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COACHING MOVEMENT OFF THE BALL AND ROTATION IN A THREE-PLAYER MIDFIELD AREA

40 Drills - How to build up
patterns of play and manage
transitions to defend!

FIRO SPORTFOTO

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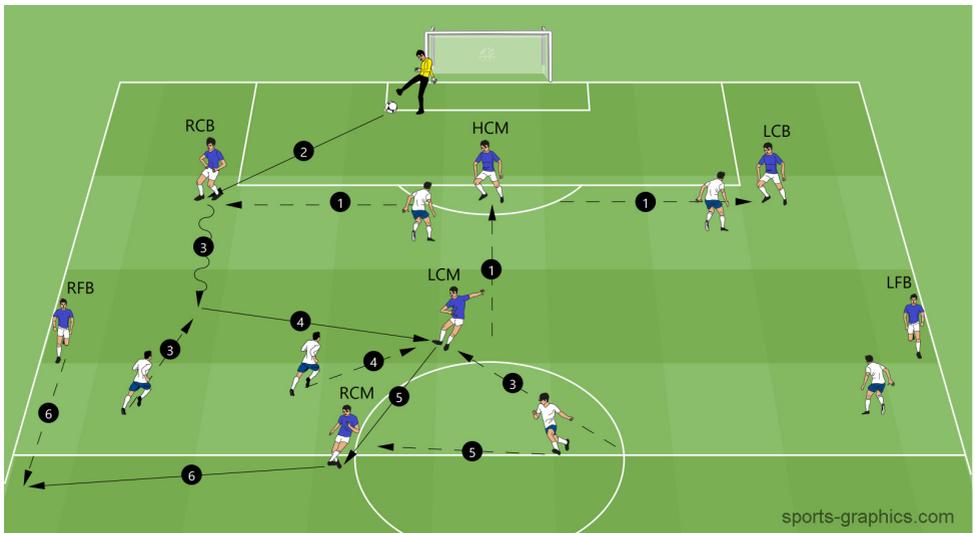
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Introduction

Tactical trends usually come and go in football; Pep Guardiola's possession orientated style, or Jürgen Klopp's counter-pressing which he implemented at Borussia Dortmund and Liverpool F.C. are currently the most modern and essential styles of play; together with a variety of other styles of play, these trends have created many playing patterns. What they all have in common is the fact, that they derive from the most important one of these styles: the positional play (or juego de posición).

We can consider positional play as preparative for one of the most exciting patterns of play and movement we can find in football fixtures nowadays. The aim is to support the player in possession and to create a passing lane behind the nearest pressure line, to advance the move toward the final third: the players rotations.

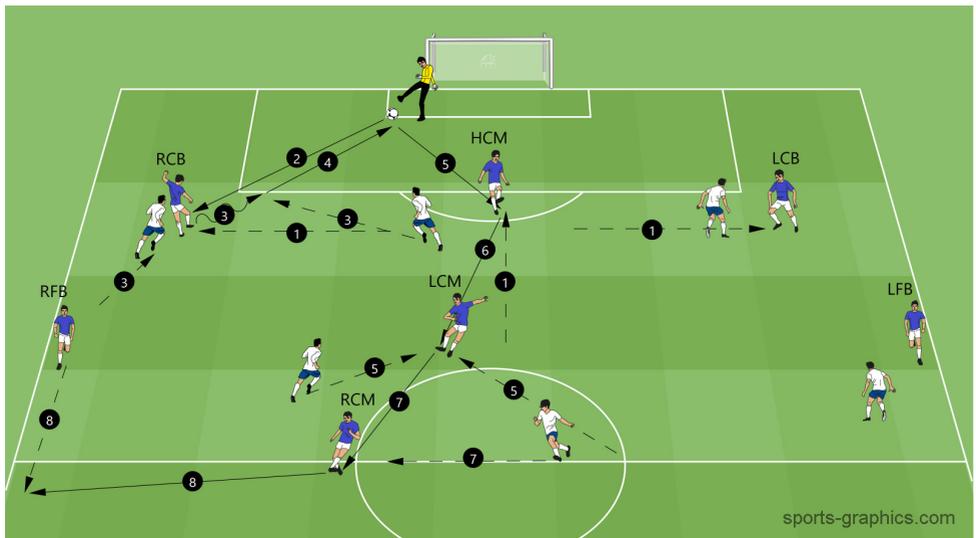
The most famous is the La Volpe Exit (La salida lavolpiana) that involved the center backs, the holding midfielder, and the fullbacks in the building-up phase at a time when players had to stand out of the penalty area for goal-kicks. This rotation allowed the fullbacks to push up the field before the move started and the team to escape the first opposition's pressure line.



The deepest midfielder dropped back in between the two center backs, which split out into wide zones to create a three-man backline. The fullbacks advanced to create another wide line to try to stretch the second defending line horizontally. Another midfielder could drop back into the spaces left vacated by the deepest midfielder on the defensive line, stretching the opposition vertically and playing as another passing option on the same line as the fullbacks.

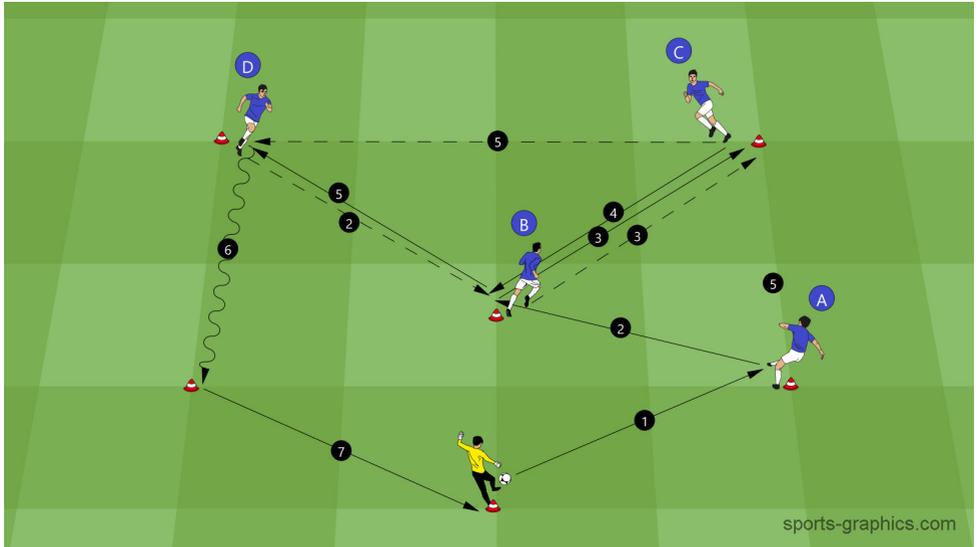
This way, numerical and positional superiority allowed the possession team to progress the ball from the defensive third to the middle third with many possible passing angles and options. The backline of three allowed overcoming pressure two opposition forwards' pressure, when the goalkeeper passed to the free teammate, who could dribble the ball up, inviting the pressure of the opposition winger. The second dropping back midfielder could receive, inviting the pressure of the direct opponent, allowing the third midfielder to receive and play out wide to the fullback behind the opposition winger if he could beat on time the marker.

This concept of moving positions and creating numerical advantages in critical areas of the field was effective even against three pressing opponents, and it has become much more common in the modern game.



If the opposition pressed with three forwards, the goalkeeper acted as back support to find an option to play forward, after having invited the pressure of two opponents by passing the ball to a center back. The holding midfielder or the opposite center back was usually able to receive (the holding midfielder receives in this example). The second dropping back midfielder could receive, inviting the pressure of the direct opponent, allowing the third midfielder to receive and play out wide to the fullback behind the opposition wide forward if he could beat on time the marker.

Exercise 1: cycle passing pattern of play (1)



ORGANIZATION / STRUCTURE

15 m sides' pentagon, 6 cones, 5 players (1 goalkeeper included).

SEQUENCE

1. The goalkeeper stands on the lower cone of the pentagon. He has the possession to start all the sequences.
2. A can be on one of the wide lower cones (on the right one, in the picture); the midfielders B, C, and D start the sequences on the center and upper cones.
3. The goalkeepers pass wide, at his right to A (1).
4. D drops back with a diagonal run, and he receives from A (2) on the center cone.
5. Meanwhile, B runs forward off the ball to create space for D to direct the ball control and to pass him on the run (3).
6. B receives on the upper cone, and he turns back with the ball (180° change of direction) to lay the ball off to D, who acts as a back support on the center cone (4).
7. D must receive with the right body shape to pass toward the opposite side on C's run (5).
8. C receives and he dribbles the ball back to the lower-left cone (6), before passing the ball to the goalkeeper (7), before starting the sequence again.
9. The players rotate as follow: A > B > C > D > A (or opposite cone).
10. The sequence must be carried out toward the opposite side after 3' (A must be positioned on the left lower cone).

VARIATION

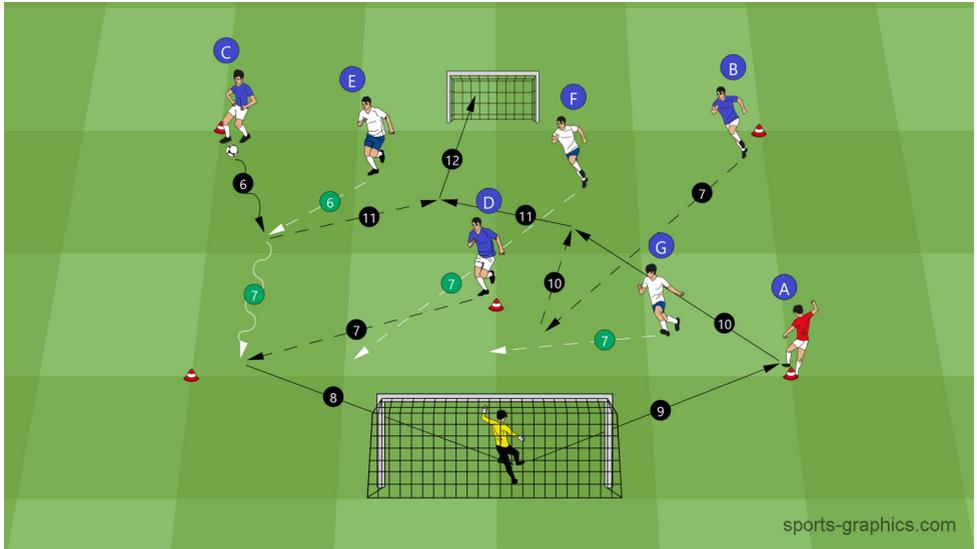
A can decide where to shift to receive the pass from the goalkeeper, starting in front of him.

COACHING POINTS

- Rotation timing.
- Quick reactions after the rotation trigger pass.
- Oriented ball control.
- The pace of the passing pattern.



Exercise 2: 3 v 3 + (1) and Gk – Negative transitions and new rotations to play out through the center



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ORGANIZATION / STRUCTURE

20 m sides' pentagon, 6 cones, 8 players (1 goalkeeper included), 1 regular goal, 1 mini goal, 3 color bibs.

SEQUENCE

1. This exercise is a progression of the previous one; 1 regular goal and 1 mini goal are added. Player A becomes a joker, and 3 active defenders (white bibs) are free to press all the opponents with and without the ball during the rotation sequence.
2. The goals of the defenders are to win the ball and to try to score in the regular goal. The blue players must recover the possession from carrying out a new rotation, before scoring in the mini-goal. In this example, E counters C (6) while the blue players are performing the rotation pattern of play of the previous exercise; he wins the ball and dribbles forward to try to score (7).
3. D and B retreat their positions to close down the goal space and to recover the possession as soon as possible. D recovers the possession, and he passes the ball back to the goalkeeper (8) to start a new rotation sequence.
4. The goalkeeper must pass the ball to the joker (9); this is the trigger of a new pattern of play among the midfielders to play out through the center after the negative transition phase of play.
5. A passes to B (10), who receives on the run, behind G; B lays the ball off toward C (11), who meets the ball after a diagonal run, behind E and F, and score in the mini-goal (12).

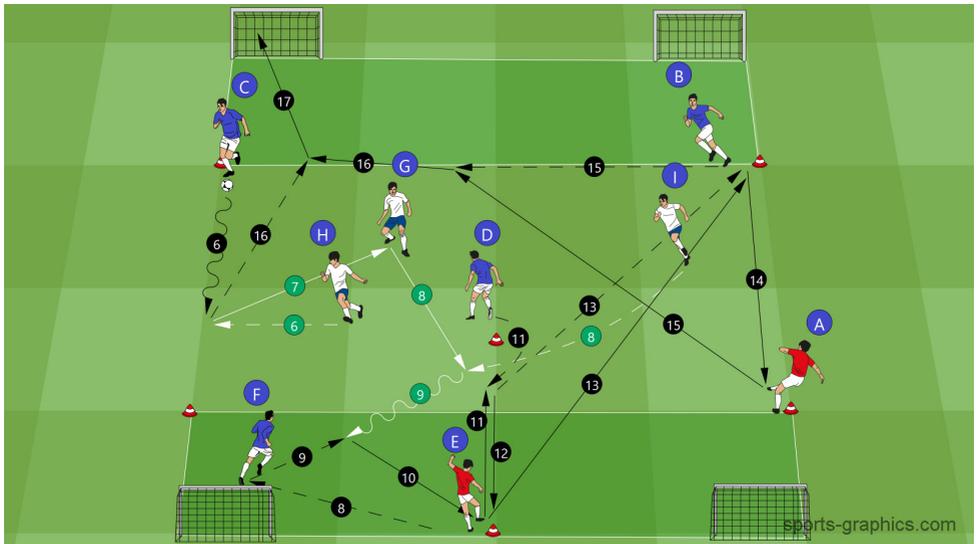
6. If the defenders win the ball back again and until the ball goes out of play, the exercise becomes a 3 (+Gk) v 3 (+1) duel, as the joker is a support for the team in possession.
7. The joker A must change side when the sequence starts again after the ball has gone out of play.

COACHING POINTS

- Rotation timing under pressure.
- Quick counter-pressing in case of loss of possession.
- Quick rotations to counter-attack as the ball is recovered.



Exercise 16: 4 v 3 (+2) - Negative transitions and new rotations to play out with the outer midfielder.



ORGANIZATION / STRUCTURE

50 x 40 m rectangle (10 x 40 m lower and upper finishing areas), 6 cones, 9 players, 4 mini-goals, 3 color bibs.

SEQUENCE

1. This exercise is a progression of the previous one.
2. E and A are jokers on the lower center cone and the right lower cone at the bottom of the playing area, and he has the possession to start the sequence.
3. The objective of the blue team is to carry out the same pattern of play of the previous exercise, under the pressure of three defenders (G, H and I), who are active inside the main area.
4. If defenders win the ball, they must counter-attack, creating a 2 v 1 duel inside the lower finishing area to score in one of the mini-goals.
5. H counters C, in this example, and he passes back to G, saving the possession. G plays forward, meeting I's arched run behind D (8). I dribbles the ball inside the finishing (9) area to play 1 + 1 v 1 duel together with E and against F.
6. F counters the direct opponent and wins the ball back, passing back to e (10); from now, the blue players must counter-attack as quickly as possible, but all they and the second joker on the right (A) must touch the ball before finishing.

7. E plays a 1-2 combination with D, who turns back to receive (11-12); E passes forward again on D's run (13), as the jokers can't play the ball between them.
8. D changes direction and ley the ball back to A (14), which receives and plays a diagonal pass on B's run (15).
9. C runs inside the blues' finishing area and receives from B, before scoring in the opposite mini-goal from A's position.
10. The next sequence must be carried out toward the opposite side after a fixed limit of time (A must be positioned on the left lower cone).

COACHING POINTS

- Quick counter-attacks as the ball is won back by the defenders.
- Quick transitions to defend.
- New rotations pattern of play and quick combinations, if the ball is won back by the first attacking team to finish.



7. In this example, H can win the ball back, and he passes directly to J (5), who is standing on the lower center area. If J can control the ball against A and G, who runs inside the ball area to double team the opponents, the teams switch roles, and the sequence starts again.
8. The white team's player must now move toward the cones, and the blue one must move inside to defend and prevent the midfield rotation of the following sequence.
9. If the defending team wins the ball back again, the players must pass to a joker to start a new sequence again.
10. The sequence must be carried out toward the opposite side after 3' or every time the teams must switch the roles.

COACHING POINTS

- Rotation timing / Find the trigger pass under pressure.
- Press on ball carriers to win the ball back.
- Quick positioning when the ball is won after the pressure phase.

