

Greg's Positional Play

Well Surbiton beat Guildford in the EHA Play-off's and our all conquering hero Greg Nicol scored.... again! This article from him talks about positional play and is ideal for those aspiring Greg Nicol's.

Forwards Positional Play

This aspect of play can be divided into 3 different categories.

- 1. Attacking play**
- 2. Attacking play inside the circle**
- 3. Defensive positioning**

I can give some indications as to what is considered the correct positions to move into and how to do this however I always believe that strikers need to be given a bit of license to roam a bit . This will give the defense something to think about. There are however certain positions that are key and need to be filled or moved into and the strikers as a group need to work together to achieve this.

Attacking play

most teams will line up with 3 forwards i.e. left, right and centre strikers. This is the way they would line up at the beginning of the game however it is not imperative that this formation stays the same throughout the game. One of the keys to disrupting a defense is the constant rotation of forwards throughout the field. For example if the right striker leads his defender infield ,the channel on the outside would be open for a pass to be played down to the centre striker who would have made an outfield lead toward the touch line. The important factor in this rotation is the timing. It needs to happen in synchronization as this will keep the defenders focused on their individual marking roles and will not allow them to change markers. It is also crucial that if the defenders do try to change markers that the pass is made at this time leaving them both off their markers and really exposed... Although rotation is encouraged each striker has a definite positional role in their designated area. I.e. left, right and centre

to illustrate this we will use the left striker. The mirror image should occur on the other side. The left striker needs to make movements back towards his own defenders to receive the ball as well as lateral and forward movements. The key is to vary ones movements and not to be predictable. There also needs to be some urgency and speed in the movements to give ones own players a definite target to hit. Double leading is crucial to ensure more space and therefore a chance to attack. By this a player needs to make an initial lead to get the defender going one way and then quickly

change direction to find the open space. E.g. lead infield to eventually receive a pass that is on the outfield. Players can also use tactics such as pushing or leaning against the defender in order to gain a few extra yards. It could be the difference in getting the space to create something useful. The key to being a successful striker is to be able create space to do all your tricks and make your plays. These movements should help in trying to achieve this. The same principal applies to if you are going to be playing in the center. It is no good running on 1 angle to receive the ball. Defenders will read this and step up and intercept the ball. Another issue is to signal discreetly to your player passing the ball exactly where you want it. If you want the ball to the right however you are making a lead to the left the ball carrier needs you to show him a sign that you want the pass in the space away from where you are. These signals need to be understood by all and obviously discreet so that the defenders cant read where the ball is going. Some methods- Indicate with the stick, point with your fingers, show with your eyes if eye contact is made.

Attacking positioning in the circle

to illustrate the positioning in the circle I will simulate a right hand side attack but the mirror image should occur for a left side attack. If a player is looking to pass the ball from the right the options that forwards provide should be as follows:

The opposite striker i.e. left, should lead to the base line on the right of the goal to receive a pass, this lead would be away from the goal and will probably result in the player receiving the ball and then looking to win a corner or make a pass. Very seldom is this a scoring chance but the 2nd phase of it can be. This lead is seldom followed the whole way as the defenders like to keep it quite tight around the centre of the circle for obvious reasons, so the striker may have time to stop and make a pass.

The right striker should lead towards the passport making shorter leads towards and away from the goal depending on whether he wants to receive the ball in front or behind him. This is the goal scoring area so the leads need to be short and sharp. The remaining striker will lead outward to the back post to pick up any pass or shots that are going past the post. Many chances go passed here so it is crucial this player is ready and expecting the ball at any time. From these positions it is clear that options will become available to the ball carrier and then once a shot is taken the positions double up as perfect rebound opportunities. I have stipulated who goes to which position but this is not fixed in stone. An agreement would be that the players must ensure that each position is filled and it does not matter who makes the lead there. As long as 1 striker is on the base line one leads to the passport area and one to the far post, options will become available.

Defensive positions

when the opposition has the ball it is crucial that the strikers play their part in defense. The forwards need to work as a group to ensure that the opponents back division is put under pressure and their options are limited. The best way of achieving this is to allow them to play the ball wide to the flanks first and then to move closer and close down their angles. e.g. if we let them pass the ball to there left halfour centre striker needs to get in the line of their sweeper so the ball can't be passed back and transferred to the open side of the field. Our right striker will close the player down from the front allowing few options down the line. The opposite striker i.e. left will come right across the field to cut out any diagonal passes available. If done quickly and the correct angles are used it will become difficult for the defenders to get out of this situation and then if we win the ball here it is a really good opportunity to score a goal.

This method and position requires a lot of running for the forwards so on some instances it is used further back in the field .i.e. the half way line. This is known as a half court press as opposed to the 1st which is a full press. The difference is that the forwards will just track back allowing there defenders to advance forward. The key is to align your forwards in positions that the opposition cannot play dangerous passes and then have to go wide. This is when your team needs to move quickly and implement the press on the flanks.

The key to all these movements both defensively and attacking is that all the players involved are aware of the other players around them. It must be done as a group to be really successful. If one player is slightly out the others can be made to look silly.