

# FOOTBALL INTELLIGENCE

Training and Tactics for Soccer Success

ISRAEL TEOLDO, JOSÉ GUILHERME  
AND JÚLIO GARGANTA



# Football Intelligence

Soccer is the biggest game in the world and has proved to be an unprecedented phenomenon of social impact, inhabiting a prominent place in the daily lives of millions of human beings, a game that has impact even in the most remote places. In an ever-changing world of soccer coaching and tactics, player intelligence has become increasingly important, providing the essential ability to act effectively in a given moment. Therefore, in recent years, the tactical component has been increasingly valued and diffused. Around the world, this dimension of sport performance is being studied and applied by many professionals in the field, from the youth academies all the way through to the professional level.

This book is designed to help those who devote much of their time to improving the quality of the game, by coaching and training highly informed, creative and intelligent players. These coaches devote their time and energy to improve players' and teams' performances. In turn, match analysts, physiotherapists, psychologists, clinicians and the sport science team dedicate themselves to optimize resources that help boost the performance levels of the players, the coaches and the team.

*Football Intelligence: Training and Tactics for Soccer Success* presents procedures and ideas that, besides assisting in the task of evaluating the tactical performance of soccer players and teams, also allows improving their expression throughout the learning and training phase. This book will be key reading for football coaches and players alike, as well as students and practitioners of sport psychology and performance analysis.

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“This book was written by three genuine superstars of research, theory and practice in top-level soccer. This is a book that refreshes our knowledge with respect to cutting-edge technical and tactical aspects, among others, through the perspective of complexity. No one who is aware of the evolution and development of soccer can fail to read this book written by professors Israel Teoldo, José Guilherme and Júlio Garganta.”

**João Paulo Medina**, *Sports Executive*

“A compendium of genuine concepts that brings to the light of our discernment a logical and simple comprehension about the game and the training, despite all its complexity. Therefore, it is a book that rebuilds and organizes our way of thinking about the game and the training.”

**Ricardo Drubsky**, *Coach*

“All the tactical complexity of soccer condensed into an intelligent book, which leads us to an understanding of important concepts, therefore opening new paths for a better preparation and assessment of a soccer team.”

**Ney Franco**, *Coach*

# **Football Intelligence**

Training and Tactics for Soccer Success

**Israel Teoldo, José Guilherme and  
Júlio Garganta**

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**This book is dedicated to all those who have devoted much of their time to soccer and to the people involved in it, who help colouring the world and making it a better place to live and get along.**



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# Foreword

To preface a book by acknowledged experts and researchers in soccer such as Israel Teoldo, Júlio Garganta and José Guilherme is not an easy task.

As Júlio Garganta often says, soccer is played with ideas; well-played soccer is played with good ideas and poor-played soccer, with bad or sometimes no ideas at all. This insight by itself provides us with a taste of the rich content developed by the authors throughout this book.

The passion that distinguishes almost everything that is involved with soccer is something fantastic. However, when the central topic is the game, the subject deserves to be considered with the perception of how complex playing is. That is precisely what the authors do. To the extent that the book offers an immersion into the complexity of the tactical dimension, the more attractive the subject becomes. That reminds me of Constantin Brancusi, when stating that “simplicity is complexity resolved”.

Thus, the great deal is to produce ideas that enable the development of an atmosphere that facilitates the generation of solutions for playing simple, but also with quality and effectiveness. Also, everything is developed within logic—the internal logic of the game, the logic of comprehension. Logic that does not intend to be different, and therefore it is. And it is different because, even in an extremely competitive environment, there is still plenty of space and importance to reflect upon and preserve throughout the entire process, the social, anthropological and philosophical aspects, which are so important when it comes to dealing with people.

The logic is also different because, when coming up with “the game/training back to the players”, implicitly, does not neglect the importance of soccer games practiced in public areas, such as streets, vacant lots, beaches, etc. In this aspect, one of the core ideas refers to the typical freedom of this recreational practices, in which participants are allowed to play the role of the “real owners of the game”, not only by emulating their idols, in an attempt to reproduce their body and gestural expressions, but also to do so in a scenario of endless creativity.

Within this environment, children and teenagers used to learn how to play the game through playing, as they picked up its spirit and played every possible role, thus developing their motor and coordinative skills, as well as their cognitive,

perceptual, attentional and decision-making aspects. All this is translated into a “game-specific knowledge”, and is expressed in a natural, spontaneous, ludic and creative manner, becoming captivating and resulting in the vaunted passion for the “ball game”.

This is how, in an up-to-date context, with great sensibility and within the big picture in which the game is incorporated, the authors manage to convey in this work a deep knowledge regarding the development of the skills necessary to its practice.

Based upon systemic thinking, they show that a team is something different from its players, who cease to be isolated parts to become a unit along with the others and thus acquire a new expression.

By potentializing training and the different forms of assessment, Israel Teoldo, Júlio Garganta and José Guilherme propose a new way to effectively prepare players and specially the team, *raison d'être* of the game itself.

Through the interactions, permeated by intentions (behaviours), players and teams are capable of materializing the ideas originally proposed. Thus, they become capable through the broad repertoire, which is systematically acquired and applied in training sessions. Besides, they are encouraged to reflect upon what to do in the different moments or phases of play, thus being allowed, within certain contexts, to make more appropriate decisions to the different demands and as effectively as possible. Therefore, we understand that “training makes the game, which justifies or validates training” (Júlio Garganta).

These are some of the ingredients that the beloved reader will find in this seminal work about the pedagogy of soccer, written by three of the greatest exponents in this area, and that will certainly make you reflect critically about several aspects of teaching soccer, by confronting traditional and present methods.

Enjoy your reading!

Paulo Autuori  
International Brazilian Soccer Coach

# Foreword

To preface a book with so many tested theoretical contents about soccer is for me something rather rewarding and odd at the same time. This is because after 40 years of work in Brazil and abroad, I am still regarded, pejoratively, as a theoretical coach. All because I value the game in which the player does not only play but also reads it, thinks it and generates ideas.

I have always believed that our (Brazilian) way of observing and understanding the game was rather subjective. It was enough to observe and analyse the plays of each player, and we had all the indicators we needed to understand the team's performance.

We have got used to think of a team as the sum of individual performances and of areas that are drawn together as a whole. We have managed to get where we are now by developing the technique of our players who, by their exuberance and brilliance, have made us five-time world champions.

Nevertheless, nowadays we begin to understand that the path that will lead us back to victories and world titles goes through a quite accurate adjustment to what this book so cleverly presents us.

The new soccer, in contrast with soccer played three decades ago, shows us that we can no longer “play” without any of the 11 team players, in the different moments of the game: attack, defence and offensive and defensive transitions. And that does not refer to having a player sent-off, but rather a player who is on the field and does not perform collective actions to achieve the goal.

In this context, the authors, PhDs in their activities, show us that it is not enough to play the game, everyone does that, that it is not enough to know what to do during the game, many do that, but, above all, it is necessary to know the reason for every detail of this complex system, which possesses several games within a game (playing at home or away, early or closing moments of the match, early or final stages of a competition, scoring or conceding first, among others).

Therefore, this book allows us to step into the world of objectivity of soccer, providing us with tools that facilitate our work with our smart goal in an accurate way, without, forcibly, neglecting the beauty of the game.

The didactic and evaluative tools presented here enable the anticipation of scenarios and, in view of the content presented, make this a bedside book for the

coaches who want to become winners in a profession not only so cruel and difficult but also honourable and beautiful.

Enjoy your reading!

Renê Simões  
International Brazilian Soccer Coach



# Foreword

My thoughts on soccer and the concepts I apply bring ideas to a game that prioritizes the synchrony, from all the tactical aspects to the players' technical excellence. The concepts that I usually develop with my players range from the clear definition of their positions according to the game and involve, among other aspects, qualified possession of the ball, in-depth triangulations, aggressive marking and speed in actions of transitional play.

I believe that in order to develop these concepts and maximize the athletic quality of a team we should be prepared for intelligently managing to obtain the full potential of our players in the different game (physical, technical, tactical and emotional) components.

In search of this purpose, this book comes at the right time and with an important mission: to support coaches and soccer practitioners in general, to accumulate knowledge so as to fundamentally enable us to display increasingly more efforts that qualify our game.

The authors of this book alert to the interrelation between the concepts of tactics and strategy, the development of tactics through the model and the principles of play, the creation and occupation of spaces, positioning and movement of players, which I consider key concepts for when we are preparing to play a match. By performing this preparation, we generate a strategy, anticipate potential situations, seek to provide athletes and the team with options of offensive movements and defensive positioning that will allow us to achieve our goals. A well-done and grounded preparation enables us, during the game, to endorse or, if necessary, to rethink the initial strategy, as the game speaks and shows us other routes, which implies that, all of a sudden, we should choose for plan B, tactical alternatives that were also practiced during pre-match.

In one of the chapters within this book, the authors highlight the tactical modelling, which is the expression of what we plan and intend for the game and how we interpret its essence. In order for soccer to be played with ideas, modelling of training and play should provide athletes with conditions to think, to propose the game. Through this organization, we are able to qualify their decision-making and thus have players who are more active than reactive to the game. I say this

because, for me, it is more pleasing to watch athletes and teams that do not display a systematically reactive play.

As a means to examine whether the players understand the concepts I show them, I have been systematically searching for tools to assess, operationalize and guide training according to how I think soccer and how I prefer my teams to behave on the field. I am an apologist for teams that possess creative players, with good technical level (good reception, good passing, etc.) that read the game well, are intense, fast, dynamic, competitive and supportive. Obviously, I am aware that all these qualities are hard to find within the same team, however, the more qualities my team possesses, the closer to excellence in performance and, consequently, of victories we will be.

Particularly, 2014 was a year of professional qualification. I dedicated in my personal and professional life some time to watch, on site, Bayern Munich, Barcelona, Real Madrid, Arsenal, Manchester City, Atletico Madrid matches, among other teams, and to follow decisive matches such as the Champions League and Copa Libertadores finals. In these opportunities I managed to interact with top-level professionals such as Carlos Bianchi and Carlo Ancelotti and to have several interesting conversations, in which I could review and confirm my concepts on soccer. I also used this time to read and study about the (General, Operational, Core and Specific) tactical principles and how to apply them to the training method I adopt, so as to allow my team to play as a proponent of the game. Through the knowledge gained I could think of new and motivating training sessions, which could, among other things, support players' positioning on the field in several situations such as defensive and offensive coverages, development of set pieces in offensive dead ball situations, defenders' positioning and movement in set pieces, team's intra- and inter-lines' organization, and "aggressive" and "fast" transitions of play, such as "lose-and-press" and counter-attacking, among others.

Therefore, in face of the growing importance of the tactical component for quality play—and we could intimately observe this importance during the World Cup matches in Brazil—this excellent book by the trio of professors Israel Teoldo, Guilherme Oliveira and Júlio Garganta comes to convey ideas that allow to enlighten soccer and, as direct promoters of this spectacle, I believe that all of us should enjoy this effect. Thus, I hope you, reader, might enjoy this reading. My technical staff colleagues and I are already doing so!

Enjoy your reading.

Adenor Leonardo Bachi (Tite—Coach of Brazilian National Team)

Adenor Leonardo Bachi (Tite)

# Introduction

Soccer has proved to be an unprecedented phenomenon of social impact, inhabiting a prominent place in the daily lives of millions of human beings, a phenomenon that may be witnessed even in the most remote places of the planet.

On the match stage and behind the scenes of practice and training, the demands of specialization are increasingly greater and more refined, which justifies an increased responsibility and a more accurate competence by all those involved.

The players play the game. The coaches devote their time and energy to improve players and teams' performances. In turn, match analysts, physiotherapists, psychologists, clinicians and the remaining staff dedicate themselves to optimize resources that help boosting the performance levels of players, teams, coaches and others.

In this context, practice in youth academies and top-level professional teams has posed continuously different and challenging problems, with respect to the relevance of the training to play according to ideas and playing styles that allow the materialization of these ideas. Therefore, modern training methodologies are incessantly urged to include practices related to representativeness and specificity of the models and conceptions of play, in order to ensure a significant transfer of sport performance, from training to competition, and to make preparation increasingly consistent.

It is clear, therefore, that the progress of soccer depends, more and more, on the need to create and systematize a body of knowledge that supports the evolution of practices. Hence, it seems relevant to study soccer, in its various fields, in order to help understand the constraints that favour or hinder the progress of players, teams and of the game itself. At the same time, it is necessary to spread knowledge, so as to benefit from it.

The authors of this book have devoted a significant part of their academic, professional and personal time to this enthralling team sport and, over the years, have come to realize that there is not only one single "geography of knowledge" in soccer, just as there is no single answer to the questions: How to train? How to play?

Effectively, the richness of soccer seems to lie, largely, in the fact that it can be played, practiced and thought of in plural. Hence we are in favour of neither the

globalization of training methods nor the standardization of playing styles. On the contrary, we acknowledge that the different perspectives, training and forms of expression of teams and players, comprise an important asset, so that this sport never ceases to be an art and, as such, remains very much alive and keeps stirring emotions.

This work is a result of the study, practice and reflection of its authors, always taking soccer playing and training in soccer as mottos, and was conceived with the purpose of spreading and sharing a way of prospecting and evaluating the game of soccer, according to logics and principles. From a conceptual organization, several drills are presented and evaluation procedures are suggested, and may be applied to gather information regarding the tactical performance of players and teams.

It should be said, however, that the systematization of conceptions and knowledge presented here should not be outlined as a prescription. On the contrary, they are intended to also constitute a contribution that challenges other ways to see and understand soccer.

We wish to dedicate this book to all those who admit that the act of training with quality is the most influential condition in the improvement of players, teams and in the positive transformation of soccer.



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## **Section I**

# **Understanding the Soccer Game and Its Dynamics**



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# 1 Soccer

## A Game of Tactical Knowledge

### 1.1 Tactics as a Complex Dimension

Throughout the years, soccer has been analysed through different perspectives that have emerged due to the use of paradigms that were created by part of the scientific community, which began to apply them to understand the reality of the phenomena (Capra, 1996; Morin, 1991).

Over the last centuries, the evolution of knowledge and expertise was based on paradigms that separated the phenomena or the objects of study so as to understand them in a more simplified manner (Morin, 1991). These approaches not only facilitated countless discoveries and promoted exponential growth in science but also made it clear that the complexity of certain phenomena and fields could not be studied from such angle. That is, they could not be simplified and had to be studied inside the limits of their inherent complexity; otherwise they would cease to exist. Trying to solve this issue, new fields of study, theories and investigation methodologies emerged in the Sixties in a more consistent manner, attempting to understand the phenomena in their complex nature (Benkirane, 2002; Capra, 1996; Morin, 1991; Stacey, 1995).

The attempt to comprehend and understand soccer games is also going through this dichotomy of paradigms. On the one hand the game is split into four dimensions (tactical, technical, physical and psychological), but on the other hand new approaches appear, describing the game as a full and complex creation, in which any attempt of breaking it apart is regarded as a mutilator of its essence. While in the first approach these different dimensions are broken down to the smallest detail, in the second approach, the study of the whole, the dimension or the detail are inseparable from the complexity intrinsic to it.

Given these different approaches, elaborated with the purpose of understanding and acting effectively and efficiently within the game and, consequently, within the training that generates it, we understand that the concept of tactics in soccer should also be considered in light of its own complexity.

In this context, if the definitions of tactics from different authors (Garganta & Oliveira, 1996; Gréhaigne, 1992; Mahlo, 1974; Teodorescu, 1984) point towards the behaviours that the player and/or team assume to deal in a correct way with the problems systematically presented by the game regarding the occupation of



the field, it is reasonable to say that the concept of tactics may be considered as the management (positioning and displacement/movement) of the playing space by players and teams.

This concept is related to what may be observed of the behaviour of players and the team in the field. Thus, we emphasize that this is a simple way to conceive tactics, given that underlying each positioning and displacement/movement there is a complex process that involves multiple aspects of players' cognition—(central and peripheral) perception and memory, information processing, attention/concentration and the (procedural and declarative) knowledge among them—which subsidize a more creative and/or intelligent decision-making from the players and the team, leading to the solution of the problems posed by the game.

Such comprehension of tactics takes this dimension to an emergent process (Frade, 1990; Laughlin, 2008), resulting in the interaction between a combination of factors, ideas and specific knowledge (Guilherme, 2004; Mahlo, 1974) among the different actors of a team: players, coach and the surrounding context (Guilherme, 2004). Therefore, the tactical dimension of a soccer team should be understood as a unique structure distinguished by its non-linear and spiralling complexity and dynamics. In summary, it is about a specific cultural context generated by the interaction of its different actors, which enables the emergence of a collective identity over time.

This idea of the tactical dimension as a unique structure, in which each team uncovers their own measure in a *sui generis* manner, contrasts with the abstract idea through which it is often presented. Thus, when we talk about a team's tactical dimension we do not mean a general concept, but rather a specific one, which contextualizes and gives meaning and consistency to all other dimensions.

In this case, as defined by Gibson (1979), the specificity refers to a qualifying concept of a relation of interaction between variables. These variables represent the specific information of a given context (Laughlin, 2008). As such, the variables are only considered specific if the informational links between them maintain a relation of dependence (Beek, Jacobs, Daffertshofer, & Huys, 2003). Therefore, the tactical dimension assumes in each team a different organism, with its own identity and particularities, which emerge from the relation of complicity with other dimensions. These, however, also exhibit particular characteristics influenced by the specific informational context generated by the respective interactions.

As a consequence of such properties, the technical, physical or psychological dimensions are meaningless without the tactical one to contextualize them, in the same way that the tactical dimension cannot express itself if any of the others is not present. With this statement we do not intend to convey the idea that the tactical dimension is more important than the others, but rather to highlight that it plays the role of generator, catalyst and specific informational coordinator of each team.

This understanding of tactics refers to the interaction of distinct variables: the ideas and specific knowledge of the different actors.