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Tactical Principles of Soccer: concepts and application

Tactical Principles of Soccer

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Abstract: There are few researches that study tactical knowledge of soccer players concerning game principles. It occurs because it is difficult to observe and evaluate the tactical knowledge during the game. Definitions of the game principles are still confusing in the literature. The authors have used diverse terminologies, references and characteristics to define them. The aims of this paper are to provide a review about some concepts regarding soccer tactical principles, to propose the addition of two more tactical game principles and to show their practical applications on the offensive and defensive phase.

Keywords: Soccer. Tactics. Game Principles.

Introduction

In Soccer, tactical skills and the cognitive processes underlying decision-making are considered essential requirements for excellence in sports performance. During a match numerous situations whose frequency, chronological order and complexity cannot be predicted emerge, demanding great capabilities of adaptation and immediate response from the players and teams based on the concepts of opposition that are present in each phase of the game (GARGANTA, 1997).

These situations of opposition are so evident in a Soccer match that one can observe tactics through the spatial organization of the players in the field in view of the match circumstances with respect to the movements of the ball and the alternatives of action of both teammates and opponents (DUPRAT, 2007). This form of understanding tactics gives special emphasis on movements and positioning within the field highlighting players' ability to occupy and/or create free spaces according to the most suitable tactical principles for that given moment.

Tactical principles are defined as a set of norms about the game that provide players with the possibility of rapidly achieve tactical solutions for the problems that arise of the situations they face (GARGANTA; PINTO, 1994). Because of such features, tactical principles need to be

understood and present within players' behaviours during a match, so as their application facilitates achieving objectives that lead to score or avoid goals. Collectively, the application of the tactical principles helps the team to better control the game, maintain ball possession, to perform variations in ball circulation, change the pace of the game and materialize tactical actions aiming to break up opponents' balance and, consequently, to more easily score a goal (ZERHOUNI, 1980; ABOUTOIH, 2006). Therefore, the more adjusted and qualified the application of the tactical principles is, the better the tactical performance of the team or player will be in the match.

Given the importance of the tactical principles for the organization and performance of the team within the field of play, this paper aims to contribute to the definition, in both the conceptual and operational level, of the tactical principles of the game of Soccer, to propose the addition of two core tactical principles and highlight their practical applicabilities in the offensive and defensive phases of play.

The Tactical Principles

The tactical principles arise from the theoretical construct regarding the logic of the game, and are operationalized by players' tactical-technical behaviours. It is therefore demanded from the players being aware of such principles, in order to simplify the transmission and operationalization of concepts, thus helping in the selection and execution of the action necessary to the situation. Tactical principles possess a certain degree of generalization of movements and are closely related to players' actions, motor mechanisms and tactical awareness and knowledge (CASTELO, 1994).

Within Soccer literature, different designations have been used to mention and describe tactical principles. Among the variety of concepts presented by different authors (ZERHOUNI, 1980; TEODORESCU, 1984; WRZOS, 1984; BAUER; UEBERLE, 1988; MOMBAERTS, 1991; BAYER, 1994; CASTELO, 1994; GARGANTA; PINTO, 1994; PERENI; DI CESARE, 1998; RAMOS, 2003; ABOUTOIH, 2006; DUPRAT, 2007), it is possible to notice certain agreement of ideas around three theoretical constructs that relate players' tactical organization in the field of play and that are identified as: general, operational and core principles.

General principles possess such denomination because they are common to the different phases of play and to the remaining principles (operational and core), based on three concepts that come from spatial and numerical relations, between teammates and opponents, within the zones of challenge for the ball: (i) do not allow numerical inferiority, (ii) avoid numerical equality and (iii) seek for numerical superiority (QUEIROZ, 1983; GARGANTA; PINTO, 1994).

Operational principles are according to Bayer (1994, p.145), "... the necessary operations to deal with one or various categories of situations". Therefore, they are related to attitudinal concepts for both phases of play, whereas in defence: (i) neutralize shooting situations, (ii) regain possession of the ball, (iii) prevent opponents' progression, (iv) protect the goal and (v) decrease effective play-space; and in attack: (i) maintain ball possession, (ii) build up offensive actions, (iii) progress through the opponent's half, (iv) create shooting opportunities and (v) shoot at goal.

In turn, *core principles* represent a set of ground rules that guide players' and team's actions in both phases of play (defence and attack), in order to create unbalances in the opponent's organization, stabilize the organization of the team and provide players with an adjusted

intervention within the "centre of play"¹. In literature, it is possible to observe propositions with four principles for each phase of play that are consistent with their goals, whereas in defence the principles of: (i) delay, (ii) defensive coverage, (iii) balance and (iv) concentration; and in attack, the principles of: (i) penetration, (ii) depth mobility, (iii) offensive coverage and (iv) width and length (WORTHINGTON, 1974; HAINAUT; BENOIT, 1979; QUEIROZ, 1983; GARGANTA; PINTO, 1994; CASTELO, 1999).

Besides these principles we propose the addition of two others that are related to the concept of playing tactics and to the functional collective coordination², designated as principles of "defensive unity" and "offensive unity". Those are based on cohesion, effectiveness and functional balance between team's longitudinal and transversal lines³ so as to transmit confidence and safety to teammates and to provide direct intervention in the "centre of play" from those players that are further away from the zones of challenge for the ball.

The addition of these principles emphasizes the importance of the interactions of elements inherent to the game as well as the idea presented by Garganta (2005, p. 181) who states that "...each one of the teams facing each other behaves as a unity whose relations between its elements transcend individual values".

According to such concept, and through these principles, which are oriented through players' understanding about the game and through the playing model advocated by the team, it is assumed that the players should rationally occupy the field of play according to the instantaneous configurations of the match, thus avoiding stretching and imbalance of the action lines and allowing the team to play as a homogeneous block⁴ (HAINAUT; BENOIT, 1979).

In practical terms, the application of these principles is manifested in situations in which the player feels that his own team provides basic organization, which allows the occurrence of compensations or support to actions within the "centre of play", ensuring effectiveness and organization. Indeed, when a player takes on another specific position or function in the match according to its momentaneous configuration, it is expected that another teammate cover his/her duties and his/her position within the team's system of play (CASTELO, 1996).

Also, there are situations, in which the players further away from the "centre of play" provide conditions for their teammates directly involved in the on-ball actions, to press the opponent both defensively and offensively. However, for this, as stated by Castelo (1994), it is necessary that each player, besides being aware of the surface of the field of play, its limits and basic specific functions, equally understands his/her teammates' missions and be ready to help them in any game situations, by supporting or taking on their duties.

Besides this, the application of these principles and the team compacting force the opposite team to play under a strong technical-tactical and psychological pressure, what may increase the possibilities of mistakes in game situations and help players to be ready to directly interfere in the "centre of play" at any moment or circumstance, whether it is for the displacement of the player towards the ball or for the fluctuation of the "centre of play" towards the play (TAVARES; GRECO; GARGANTA, 2006).

¹ The "centre of play" is a 9.15m radius circumference from the position of the ball. This measure of the "centre of play" was conceived based on the official laws of the game of Soccer (FIFA, 2008), since it is assumed that players who are positioned further than 9.15m from the player in possession are not able to directly interfere in his actions.

² Functional collective coordination refers to the capacity of the team to move according to the exploitation of the skills and competences of each player.

³ The team's longitudinal and transverse lines originate from the position of the players in the field of play. It regards imaginary lines conceived between players' positions that, if conceived perpendicularly to the bottom line, are designated longitudinal, while if conceived alongside this same referential are designated transverse.

⁴ In this context, the idea of "homogeneous block" should be reported as a kind of dynamic homogeneity, with respect to the purposes of the group, i.e. a unitary collective coordination. It regards a systemic phenomena that is typical of the collective behaviour, such as occurs with shoals, flocks, swarms when they move, as one single body. In the search for organizational homogeneity, teams demand positional balance, to ensure the identity and integrity of the collective system, while seeking for opponents' imbalance/disorganization.

Figure 1 schematically presents the general, operational and core tactical principles, as well as their objectives in each phase of play. It is possible to observe that the core principles possess a dialectic relation, i.e. for each of the five attacking principles (penetration, offensive coverage, depth mobility, width and length and offensive unity) there are the same amount in defence (delay, defensive coverage, balance, concentration and defensive unity) that possess opposing objectives. Next, the specifications, guidelines and typical actions of each of these principles for each phase of play will be presented.

Figure 1: Phases of play, objectives and general, operational and core tactical principles of the game of Soccer (based on GARGANTA; PINTO, 1994)

Tactical Principles of Soccer

General Principles	Seek for numerical superiority	Avoid numerical equality	Do not allow numerical inferiority
	Attack (with ball possession)		Defence (without ball possession)
Phases	Attack (with ball possession)		Defence (without ball possession)
Operational Principles	Maintain ball possession Build up offensive actions Progress through the opponent's half Create shooting opportunities Shoot on goal		Prevent opponent's progression Decrease opponent's playing space Protect the team's goal Avoid shooting opportunities Recover ball possession
Core Principles	Penetration - Destabilize the opponent's defensive organization; - Directly attack the opposite player or the opponent's goal; - Create advantageous attacking situations in numerical and spatial terms.		Defence-Attack transition and/or Attack-Defence
	Offensive Coverage - Support the player in possession by providing options to give sequence to the play; - Decrease opponents' pressure on the player in possession; - Create numerical superiority; - Unbalance the opponent's defensive organization; - Ensure conservation of ball possession.		
	Width and Length - Use and enlarge the effective play-space of the team; - Expand the distances between the opponents' positions; - Make marking difficult for the opponents; - Facilitate the offensive actions of the team. - Move to a safer space; - Win time to make adequate decision for a better subsequent action; - Seek safe options through players in defensive position to give sequence to the play.		
	Depth Mobility - Create actions to disrupt opponent's defensive organization; - Position oneself in a suitable space to score; - Create in-depth passing options; - Achieve ball control to give sequence to the offensive action (pass or shot on goal).		
	Offensive Unity - Facilitate team dislocation onto opponent's midfield; - Allow team to attack in unity; - Make safer the offensive actions performed in the epicentre; - Allow more players to get in the game epicentre. - Diminish play-space in the defensive midfield.		
			Delay - Decrease space the player in possession has for offensive action; - Direct the progression of the player in possession; - Block or delay opponent's attack or counter-attack; - Provide more time for defensive organization; - Restrict pass possibilities to other opponents; - Avoid dribbling moves that enable the progression in own defensive midfield and towards the goal; - Prevent shot on goal.
			Defensive coverage - Act as new obstacle to the player in possession, in case he dribbles the player performing Delay; - Insure and provide confidence to the player performing Delay in order to support his initiative in blocking the offensive actions of the player in possession.
			Balance - Ensure the defensive stability in the area of the challenge for the ball; - Support teammates performing Delay and Defensive Coverage; - Block potential passing options; - Mark potential players who could receive the ball; - Chase the player in possession and make an effort to recover the ball; - Regain the ball and move it away from the zone where it was recovered.
			Concentration - Increase protection of the goal; - Drive opponent's offensive play towards safer areas; - Increase pressure within the game epicentre.
			Defensive Unity - Enable team to defend in unity; - Ensure the spatial stability and dynamic synchrony between longitudinal and transversal lines of the team in defensive actions; - Decrease the offensive amplitude of the opponent team in width and depth; - Ensure basic guiding lines that influence the players' technical-tactical behaviours positioned outside the game epicentre; - Constantly balance or rebalance the relative strengths in the defensive organization according to the playing situations; - Obstruct possible passing options for opponents that are in the epicentre of play; - Decrease the playing space using the offside rule; - Enable involvement in a subsequent defensive action; - Enable more players to get in the epicentre of play

Core Tactical Principles of the Offensive Phase

The core tactical principles of the offensive phase of play help the players, both the distant ones and the ones who are more directly involved in the "centre of play", to guide their attitudes and their technical-tactical behaviours on behalf of the team's goals, i.e., to take the ball to vital areas of the field of play and score a goal (CASTELO, 1996).

The compliance with these tactical principles allows the team to obtain favourable conditions in terms of time and space to fulfil the task, i.e., a higher amount of players in the "centre of play", greater ease to perform offensive technical-tactical actions and greater possibilities to create instability in the opponent's defensive organization (CASTELO, 1994).

Principle of Penetration

The principle of penetration is characterized by the evolution of the game, in situations in which the player in possession is able to progress towards the goal or the bottom line, searching for areas of the field that provide greater risk to the opponent and are susceptible to the continuity of the offensive action, to a shot at goal or to the scoring of a goal.

The guidelines of this principle advocate the search for the disorganization of the opponent's defence by creating situations favourable situations in spatial and numerical terms, that allow the attacking player(s) to move to a vital zone of the field of play, which is favourable to a shot at goal.

As typical actions of the principle of penetration, we can consider dribbling and progressions that decrease the space between the player in possession and the opponent's bottom line, enabling crosses or displacements towards the opponent's penalty area; dribbling opposite player(s), thus allowing the gain of space and guiding the player in possession towards the goal; dribbling opposite player(s) thus allowing the player in possession to perform a pass/assistance for a teammate to keep up with the play or shoot at goal; or also in a situation of 1 vs. 0 in which the player in possession "attacks" the space towards the opponent's goal.

Principle of Offensive Coverage

The principle of offensive coverage is related to the actions of approximation of the teammates of the player in possession, thus giving him offensive options to proceed with the play, through passing or an action of penetration into the opposite defence.

The guidelines of this principle assume the simplification of the tactical-technical response from the player in possession to the game situation, the decrease of pressure from the opponent on him, the timely increase of maintenance of ball possession and, in a certain way, the formation of the collective balance that benefits the first defensive actions in the case the player loses the ball to the opposite team.

The actions related to this principle can be noticed within the game when the teammates of the player in possession are positioned in the field of play in order to receive the ball and proceed with the play, performing, for example, 1-2 combinations and/or triangle passing with the player in possession. We consider that the player performed the principle of offensive coverage when he is positioned in the "centre of play" and enables a passing option to the player in possession, allowing him to pass the ball.

In practical terms, it is possible to verify that the distance from the player who performs the offensive coverage to the player in possession may vary according to the (technical, tactical,

physical, psychological, etc) characteristics of the opposite team, their strategy for the game (midfield marking, pressing, etc) weather conditions (wind, rain, snow, heat, cold, etc), pitch conditions (grass, gravel, irregular, etc) and the position in which the ball is (defensive, offensive or midfield third). It is then necessary that the players who perform offensive coverage are aware of these variables and thus, position themselves accordingly to the game situations. For example, the player performing offensive coverage can position himself a bit further from the player in possession when the ball is closer to the offensive third, where it implies more pressure from the opposite team to regain the ball, or when weather and pitch conditions are poor, to the extent that higher ball control skills are demanded, what can also demand more time from the player. Moreover, in situations in which the ball is closer to the defensive third, a place where the pressure from the opposite team is lower or weather and pitch conditions are more favourable for the execution of pass, players can perform offensive coverage closer to the player in possession to provide more rhythm and speed to the game (CASTELO, 1994).

Principle of Depth Mobility

The principle of depth mobility is related to the initiative of the attacking player(s) without possession of the ball to search for optimal positions to receive the ball. Among the numerous movements performed by the player in the field of play, we define as depth mobility the movement of the attacker "on the back" of the last defensive player, in order to generate instability in the defensive actions of the opposite team and substantially increase the number of scoring chances. Also, it is considered that these movements favour the creation of new playing spaces, which will provide better conditions to the player in possession to proceed with the offensive action towards the opposite goal and/or to enable other teammates to move themselves in the effective play-space.

The guidelines of this principle aim, primarily, the variability of positions, the creation of options for deep passes and the break of the opponent's defensive structure, so as to increase the game pace and succeed in unbalancing the opposite defence.

Another important aspect regards the difficulties generated by the attackers without possession to their markers when they perform actions of depth mobility that go beyond their range of view since it hampers the simultaneous perception of the ball and of the player. Besides that, the spaces created for these movements, when properly explored by other teammates, make it hard for the opposite players to mark their respective attacking players, preventing mutual defensive coverage (WORTHINGTON, 1974).

Because it possesses such advantages the aforementioned author considers that this is one of the most important principles to be developed collectively. For this, it is necessary that all players are able to comprehend the displacements of their teammates according to the position chosen by the player in possession, what normally does not mean to simply and purely move oneself, but rather to move with tactical meaning and organization.

The actions related to this principle can be noted within the game through the players' displacements in relation to the opponent's bottom line or to the opponent's goal. The movements towards the bottom line can be designated by action of divergent depth mobility that in sum aim to create passing options, increase the field of play in width and length, and/or destabilize the opposite defence. Besides these, there are the actions of convergent depth mobility, which are actions that the attacker performs towards the opponent's goal, aiming to find extremely favourable conditions for scoring a goal.

Visually the success of the actions of depth mobility can be observed when the player can receive the ball in a more advantageous situation for the attack and his movements force the defender to follow him, thus being displaced from his position of defensive coverage, or when

as pass is made to the space created by the action of depth mobility, enabling to create threats to the opponent's defensive system.

Principle of Width and Length

The principle of width and length is distinguished by the relentless search of the players without possession for positions further away from the player in possession, thus creating defensive difficulties to the opposition, which in face of the transverse and/or longitudinal increase of the field of play, should opt for marking a vital space of play or the opposite player (WORTHINGTON, 1974).

The actions of this principle begin after the regain of ball possession, when all team players search for and explore positions that allow the increase of the offensive play-space, having as guidance the technical-tactical behaviours of their teammates and opponents according to the position of the ball. Therefore, the distance of some players from the "centre of play" create spaces for their teammates to benefit from free corridors towards the opponent's goal or facilitates the occurrence of 1 vs. 1 situations, with clear advantage for the attacking player (CASTELO, 1996).

The guidelines of this principle are directly associated to the theoretical knowledge that players possess about the tactics of the game, as well as the comprehension of the space to the game, particularly for a certain offensive action. This principle will be crucial to help the player to occupy and explore vital spaces, which provide more and better options of deep and wide passes and are important for creating a higher number of offensive tactical options (SOLOMENKO, 1982).

Besides this, the control of the typical actions of this principle is essential for success in the game, since the space constrains the time to perform the action and to make a decision according to the transitory configuration of the match. Therefore, the more space the team has to attack, the better elaborated will be their answers to the demands of the situation.

In the game the actions of the principle of width and length can be observed when players perform dispersing movements, both in width and in length, searching for the increase of the effective play-space, as for example, the individual movements performed immediately after the team regain the ball that, if performed efficiently in the collective plan enable the creation and exploration of free spaces in pursuit of the goal.

Principle of Offensive Unity

The principle of offensive unity is strictly related to the comprehension of the game by the players and to the playing model adopted by the team. This principle is established based on the knowledge of the players about the importance of their movements, their limitations and their positions in relation to their teammates, the ball and their opponents (TEISSIE, 1969; HAINAUT; BENOIT, 1979). In the search for cohesion, the effectiveness and the functional balance between the longitudinal and transverse lines of the team in the offensive actions, players should also possess a high degree of tactical understanding aiming not to break down the solidity of the team, thus being able to play as an indivisible whole (SILVA; RIAS, 1998).

The guidelines of this principle imply an organization according to the play-space and to the specific roles of the players, in which they should fulfill a set of tactical-technical tasks during the offensive phase that clearly goes beyond the dominant mission of each player in their real activities (CASTELO, 1996).

By considering the guidelines of this principle, the actions of a highly organized attack support preventive measures ensured by one or more players who position themselves and act on the back of the attacking players. Through such behaviours, starts a conception of team organization that will be responsible for providing an organized transition to defence in case of unsuccessful offensive actions and/or the organization of a temporary defence according to the situation, until all teammates return to their real positions within the team's defensive system (TEODORESCU, 1984).

By playing according to this principle, the team, as a structured block, will be able to increase, without decompensation, their lines of action and penetration within the opposite team, in order to solve momentary game tactical situations as a whole.

During a match, the representative actions of this principle can be observed through the position of the players within the field of play, so as to favour a continuous, fluent and effective circulation, thus avoiding its interruption (loss of ball possession). Besides this, the group of team actions will instill confidence and safety to the teammates within the "centre of play", allowing the creation of continuous instability and resulting imbalances to the opponent's defensive organization.

Core Tactical Principles of the Defensive Phase

The specific tactical principles of the defensive phase help all players, both the most distant ones and the more directly involved in the "centre of play", to coordinate their actions and their tactical-technical behaviours within the logic of movements preconized for the team's defensive method, essentially looking for rapid and effective execution of the defensive actions that lead to the achievement of both of the defensive objectives: defend the team's own goal and regaining possession (WORTHINGTON, 1974).

The fulfillment of these principles will help players to guide their behaviours and positions in relation to the ball, their own goal, their opponents, their teammates and the dynamic events of the match, thus allowing the defense to guide the attacking actions to less vital areas within the field of play and also being able to limit the space and time available to the execution of attacking actions by the opposite players (BANGSBO; PEITERSEN, 2002).

Principle of Delay

The principle of delay basically refers to the action of opposition by the defensive player to the player in possession, aiming to decrease the space of the offensive action, restricting the passing options to another attacking player, thus avoiding dribbling moves that favour the progression through the field of play towards the goal and, primarily, preventing the shot at goal (CASTELO, 1996).

The guidelines of this principle propose the rigorous and individual marking on the player in possession, the stop or delay of the opponent's offensive action, the restriction of passing options and of shots at goal, the prevention of the longitudinal progression through the field of play, the induction of the game towards a certain side of the field and the gain of time for a defensive organization in order to increase the porobability of defending effectively and regaining the ball (WORTHINGTON, 1974).

The typical actions of this principle are present in the frontal approach that usually occurs in the central corridor of the field of play and/or closer to the defensive area, where the defender should achieve a position between the ball and his own goal; and in the side approach that usually occurs in situations closer to the sideline, where the position of the defender is established according to the ball, his own goal, the attacker and the intention to drive the actions of the opponent's attack to this side/direction.

Principle of Defensive Coverage

The principle of defensive coverage is related to the supporting actions of a player "on the back" of the first defender, in order to strengthen defensive marking and avoid the progression of the player in possession towards the goal. By taking a position that avoids defensive imbalances that imply in the opening of favourable spaces to the progression of the opponent, the player who executes the actions of defensive coverage aims to act as a new obstacle to the player in possession, in case this player overtakes the player in delay. Besides this, the player performing defensive coverage can also guide the player in delay about the opponent's tactical-technical actions, in order to stimulate him to take the initiative of opposing the offensive actions from the player in possession (BANGSBO; PEITERSEN, 2002). This type of attitude facilitates the opposition to the attacking actions and also transmits safety and confidence to the first defender (WORTHINGTON, 1974).

When defensive coverage is performed in a situation of numerical superiority for the defence (ex. 2vs.1), facilitates the actions of support from the player who performs it, since the basic concern is essentially focused on the player in possession. Moreover, the defensive coverage performed in situations of numerical equality (ex. 2vs.2) involves other concerns to the player who performs it, since besides having to be aware of the player in possession and the teammate who performs it, he has to be aware of the movements executed by the attacker who performs offensive coverage.

Some factors related to the extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of the game should be considered by the players in the moment they perform defensive coverage, due to their influence on the distance and the angle between the player in delay and the player in coverage, determining the efficiency of the actions performed. These factors regard the zone of the field where coverage will be performed, to the conditions of the pitch, to the weather conditions, to the communication between the players and to the tactical, technical, physical and psychological skills that his teammates and opponents possess and present in the game (WORTHINGTON, 1974; BANGSBO; PEITERSEN, 2002).

In relation to the zones of the field, the distance and angle of the coverage will vary according to both very important concepts that will be implied and will gradually establish themselves according to the position of the ball, that are: the meaning of risk to goal and the allowance of space to offensive maneuvers. Therefore, the closer the "centre of play" is from the defensive sector and from the central corridor, the more risk the ball will offer to the goal and the less space should be available for the attacker to perform offensive movements. In situations in which the "centre of play" is present within the central corridor and closer to the goal, the player responsible for defensive coverage should approach the player in delay, so as to reduce the chances of finishing from the opponent and provide more safety to the defensive sector of his team. In the situation in which the ball is played within the side corridors, further from the defensive sector, the player in coverage should stay distant from the player in delay, since with the advent of more space for the execution of the offensive movement, the player in possession can go past both markers at once, according to the increase of the speed of execution. Besides this, in such areas the risk to goal is minimized when compared to other areas of the field of play.

In relation to the pitch and weather conditions, the player in defensive coverage should stay at a shorter distance from the player in delay, as conditions are more adverse to the attacking team⁵. The adoption of this kind of behaviour will discourage the player in possession to execute dribbling, since it will be harder for him to maintain possession, thus facilitating the defensive action. Besides this, the actions of defensive balance will also be facilitated, in case

⁵ *In the case of the wind, this relation is inverted. If the attacking team has the wind in their favour the coverage should be closer, while if the wind is against them, the distance between the players in coverage and delay might be increased.*

the player in possession executes a passe to a teammate who performs the offensive coverage; in this moment, due to the adverse conditions, the player might be positioned further, thus increasing the time of the ball flight and demands more time for controlling it.

The communication between the players is another factor that also determines the success of the defensive coverage, because we might act as guide to create harmony between all defensive movements. Communications can be established verbally and non-verbally. The verbal forms, which are consolidated through the hearing and vocal systems, are essentially expressed through the guidelines provided by the players with respect to their own and to the opponents' positions. On the other hand, non-verbal communications, noted essentially by the visual system and sometimes by the tactical system, are expressed through body signals present in the actions of one's own teammates and opponents. Associated with this factor it can also be said that the degree of coupling and mutual confidence in communication is essential for determining the success of defensive actions.

From the mentioned factors that influence the actions of defensive coverage, the last, although not less important, is related to the tactical, technical, physical and psychological skills that players present during the match (CASTELO, 1996).

This factor is related to the previous acquired knowledge and to the awareness that the player in defensive coverage has in the game, thus establishing a similar line of thinking for all situations in which there is prevalence of one skill or another. It can be stated that if the player in defensive coverage is aware that the player in delay is weak in any of these skills in relation to the player in possession, he should approach him. On the other hand, if the player in delay displays superior skills in relation to the attacker, the coverage can be performed at higher distance, as there will be more possibilities for the player in delay to regain the ball and therefore, this player who was performing defensive coverage becomes the first offensive option to proceed with the play.

As an example of such variability of positioning in Soccer, it is possible to highlight a situation of technical prevalence, in which the player in possession can decide for dribbling or passing. Therein, if the player is performing defensive coverage, thus observing that the player in possession is a skilled dribbler, he should approach the player in delay, since the chances of being passed are higher, whereas if a player is aware that he is performing the action of coverage towards a player who possesses better skills of passing the ball to dangerous zones of the field, he should be positioned further, because the probability of executing a pass is higher than that of executing a dribble. Besides this, if the player in coverage is aware that the player in possession is not well developed in any of these skills, he can position himself further away from the player in delay, thus increasing the probability of regaining possession, and therefore he will be able to support the new configuration of play.

The characteristics of the actions of defensive coverage in game situations can be noticed when the position of the player in defensive coverage (who should be positioned between the player in delay and his own goal) provides support and safety to the player in delay.

Principle of Balance

The principle of balance is assured from the moment players comprehend the notions inherent to their structural and functional aspects. The first aspect regards the premise that the team's defensive organization should possess superiority, or at least ensure numerical equality of defensive players in the "centre of play" positioned between the ball and one's own goal; in turn, the second aspect is associated with the actions of readjustment of defensive positioning in relation to opponents' movements.

Through the application of such notions, the aim is to ensure defensive stability in the "centre of play" through the support of these players to their teammates who perform actions of delay and defensive coverage. By taking an adjusted position in relation to other teammates, the player who performs actions of the principle of balance is in better conditions to transmit safety to his teammates in creating unfavourable conditions to the player in possession and his teammates, consequently increasing the predictability of the opponent's offensive play and the possibility of regaining possession (CASTELO, 1996).

The guidelines of this principle include therefore the coverage of spaces and marking of free players without possession, coverage of eventual passing options and, in some cases, the decrease of game pace, thus forcing the opponent to accept such pace.

The actions of the principle of balance can be essentially detected through the balanced arrangement of defenders between the ball and their own goal in actions of marking opposite players without possession and of support to other teammates who are in charge of performing actions of delay and defensive coverage in relation to the player in possession.

Principle of Concentration

The principle of concentration is based on players' movements towards the zone of the field of higher risk to goal, with the aim of increasing defensive protection, reducing the available space to perform offensive actions from the opponent in the "centre of play" and of facilitating the regain of ball possession (BANGSBO; PEITERSEN, 2002).

The guidelines of this principle are guided by the attempt to drive opponent's offensive play to less vital zones within the field of play and to minimize the offensive amplitude in width and length, avoiding the creation of free spaces, specially on the back of the players who perform delay, coverage and defensive balance.

Therefore, the actions of concentration can be performed in any zone of the field of play, by simply having all players who are involved in the action aware of the importance of their movement to reduce space and increasing pressure in the "centre of play".

During the match, the typical actions of this principle can be observed when defenders positioned further away from the player in possession are able to "gather", thus adopting closer positions between them, in order to limit the offensive options of the attack to a certain zone of the field.

Principle of Defensive Unity

The principle of defensive unity possesses a strong relation with the understanding by the players of the game and of the playing model adopted by the team. The unit concept of defence of a team goes through the awareness of all players with respect to the importance of their movements, their limitations and their positions in relation to their teammates, the ball and their opponents (TEISSIE, 1969; HAINAUT; BENOIT, 1979).

The guidelines of this principle aim to ensure that basic guidelines that coordinate the attitudes and tactical-technical behaviours of the players positioned outside the "centre of play". These guidelines also allow that the team is able to constantly and automatically balance and rebalance the *rapport de forces* of the defensive method according to the momentary configurations of the game (CASTELO, 1996).

In this principle, the offside rule is an important ally of the defending team since through its effective exploration and execution, the last defensive line is able to decrease the opposite effective play-space and exert more pressure within the "centre of play".

Therefore, by performing effective movements that suit the offside rule and considering the characteristics of the principle of defensive unity, the team is able to pressure the player in possession and the teammates who help him in the offensive maneuvers. The fact that this action of pressure and reduction of space decreases the time that the player in possession and his teammates have to make decisions and perform their actions, can lead them to tactical or technical mistakes that benefit the regain of ball possession or the arrival of more defenders to help in the defensive actions.

To ensure cohesion, effectiveness and functional balance between the team's longitudinal and transverse lines in defensive actions, the players responsible for executing the principle of defensive unity need to be coherent in their displacements, according to the variability of the momentary game situations and the knowledge of his teammates' skills and movement possibilities (PINTO, 1996).

During the match, the typical actions of this principle can be observed through the coordination of the movements of the players outside the "centre of play" in line with the position of the ball, allowing the development of a more harmonious and efficient play between the team's longitudinal and transverse lines, as for example: the movement of the side player towards the centre of the field to help on team compaction, when the game action is being developed in the opposite side.

Concluding Remarks

The tactical principles contribute to players' organization and performance in the field of play. The knowledge of their guidelines, objectives and specifications constitutes an important support for P.E. teachers, soccer school coaches and team managers in guiding the teaching-learning-training process in Soccer. On the other hand, the comprehension of these principles by the players offers the advantage of structuring the actions with objectives, intentions and tactical meaning that help to regulate and organize the tactical-technical actions in the match.

Besides this, the knowledge of the tactical principles can support the process of tactical assessment of players' performance. Considering that the dynamic behaviours of a team as well as their effectiveness in a match can be appreciated from the quantitative and qualitative variables of players' actions in the relations of cooperation and opposition, it is assumed that the comprehension of the tactical principles represents an useful tool to support this assessment. For this purpose, the conception, development and validation of instruments capable of quantifying or assessing the application of the tactical principles of the game becomes important, in order to achieve a response or result that helps the comprehension of player's tactical behaviour in the field of play.

As a result of the development and application of an instrument with such characteristics, it is possible to highlight the possibility of observing and studying the player in match and training situations, allowing the control of his playing performance, thus helping to detect points of improvement.

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