

The Argentinean Passing Game

theory

The words of Angel Cappa were confirmed in the last World Cup in Germany. The Argentines passed the ball beautifully. Caressing it with love, one and two touch passing, pass and move. But they don't just move anywhere. They have fantastic technique, but also a great insight into the game, creating angles with their runs. I feel we do not practise simple possession play enough and the Direct Game, the brain child of Charles Hughes, technical director at the FA in the 1970s, who preached a direct style of play using as few passes as possible to get the ball forward. It had been wing commander Charles Reep, retired from the RAF and a statistician who had studied how goals were scored in hundreds of games. He discovered that 80% of goals scored were from three or less passes. He went on to work with Graham Taylor at Watford in the 1970s that had great success using this theory. But times change and one of the greatest ever goals was scored after a 24 pass move by Argentina against Serbia and Montenegro in a 2006 World Cup group match.

This game celebrates the beauty of good possession football.



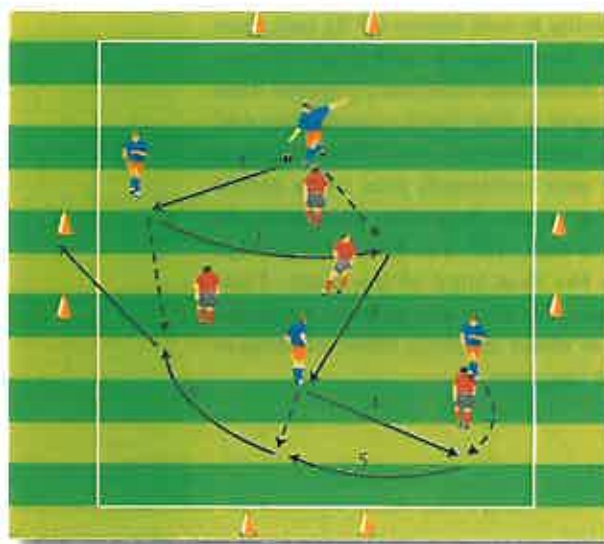
"The elementary steps that define a good player are that he receives the ball, passes. And then runs. Not the opposite. But increasingly frequently we see that when a player receives the ball, the first thing he does is run with it. Then when he looks up, it's already too late. He is surrounded, and if he tries to go forward he runs into an opponent. And so the journalists have a justification for their view that nowadays there is no space on the field. Of course there isn't; playing like that, the players close down their own space."

Angel Cappa (an Argentine coach)

"Where I come from, Don Torcuato (a neighbourhood in the outskirts of Buenos Aires) we are lucky to have a lot of open spaces and fields. I spent my whole childhood playing football with my friends, from dawn to dusk, always in open spaces. Sometimes we'd stop for a bite to eat and then carry on. I still live there – when I go to Buenos Aires – and I still play football there with those same friends."

Juan Roman Riquelme

practise



Organization

- Age Group U10s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach.
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 1 metre wide (use traffic cones) placed 5 metres back from the pitch, centrally at each end and on the sides.

Progression

The teams play a possession game. To score a goal they must complete a set number of passes, e.g. 6-8 before they can score in any of the 4 small goals. This gives the team that does not have possession a further chance to win the ball back. The team in possession has to show composure to score after the passing sequence. To help the team in possession you can add a neutral player.

The Diagonal Game

theory

This game was inspired by an interview I did with Malcolm Cook the founder of Freeflow. He described his childhood, playing football in the streets of Glasgow. The streets were lit by gas lamps which were diagonally opposite each other. They were used as goals so the children automatically made diagonal runs.

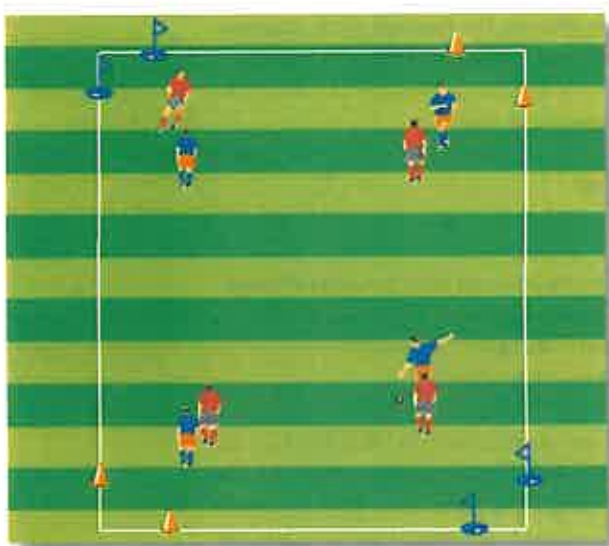


"A lot of great players in the world will often say they don't know how they produced a piece of game changing magic – 'It just happened', said with a shrug of the shoulders.

What has actually happened is that they have often merely instinctively carried out an act from the archives of tricks and instincts built up over the years of playing football with no boundaries in their formative years."

Oscar Egbogu (grew up playing street football in Africa and now plays 5 a side in London with work colleagues)

practise



Organization

- Age Group U9s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 4 goals made up of 8 traffic cones and 8 coloured marker cones. These are placed at each corner

Progression

The pitch can be laid out in either portrait or landscape mode. The goals are situated in the corners. Red marker cones are placed on the traffic cones at one end and also on the goal diagonally opposite. Blue markers cones are played on the other two goals. So one team tries to score in 2 goals that are diagonally opposite and has to defend the other diagonal, made up of the blue goals. The game can take a bit of time for the players to adjust to scoring in and defending goals at opposite end of the pitch. Another game to really test the insight of players and a game which encourages diagonal movement.

The Dutch Brick Game

Theory

This game is from the streets of Amsterdam. Gullit and Rijkaard played together in the same games. Incredible to think they went on to play together for both AC Milan and the Dutch national team. This game is all about showing skill in a confined space. Ideal for a warm up game as the space restriction will prevent players from running quickly and pulling muscles. This game will only really work with older youth players with good skill. Younger players would struggle with the lack of space. I like these types of games as they replicate a crowded mid-field. It is easy to look good when you have plenty of space but how can you handle playing in tiny areas of space. This game really sorts out the technical players with insight from the rest.



"Someone would find a brick which was then placed on its end to serve as a 'goal'. The object of the game was to 'score' by striking the brick with the ball and knock it down. We played our version of football every single day."

Ruud Gullit

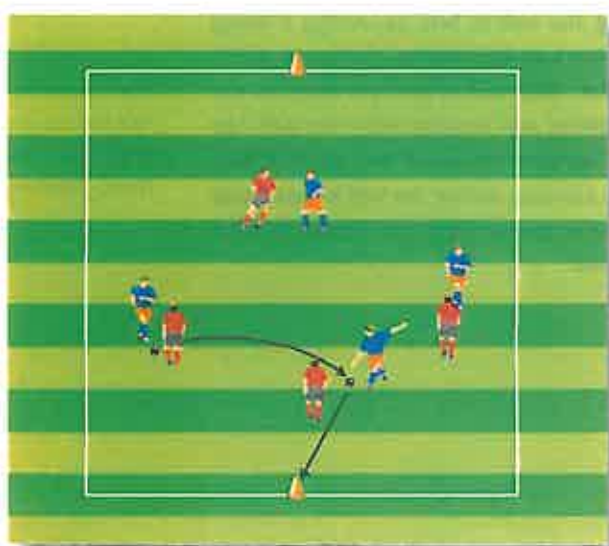
"I never played on the main pitch; we preferred the adjacent basketball court where the target for a 'goal', the post of a basketball net, wasn't so big, and no one had to stay there and guard it. Because the court area was so much tighter, and the goal so much smaller, it was imperative to develop your skills and technique, to be quick-thinking rather than chase the ball all the time. The football was so good."

Ruud Gullit

"But as a human being in the streets I was already a winner. I mean in my neighbourhood I was a winner, a fighter. Street football is about one on one, it's aggressive and I always wanted to go against the best players. After the game in the street when everyone was going home I always invited someone to play with me one on one. That was real winning or losing. Dead or alive. And I liked that. I was playing for my life."

Frank Rijkaard

practise



Organization

- Age Group U12s to adults
- Pitch sizes 30 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach but much smaller than a normal 4v4 pitch
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes (4 players)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – A traffic cone at both ends of the pitch.

Progression

A normal game, but to score a goal players have to knock down the solitary cone.

The One-Nil Game

theory

This is probably my favourite small sided game. This is more of a possession game, played like a standard 4v4 game but with a twist. Because of the nature of the game I limit each match to 5 minutes, but may play 2 or 3 games one after the other.

"We didn't need a referee; we accepted the rules of the game and stuck by them. For us not to have done so would have spoilt the game for everyone. It taught us that you can't go about doing what you want because there are others to think of and if you don't stick to the rules, you spoil it for everyone else. Of course, that was not a conscious thought at the time, but looking back those kick about games on the waste ground did prepare us for life."

Stanley Matthews



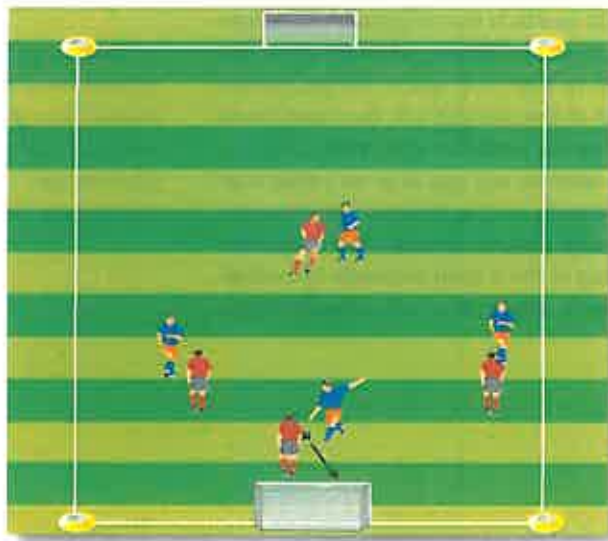
"For me, the ball is a diamond. If you have something that precious you don't get rid of it, you offer it."

Glenn Hoddle

"Keeping possession is a way for a team to get a breather."

Gordon Taylor PFA

practise



Organization

- Age Group – U11s to adults
- Pitch Size 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

The basic rule of the game is that you can only win by one goal. The game begins as a normal 4 v 4 game with the usual rules. When a goal is scored, the team that scored must just try and keep possession and can't score into the goal. If they do, the goal is disallowed and a goal kick ensues. If the other team then equalise and make it 1-1, either team can then score to make it 2-1. The team leading then just has to keep possession. This is an excellent possession game and also allows a team to play out time by keeping possession, which is why I limit the game to just 5 minutes. As well as possession, teams also have to attack with speed when needing to score and the game also focuses on transition.