

# Module 3. Integration of the Conditional Structure in the Game Model

## Unit 3.1 The game model

### 3.1.1 What is the Game Model?

One of the missions that coaches and fitness trainers have is to try to replicate the levels of load (volumes and intensities) during training that approximate, equal, or exceed the demands of competition. The training week allows adjusting these workloads based on the established needs from a conditional standpoint and, at the same time, fitting into the tactical framework that also needs to be carried out. These demands will fluctuate depending on the objective of the microcycle, but there is a common denominator that is always present regardless of the load, and that is the relationship that is intended to be generated in the training tasks with the *game model*. To achieve this, Jonatan Giráldez (2021) defines the game model as the intended interactions by the coach that occur between players in the two moments of the game, the possession phase and the recovery phase. It implies a "non-verbal" communication system among "everyone" that serves us to generate a series of advantages within the game that the opponent is unaware of. These interactions stem from the ideas of the coaching staff and the nature of the players.

These "advantages" that are intended to be generated during the game refer to the superiorities that Professor Seirul-lo summarised in four aspects and that could be found during the possession phase. They are summarised as follows:

1. Numerical superiority: we have more players in a specific area of the field compared to the number of opposing players.
2. Positional superiority: we are better positioned, regardless of the number of players from one team to the other. Our position allows us to receive the pass in favourable conditions.
3. Qualitative superiority: we are better in a specific area of the field compared to the direct opponent. For example, the team is capable of creating a 1v1 situation with our winger against their full-back.



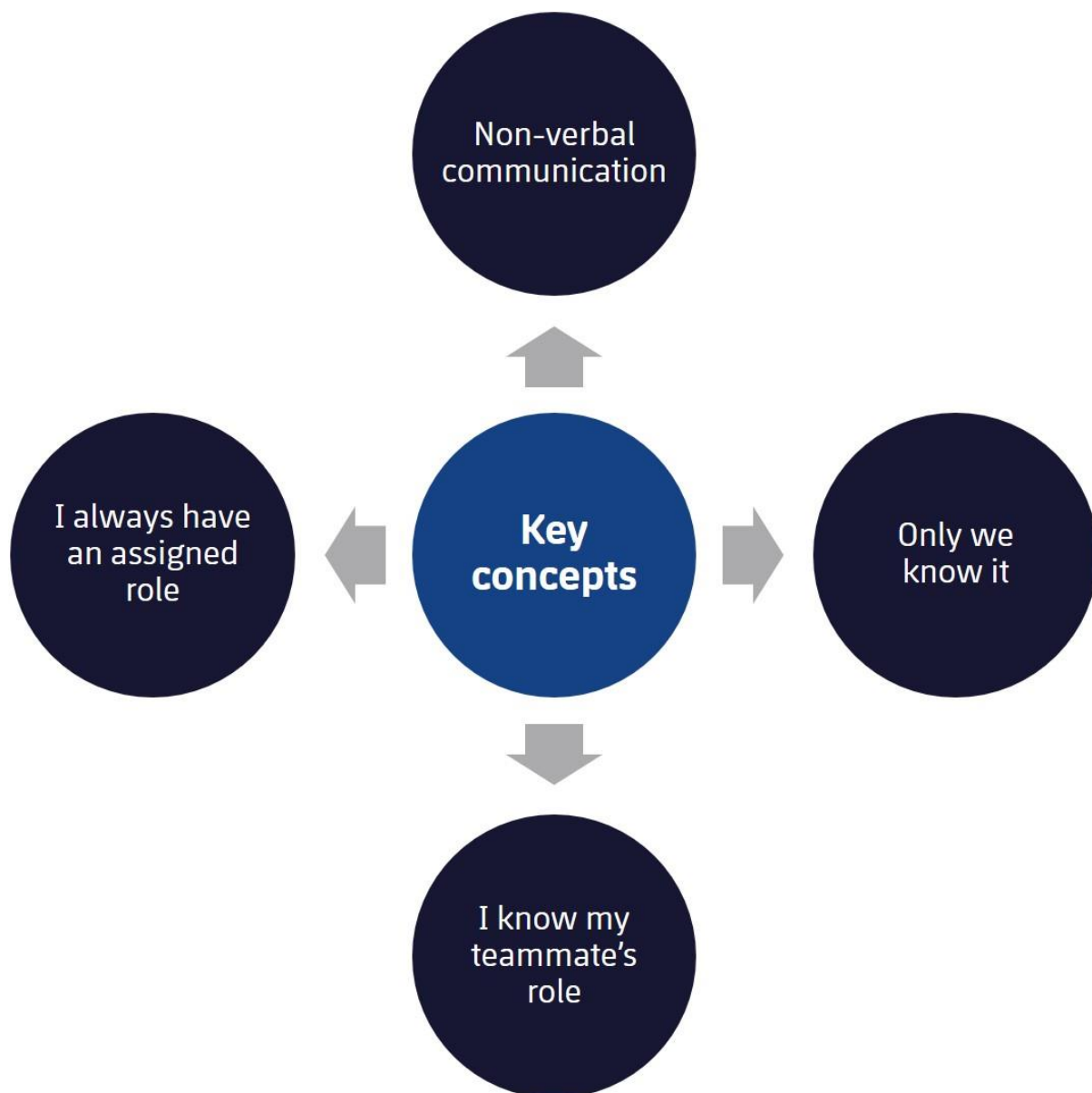
4. Socio-affective superiority: we relate to each other better. A specific group of players come together and associate in a particular area of the field.

Once this conception of the game model is understood, it is during training where special emphasis is placed on building and optimising this communication, which is present in all tasks. It is a way of understanding training, which is conceived as a space to increase and improve the communicative relationships among players. Coaches provide resources, and the characteristics of the players, along with the interactions that occur between them, help improve this communication process day by day.

Key concepts of the game model: when the season starts in a football team, it is a priority to establish a unique and specific language that emerges from the relationships established between players. Regardless of tactical preparation and without considering the opposing team, a language that everyone understands must be built during training, both in the possession phase and in the recovery phase. The characteristics are shown below:

**Image 1: Characteristics of the Game Model**





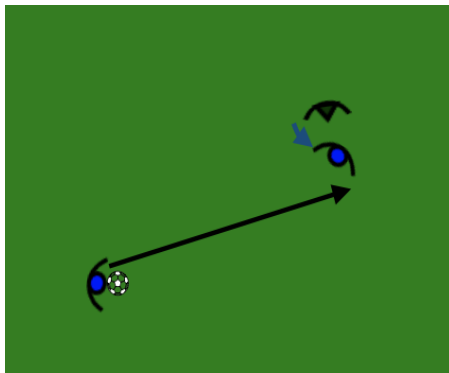
Source: prepared by the authors.

Comunicación no verbal	Non-verbal communication
Siempre tengo un rol asignado	I always have an assigned role
Conozco el rol de mi compañera	I know my teammate's role
Solo lo sabemos nosotras	Only we know it
Conceptos claves	Key concepts

- “Non-verbal” communication: the intended communication in the game through the relationships established between players does not necessarily involve speaking to communicate. Instead, it should be understood based on gestures, prior movements, tactical positioning, pass information, etc., to facilitate the team's communication in the best possible way. Here are two examples to explain this type of communication (Images 2 and 3). The first example is a pass delivered to a teammate's furthest leg, understanding that it can facilitate

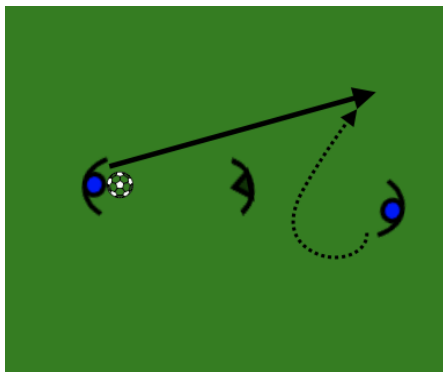
a better relationship with the next action (progression). Additionally, it would also avoid possible interception by the opposing player. The second example involves a prior movement by a player who intends to receive the ball behind an opponent. The player initially shows herself on one side but uses her arm to indicate where she wants to receive the pass. Typically, this signalling goes unnoticed by the opponent. The "communicative" experience between players helps these passes to be executed without the need to signal the destination area and even allows for the option of adding more prior movements before the final reception.

**Image 2: Pass Delivered to the Furthest Leg**



Source: prepared by the authors.

**Image 3: Movement Before the Final Reception**

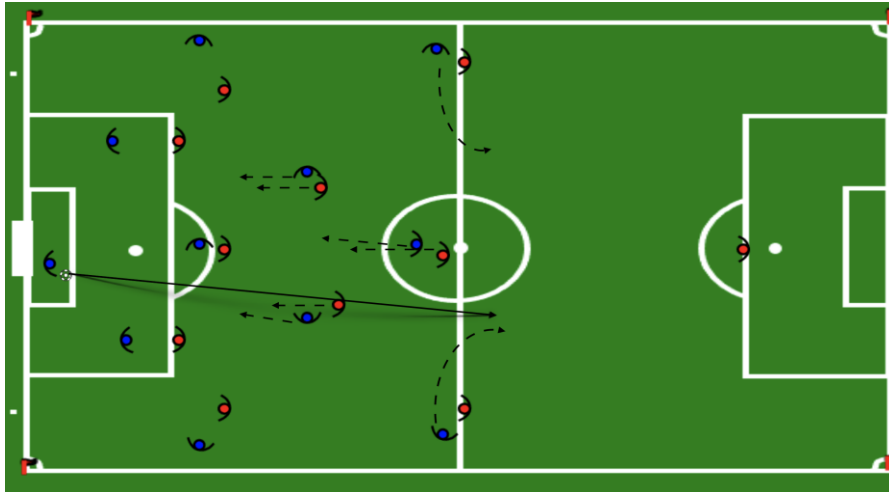


Source: prepared by the authors.

- Only we know it: this "non-verbal" communication implies such deep knowledge that the opponent is unaware of it. An example of a game situation could be as follows (Image 4): the opponent applies a type of pressure where individual match-ups are practically created all over the field. In response to this situation, a behaviour that may emerge, depending on the characteristics of the players on the field, could be when the midfielders and forward position themselves in support, moving towards the centre of the field to create a 1v1 situation between our winger and their full-back. The pass that the goalkeeper should execute would

be a low and driven pass to favour the winger's circular trajectory. This "non-verbal" communication from the midfielders and forward informs us, as a team, where the advantage lies in that game situation. There is no need to speak; everyone knows it.

**Image 4: Example of Start of Play**

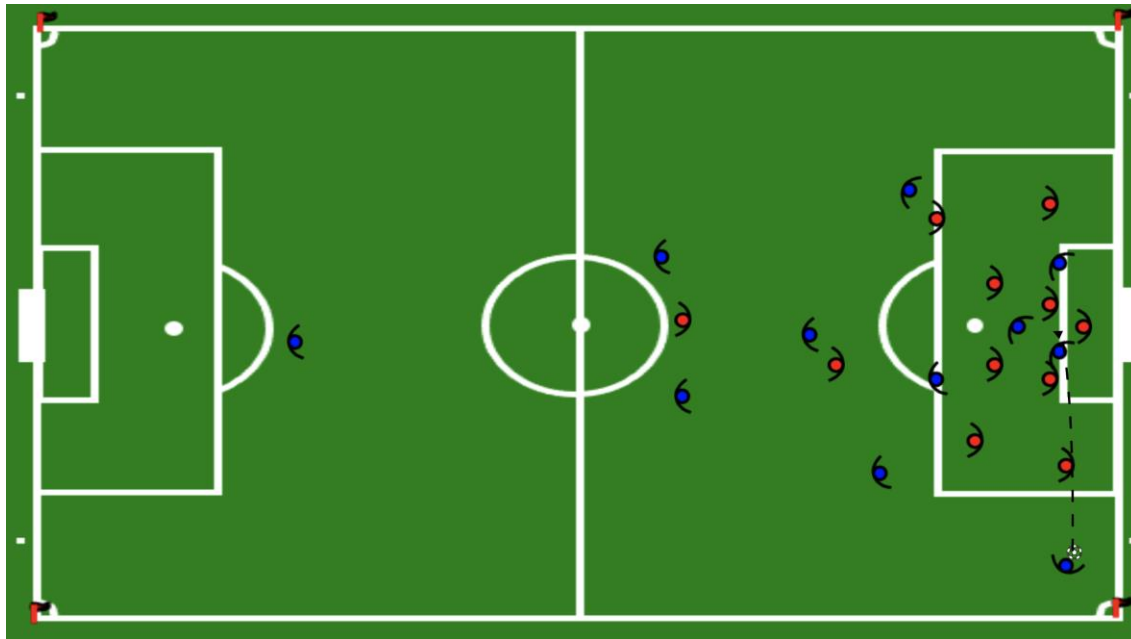


Source: prepared by the authors.

- I know my teammate's role: this "non-verbal" communication system allows recognising what my teammate should do at all times. This, in turn, enables constant collective reorganisation around the game since the movements and positions that occur in the possession and recovery phases are based on relationships with the intention of better communication. In the previous example, the forward who makes the approaching movement to attract a central defender knows the role of the winger. Without this knowledge of roles and functions, it would be very difficult to take advantage of the benefits that arise during the game.

- I always have an assigned role: regardless of the position on the field and the presence or absence of the ball, all players have a role within the game. These positions convey messages that transcend communication within the team, allowing the intended actions to be optimised. An example could be in a situation of an offensive cross. There is a player who needs to execute the technical action of the cross, others need to attempt a header, but there are also players who need to cover the attack to anticipate a possible loss and give the team the opportunity to regain possession as quickly as possible (Image 5). These latter positions may seem insignificant to the play at first glance, but they hold great importance in the event of a loss, as their positioning allows the team to have more options to regain the ball in the opponent's half.

**Image 5: Positions that May Seem Insignificant to the Play at First Glance**

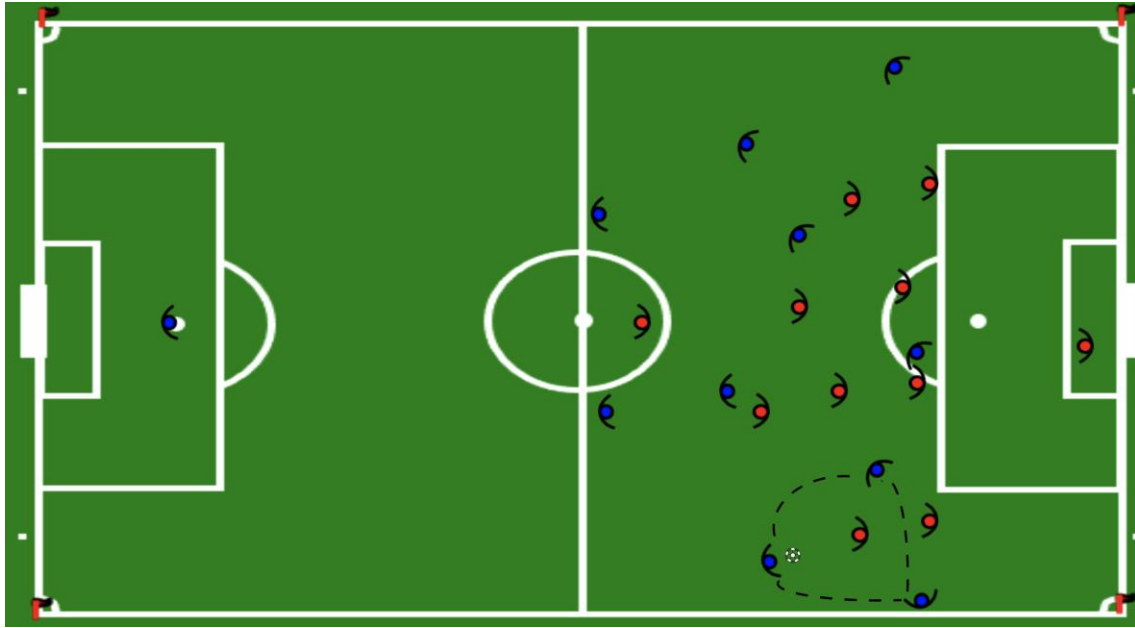


Source: prepared by the authors.

- Variability of roles: within the two phases of the game (possession phase and recovery phase), one of the key aspects is the individual player's ability to perform in different roles.

This allows for modifying game tendencies and increasing the level of unpredictability within the same starting eleven. An example in the possession phase could be as follows: the ball is in the side corridor, and the positions to be occupied are as observed. After one or more passes, the positions may or should vary while respecting the role and function that each player must carry out in that specific position. When the player is in the outside midfielder position, she will have a different role and function compared to when she positions herself between the opposing team's centre-back and full-back (Image 6). Being able to adapt to different positions implies a different role and function that the player must recognise at all times so that the team can play better football. Furthermore, the greater the versatility, the more resources the team will have and the higher the capacity to surprise the opposing team.

**Image 6: Player Is in the Outside Midfielder Position**

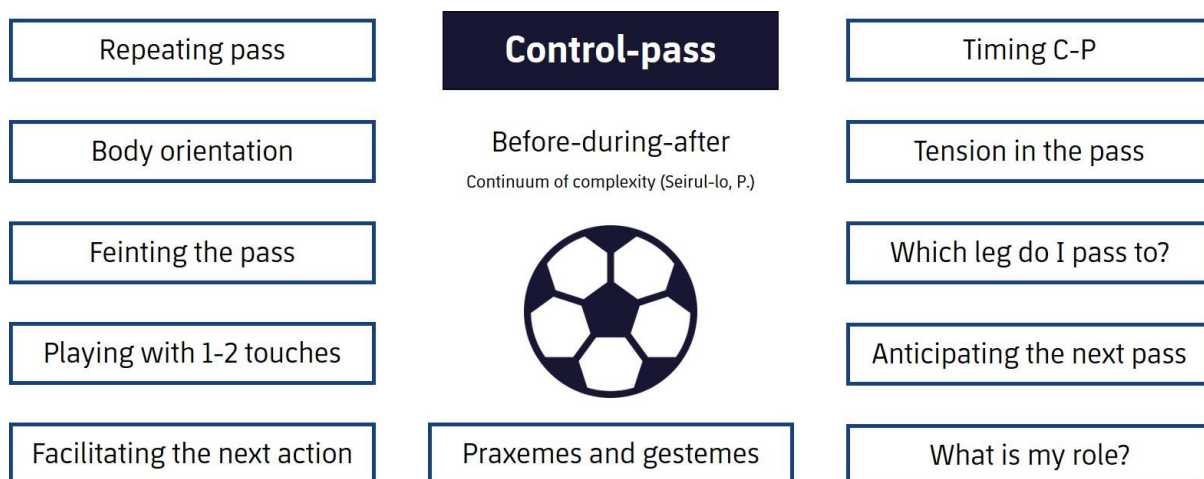


Source: prepared by the authors.

### 3.1.2 How to Optimise the Communication Process during the Possession Phase

Below there is a compilation of information and criteria to consider during the possession phase to facilitate effective communication within the team.

Image 7: Criteria to Consider during the Possession Phase



**Present in all training tasks with the aim of improving communication.**

Source: adapted from Giráldez, 2021. Unpublished.

Repetir pase	Repeating pass
Orientación corporal	Body orientation
Fintar el pase	Feinting the pass
Jugar a 1-2 toques	Playing with 1-2 touches
Facilitar la siguiente acción	Facilitating the next action
Praxemas y gestemas	Praxemes and gestemes
Control-pase	Control-pass
Antes-durante-después	Before-during-after
Continuum de complejidad	Continuum of complexity
Timing C-P	Timing C-P
Tensión en el pase	Tension in the pass
¿A qué pierna le doy pase?	Which leg do I pass to?
Anticipar el siguiente pase	Anticipating the next pass
¿Qué rol tengo?	What is my role?
Presente en todas las tareas de entrenamiento con el objetivo de comunicar mejor	Present in all training tasks with the aim of improving communication.

This entire process of control-pass involves a continuum of complexity (Seirul-lo), which is present at all times during the game. Players must understand that they are playing football all the time, and what they do before making contact with the ball will have an impact on the “during” phase, while what they do after making the pass will have an impact on the next before it is given again.

It is about connecting with the game and playing before, during, and after the pass. Playing all the time.

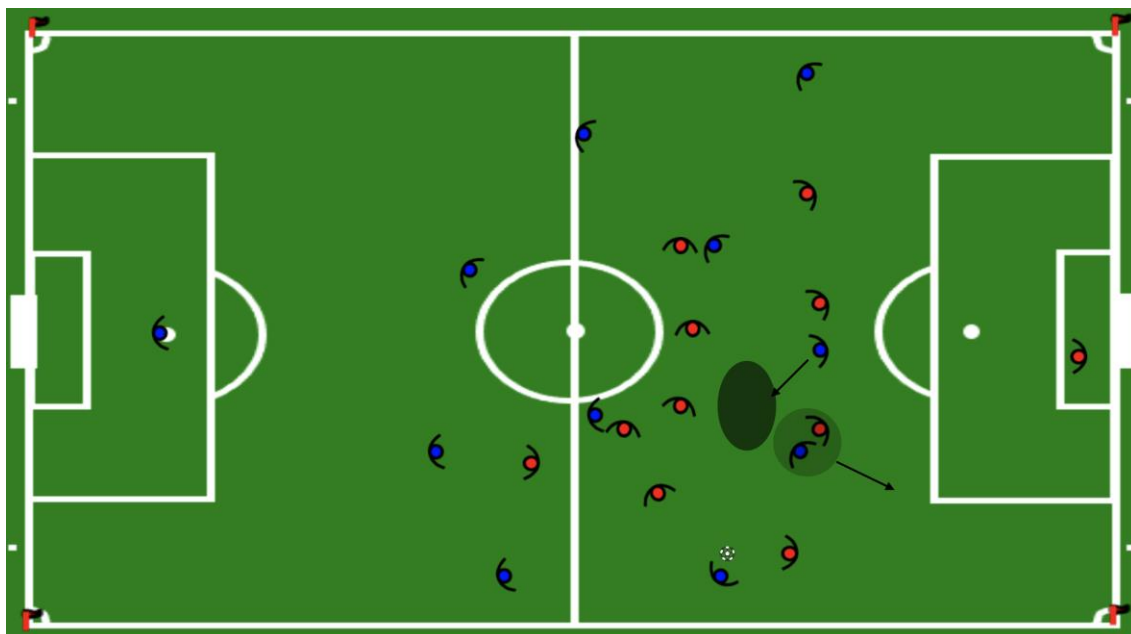
The instructions or criteria to consider during training in order to improve the referenced communication process are as follows:

- Repeating pass: this involves passing the ball back and forth with the same teammate. For example, attracting a specific number of opposing players to a particular area of the game to later find advantages in another space.
- Body orientation: understanding the player's position and profile as a way to enhance communication within the team. This body orientation should not always be based on the next passing lane but rather on optimising relationships within the game.
- Feinting the pass: not looking where one is going to pass, as long as the potential receiver anticipates it, helps optimise communication by creating advantages within the game that the opponent is unaware of.
- Playing with 1-2 touches: a player from Barça should be technically capable of managing passing relationships with both legs and be prepared to execute actions with one or two touches. This requires technical mastery of all contact surfaces and continuity in ball control that guides and facilitates communication.
- Facilitating the next action: a key aspect of improving intra-team communication is playing with the intention of assisting the teammate who will be the next receiver. This means not just passing for the sake of it but giving the best possible pass to facilitate the subsequent game action.
- Timing of control and pass: Everything revolving around the possession phase requires constant synchronisation. Everything that happens through passing necessitates adjusting the timing appropriately. It is not enough to pass or detach to receive the pass; one must maximise the space-time relationship to increase the probability of generating better advantages within the game.
- Tension in the pass: the strength applied in a pass carries different communicative meanings. For example, delivering a firm pass to a specific leg can provide information on whether that teammate can control the ball to progress or not. Conversely, a soft pass with a separating movement can signal to the recipient that pressure is approaching from behind, requiring them to play with one touch facing forward. On the other hand, if the pass is tense and the receiver is forced to control it, it may facilitate pressure on the opposing player.
- Which leg do I pass it to?: it is not about passing just for the sake of it, but helping the teammate communicate better in their next action. Therefore, it is also important to consider the defensive trajectory of the opposing player in order to pass accordingly and assist the teammate in better positioning for their next pass.

- Anticipating the next pass: at all times, players should be capable of anticipating the possible circulation of the ball. Being able to anticipate the action two or three passes ahead will increase the possibilities of space and time in favour of the possession phase.

- Praxemes and gestemes: a gesteme refers to a communicative intention performed by players or the coaching staff that can be decoded by the team members. For example, using a hand signal to indicate which leg the pass should be delivered to is a gesture that helps optimise the communication process. On the other hand, praxemes are motor actions that also involve communication through movement or positioning. For instance, when the ball is in the external corridor, the midfielder decides to make a long ball movement towards the wing (Image 8). This movement can implicitly convey a message to attract a possible opponent and create space and time for the team's forward to show support.

**Image 8: A Midfielder Makes a Long Ball Movement Towards the Wing**



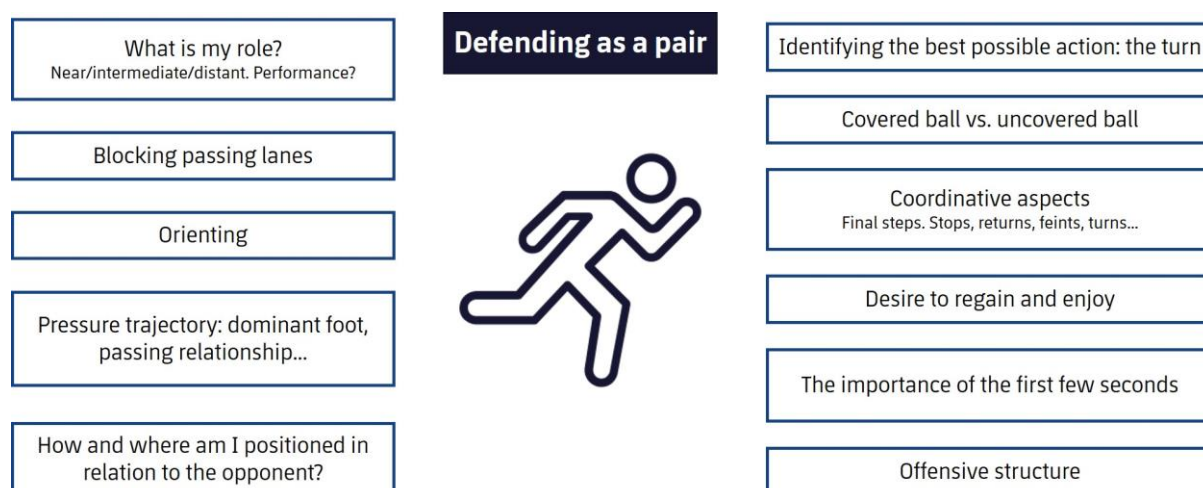
Source: prepared by the authors.

All these criteria considered to improve the communication process during the possession phase are present in all training tasks. Regardless of the technical, psychological, tactical, or physical objective of the task, the communication code is a constant generator of information to enhance all processes. The passes that are made and what is done before, during, and after have a meaning that helps optimise communicative relationships between players.

### **3.1.3 How to Optimise the Communication Process during the Recovery Phase**

Similar to the possession phase, when we do not have the ball, a series of criteria are taken into account in order to try to regain possession as soon as possible.

**Image 9: Criteria to Consider in Order to Regain Possession as Soon as Possible**



Source: adapted from Giráldez, 2021. Unpublished.

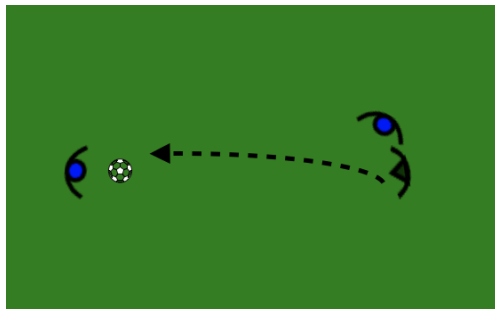
¿Qué rol tengo? Cercana/intermedia/alejada. ¿Actuación?	What is my role? Near/intermediate/distant. Performance?
Tapar líneas de pase	Blocking passing lanes
Orientar	Orienting
Trayectoria de presión: pierna hábil, relación de pase...	Pressure trajectory: dominant foot, passing relationship...
¿Cómo y dónde estoy ubicada en relación a par?	How and where am I positioned in relation to the opponent?
Defender a 2	Defending as a pair
Identificar la mejor actuación: el giro	Identifying the best possible action: the turn
Balón cubierto vs. Balón descubierto	Covered Ball vs. uncovered ball
Aspectos coordinativos. Últimos pasos. Frenadas, retornos, finitas, giros...	Coordinative aspects Final steps. Stops, returns, feints, turns...
Deseo de recuperar y disfrutar	Desire to regain and enjoy
La importancia de los primeros segundos	The importance of the first few seconds
Estructura ofensiva	Offensive structure

- What is my role? Near/intermediate/distant as regards the position of the ball. Performance?: being aware of my position on the field implies recognising a specific role in terms of what needs to be done. Everyone plays without being influenced by the location of the ball. Based on this, the best possible defensive performance of each player should be recognised. For example, if the team loses the ball and there is a numerical disadvantage of 1 against 3 in the ball zone, the defensive performance and repositioning will be different compared to a 1 against 2 or a 2 against 2 situation in the same area.



- Blocking passing lanes: as a general criterion during the recovery phase, individual tendencies in pressure movements involve pressuring the one in possession and blocking a passing lane. In the graphical example (Image 10), it is recognised that a player who has just defended the nearby opponent jumps onto the one in possession and blocks the passing lane to the supposedly free player.

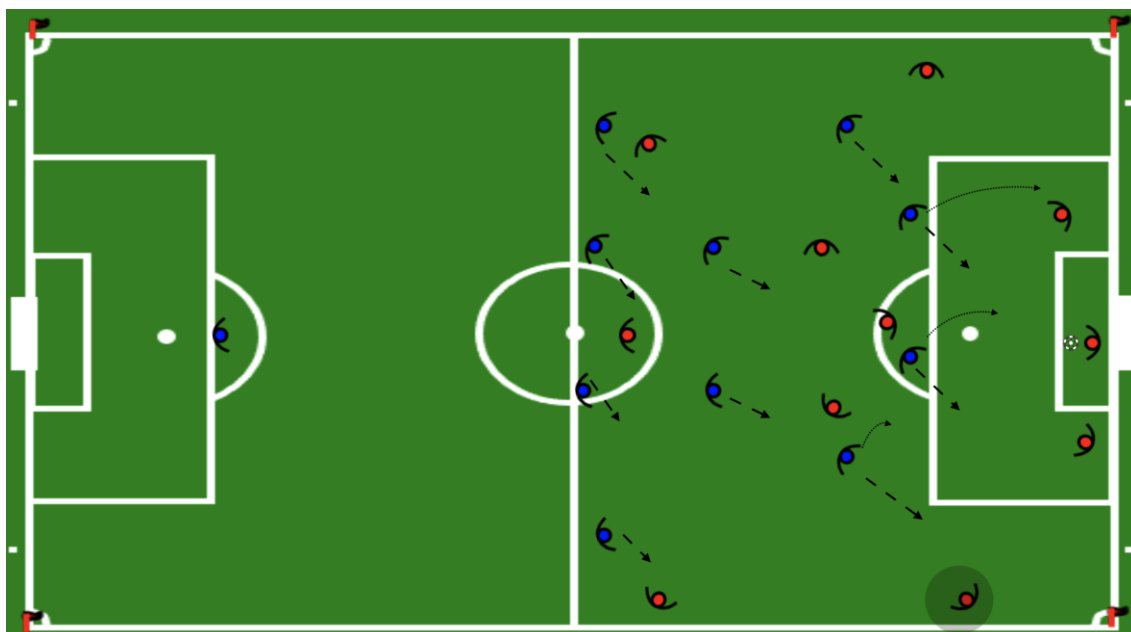
**Image 10: Blocking Passing Lanes**



Source: prepared by the authors.

- Orienting: another criterion valued during the recovery phase involves directing the opponent's play towards the zone that is most advantageous for us. Even when our team does not have possession, we must be capable of making the opponent play in the area of the field that we desire as a team. This means that, in terms of defensive trajectory, we need to guide the opponent's play towards specific points that we recognise and want in order to have more opportunities to regain the ball. The example shown below (Image 11) illustrates this, where the entire team is positioned in a way that the pressure being applied directs the opponent towards the wing where their left full-back is located.

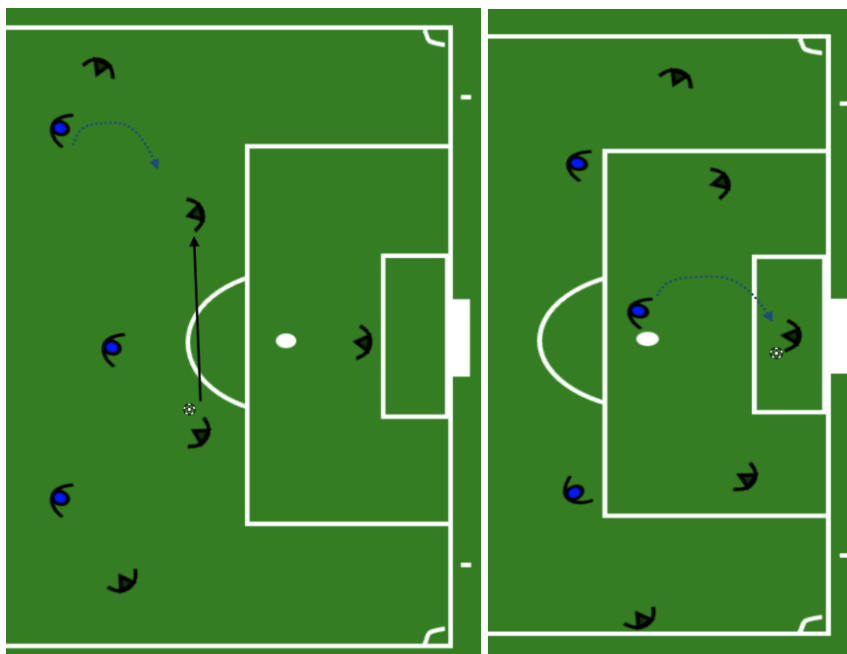
**Image 11: Orienting Towards the Zone that is Most Advantageous For Us**



Source: prepared by the authors.

- Pressure trajectory: dominant foot, passing relationship...: when we prepare to pressure an opposing player, another consideration is to reduce the distance to her based on the passing relationship I intend to block. In Example 1 of Image 12, if the left-wing decides to anticipate a possible pass from the left centre-back to the right centre-back, the pressure is applied by blocking the passing relationship with the right full-back. Example 2 would be regarding the pressure trajectory based on the opponent's dominant foot, which would be carried out on the right side of the opponent's goalkeeper since her dominant foot is the right one. This way, we can direct the play towards her left foot, where she will have fewer options to establish a better connection with the next pass.

**Image 12: Examples 1 and 2**

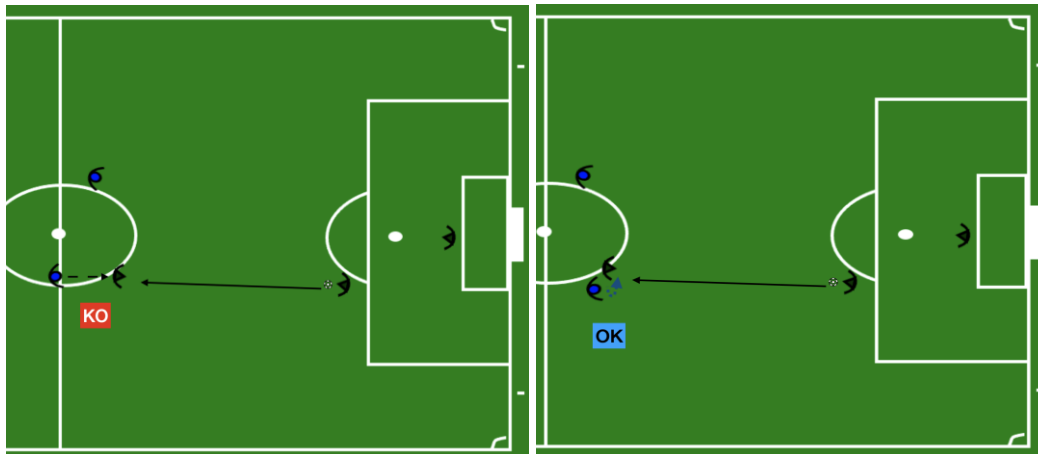


Example 1 Example 2

Source: prepared by the authors.

- How and where am I positioned in relation to my counterpart?: the distance and position I have in relation to my direct opponent are key factors in being able to regain possession of the ball. The examples shown illustrate the options (Image13). If my distance and position as a centre-back are behind the opposing forward, my options for anticipating their moves are reduced. On the other hand, if my position is practically at the same height and with a positioning that allows me to anticipate, as a centre-back, I will have more opportunities to regain the ball.

**Image 13: How and Where Am I Positioned in Relation to the Opponent?**

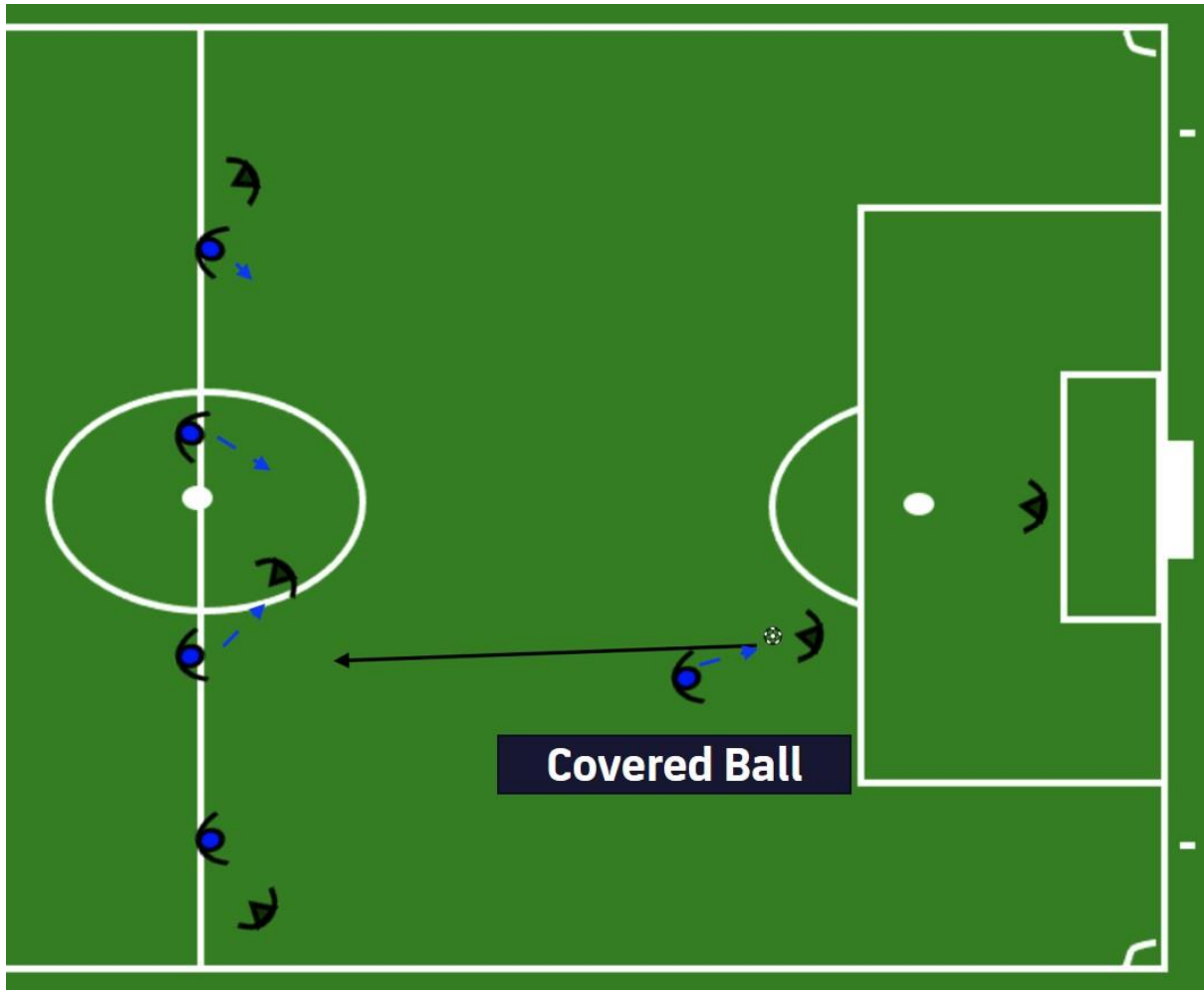


Example 1: position that does not allow me to anticipate. Example 2: position that allows me to anticipate.

- Identifying the best possible action: the main objective when we do not have possession is to regain it. However, this does not mean pressuring 100% of the time, regardless of where the ball is or how the team is positioned. There are occasions where the best course of action is to reorganise and give time for the team to be prepared to press again. An example would be a situation where the opponent changes the direction of play and manages to take the ball to an area with less defensive presence. Our mission is to carry out defensive trajectories that allow us to reposition ourselves around the ball and once again apply pressure.

- Covered ball vs. uncovered ball: due to the opponent's style of play, they often seize any opportunity to kick the ball directly behind the defensive line. One of the most important defensive criteria is to identify whether the ball is covered or uncovered. A covered ball refers to when the ball is being pressured by one of our players, while an uncovered ball means that neither the opponent nor the ball is under pressure. In the first case (Image 14), it is difficult for the opponent to make a direct long pass, whereas in the second case (Image 15), the options for a direct long pass are more evident. Our defensive behaviour differs depending on each of these situations. Generally, if the ball is covered, our pressing from the players in distant positions can be oriented forward, while if the ball is uncovered, the space to protect from our distant players is behind us.

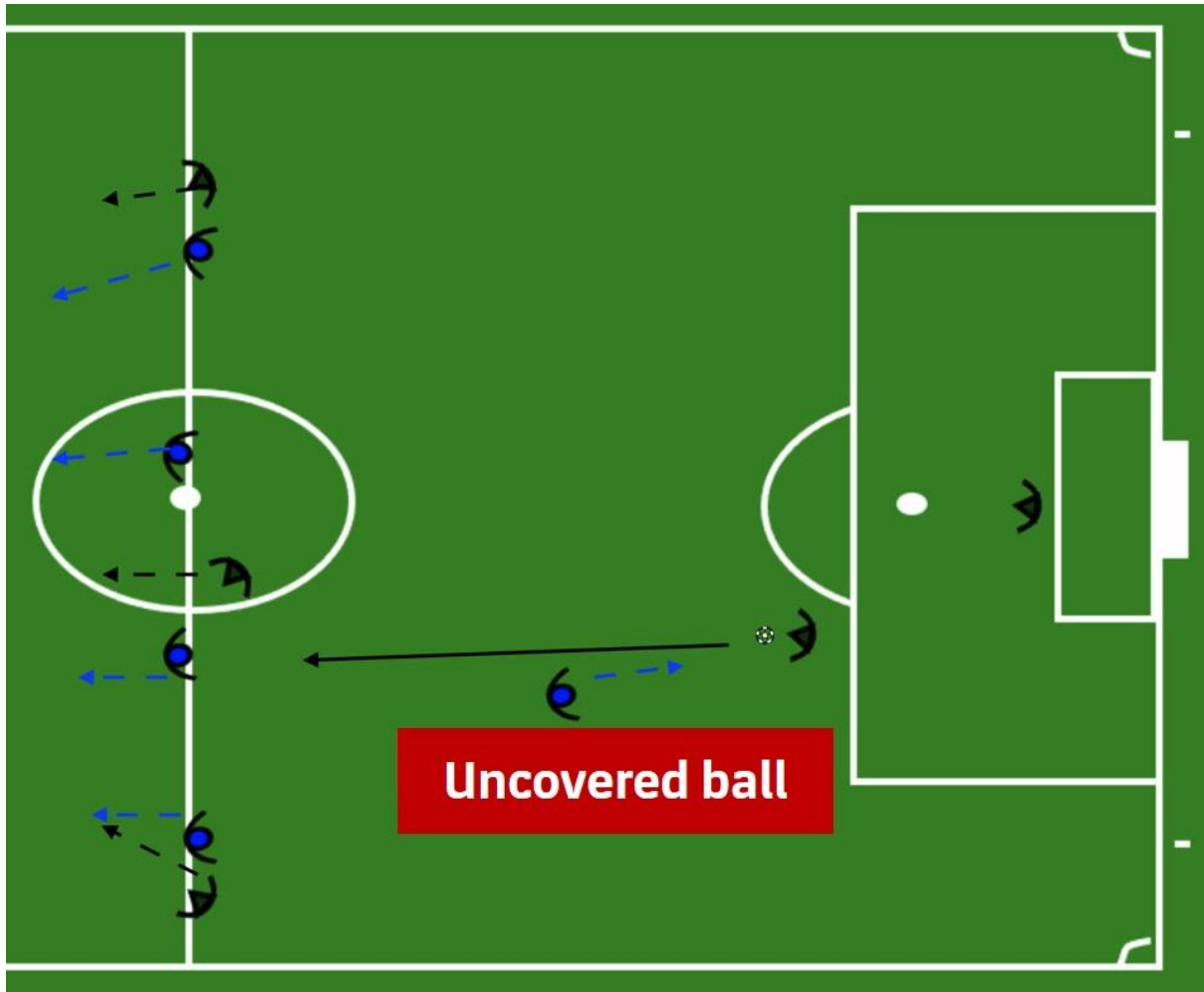
**Image 14: Covered Ball: Allows Forward Pressure**



Source: prepared by the authors.

Balón cubierto	Covered Ball
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Image 15: Uncovered Ball: Protection of the Space Behind



Source: prepared by the authors.

Balón descubierto	Uncovered ball
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- Coordinative aspects: last steps, stops, returns, feints, turns...: without considering collective non-verbal communication aspects, one of the most important considerations in relation to the recovery phase is related to individual coordinative aspects. If all players speak the same language and the team's work is good, the determining action to be able to regain possession of the ball has to do with individual criteria, highlighting the last steps of the run to not be surpassed, how I position myself physically so as not to overshoot during the stop, how my centre of gravity helps or hinders me in turning, returning, or changing direction in those final metres... In short, purely individual aspects are analysed so that, from a coordinative perspective, the collective action of regaining possession is successful.

- Desire to regain and enjoy: the goal is not to be defending throughout the game, but rather to be able to instil a culture of desire and joy in the defensive phase. If the team enjoys defending and adds the collective and individual aspects in line with what needs to be done at each moment, the possibilities of regaining possession will increase.

- The importance of the first few seconds: when the team loses possession, one of the obligations is to try to regain the ball as quickly as possible. The less time we give the opponent to reorganise when they are able to regain possession, the fewer options they will have to continue that phase of possession. Therefore, the culture and norm of the first few seconds when the team loses the ball should be established, so that they dedicate the necessary energy after the loss and are able to regain possession as soon as possible.
- Offensive structure: the moment of regaining possession should not be associated solely with defensive intensity. The team will have more defensive success if the offensive structure they had prior to losing the ball is good. The summary of this idea is to attack well in order to defend better. If the attack is tactically sound (positions and locations), we will have more chances of defensive success when the team loses the ball.

### **3.1.4 Integrated Model for Improving the Communication Code**

The goal we set as a staff is to try to make the team play football in the best possible way. Given the club we are in, we have the obligation to captivate people by watching us play because playing well will give us more chances to win matches. However, this collective construction that needs to take place begins with the communication code that must be generated within the team. We do not go into tactical details about how to press or the types of progressions that are relevant with the ball. The most important thing is to create an awareness of how we can learn to communicate in the best possible way during the possession and recovery phases. This can only be achieved through training tasks.

What type of tasks define us as a team?

Tasks where we prioritise a high tempo of ball circulation and where players constantly create passing lanes for the ball carrier, thus increasing the chances of success in the possession phase. In addition, as a team, we must have the initiative in the game and control the match for as long as possible. This involves dominating the opponent when in possession by keeping the ball for longer periods of time, and when we do not have it, applying a pressing approach that is oriented forward. We urge the players to regain possession as soon as possible (awareness of resting with the ball). During the possession phase, we aim to develop Barcelona-style playing concepts through control and passing, and to be able to identify different types of superiorities, etc.

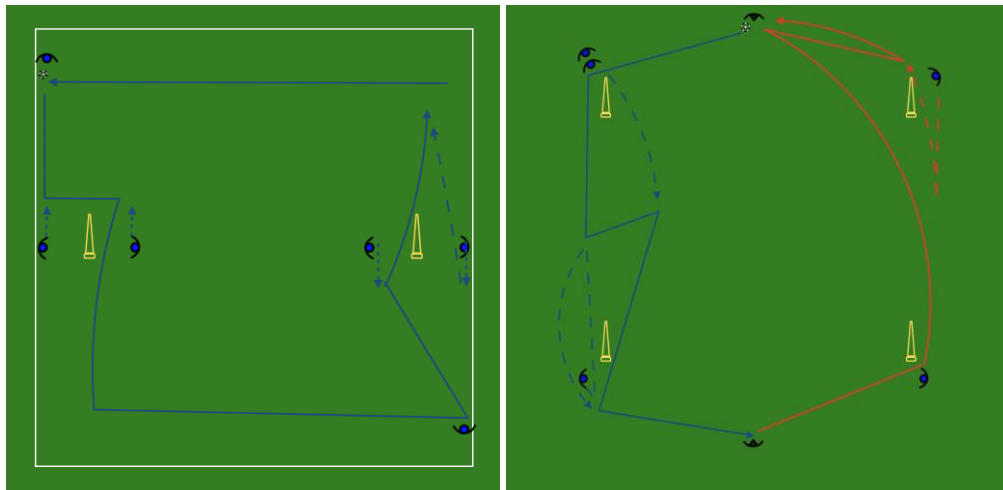
Adapting these tasks based on the characteristics of the opponent

The main objective during training tasks is to prioritise those that help the team improve their non-verbal communication code during both phases of the game. The opponent is taken into account, but the weekly focus is on using those aspects of the game that help improve the team's game model and can be utilised preferentially to prepare for the upcoming match.



One of the types of tasks that emphasises the introduction of this improvement in non-verbal communication is control and passing. The optimisation of this entire communicative process is achieved through open or closed passing sequences, where the objective is to create or consolidate non-verbal communication channels through passing. Below there are a couple of examples of tasks to introduce guidelines that were detailed during the development of the control and passing content (Image 16).

**Image 16: Non-verbal Communication through Passing**



Source: prepared by the authors.

Which leg do I pass to? What tension do I pass it with? Do I anticipate the next pass? Is there an advantage and does it facilitate my teammate's next action? Do I indicate with my hand where I want the ball? Is there a previous movement to the location where I ultimately want to receive the ball? Is the timing right? These are some of the questions and considerations taken into account in the development of tasks of this kind in order to facilitate new communication channels through passing within the team, which are subsequently transferred to the rest of the training tasks.

It should be noted that the communication that emerges in these tasks transcends the other types of tasks carried out during the training session (such as rondos, positional games, situational games, waves, finishing drills, small-sided matches, structured matches, etc.).

## Unit 3.2 Relationship between the Conditional Structure and the Game Model

The theory of dynamic systems entails a holistic view of training. By holistic, we mean that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, it is more than the sum of the information from each part analysed individually. Holistic training is a methodological approach based on the

combination of concepts from sports training and the concepts of complexity theory. It is based on designing tasks with non-linear responses; uncertainty is the creative basis of the process, grounded in the game and its complexity, which cannot be performed in environments detached from the complexity of the game where the athlete has to act. It should be used in both developmental stages and high-performance levels. The aim is to promote self-organisation of the athlete by stimulating situations that foster the development of interaction possibilities between systems. Each player interacts with the evolving context in a unique way. The training response will be individualised and adjusted to the characteristics of each player.

Each player is unique with their own history and experiences in football, as well as their own characteristics and abilities. The player must adapt to the game model, just as the model also adapts to her and her characteristics. The interplay between players and the game model is the most important hallmark, and it is constantly dynamic and adaptable. The foundations of the model are fixed, but one of its key characteristics, as seen in the previous sections, is that it is constantly adaptable, with the intention of expressing its maximum performance at all times. As coaches, we are responsible for assessing and managing the dynamics of the season, considering the available players and their fitness levels, both individually and as a team.

A crucial aspect in optimising the performance of both the player and the game model is to enhance each player's strengths. For example, if a player excels in her ability to cover ground on the wing, we must provide her with all the resources to showcase that to the fullest extent, thus enhancing her capability. In this way, we will provide the game model with this possibility. On the other hand, if the context of the team or the characteristics of the opponent require this player to display a more associative behaviour with the ball, with teammates taking up more central positions, if we can provide the player with a high level of adaptability, she will be able to offer what the game model requires at that moment. In this sense, we could be talking about improving the less characteristic aspects of the player. And when we talk about enhancing strengths and improving "weaknesses," we consider all aspects of the player's structures as a whole. As coaches, we must be able to clearly identify our challenges or objectives for each player. We will work on aspects that are more specific to the conditional structure in synergy with the other structures as much as possible.

Therefore, our focus will be on achieving this ideal scenario where both the game model and the players are as adaptable and adjustable as possible in relation to each other, establishing a constant dynamic relationship. The coach, with the support of assistants and fitness coaches, will be the helm of this variation, creating intentional situations to foster these relationships towards a specific direction.

### **3.2.1 The Conditional Structure in Tasks Specific to the Game Model**



Aspects of the game require direct involvement with the conditional structure, and some of them expose the player to situations of very high or maximum intensity. Training tasks designed to replicate the average demands of matches lead us to generate highly demanding situations, avoiding getting stuck only with reduced game situations, as this would likely leave the players unprepared for the more demanding phases that arise during the match (Gabbett et al., 2016). Find below the aspects of the game or situations that should not be overlooked in the sessions:

- Mastery of offensive play in confined spaces: the conditional structure demands the ability to sustain efforts over time with strength-related characteristics, constant changes of direction, accelerations, and decelerations. The intensity may not be very high (or it might be), but it will involve high repetitions in a period of time. The player's centre of gravity will remain low throughout the effort to enable quick reactions and changes in movement. All of this, of course, with synergy, the ability to interpret and decide during the game according to opponents, the ball, and teammates.
- Mastery of intense pressure in the initial moments of the recovery phase: post loss pressure requires the ability to chain an effort with the ball, which, at the moment of losing possession, already implies that our intensity has been high due to the attempt to avoid this situation, followed immediately by the effort to try to regain possession in the nearest space. This transition in a confined space is very important in our game model, and the players, besides being able to interpret and make good decisions in this situation, must be conditionally capable of performing this sequence of actions.
- Long-distance efforts in the recovery phase: following the explanation of the previous aspect, in the recovery phase, if we are unsuccessful in attempting to regain possession of the ball in a closed space, a transition with wide spaces can be generated due to the distance behind our high-pressure line. If this is the case, this chain of actions will become an expression of a scenario of maximum demand (SMD), where sprints and high-intensity runs will appear, connected to the previous efforts (ball possession with loss, unsuccessful post loss pressure).
- Long-distance efforts in the possession phase: one of the key aspects of our game model is spaces. Therefore, we must be prepared and capable of both associating in confined spaces and doing so, at certain moments and situations, in wide spaces. Thus, behaviours involving sequences of associations in short and long distances, at a conditional level, will consist of the ability to perform close ball actions with high or maximum intensity runs.

The situations mentioned above are part of highly specific game situations that demand a significant aspect of the conditional structure but do not neglect the other structures. In other



words, we can train a sequence of accelerations, decelerations, and sprints simulating a SMD, but it will not be as effective as training without the appearance of the ball, without the game situation.

Many authors have discussed and described SMD, such as Reilly et al. (2000), who talk about the need to prepare athletes for the most demanding periods of play, commonly associated with scoring situations or game-deciding moments. Bradley and Noakes (2013) speak of the most demanding game block, high-intensity efforts that constitute the anaerobic components of the match, and how this period can potentially influence the outcome of a match or induce fatigue. Delaney et al. (2017) also explain the most demanding periods of play and the highest running intensity an athlete can reach within a match. The maximum match intensity, according to Lacombe et al. (2017), and the most demanding match phases, according to Martín-García et al.

When training these situations, it will be crucial for us, as fitness coaches, to determine when to do it, how often to repeat it, how much recovery time to allow, and the exact conditions of the situation.

### **3.2.2 Considerations of Training in Women's Football**

In women's football, there are several considerations to take into account which make it essential to analyse it in order to work according to its specific needs. These considerations are explained below:

- Conditional improvement: Specificity of position and its efforts. Position as a significant aspect.
- Specific organisational needs: for example, how to change orientation (conditional capacities). During the game, there are technical actions and tactical organisations that, in some cases, differ from men's football. Due to genetic factors, there are situations in the game that must be approached differently between both genders. Examples include movement, the goalkeeper's range, or how the team should tactically organise to change the game's orientation. Generally, a higher number of passes is needed to achieve the intended purpose, which is to conquer a zone away from the midfield. Although the teams' objective during the match is the same – to create goal-scoring opportunities – at a tactical level, it involves different organisational nuances due to the players' conditional characteristics, leading to varying distances between them.
- Game pace. More time and space: when considering game actions, in women's football, there is more time and space available to play. The overall game pace is lower, allowing players more time to interact with each other. From a tactical perspective, this permits better organisations around the ball. Improving the game pace is of great interest since an increase in pace creates qualitative advantages over opponents.



Analysing the game with more time and space helps identify generated superiorities and how to exploit them. Therefore, there is a tactical richness that conceptually allows for a better understanding of what happens in the game and how to capitalise on those advantages that were identified through prior analysis. Additionally, during live matches, having more time and space to play allows for greater and better recognition of these tactical aspects. In football, this increased time and space lead to improved relationships and tactical organisations around the ball. During training sessions, a wide range of tasks is performed, utilising reduced spaces to enhance offensive and defensive game pace concepts. These tasks intensify actions related to the ball.

- Specific work and individual improvement: one of the most important processes within the season is to focus part of our work on making the player a better player every day. This individual improvement will positively impact the overall team performance. The procedure is as follows:

1. Initial meeting: during the preseason, the player meets with one of the assistant coaches, and this is where they discuss different areas of improvement that the player can develop.
2. Improvement objectives: from this initial discussion, a series of individual objectives are agreed upon, and the player will focus on gradually improving. These objectives can be technical, tactical, physical, psychological, nutritional, etc.
3. Individual tasks: this is the point where specific activities are established for the player to work on in relation to what she needs to improve. Each staff professional within their area will design tasks for the aspects the player and mentor consider that can be improved.
4. Follow-up meetings: without a strictly defined periodisation, the player needs to regularly review the improvement objectives set at the beginning of the preseason, so these meetings serve to adjust these contents. Sometimes, objectives have already been accomplished, or conversely, new areas where the player needs to work on emerge.
5. Post-match individual analysis: after each game, the player receives individual video clips of the match through an application where her mentor provides comments. Not only are individual aspects that need improvement discussed, but also good actions that occurred are reinforced. Ultimately, the goal of this post-match analysis is to strengthen aspects of the game that are present but in a much more individualised manner.

### **3.2.3 Session Design by the Coaching Staff**



The coaching staff at FC Barcelona consists of the head coach, two assistants, fitness coaches, goalkeeper coach, and analysts. This group must have a deep understanding of the team's game model and structured training. They should view both aspects as common and fully interrelated, with a cause-and-effect relationship, aiming to optimise the team's performance. To achieve this, they must always consider all of the player's structures in each situation and be able to balance preferences for cognitive, coordinative, conditional, etc., aspects so that none of these are excluded, or, if they are, it is not that often. Tactical content should always be seen as an opportunity to work on conditional aspects, and vice versa, creating a direct relationship between them. All this must be reflected in the session design and execution. Increasing the complexity of a task will have specific effects on conditional and tactical aspects. Prolonging the duration of a task will lead to increased fatigue, affecting decision-making and execution.

When putting all these principles into practice, the coaching staff follows these steps in designing training sessions:

- Established weekly or microcycle calendar: this includes training sessions, travel or movement, and matches.
- Match plan: the technical-tactical aspects that need to be worked on throughout the week are outlined.
- Technical-tactical content, conditional content, and correlation: synchronisation between them.
- Designing the microcycle structure: this involves distributing the types of tasks and contents that need to be addressed.
- Session design.
- Task design.

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