

# TECHNICAL FIELD



COURSE FOR

COACH

PROFESSIONAL OF 1 ° CATEGORY

UEFA PRO

## "THE FOOTBALL THAT I WOULD LIKE TO"

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## INTRODUCTION

The founding idea of my football is based on the will of a **football** purposeful, possession and attack. I would like to play total and collective football, with 11 active players in the offensive and defensive phase. By manipulating spaces and times, we have the ambition to command the game in both phases.

The "game" must be the guiding thread of my team. By "game" we mean that conductor made up of principles, positions and emotions between the players themselves. A game based on the collective but which is able to enhance the strongest individualities.

The two cardinal principles of my idea of football are related to **ball**: we want and must keep it as long as possible until we attack and we must have a strong competitive ferocity to go and recover it immediately once lost.

In modern football the game module is now changing its function. From a static disposition of the players we are arriving at a dynamic occupation of the positions functional to the principles of the game model. A disposition that varies in the two phases (offensive and defensive) and of the emotional moments that alternate in the game.

We will therefore look for technical and dynamic players, giving importance to one on one especially for external players.

Through the tutorials we want to help players recognize situations and adapt to **context** more and more liquid than matches. \_\_\_\_\_

The definition and creation of the **Ideal CONTEXT** ( tactical, technical, physical-athletic and emotional) to make our players express at their best, will be our most important challenge.

I would also like to mention the teams that inspired me in shaping my idea of football.

Teams and coaches that I admired as a fan and others with whom I was lucky enough to play together or against: Crujff's Barcelona and then Guardiola's, Van Gaal's Ajax, Ancelotti's Milan up to Conte's Juventus.

## THE PLAYERS

As we will see below, the meaning of role is changing in modern football. It is no longer a fixed position that identifies the characteristics of a player, but more and more the different functions and therefore the tasks that a player performs in the match identify him. Therefore the characteristics of the players are enhanced through the tasks he is called upon to perform.

However, we quickly see the main qualities of high-level players in modern football through classic roles.

- **GOALKEEPER**

In addition to the classic characteristics of the goalkeeper in the defense of the goal, a modern goalkeeper cannot fail to have qualities in the defense of the space forward and in the game in possession of the ball. The defense of the space forward becomes fundamental to cover the spaces with a high and aggressive defensive line. Furthermore, in ball possession the goalkeeper is to all intents and purposes a construction player able to choose the most effective solution, to lead the ball and to find a filtering pass.

- **CENTRAL DEFENDER**

Together with the goalkeeper, the role of the central defender is the one that has changed the most in the last 30 years, both in the defensive and in the offensive phase. First there was the scorer defender concerned only with his direct opponent, then with the advent of the area there was the defender of the department able to read spaces and situations. Now the defender must be able to mix these two skills as well as cover large spaces if we want to have an offensive team that

attacks with many players. In the possession phase, the defenders became the first directors of the team, often taking the task of setting up given the numerous man-made scoring to which the play teams are subjected. By now the "key passes" (ball transmission that crosses an opposing pressure line) of the central defenders are numerically reaching those of the central midfielders, who have always been leaders in this important statistic.

- **EXTERNAL DEFENDERS**

It is a very flexible role, there are external defenders with very different characteristics but modern football systems allow them to be exploited by assigning them different functions. The full-back who is very good at pushing will be responsible for guaranteeing amplitude in attack, the one who is best at defending can often become a central third, the technically and tactically good one we can use as an added midfielder in possession. Their importance has certainly increased dramatically at the beginning of the maneuver, in fact in some cases we can speak of full-backs as directors.

- **CENTRAL MIDFIELDERS**

The football of the last 20 years, with Ancelotti's Milan, Guardiola's Barcelona and Zidane's Real, has shown that one cannot ignore the technique of one's midfielders. After a historical period dominated by physical midfielders (1990s), the effectiveness of technical players with great vision of the game in the middle of the field has been rediscovered. Obviously, to these qualities must be added a good dose of mobility to be able to perform more functions (construction and finishing for example) and an especially mental predisposition to the defensive phase with immediate re-attack in case of loss of the ball.

- **MIDFIELDERS**

As with the wingers, wingers are also one of the roles with the greatest possibility of flexibility. Based on the characteristics, you can decide to isolate the strong player in 1vs1 in width (a fundamental characteristic in high-level football), or to bring the wing into the finishing area on the inverted foot if we have a technical and able player available. to perform assists and unmarked passes. Here, too, the lost ball re-aggression is a fundamental characteristic as for all the players who act in the offensive half.

- **FORWARDS**

Attackers are often among the most talented players with their own particular characteristics. Talent and characteristics that must be enhanced within a collective capable of bringing out the best individualities. In my model of the game, the attack of depth (even short) is a very important element and often it is the attacker who deals with it continuously (even if attacks in the space of midfielders or wingers can be lethal). In an attacking football with many offensive players (between attacking midfielders and wingers) it is also necessary that the attacker is able to communicate with his teammates with technique and intelligence to facilitate the insertions of the same.

# 1. OFFENSIVE PHASE

## 1.1 CONSTRUCTION

We think that a clean exit of the ball is essential for the good development of the action. We will therefore always try to build the game from behind by organizing the construction phase based on the opposing pressure.

We believe that there are three fundamental options of our player under construction with the ball:

- To conduct\_\_\_\_\_
- Filter\_\_\_\_\_
- Increase with ball possession (also lateral or going back) the space and time necessary to be able to advance through one of the two previous principles\_\_\_\_\_

We will try with particular attention to overcome the opponent's pressing by using a vertex (as a third man) to create what we call the “most open possible” ball.

In zone 1 we will thus have a limited numerical superiority (+1) in order not to waste other men below the ball line. Very important at this stage will be using the **goalkeeper** especially against teams that press us high.

The modern goalkeeper, as already mentioned, at a high level (but not only) must play with courage in advanced positions, leaving the goal mirror and the penalty area. He must be able to find the filter passage (“crux”) and to lead to provoke an opponent's exit under pressure.



We try to build internally for several reasons:

- make the opponent's pressing more complicated
- send out a cleaner ball that is more difficult to read for the opponents. From the center the chances of being dangerous increase and the defensive line we are attacking is kept more engaged.

My idea of the construction is to climb compactly, overcoming one pressure line at a time without forcing verticalizations or launches. This principle allows us not to lose our structure and thus be more ready for the defensive transition phase once we have lost the ball with immediate re-aggression.

**We want to attack well, to defend well.** We will attack trying to bring many players into the ball zone, so we could re-attack with a turnover and delay the opponent's transition to be able to rearrange ourselves for our defensive phase.

Through rotations and exchanges we want a dynamic ball possession capable of  
disorganizing the opponents by making them get out of their positions.

Our offensive development will be at two speeds: behind it will be waiting and preparation, while in front it will be fast and directed towards the goal after the key pass that frees a player between the lines. (The ball transmission will always be dry and strong).

It is evident, however, that the opponents will determine our choices in the construction phase: the more pressure and the greater number of men they bring to our half to press us, the more space they will leave us to attack them.

Starting from the concept that the ball is always faster than man, we want to build our advantage through the continuous and dynamic movement of the same ( *"Without haste but without pauses"*), with the aim of creating space for us to advance. It will be essential that our players do not just perform but that they understand in order to choose the most advantageous option allowed by the opponent.

**The most important sub-principles of construction but more generally of our possession stock are:**

1) Creation of the **rhombus** dribble around the ball carrier:

support, lateral supports and vertex (the latter possibly behind the pressure line). Regardless of the role, the players close to the ball must continually rebuild this rumble around the ball. If a diamond player is tightly marked, he may move to go and away and his seat will be occupied by a teammate.

2) Creation and occupation **free spaces**: behind the line of

pressure free players wait for the ball, continuously correcting the position (equal distance from the opponents) and posture; on the contrary, the marked players move and create a space, a partner can occupy that free space and can be served quickly. If it is marked, it will move again recreating the process for creating the spaces.

3) We must recognize the **game codes**: if the ball carrier is

free with the ball open the teammates move away / unmark in finishing / attack the depth. If, on the other hand, the ball carrier is under pressure and / or in difficulty, his team-mates approach to help him and advance possession.

4) In our football ("position game") the most important aspect

are just the **locations**. We must respect the positions of our playing structure by waiting for the ball to arrive from the player and not the other way around.

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Other important sub principles:

- a) if I have space I carry the ball until an opponent comes out (in this case our vertex prepares for a 1-2)
- b) if free, the partner must be served beyond the opponent's line (not always because it depends on whether we have positional / qualitative superiority)
- c) ball above ball below
- d) ball inside ball out
- e) I play right to go left
- f) I play on who I see
- g) I play and move
- h) playing mainly the ball on the ground
- i) always and continuously stand in the light area
- m) **look for diagonal passages**
- n) **search for the third man**

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*"The third man is impossible to defend"*

(cited Xavi)

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## 1.2 DEVELOPMENT



In the offensive phase we do not have a fixed module but the positioning and movements of the players on the field are required by the search for the achievement of our principles.

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*"The role in modern football is no longer a position, but one function"*

*(cited A. Gagliardi)*

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In particular, the three fundamental macro principles for attacking the opponent's defensive line in an effective way are:

- **maximum and double WIDTH**
- **continuous search for FINISHING**
- **frequent attacks on DEPTH**

These three macro principles should be thought of as containers that must always be full. They are also areas that must therefore always be filled, no matter by whom ... even better if with continuous rotations by the players.

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The goal is to continuously fill these three containers to "stress" the opponent's defensive line.

- **WIDTH**

We want one player, and only one, to always be wide and pointed to ensure maximum width of the field both on the right and on the left in every action.

This will allow us to force the opposing full-backs to make a choice: either they remain wide and allow spaces in the center, or they tighten and will always arrive late on our game changes and cuts of our external.

The amplitude will be guaranteed by players accustomed to playing with pure, technical, fast and good wings to play one on one.

The strikers or midfielders can change the game "with their eyes closed", the opposite exterior will always be wide and high. **We drift to the right** to attack on the left. The OPPOSITE amplitude in fact must be constant and searched for frequently.

The width will be occupied by one player per band, in fact only one player is enough to widen the opposing defensive line, so that the remaining players will be able to place them in the central areas of the field

- **FINISHING**

The main objective of our offensive phase is to find a player in the finishing zone. At least two interns will be stationed constantly in this mobile area between the opponent's defense and midfield and, frequently, other players will join them.

With the ball open and facing the goal in the finishing zone at least two players must attack the depth.

The players positioned between the opposing lines must insistently move in order to always have a free passing line. They must be able to stay out of the opponent's shadow zone.

- **DEPTH'**

The depth will have to be constantly attacked especially when we are closer to the opponent's goal. The attacker and in turn the external and internal players must attack the defensive line with cuts and insertions. There are several reasons:

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- lengthen the opposing team by lowering the defense, thus freeing up the spaces necessary for our finishing
- keep the opposing defenders "mentally" engaged
- attack the space, receive the ball ... and score!

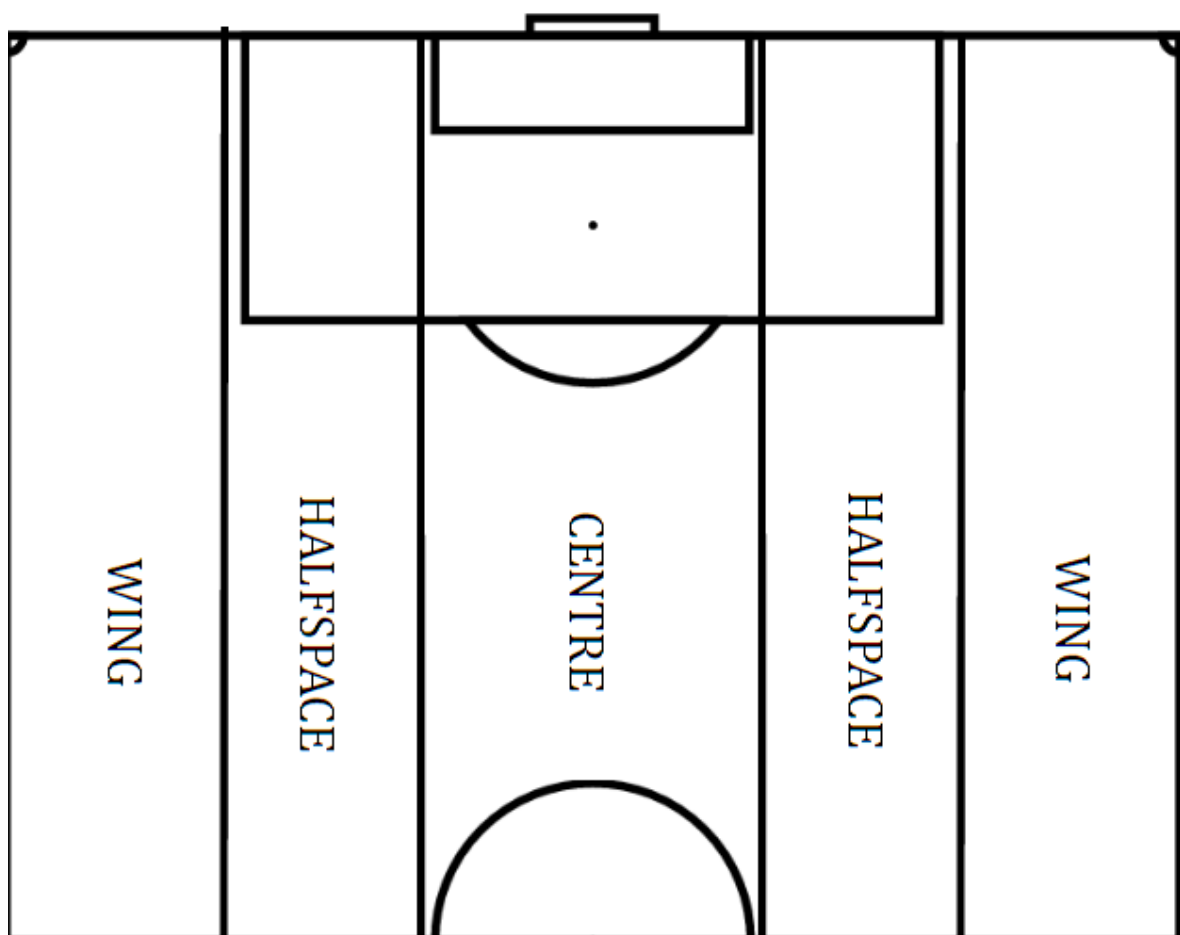
Depending on the characteristics of the players we can play with a single central attacker or with two strikers, in this case the game of opposites is played (one comes the other goes, one short and one long ...).

If our only attacker meets or slips into the finish zone, the outside of the weak side attacks the depth (the container must always be full).

Even short depth is attached to the “open ball” code.

In the possession phase, the team must be sufficiently staggered both horizontally, on different lines, and vertically, on different bands.

Especially on the occasion of the attack on the defensive line, the 4/5/6 players prepared will have to divide vertically along the field to attack the line in all its width (the two vertical bands, the half-spaces and the central area).



Regardless of the module we can see how we could go to occupy the positions of fensive necessary to achieve the objectives of the attack phase.

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The tip attacks the depth, the wings spread out in breadth.

The interiors go up in the finishing area and the full backs come in under construction. The central midfield dances between the two defenders reading the situation (one or two opponents pressing).

We will therefore go to position ourselves on the field with a **325 or 235** in the offensive phase.

But the movements are not fixed. Depending on the characteristics of the players and the context, there will be different rotations: the left back can be raised in width, the outside can come into the finishing area and therefore the inside can move back under construction.



### 1.3 CONNECTION TO THE LINE

It is necessary to attack the opposing line with at least 5 players (the two external and the three central players), often the players in the line attack can become 6 or 7.

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We can simplify the connection to the line in 3 main situations:

- man in the finishing area and looking for a personal solution ( **unodue and wall entry, shot from outside, 1vs1, veil and combinations**)
- man in the finishing area and depth search ( **cuts by the attacker and winger, insertion of the winger**)
- width with 1vs1 and crosses / crosses. (in particular from the bands we will try or **crosspieces** or going to the bottom one **ball behind** on the disk).

The direct attack that will be used on the occasion of particularly high or weak defensive lines in the defensive reading of this situation.

Trying to vary the game and to make ourselves as unpredictable as possible, we could therefore alternate the short game from below with a sudden depth attack even from zone 1 or 2 ("direct attack").

However, we will try to arrive as much as possible in the finishing area in a maneuvered manner.

With the ball open and facing the goal in the finishing zone at least two players must attack the depth.

The defensive line must be constantly attacked with cuts and insertions even out of time.

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In general we will ask our players, in an offensive position, to attack the goal and fill the penalty area.

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We want to fill the penalty area with at least 3-4 players, with particular attention also to the opposite outside who can often successfully close at the far post.

Within a football of principles and spaces, it is however important to be able to add plays and movements encoded in the last 30 meters to guarantee greater possibilities and safety for our players. Play and movements designed and prepared trying to enhance our characteristics.

**However, I believe that in the last 30 meters creativity and individual talent must be the masters, with the players free to express themselves by looking for plays.**

**decisive.**

The organization and the structure of the game with our principles will thus be of fundamental importance in allowing us to reach the last 30 meters with players and positioning capable of disorganizing the opposing defense and thus favoring the decisive plays of our most important offensive players.

## 2. DEFENSIVE PHASE

### 2.1 PRESSING

The objectives in the defensive phase are two:

- **do not take goals**
- **retrieve the ball as fast and as high as possible**

Starting from this important concept, I would like to organize a defensive phase which therefore not only has the purpose of protecting our goal but which is also a means to recover the ball in areas of the pitch that are dangerous for the opponents.

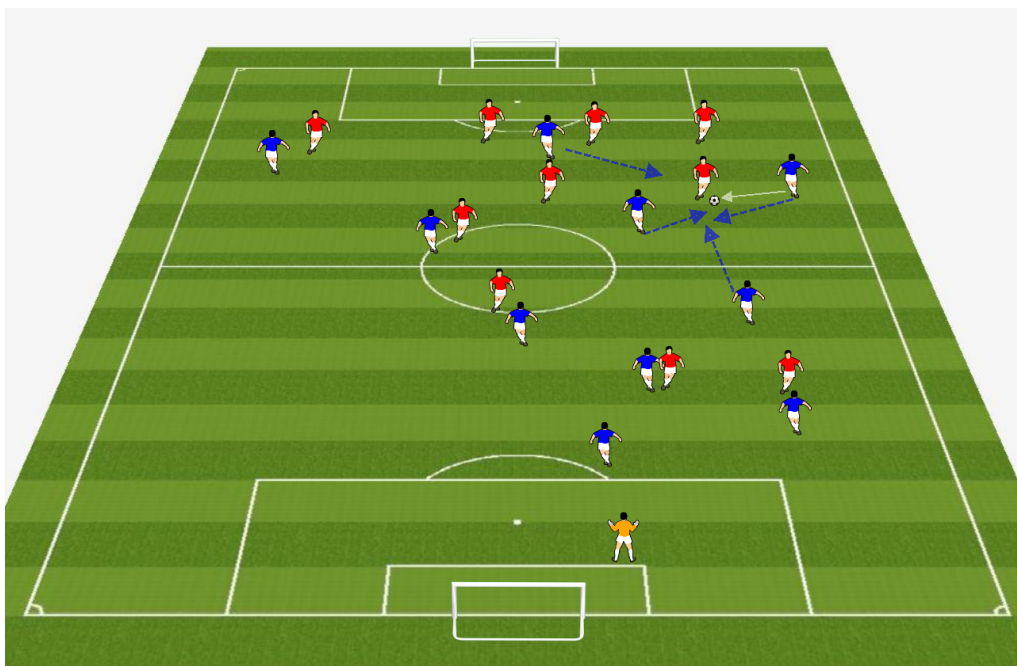
Recovering the ball in the offensive half also has enormous mental and emotional value in the course of the match: it limits the courage and self-esteem of our opponents and increases ours, thus helping us to get closer to that technical and mental domain of the field and of the game that ours main goal.

**Re-aggression:** We want to play a lost ball to regain possession of the ball immediately, and we implement preventive cover and control of the area to continue to occupy the offensive half of the pitch and not run backwards. Defending team by running forward.

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On the lost ball the player closest to the ball starts the re-aggression but the primary objective of the first player must not be that of recovering the ball (too risky to get jumped) but to cover the ball and induce the opponent's carrier to error.

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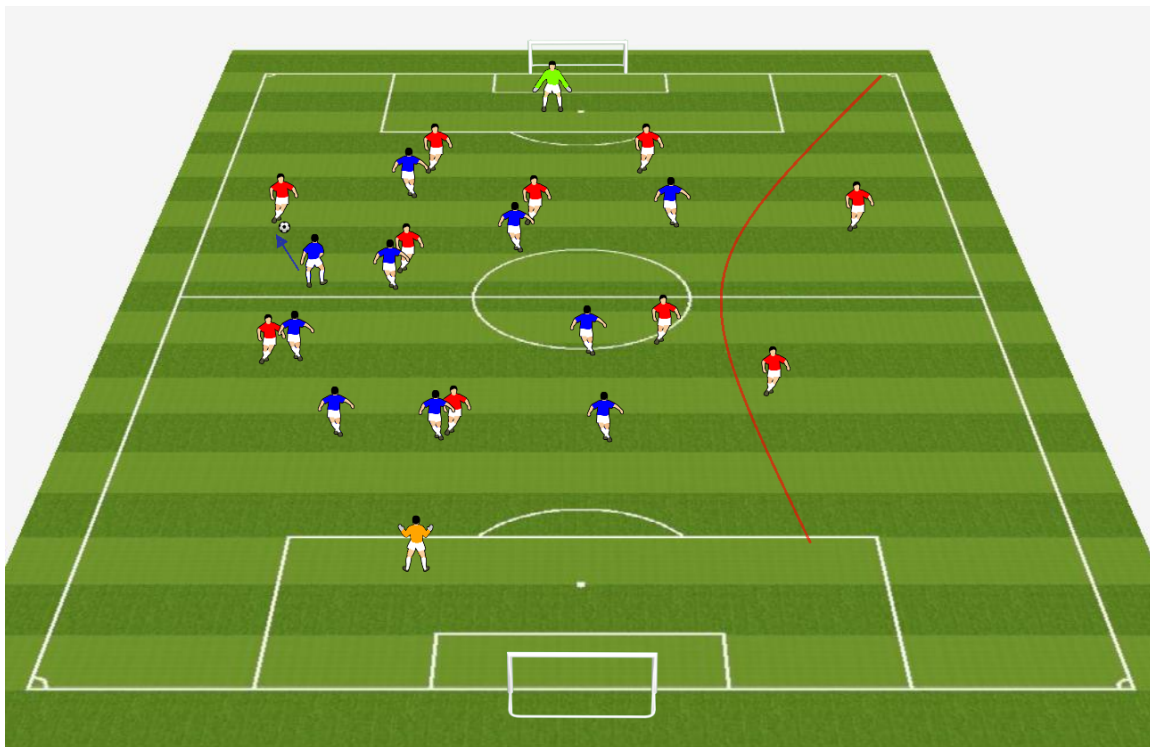
Some **studies carried out with my staff** show that the reappressions of the top teams are about 30-35 per game with 70% success (immediate recovery of the ball). The average duration of these positive re-aggressions is about 5 seconds and involves on average  
2.5 players.

They are mainly the midfielders. obviously, the players most involved in the re-aggression phase and the top players in this fundamental one can complete more than 12  
re-aggressions per game.

The areas in which more re-aggressions occur are the half-spaces and the lateral lines. More difficult to re-attack in the central area (the opponents have more chances to get out) and in the opponent's penalty area where, even if the ball is recovered, it is often immediately kicked away.

The team will implement two different ways of defending depending on the game situation and the situational context. With the ball in the offensive half we will apply a high pressure.  
with the ball in our half we will be more in the waiting line.

We press high on the opponent's construction from behind, studying and preparing the opposition, climbing forward and isolating one or two opposing players on the weak side.  
The defensive line plays high and aggressive and the goalkeeper is essential in guaranteeing coverage to the central players and covering the depth. Having recovered the ball in the offensive trocar, we quickly attack the opponent's goal (5-10 seconds if it does not materialize, we keep possession and resume our positional structure). We try to isolate the opponent by bringing him to the sideline. The attacker gives the signal to press by marking the first discharge, however the forward shifts are called by the players positioned behind who jump on the references allowing the advanced players to climb forward.



From the postponement of the fund we implement an invitation pressing: trying to direct the opposing bets towards a specific area of the field or a specific player we want to attack.

Also in this case we have made some **specific studies**: the big teams in Europe perform about 45 pressing actions per game for a total of 12-14 minutes of actual play spent defending forward. About 60% of these actions lead to ball recovery and only 10-15% of the time a great team under pressure is beaten by the opponent's construction. However, in times when the high pressure is beaten the chances of conceding a dangerous action increase considerably.

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## 2.2 DEFENSIVE PROVISION

With the ball in our half, we reposition ourselves in the starting positions and pay attention to the covers. From marco-marco (of pressing) we pass to marco-copro. We do not want to concede key and filtering passes in the finishing zone (reduced to the maximum with the high line and near midfield).

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We slide a lot in the ball zone.

If an offensive winger, in the last 30 meters, sliding towards the center of the field in the ball zone finds a free opponent between him and the side midfielder, he positions himself internally then towards the ball zone.

The team must be tight and short, in particular the attackers must work connected and ready to recover the balls that come out of our last quarter of the game.

Often the waiting line in one's own half is mistaken for a passive defensive phase.

More and more, however, in modern football we see teams that even when defending low adopt attitudes and mentalities similar to those used in the opposing half of the pitch during the pressing phase.

Almost always **the intensity** is associated with a great physical performance, obviously an aspect not to be underestimated, but the real big difference in the big teams is given by the mental intensity, from that the fierce desire to recover the ball regardless of whether we are pressing or waiting line .

## 2.3 DEFENSIVE LINE

Defensive line to 4 that works in the department but in relation to the opponents. High and aggressive forward on the climbs with particular attention to the position of the goalkeeper.

Even in the defensive phase, as well as the offensive one, the **role of goalkeeper has completely changed in the past 20 years.**

In fact, until a few years ago this role was almost exclusively based on skill and attention in the "defense of the goal". In modern football it has become indispensable for goalkeepers and their coaches to pay maniacal care also to the "play with the feet" phase (as we have seen in the chapters of the offensive phase) and to "defense of space".

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The goalkeeper is tied to his own defensive line, if our line goes up to mid-court because it accompanies our offensive pressing, the goalkeeper must also go up to the edge of the area and beyond ready to give the defenders cover on any attacks from depth.

Other important concepts of our defensive line:

Advance scoring and exploitation of 2vs1 with a defender in front and another in cover.

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An interesting solution with the ball in the last 30 meters could be that of our central midfielder who enters the defensive line to compose a fundamental 5-a-side line to better defend in width and be aggressive centrally.

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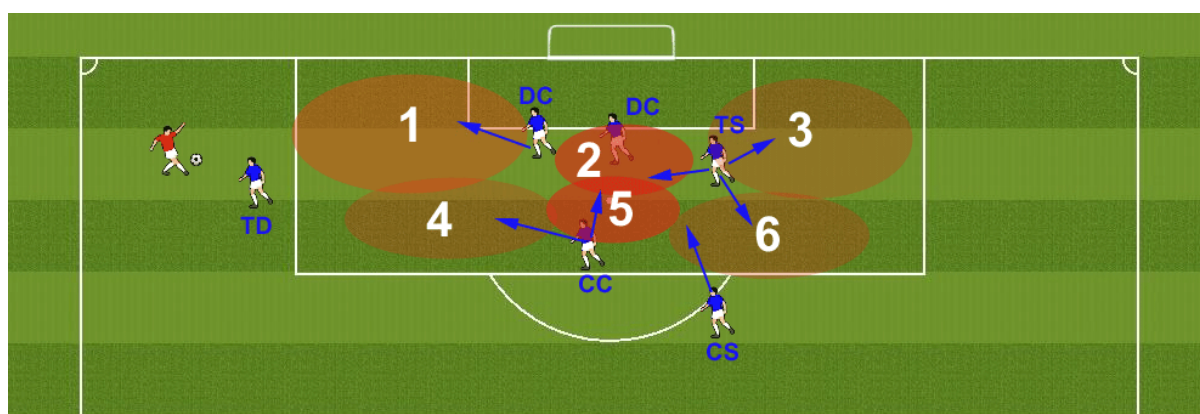
Here too the characteristics of our midfielder and therefore of the context determine this choice.

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We avoid doubling especially those too close to the opponent. Against particular players we prepare a second line of close coverage (5mt) in case of 1vs1.

In a side ball situation we will position ourselves as a man in the area. Within the area of competence the defender will relate to the opponent without taking him in tight but loose marking (to try to obviate counter-movements).



We have divided the area into six zones. On the side ball from the right, the central defender is the first to move and is positioned just ahead of the pole (height that varies) to cover towards zone 1. The defender in zone 1 must avoid the advances on the first post and act from the first screen for the crossers and balls behind. The second central defender is stationed in zone 2. The opposite full-back, slightly diagonally opposite, takes care of zone 3 and / or 6. Everyone within his zone relates to any opponent. Reason why the opposite full-back will also be able to come to the central areas (2 and 5) if we were inferior. The central midfielder runs towards the spot and relates to the opponents in zone 5, in fact, and zone 4. The opposite half-winger tries to return to zone 5, also relating to the zone

6. If we have the half-winger, he relates to teammates and opponents in the 4-5-6 zone.

### **3. TRANSITIONS**

By now in modern football, transitions have assumed a fundamental importance. No longer and not just a quick counterattack tool but also and above all a link between the two game phases and therefore often between two different provisions and modules.

Trying to speed up this transitory phase as much as possible is a reason for great study and a possible pivotal element between a good performance and a bad performance.

In exposing our offensive and defensive ideas we have already widely talked about situations that can be aggregated to the transition phase, this is because the cycle of the game is unique and indivisible and we have summarized it here only for convenience.

#### **3.1 OFFENSIVE TRANSITIONS**

Offensive transitions are one of the game situations where the characteristics of the players available can and must influence the ideas and principles of the manager. Having midfielders, winger and forwards of the leg allows you to be able to restart quickly in attack; on the contrary, having dribble midfielders and maneuvering attackers advises to consolidate the ball without overturning the game front and then start the action with a positional attack.

Another variant that must necessarily be analyzed is the field area in which the ball is recovered: in the offensive half it is preferable to try to counterattack to surprise the opponent's defense.

In the idea of the continuous and indivisible game cycle, the **game price quotation** becomes fundamental for both transitions both offensive and defensive.

By preventive play we mean those movements and attitudes that some players, no longer useful to the phase of the game we are playing, implement by anticipating the transition phase.

In offensive transitions, for example, the preventive play of some forwards when we defend low in positional defense, can include some off-line mismatches, perhaps lateral behind an opponent full-back who has pushed forward. This will allow him to be free to be able to restart when we recover the ball. In the event that the opposing central defender came out sideways on him in marking, we would have messed up their deployment with the possibility of exploiting the spaces freed by these movements.

**Always from our studies** it emerges that the dangerous average transition lasts about 10-12 seconds, with an average of 2 passes to reach the goal and involves almost three players.

### 3.2 DEFENSIVE TRANSITIONS

One of our main weapons in defensive transitions is the **immediate re-attack** lost ball, a topic that we have already extensively treated.

Even in defensive transitions, however, it assumes a notable importance the **preventive game**: when we are in positional attack the defenders no longer useful in the offensive phase must already think about the possible defensive transition, marking the opposing attackers thus preventing the opposing team from restarting quickly.

The so-called preventive markings and coverages are also linked to our re-aggression phase, the players near the ball quickly shorten towards the ball and the opponents near while our defenders are in preventive marking on the attackers trying not to make them receive easily.

Above all in the preventive marking of the central attacker we try to exploit a possible 2vs1 of our power plants by forcing the advance, but more generally even here the study of our characteristics and of the opponents becomes fundamental.

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Against structured attackers who are good at defending the ball, the preventive marking will be more focused on finding an advance even in the case of an individual duel; on the contrary, against external opponents who are perhaps very good at speed, the privileged choice will be that of a preventive cover more attentive to covering the spaces behind.

## CONCLUSIONS

I have tried to expose and synthesize the football I have in mind. A football that comes from my career as a player and from the studies carried out once I hung up the shoes.

I believe that a proactive, attacking and quality football can give great advantages. More enthusiasm in the environment, more involvement from players and staff. Dynamics, these, necessary to be able to create the empathy that is the basis of successful teams. I am also convinced that researching this type of football can give you more chances of reaching the final victory.

Soccer is a very low scoring sport unlike other major sports (from basketball to volleyball). This “small but big” difference determines that sometimes it is not the team that deserved to win that brings home the final result. Numerous researches have shown, however, that in the medium-long term performance tends to align with results, one more reason to immediately search for a quality game that produces many scoring opportunities and that over time will lead us to victory!

I would like to thank my colleagues and the lecturers of the course for this journey together, a stimulating journey especially for the comparison with all of you.

Thanks also to my staff with whom I shared the ideas of my football project.

Finally, a reminder to the career companions who accompanied me during my career and to all the technicians I have had, each of them left me something:

Moro, Reja, Materazzi, Hodgson, Lucescu, Simoni, Colomba, Mazzone, Ancelotti, Leonardo, Conte, Allegri, Viera. And in the national team: Tardelli, Gentile, Trapattoni, Lippi, Donadoni and Prandelli.

A kiss and a big hug to my family are my greatest affections and the first and last thoughts of my days.

*Andrea Pirlo*