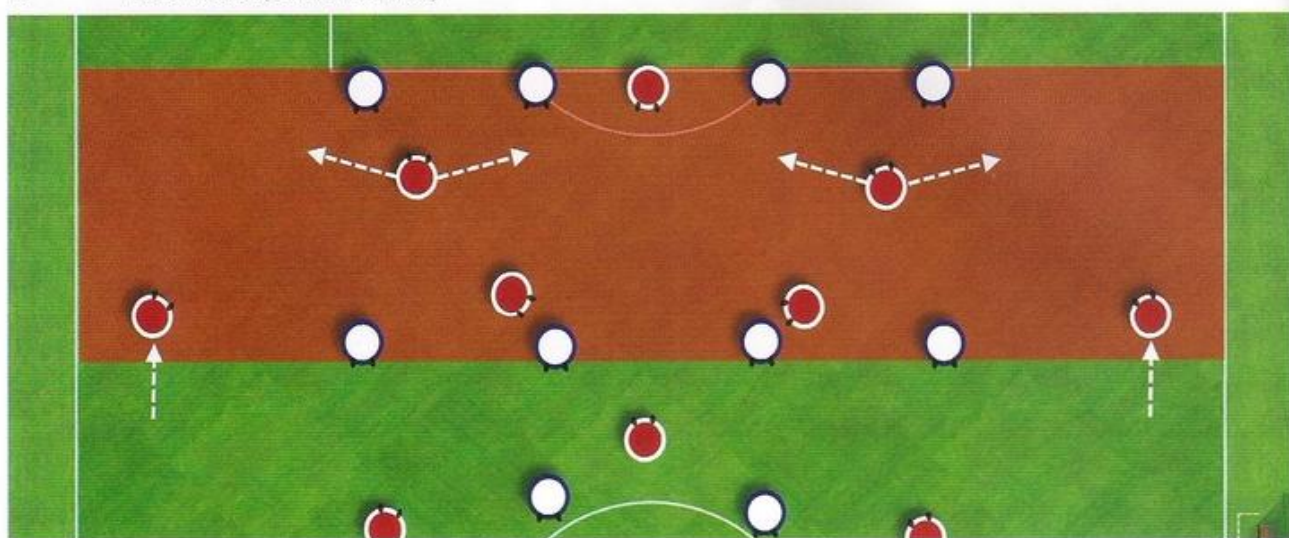




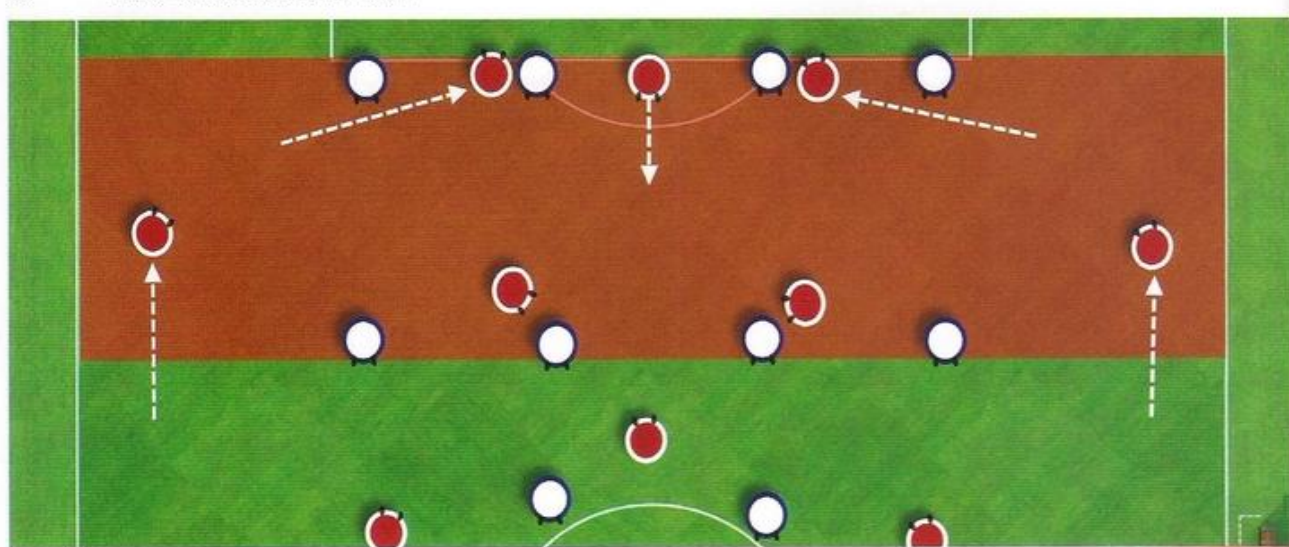
3. Inverted (two inverted and a striker)



4. Wide No. 10's (Christmas Tree)

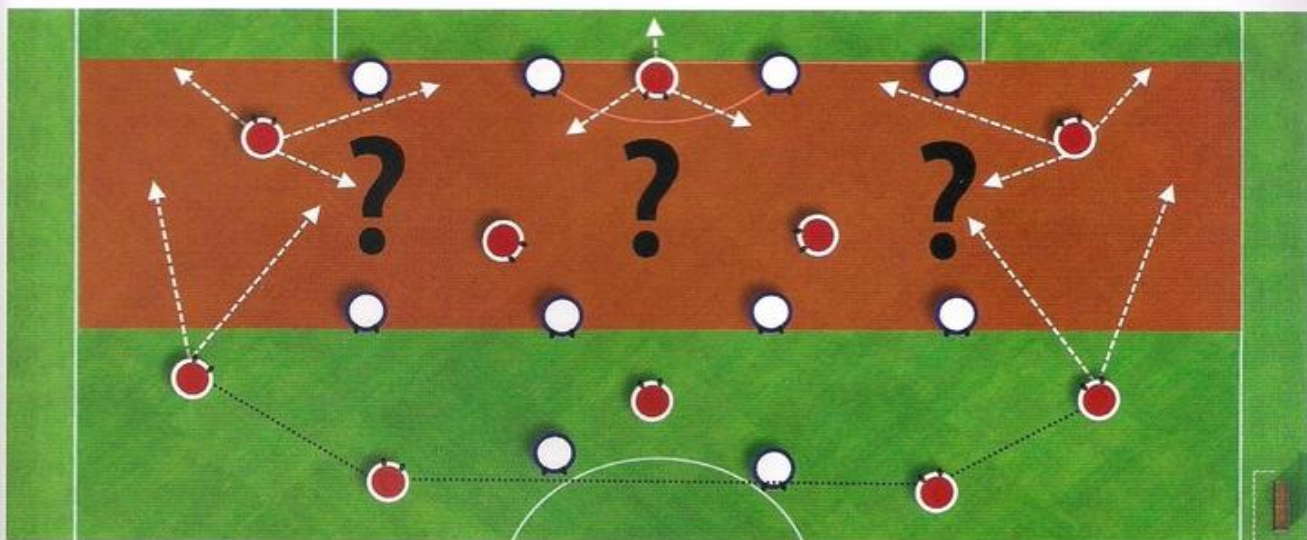


5. False 9 and Inside Forwards





## 6. Random/Free Motion



For each of the six types of hat a team can wear there are a variety of consequences for the movement and animation of the team. When there is an inverted winger, wide No. 10 used or inside forward used there is an increased emphasis placed upon the fullback underneath to get forward and offer width. Michael Beale would argue that the player awareness of others and self leads to a natural movement between players, citing the use of an inverted fullback which would then have the consequence of width coming from the winger. At Liverpool FC this relationship between players will be dictated by whoever the A Players are in the team.

The very idea that a team can play with a #1-4-3-3 and be so flexible is an alluring one as it can lead to unpredictability and an approach that will get the best out of the team's best players, depending on the scenario. It is from here I wish to leave you with the consideration of where a #1-4-3-3 might start and a #1-3-4-2-1 might end during the attacking moments of the game.

*"I always tell my guys that our playing style is about movement"* – Marcelo Bielsa



# 17 CONCLUSION OF THEORY

“I believe we should seek not to replicate the purity of Mourinho, Guardiola or Bielsa, but to find what I call ‘synergy’”

- Chris Davies, Assistant Manager of Celtic FC (Formerly Liverpool FC)

Somewhere along that long, long riddled road between Rosario and Buenos Aires surrounded by the cultured Spanish silence in a shoulder-to-shoulder packed bus, a snapshot can be taken of a person undergoing a dedicated quest to better understand a hidden school of football philosophy, carrying nothing more than enough clothes for a week and four worn out journals filled with the ideas of others.

*“I am not sure that I exist, actually. I am all the writers that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the women that I have loved; all the cities I have visited.”* - Jorge Luis Borges

In all the years of research, the objective has never changed. ‘How can I add to what I’ve already learned and continue to stretch the current spectrum of knowledge?’ In truth, the objective of this book is no different. For the reader, you, to have already formed your own foundations and consider the content of this book to inspire building blocks in areas that were previously neglected or underdeveloped. Our education should seek nothing more than to keep building the castles around us.

*“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self”* – Ernest Hemingway

Reflecting upon the structured content of this book there are areas each person would consider most valuable, each person with a different lens and each person with their own unique evaluation of what has been filtered as unimportant and truly valuable information.

Learning from a symbol of purity has always been a source of significant learning, learnings taken from the far right or left of the different schools of thought in football. Chris Davies however, provided an interesting moment when he highlighted his quest of ‘synergy’ to me over a few coffees and three hours of philosophical thinking:

*“I believe we should seek not to replicate the purity of Mourinho, Guardiola or Bielsa, but to find what I call ‘synergy’”* – Chris Davies

*“The human being should never set a limit to his sport performance. A model is setting a limit”*  
– Paco Seirul-lo (FC Barcelona methodology director)

The content of this book often reflects upon the purity of a far extreme philosophy of football, a direction of an attacking football philosophy that is ruthless in its penetrative style: everything before an Advanced Area Action is nothing more than an action to serve this purpose.

To look to utilise any of the information written on these pages, there are three elements to consider: your players, the opposition and the moment (as detailed on pg.56). How you should set up your team in all phases of the game depends heavily on who your best identifiable players are and the profiles of all the individuals in the team. Then we must consider the opposition from many facets: formation, movement, player profiles, opposition strengths, opposition key strategies, opportunities to exploit the opposition and so on. The ‘moment’ covers much of the psychological elements: what is the environment of the team like, where are we in the season, what is the situation, what pressures are there etc.



The one key question before designing for an opponent is 'how can we best create goal scoring opportunities?' and work your way backwards from there. It might be that you wish to draw slow central defenders out of their slot vertically and to do that you need to put in place a strategy to move the opposition's defensive midfielders. It might instead be that you have identified a weakness in the opposition to defend crosses with a secondary defensive structure (the structure used when the primary defensive structure is not possible). Your objective might be to try and get behind the opposition fullback where you invite either the opposition defensive midfielder or central defender out of position in the wide area.

Using the information provided in this book you can then begin to identify methods to deconstruct the opposition and break down their defensive structures. But never without recognising that this book represents a theoretical model and not a guide for how to implement an exact playing style (a philosophical level and not the level of application).

If we once again look at Switzerland's #1-4-4-2 diamond (EURO 2016 Group E Qualification) we can analyse an application level that perhaps brings together a number of mechanisms to best facilitate Advanced Area Actions. You may see some similarities once again to the #1-3-4-2-1 or #1-3-5-2 structures outlined in a previous chapter.

#### Switzerland #1-4-4-2 diamond (EURO 2016 Group E Qualification)



Switzerland's use of the midfield diamond is particularly interesting because it is the common movement of players that brings about specific mechanisms to increase the AAA scores for the best players of Switzerland.





Beyond using Valon Behrami as the ball playing player on medium platform to the right hand side (lane 4 in particular), Switzerland look to overload the left hand side of their field with four or five players. The defensive midfielder, left sided central midfielder, left fullback and potentially the left sided centre forward and left centre back are all involved in overloading an area with a view of attracting the opposition midfield across to these areas and freeing up key players in key areas.



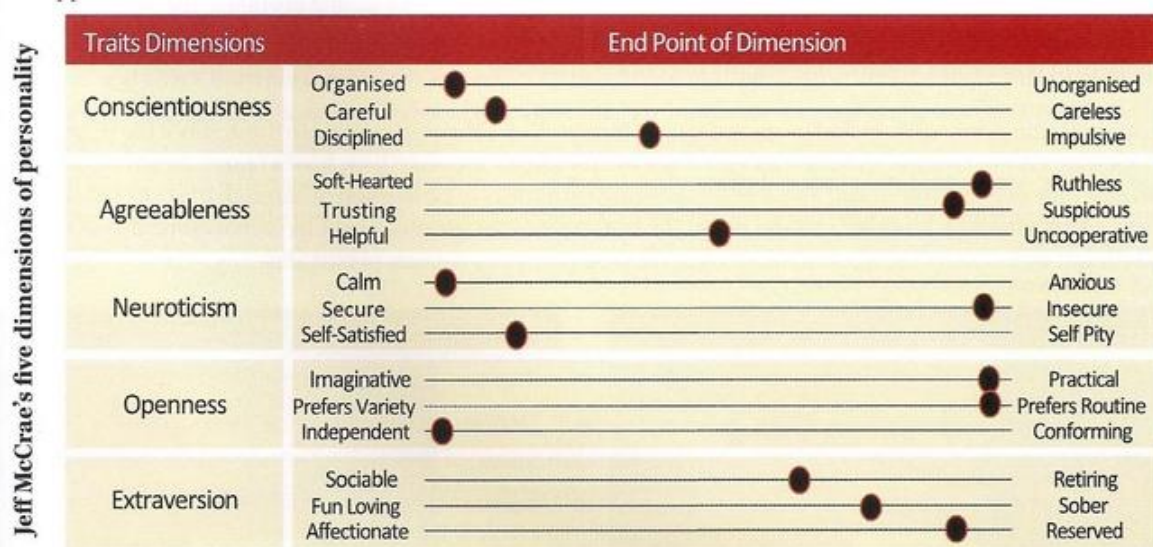


With the mechanisms employed on the previous page, Switzerland have three common options to play out to players away from the opposition midfield. Option A is to play into Shaqiri at the top of the diamond in an Advanced Area, option B is often to play to Behrami who will look to play quickly into Advanced Areas and option C is to switch out to the right fullback who has taken up a high position on the weak-side wing.

These simple mechanisms come together to give an asymmetric approach to increasing the AAA score of the team with varying degrees of unpredictability as players often improvise from a loosely implemented structure. Implementation of a perfect structure doesn't appear to be an objective of Switzerland and remembering my lesson learned from the University of Oxford football team, it is better to aim for and accept complexity than be too specific and become complicated. It is better to help shape a team for dynamism and provide them with a synergistic approach to solving problems than a fixed set of structures and mechanisms.

The theme of synergy returns to us and it is a theme I have given a great deal of theoretical consideration to during my studies. I have concluded that there are thirty-two pure modules of the game. Thirty-two ways of playing in perfect theory that considers nothing in between the two ends of extremism.

Taking inspiration from Jeff McCrae's five dimensions of personality, I looked to theorise a team's playing 'personality' using a similar approach.



If we consider that there are four moments of the game (during open play, ignoring set pieces) we have our moments of (1) out of possession, (2) in-possession, (3) the attacking transition: moving from defending to attacking and (4) the defensive transition: moving from attacking to defending.

In each of the four moments we have two choices on a simplistic and theoretical level. When we are in the attacking transition for example, we can either place more emphasis on being patient and look to build possession or we can look to counter attack and move forwards quickly with the ball (with more risk). In our defensive transition we can either look to immediately press the opposition in high areas of the field as a team (counter-press or otherwise known as 'combat zone') or we can place more emphasis on looking to fall back as a team into medium-low organised block (or otherwise known as 'build a block').

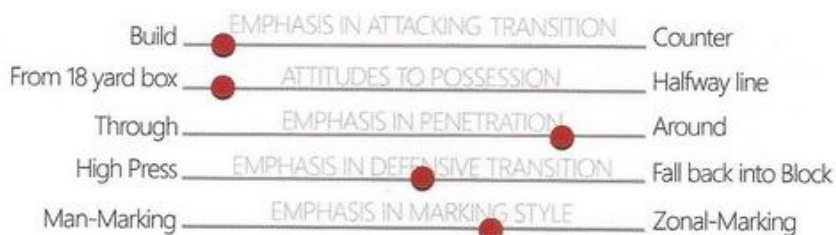
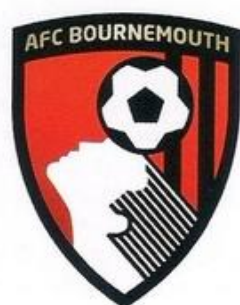
I have then proposed that there are two layers to attacking, the first layer is how we treat building in possession: do we look to build from deep areas around our own 18-yard box or do we only look to build with possession once we get into the opposition half of the field? The second layer then looks at how we look to penetrate the opposition: do we look to play centrally through the opposition (inclusive of playing over) or do we look to play around the opponent's block?

The defensive component considers only how we mark the opposition within our defensive structure: do we man-mark or do we zonal-mark?

With the five components considered in this preliminary model of capturing a team's playing 'personality' we can now look to present thirty-two pure modules of play, pure because we are looking to be theoretical and consider only options at each end of the dimensions of team personality.



## Dimensions of Team Personality: an example using AFC Bournemouth



The above image presents a subjective model of defining the team's personality through the five dimensions I have proposed. To move over to a more objective model we could record each of the dimensions every action and look to 'weigh' the balance of actions on a linear diagram as shown above (or against the team or league average). The objective data for how a team treats the moment of attacking transition for example, will fit somewhere between the 100% purity of 'building and being patient in possession' and the 100% purity of 'counter attacking'.

The dimensions of team personality model proposed is used by myself on a theoretical level to think about the many options we have on the football field (rather than as a tool for objective measure). We often hear how a team "doesn't have a plan B" and looks to play only one way (often said about teams who are extremists in possession or through the use of a target-man striker: short or long passing), however I would argue the current view of various 'plans' in such a context is of a shallow nature. Especially if we consider the 32 combinations in the six dimensions of team personality.

	Attacking Transition	Building	Penetration	Defensive Transition	Defending Between Lines		Attacking Transition	Building	Penetration	Defensive Transition	Defending Between Lines
1	BUILD	18-YARDS	THROUGH	HI-PRESS	MAN	17	COUNTER	18-YARDS	THROUGH	HI-PRESS	MAN
2	BUILD	18-YARDS	THROUGH	HI-PRESS	ZONAL	18	COUNTER	18-YARDS	THROUGH	HI-PRESS	ZONAL
3	BUILD	18-YARDS	THROUGH	BLOCK	MAN	19	COUNTER	18-YARDS	THROUGH	BLOCK	MAN
4	BUILD	18-YARDS	THROUGH	BLOCK	ZONAL	20	COUNTER	18-YARDS	THROUGH	BLOCK	ZONAL
5	BUILD	18-YARDS	AROUND	HI-PRESS	MAN	21	COUNTER	18-YARDS	AROUND	HI-PRESS	MAN
6	BUILD	18-YARDS	AROUND	HI-PRESS	ZONAL	22	COUNTER	18-YARDS	AROUND	HI-PRESS	ZONAL
7	BUILD	18-YARDS	AROUND	BLOCK	MAN	23	COUNTER	18-YARDS	AROUND	BLOCK	MAN
8	BUILD	18-YARDS	AROUND	BLOCK	ZONAL	24	COUNTER	18-YARDS	AROUND	BLOCK	ZONAL
9	BUILD	HALFWAY	THROUGH	HI-PRESS	MAN	25	COUNTER	HALFWAY	THROUGH	HI-PRESS	MAN
10	BUILD	HALFWAY	THROUGH	HI-PRESS	ZONAL	26	COUNTER	HALFWAY	THROUGH	HI-PRESS	ZONAL
11	BUILD	HALFWAY	THROUGH	BLOCK	MAN	27	COUNTER	HALFWAY	THROUGH	BLOCK	MAN
12	BUILD	HALFWAY	THROUGH	BLOCK	ZONAL	28	COUNTER	HALFWAY	THROUGH	BLOCK	ZONAL
13	BUILD	HALFWAY	AROUND	HI-PRESS	MAN	29	COUNTER	HALFWAY	AROUND	HI-PRESS	MAN
14	BUILD	HALFWAY	AROUND	HI-PRESS	ZONAL	30	COUNTER	HALFWAY	AROUND	HI-PRESS	ZONAL
15	BUILD	HALFWAY	AROUND	BLOCK	MAN	31	COUNTER	HALFWAY	AROUND	BLOCK	MAN
16	BUILD	HALFWAY	AROUND	BLOCK	ZONAL	32	COUNTER	HALFWAY	AROUND	BLOCK	ZONAL



*“There is always a certain confrontation of structures of course: Arsenal play in a certain structure, we play in a certain structure, they have a certain style, we have a certain style” - Pepijn Lijnders*

A team may look to narrow down their approach of playing personality to only eight or sixteen approaches but without fail you will not find a team that approaches every single game with an identical personality in all six dimensions.

To fulfil Chris Davies' ambition of seeking 'synergy' we must consider that you can place more or less emphasis on any of the six dimensions. That is if you are satisfied with there being only six dimensions. You may wish to add further layers to model appropriate to your own team's playing style. A truly synergistic team is able to recognise the 'moment' they are in and adapt from personality to personality during the flow of a game. Mark Sampson talks about how his team looks to 'seize the moment' upon three mistakes in a row from the opponent or recapture the moment if his own team have made consecutive errors through altering the approach to risk for a period of time.

The tools you use to affect the balance of personality on the field can exist in the form of simple instructions from the sideline. Mark Sampson will often be seen communicating a period of 'five minutes', a way of communicating to his team to retain possession over pushing for penetration through several key players in midfield. Game management is an area we often see neglected where coaches place a blind faith in a fixed playing style and personality for ninety minutes.

Raymond Verheijen's 'football braining' model shows that teams do not maintain the same quantity of maximum explosive actions per minute for the entire duration of a game and many critics will conclude that Marcelo Bielsa's teams become fatigued in the second half of a season due to the constant demand of man-to-man pressing in high areas of the field. We can see through varying levels of assessment (minute to minute or comparing periods of the season) how an approach of some kind to altering the team's personality could be beneficial, so long as it does not have a negative impact on the communication (intuitive playing style) of a team.

The team personality model proposed in this book does not suggest that you should seek synergy in its purist form, but instead become aware of the different 'plans' (plan A, B, C...) a team can have in relation to the moments of the game.

*“I don't think there is only one way to play with the ball. You can play in different ways to get results and every way is valid.” - Paco Jemez, Rayo Vallecano Manager*

The synergy that Chris Davies seeks refuses the 'fixed plan' view of a team's personality because the fixed plan becomes 'complicated' (reliant on a specific set of conditions) rather than 'complex' and responsive to the conditions of 'the moment'. The six dimensions of personality have been left in its theoretical presentation by myself for that very reason, that teams change their personality in response to 'moments' throughout a match. A team should prepare for football to be responsive and 'plug in' whichever personality is required in that moment. To grow the team's personality is to deepen the resolution of the overall plan and common idea, unique to the individuals you have in the team you coach or play for. You can never have perfect implementation of someone else's plan.

*“The solution is an alternative plan? No. The solution is to improve and deepen the resolution of the plan that we have” - Marcelo Bielsa*

There is no success to be found in replication of the outcome of another's work. It is for this reason that the examples and theory in this book have spread further than those of only Marcelo Bielsa. The objective was to find the common thread across football and reveal the nearly invisible elements that come together and underpin tactical theory in football philosophy, then to present that to you to reject or accept into your own football structures, your own football language.

Football has and will always follow the impulses of imitation and rejection, in a constant state of change, a constant state of progress...

...as a general rule, human beings either imitate or reject the great monuments they experience, rarely do they acknowledge the small, nearly invisible treasures.



# 18 TRAINING METHODOLOGY

The methodology section of this book uses football as the starting point and not any observed training sessions during my study. I feel that without a full understanding of the game (from both a 'zoomed-out' perspective and one that considers all the individual elements) there is little point in including the session in this book. Every session that follows in this book is interlaced with the theoretical section that has gone before.

*"You have to understand why you're doing the surgery. Before the doctor does anything he diagnoses it, he does research how he can cure this and how he can fix this"* – Mario Despotovic, former Dinamo Zagreb Coach

Not included in this part of the book are many of the isolated unopposed technical break downs on individual actions that Marcelo Bielsa commonly uses, many of which are related to crossing the ball into areas of the box. Bielsa's methodology typically incorporates many of the patterns of the game and from there players are to react to the scenarios they find themselves in. These patterns and guidelines have been heavily reflected throughout both the theoretical and session sections of this book.

Many of the sessions in this book look to create automatisations in our actions and decisions on the field. We as coaches have consciously broken down and theorised the game but this cannot be the same approach as detailed to players. To highlight why, try walking at a fast pace and then without breaking your pace, count down from one hundred to two by deducting seven each time. We can do this with ease while sitting and concentrating, but by just adding a small amount of unconscious activity we struggle. The same processes occur in football and every other movement activity. Players thrive when they have adopted the theory in this book on an unconscious level. It is our role as a coach to create positive cognitive bias' in response to recognisable situations (as detailed in the RPD Model in chapter four on page 34).

The Training Methodology section of this book is presented in sections, each with four to ten sessions (of varying formats) under the section. A total of over fifty sessions from nine sections:

- Section 1. Up-Back-Through (UBT)
- Section 2. Out-In-Out (OIO)
- Section 3. Weak-side Fullback Movements (WSFB)
- Section 4. Overload-to-Isolate (O-I)
- Section 5. Rotations
- Section 6. Overloads
- Section 7. One vs One and Individual Objectives
- Section 8. Finishing
- Section 9. Match Day / Training Match Targets and Final Thoughts

Formats include: multi-directional possession box games (rondos), repetitive drill-based formats, advanced technical pattern practices, phases of play and small sided games. It should be made clear that the use of the word 'rondo' in this book has been applied to mean any multi-directional small space possession box game.

Note that all sizes of space that are recommended in the session set ups are done so as a starting guide, adapt according to ability, age, learning outcomes, desirable intensity and other variables.

The session design proposals in this book have taken influence from the following:

- Desktop research on sessions from Marcelo Bielsa (Bilbao and Marseille), Mauricio Pochettino (Tottenham Hotspur) and Eduardo Berizzo (Celta Vigo)
- Personal research from recordings of sessions sent to me delivered by Bielsa, Diego Simeone and Jorge Sampaoli in particular (Atletico Madrid, Chile, Argentina and Bilbao)
- Interviews carried out by colleagues and former players coached by those considered appropriate in the professional game (Bielsa, Pochettino, Martinez etc).
- Various study visits carried out to clubs in England, Spain, the Netherlands and more over the years.
- Tim Lees (Former Liverpool FC and Wigan Athletic coach under Brendan Rodgers and Roberto Martinez) in particular has had a big influence on the thinking behind the session design in certain sections of the book (for further information see Tim Lees' book 'Developing an Elite Coaching Philosophy in Possession' available from [www.PlayFromTheBack.com](http://www.PlayFromTheBack.com))
- Sessions developed personally by Jed Davies, bringing together theory and knowledge of Spanish Training Methodology and the proposed theory outlined in this book

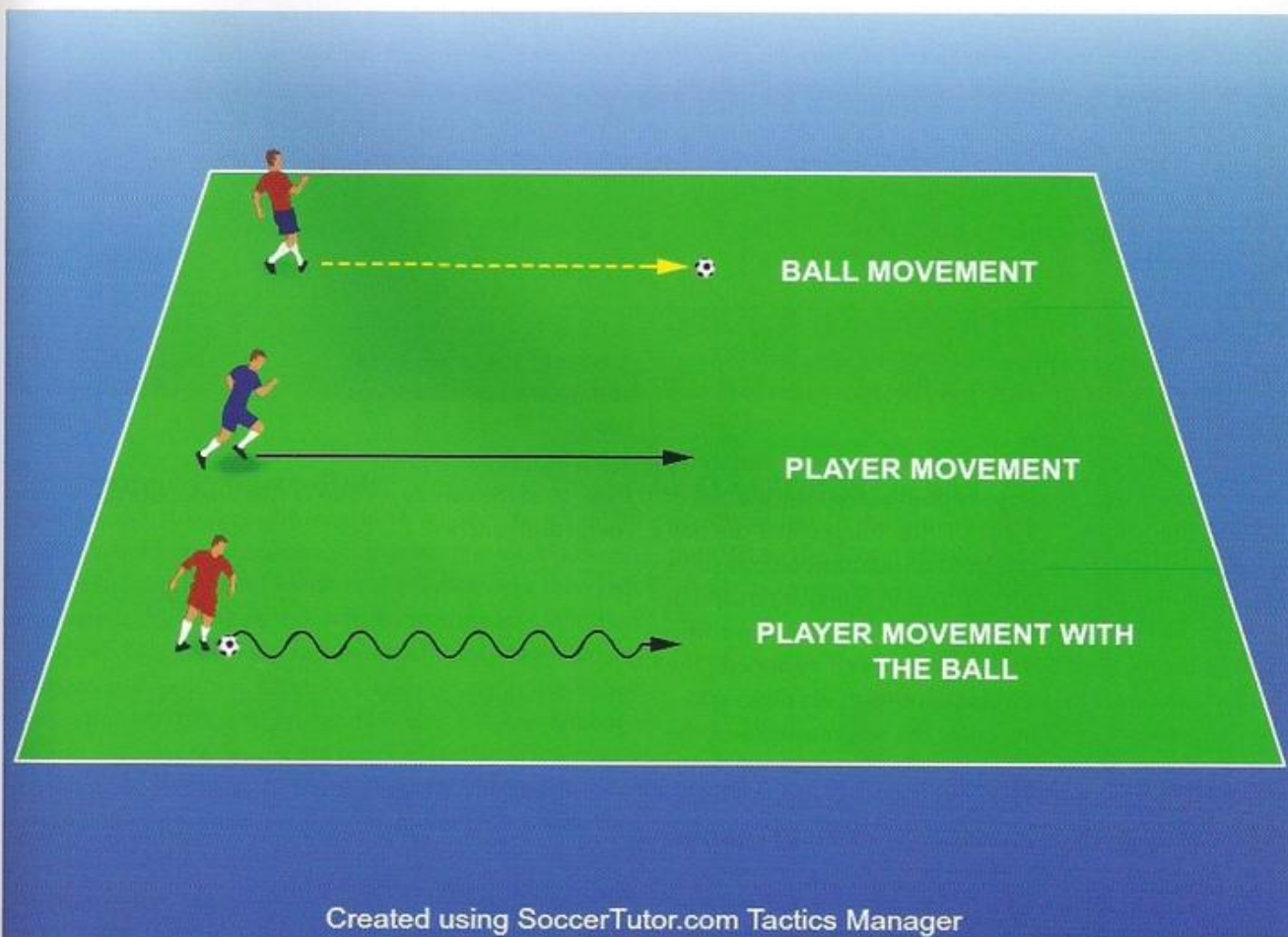


## PRACTICE FORMAT & DIAGRAM KEY

Each practice in this book includes clear diagrams with supporting training notes such as:

- Name of Practice
- Session Set Up
- Session Narrative
- Coaching Details
- Progressions/Variations
- Key Learning Focus

Where possible, the reader is encouraged to add his or her own notes to the page in the space provided.





# SECTION ONE: UP BACK THROUGH (UBT)

## 1.1 Four vs. Two Principles (Progression 0)

### Set Up

An area of between 8-yards by 8-yards up to 12-yards by 12-yards dependent on ability and secondary learning objectives. Smaller can be used for younger players of good ability. Some coaches like to change the set up to a more rectangular one to place emphasis on the session's narrative.

### Session Narrative

Players are to view this as a directional rondo, that there is a top and a bottom to the space practiced in. The bottom is always the side with the ball and the top is always the side without the ball. It may be beneficial to ensure the bottom and top are only one of two sides (south and north), then the two sides remain as supporting sides.

The objective is to get the ball from the bottom to the top as often as possible, from a deeper player (like a central defender or deep midfielder) to an advanced player. The two defenders must be coached to prevent success for the attacking side and from there the in-possession players must learn how to manipulate the situation with the ball so that they can penetrate to the top player.

Should a defender win the ball there are a variety of consequences coaches like to impose. Some have the player that lost the ball and the player that intercepted the ball swap only, other coaches prefer to recognise good collective defending and reward both defenders upon intercepting the ball. The person who lost the ball AND the player who passed him the ball before are then both swapped. The changing of players should be done with absolute speed (without thought or delay), it is the responsibility of the new defender to pick up the bib (or the pinny for the North Americans reading this book) from the floor or catch one thrown in his direction and not the attacker to ensure the defender is delicately handed over the bib.

The coach should ensure there is a constant flow of new balls at any point the rondo needs a new ball (if the previous ball has been kicked out of play for example).

### Coaching Details

The defenders should look to try and take up positions that invite the third line pass as a defensive trap. The defenders should therefore be on two different lines to get two opportunities at intercepting any third line pass. Defenders are also to be mindful that they should prevent any passes going to the player at the top through the sides and are to block all passes.

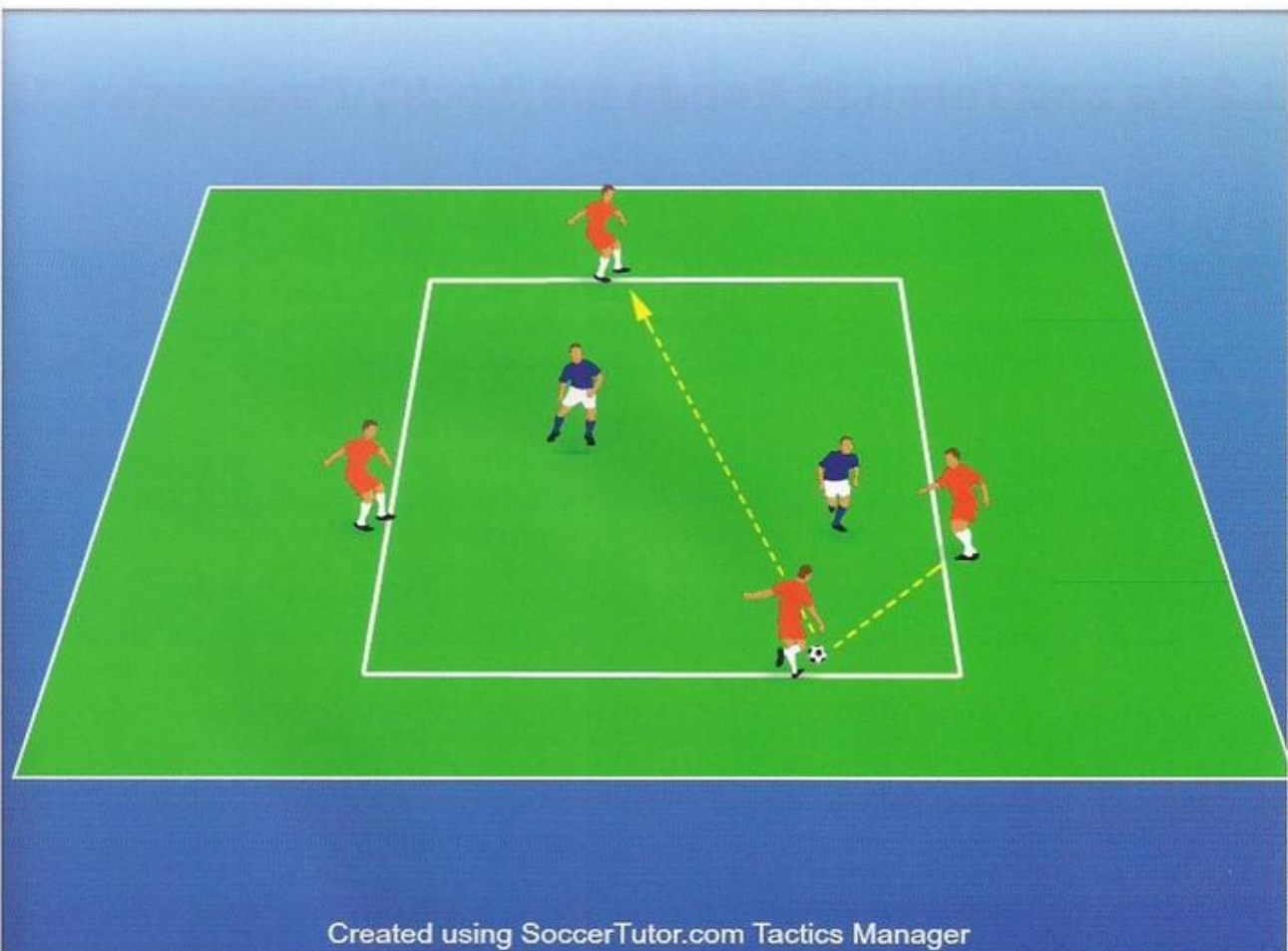
The attackers should learn to manipulate the positioning of the defenders by playing shorter passes and horizontal passes to create bigger gaps to penetrate through. If you cannot play through, then playing around the defenders takes second priority. The threat of playing around the defenders will pull defenders out of position.

Technical components such as body shape (hips always open to the direction the receiving player wishes to play before receiving the ball), initially encouraging receiving across the body and weight of pass are necessary details to touch on. The coach should focus on deceptive movement and receiving techniques too (double movements and fakes).

Page 48 in the theory section of this book puts this type of rondo into practice.

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### Variations / Progressions

Coaches like to vary the narrative of this practice by placing a limit on the number of touches the attackers can take or the sequence of touch limits (one touch, then two touch cycle). So long as the overall message isn't lost then variations like the above can be good to promote tempo changes and further challenges. Coaches may individualise the session and place touch conditions on players that have specific learning targets. Some coaches will use a minimum touch limit for players to encourage them to receive and play out under pressure (minimum two touches). Another way to encourage tempo and urgency is to use timed bouts of 45 seconds to see how many points the attacking team can get (devising a point system around first, second and third line passing or simply how many times the attacking team has moved the ball from bottom to top).

### Key Learning Focus

Learning how to manipulate two defenders with different pass types and movements to create opportunities to penetrate to advanced areas.



# SECTION ONE: UP BACK THROUGH (UBT)

## 1.2 Up and Through Rondo (no 'back') (Progression 1)

### Set Up

Two squares of 8x8-yards to 12x12-yards back to back with a dividing line to indicate the dividing line (using flat discs or a minimal number of cones). Again these distances are proposed as a starting point, they can be varied for different outcomes or to meet the needs of the individuals

### Session Narrative

As before the same learning outcome should be carried through to this session. In this session, once the ball reaches the top of the 5 vs 2 (which is now fixed to mean the dividing line as the top) the receiving player should turn and play to any one of the three players ahead of him.

The three players ahead of him will be the two players moving across to the next square or the target player at the end. Typically, the target player is covered by the defender so one of the two sides are used.

Once you have turned, the objective becomes to get the ball to the target player. You must reach the target player before you can play back across the dividing line into the next box. The player on the dividing line becomes the central player and the central player becomes the player on the dividing line upon switching to a next square.

There should always be two defenders where the ball is and therefore upon a switch, the nearest defender should race across to the next square and the other defender stays to block any passes to the target player once the ball eventually makes its way across.

In this rondo defenders stay as defenders until they have won the ball a total of three times or the coach decides change is appropriate. All three defenders can change upon the collective efforts or the individual can change as an individual reward, this is up to the coach and what type of environment is necessary in this moment of learning

### Coaching Details

The movement and use of the central player in the 5 vs 2 should now be touched on. Using this player can pull players out of position, to receive the ball in front and the behind the defensive line of the two defenders.

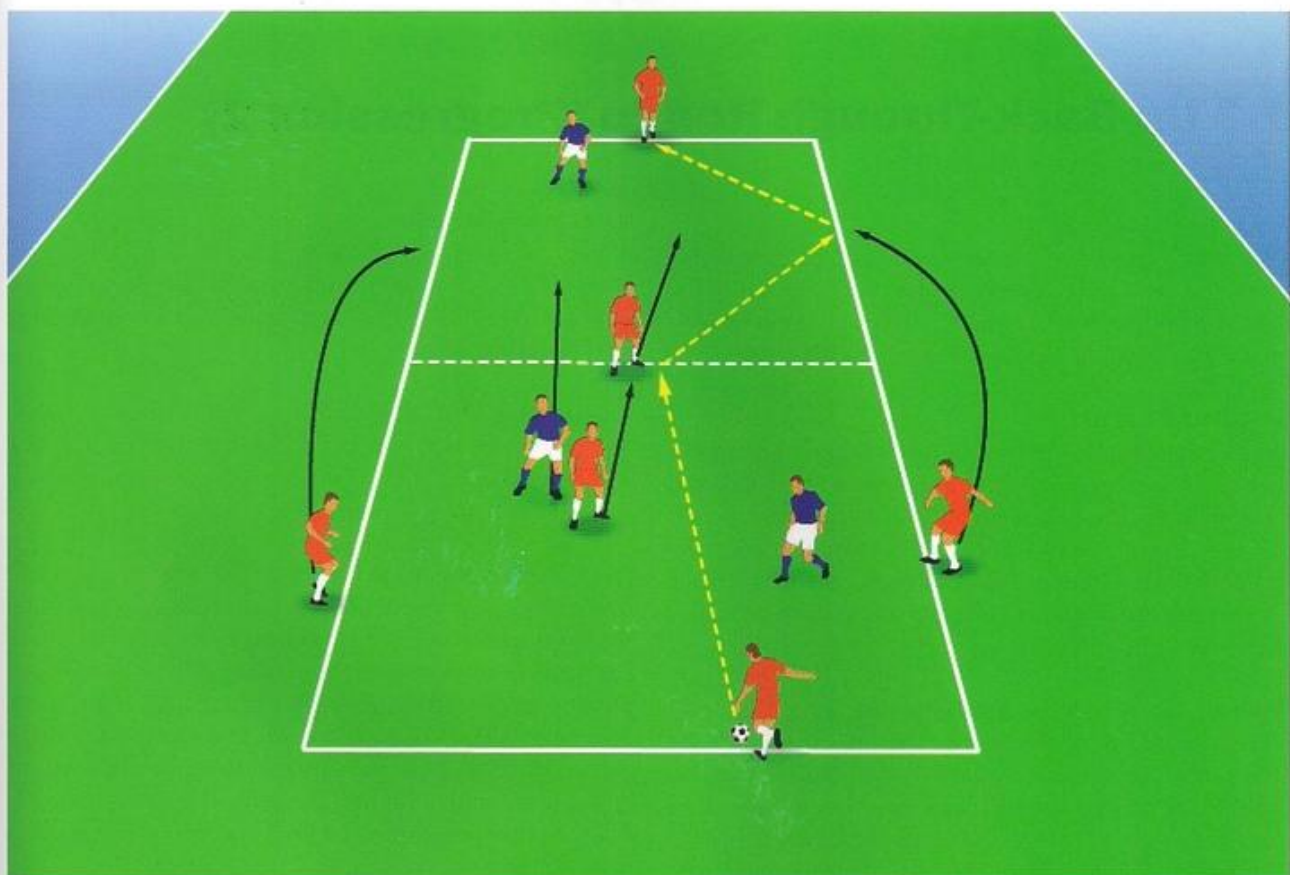
The same coaching details are emphasised as before (session 1.1, page 140): receiving techniques, body shape, methods to manipulate the position of the two defenders in the way of you being able to penetrate through to the player at the top of the rondo.

The body shape and movement of the at the top of the rondo (on the dividing line) should allow for the player to turn and pass through in two touches, rather than taking three touches to receive, turn and then pass. One touch play is encouraged elsewhere.

The intensity of the session should be driven as players race across to the next square. There is no place for switching off in these continuous rondos. The coach should have access to balls to feed them into the play when required

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### Variations / Progressions

You may add a second central defender along the end lines but ensure you make a judgement of inactivity vs. activity effect by adding a player here.

There is scope to aid secondary learning objectives by altering the size of one box (wide and short, long and narrow etc to provide different problems for players to solve).

### Key Learning Focus

This rondo is introduced to lead onto the next phase in the development of the Up-Back-Through Rondo series. Players becoming familiar with the idea of celebrating penetration, intensity of the sessions and flow of the session format.



# SECTION ONE: UP BACK THROUGH (UBT)

## 1.3 Up-Back-Through Rondo (Progression 2)

### Set Up

Two 12x16-yard boxes (variable) and a 5-yard receiving channel is included to represent the space in front of the defensive line (line 6 of 7). There are also two cones added around 8 to 10 yards away from the rondo either side.

### Session Narrative

The previous rondos (pages 140-143) looked to educate players on manipulation of the defenders' positions and introduced the idea of this session format: to continuously go from target to target through a receiving task centrally. In none of these rondos can a fullback play to a winger. The wingers remain inactive in this rondo until the ball is transferred.

Positions should now be highlighted for the purposes of players identifying the scenario. The objective is for the attacking team to play through to the striker (F9) who should look to play the ball back to either a fullback or central midfielder. Once the ball is played backwards, both wingers should make diagonal runs into the next square at pace and the ball should be played through to one of the two wingers.

Once the winger receives the ball, he must play to the target player at the end. Then the session format is mirrored. The exact same scenario is repeated. Wingers become fullbacks and fullbacks become wingers.

Coaches are to ensure that movements by wingers and fullbacks is to be done at 100% speed, even when the full backs race out to their new position waiting for the ball to be played through. The player racing out will typically get around 6 to 12 seconds rest before required to make a new sprint.

My preference is to keep the central midfielder as a central midfielder due to the specialist role of a deep lying midfielder. Therefore, upon switching into the new square (always through an up-back-through) the central midfielder is to follow the ball across and the striker is to back pedal out into the next square.

The strikers' movement becomes imperative in this session and coaching points are directed at this player to form

structures in his movement.

The defender behind the striker is not to tackle the striker but must follow him as he drops into the receiving space (to represent a central defender being pulled out of position in an up-back-through).

### Coaching Details

The movement of the striker is highlighted to be that of a striker moving off of his defender into the space between the opposition midfield and defence.

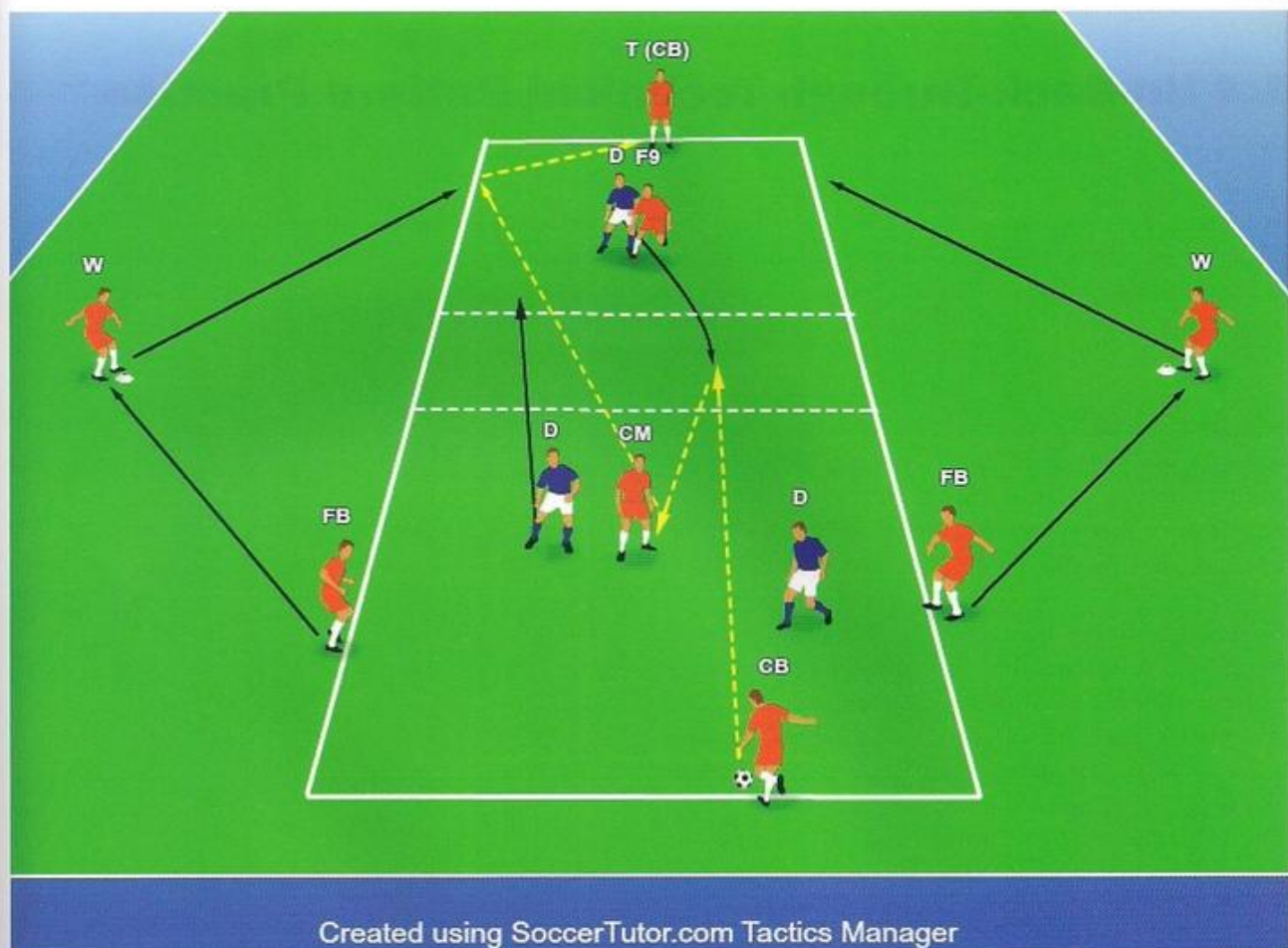
The striker should look to stretch the play and only drop into the receiving space when a pass can be played through – he shouldn't spend time in the receiving space and therefore if the pass does not come to him (which will be the case on plenty of occasions) he should look to reset his movement and stretch play again before dropping in. The striker will need to focus on 'the moment' to move and begin to envisage passing lanes into the receiving space from the four players in the square (central defender, fullbacks and central midfielder).

The striker will then need to identify who to set the ball back to after the ball is played up to him. The correct technical execution of action in setting a ball back after approaching the ball at speed should be a focus (head over the ball, toes pointed up, compact body shape, tensing of core muscles etc). The up-back-through action should be carried out with singular touches (rather than taking a touch to receive and then a touch to pass) and as a result the ability to play the ball on the floor is imperative (presenting conditions of control to the receiving player).

The striker should look at a few different types of movement into the receiving space:

1. Checking into his defender and then towards the ball in the receiving space when appropriate
2. Moving behind the eye-line of the defender and then when the defender looks at the ball (losing sight of the striker) and when the timing is correct (with a passing lane), the striker can drop into the receiving space.
3. Pushing into the defender from the side and moving diagonally into the receiving space (away from the direction of push).





### Variations / Progressions

The striker will need to know when to turn and play with the ball and when to set the ball back. Have the defender vary his movements (between following the striker into this space and not) and the striker must react: to turn when not followed and to set the ball back when followed. Eventually the two movements encouraged above will lead to this common decision making scenario itself.

You may have one too many players and for this you can add a defender along the first line of the receiving space (to represent the opposition midfielder) who can move side to side along this line and block passes.

You can alter the session by adding further central defenders along the bottom of the rondos. When the ball is not in the square with the two central defenders, you may wish to

have one of the defenders turn into a second striker – then the two strikers can rotate into the receiving space when appropriate. Once the ball reaches the target, you can ask for the target players to play one pass across to the other central defender before being allowed to play forwards (this allows for transition of players into new roles if you have players changing roles or spaces upon a switch of ball from one square to the next).

### Key Learning Focus

The technical components involved and experience of the language of the game 'up-back-through' in terms of a striker pulling a central defender out of slot and then being exploited by the diagonal run of a winger.



# SECTION ONE: UP BACK THROUGH (UBT)

## 1.4 Up-Back-Through Technical Pattern Practice

### Set Up

Distances are advised of 10 to 16 yards vertically between mannequins depending on age and ability of players. Horizontally mannequins should be between 8 and 16 yards to represent realism in the 11 vs. 11 format.

### Session Narrative

These sessions are carried out to encourage repetition of specific movements and allow for technical information regarding to movement and on-ball technique to be delivered by the coach.

The flow of the session begins with the central midfielder on the ball. The central midfielder should push the ball out of his feet and get his head up to trigger the movement of the striker to fall into the space in front of the central defender (represented by the mannequin). The striker is to set the ball back to the central midfielder who has given an angle on the other side of the mannequin in front of him – all with one touch and correct technical information (as given before in the up-back-through rondo). The central midfielder's pass through to the striker should meet the requirements of weight of pass and to deliver the conditions of control to the winger so he can finish with his first touch.

The winger should begin by dropping deep to offer a supporting angle to the central midfielder, once the central midfielder pushes the ball out of his feet and gets his head up the winger can bounce back into a higher position and only once the striker sets the ball back can the winger make his diagonal run behind the space created (imagining the mannequin representing the central defender followed the striker).

### Coaching Details

The quality of pass, supporting angles, movement and timing of movement are all areas to focus on in terms of technical information as detailed in the session narrative

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# SECTION ONE: UP BACK THROUGH (UBT)

## 1.5 Up-Back-Through Drill

### Set Up

Two rectangles of 16x10 yards with a mini goal at either end and a central channel between them of at least 4 yards. Then around 10-16 yards from the space marked out and poles should be set up as shown in the image. One cone or pole should be used around 6-8 yards from the edge of the pitches (as shown) to represent a central defender the striker (F9 moves off of). Lastly, one cone set up on either side to mark where the winger should be positioned around 5 yards behind the pitch.

Distances are to provide initial guidelines only.

### Session Narrative

The central midfielder should knock the ball out of his feet through the poles and get his head up to provide the striker a trigger to move. The striker is to move off of his marker (defender) towards the ball to set the ball back to the central midfielder either to the left or right of the central midfielder. If the striker passes the ball to the left, then the left one vs one becomes active and if the striker passes the ball to the right then the right one vs one becomes active.

Only once the ball is set back can the winger make his diagonal run into the one vs one game and at the same time the defender at the bottom can join in.

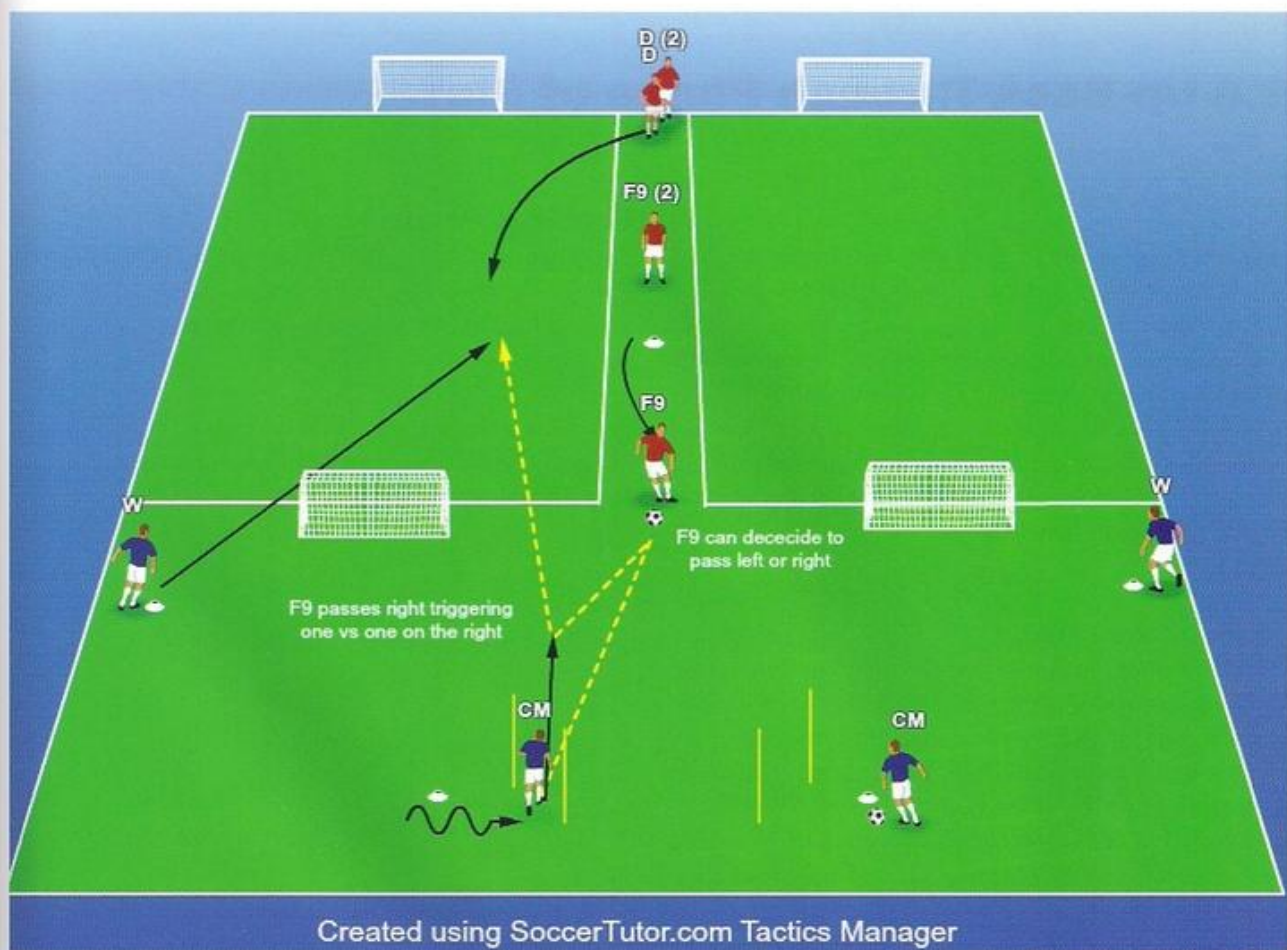
This session has been designed so that players move on to the next station in the carousel: the central midfielder becomes a winger, the striker becomes a central midfielder, the defender becomes a striker and the winger becomes a defender (clockwise rotation on the left and anti-clockwise on the right).

### Coaching Details

Once again the quality of the pass is coached and then the recognition of movement from the winger. The coach can then focus on the one vs one movements practiced by the winger. It is important both defending and attacking are areas of focus.

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### Variations / Progressions

To change the decision making trigger for which one vs one field becomes active the coach can ask the defender at the end of the field to race to one of the goal posts. Whichever goal post has been touched by the defender indicates to the central midfielder and the wingers which one vs one becomes active. The defender begins his race to touch a goal post upon the central midfielder passing to the striker - whichever goal post is touched, the OTHER field becomes active and the defender is expected to get across to the other field to defend.

If no access to mini goals, then gates to dribble through or balls on cones (to knock off) can represent goals.

As with all sessions - session progressions can follow the formula of increasing repetition, increasing speed and then increasing complexity

### Key Learning Focus

The one vs one element that can come about from an up-back-through movement and diagonal run from the winger as well as the quality in the up-back-through language.



# SECTION ONE: UP BACK THROUGH (UBT)

## 1.6 Up-Back-Through Phase of Play

### Set Up

On a pitch appropriate to the age of the players, the pitch should be divided exactly as shown in the image above. Flat discs or athletic lining tape are preferred to avoid interference of the game. The phase of play should be set up so that there are goals beyond the half-way line (or balls on cones or gates if not available). Around 12 yards from the mini-goals there should be two fullbacks represented by mannequins. There needs to be a channel across the field around 12 yards in front of the mannequins that is 3 yards in depth.

### Session Narrative

The blue team in the image (on the right hand side page) are the defending team and while defending they are locked into the zones shown. The four defending midfielders are to move horizontally within their zone to try and block any passes through to the striker(s). Once the white team decide to pass the ball out to one of their wingers then the nearest blue midfielder can leave his zone to prevent a forward pass from the winger to the striker.

The objective of the white team is to play the ball up to the striker who can then set the ball back to one of the two central midfielders. The central midfielder should then play the ball through to one of the two wingers. In the ideal scenario the winger furthest away from the opposition centre backs is passed the ball, then he should finish into one of the mini-goals. You may limit the movement of the centre backs (blue team) to encourage success at first.

Any white player can play the ball up to the striker. The wingers however can only do so from the dotted line and not beyond that (shown in the image where the left winger is positioned, and no further forward). The wingers are limited to a maximum of two touches (receive and release).

Once the blue team win the ball then they are free to leave their zones and attack the goal. If the white team win the ball and make three passes in a row, then the blue team must retreat back to their zones.

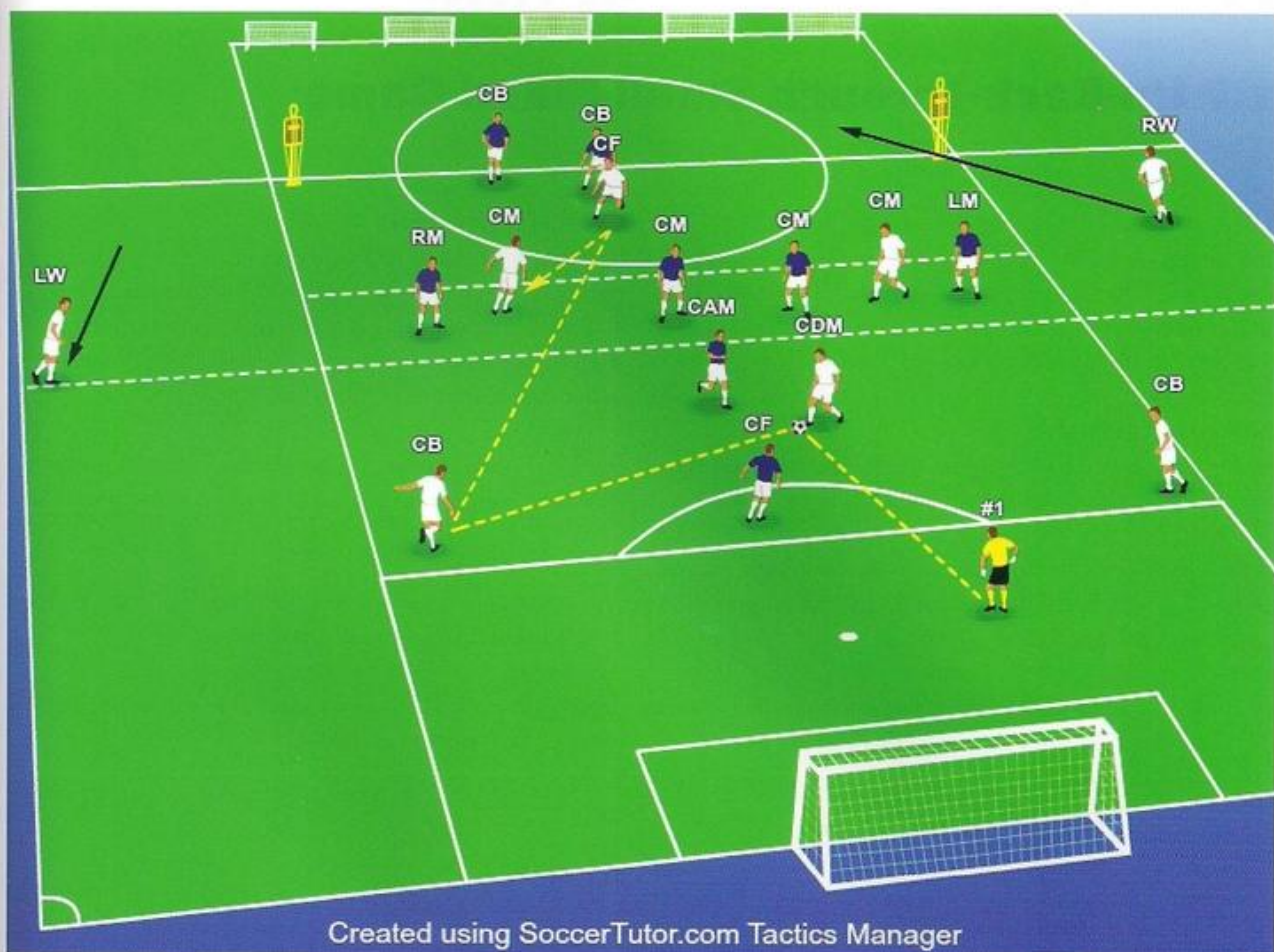
### Coaching Details

The coach is to bring in much of the coaching detail touched upon in the previous sessions of this session: body shape, quality of passes, identification of the moment, movement etc.

It is important that the picture painted is highlighted from start to finish of the session: opposition midfield line, opposition defensive line etc.

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### Variations / Progressions

To vary the difficulty to be easier you can alter the numbers of midfielders in the blocking channel, limit the movement of the blue team's defenders and/or increase the number of strikers.

### Key Learning Focus

Formation specific building out from the back with the view of penetrating the opposition midfield line using the language of the game 'up-back-through'.



# SECTION ONE: UP BACK THROUGH (UBT)

## 1.7 Up-Back-Through Small Sided Game

### Set Up

The pitch size for this small-sided game is advised to be 45x30 yards as a starting point. Each third should be 15x30 yards. There should be coned off corners to show that the corners of the field are out of play.

### Session Narrative

In this small sided game players are locked into zones as shown. When in possession your team should have two vs one in the first third (including your goalkeeper), then four vs three in the middle third (inclusive of the neutral player) and lastly one striker in the final third against the opposition centre back and goalkeeper.

The only way a player may leave his zone is through being released into an up-back-through. You can only score goals from the final third.

In this session there are no transitional movements as teams stay in their zones throughout.

### Coaching Details

Bringing together much of the coaching detail from the previous sessions in this section this session format looks at identification of up-back-through opportunities. Body shape, positioning, timing of movement and quality of actions are to be coached as usual.

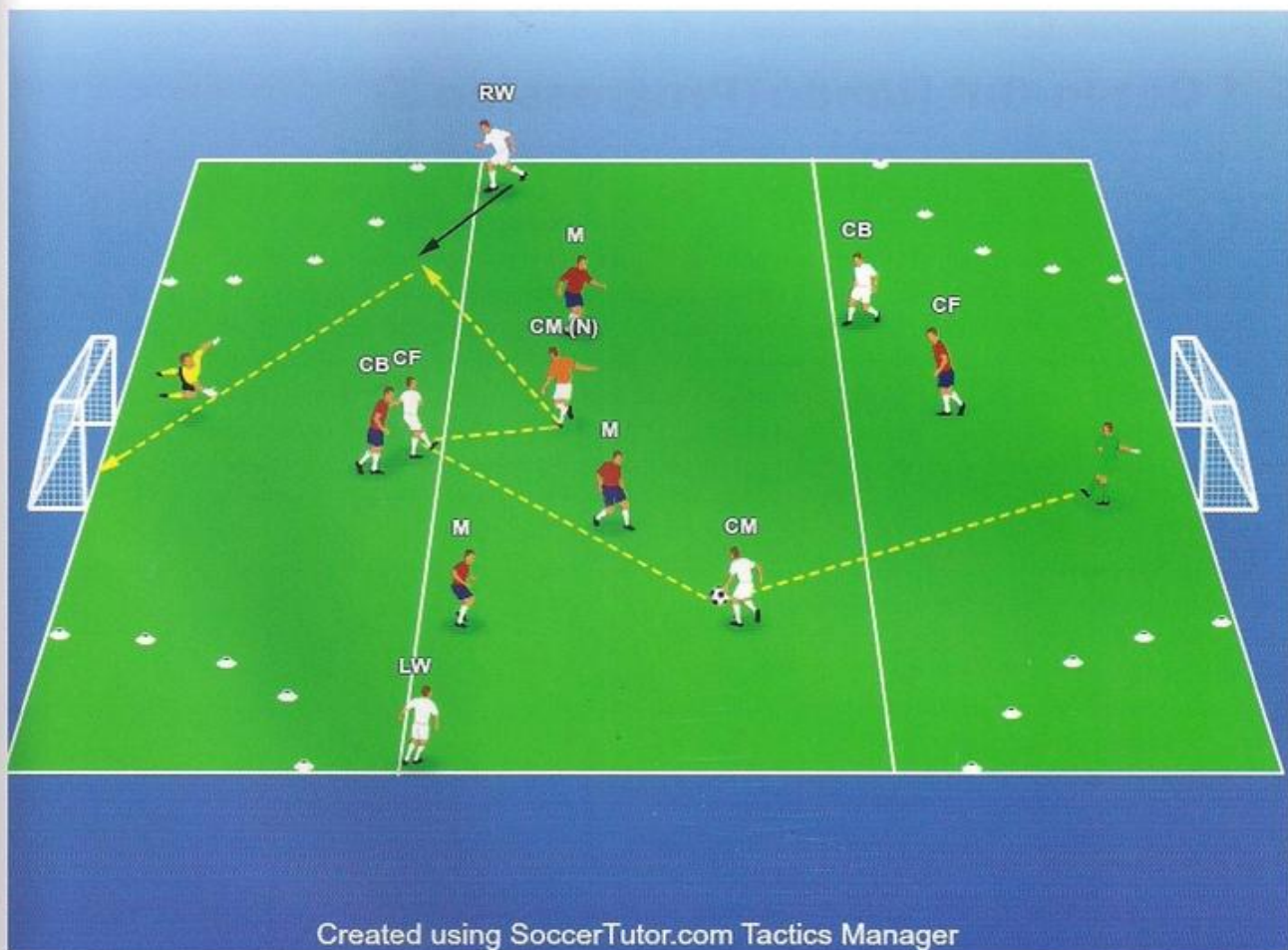
Sessions should follow the penetration specific principles (priorities) of play as detailed in the theory section of this book.

The striker does not always need to set the ball back and can turn to finish if allowed space to turn his defender.

Any player can go through (wingers, central midfielders or neutral player) on the up-back-through.

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### Variations / Progressions

You can vary between allowing teams to only use the on-touch up-back-through and allowing for players to take more than one touch in the language used.

### Key Learning Focus

Finding opportunities to employ the up-back-through language of the game in the final third.



## SECTION 2. OUT-IN-OUT (OIO)

### 2.1 Out-In-Out Rondo (Progression 3)

#### Set Up

This session is set up identically to the up-back-through rondo shown in the previous section of this book (session 1.3, pages 144-145). It is vital that this rondo is only used AFTER the up-back-through rondo has been made familiar to players. In this format it is advised that poles are added to the central receiving channel to guide the wingers for their action.

#### Session Narrative

This session is an 'add-on' to the up-back-through rondo. The same conditions apply as before only the players can now get across to their target player via the Out-In-Out language as well as the Up-Back-Through language. As with before, the fullback cannot play to a winger.

Once the ball reaches the target and there are two central defenders, one horizontal pass is required before the players can begin to play forwards. It's possible that one of the two central defenders can become a second striker and rotate into the central zone as the centre forward resets his movement. No player may wait in the central zone.

The winger in an Out-In-Out must race in to at least the edge of the receiving space. As the ball travels to the winger, the fullback is required to overlap into the next square.

Should the fullback not identify the moment, the central player receiving the 'In' pass is expected to turn and keep possession as the players reset to keep the rondo going. There is no place for play stopping in this format.

Once the player has overlapped and received the Out pass, he becomes the fullback on the other side and the winger simply goes back out to be a winger again. The rondo mirrors itself entirely once the ball reaches the target player.

All transfers of play are limited to those via Up-Back-Through and Out-In-Out languages.

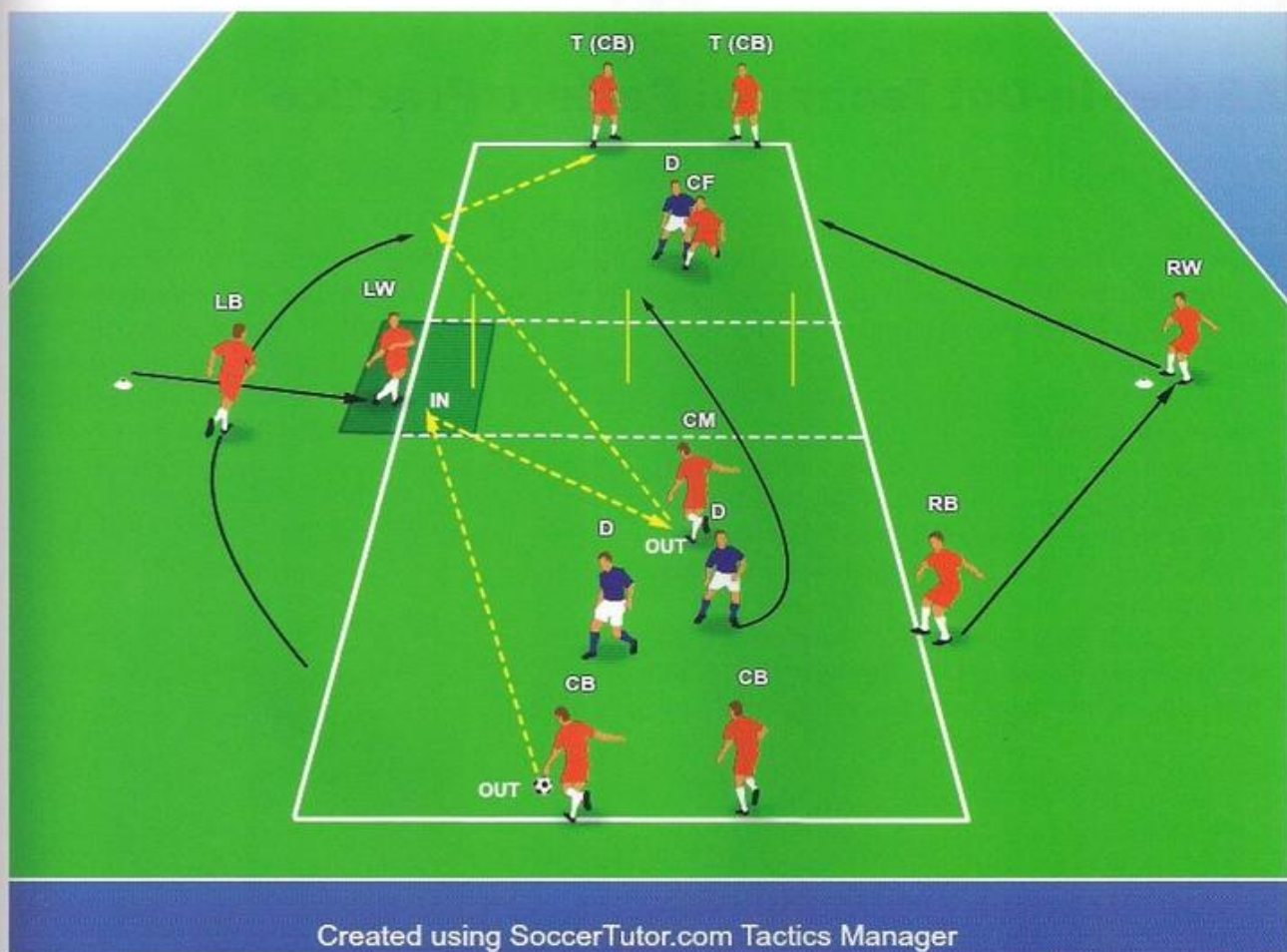
#### Coaching Details

The coach is to encourage this language of the game ONLY on the strong-side rather than switching the ball out to a weak-side winger to avoid confusion when translated out to the 11 vs 11 format.

Intensity and a continuation of coaching information is expected throughout the entire series of rondos in this format (Up-Back-Through, Out-In-Out and Weak-side Fullback rondos)

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### Variations / Progressions

- If 10 players – with only one target on each end and without a third defender. Both defenders follow from box to box
- If 11 players – with only one target on each end.
- If 12 players – one end with one target and the other with two targets.
- If 13 players – as shown in the image above.
- If 14 players – with a defender added to the first line of the receiving space to block moving side to side along this line. Upon a transfer he would become the second defender in the next square and one of the two defenders in the other square would position himself on the first line of the receiving space to block moving side to side.
- If 15 players – as with 14 players but with two strikers.

Other variations include a defender to follow the winger who moves inside.

Point scoring systems can be put into place for the defenders for them to become attackers OR this can be timed.

### Key Learning Focus

Identifying when to use an Out-In-Out language alongside the existing knowledge of Up-Back-Through.



## SECTION 2. OUT-IN-OUT (OIO)

### 2.2 Out-In-Out Technical Pattern Practice

#### Set Up

As shown in the image (on the right) with spacing between defenders around 8-10 yards between each. Cones should be laid down to highlight starting positions for the three players.

#### Session Narrative

As the central midfielder pushes the ball out of his feet and gets his head up, the winger should move quickly in front of the defender's fullback (represented by a pole in the image). The ball is then set back inside as the fullback overlaps to exploit the space opened up. The fullback is to then demonstrate a variety of crosses from: (1) cut backs and (2) whipped early into the channel. This may be dictated from the type of through ball provided by the central midfielder.

#### Coaching Details

The coach is to work on the quality of the set back inside by the winger and the technical used (compact body shape, toes up, head over the ball etc) and the quality of the ball played by the central midfielder out to the overlapping fullback. Control is to be presented upon arrival to each player (see theoretical session of the book on page 62 for definition of control)

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## SECTION 2. OUT-IN-OUT (OIO)

### 2.3 Out-In-Out Drill

#### Set Up

Distances between the CM and W cones should represent realism in terms of distances typically passed and moved towards the ball in a game. I would prefer to set these up at around 20 to 25-yards apart, meaning a pass of around 12-15 yards is met by someone who has moved 8-10 yards. The distances between the W cone and the FB cone is advised to be set up at around 10 yards back to allow for the movements to take place and the subsequent 1 vs 1 action. The mini-goal should be set up around 12-15 yards from the W cone, again to allow for distance for the 1v1 action.

#### Session Narrative

The central midfielder (CM) is to push the ball out from his feet and get his head up to trigger to movement of the winger. The winger is to sprint towards the central midfielder and receive the 'out' pass to play back to the central midfielder with his first touch.

Upon the pass back to the central midfielder the winger then becomes a tracking defender and the fullback should have made his diagonal overlap of the winger's ball contact position. The central midfielder will then have moved towards the ball and played the final 'out' ball to the fullback who is now to go through on the mini-goal with the tracking defender (previously the winger). The fullback must take at least one touch before finishing.

#### Coaching Details

The coach should focus on the quality of the pass from the central midfielder (moment, spin, direction, speed and position onto the ball), the movement of the winger and his lay off and then the aggressive action of the fullback to sprint onto the ball and fend off the tracking defender. Typical technical details for passing on the first touch are given to the winger and central midfielder.

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### Variations / Progressions

Coaches can increase the distance to the mini-goals and require any one vs one skill to be practiced from the fullback (defender on the angle) or incorporate a crossing element into the fullback's post receiving actions once he has run through some gates

### Key Learning Focus

The objective is to highlight and promote the relationship between these players and the language of the game being practiced: out-in-out.



# SECTION 2. OUT-IN-OUT (OIO)

## 2.4 Out-In-Out Phase of Play

### Set Up

This phase of play requires three mini-goals or a replacement of similar motivation and a receiving area that has a central area highlighted.

### Session Narrative

The back four and the deep midfielder are to play against at least two strikers in the first phase of the session layout. The objective for the five players is to play through the central area - through the central area and not 'via' the central area, meaning the pass travels from the bottom zone into the striker or winger rather than into the CM (the central zone has two fixed midfielders inside looking to block passes through and one team mate inside to offer support to any lay offs).

Once the white team has played through (not via) the central area they can look to go to goal and they can do this in a number of ways:

1. Direct from the first zone to the striker who can turn to finish if given space to turn
2. Direct from the first zone to the winger if he is not followed inside by his defender
3. Via an Up-Back-Through should the striker be tightly marked. The two midfielders in the blocking channel are instructed not to intercept the ball back to the midfielder at first
4. Via an Out-In-Out should the winger be followed by his defender and the fullback has made the overlap.

Once the red team wins the ball they are free to leave their positions until the white team win the ball back and make three passes (signalling for the red team to reset back to their original fixed zones).

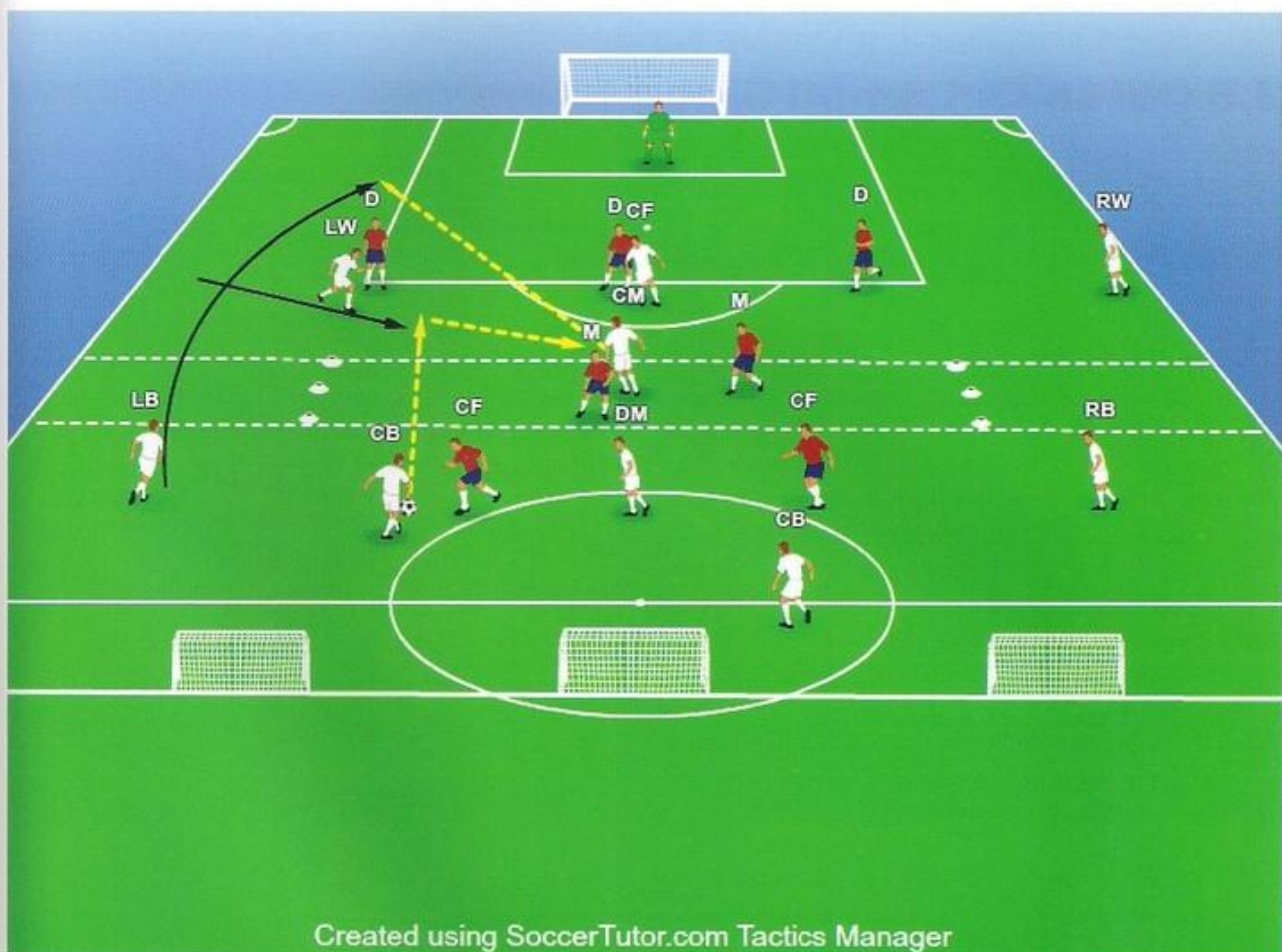
### Coaching Details

The coach must prioritise the pass into the striker (to turn and strike or set the ball back for an up-back-through) and the out-in-out is an add on to that priority.

The decision making of the five players playing out and the non-verbal communication between players (in line with the theory presented in this book) are encouraged.

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### Variations / Progressions

If there are fewer players then you can cut off one of the wide areas (as a function format session would) and remove the winger, fullback and a defender from that side. An example of a function format can be found on page 239.

### Key Learning Focus

Learning the principles outlined in this book and identification of the languages of the game



## SECTION 2. OUT-IN-OUT (OIO)

### 2.5 Out-In-Out Small Sided Game

#### Set Up

A small sided game set up with three thirds and a wide channel.

#### Session Narrative

In this small sided game there are a series of transition rules from attacking shape to defending shape.

When attacking, your team is set up with a central defender and goalkeeper in the first third, the middle third is to include both fullbacks, two central midfielders and a further third neutral central midfielder. The final third consists of a striker and then two wingers who must stay in the wide channel unless triggered to move inside.

When defending both fullbacks are to fall back into your first third and both wingers are to fall back into the second third and stay in those zones until they win the ball.

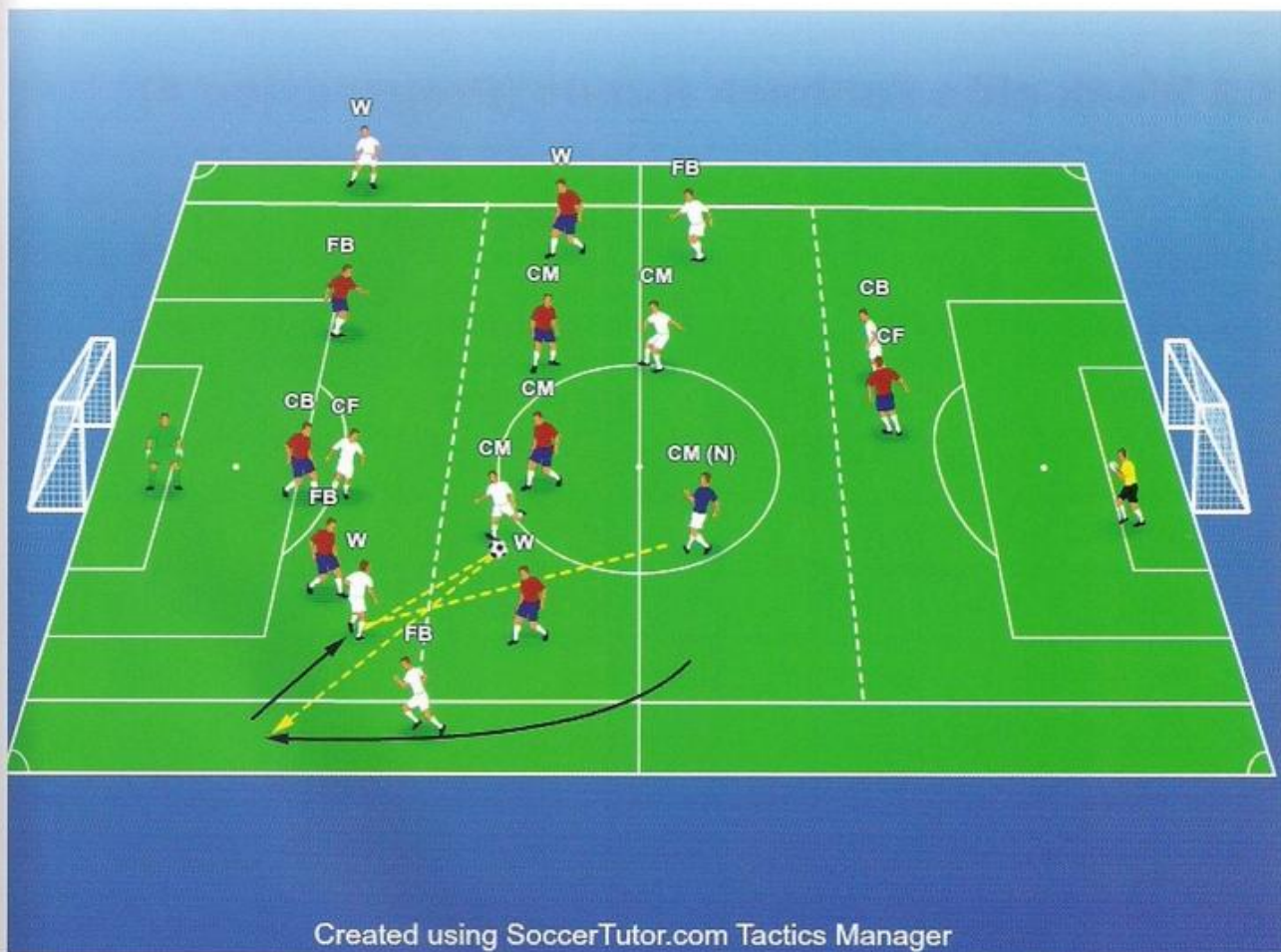
The Up-Back-Through is prioritised as with the small sided game in the previous section of this book (page 152-153). Only this time the add-on is that where appropriate the wingers can race in for an out-in-out (if their fullback follows them inside) or to receive and finish if they aren't followed. The fullbacks should overlap anytime the winger comes inside.

#### Coaching Details

Coaches are encouraged to work on the decision making elements between the four scenarios from the session narrative as often as possible. To turn and shoot or to set the ball back as part of a language. Coaches should encourage intensity in transition and perhaps introduce rules to encourage shape is found before action begins (three passes in the central third).

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### Variations / Progressions

Along with the idea of introducing passing rules to control the transitional movements (like maintaining the ball for 3 passes before a team forces the opposition to fall back into their defensive shape) the coach can work with individuals on the individual needs by challenging players with specific one vs one actions such as protecting the ball (introducing a minimum touch rule privately to an individual and ensure the group know some players are given development rules alongside the overall objective).

### Key Learning Focus

To educate the four scenarios outlined to this point of the session outcomes: the moments of movement and then the scenarios they find themselves in.



## SECTION 3. WEAK-SIDE FULLBACK (WSFB)

### 3.1 Weak-side Fullback Rondo (Progression 4)

#### Set Up

The setup of this rondo is identical to that of the out-in-out rondo (page 154) but must include an emphasis on a strong-side and weak-side during the introduction.

#### Session Narrative

This rondo is the final add-on to the up-back-through and out-in-out rondos seen previously. Previous rules apply in this rondo – rules around the transition of positions and actions of the second defender on the target end are included in the previous rondo session narratives.

As well as the options of up-back-through and out-in-out the players are now allowed to get across to the other side of the rondo through a weak-side full back movement through specific triggers.

Any time the ball is played from the strong-side into the central midfielder AND he can turn out then the weak-side winger should sprint inside BEHIND the poles and the weak-side fullback is to advance forwards. After this action has taken place the winger goes back outside to stay as the winger (now in the other direction) and the fullback becomes the fullback on the other side as the rondo mirrors itself.

Should the fullback not overlap then it is the responsibility of the central midfielder to take another option or retain possession.

#### Coaching Details

Coaches are to focus on the positioning of the central midfielder and his ability to find space for which he can turn out on a weak-side by finding the 'diagonal pocket'. Coaches are to celebrate and highlight the out-in-out and up-back-through options too.

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## SECTION 3. WEAK-SIDE FULLBACK (WSFB)

### 3.2 Weak-side Fullback Technical Pattern Practice

#### Set Up

Across the full width of the field and preferably from one of the three platforms: low, medium or high as part of the circulation from fullback to fullback. Poles should be used to represent fullbacks and differentiate them from the mannequins. Cones have been laid out in the image to represent the boundaries of movement for the defenders as the ball moves left to right and right to left.

#### Session Narrative

The ball is to start with one fullback and travel across to the other fullback through each central defender (not skipping a player). As the ball reaches the other fullback the ball should then be passed inside to the nearest central defender and then into the deep midfielder. Once the deep midfielder picks the ball up he should look to play out to the weak-side wide area where the weak-side winger would have made a sprint infield and the weak-side fullback has made his sprint to overlap and receive the pass played.

Wingers and fullbacks are to rotate positions in this exercise.

The ball must travel at least one full circulation of fullback to fullback before being played into the defensive midfielder. Passes are instructed to be carried out with two touches (receive then release) in this exercise.

#### Coaching Details

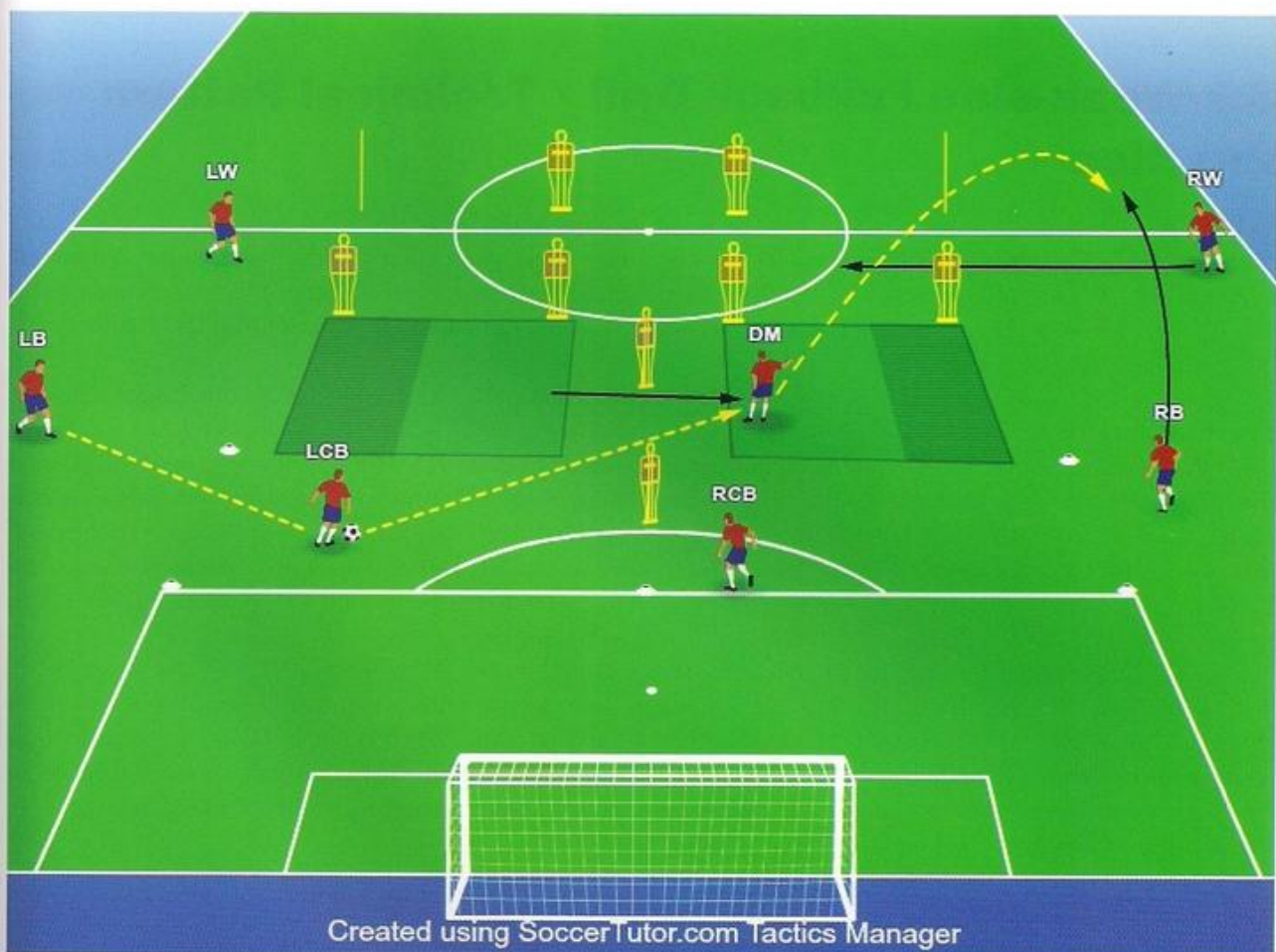
The positioning of players as the ball moves is imperative in this session format. The fullbacks should receive the ball as wide as possible in their space but when the ball is on the other side of the field they should tuck inside to their marker (white cones).

Central defenders should look to receive the ball in the centre of their space and move across with the ball each time but giving an angle to one another as the centre defender is on the ball (dropping off into a deeper angle by three or four yards) and taking their first touch forwards.

The deep midfielder should keep his body shape open to receive the ball at any point and look to give a constant angle to the position of the ball. If the ball is with the fullback, he moves across with it (into the nearest shaded box) but when the ball is with the centre back he should be positioned in the diagonal pocket (opposite to the ball in the 'other shaded box'). Wingers are given the detail that when the ball is on their side of the field they should tuck inside (as part of the one in and one out rule with his fullback) and when the ball is on the other side of the field they should keep width as the fullback tucks inside.

The weight of pass and type of pass is to be coached and varied where appropriate. Receiving with the players back foot and moving with the ball are also emphasised.





### Variations / Progressions

Repetition, Speed and Intensity then Complexity.

### Key Learning Focus

Positional rules and angles of support as appropriate for a weak-side fullback language.



## SECTION 3. WEAK-SIDE FULLBACK (WSFB)

### 3.3 Weak-side Fullback Drill / Technical Pattern Practice

#### Set Up

There should be seven cones, one mannequin and two mini-goals (or suitable replacement) set up for this exercise. The distance between the two central defenders should represent that expected in the game.

#### Session Narrative

One fullback starts on the ball (the right sided fullback in this diagram) and plays the ball to the central defender. The central defender then takes a touch forwards and looks to play into the defensive midfielder who then plays out to the weak-side.

The winger should sprint into the inside cone once the deep midfielder takes his first touch and the fullback should look to overlap in the same instance. Once the ball is played through or over to the fullback then the one vs one duel occurs between the fullback and the now defender (previously the winger).

After each cycle the ball should then start from the other fullback and the action occurs on the opposite side of the field.

#### Coaching Details

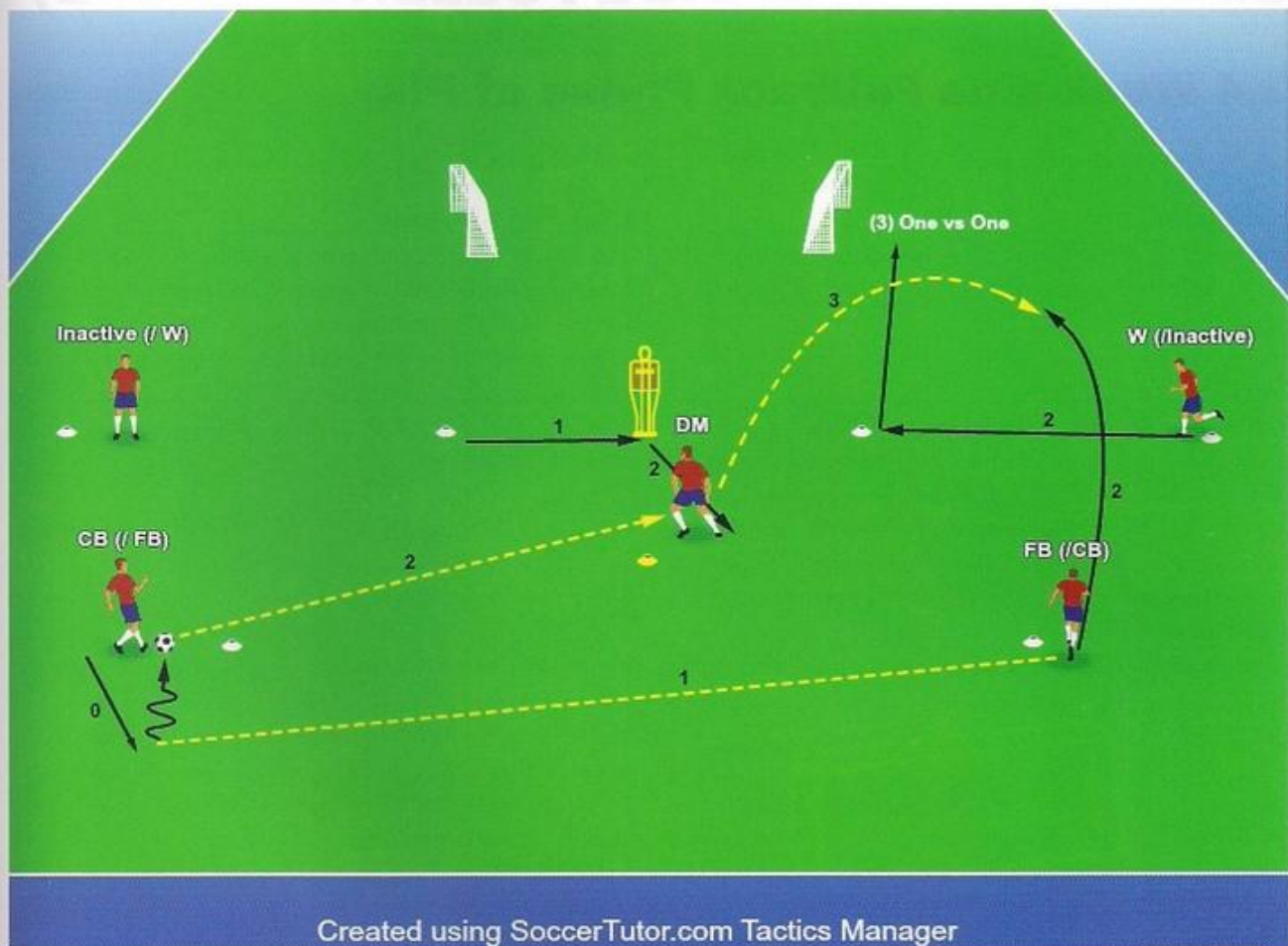
The angle given from the central defender is the first coaching point along with his first touch (forwards with his head up). The ball is then played into the deep midfielder.

The deep midfielder should position himself on the opposite side of the mannequin to the ball. If the right sided defender is in possession of the ball, then the deep midfielder should start on the left hand side inside cone. As the ball travels across to the left sided defender the deep midfielder will move with the ball with good body shape (shoulders and hips open to the field) before dropping off the mannequin to give the angle.

The winger's sprint into the inside cone should be done upon the deep midfielder's first touch and as soon as the winger reaches the inside cone he becomes a tracking defender in the one vs one moment with the overlapping fullback.

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### Variations / Progressions

Repetitions, Speed/intensity and then Complexity

### Key Learning Focus

The positional rules and movement associated with transferring the ball from centre back to centre back then playing into a deep midfielder in line with a weak-side fullback language opportunity.



## SECTION 3. WEAK-SIDE FULLBACK (WSFB)

### 3.4 Weak-side Fullback Phase of Play

#### Set Up

The setup for this phase of game is identical to that of the up-back-through phase of play game (page 150) in section one of these sessions.

#### Session Narrative

This session follows the rules previously laid out in the up-back-through phase of play, only this time the option of the weak-side fullback movements are added where appropriate. When the deep midfielder can receive the ball on the weak-side of midfield from a centre back AND he can turn out then the weak-side winger can make his sprint in behind the opposition midfield line. The weak-side centre back then becomes a weak-side fullback and makes his overlap at pace to receive the ball out from the deep midfielder.

Once the ball is played over to the weak-side fullback then the winger joins the striker in a two vs two to get on the end of a first time cross. The fullback must deliver this ball on his first touch after controlling the ball (if required to take a touch to create conditions of control).

As with before, the same conditions apply to the blue team once they win or lose the ball.

#### Coaching Details

The coach should again emphasise the up-back-through language where possible and then highlight opportunities for the weak-side fullback language to be used. If players do not recognise this moment, then it is the responsibility of the deep midfielder to take alternative action. Review coaching details for the up-back-through section of the book for further detail.

FON + C (Forward, Opposite, Near (and Communicate)) should be encouraged by those players in front of the opposition midfield line. The FON + C method has been influenced by Clive Woodward's CTC methodology in improving player visual awareness within a specific playing style. Players are to look forwards before receiving the ball at the scenarios ahead of them, opposite of the ball (to the weak-side) and then near the ball to assess each scenario. Lastly players should communicate (non-verbally and verbally) the information they've collected.

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ADD HANDMADE NOTES





### Variations / Progressions

The coach can then educate players to also look to play in the weak-side winger after his movement in behind the opposition midfield line if he is free. Upon this pass, the winger turns with the ball and enters into a two vs two with the two defenders and his striker. The winger and striker then have five seconds to score

### Key Learning Focus

To recognise opportunities for the weak-side fullback movements in a phase of play (inclusive of playing a pass to the winger who has moved inside).



# SECTION 3. WEAK-SIDE FULLBACK (WSFB)

## 3.5 Weak-side Fullback Small Sided Game

### Set Up

This small sided game follows the setup of the out-in-out small sided game (page 162)

### Session Narrative

In this small sided game there are a series of transition rules from attacking shape to defending shape.

When attacking, your team is set up with a central defender and goalkeeper in the first third, the middle third is to include both fullbacks, two central midfielders and a further third neutral central midfielder. The final third consists of a striker and then two wingers who must stay in the wide channel unless triggered to move inside.

When defending both fullbacks are to fall back into your first third and both wingers are to fall back into the second third and stay in those zones until they win the ball.

The Up-Back-Through is prioritised as with the small sided game in the previous section of this book (page 152-153). The first add-on is one where the wingers can race in for an out-in-out (if their fullback follows them inside) or to receive and finish if they aren't followed. The fullbacks should overlap anytime the winger comes inside."

The second add-on is one that exists if an opportunity for a weak-side fullback is presented then the winger may make his movement inside and the fullback will overlap.

### Coaching Details

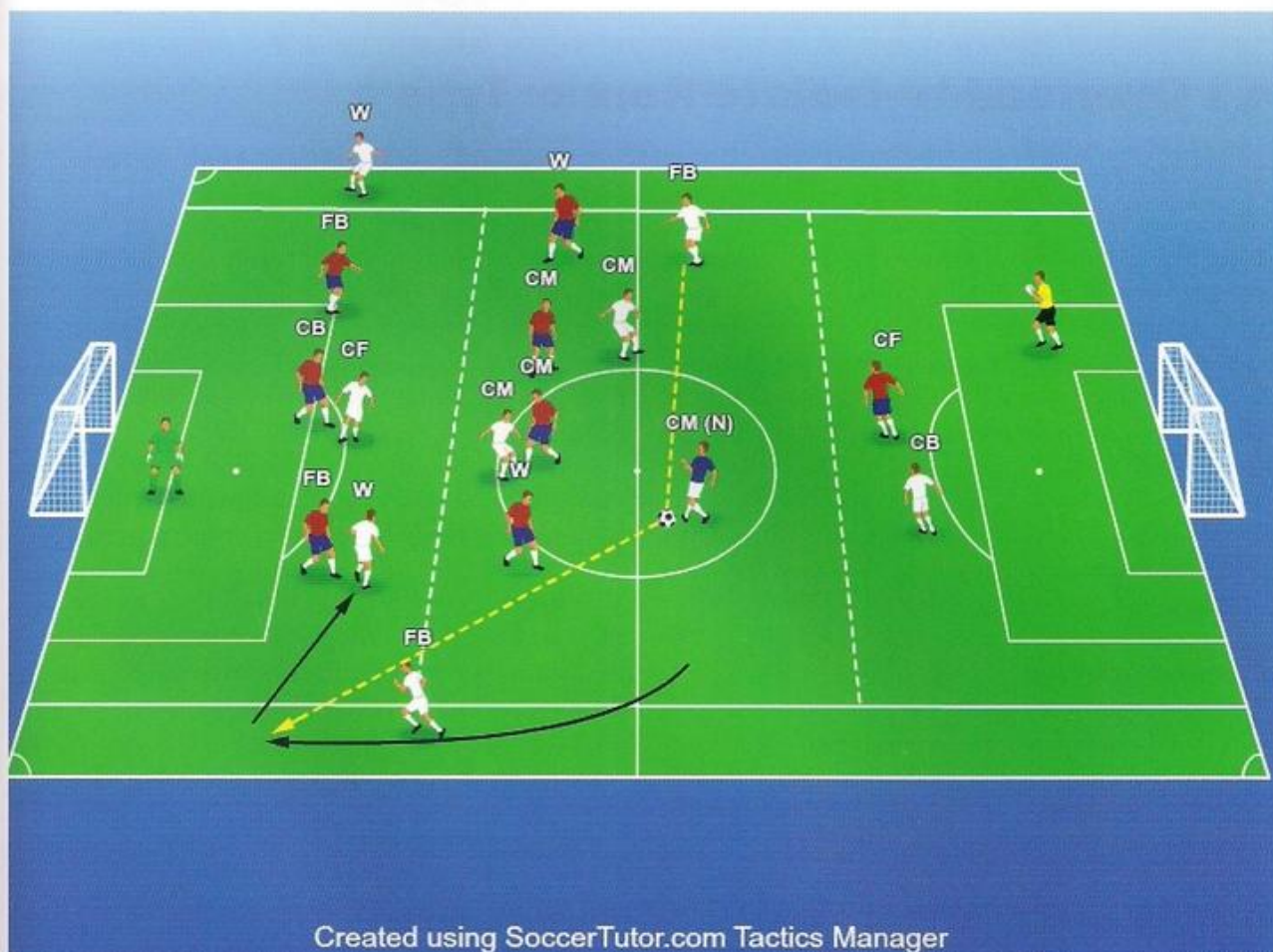
The team should now be fully aware of the option to play in the weak-sided winger if he is not followed and blocked. The fullback is encouraged to act quickly after receiving the ball and select from a variety of crossing options:

1. Whipped in behind the defenders into the corridor between the goalkeeper and defensive line
2. Driven at one height across the box
3. Cut back with disguise
4. Lofted into a deep area (into the weak-side winger perhaps?)
5. Curved into a back post area (Beckham)
6. Whipped into the front post area

FON + C (Forward, Opposite, Near (and Communicate)) should be encouraged by those players in front of the opposition midfield line. The FON + C method has been influenced by Clive Woodward's CTC methodology in improving player visual awareness within a specific playing style. Players are to look forwards before receiving the ball at the scenarios ahead of them, opposite of the ball (to the weak-side) and then near the ball to assess each scenario. Lastly players should communicate (non-verbally and verbally) the information they've collected.

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ADD HANDMADE NOTES





### Variations / Progressions

Coaches can look to manage the transitional changes between teams by placing a minimum number of passes that must be made by teams in the first two thirds before looking to play into the final third.

### Key Learning Focus

Identifying when the weak-side fullback language may be used amongst the up-back-through and out-in-out languages of the game.



## SECTION 4. OVERLOAD-TO-ISOLATE (O-I)

### 4.1 Overload-to-Isolate Rondo: Type A

#### Set Up

This session consists of two 8x8-yard possession boxes set up either side of the 18-yard box (around 36 yards apart) for the 11 vs 11 format. There should then be a central area marked out at a slight angle behind the boxes (shown in the diagram above with the CM standing between them) and then lastly two poles around 5 yards from the 8x8-yard possession boxes.

Note. The rondo boxes can be any size you wish, you may wish to represent something from the game. The sizes above are only for primary guidance.

#### Session Narrative

Two three vs one rondos on either side and after a signal one possession box disperses: the nearest player to the centre back pedals out as a central midfielder showing for the ball, the player furthest towards the wide area back pedals out as a winger waiting for a switch pass.

The other possession box should look to distribute the ball to the central midfielder quickly, who will then switch the ball out to the winger. As the ball leaves the possession box into the central midfielder, the three players are to look to enter the 18-yard box and provide options for a cross.

Upon the first touch of the central midfielder, the defender in the dispersal box should look to run around the pole (vary distance if necessary) and put pressure on the winger as he receives the ball. For the session narrative to flow the defender should be reaching the winger after the winger has taken his controlling touch and got the ball out of his feet (to represent the scenario during an Overload-to-Isolate).

#### Coaching Details

The coach needs to work on the body shape of the players showing firstly: the central midfielder needs to open up his body before receiving the ball signalling where exactly he wants the ball with his hands and voice as well. The angle given from the central midfielder is important to allow for better orientation of the field upon receiving the pass.

The type of delivery out to the winger should be varied (inside, laces, outside of both feet; driven along the ground, lofted to the winger's chest, curved into his path etc).

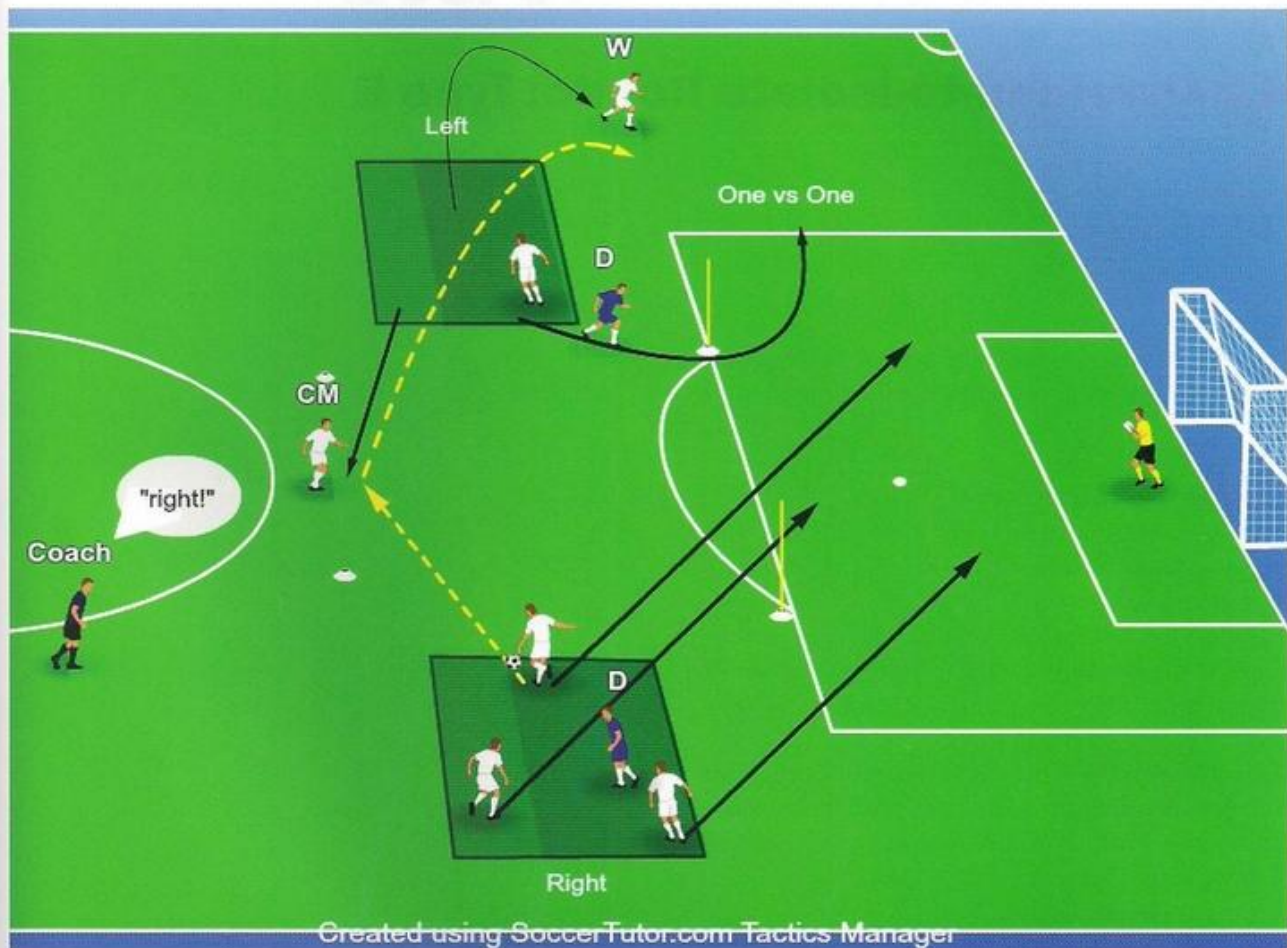
The winger's first touch should be out of his feet in a purposeful direction – this may be off at an angle towards goal or directly into space. Then the winger needs to decide between beating his defender one vs one using a variety of one vs one movements or delivering one of the types of cross early.

A variety of crossing types should be coached:

1. Whipped in behind the defenders into the corridor between the goalkeeper and defensive line
2. Driven at one height across the box
3. Cut back with disguise
4. Lofted into a deep area (into the weak-side winger perhaps?)
5. Curved into a back post area (Beckham)
6. Whipped into the front post area

The attackers entering the box are to be aware of their movements as a collective and what spaces they are filling to meet crosses





### Variations / Progressions

The signal for the overload-to-isolate action to occur can be from a coaches call, a number of passes made or once one team loses the ball (the team that loses the ball to its defender is to be the team switching and crossing the ball). This session can be carried out with different numbers with ease and can even include a third rondo within the 18-yard box of which the three attackers would instantly become defenders and the defender in that rondo would join the attack. From here it becomes easy to alter the one vs one scenario and where the defender comes from (which angle he takes towards the winger).

### Key Learning Focus

To learn the language of Overload-to-Isolate and some of the technical components interlaced with the language.



# SECTION 4. OVERLOAD-TO-ISOLATE (O-I)

## 4.2 Overload-to-Isolate Rondo: Type B

### Set Up

Two possession boxes of around 8x8 to 12x12-yards depending on numbers, age and ability. The boxes are divided by a space suggested of at least 10 yards in width. There should then be two mini-goals (or representative) around 10 yards ahead of each possession box.

### Session Narrative

There are various positional rules involved in this session's narrative. In the example on the right hand side image we see a three vs. one rondo on the far right, a left-sided central defender and a left-sided central midfielder taking up angles of support for when the three vs one rondo look to play out to the other side.

Upon the third pass in the rondo, the second defender is to come in and make the rondo three vs two. The rondo must find a way out of this situation and across to the other side of the field as quickly as possible through one of the two supporting players centrally.

The defender on the line of the other possession box can only move left or right to try and block the pass into the target player on the far side. Once the target player has taken his first receiving touch then the defender can turn to leave his line and put pressure on the ball. By this time the target player should be joined by the left-sided central defender and left-sided central midfielder.

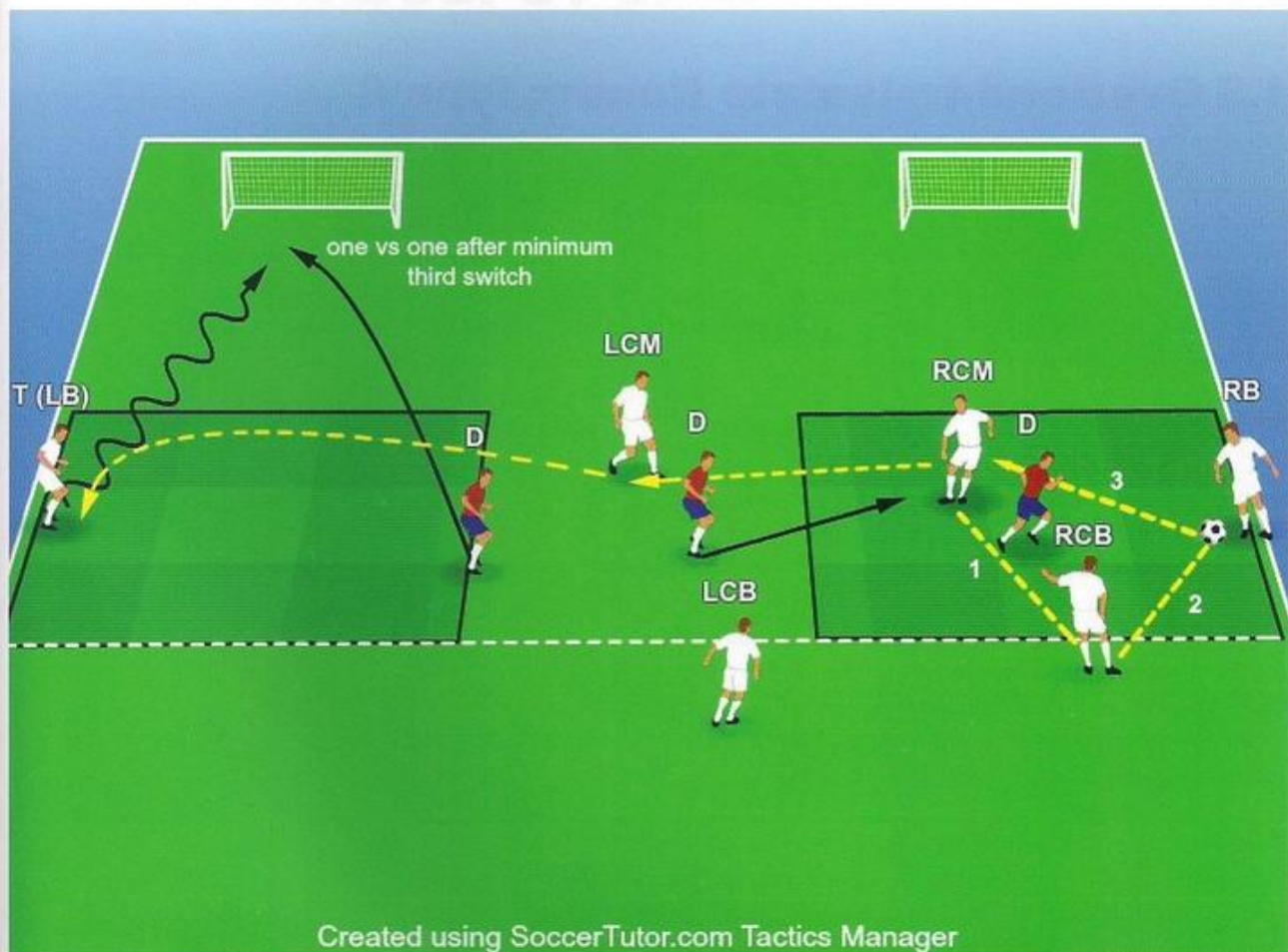
The session should mirror itself left to right. After three switches of play, the winger can choose to take his first touch out of the box towards the goal and the defender is to make his defensive run to try and win the ball back on the angle.

### Coaching Details

The coach should concentrate his points on ways to get out of situations and ways across to the weak side of the field.

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### Variations / Progressions

The number of switches before the one vs one action is variable and can be decided by the players (and for the defender to react naturally to whether the target player's decision).

### Key Learning Focus

Finding ways to get out of situations where defenders are being dragged out over to your overload.



## SECTION 4. OVERLOAD-TO-ISOLATE (O-I)

### 4.3 Overload-to-Isolate Rondo: Type C

#### Set Up

Two rondo boxes set up back to back. The size of the box depends on the number of players, playing ability and age of the players. In this example the box is set at a minimum of 12x12-yards given the number of players.

#### Session Narrative

The ball is in one of the two rondo boxes and cannot be transferred to the other side until the players reach a minimum pass target (four passes).

The players are to take up positions as shown: three neutral and fixed players make up the two targets at either end and the central midfielder. The four players on the outside alongside their one player inside and five players in the middle change depending on who is in possession.

If the white team has the ball, then the whites take up the wide spaces (two on each side) but the second a blue player wins the ball then they should look to play to any of the three neutral (yellow) players and sprint out and take up the wide positions as the white players sprint in and take up the central defending positions.

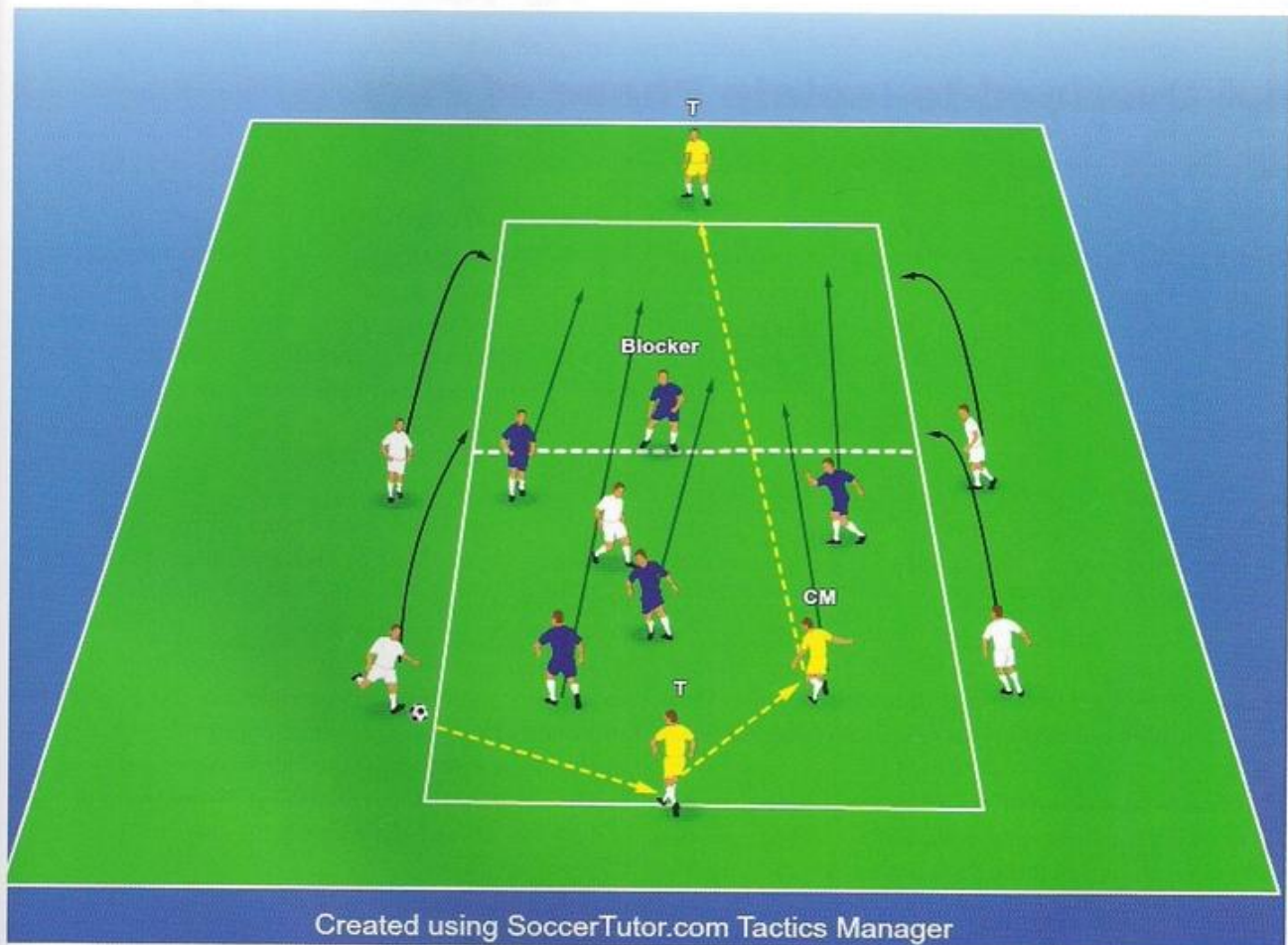
All players apart from the far target player are to be in the same box as the ball is in and cannot enter the other side until the ball is switched. Using this format it is important that you instruct the defending side to keep one player along the blocking line sliding right to left

#### Coaching Details

The coach is looking for tempo, supporting angles, movement to find space and manipulation of the defenders through movement of the ball and positioning. The coach is responsible to demand high levels of intensity and action – keep a supply of balls and make sure the transitions happen as quickly as possible, with no delay.

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### Variations / Progressions

The numbers involved in this session is flexible. You may use two less players and achieve the same format by removing the blocker and the central white player for example.

The coach may impose limitations on player touches (minimum or maximum) and can individualise these limitations to meet the development needs of the individual.

### Key Learning Focus

Learning to play within pressure and finding a way out of it towards an isolated player.



## SECTION 4. OVERLOAD-TO-ISOLATE (O-I)

### 4.4 Overload-to-Isolate Phase of Play

#### Set Up

This phase of play requires one full size goal at one end and three mini-goals (or representatives) at the other end. There should be three vertical spaces marked out and a defensive line that cannot be broken without one of the tasks being carried out before.

#### Session Narrative

The white team is attacking the large size goal and penalty area. The blue team is defending these spaces and looking to attack the mini-goals.

The white team can only break the defensive line through an up-back-through or overload-to-isolate language. Until then the white team cannot enter the final 18-yards.

If the blue team win the ball, then they attack the mini-goals as stated but if they lose the ball (after winning it) and the white team keeps the ball for three passes then the defensive line must drop back to their line.

The white team should look to find one side of the field and make four or five passes before switching the ball (if the blue team are moved across) or constantly look for the up-back-through option as a direct alternative.

Goals can only be scored from within the 18-yard box.

#### Coaching Details

The white team is to try and manipulate the defending team by drawing them across. As a result, the white team will be looking at third line passes to draw players out of position with urgency (passes into the striker for example) or look to make runs through spaces left by the defending team.

Positioning should be highlighted thoroughly in this format.

FON + C (Forward, Opposite, Near (and Communicate)) should be encouraged by those players in front of the opposition midfield line. The FON + C method has been influenced by Clive Woodward's CTC methodology in improving player visual awareness within a specific playing style. Players are to look forwards before receiving the ball at the scenarios ahead of them, opposite of the ball (to the weak-side) and then near the ball to assess each scenario. Lastly players should communicate (non-verbally and verbally) the information they've collected.

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### Variations / Progressions

The coach can vary much of this session: which languages can be used, how deep the defending team is to be set (think about the Switzerland vs Chile game scenario presented in theory section of this book) and variations of languages. Perhaps the coach will allow for any switch and slice action as an opposite response to an overload-to-isolate. The coach is paint the picture of opposites: up-turn-shoot vs up-back-through, overload-to-isolate vs switch and slice etc.

### Key Learning Focus

Placing the overload-to-isolate into game context



## SECTION 4. OVERLOAD-TO-ISOLATE (O-I)

### 4.5 Overload-to-Isolate Small Sided Game

#### Set Up

A small sided game set up into thirds and then the central third is split in half. Two wide channels complete the design of the session setup.

#### Session Narrative

As with all small-sided games in this book players are locked into zones unless triggered. The first and final third are made up of a striker, a central defender and a goalkeeper. The middle third consists of four midfielders on each team and then a neutral player (who will play on the side that has possession).

There are a variety of ways teams can unlock opportunities to shoot:

1. The ball is played up to a striker who is allowed space to turn and shoot
2. The ball is played up to a striker who is marked and therefore an up-back-through language is initiated
3. The overload-to-isolate language is used and releasing the weak-side winger into the final third

The midfield is to take the ball to one of the two sides. The in-possession team must have both its wingers in the wide channels (the weak-side winger takes up a position in line with the final third entry line). The neutral player must always be in the box with the ball along with at least one of the two central midfielders. The defensive team can only commit three players to one box and must leave one of their wingers on the line of the split down the middle of the middle third. This winger on the defending side can only leave this split if the ball is transferred to the other side or the language of overload-to-isolate is initiated. Once the overload-to-isolate language is used, the defender along this line can turn and sprint to become the second defender (making a defensive run to try and put pressure on the weak-side winger who has entered the final third).

#### Coaching Details

The coach is to detail ways of playing out of pressure and within it: movement, types of pass, ways to manipulate the position of defenders and then employ the specific principles of play as outlined in this book.

FON + C (Forward, Opposite, Near (and Communicate)) should be encouraged by those players in front of the opposition midfield line. The FON + C method has been influenced by Clive Woodward's CTC methodology in improving player visual awareness within a specific playing style. Players are to look forwards before receiving the ball at the scenarios ahead of them, opposite of the ball (to the weak-side) and then near the ball to assess each scenario. Lastly players should communicate (non-verbally and verbally) the information they've collected.

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### Variations / Progressions

The coach may add 'wall-passes' off of the striker to the list of ways that can unlock an opportunity to shoot.

There can be a rule introduced that means a team must make a minimum number of passes before switching the ball out to the weak-side winger.

### Key Learning Focus

Learning to use the overload-to-isolate language through pressure



## SECTION 4. OVERLOAD-TO-ISOLATE (O-I)

### 4.6 Overload-to-Isolate Game + Competitive Technical Task or Exercise

#### Set Up

Two pitches set up with a channel between them that is at least 8-10 yards in width. Mini-goals at each end of either pitch. A source of balls at either end to allow for continuous play. In the central channel a one vs one challenge is set up.

#### Session Narrative

In this example there are two teams of seven (14 players). Each team numbers their players one to seven and players are to remember their number with importance.

One pitch should begin with six vs six and the other one vs one. For the purposes of explanation, numbers one to six begin on one pitch and numbers seven begin on the other. This session works best with at least two coaches. Once to touch one of the two games (with minimal interference of play) and one to manage the central corridor ('the task corridor').

The coach in the task corridor should call out a number ("number six") and both players numbered six will race to the task corridor to carry out the one vs one challenge. One player will win the challenge and one will lose. The winning player will sprint immediately into the other field (making it two vs one) and the losing player of the challenge will need to wait for his entrance into the game. This means that there is a temporary overload on the second pitch.

In the example given the task corridor challenge is a one vs one into gates. The winner enters the next game immediately and the losing player will complete a further challenge (thirty juggles / kick ups) until he can enter the next game.

The coach then calls a different number to move across from one field to another. This can be from either field.

#### Coaching Details

The coaches should adopt an approach of 'coaching in the shadows' to avoid interference of the session flow. By pulling players aside and talking to them individually you further add to the overloads and underloads theme that is incorporated in this session narrative.

Players are to work on using overloads, protecting the ball in underloads and one vs one skills.

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# SECTION 5. ROTATIONS

## 5.1 Under and Over Rotation

### Set Up

A 12x12-yards box split into four with flat discs.

### Session Narrative

This session is directional (north to south and back or west to east and back depending on who is in possession) and looks at the rotation and collective movement of two players (two central midfielders, a midfielder and a striker, a winger and a midfielder etc). The objective is to get the ball from one end to the other through a player centrally, the ball must always go via a player centrally and cannot go direct from one end to the other.

### Coaching Details

The coach should highlight the relationships of movement and positioning between two players.

One right, one left, one high and one low is the initial ruling to be followed and for movement to work within. The first step is for players to understand their movements in relationship to one another in a linear manner. When one player drops low, the other is to go high, when one player comes across to the left, the other should go right etc.

From there we are looking at tertiary movement. For example, the player may be in the top right box and come down to the bottom right (forcing the other player across to the bottom left box and then up to the top left). Once the pass doesn't come in then the player in the bottom right may now move across to the bottom left (creating a checkmark/'tick'  movement) while the other player circles out to the top right.

Then we can look at two circular rotations: under and over vs over and under.

Under and then Over looks at the team rotating in a way that the player at the bottom makes a forward run to the top left from the bottom right (clockwise) and the other player comes over the top (to receive the ball behind lines).

Over and Under looks at the player in the bottom right rotating in an anti-clockwise motion and the player in the top left comes on to the ball (and can play forwards with his first touch).

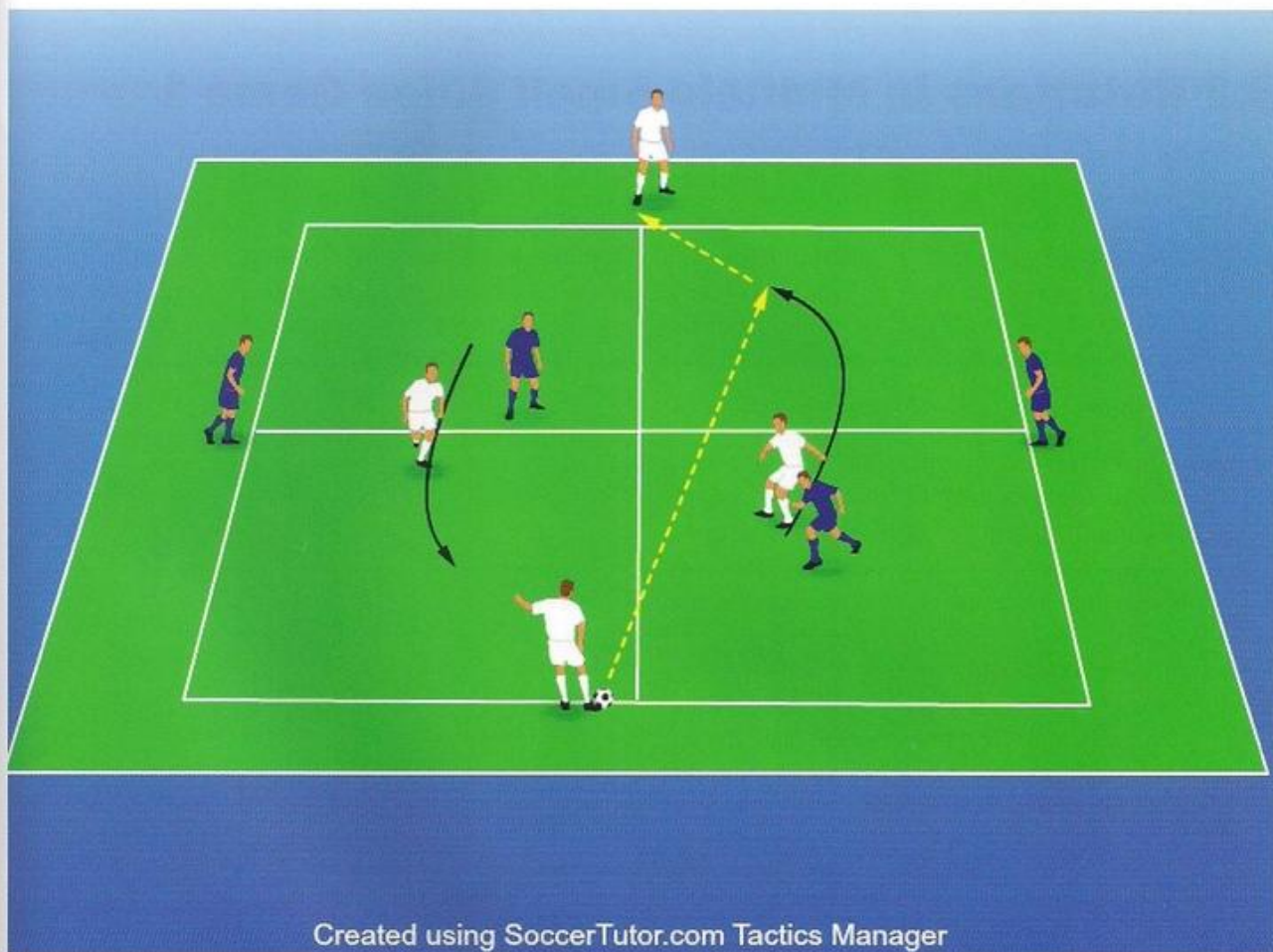
Players are to also work on an individual level with double and triple movements to lose his man.

Coaches must make sure good body shape be maintained (hips and shoulders open to the desired direction of playing in).

If a player bounces the ball back to the same player at the bottom that means the he cannot play forwards (as he is pressed) and a rotation should follow.

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### Variations / Progressions

This session can be carried out with two players at either end (including a switch ball between two central defenders) and between three midfielders in the middle in a three vs three. You can also look at the midfield diamond if we tilt the cross dividing up the spaces into an 'X'.

### Key Learning Focus

Learning to move as a collective in rotation



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# SECTION 5. ROTATIONS

## 5.2 Rotations in Midfield Small Sided Game 1

### Set Up

This pitch is set up to be in a 15x20 to 20x30-yard space for the three vs three in the centre (to be realistic for a midfield three in an 11v11). There should then be a wide channel on each side of a few yards and then a 5-yard channel behind the goal.

### Session Narrative

The game exists between three vs three in the centre to represent the three vs three in midfield that can exist in #1-4-3-3 based formations. The central defenders and fullbacks must stay outside of the central space at all times.

The central defenders should circulate the ball behind the goal (hence why at least 5-yards is expected as the channel behind each goal). The white team can circulate the ball from fullback to fullback via central defenders (and cannot skip players in this circulation) but the objective is to try and feed the ball into the three vs three in midfield. Any of the four can play the ball into midfield.

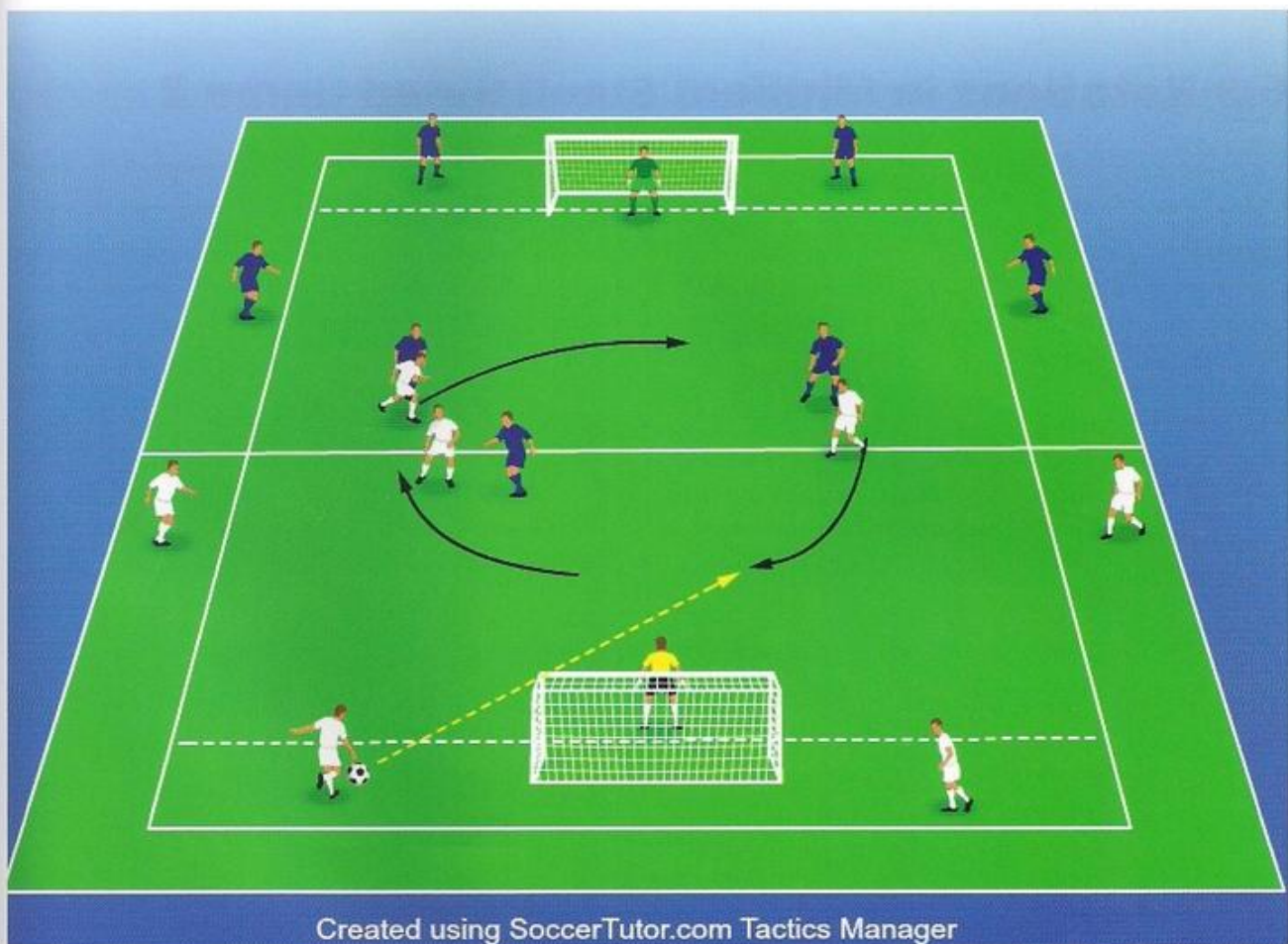
Once the midfielders have received the ball, they can play backwards to one of the back four or work out a way to get a strike on goal.

### Coaching Details

The supporting angles of each of the back four should be considered as a starting point and from there the coach is to coach collective movement between three players. It might be that the three try to isolate a two vs two and one vs one through structured movements.

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### Variations / Progressions

The coach might impose a touch limitation (maximum or minimum) for any secondary learning objectives.

This session can be carried out for two vs two or four vs four depending on the 11 vs 11 formation preferred.

### Key Learning Focus

Central midfield collective movement and rotation to find space to play forwards



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# SECTION 5. ROTATIONS

## 5.3 Rotations in Midfield Small Sided Game 2

### Set Up

On a 30x30 to 44x40-yard pitch with a halfway line and central box clearly highlighted. The central box should be 15x12 to 20x16-yards in size depending on ability, age and number of players involved.

### Session Narrative

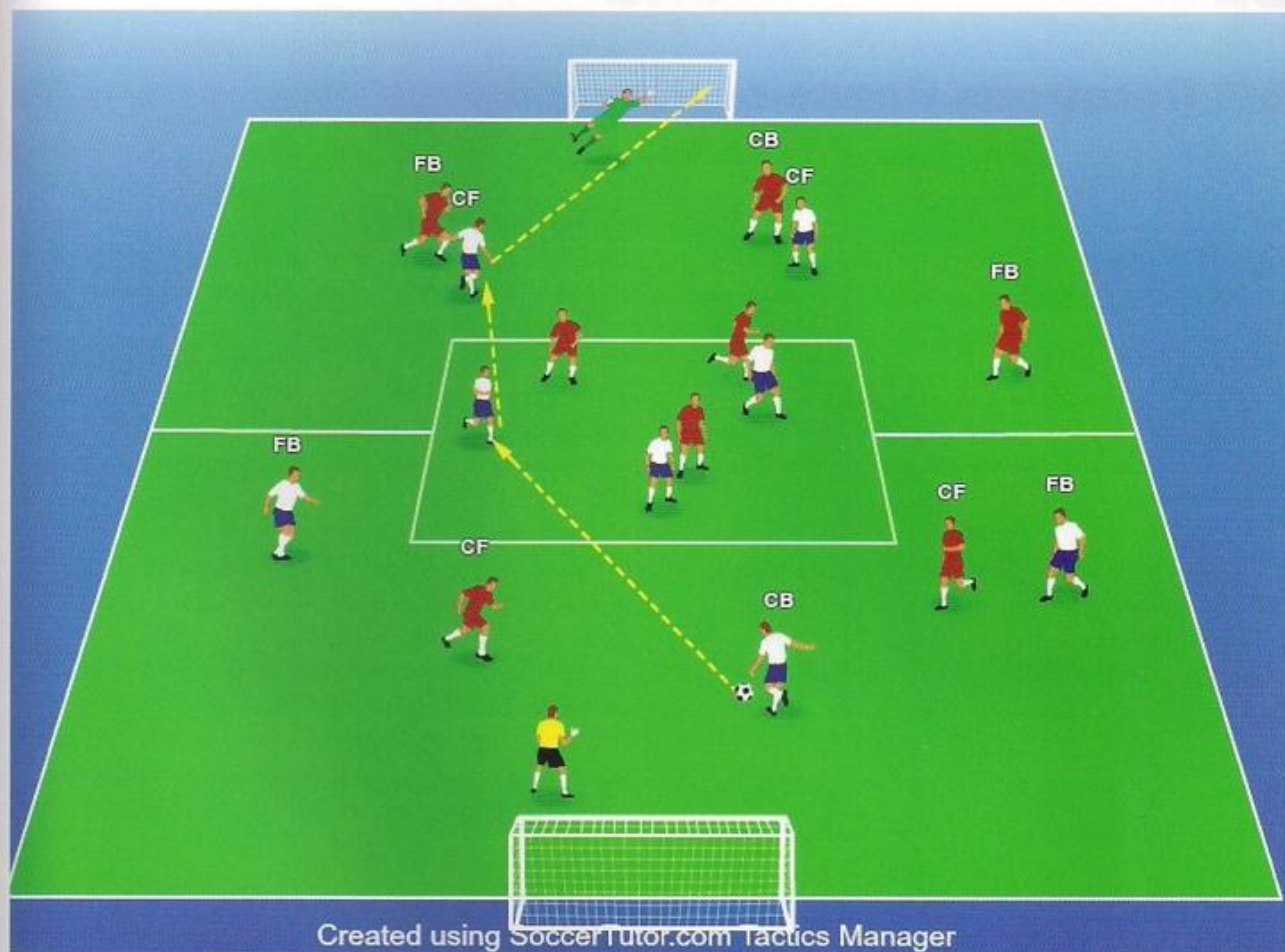
The four vs three (inclusive of the goalkeeper) must play through the midfield box before going through to one of the strikers to shoot on goal. Players are fixed to zone.

### Coaching Details

The collective movement of the three players to create space should be the coach's focus and the recognition of when to pass into a rotation from deeper players.

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### Variations / Progressions

Coaches can become more flexible with the rotation by allowing rotation between a striker and a midfielder in the box. Coaches may allow for midfielders and fullbacks to join in the attack once the striker has picked up the ball. If this is the case, then a transition management rule must be included (such as three passes by the team in possession to force the defensive team back into their shape).

### Key Learning Focus

Rotation in midfield (and strikers) to find space to play forwards.



# SECTION 5. ROTATIONS

## 5.4 Rotations Phase of Play

### Set Up

This phase of play is setup with two wide channels and an end zone with four mini-goals (or representatives).

### Session Narrative

There must always be at least one player in each wide channel and one player in the end zone for the attacking team. This will start as two wingers either side and a striker in the end zone.

The team can only score from the end zone and can only enter the end zone through a wall-pass from the striker or through dribbling into the end zone from the central area (cannot be done through the wide channels).

### Coaching Details

The following rotations can be encouraged:

1. Wide rotation between the fullback and winger (one inside and one outside)
2. Wide rotation between the fullback, winger and central midfielder
3. Rotation between the central midfield three
4. Rotation between the striker and a central midfielder
5. Rotation between two players in an under-over / over-under rotation
6. Full expansive rotation where both fullbacks take up wide advanced positions and both wingers advance into the end zone, freeing up the striker to drop into the central zone. This can only be done once the deep midfielder drops between two central defenders.
7. Any variation of the above – for example, a semi-full expansive rotation where one winger goes up alongside the striker and the other winger drops into the central zone.

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# SECTION 5. ROTATIONS

## 5.4 Rotations Phase of Play

### Set Up

This phase of play is setup with two wide channels and an end zone with four mini-goals (or representatives).

### Session Narrative

There must always be at least one player in each wide channel and one player in the end zone for the attacking team. This will start as two wingers either side and a striker in the end zone.

The team can only score from the end zone and can only enter the end zone through a wall-pass from the striker or through dribbling into the end zone from the central area (cannot be done through the wide channels).

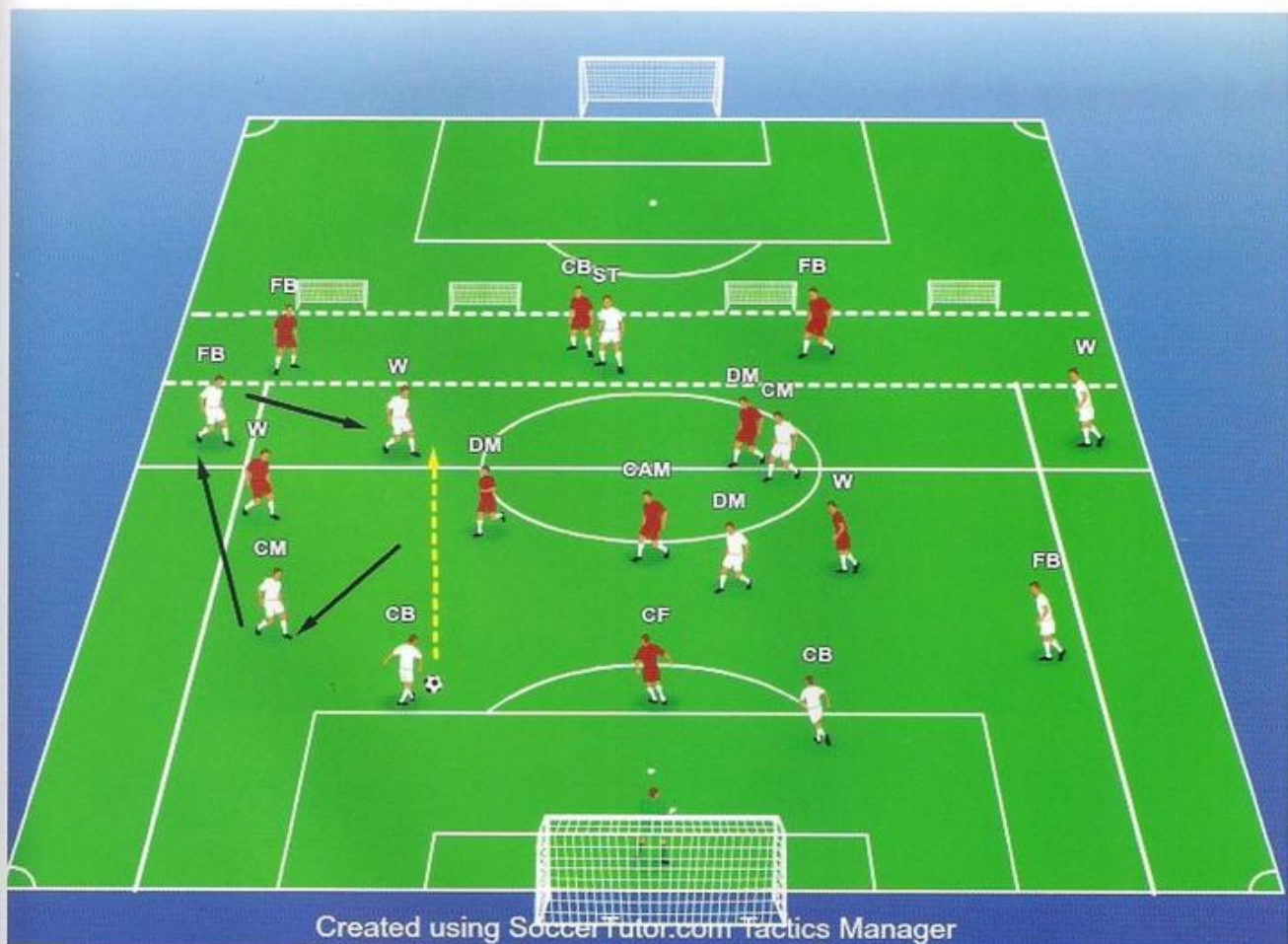
### Coaching Details

The following rotations can be encouraged:

1. Wide rotation between the fullback and winger (one inside and one outside)
2. Wide rotation between the fullback, winger and central midfielder
3. Rotation between the central midfield three
4. Rotation between the striker and a central midfielder
5. Rotation between two players in an under-over / over-under rotation
6. Full expansive rotation where both fullbacks take up wide advanced positions and both wingers advance into the end zone, freeing up the striker to drop into the central zone. This can only be done once the deep midfielder drops between two central defenders.
7. Any variation of the above – for example, a semi-full expansive rotation where one winger goes up alongside the striker and the other winger drops into the central zone.

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### Variations / Progressions

Repetition, Intensity / Speed of actions and then complexity.

### Key Learning Focus

Learning specific rotations in relation to formation to increase the number of advanced area actions



## SECTION 6. OVERLOADS

### 6.1 Rondo 3v1

#### Set Up and Session Narrative

Three vs one in an 8x8-yard area. Once the defender wins the ball he should change with the player that lost the ball immediately without delay. Should the players use a bib (pinny) then it is the responsibility of the defender to catch or pick the bib up and not the defender to hand it over.

#### Coaching Details

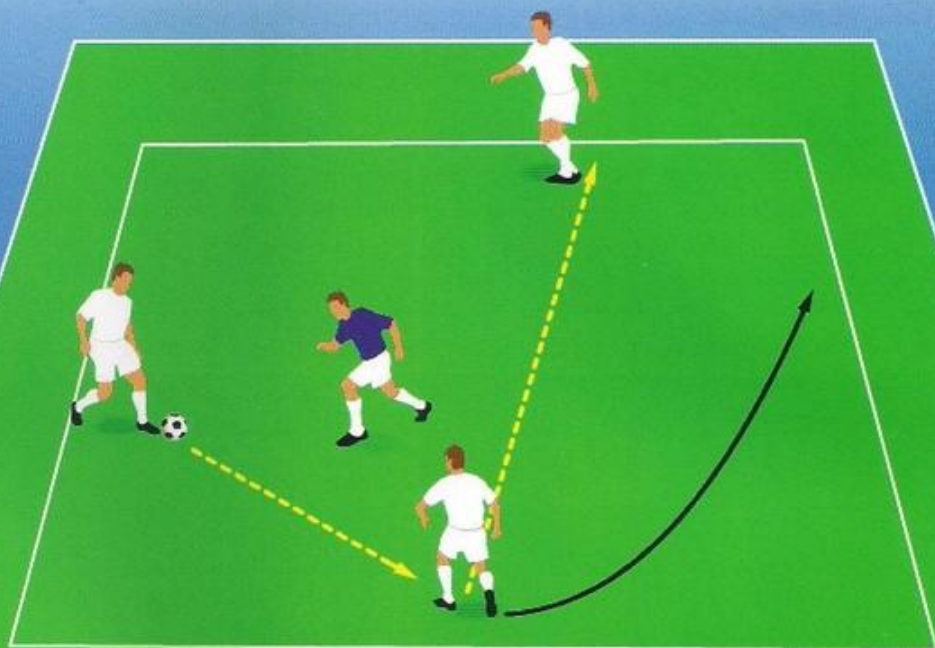
Typically, players will look to offer good supporting angles to the player on the ball and position themselves with an open body shape for the next action (to pass). Coaches should encourage one and two touch play.

Players are to learn how to manipulate the positioning of one defender with first line passes to draw a defender across and create space for a longer pass.

Coaches should encourage a variety of receiving techniques and fakes (movement / receiving)

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### Variations / Progressions

Players can vary the number of touches taken as with previous sessions of a similar format. Coaches can impose either a maximum or minimum number of touches taken per player or follow a pattern (one touch, two touch, one touch...)

### Key Learning Focus

Manipulation of a defender through different types of pass and positions



# SECTION 6. OVERLOADS

## 6.2 Rondo 4v4+2 (2v1)

### Set Up and Session Narrative

A space 12x12-yards split into four smaller squares. There are two neutral players who remain as neutral players throughout and then four vs four (whose positions are effected by who is in possession).

There can only ever be a maximum of two defenders in a square at any one time and up to three attacking players in a box, if both neutrals are in the same box.

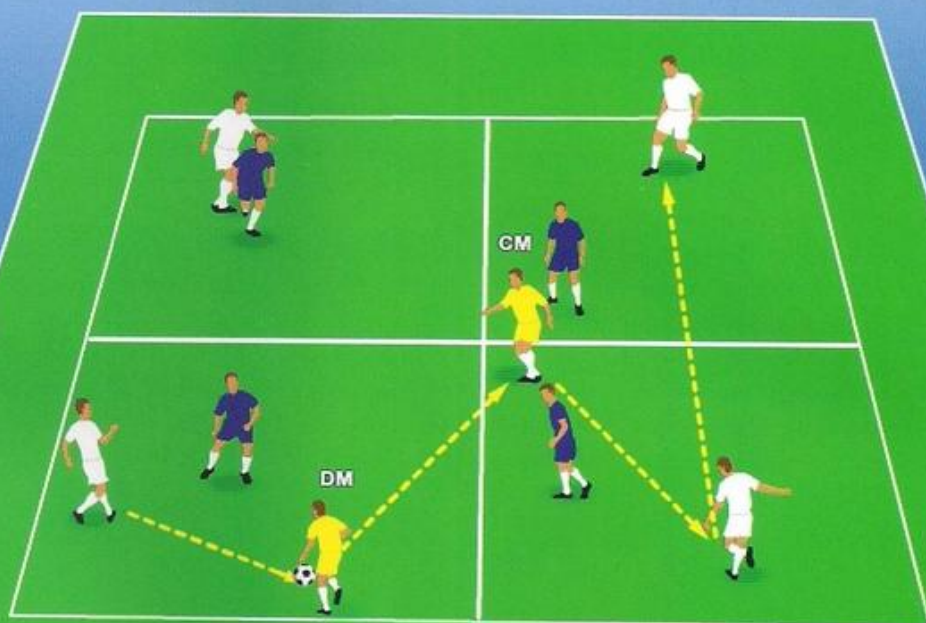
### Coaching Details

The attackers should look to find the spare man and recognise when the overload decreases, remembering that two vs one is more effective than three vs two.

Players become familiar with the idea of the spare man, manipulating the defenders organisation and isolating an overload.

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### Variations / Progressions

Limitations on touches taken (maximum, minimum or sequenced) and a minimum number of passes that have to be played in each space.

### Key Learning Focus

Recognising the appearance of overloads and the disappearance of overloads



# SECTION 6. OVERLOADS

## 6.3 Rondo 3v3+2

### Set Up and Session Narrative

A space of around 8x12-yards.

This session is three vs three with two neutral players on each side. The objective is to keep the ball through various coaching messages. Once the defensive team wins the ball, they should play out to one of the two neutral and sprint out to take up the positions of the attackers. The positions shown in the image to the right are for the purposes of contextualisation in terms of the rondo being directional.

### Coaching Details

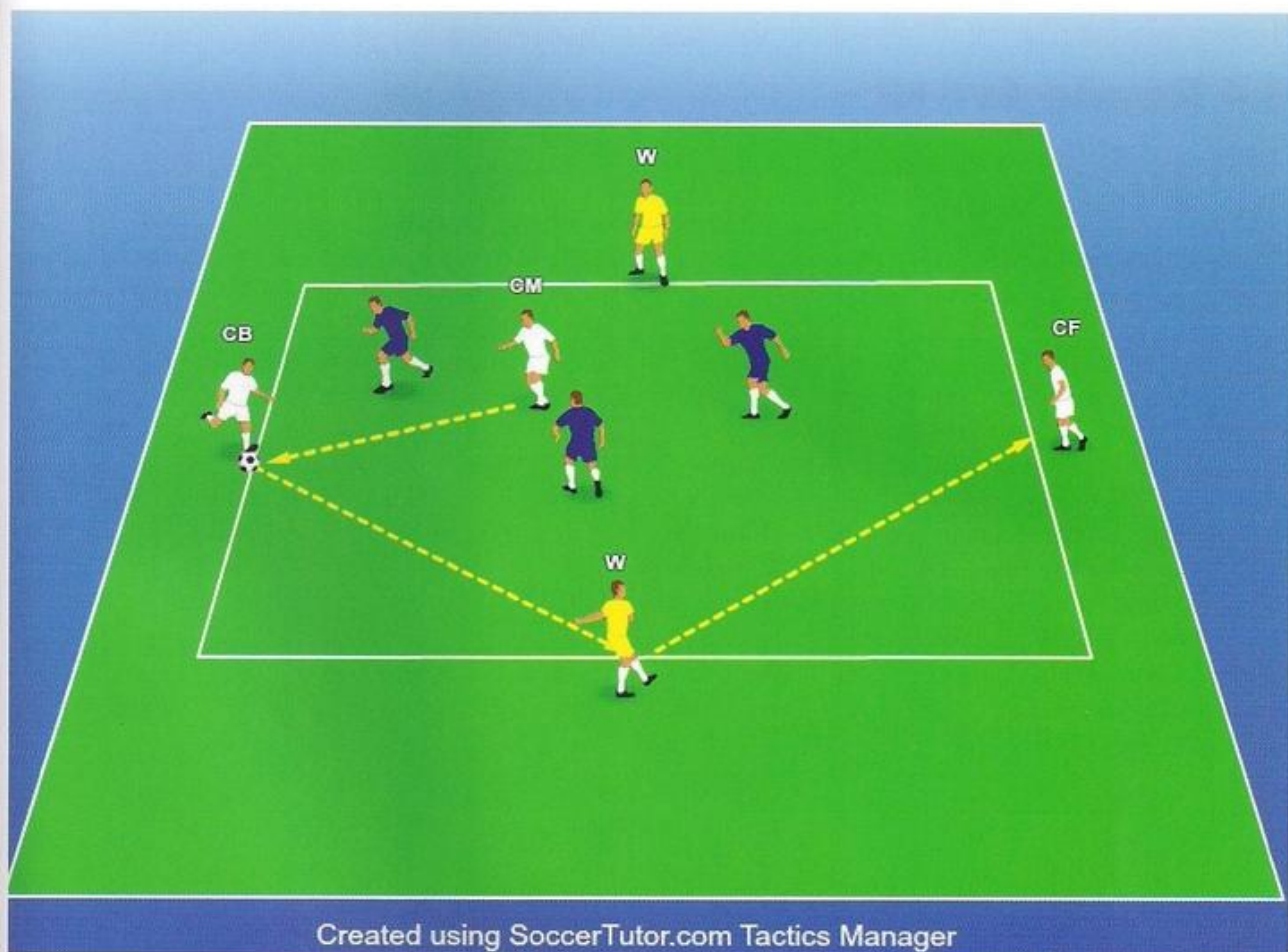
The transition should be highlighted and the value in speed of transition is of absolute importance.

Players will learn to play to the spare open man upon winning the ball (away from immediate pressure)

Good team play can only be possible if the individual technical components and strategies come together: orientation of body shape, supporting angles, good distancing and movement to support.

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### Variations / Progressions

Include another neutral centrally if one too many. The common limitations can be placed upon touches per player.

### Key Learning Focus

Playing out to a spare player on the attacking transition and create effective overloads



## SECTION 6. OVERLOADS

### 6.4 Rondo 4v4+3

#### Set Up

A space of at least 8x16-yards is advised as a starting point dependent on experience, ability and age of the players.

#### Session Narrative

Similar to the previous rondo, this session has a number of neutral players who do not transition into other positions. The four vs four are considered attack vs defence and upon winning the ball the attacking transition consists of the blue team taking up positions around the outside and the white team sprinting inside to try and win the ball. This rondo should be thought about as a directional rondo in terms of north to south and south to north. Upon winning the ball the defending team should pass to a neutral then transition to their attacking shape.

#### Coaching Details

A continuation of coaching principles should be carried through the rondos as we increase the numbers of those involved. The more defenders involved the more coaches should touch on strategies to manipulate the positioning of defenders and identifying the two vs one scenario as highlighted in the second chapter of the theory section in the book. Defenders are encouraged to try and intercept passes rather than tackle players and work together with the same principles as rondos detailed before.

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## SECTION 6. OVERLOADS

### 6.5 Rondo 6v6+3

#### Set Up

In a space of around 8x12 and 10x15-yards.

#### Session Narrative

Once again, this rondo is directional (north to south and mirrored back) and asks the attacking team to exercise the principles outlined to manipulate the positions of defenders and identify the two vs one scenarios as outlined in chapter two of the theory section of this book.

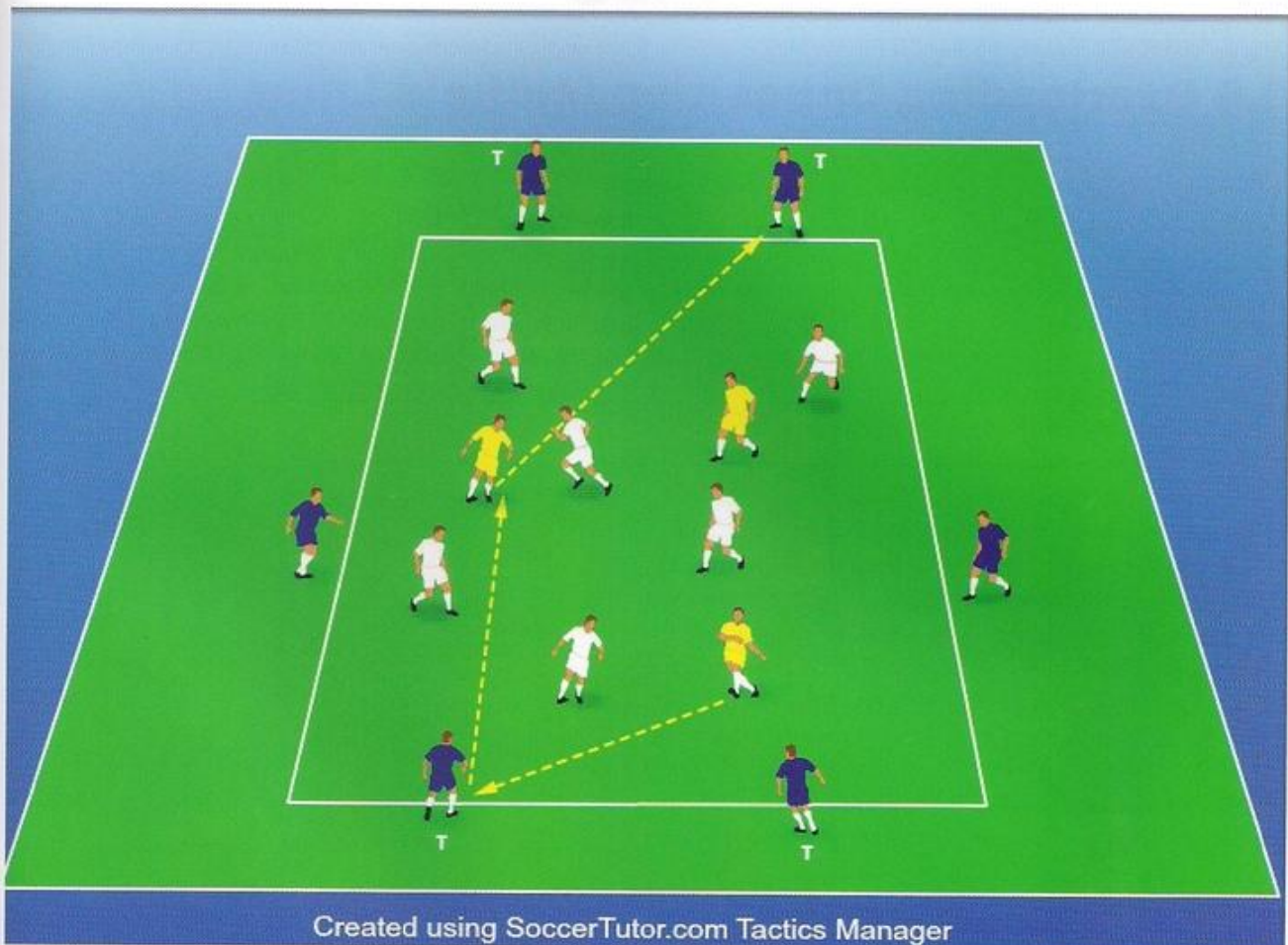
In this rondo the six players around the outside (attackers) are joined with three neutral players centrally against six defenders centrally. Upon winning the ball the defenders should pass the ball to a neutral and transition quickly to attacking positions.

#### Coaching Details

Angles of support, movement of the individual to find space, rotation, different types of pass to manipulate the position of defenders and so on. The rondos series as presented in this book are a buildup of complexity where the coaching information is a continued thread throughout.

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### Variations / Progressions

Repetition. Increase intensity and speed then complexity

### Key Learning Focus

Identifying, finding and creating the penetrative two vs one principles and scenarios

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# SECTION 6. OVERLOADS

## 6.6 Overloading Opposition Midfield Lines

### Set Up

Two 8x8-yard boxes back to back with four mini-goals (or representatives) set back around 6-yards from the 8x16-yard marked out space.

### Session Narrative

This session has been inspired by the theory given in the #1-3-4-2-1 chapter in the theory section of the book.

The objective is for the defenders to play through one of the four midfielders and get the ball to the central forward at the top of the rondo. Once the ball is played up to the striker, then the striker should play back to one of the defenders directly (around, through or over the four vs three in the centre). Each time the attacking team manages to get the ball to their striker they will gain one point.

The defending team are to win the ball and shoot into one of the four goals to gain three points. Once the attacking team regains the ball, they should look to reset the play by playing back to a defender before going forwards again. Defenders can move freely between boxes.

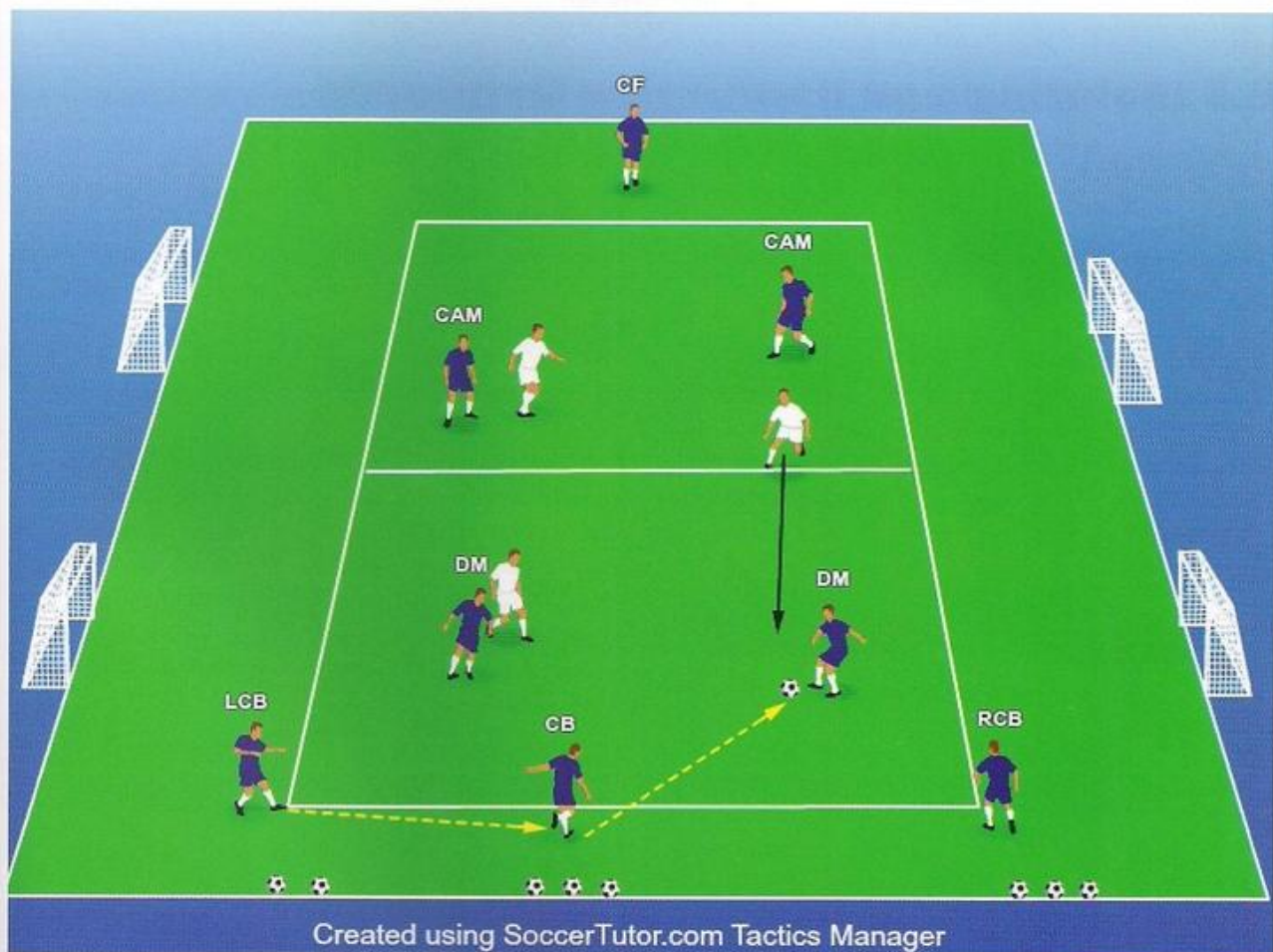
The deep midfielders should stay in shape (two in first box) and the attacking midfielders too (two in the second box) unless triggered by any rotation. The defenders can play into any of the four central midfielders.

### Coaching Details

The principles as outlined in chapter fifteen (page 122) of this book should be coached. Detailing how four midfielders can draw out the opposition midfielder and exploit spaces further afield. Additional points can be rewarded to the attacking team should they pass through both boxes.

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### Variations / Progressions

Various rotations can be used from rotating into a diamond midfield and the rotation between an attacking midfielder and central forward can be included. The coach can instead paint a picture of one of the two central attacking midfielders being a winger dropping inside to central spaces and forming the same shape through animation.

### Key Learning Focus

How to use an overload of four against three in central midfielder areas

## SECTION 6. OVERLOADS

### 6.7 Isolating and Identifying Overloads

#### Set Up

On a small-sided game pitch that typically has length to it to ensure the objectives are emphasised.

#### Session Narrative

This small-sided game is played with normal rules, only once the ball is lost the player who lost the ball should sprint to the furthest corner and complete the task given. In the example above the player is to sprint in and out of the poles before re-entering play.

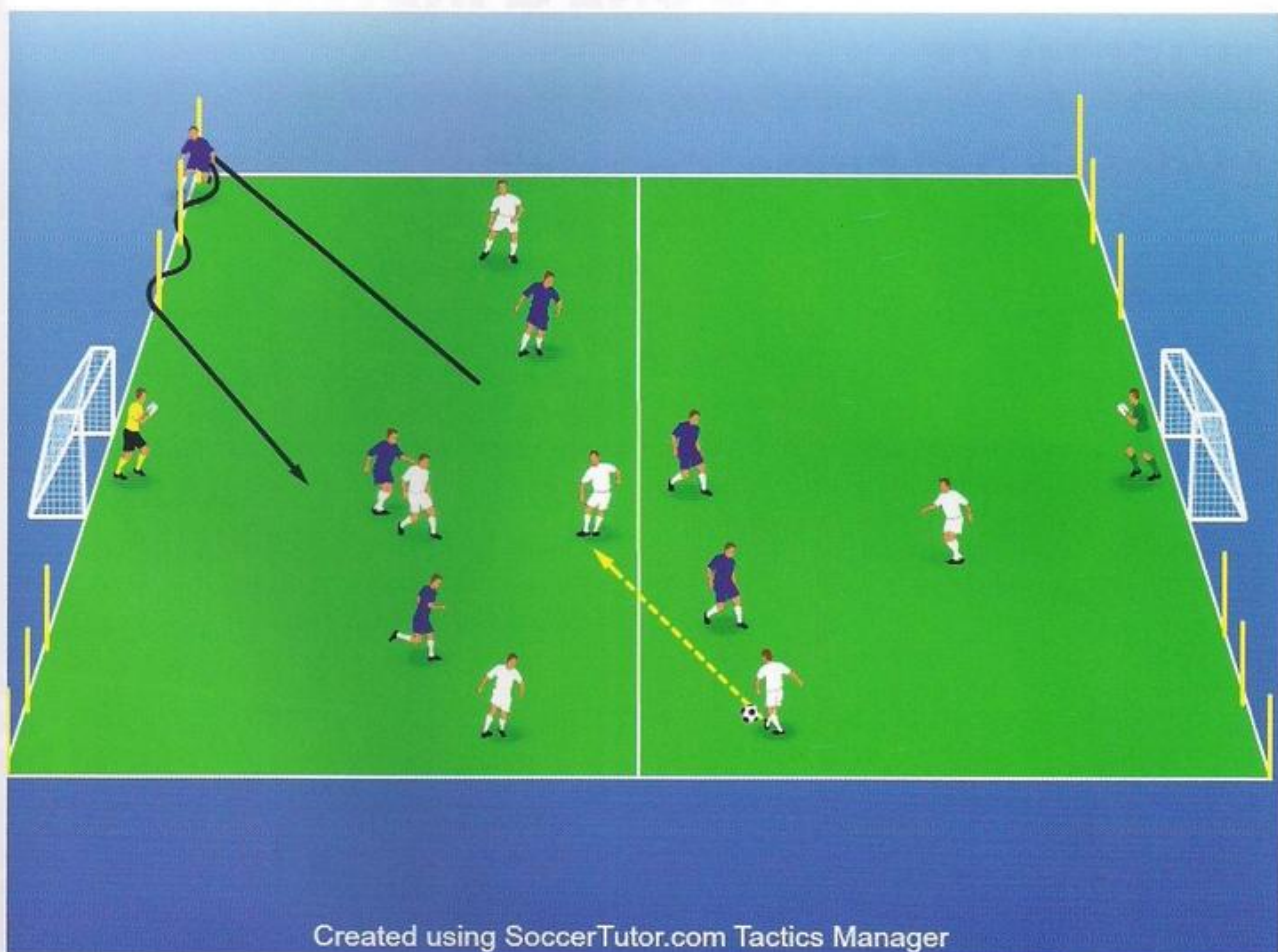
#### Coaching Details

Players are encouraged to exploit the moment use advantageous overloads upon winning the ball. Players need to start to recognise not only where the overload is but how best to use this moment to bring about goal-scoring opportunities through advanced area actions.

Note that since there are less defenders in the moment of a player performing a task in the corner of the field, you should take more risk in possession where overloads occur due to numbers now around the ball to recover the ball upon losing it. It may be advisable to promote a rule whereby the player who lost the ball only has to perform his task in the furthest corner of the field if the ball is not recovered by his team within 3 seconds.

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### Variations / Progressions

The task to be carried out by the player who lost the ball can meet any technical or physical objectives planned off the field too.

### Key Learning Focus

Identifying the moment and how best to use the overload

# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.1 One vs One Bielsa (Crossing)

### Set Up

Along the 18-yard box a second line should be added around 1-yard from the line.

### Session Narrative

A firm favourite of Marcelo Bielsa and used also by many of his former players and admirers from Eduardo Berizzo to Tim Lees. The objective is to provide a scenario to two players where one is working to try and find space to cross and the other is looking to block the cross.

Players must stay as close to their line as possible and cannot cross the line. The defender works off the line of the 18-yard box and the attacker along the new line

### Coaching Details

The attacking player should first look at the acceleration and deceleration techniques used with the ball to find half a yard to cross the ball. The attacker can use either foot to deliver the cross but both feet are to be used. Most examples see the attacker go down the line and use his relevant foot for an out-swinging cross.

The defender must look to keep his eyes on the ball and not turn his back to the ball to block any cross (as this can be taken advantage of with a faked cross).

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### Variations / Progressions

The attacker can be challenged to deliver specific types of cross: whipped, driven, lofted (chipped), cutback and so on. The coach can add in targets for delivery – either goals or defenders who are to clear the ball etc.

### Key Learning Focus

Winning the wide area one vs one

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# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.2 One vs One Bielsa (Shooting)

### Set Up

Along the 18-yard box a second line should be added around 1-yard from the line.

### Session Narrative

As with the previous session, this session narrative is one widely used by Bielsa at all the clubs he coaches. Bielsa likes to design sessions that demand explosive actions and fit within a wider pattern of play.

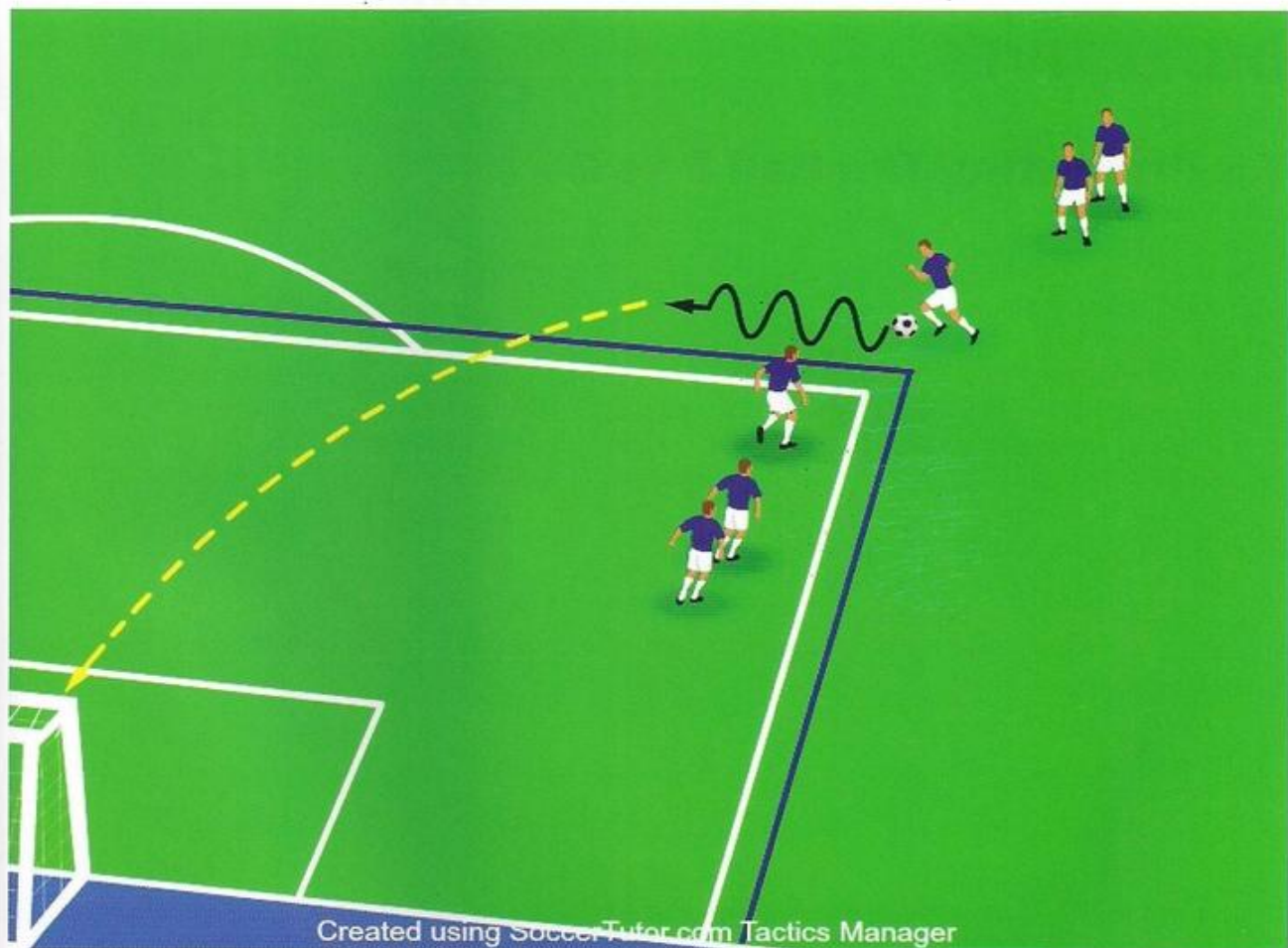
This session follows the same rules as the previous session only the attacker must look to find an opportunity to shoot and the defender must block the shot.

### Coaching Details

The attacking player must now work off a similar skill-set but in execution towards a shot. Use of the sole of the foot, various turn types and fake-movements are encouraged.

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### Variations / Progressions

The coach can vary the type of finish by positioning a mannequin as a goalkeeper or using an actual goalkeeper and altering the positioning of that player. There should be a variation in types of shot: chip, placement, power, curled, dripped etc.

The coach can also create a situation where a player is to receive the ball and then go into this particular one vs one scenario too, rather than starting from a standstill position

### Key Learning Focus

Winning the one vs one at the edge of the 18-yard box

# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.3 Protecting The Ball 3 vs 2

### Set Up

In a space of around 10x10-yards.

### Session Narrative

A session carried out by Pepijn Lijnders often at FC Porto whereby players would practice their one vs one skill-set under pressure.

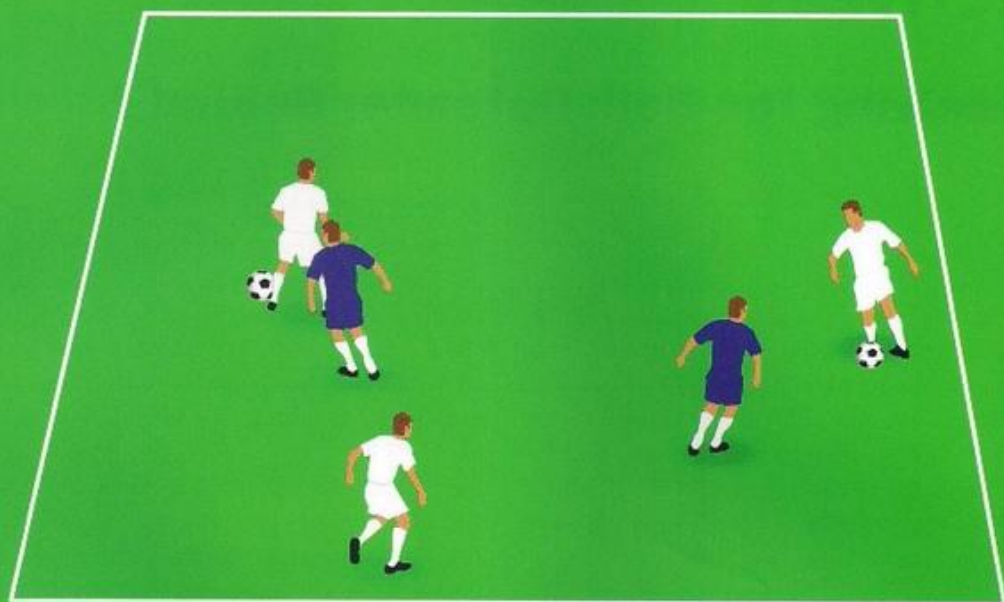
Players are to take a minimum number of touches or perform a minimum number of one vs one skills before finding the spare man. Often players will need to go beyond the minimum as the spare man is not available to both players at the same time.

### Coaching Details

Players are to become comfortable at playing out from pressure and protecting the ball. Protection and getting free skill movements are encouraged: Cruyff turns, U-turns, V-drags, V-drags behind the standing leg, Maradona-turns, step overs, rolling the ball and protecting the ball etc.

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Created using SoccerTutor.com Tactics Manager

### Variations / Progressions

The coach can design a larger scaled session with more randomness of who the defenders are and where they come from (varying the one vs one receiving scenario)

### Key Learning Focus

Learning to protect the ball and outplay the opponent

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# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.4 Receiving The Ball: Defender Behind 1

### Set Up

This session requires five players for it to be continuous but can be with less. There needs to be two gates on either side, one pole at the beginning of the circuit, a mannequin, three cones and an end zone marked out. The typical length of the space used is around 15 to 18-yards, the typical width is of around 10-yards. Credit for this session design must go to Tim Lees and more can be found out about his methodology in his book 'Developing an Elite Coaching Philosophy in Possession' available from the website [www.PlayFromTheBack.com](http://www.PlayFromTheBack.com)

### Session Narrative

The session begins with the player at the bottom of the exercise who must push the ball past the pole and get his head up to trigger movement.

The central player is to start behind the mannequin and look to make a movement either side to receive the ball. Upon the pass from the player at the bottom, the defender at the top can begin his sprint to press the receiving player from behind. The distance should be set so he gets there just in time for the first touch of the receiving player (you can manipulate this by setting the starting cone further back or adding in a cone he must make his run around to create an angle – as shown in the diagram).

The receiving player then has five seconds to try and dribble through one of the two wide gates or into the end zone. The player receives two points by dribbling into the end zone and one point by dribbling into one of the gates.

The player who passed the initial pass then becomes the receiving player, the receiving player then joins the back and waits his turn to become the pressing defender and the player that just pressed as a defender then becomes next in line to pass the ball into the receiving player.

### Coaching Details

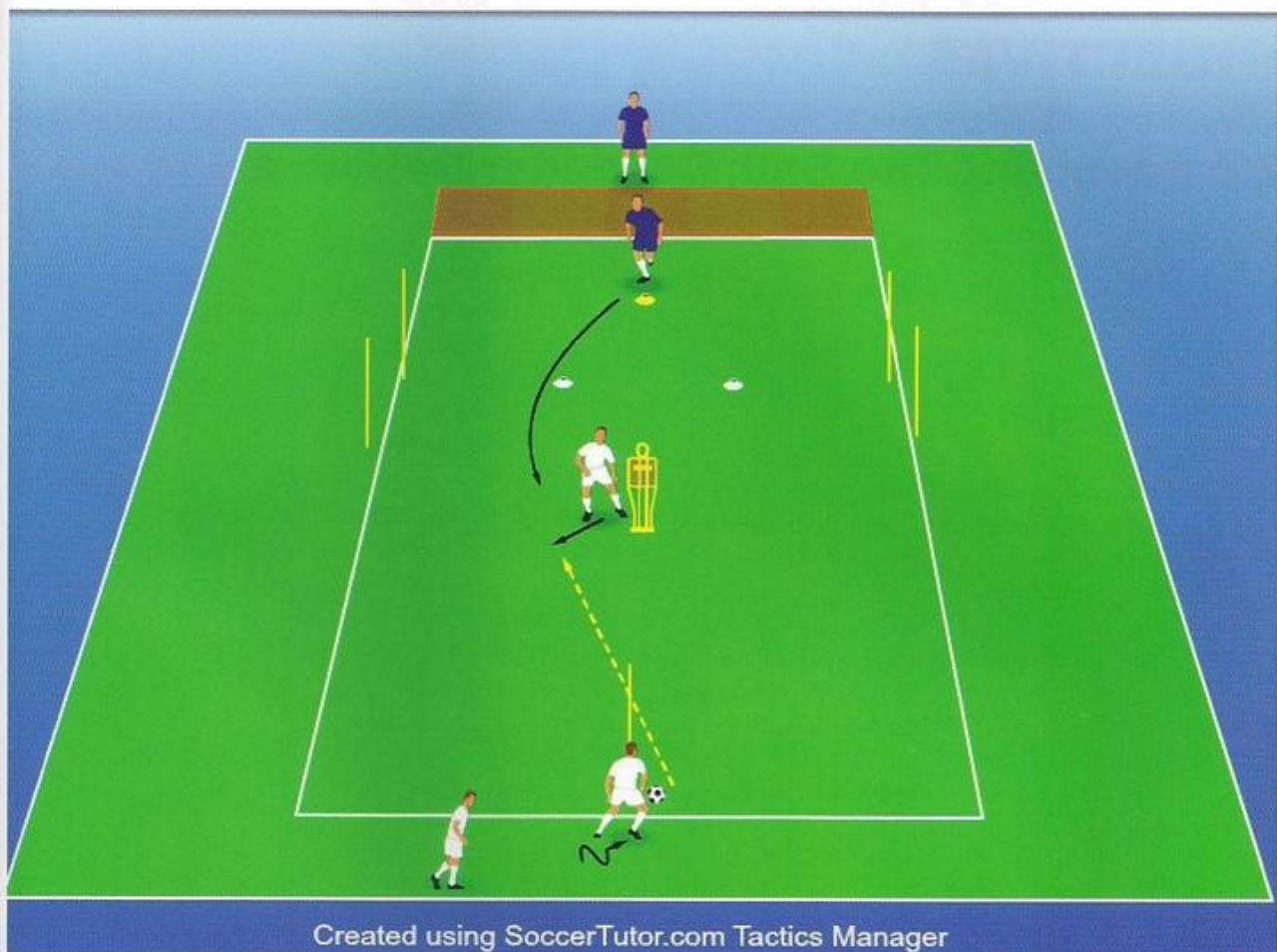
The receiving player is to practice a number of receiving skills and immediate one vs one skills to outplay his opponent. Whether the receiving player can turn, needs to receive with the outside of his furthest foot from the pressing player or can take a no-touch turn depends on his identification of what type of press is coming and the defender's body shape.

The defender should begin his approach fast, slowdown, then turn sideways, and get low. "Fast, slow, sideways, low". If the attacker can recognise deficiencies in his defender's approach, then he can exploit the defender upon receiving the ball.

This session combined with creating similar scenarios in small-sided games or phases of play has been the most effective way to educate players to improve their ball retention success rate and have players learn to trust one another to pass to players even when marked.

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### Variations / Progressions

The distance the initial pass and the type of pass the player should receive are highly variable. The session can be stretched right out so the receiving player is to receive a 20-yard pass if necessary but then the remaining distances must be considered as well (between the pressing defender and the receiving player).

### Key Learning Focus

Learning to win the one vs one (defender behind scenario)

# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.5 Receiving The Ball: Defender Behind 2

### Set Up

A space of around 6x12-yards with rectangles added at each end of 3-yards. This session needs five players for continuous flow.

### Session Narrative

This session isn't complicated if explained well to players but can come across as overly complex if not done well. The player at either end is to be a target (north-south and south-north) and the objective is to take the ball from one end to the other in a continuous exercise.

There is a one vs one scenario in the centre where one player is to receive the ball and look to play the ball into the target player at the end. The defender is looking to win the ball and play into any of the two ends. When the defender wins the ball and plays to one of the two ends he becomes the attacker and the player that lost the ball becomes the defender.

The fifth player is to wait in the rectangular box and cannot enter the one vs one scenario (two make it two vs one) until the receiving player has taken two touches. After entering the play any of the two can play into the target player at the end. Whichever player DID pass the ball into the target player stays as the attacking player in the centre, the player that DID NOT pass the ball to the target player must race over to the target player and play a wall-pass with the ball and then swap positions with him.

That is to say you may play the ball into the receiving player, he might turn his defender and then play directly into the target player. If that is the case then you have to run to the other target player, play a one-two with him in the rectangular space and swap positions. You will then become the target player and he is released to possibly join in the two vs one (after the receiving player has taken his second touch).

These changes allow for high levels of concentration and collective coordination but also for the session format to flow.

### Coaching Details

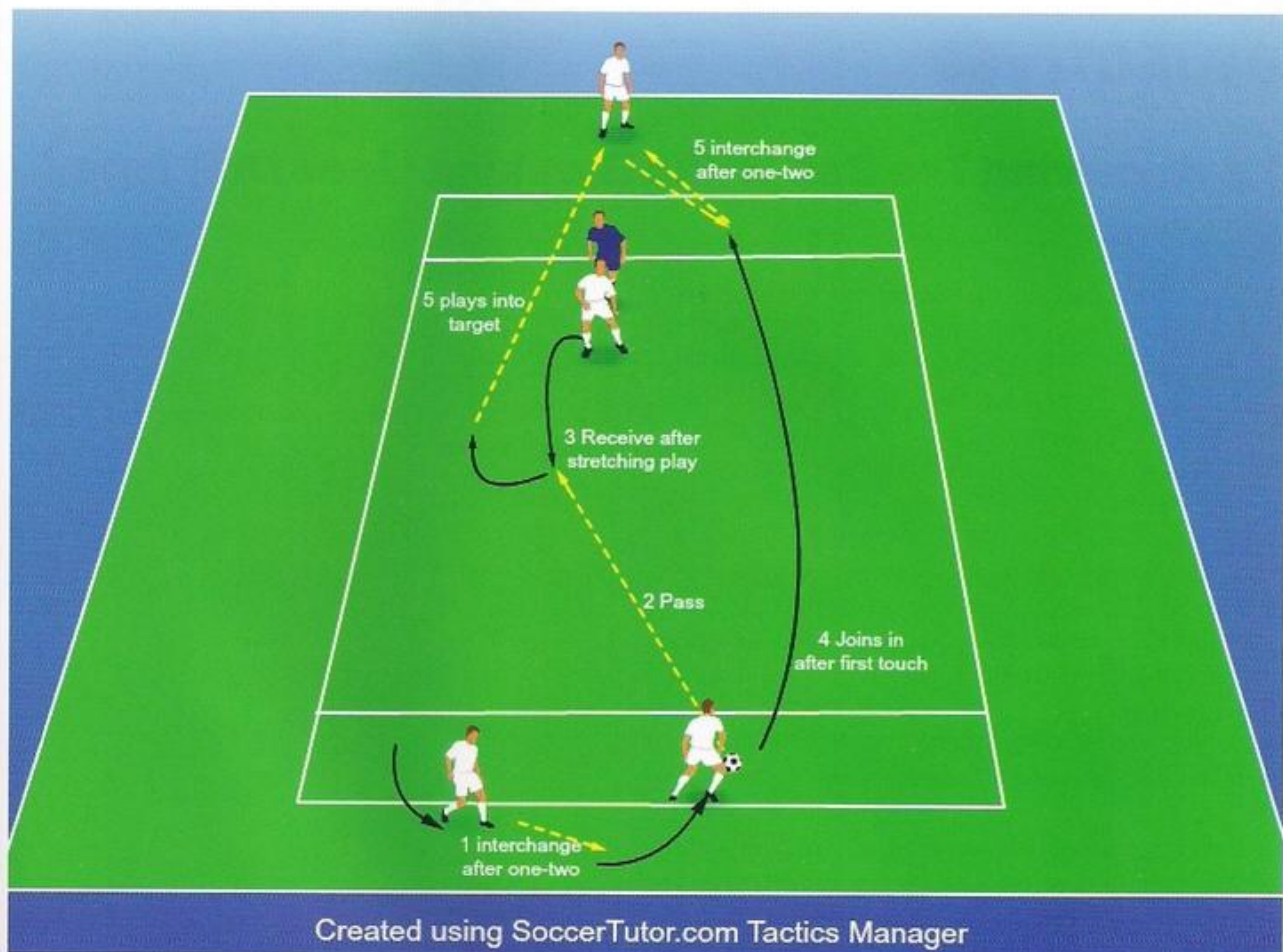
As the interchanges occurs at the end, the receiving player is to 'stretch the player' and the defender is coached to stay behind him at first. When the defender is allowed to stand ball-side of his player then the attacking player must work on his movement to find space to receive the ball.

This session follows on from the previous session where we are to focus on the receiving techniques and outplaying movements as well as the possibility of using your supporting player to get beyond your defender.

The coach should keep a constant flow of balls to keep the continuity of the exercise.

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### Variations / Progressions

To remove complexity we can have timed bouts where both target players stay as target players.

### Key Learning Focus

Learning to win the one vs one (defender behind scenario) and protect the ball

# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.6 Receiving The Ball While Breaking Lines Drill Type A

### Set Up

Cones set so the pass and the run into the mannequins is around 10 or 15-yards. Three mannequins to represent a space on a football field.

### Session Narrative

The ball begins at the top, is set back to a player at the bottom who must play a first time ball into the space between the mannequins. The receiving player must make a fast paced run into this space for the ball to receive it between lines. The mannequins represent either the space between the opposition midfield and defenders or the space between the opposition central midfielders.

Once the runner has received the ball he must dribble out to the next cone and set the ball back to repeat the cycle.

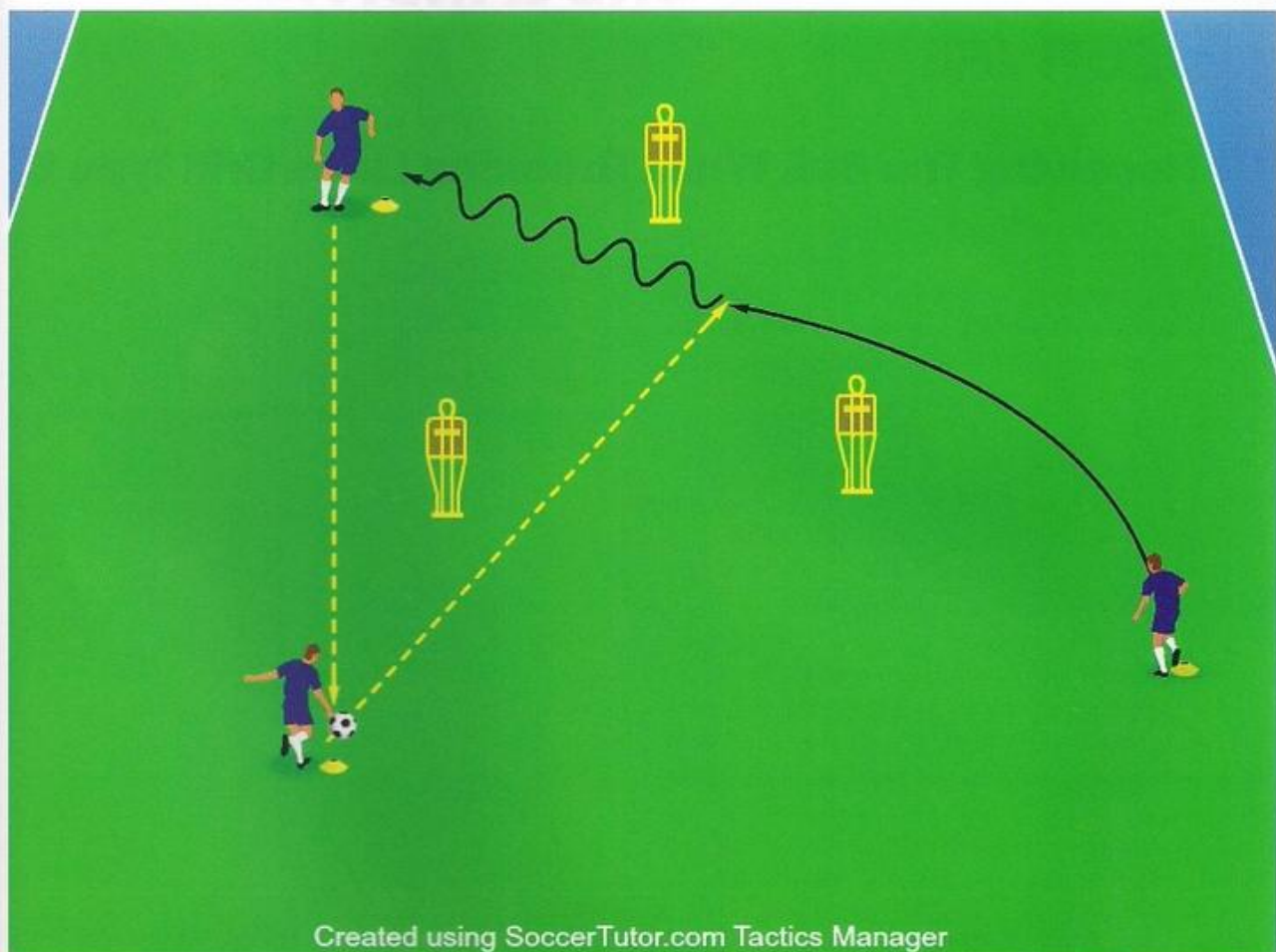
Over all my research of Bilbao training sessions (when Bielsa was manager), the most commonly touched upon theme by Bielsa in training sessions is that of receiving the ball after a forward run breaking lines.

### Coaching Details

The coach is to demand high levels of intensity and repetition of the receiving moment at pace. The timing of run and collective activity is the secondary key focus for the session as well as the idea of automatising the actions involved.

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### Variations / Progressions

This session is just one type of format that Bielsa employed for similar principles. The type of run is to be contextualised too – perhaps it is a winger running beyond the defensive line or a central midfielder breaking lines centrally. Whatever the picture, it should be painted through session design.

### Key Learning Focus

Receiving the ball after a forward run that breaks the opposition lines

# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.7 Receiving The Ball While Breaking Lines Drill Type B

### Set Up

A series of equally spaced out poles – a minimum of five lines of posts. The distance between posts is suggested to be 8 to 10-yards apart vertically and 12-yards apart horizontally. This session requires three players.

### Session Narrative

Player A(a) begins on post line 1 on the left hand side and passes into player A(b) who sprints with a diagonal run from post line 1 (right) to post line 3 (left) and receives the ball somewhere centrally in line with post line 2.

Player A(b) then dribbles to the third post line on the left and sets the ball back to player A(c) who is waiting at post line 2 (right). As player A(b) dribbled to post line 3 (left), player A(a) has moved up a post line to post line 2 (left).

Player A(c) receives the ball with one touch and then passes the ball to player A(a) who is making his sprint to receive the ball in line with post line 3 and then dribbles up to post line 4 (right). Once he reaches post line 4, he turns back and sets the ball back to player A(b) waiting at post line 3 (left).

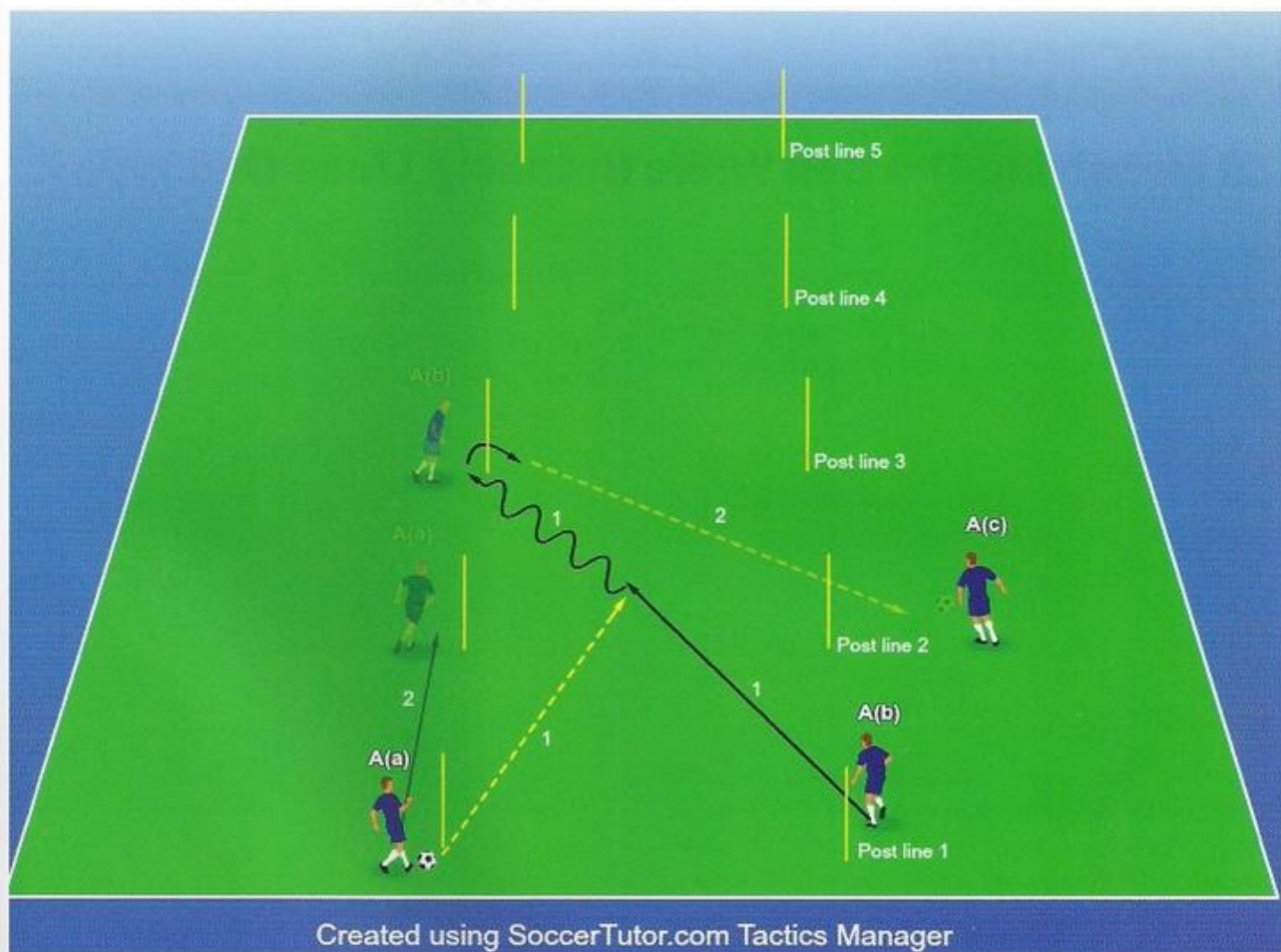
This sequence continues until players reach the end of the post lines. All sprints are to be done at 100%

### Coaching Details

This session design is about repetition of an idea: to receive the ball on a forward run at 100% speed. The session is designed to automatise actions and meet the football specific football fitness requirements (maximum explosive action with minimum rest).

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### Variations / Progressions

Repetition, Intensity and Speed of Action and then Complexity

### Key Learning Focus

Receiving the ball after a forward run that breaks opposition lines

Other examples and variations of this session format can be found on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) titled "20120911Training by Bielsa.mov" and "Athletic Bilbao, training session in Helsinki, part one, 29.8."

# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.8 Receiving The Ball While Breaking Lines Drill Type C

### Set Up

A series of equally spaced out poles – a minimum of four lines of posts. The distance between posts is suggested to be 8 to 10-yards apart vertically and 12-yards apart horizontally. This session requires a minimum of four players.

### Session Narrative

Once again, a variation of Bielsa's most common theme in training sessions reviewed online, in person or through external material.

Player A(a) is to pass player A(b) who makes his sprint to receive the ball behind his marker. Player D(a) doesn't look to intercept the ball, only to act as a reference.

Once Player A(b) receives the ball he runs with the ball to the next post line. As player A(b) receives the ball he should be put under pressure from player D(b). Player D(b) has no intention of winning the ball, only to act as a reference of pressure once again.

Once player A(b) has dribbled to post line 2, player A(a) has jogged to post line 2 (left) and player D(a) has made his sprint to post line 3 (left). Both D players are to perform all runs at 100%.

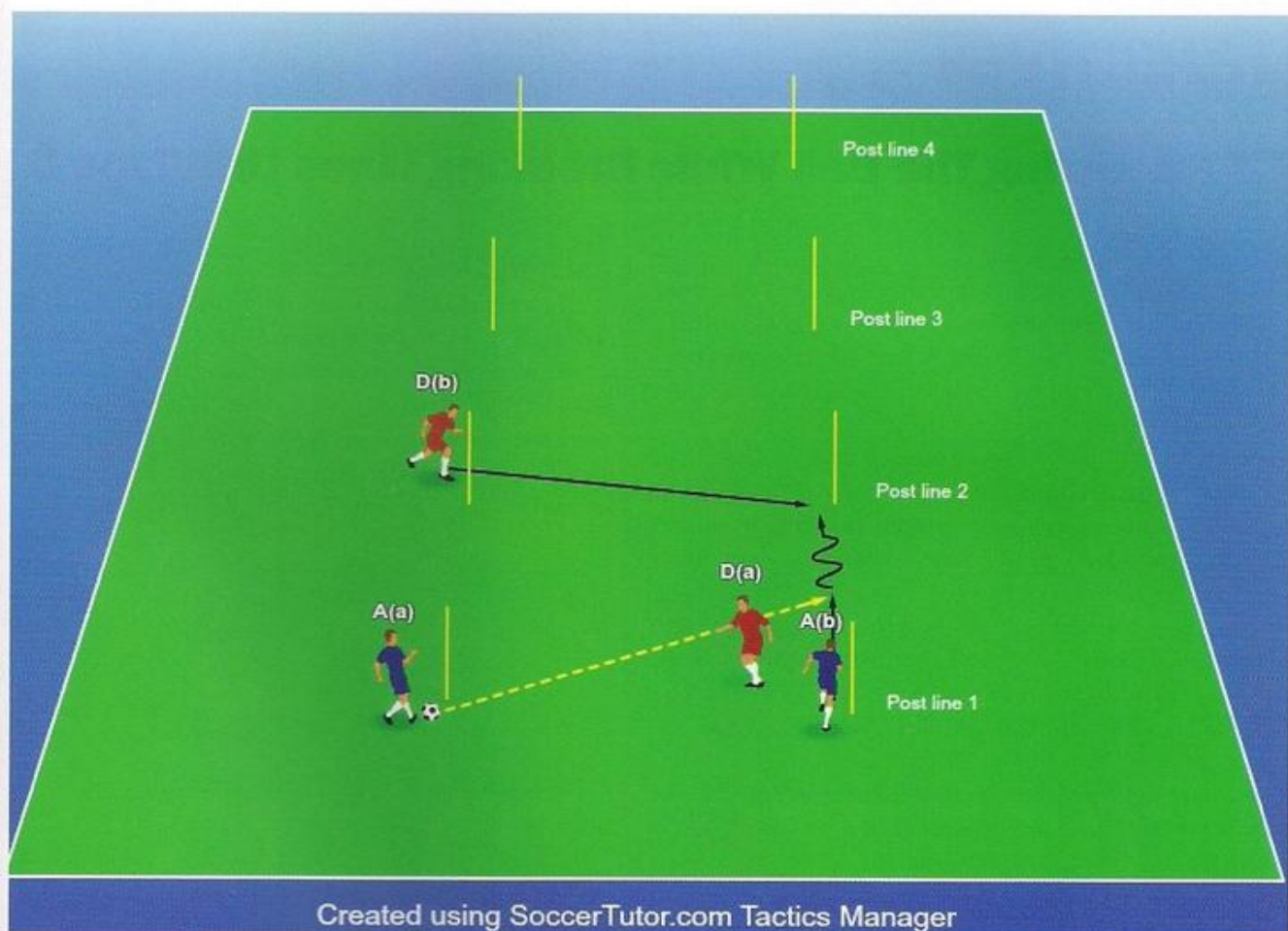
Player A(b) will pass the ball to A(a) to reset the scenario shown in the diagram above only one post higher up. The sequence of actions starts again in the same direction.

### Coaching Details

The coach needs to demand intensity of action once again. The action of receiving the ball behind an opponent with new pressure coming at you is the scenario being automatised.

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### Variations / Progressions

Repetition, Intensity and Speed of Action and then Complexity

### Key Learning Focus

Automatisation of receiving the ball after a forward run

An example of this session can be found on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) titled "Bielsa, Athletic, Ejercicio 4, 21/05/2012"

# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.9 Receiving The Ball While Breaking Lines Drill Type D

### Set Up

Three cones and a mini-goal with three players. Distances are advised to be 10-yards between the two cones at the bottom and then a third cone placed 5-yards from the central point of those two cones. A mini-goal should be added 5-yards behind that cone.

### Session Narrative

Linking in with the previous session and tying together content from a presentation Bielsa delivered as part of a coach education module. The two blue players are to pass the ball between one another until the moment the red player decides to try and press the ball and win the ball. The red player must fully commit to pressing the position of the blue player and not move only in part towards the player.

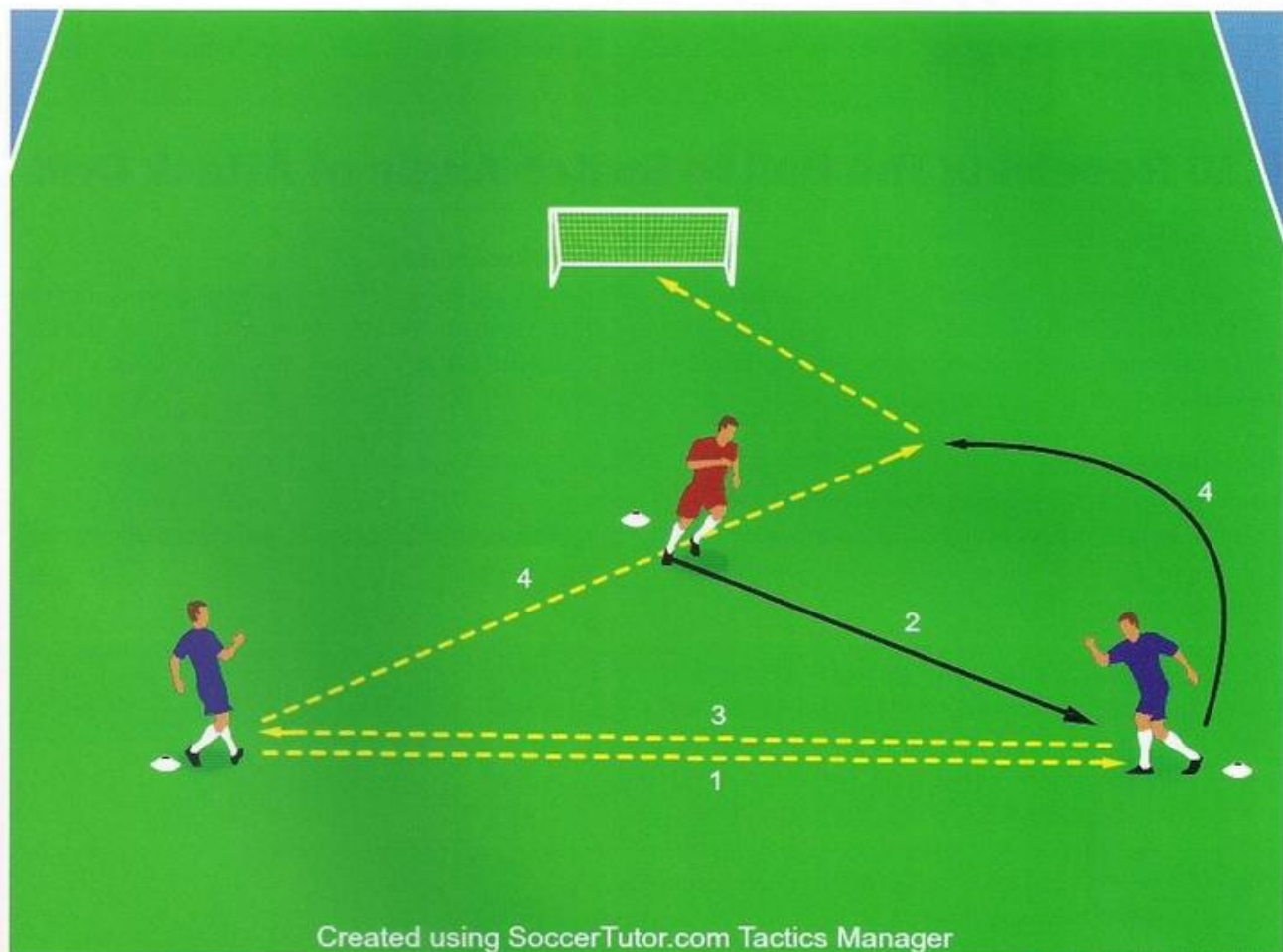
As soon as the red player commits the blue player must look to play the ball back to his teammate and make a forward run to try and receive the ball behind the defender who has pressured him.

### Coaching Details

The coach should look to promote the theme of two vs one as a theme that can occur in many scenarios in football. The red player is to represent a defender (most likely a midfielder) who has been drawn out of his slot due to a common pressing trigger: that of the horizontal pass without an angle. The purposeful presentation of this pressing trigger is effective in pulling players out of shape.

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### Variations / Progressions

Repetition, Intensity and Speed of Action and then Complexity

### Key Learning Focus

Receiving the ball after a forward run into space creating through the presentation of a common pressing trigger to a defender

Footage of Bielsa's presentation mentioned in the text above can be found on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) titled "Bielsa y la necesidad de Entrenamientos Especificos"

# SECTION 7. ONE VS ONE & INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES

## 7.10 Receiving The Ball to Switch Angle of Attack Drill

### Set Up

Two rectangles of 6x15-yards back to back. In the centre a 6x4-yard box should be marked out across the centre. Two mini-goals at either end and a minimum of six players (three per rectangle).

### Session Narrative

The player on the end is to pass the ball into the receiving player (a central midfielder) who should receive the ball and look to play out to the other side (switching the angle of attack).

The defender is to sprint out and attempt to win the ball and prevent the switch. The defender must start on his line and the central midfielder must start on his line too. The player passing into the receiving player must provide an angled pass into the receiving player and not a horizontal one.

If the defender wins the ball, then they are to dribble across the end line (same as the goal line).

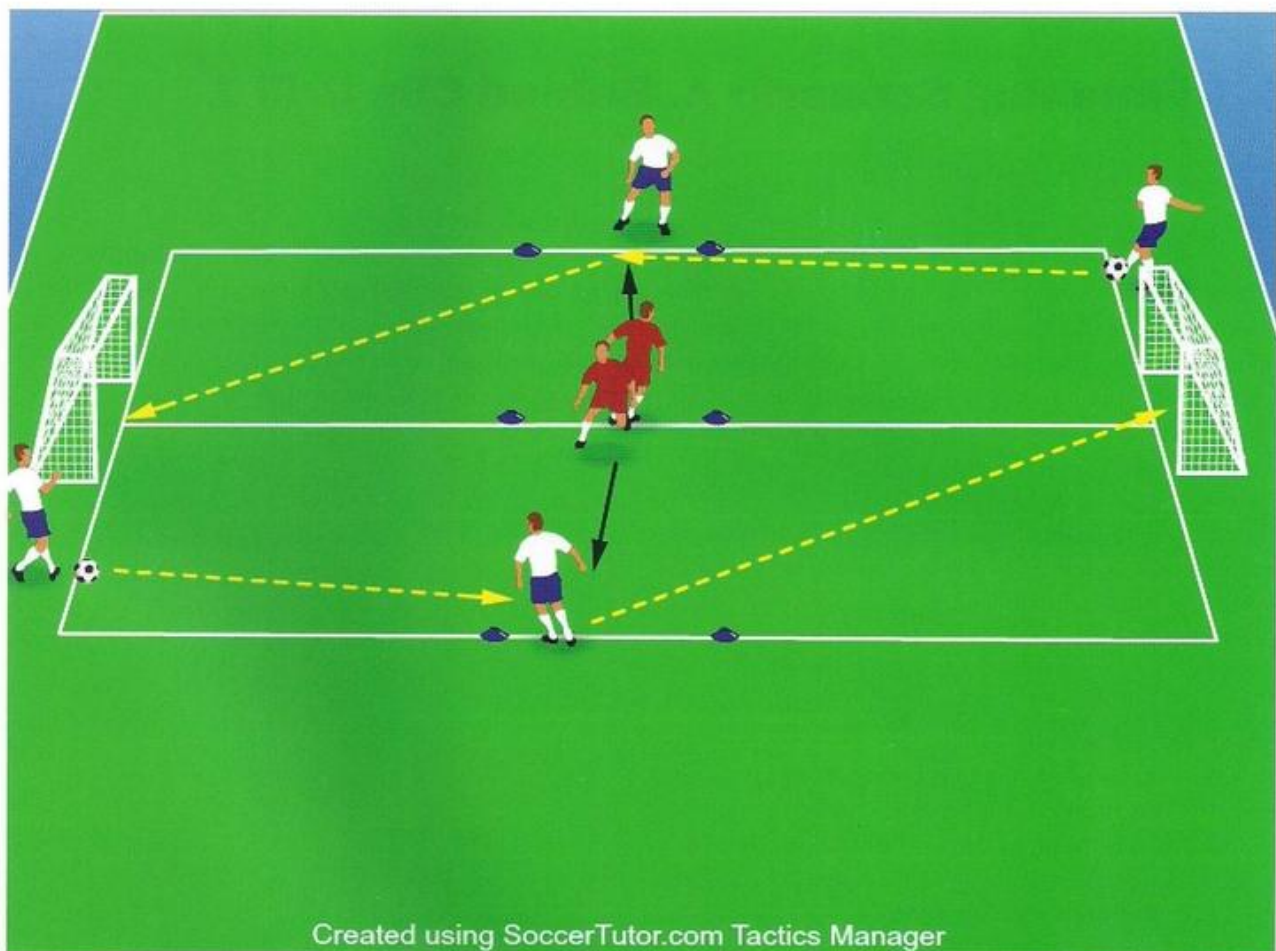
### Coaching Details

The key focus points are for the different types of receiving skills and then one vs one outplaying skills to open up and pass the ball across the field. Step overs, fakes, different types of turn are all skills to focus on. Coaches should set the exposure to pressure (semi-opposed vs opposed) appropriate for the learning objectives.

The coach should encourage the receiving player to check his shoulder often.

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### Variations / Progressions

This session actually works better without goals and with a second player at each end in my own opinion but with a clear focus on the starting positions both the central midfielder and defender must take up on each new entry (to recreate the scenario of receiving across your body with pressure). With two men at either end then you can give the option for the central midfielder to try and switch out if he can (crediting three points for each switch) and if not possible then he can play back to the direction the ball came from (credited with only one point). Timed bouts with a scoring tally is then advised.

Another variation is one where there are various coloured gates at either end and upon passing the ball to the receiver he should look to try and then play through the colour gate called out (placing emphasis on the awareness of where the player should turn to).

### Key Learning Focus

Receiving the ball to turn out and switch the angle of attack while under pressure.

# SECTION 8. FINISHING

## 8.1 Finishing Scenario A. Behind CBs Drill 1

### Set Up

The two set ups shown in the image given two examples of finishing patterns used by Marcelo Bielsa when Athletic Bilbao manager (2012/13 season). The set up on the left (in the image on the right hand side page) involves one mannequin to act as a fullback (for visual reference) and then two poles and one cone for starting positions of the three players used.

The set up on the right consists of one singular mannequin and one wall as well as two poles for starting positions. Distances between mannequins and poles are set at 10-yards apart.

### Session Narrative

The set up on the left is a simple up-back-through finishing exercise where the central midfielder plays the through ball to a wide player making a diagonal run behind the space opened up by the striker who dropped off the defensive line (taking his central defender with him).

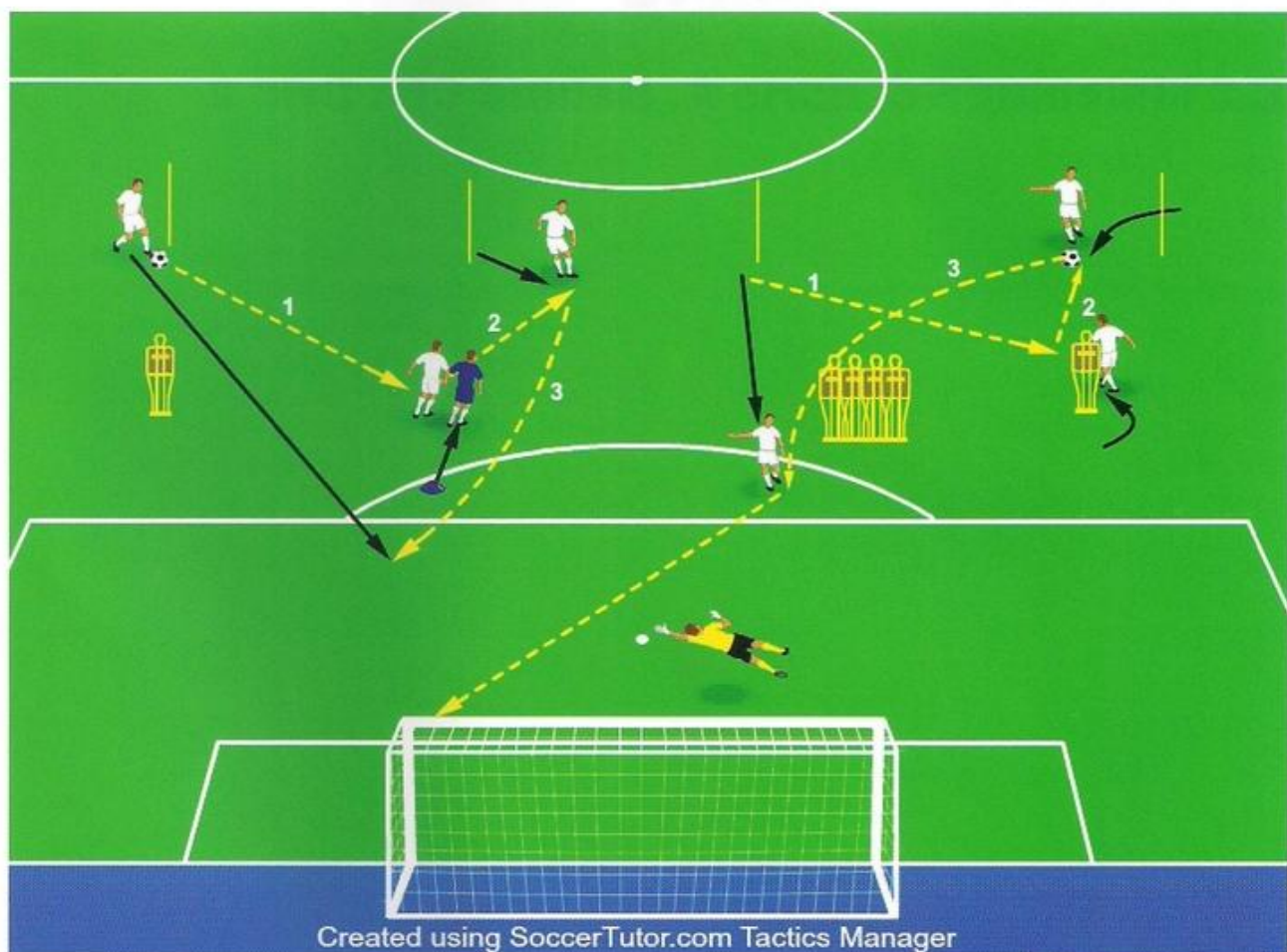
The set up on the right looks at finishing from an aerial pass over a defender who is moving forwards to cover for a fullback being pulled out of position. Once again the up-back-through (over) pattern is used with the central midfielder making the run behind the wall (representing defenders who are travelling in a forward direction). All finishes in both exercises are to be carried out in one or two touches.

### Coaching Details

The session narrative allows for the coach to work on specific techniques within a framework. Weight of pass, body shape (orientation), angles of support, timing and type of movement and so on are all areas that can be touched upon through the session format and narrative.

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### Variations / Progressions

Other examples within this scenario exist in the decisions made when a central defender does not follow his striker resulting in the striker turning to finish from in front of the defensive line.

### Key Learning Focus

Learning to finish from space behind central defenders

# SECTION 8. FINISHING

## 8.2 Finishing Scenario A. Behind CBs Drill 2

### Set Up

Set up so the shot attempt is from around 12 to 16-yards if possible and so the original pass is between 12 to 18-yards.

### Session Narrative

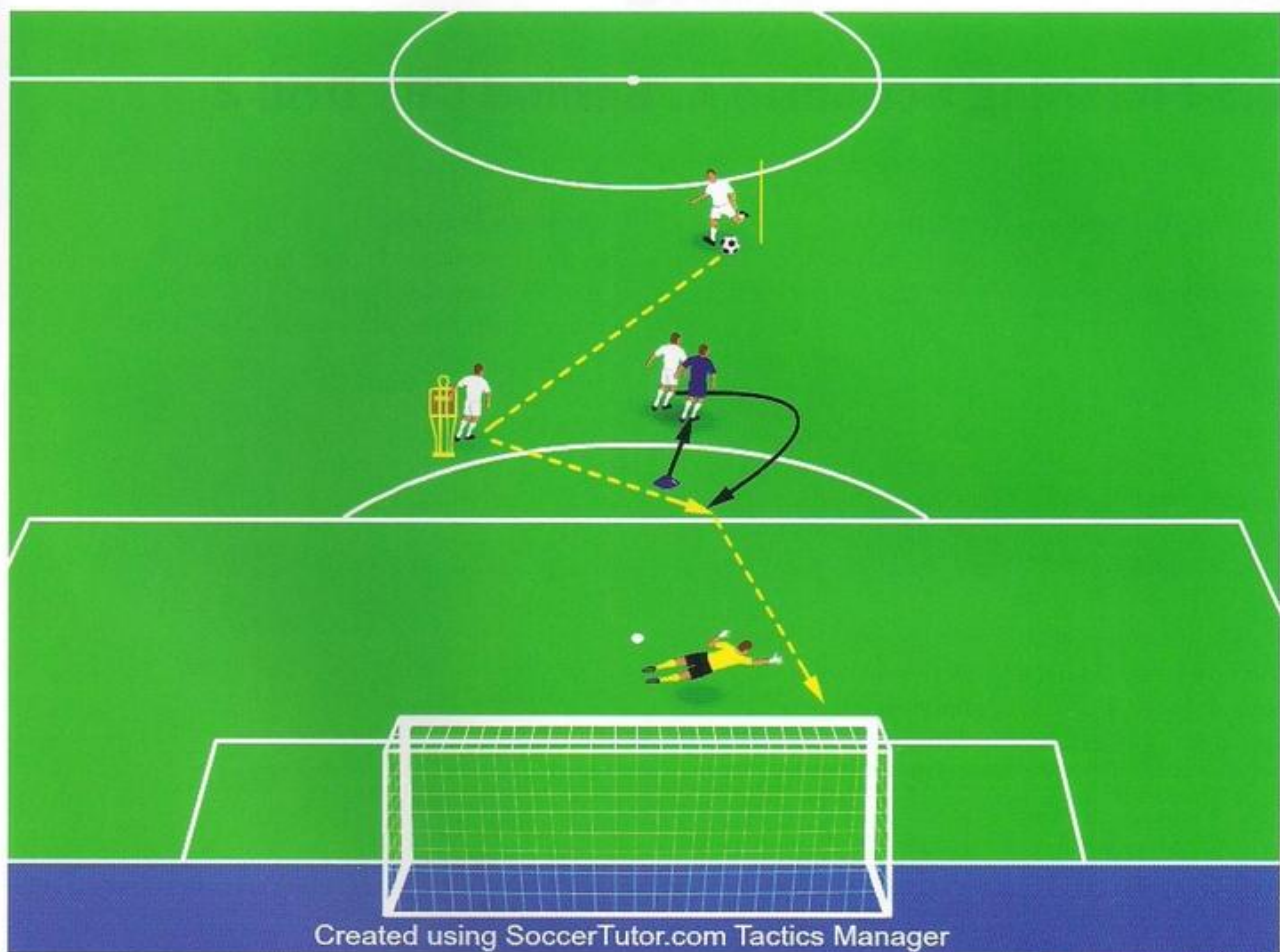
This session works off the idea of pulling a player out of position and exploiting the space behind yourself. The ball is played up to a striker who plays a wall pass around the corner to an attacker who had initially moved towards the ball (to drop in the pocket). The attacker should spin away in behind the space that has now opened up.

### Coaching Details

The quality of pass, change in tempo of movement and different ways to play the ball 'around the corner' are areas to place focus on pre-type of shot. The attacker is encouraged to try and finish first time given the pressure he would be under in a game after spinning away in this area. The attacker should attempt to finish in both directions (near and far post) as well methods to go beyond the goalkeeper.

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### Variations / Progressions

Other examples within this scenario exist in the decisions made when a central defender does not follow his striker resulting in the striker turning to finish from in front of the defensive line.

### Key Learning Focus

Collective identification of off-ball movement to pull central defenders out of slot

## SECTION 8. FINISHING

### 8.3 Finishing Scenario A. Behind CBs Drill 3

#### Set Up and Session Narrative

Similar set up as before only detailing how forward movement can draw out central defenders in the same language.

The pass comes in from an angle seemingly towards the central midfielder who has made a forward run, only for the central midfielder to delay and dummy the ball through to the striker and spin in behind the space the central defender leaves behind him as the defender looked to press the central midfielder.

Please view footage of Athletic Bilbao vs P.S.G (Group stage (Group F) - 29/09/2011 ) for this movement executed in a game scenario. Video link: [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xle5b5\\_athletic-bilbao-v-psg\\_sport](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xle5b5_athletic-bilbao-v-psg_sport) [minute 01:16-01:29]

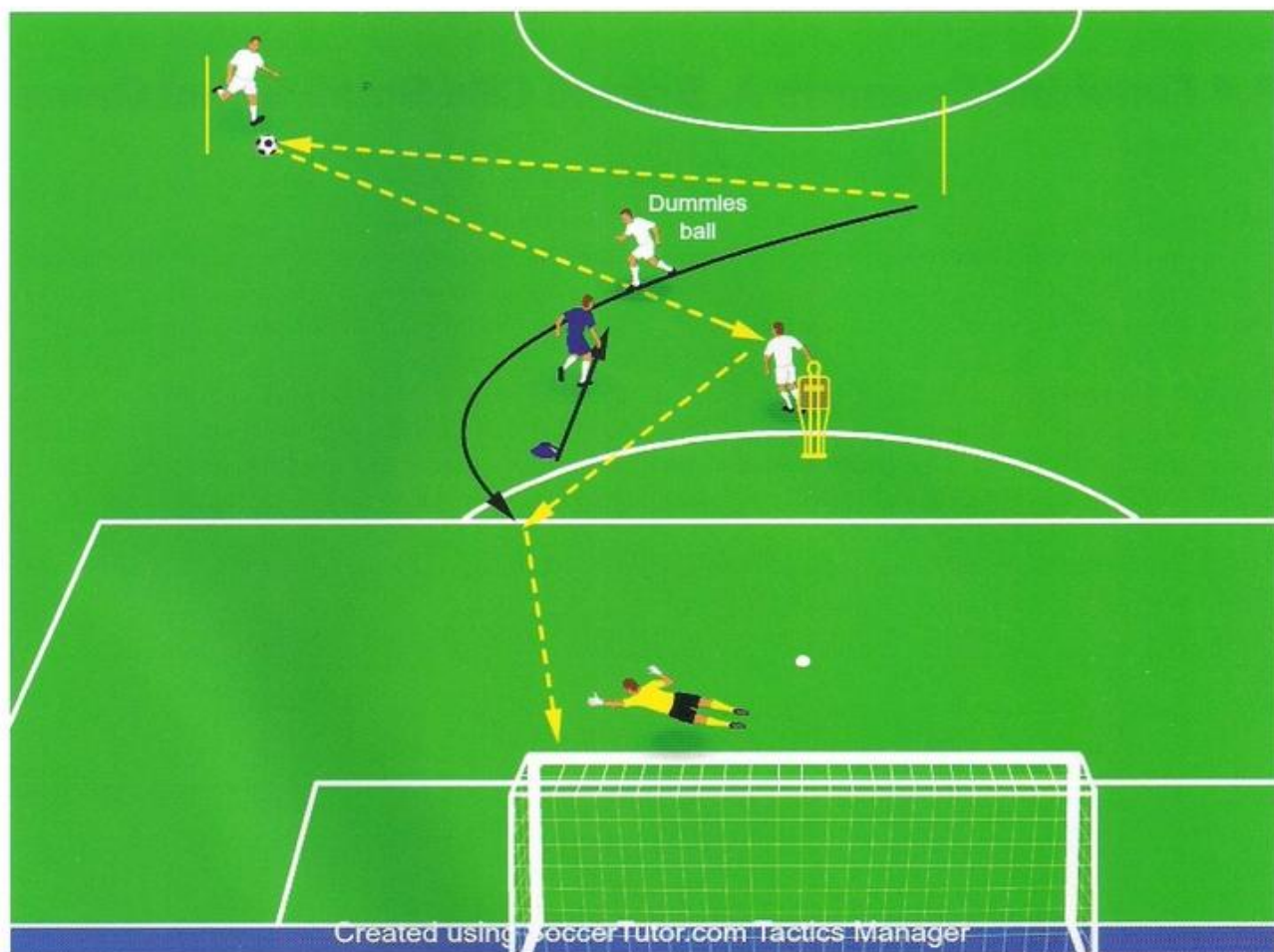
While the footage against P.S.G doesn't lead to a shot, it does lead to an assist and is evidence of Bielsa's wall pass being used in a match.

#### Coaching Details

The coach should encourage disguise in the dummying of the ball through to the striker and a continuation of coaching points from the previous session in this section.

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ADD HANDMADE NOTES





### Variations / Progressions

Increases or reduction of repetitions, intensity and speed of action and complexity.

### Key Learning Focus

Collective identification of off-ball movement to pull central defenders out of slot through a forward run from a midfielder.

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# SECTION 8. FINISHING

## 8.4 Finishing Scenario A. Behind CBs Small Sided Game

### Set Up

A small sided game with a directional purpose. A channel should be placed in the final third at one end and a coned off area in the final third to encourage centralised play.

### Session Narrative

The two strikers are the only attackers allowed into the receiving area and final third unless triggered for others to enter. Players are locked into zones unless triggered.

Triggers include that of the ball being set back for an up-back-through upon a striker receiving the ball and setting the ball back.

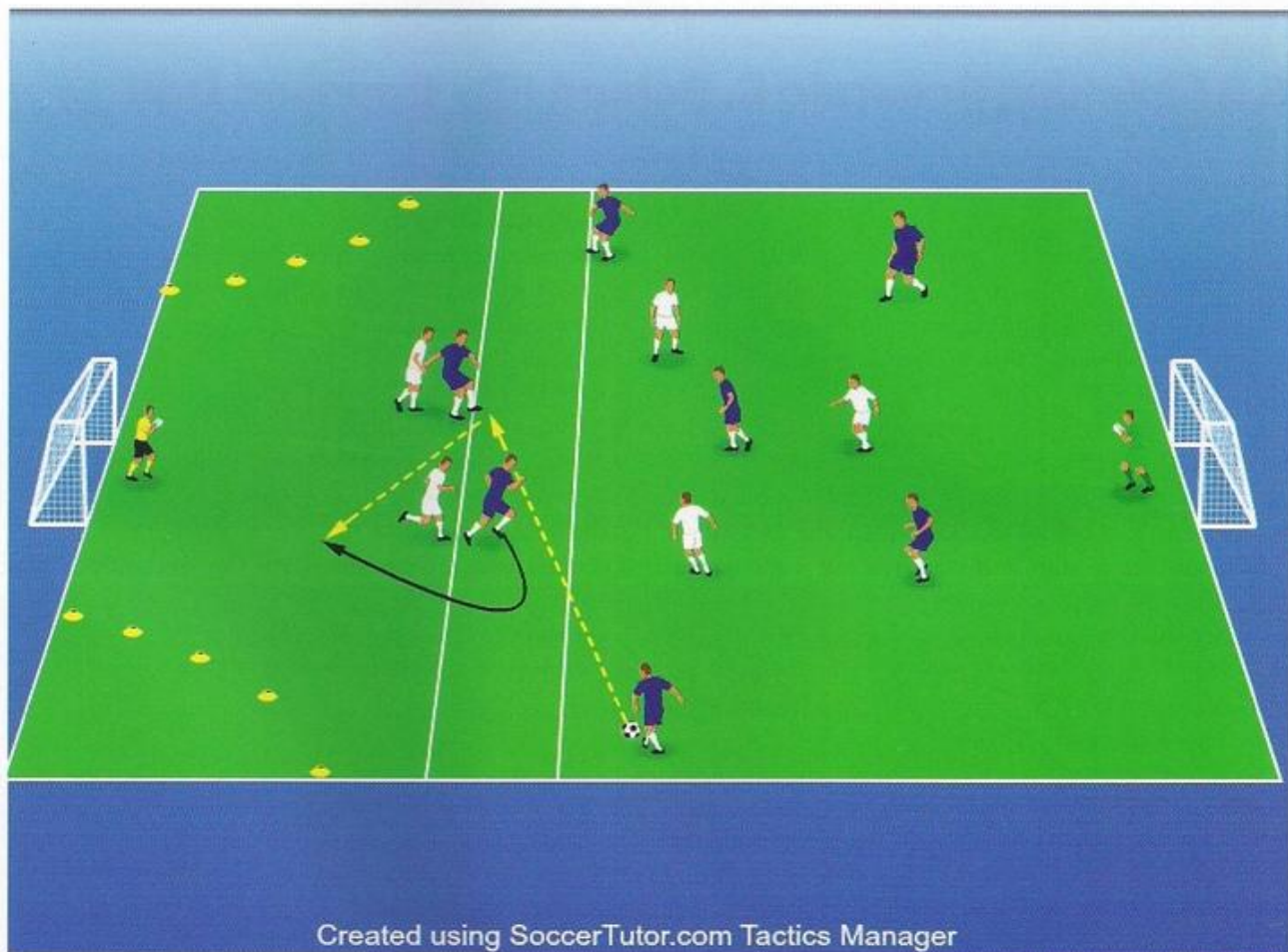
### Coaching Details

The two strikers can work together and look to incorporate the wall pass movement highlighted in the previous two sessions as well as using the up-back-through language.

Should strikers not be followed and marked into the receiving zone then they are encouraged to turn with the ball and shoot. Defenders should therefore be coached to mark and cover well.

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ADD HANDMADE NOTES





### Variations / Progressions

Rotations between one of the strikers and a central midfielder can be used to bring about different types of provocation in pulling central defenders out of slot.

### Key Learning Focus

Using the wall pass as part of an attacking strategy between attacking players

## SECTION 8. FINISHING

### 8.5 Finishing Scenario C. Behind FBs Opposed Drill

#### Set Up

A mannequin should be set up on the corner of the 18-yard box to represent the fullback we will get behind. Two poles are used to represent starting positions for players and a marked out white area is to be created at the edge of the 18-yard box.

#### Session Narrative

All players apart from the goalkeeper, defensive midfielder (white team) and central attacking midfielder and winger (blue team) are to start in the marked out white area at the edge of the box. The winger begins with the ball and should play a one-two with the central attacking midfielder to receive the ball behind the fullback (mannequin). As the ball is played through to the winger the play becomes free and players can leave their zones.

If no player comes out to put pressure on the winger, then he is free to finish. However, it is likely a player will come out to pressure the winger: either the defensive midfielder or the nearest central defender. It is these two scenarios this session highlights and looks to create.

#### Coaching Details

The winger is to identify where space has opened up when he is pressed by a player and select the appropriate type of assist from the wide area.

A variety of crossing types should be coached:

1. Whipped in behind the defenders into the corridor between the goalkeeper and defensive line
2. Driven at one height across the box
3. Cut back with disguise
4. Lofted into a deep area (into the weak-side winger perhaps?)
5. Curved into a back post area (Beckham)
6. Whipped into the front post area

USE BLANK SPACE TO  
ADD HANDMADE NOTES



**Scenario:****Session:****Variations / Progressions**

The coach can vary the starting positions and which play can go out to put pressure on the winger.

**Key Learning Focus**

Assisting goals from wide areas after getting behind the opposition fullback and drawing a defender out of his slot

# SECTION 8. FINISHING

## 8.6 Finishing Scenario C. Behind FBs Functional Game

### Set Up

A functional practice set up with two goals at either end. The cut should start around 8-yards wide of the post and run straight to the 18-yard box. From here the cut takes an angle to the centre of the pitch as shown in the diagram on the bottom of the right hand side page. There should then be two further divisions of space: one line at an angle to cut from the centre circle down to 16-yards from the corner flag. The second cut should go from the goal post to the other line cutting inside the width of the 18-yard box. A mannequin should be positioned on the edge of the 18-yard box.

### Session Narrative

The white team is attacking the typically positioned goal through specific zones. The first zone exists with the goalkeeper, a central defender and flexibility for the winger to drop back into it. The central zone consists of a striker, an attacking central midfielder and the weak-side winger who has come inside.

The blue team have two attackers in the final zone who cannot leave their zone and then a fullback, two central defenders, a defensive midfielder and a goalkeeper in their own zone. The fullback is replaced with a mannequin so is not included.

The white team are to try and counter attack and get the ball quickly to their attackers who are in a two vs one scenario. Clearances high and wide can be encouraged to the defending team. The white team should push up aggressively and hold a high line (without exiting their zone). The mannequin is ignored for the purposes of the off-side line.

The blue team must play out from their goalkeeper and look to break down the wing without being off-side. Once the ball goes wide into the wide zone, then any one defender can come out to press the winger after he passes the fullback mannequin. This will typically be the nearest central defender or the defensive midfielder. This player can ONLY come out once the winger passes the fullback mannequin.

During the blue team building out, the central midfielder can also drop back in to make it 4 vs 2 in favour of the team building out from the back.

### Coaching Details

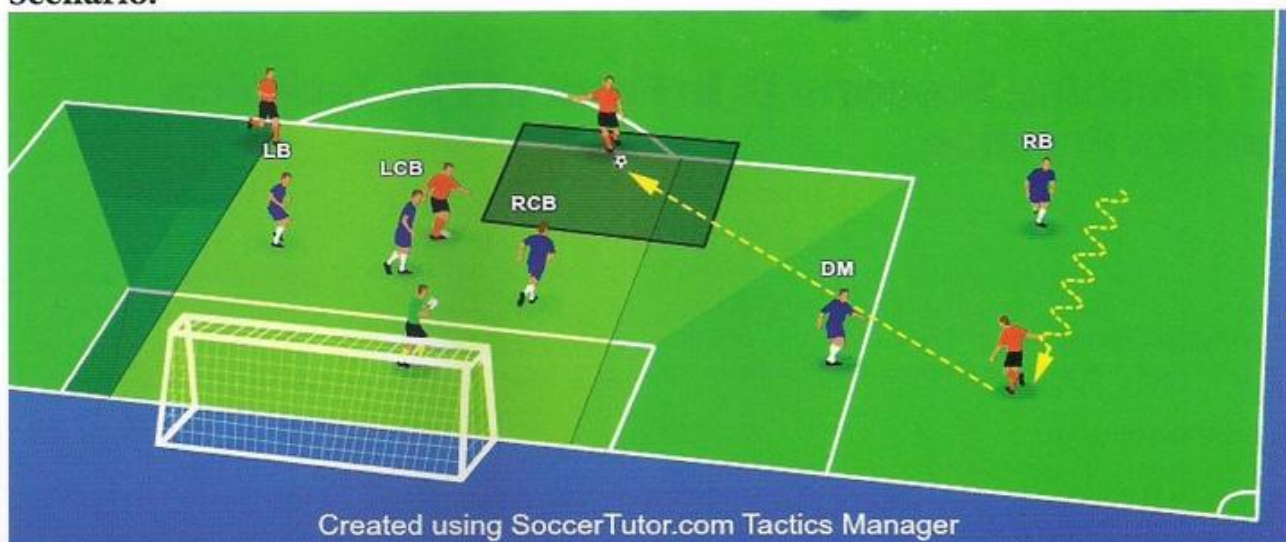
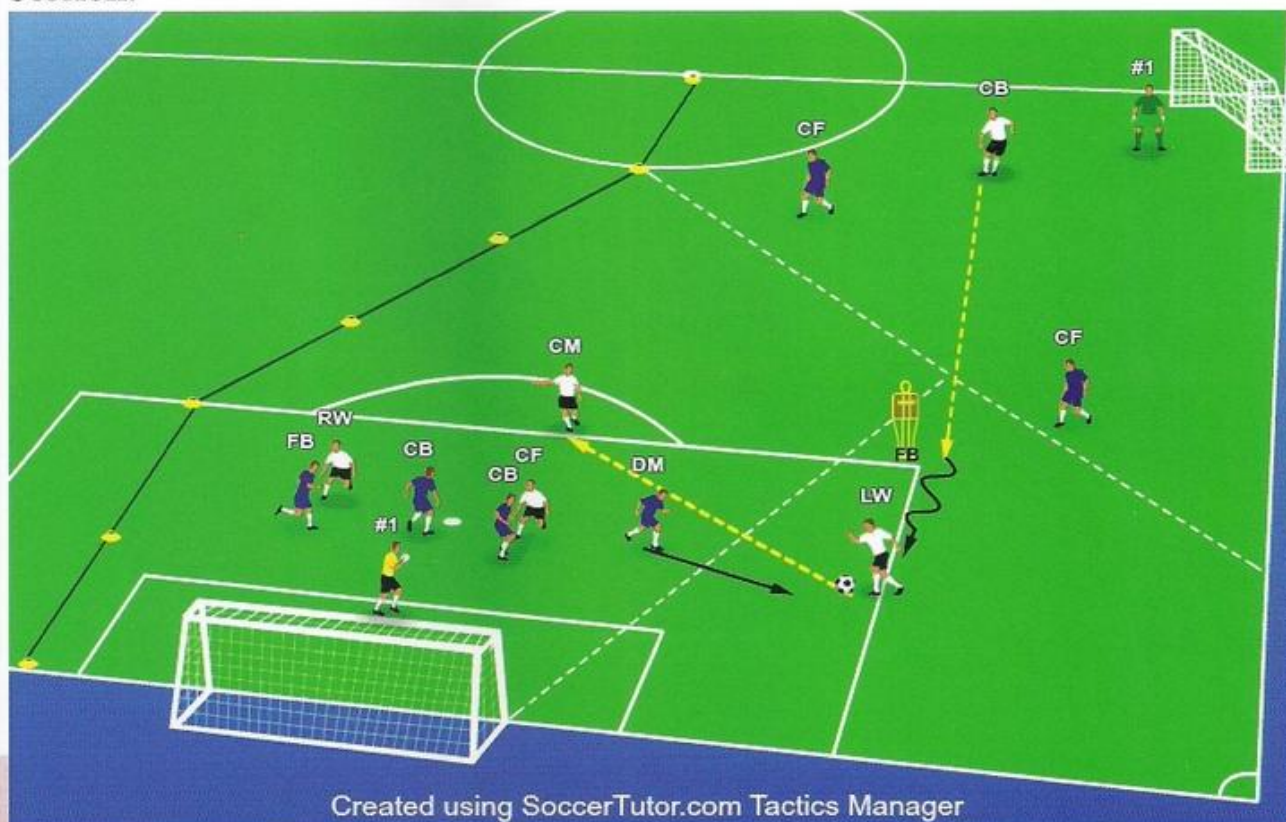
The winger and his team is to identify where space has opened up when he is pressed by a player and select the appropriate type of assist from the wide area.

A variety of crossing types should be coached:

1. Whipped in behind the defenders into the corridor between the goalkeeper and defensive line
2. Driven at one height across the box
3. Cut back with disguise
4. Lofted into a deep area (into the weak-side winger perhaps?)
5. Curved into a back post area (Beckham)
6. Whipped into the front post area

USE BLANK SPACE TO  
ADD HANDMADE NOTES



**Scenario:****Session:****Variations / Progressions**

The coach can alter which players are allowed into which zones and upon which conditions to bring about different scenarios that occur in the game.

**Key Learning Focus**

Assisting goals from wide areas after getting behind the opposition fullback and drawing a defender out of his slot

## SECTION 8. FINISHING

### 8.7 Finishing Scenario D. In Front of FBs Technical Pattern Practice

#### Set Up

The back four mannequins should be set up as a common response to the winger picking the ball up. There should be four cones laid out for purpose of reference in the exercise. These four cones resemble the opposition midfield line.

#### Session Narrative

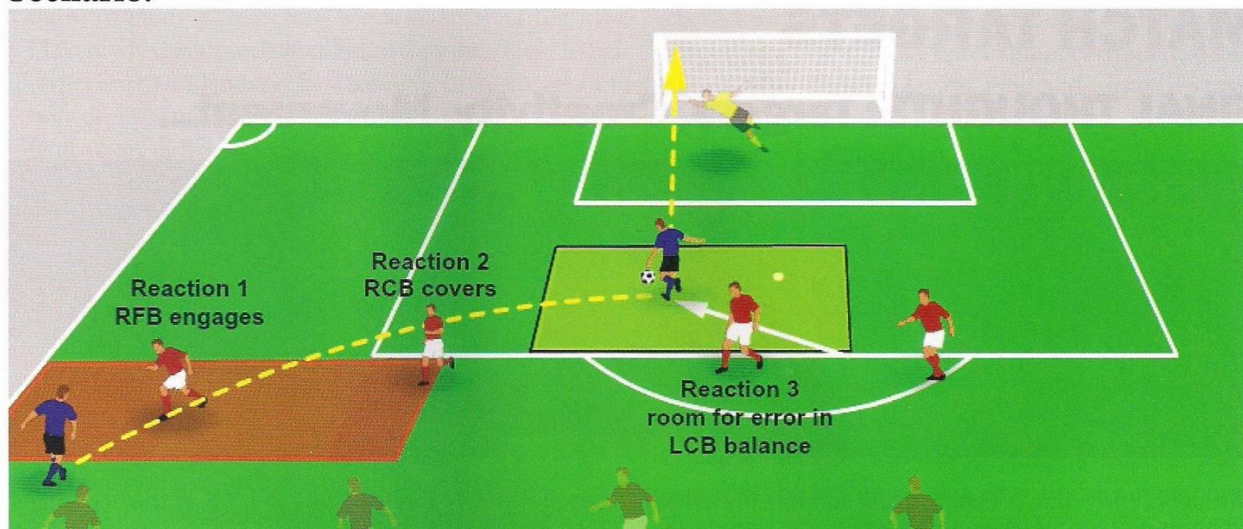
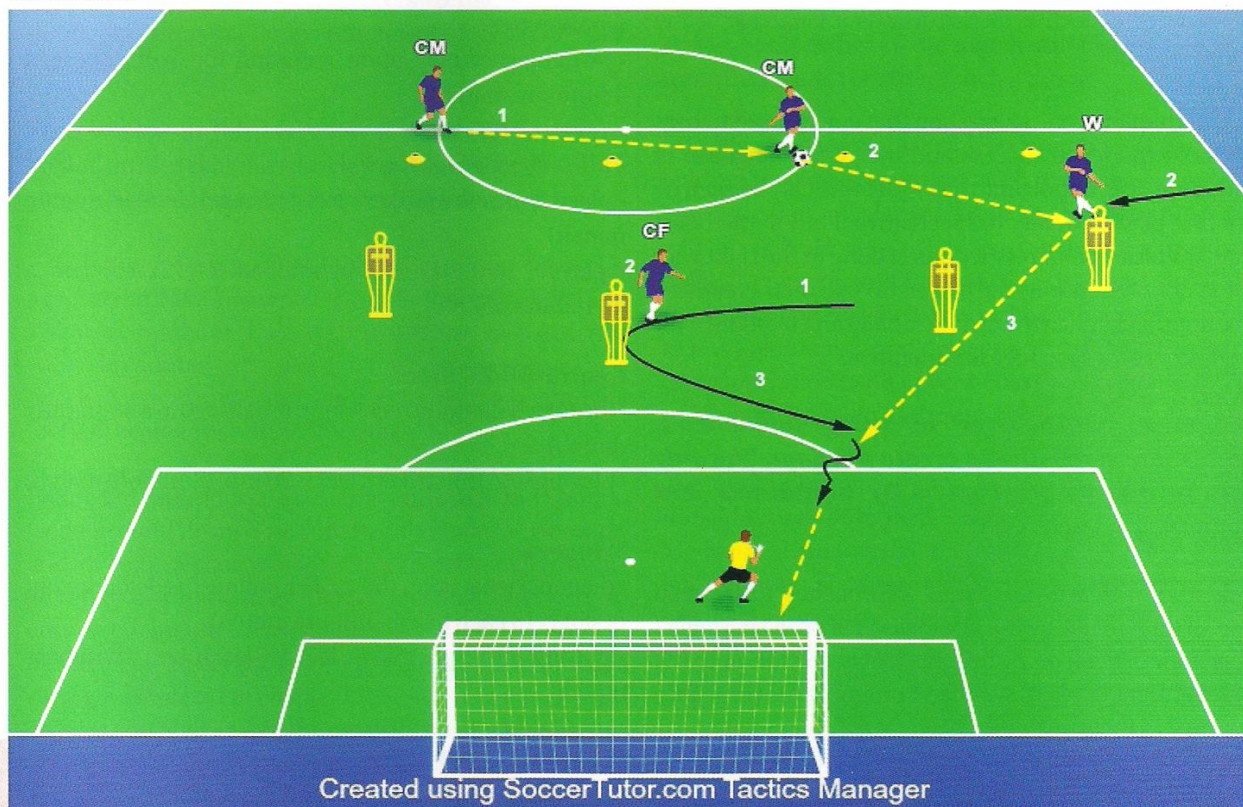
The ball is to travel through two central midfielders out to a winger before the pass goes through to the striker after his movement is complete.

#### Coaching Details

The striker's movement is the main concept coached in this session format. To have the striker backpedal out to the far sided central defender and time his movement to exploit behind the other central defender (who has stepped forward to cover for the fullback who would have pressed the winger picking up the ball facing forwards).

USE BLANK SPACE TO  
ADD HANDMADE NOTES



**Scenario:****Session:****Variations / Progressions**

Repetition, Intensity and Speed of Action, Complexity of tasks.

**Key Learning Focus**

Identification of players using a common pattern and goal scoring scenario upon the winger picking up the ball in a wide area.



# SECTION 9. MATCH DAY / TRAINING

## MATCH TARGETS

### FINAL THOUGHTS: Targets, Creativity, Movement...



Throughout my time coaching I have identified ways to implement ideas presented in this book. One of the ways is through individual match day targets as a way to filter the players' collective focus towards a language of the game.

In this chapter is one suggestion that can be used to help players experience success and use of the language of the game. It is important that while this can be seen as limiting players' ability to be creative, I am of the belief that limitations and restrictions, if done in the right way, bring about scenarios for players to use their creativity. The approach taken towards flexibility and freedom with the framework of an idea is imperative.

*"I am a big believer in using boundaries, limitations and rules to create freedom. The only way to expand freedom is by limitations and boundaries"* – Ido Portal

This approach will not fit all approaches to develop and that I am fully aware of. However, if used sparingly I have experienced many benefits and acceleration to the development of players' understanding of the principles outlined in this book.

The following targets are generic and do not consider the needs of the individual. It is the job of the team's coach to identify how these targets can be applied to the individuals in your team. The following targets are not per player but per position (meaning if you have two players sharing playing time in that position they share the responsibility of the positional target).

Example: Match Targets 7 vs 7 (#1-2-3-1) to encourage the Up-Back-Through Language

#### Goalkeeper:

- switching of play upon receiving the ball (24x in a 48-minute match)

#### Fullback / Centre Backs:

- playing into the striker's feet (12x each in a 48-minute match)
- playing into the central midfielder (12x each in a 48-minute match)

#### Central Midfielder:

- through balls upon receiving the ball (x20 in a 48-minute match)
- playing into the striker's feet (x20 in a 48-minute match)

#### Wingers:

- diagonal runs upon the striker pulling his defender out of slot (x18 each in a 48-minute match)
- playing into the striker's feet (x9 each in a 48-minute match)

#### Centre Forward:

- showing in the pocket (behind the opposition midfield and resetting if the ball does not come (x36 in a 48-minute match))
- laying the ball off vs turning with the ball ( find balance)



Targets are not absolute and of great importance but more to guide players into the familiarity of the idea. Players who become disappointed they didn't reach their target are to understand the real value in the targets and how an individual not making a target is often not the fault of an individual but the fault of a collective non-verbal communication success.

The targets approach can be done for each of the languages by coaches understanding the actions involved in each of the languages of play and how they come together to make the whole. The objective of targets is to provide a platform for familiarity and insight into languages of the game. By providing players with a link between training methodology and match day implementation you bring about an opportunity to get success in the initial stages of developing the idea. This initial success can ignite a fire of curiosity within a team environment and allow the players to dig deeper into developing a greater understanding of the narrative that exists in a complex game.

Each session in this book has a 'narrative' or a story behind an idea that may develop within the format. Each game players play too can follow a guided narrative.

I had the pleasure of watching Barcelona U19 play against the Nike Academy towards the end of 2015 at Wembley Stadium. I sat with two fellow coaches, one with a breadth of experience in the Spanish leagues as a coach (Kieran Smith) and one very familiar with the elite football academy scene in London.

Before the game kicked off Kieran and I took the London Underground from London Paddington to Wembley and for some reason we didn't go direct, I know we didn't go direct as I remember making a change. We were so enveloped in our conversation debating the subject matter of creativity that we were asked to leave the tube carriage as we had to change. Once again, lost in a world of ideas and oblivious to the outside world, although this time closer to home, in London and not a restaurant somewhere in Canada.

This conversation carried on through to us walking around the stadium towards the entrance to meet another coach. I think subconsciously this was a debate that occurred as we both knew Barcelona are famed for their structured approach to developing young football players in terms of positional rules and decision making in various scenarios.

It was sometime in the second half that something clicked with me. A young player called Riqui Puig was playing as a false nine for Barcelona, clearly not the same age as other players playing. Puig had turned 16 just a few months before this match and is playing against two towering defenders of the Nike Academy. The crowd at Wembley cheered and the applause echoed around the stadium after many of Puig's touches as he would spin his defender, flick balls around corners and win free kicks against two giants, making everything look so effortless. I wondered to myself, were these 'traits' or examples of creativity?

There's a famous video recording (available on YouTube) of the French National Team players training before the 1998 World Cup Final against Brazil, a final France went onto win 3-0 and Zidane left his mark scoring two goals. The French players and coach of the 1998 World Cup winning side discussed how to deal with Brazil's star striker Ronaldo before the match and discuss two clear traits that made the striker such a threat.

Desailly is energetic with his explanation of Ronaldo's lightning quick step overs and the players together conclude that it is dangerous to let Ronaldo run at you with his skills. However, they also touch on the Brazilian's ability to pin you and turn with the ball past you if you mark him too closely. The conclusion was then to stay in front of Ronaldo and delay the striker unless you had cover, only then (with cover behind you) should you go to pressure Ronaldo and try to win the ball.

The most intriguing theme in their discussion is how Ronaldo was described in a very mechanical way. Mechanical in a way that these movements are traits and not examples of creativity and necessarily something of originality. If a skill is repeated often, it then flirts with the idea of creativity and instead becomes a biomechanically learned structure.

I come back to Riqui Puig and his boundless creativity; where can the line be drawn between allowing players to be creative and freedom of decision making versus the idea of structure and organisation on a football field? Some coaches will argue specific languages, patterns and targets take away the players' ability to be creative and in many respects they're right. However, I look at Puig and think: "is he a product of organisation and order at Barcelona? Is a product of structured learning?"



Then I conclude. It isn't his technical ability (which of course is of a very high level) or ability to be creative that sets him so far apart from others on the field that day, but instead his ability to recognise situations and move into situations knowing who he is taking with him (from the opposition's defence). He moves into a space between lines and he knows he has taken a central defender with him and from here the magic begins. Puig turns and beats his man on the receiving touch as he flicks the ball into the space now emptied, like lightning and now he is yards away from his original defender and engaged in provoking a response from his new defender. "There it is!" I think, we can debate the meaning of creativity all we want but the real debate we should be having is around the opportunities to be creative and identification of scenarios on a football field.

"Movement is the defining skill that frees our players, not on-ball technique" is how I concluded an article written about the same topic from above. I regret writing the sentence as I did as it devalues the importance of technique but the point was to emphasise that at the top of this hierarchy of our youth development models needs to be this idea of movement and understanding space on a football field (as part of 'communication'), above creativity and above our on-ball technique. Movement is what liberates us to be as we think. Technique allows us to execute a decision, but without understanding of movement the decision-making scenario isn't the best one we could be in at that very moment.

"Every action in football has a decision-making element and a technical element" – this was the first sentence I really wrote down at one of Verheijen's coach education lectures. The first sentence I really wrote down as it sat with me for a moment ignoring whatever was said directly after that. But for me there's a level above this. Every action in football takes place within a moment and scenario. How can we educate players to find the best moments and scenarios to then apply excellent decision making and technical execution?

I've written this book to explore that very idea, one I feel is missing in football literature. I wanted to finish writing this book as someone with expertise in movement and communication on a football field and being able to find common scenarios we can better educate our players in. I've instead come away with the beginning of an obsession; I've only really just started to lay the foundations of the shift in the common idea which I now view the game through.

Ernest Hemingway once said that a good story, a good narrative, was like an iceberg: what is visible is always dwarfed by the momentous structures that are hidden underneath the water, which confers intensity, mystery, power and meaning to what floats on the surface.

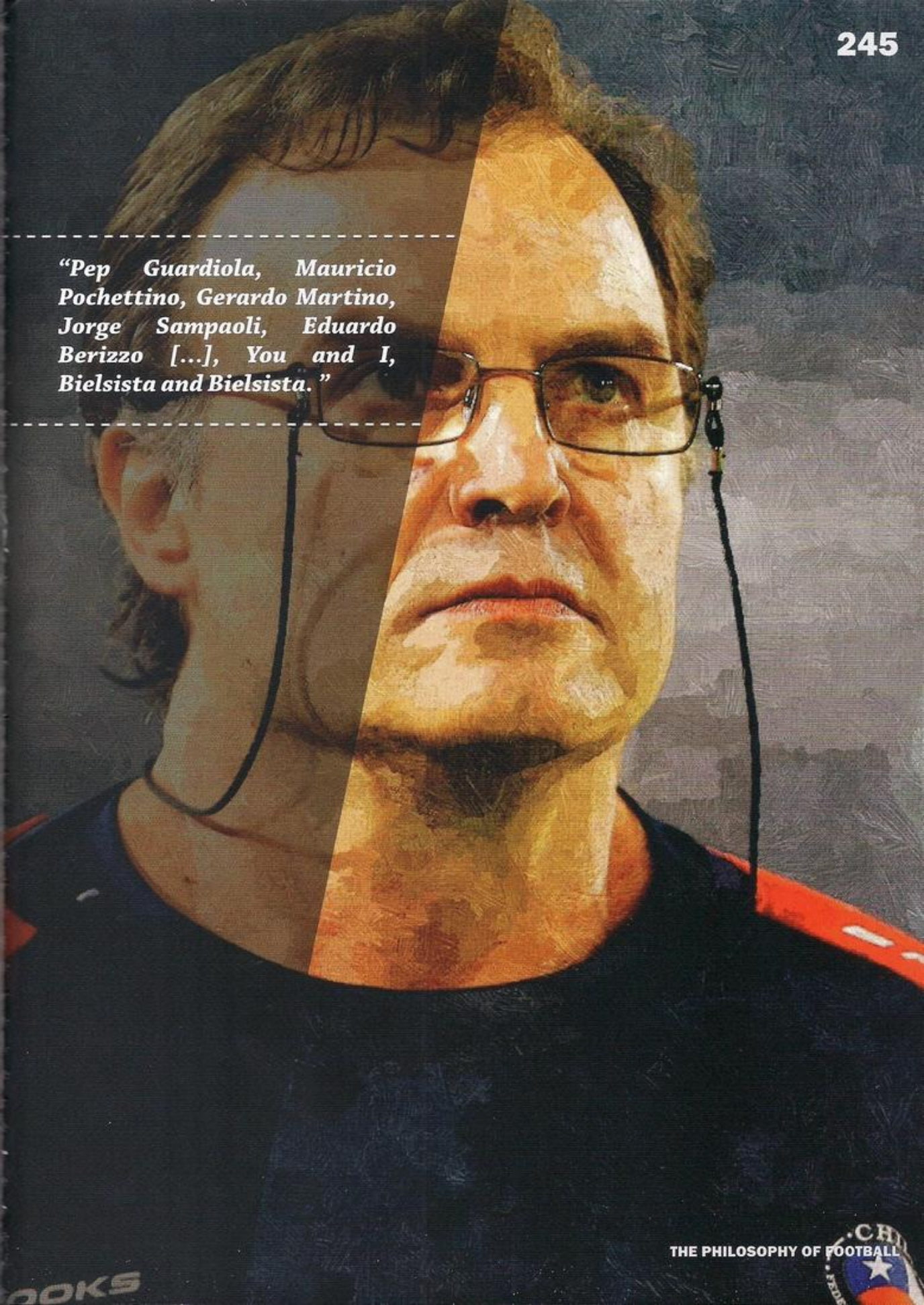
Intensity, mystery, power and meaning – I like the way that sounds. I can only hope that this book ignites a long pathway of intensity, mystery, power and meaning for coaches, analysts and others who have read these pages.

Jed C. Davies

Written and researched from September 2012 to

February 2016





*“Pep Guardiola, Mauricio Pochettino, Gerardo Martino, Jorge Sampaoli, Eduardo Berizzo [...], You and I, Bielsista and Bielsista.”*