Principles of play part 1: HOW TO ATTACK

Posted by STLCoach - 13 Apr 2011 09:34

Principles of play part 1: how to attack

"You can be sure in succeeding in your attacks if you only attack places that are undefended"
Sun Tzu, The Art of War

Youth soccer coaches spend a lot of time thinking about which formation they want their team to play in.

Coaches of children as young as four or five write to me asking if it's better to play 1-2-1-2 or 2-2-2 and when it gets to eleven-a-side ("proper" soccer), the issue of formations seems to become even more important.

Clearly, some coaches think that it's just not possible to play soccer if your team doesn't play in the right formation.

But (as I pointed out in a recent Clinic) there is no "best" formation for a youth soccer team. Coaches have to consider their team's strengths and weaknesses, how the opposition are going to line up, the style of play they favour (slow build ups from the back? Soaking up pressure, then a fast counter attack?) and even the weather conditions on the day of the match.

Coaches also need to consider the ability of their players to understand their role in a team formation.

In my experience, many players under the age of 12 or 13 find having to remember their role in different formations a big distraction and their performance can suffer as a result.

If you are finding it hard to get your team to play in your chosen formation you might be better to make sure they fully understand soccer's "principles of play" instead of the banging your head against a brick wall trying to make them play 4-4-2 etc.

The principles of play were first formalised by Allen Wade, former director of coaching for English FA, in the late '60s in the manual, "The FA Guide to Training and Coaching" and are the foundations upon which all good soccer teams are built.

Principles of play are important because your players need to use them in every match, irrespective of the formation you or the opposing team choose to play.

While principles of play may sound a bit theoretical (and you won't find principles of play even mentioned in 99% of modern coaching manuals), all youth soccer coaches should teach them in their training sessions.

Principles of play can be split into two main categories: attacking and defending. Each has five elements.

The five attacking principles of play
1. Penetrate

Always try to score. As soon as one of your team gets the ball they should ask themselves: "Can I

score?" If the answer is "no", they should attempt to penetrate the defence by passing, dribbling or running at them. Players should always be encouraged to look and move forwards, not back.

2. Support

Help the player who has the ball. Players who don't have the ball should immediately move to a position where they can either receive a pass or draw opposition players away from area the ball carrier is running into (see below).

3. Create width

When attacking, use the full width of the pitch. Having your players in wide positions (with or without the ball) draws defenders out of the middle, unbalances the defence and creates spaces for other players on your team to move into.

The lack of defensive pressure in the centre of the pitch also allows your attacking players time to shoot. Consequently, you should encourage players to run into wide areas of the pitch even if they have no immediate intention of receiving the ball.

4. Create depth

When in possession, your team should attempt to stretch the opposition vertically as well as horizontally. Leaving at least one player back and encouraging attackers to move as far forward as possible will create options to pass the ball forwards and allow safe backwards passes.

5. Surprise/creativity

The ball should be moved towards the goal as quickly as possible and player movement should be immediate and hard to predict. You should also tell your players to be creative in the way they move the ball. Volleys, back heels, flicks, moves such as step overs and fakes should all be taught and positively encouraged. Even if they fail, the prize – a goal – makes them worth the risk.

How to practise principles of play
Penetration

Practise and develop individual dribbling skills in 1v1 contests. Team penetration can be practised by playing small-sided games on long, narrow playing areas to encourage direct play.

Support

The basic principle of good supporting play (moving to a place where you can receive a pass) can be quite easily demonstrated and developed in 2v2 games.

Creating width

Play 4v4 on a short, wide pitch with three goals at each end. The rewards of stretching a defence horizontally should soon become apparent.

Depth

Practise stretching opponents vertically by playing 4v4 games where players are told there must always

be someone in the position of central defender. Move on to 7v7, split the field into thirds and make it a condition that there must always be at least one player from each team in each third.

Surprise/creativity

In all the above games, encourage speed of play and congratulate players who demonstrate individualism and flair. Teach moves, fakes and skills such as ball juggling and never criticise a player for trying something that doesn't work.

Conclusion
You will have a team full of players who understand the principles of attacking play (even though they may not know them by that name) can play in any formation, against any opposition and adapt quickly and effectively to whatever happens on the field.

You should take every opportunity to teach and reinforce them, ideally by using small-sided games and helping your players to discover the answers for themselves.

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Cut out the pass IN ATTACK

Posted by STLCoach - 13 Apr 2011 09:46

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Cut out the pass

By David Clarke

One of the things the modern greats like Xavi, Lionel Messi and Zinedine Zidane have is the ability to receive a ball under the pressure of onrushing opponents – it seems to me that they don't need any space at all to control the ball and keep it away from opponents.

Of course you and I are coaching young players who can easily be put off by a player running towards them – they need a lot of space to control the ball.

Defenders must close down opponents quickly so they reach the player at the same time they receive the ball. With no time to get it under control it will be much easier for the defender to step in and win it.

How to play No man’s land
Using the penalty area mark out an area the same size opposite with a 10-yard "no man's land" in between the areas.

Play 5v5 with a goalkeeper, two defenders and two attackers on each team.

Put two attackers from one team and two defenders from the other in each half.

Players must stay in the half they start in.

Toss a coin for kick off, play starts with the goalkeeper.

Restarts are with the goalkeeper if the ball goes over the end lines, no corners. Take throw-ins as usual.

Play is continuous – when a team wins the ball they look to pass and attack the goal.

Attackers must create space for the defenders to pass to.

Defenders must try and win the ball from the attackers.

How to advance it
The passing player can follow the ball into the attacking half.

Widen "no man's land" to 20 yards to make passing and timing of runs harder – do this by moving the orange area back 10 yards but keep the areas the same size.

By making "no man's land" wider you make the pass longer giving the defenders more time to see the ball and close the attackers down.

It also means that it will be harder to make the pass accurate because the player will need to think about power.

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