

**THEORIES ON
ATTACKING**

*“The 5 Principles
Of Attacking”*

It is important to teach the Principles of Attacking and Defending. To get a better understanding of these Principles, it is perhaps best to begin with the Attacking Principles.

The five (5) Attacking Principles are: 1) Penetration; 2) Support-Depth; 3 Support-Width; 4) Mobility; and 5) Finishing

Whenever a team gains possession of the ball the immediate thought of the player with the ball should be: Go to goal! Getting the ball going forward toward the opposing goal should always be the first option upon possession. This is “penetration” and is the most important of the attacking principles.

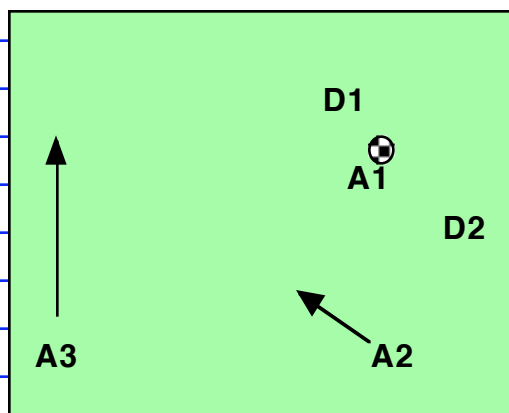
The player in possession of the ball thus becomes the First Attacker.

The keys to getting the ball going forward are the next three (3) principles: support-depth, support-width and mobility.

The player with the ball should optimally have support behind (depth) and on one or both sides (width). The person closest in support -- either behind or on the side -- becomes the Second Attacker. All others are Third Attackers. Of the two (2) support players, the depth support could be viewed as the more important since this player can also provide covering defense should possession be lost.

Coaches of youth teams should preach depth support as much as possible. This support player can be directly behind the player in possession or on an angle, diagonally behind. The decision of where to be -- directly behind or diagonally -- is up to the second attacker and obviously depends on the placement of defenders.

In the diagram below, Attacker 2 moves diagonally left to get into



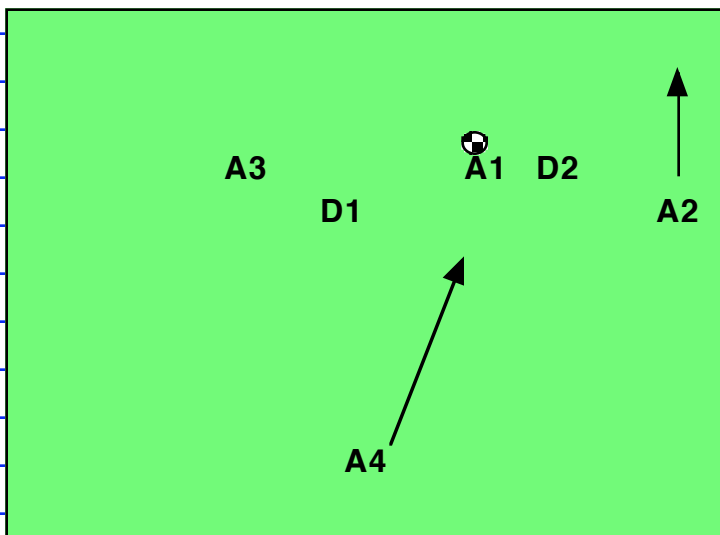
a better support angle for Attacker 1 since Defender 2 is in the passing lane directly behind Attacker 1. Attacker 3, meanwhile, moves into a wide support spot. In this situation, Attacker 2 is a much better passing option for Attacker 1 since Defender 1 could step into the passing lane between Attackers 1 and 3.



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Now, should Attacker 1 beat Defender 1 in their 1v1 battle, Attacker 3 would become a good option, providing this player continues his or her run along side the ball. Defender 2 would give chase and probably attempt to jockey (or guide) Attacker 1 toward the middle of the pitch where most of the supporting defensive players will be. This is where Attacker 2 becomes even more useful than before. Attacker 2 would do best to keep pace as the depth support player until Defender 2 makes his or her move. If Attacker 1 is indeed angled in toward the middle of the pitch, Attacker 2 should become a width support player, on Attacker 1's right side, with the possibility of getting ahead of Attacker 1 into a more penetrating position. The decision of course depends on the placement/movement of the defending players. Should Attacker 2 take up the width support spot on the right side than a fourth attacker must take up Attacker 2's depth support spot. This is called "mobility" -- movement of all other players in support of the ball.



While Defender 2 has done his or her job of guiding Attacker 1 to the middle, Attackers 2 and 4 continue to complicate matters for the defense by getting into advantageous positions. And, with a fast run ahead, Attacker 3 can be a dangerous (to the defense) option on the left. The Attacking team of four (4) has done an outstanding job of getting the ball going forward.

By applying the first four (4) attacking principles -- penetration, support-depth, support-width, mobility -- the attackers are now creating an opportunity to apply the fifth and final principle of finishing -- scoring a goal. By getting the ball going forward, by first adding support from behind and then adding some width and with a fourth attacker moving up into the attack, the attacking team has created a scoring opportunity



It is indeed important for youth coaches to teach the attacking principles as part of training and this holds true for all age groups. This does not mean, however, that you want the players to act like robots on the field. Soccer is not a choreographed sport.

Creativity is what makes soccer such a beautiful game.

The attacking principles are there as a means to an end -- scoring goals, which is, obviously, the object of the game.

And the attacking principles **do not** restrict creativity in any way.

In fact, creativity could be a “sub-principle” within any of the main principles.

Creativity is definitely a part of Attacking Principle 1 -- penetration.

With the idea being to get the ball going forward toward goal as immediately as possible, a creative dribble past the first defender opens the field for the remaining attackers while causing defenses to scramble about in an effort to get support and in proper balance.

Creativity is also featured with the second and third attackers by virtue of their decision making process.

To get into optimal and optional passing lanes, attacking players must make creative runs -- diagonally, bending, overlapping, flat, rotating, etc., all of which will be covered and described next.

The final attacking principle, finishing, can be a culmination of all of the above --

- a creative dribble to beat a defender +
- two or three creative runs by support players +
- a creative pass from the first attacker =
- a creative goal such as a header or volley off a cross, a cracking shot into the top corner of the net, etc.

Call it “Creative Attacking!”

Speed of play can indeed be defined as a tactical concept. Getting your team to play with speed without sacrificing quality of play is a worthy task and certainly one not difficult to accomplish.

Speed of play relies on five (5) principles:

- 1) Movement off the ball;
- 2) Short, accurate passing;
- 3) Creative runs forward;
- 4) Quick touches;
- 5) Clean first touch.

Movement off the ball: While the player in possession of the ball is the most important speed of play attacker, the remaining attackers must be in constant motion. The third and fourth attackers need to make runs that move away from the ball or the path forward of the player in possession of the ball.

Short, accurate passing: Speed of play is not the same thing as Direct Play; that is, speed of play does not require long passes behind the defense. Rather, speed of play requires short passes, some of which may not always be in a forward direction toward the goal. And, of course, the passes must be accurate to maintain speed of play consistency.

Creative runs forward: As the ball makes its way to goal, it is important for some players to open up some space. This is done with creative runs -- diagonally or bending, straight with a quick, lateral cut, etc. Once the ball reaches the scoring area, players -- specifically the forwards when not in possession -- need to make “check to” and “check away” runs. Checking to or away from the ball can unbalance or disorganize a defense.

Quick touches: In order to maintain quality speed, attackers need to restrict their amount of touches. Dribbling is secondary to 1-, 2- and 3-touch passing and receiving. One-touch play, or wall passing, is the key weapon in speed of play.

Clean first touch: A clean first touch enables the attacking player to play quicker. A clean first touch can result in an effective 1-touch combination play. At the very least, a clean first touch allows for better decision making.



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Emphasizing these five speed of play principles can be done during the technical and tactical phases of a practice session.

In the technical phase, start by putting players into pairs and conduct the “3-2-1” passing and receiving drill. Players start with simple 3-touch passing -- receive with the first touch, set the ball up with the second touch, pass with the third touch. Start this segment by having the players pass with either the right foot or left. Run for 60-90 seconds, then switch to the other foot. Next, have the players alternate the three touches -- receive with left foot, set with right foot, pass with left foot, or vice versa. Lastly, have the players perform all three touches with the same foot. Do each segment for 60-90 seconds. In the two-touch P&R segment do the same as with the three-touch. Use alternate touches and same-foot touches and again going for 60-90 seconds. End the drill with simple one-touch passing and receiving.

In the tactical phase, begin with a simple warmup drill -- 3-team “Numbers-Up” Keepaway. One team defends against the other two teams for a certain amount of time -- 2-3 minutes is adequate. Within this game limit the “Numbers-Up” teams to touch restrictions. Start with a 3-touch restriction. After each team has served as defenders, go with a 2-touch restriction on the attacking teams. Then finish with a 1-touch restriction game.

Keep the small-group teams together for the next segment and in a tight grid -- perhaps 40 yards long by 30 yards wide for a 5v5 match -- and play “Line Soccer”. Start with a basic 2-team game, with the winning team staying on to play the idle team. Progress to a 5v5 “Line Soccer” game with touch restrictions. Start with 3-touch, move to 2-touch and then to 1-touch.

The last segment of teaching Speed of Play would be a regular two-team match. This, however, starts with touch restrictions -- 3-touch to 2-touch to 1-touch and then finishes with a regular match with no restrictions but with the emphasis on quick touches.

This kind of training session should be conducted as often as possible before and during the season.

Often you hear youth coaches talk about ball possession:

“We need to possess the ball more,” they say to their players. That is good.

Coach possession. Possession is what makes the Brazilians so much fun to watch. They make the game look easy with their flare, with their creativity with the way they dribble and pass and move. Possession is their objective. But they do what all youth coaches must teach:

They Possess With A Purpose.

The purpose being to score a goal.

Stringing together five or six passes in the midfield without the ball going forward toward goal may seem technically spectacular but it is certainly not purposeful. This is where the **Attacking Principles** come in. Penetrating the defense via a dribble or pass to a supporting player is possessing with a purpose.

Most importantly, the movement of the supporting players is what makes possessing the ball seem so simple. An outside back (defender) passing the ball forward to a midfielder and continuing his run down the flank will unsettle an otherwise organized defense as it puts more attackers into the scoring zone sometimes creating what is known as a numbers-up situation.

Constant movement wrecks havoc on defenses which is why youth coaches should teach “attacking” soccer. In youth soccer, too often you see the two or three defenders in an 8v8 game, hanging back by their own penalty box, while their teammates -- the midfielders and forwards -- attacking some 40 yards away from them. It is this “coaching not to lose” mentality that hurts soccer.

The best advice here is to tell your players this:

“No matter what position you play, everyone defends and everyone -- and I mean EVERY ONE -- attacks.”

“Except me,” your goalkeeper may say. “I defend but don’t attack.”

“Wrong!” you will counter. “Because every time you make a save or take a goal kick or punt the ball you are beginning our attack.”