Module 3. High-press training in football

Introduction

One of the goals pursued by this module 3 is to establish the bases and the key factors in high-press training in football, as well as to facilitate its understanding and to offer clear and simple guidelines for its application.

In order to do that, we are going to talk about:

1. Traditional training methods: the analytical method and the integrated global training method.
2. Current training methods: the structured method and the tactical periodization.
3. The internal game logic and the variables for controlling tasks' design.
4. Tasks for working high-press from the collective point of view and from the point of view of the different team's lines (defensive line, midfielder's line and forward's line).

We are going to talk about the most traditional training methodologies (analytical and global), as well as the most current methodologies (the structured method and the tactical periodization), for introducing training tendencies with which coaches nowadays prepare their sessions for that stage of the game. Besides, we are going to enumerate and comment on the different "ingredients" the game has and we will try to understand their internal logic, which will lead us to have a clearer idea of the game components to consider when we design a task.

Finally, we are going to see some examples of existing tasks for the specific high-press training, from the point of view of the different tasks' methods for working with the group and for working the different lines (the defensive line, the midfielders' line and the strikers' line).

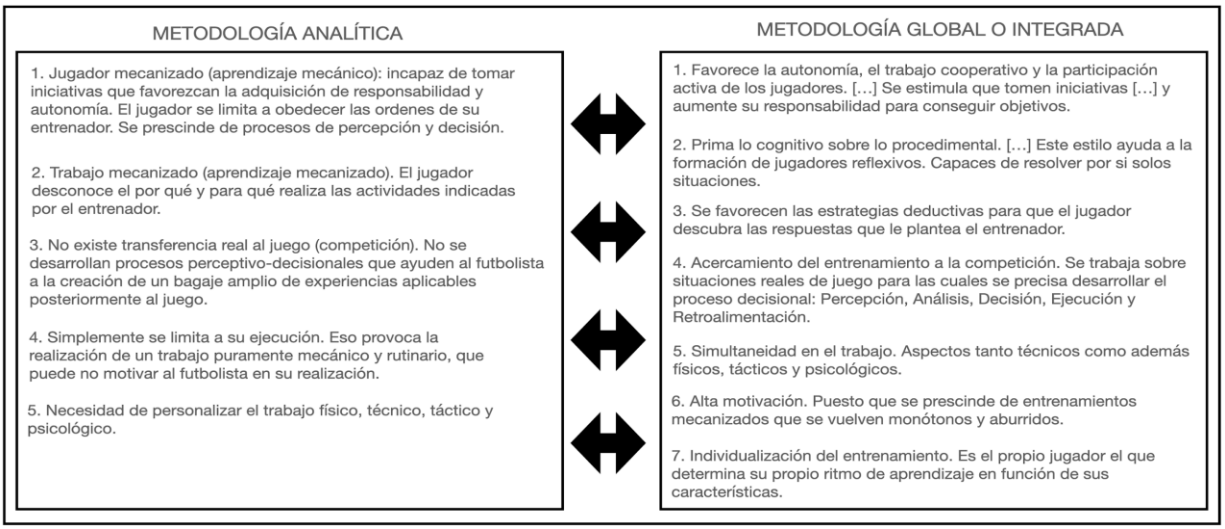
Unit 3.1. Traditional training methods: the analytical method and the global training method.

In the last years, from the methodological point of view, there has been a dichotomy among coaches and physical trainers between using the **analytical training method** or **the global integrated training method** in designing the tasks for running their training sessions.

The recent tendency is to combine these two methods. Besides, the integrated training has prevailed over the traditional analytical methodology for working on those tactical game concepts that imply an approach to the game reality. On the other hand, the analytical methodology is one of the bases in the design of tasks for working technical content, as well as working tactical content in a way that is very distant from the competitive game reality.

In relation to Tenorio and Del Pino's ideas (2008) stated on the book *La presión: conceptualización táctico-psicológica y su entrenamiento* (Pressure: tactical-psychological conceptualization and its training) we can state the following differences between these two proposed training methods:

Figure 1: Differences between the analytical training method and the global training method



Source: Tenorio, D. and Del Pino, J.M. (2008). [Untitled image about the differences between the analytical training method and the global training method], p. 104.

METODOLOGÍA ANALÍTICA	ANALYTICAL METHODOLOGY
1. Jugador mecanizado (aprendizaje mecánico): incapaz de tomar iniciativas que favorezcan la adquisición de responsabilidad y autonomía. El jugador se limita a obedecer las órdenes de su entrenador. Se prescinde de procesos de percepción y decisión.	1. Automatized player (automatized learning): not able to take initiatives that would favor the acquisition of responsibility and autonomy. The player is restricted to follow their coach´s order. Perception and decision processes are discarded.
2. Trabajo mecanizado (aprendizaje mecanizado). El jugador desconoce el por qué y para qué realiza las actividades indicadas por el entrenador.	2. Automatized work (automatized learning). The player does not know why and what for he/she does the activities the coach indicate.
3. No existe transferencia real al juego (competición). No se desarrollan procesos perceptivo-decisionales que ayudan al futbolista a la creación de un bagaje amplio de experiencias aplicables posteriormente al juego.	3. There is no real transference to the game (competition). There is no development of the perceptive-decisional processes that help football players to create a wide experience that could be later applied to the game.
4. Simplemente se limita a su ejecución. Eso provoca la realización de un trabajo puramente mecánico y rutinario, que puede no motivar al futbolista en su realización.	4. It is simply limited to the execution. This implies a purely mechanical and monotonous work, which can demotivate football players when doing it.
5. Necesidad de personalizar el trabajo físico, técnico, táctico y psicológico	5. Need for personalizing the physical, technical, tactical and psychological work.
METODOLOGÍA GLOBAL O INTEGRADA	GLOBAL OR INTEGRATED METHODOLOGY
1. Favorece la autonomía, el trabajo cooperativo y la participación activa de los jugadores [...] Se estimula que tomen iniciativas [...] y aumente su responsabilidad para conseguir objetivos.	1. It favors the players´ autonomy, cooperative work and active participation [...] Players are encouraged to take initiatives [...] and to increase their responsibility for achieving goals.
2. Prima lo cognitivo sobre lo procedimental [...] Este estilo ayuda a la formación de jugadores reflexivos. Capaces de resolver por sí solos situaciones.	2. The cognitive is prioritized over the procedural [...] This style helps for training reflexive players. Who are able to solve situations on their own.
3. Se favorecen las estrategias deductivas para que el jugador descubra las respuestas que le plantea el entrenador.	3. Deductive strategies are favored, so that players can discover the answers asked by the coach.
4. Acercamiento del entrenamiento a la competición. Se trabaja sobe situaciones reales de juego para las cuales se precisa desarrollar el proceso decisional: Percepción, Análisis, Decisión, Ejecución y Retroalimentación.	4. Closer to competition training. It is worked around real game situations for which the decision process needs to be developed: Perception, Analysis, Decision, Execution and Feedback.
5. Simultaneidad en el trabajo. Aspectos tanto técnicos como además físicos, tácticos y psicológicos.	5. Simultaneity in work. Technical aspects as well as physical, tactical and psychological ones.
6. Alta motivación. Puesto que se prescinde de entrenamientos mecanizados que se vuelven monótonos y aburridos.	6. High motivation Automatized trainings are discarded, since they become monotonous and boring.
7. Individualización del entrenamiento. Es el propio jugador el que determina su propio ritmo de aprendizaje en función de sus características.	7. Training individualization. It is players themselves who determine their own learning rhythm in relation to their characteristics.

An example of analytical task for working the defensive concept in the high-press, from a tactical and conditional point of view, can be seen on the task performed by Jorge Sampaoli with the Chile national football team (figure 2), in which two clear aims are pursued. On the one hand, there is the aim of improving the conditional capacity, something that is so necessary for resisting harassment to opponents when putting high-press, or in other words, for improving resistance to high intensity efforts (conditional goal).

On the other hand, there is also the aim of improving high-press mechanisms in the collective coordination by automatizing the paths each game position will follow (tactical-collective goal).

Figure 2: High-press analytical-conditional task

Source: adapted from Táctica Versus Táctica, n.d.

As we can observe, the tasks in the analytical method "represent isolated game actions and they only take into account some of the elements that are involved in the competition, mainly the ball, (...) and where there is no uncertainty, players acquiring the technical gesture from the exercise repetition and the coach's corrections (Tassi, 2017, p. 2).

Instead, the global-integrated

> is based on the sports practice, where technical-tactical, physical, psychological and visual abilities are relatedly expressed, but differentiated in their observation and analysis. This methodology implies an integration and combination among different types of loads, but the common denominator is always the technical and the tactical one (...). Through them

> the rest of the qualities involved in performance are developed, developing them altogether and generically. (Tassi, 2017, p. 2)

A global or integrated methodology example for working high-press can be found on the main part of the session shown on figure 3, by a task in which most of the game's components and context situations are reproduced (teammates, opponents, mobile [ball], game space, etc.).

Figure 3: Example of global methodology in the high-press training

Source: adapted from Carlos Jiménez Plou [user], 2017.

In this Raúl Agné's task with the Real Zaragoza on the 2016-17 preseason, we can observe work carried out for improving high-press, with a 6 vs 6 exercise in a limited and reduced space on the game field. The red team tries to recover the ball by putting high pressure on the black team, which, in turn, tries to escape from that pressure and to progress. This work's aim is to improve high-press on the midfielders and the strikers' line, following the 1442 game system and one in which the defensive line is not involved.

As we can see, tasks that use the global or integrated method are more close to the game reality, because there are more structural game variables in it; elements like teammates, opponents, the ball, the space, etc. and there are also other variables that are more functional like communication, strategy, intentionality and gestures or technique.

Nevertheless,

> although integrated training includes conditional elements (physical ones), coordinative elements (technique), cognitive elements (tactic), psychological elements, socio-emotional elements (stress caused by the

competition), (...) this does not guarantee a training to be close to the game reality. This aim is achieved by the structured model (...) that, besides getting the integrated training's benefits, provides the channel and the decision-making orientation towards a concrete and specific game goal. (Tenorio and Del Pino, 2008, p. 47)

Unit 3.2. Current training methods

As Tassi (2017) states in an article called *Metodologías y modelos de planificación en el futbol actual. Acentuación psicológica en la periodización táctica y el microciclo estructurado* (Methodologies and planning models in current football. Psychological emphasis on tactical periodization and structured microcycle), the two planning models that are more accepted and followed by most coaches nowadays are the tactical periodization and the structured microcycle. Besides, in this article it is stated that these planning models in football are based on a global-integrated methodology and they agree on approaching "football training as a complex sport, in which its structures must be worked integrally and simultaneously on the field" (Arjol on Tassi, 2017, p. 3).

3.2.1. The structured microcycle by Paco Seirul·lo: preferential simulation situations (PSS)

The proposition in this structured training method is based on two key aspects for training in situations that resemble competition as much as possible.

- Game actions analysis (based on a correct interpretation of it).
- Respect to the game rules, without which you cannot play football.

This is achieved by the development of the called **preferential simulation situations (PSS)**, which allows for outlining tasks in relation to real field interaction situations and in which their solutions' aim is to optimize the different structures associated with the game and the player (conditional structure, socio-affective structure, coordinative structure, cognitive structure, creative-expressive structure and emotional-volitional structure).

> What are the PSS or preferential simulation situations? They are situations that emulate the game itself and they preferentially have an impact on some of the individual's structures. These situations will be defined and deduced from the analysis and interpretation of real game situations among the coach and each player. (Efficient Football, 2020, https://www.efficientfootball.com/ssp-situaciones-simuladoras-preferenciales/)

In order to obtain optimization for these structures, we can implement tasks or **preferential simulation situations (PSS)** with a **generic, general, directed, special and competitive** nature. They will be close or distant to game reality, according to the presence of a certain number of elements that are present in the real game, namely:

a) Generic level PSS: "the load nature and organization is totally different from the one expressed in the competition. For example, improving aerobic resistance through a jogging exercise or by cycling sessions" (Fútbol Studio, 2021, https://futbolstudio.com/foro/topic/curso-metodologia-y-planificacion/). These types of tasks are used, in most cases, on season preparation periods or like competition recovery periods.

b) General level PSS:

> The load nature and organization is somehow similar to the one observed in the competition, but the decision-making is absent. For example, an intermittent-sprint training on field with distances and paths that are usual in competition (tactical intermittent). (Tassi, 2017, p. 4)

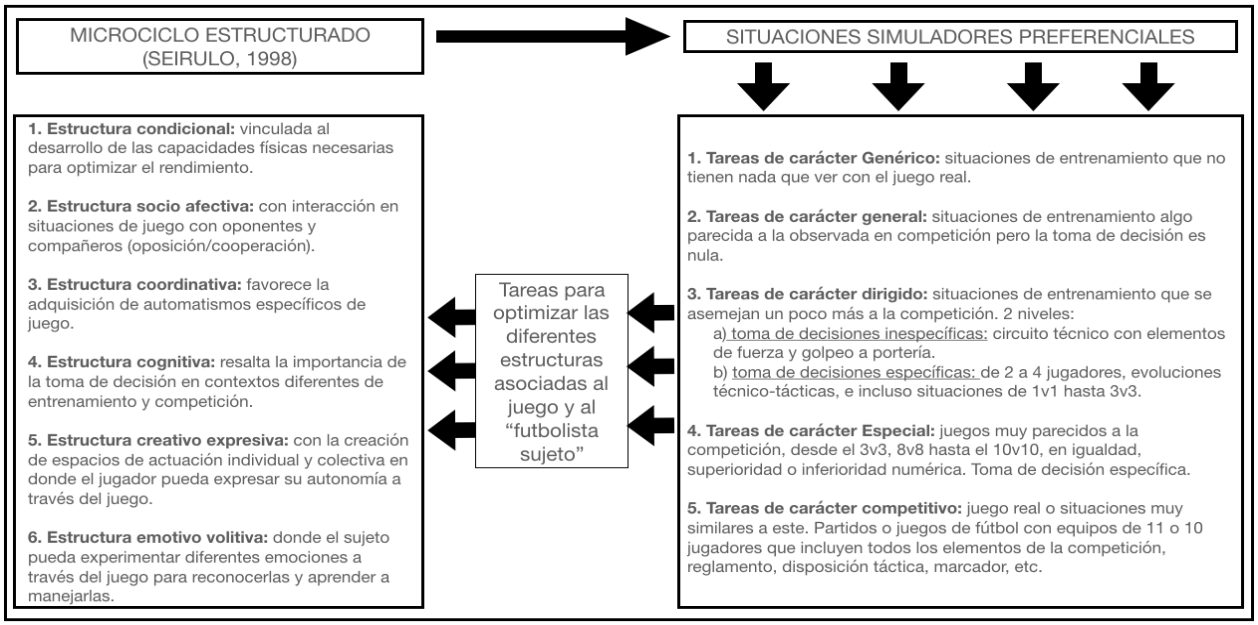
c) Directed level PSS: load nature and organization is more similar to the one observed in competition. There are two levels in relation to the necessary decision-making:

   a. Non-specific decision-making: it includes specific coordinative elements. For example, a technical circuit where the ball is included together with strength elements: jumps, fighting, sprints and goal kicks.
   b. Specific decision-making: training situations with two to four players participating in the form of technical-tactical evolutions with or without modulated opposition, and even with 1 vs 1 (1v1) situations or even 3 versus 3 (3v3) ones.

d) Special or specific level PSS: the load nature and organization is similar to the one in competition. It includes structures with games that go from 3v3, 8v8 or even 10v10, with equal, superior or inferior numbers. Decision-making is specific. For example, a 4 x 4 ball possession with 3 all-rounders.

e) Competition level PSS: it includes training situations like in real game or situations that are very similar to it. Football matches or games with 11 or 10 players´ teams in which all competition´s elements are included: rules, tactical disposition, a scoreboard, etc.

Figure 4: Characteristics in the structured microcycle planning model



Source: adapted and modified from Tassi, 2017.

MICROCICLO ESTRUCTURADO (SEIRULO, 1998)	STRUCTURED MICROCYCLE (SEIRULO, 1998)
1. Estructura condicional: vinculada al desarrollo de las capacidades físicas necesarias para optimizar el rendimiento.	**1. Conditional structure:** linked to the development of the necessary physical abilities for optimizing performance.
2. Estructura socio afectiva: con interacción en situaciones de juego con oponentes y compañeros (oposición/cooperación).	**2. Socio-affective structure:** with interaction on game situations with opponents and teammates (opposition/cooperation).
3. Estructura coordinativa: favorece la adquisición de automatismos específicos de juego.	**3. Coordinative structure:** it favours the acquisition of specific game automatisms.
4. Estructura cognitiva: resalta la importancia de la toma de decisión en contextos diferentes de entrenamiento y competición.	**4. Cognitive structure:** it highlights the importance of decision-making in different training and competition contexts.
5. Estructura creativo expresiva: con la creación de espacios de actuación individual y colectiva en donde el jugador pueda expresar su autonomía a través del juego.	**5. Creative-expressive structure:** with the creation of spaces for individual and collective work, in which players can express their autonomy through the game.
6. Estructura emotivo volitiva: donde el sujeto pueda experimentar diferentes emociones a través del juego para reconocerlas y aprender a manejarlas.	**6. Emotive-volitional structure:** where individuals can experience different emotions through the game for recognizing them and learning to handle them.

Tareas para optimizar las diferentes estructuras asociadas al juego y al "futbolista sujeto"	Tasks for optimizing the different structures associated to the game and the "individual football player"
SITUACIONES SIMULADORES PREFERENCIALES	PREFERENTIAL SIMULATION SITUATIONS
1. Tareas de carácter Genérico: situaciones de entrenamiento que no tienen nada que ver con el juego real.	**1. Generic nature tasks:** training situations that have nothing to do with the real game.
2. Tareas de carácter general: situaciones de entrenamiento algo parecida a la observada en competición pero la toma de decisión es nula.	**2. General nature tasks:** training situations that are somehow similar to the one observed in the competition, but the decision-making is absent.
3. Tareas de carácter dirigido: situaciones de entrenamiento que se asemejan un poco más a la competición. 2 niveles: a) toma de decisiones inespecíficas: circuito técnico con elementos de fuerza y golpeo a portería. b) toma de decisiones específicas: de 2 a 4 jugadores, evoluciones técnico-tácticas, e incluso situaciones de 1v1 hasta 3v3.	**3. Directed nature tasks:** training situations that are a bit more similar to the competition. 2 levels: a) non-specific decision-making: technical circuit with elements of strength and goal kicks. b) specific decision-making: from 2 to 4 players, technical-tactical evolutions and even 1v1 and 3v3 situations.
4. Tareas de carácter Especial: juegos muy parecidos a la competición, desde el 3v3, 8v8 hasta el 10v10, en igualdad, superioridad o inferioridad numérica. Toma de decisión específica.	**4. Special nature tasks:** games that are very similar to competition from 3v3, 8v8 or even 10v10, with equal, superior or inferior numbers. Specific decision-making.
5. Tareas de carácter competitivo: juego real o situaciones muy similares a este. Partidos o juegos de fútbol con equipos de 11 o 10 jugadores que incluyen todos los elementos de la competición, reglamento, disposición táctica, marcador, etc.	**5. Competitive nature tasks:** real game or very similar situations. Football matches or games with 11 or 10 players´ teams in which all competition´s elements are included: rules, tactical disposition, a scoreboard, etc.

The proposed tasks or PSSs should include the following series of irreplaceable elements:

- They must be built by using global tasks (global or integrated method).
- They should be oriented to the collective or the group.
- The goal is to learn and understand the game, not the exercise (they should facilitate free game situations).
- The aim is to communicate the intended aims to the players, in order to increase their motivation and, therefore, their learning and improvement.

One of the coach´s main task is the **players´ tactical development**, with the aim to make them better understand the game idea their coach wants to implement (game model) and them better communicate and relate with each other (team´s tactical communication):

> As coaches we are responsible for the development of our players, at the tactical level; this development will be seen on the team´s tactical connection, since players that are conscious and can perceive their teammates´ tactical intentions will be able to interact better inside the playing field and, consequently, they will increase interaction.
>
> It is not the same to look at a situation being unconscious about it than looking at the situation being conscious about it. The difference is that when you perceive it, you can act accordingly. (Efficient football, 2020, https://www.efficientfootball.com/ssp-situaciones-simuladoras-preferenciales/)

This **tactical communication** will improve players´ learning and will provide them with better response possibilities, since they will be able to solve situations more easily (prospect power):

> Tactical communication is defined as the group of terms and messages that refer to certain game concepts, ideas or situations, which we have built as a team for having a common collective language that would facilitate learning (...). The tactical communication´s purpose is players´ learning through their consciousness development and their ability to perceive the different game situations that could arise in a certain context (PSS).
>
> If tactical communication is effective, it will increase players´ ability to solve a situation in the most varied ways without losing efficacy. This is what is known as 'perspective power'. (Efficient Football, 2020, https://www.efficientfootball.com/ssp-situaciones-simuladoras-preferenciales/)

One of the aims pursued by coaches in training in their players´ tactical development is that they are aware of the whole learning and improvement process they are going through. Nevertheless, this learning process is not meant to cause an effort to players when they have to execute it. That is to say, they should be able to unconsciously execute the technical and/or tactical gestures learned, so they do not have to focus their attention at the moment of executing them and miss other important things when perceiving the play development **(players should learn from the unconscious incompetence to the unconscious competence):**

1) Unconscious incompetence: in this first stage, players do not possess the ability and they are neither conscious about it, because they have not considered it.

2) Conscious incompetence: football players start realizing they do not have the ability and they start to activate resources to learn about it, that is to say, they are conscious about it, however they do not know to effectively and successfully go through the process.

3) Conscious competence: the necessary efforts are put in learning and players start acquiring skills in this ability's performance.

4) Unconscious competence: the level of knowledge is already advanced, so the activity does not require too much attention. The work is done from the subconscious. (Efficient Football, 2020, https://www.efficientfootball.com/ssp-situaciones-simuladoras-preferenciales/)

In conclusion, **coaches should improve the collective game by improving their players individually, optimizing their structures by using PSSs adjusted to the needs in the situational context that is meant to be improved or optimized.**

In this sense, coaches should be experts in the observation of their players' learning and improvement process, in adapting examinations and analyses to know or predict what is each player's level of competence and consciousness in each game situation we want to improve (individual work). In the same way, they should also be experts in designing propositions for "PSS on training tasks that our team need for improving the game model we want to implement [for example, collective work and work by lines]" (Efficient Football, 2020, https://www.efficientfootball.com/ssp-situaciones-simuladoras-preferenciales/).

All of that is achieved through the coach's observation of what players can learn by themselves and of what they cannot. After considering what was observed, it is necessary to give information about what players cannot perceive and will not be able to perceive on their own and to design a PSS adapted for improving these situations or for strengthening the ones that work (Efficient football, 2020, https://www.efficientfootball.com/ssp-situaciones-simuladoras-preferenciales/)

3.2.2. The tactical periodization

The tactical periodization is a planning model that was presented 30 years ago by professor Vitor Frade whose main concern is what a team intends to produce in competition. That is why the game model and the tactical dimension are assumed as guides in the whole training process.

This planning model is based on the development of a team's game model and it is based on applying the principles that support it and are established by the coach.

> Tactical periodization respects the 'unbreakable entirety' game principle, extending in each exercise the four dimensions that are the constituents parts in football, as well as its four moments, being the game **principles** and **sub-principles** the only ones that are split, taking the **game model** as a reference for the whole process. **Training will then be in charge of making players understand the way of playing their coach intends to reach.** If the game model is the reference in the whole process, the tactical dimension aspect will always be the guide in the whole exercise, the others factors emerging, as a consequence. The tactical aspect is not physical, it is neither technical nor psychological, but it needs all of them to get manifested. (Díaz Galán, 2012, https://www.martiperarnau.com/vitor-frade-el-padre-de-la-periodizacion-tactica/)

In relation to Tassi's ideas (2017) and through examples for the high-press game stage, we are going to explain the principles and sub-principles and how they are arranged hierarchically.

> The principles are those general game behaviors organized hierarchically and consistently with each other; they are created and defined by the coach (Arjol, 2012). For example, the way to recover the ball when the team does not have the possession establishes the development of individual and collective behaviors during competition and training.
>
> The sub-principles, for their part, would be behaviors or actions that are deduced from the principles (following the previous example and in relation to ball recovery, they state which are the actions players should perform when closer or farther from the ball), expanding aims and content.
>
> Deduced from them, we could find new sub-principles that are much closer to players, looking for more resources that would favor their individual development in relation to the collective game model. They are hierarchically structured (different levels of principles and sub-principles) based on the four typical game moments, that is to say, based on the

following stages: attack, defense, attack-defense transition and defense-attack transition. (Tassi, 2017, p. 8)

In conclusion, in the tactical periodization, each and every game moment is considered as an indivisible whole (not only the ball moments in the offensive stage, but also in the moments without ball, in the defensive stage). Besides, the main goal is the team and the intended way of playing, forming it and adapting it during the microcycle time unit (time space between two matches) to the characteristics of the next opponent.

Figure 5: Example of global methodology in the high-press training in a tactical periodization model

Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

This is a task by Javi Gracia used in Valencia CF (2020-21) that is useful as an example of an acceptable task for the tactical periodization model. As we can see, it is about a collective work through a global task (integrated method), in which the high-press defensive stage is trained in a real match situation.

The team that works defensively faces the structure that the next opponent will presumably use in its initial stage, since the goal kick. The main goal pursued is to put high pressure for recovering and counterattack, in order to score a goal in the opponent's goal as quickly as possible. The secondary aim is to time and to drop back to their own field in case of being overtaken in pressure.

This task's intention is to recreate, as specifically as possible, the game situations players are going to face during the next match. Besides, some adaptations are made according to their own game model (one or various players' roles and movements, or even the defensive structure) to try to counteract the next opponent's build-up play.

This way, we can see how this task follows the two main principles in tactical periodization:

a) The specificity principle: putting players to practice and understand the way to put high pressure in the same situation they are going to face in the next match.
b) The propensity principle: in order to follow it, the coach will constrain and adapt the variables that define the game, in order to create situations that are similar to the ones that will occur at the moment of facing the next opponent.

Therefore, we can state that

> the **tactical periodization** always works on **specificity**, not giving room then to analytical and decontextualized exercises. That is the reason why it rejects physical or technical trainings separated from the game model, since this can make the process unspecific with its later consequences.
>
> (...)
>
> We have to avoid confusing integrated training with tactical periodization. We are talking about a specificity related to the way of playing, different from the specificity of playing that is predominant in the integrated way, although it is clear that it also has specific exercises. (Díaz Galán, 2012, https://www.martiperarnau.com/vitor-frade-el-padre-de-la-periodizacion-tactica/)

About that, we can also state that, besides the specificity principle, **the propensity principle** is another essential principle on which tactical periodization is based. This way, the game rules and its variables are conditioned for repeating the desired behaviors as much as possible:

> **We should condition the exercise, so that the intended behavior emerges repeatedly,** (...) through the systematic repetition (in specificity), allowed, in this case, by the propensity principle.
>
> Let's imagine we want to our team's players to apply a certain type of pressure. We perform an exercise in which 6 players, three forwards and three midfielders (in a 1-4-3-3 system) apply pressure against 7 players with ball possession, for example, four defenders and three midfielders. If we want players to adopt this principle, **we will have to set rules to the game, so that there are many ball recoveries on the part of the players applying pressure**, using, this way, the systematic repetition that will lead them to a habit. (Díaz Galán, 2012, https://www.martiperarnau.com/vitor-frade-el-padre-de-la-periodizacion-tactica/)

Once we have already seen the two mostly used training methods and planning models, we can state that, without leaving the analytical methodology aside, **the global methodology is the base for these two planning models when preparing the microcycle training tasks**, being the microcycle the time unit that constitutes the essential core in the training organization.

Unit 3.3. Understanding the game internal logic for developing greater ability in designing tasks

One of the things that coaches should perfectly know, dominate and control is all the variables the game has in its internal logic. This knowledge provides a wide experience for designing training tasks adapted to the concrete goal we want to achieve and with the necessary specificity we want to give them, in order to bring them closer or more distant to a football match´s competitive reality.

There is a need to understand to what extent these variables can be modified and how can they be mixed when designing a task, for directing it to the players´ behavior acquisition we want to improve.

3.3.1. The internal game logic

We are going to describe these game variables and constants, which are universal, regardless of the country where it is played and the applied game style or system. As Egurza (2020) states, the game logic must be learned, because it is a changing scenario that requires a constant interpretation.

Figure 6: The internal game logic

Source: Egurza, M. (2020). [Print screen about the internal game logic]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/KTBL4YWpOT0.

Lógica interna del juego	Internal game logic
ESPACIO COMPARTIDO (INVASIVO)	SHARED SPACE (INVASIVE)
ESPACIO POLARIZADO	POLARIZED SPACE
ENFRENTAMIENTO (ESTRUCTURAS)	PLAYING AGAINST (STRUCTURES)
COOPERACIÓN/COLABORACIÓN	COOPERATION/COLLABORATION
OPOSICIÓN	OPPOSITION
ORGANIZAR PARA DESORGANIZAR	ORGANIZING FOR DEORGANIZING
DUELOS INDIVIDUAL/COLECTIVO	INDIVIDUAL/COLLECTIVE CHALLENGES
NO HAY OBLIGACIÓN DE AVANZAR	THERE IS NO OBLIGATION TO ADVANCE
OBJETIVO COMÚN	COMMON GOAL
BAJO UN REGLAMENTO	FOLLOWING RULES
"El juego es un escenario constantemente cambiante que requiere de una interpretación continua..." (Ibon Etxeazarra)	"The game is an ever-changing scenario that is open for continuous interpretation..." (Ibon Etxeazarra)

The game action in football is a bit complex, since there is a combination of diverse elements like space, with defined sub-spaces, goals we have to reach and protect, a fixed time frame, teammates and opponents with whom individuals simultaneously interact (motor and verbal communication), through the technique and the ball. The **internal game logic** includes a series of **functional constants** (communication, strategies, intentionality, gestures or techniques) and **structural constants** (space, time, teammates, opponents, ball, rules) that influence the game action.

Game functional constants:

1) **the assigned strategy and roles**: it is important to learn about the different roles that, as coaches, we can give to our players in relation to the **strategy** we want to work out. That way, players organize their game action following the diverse **strategic roles** we assign to them and that are constantly changing in relation to the structural variables (space, time, score, teammates, opponents, etc.).

2) **Communication:** in football, it is facilitated through the gestures' communication (gesteme) and through practice (praxeme). The communication's purpose is to find the necessary **cooperation and collaboration** among teammates for **beating the opponents and the opposition** they put against us (**common goal**).

   As coaches, we should foster a good reading of this **gesture and tactical communication** through practice. In order to do that, we should promote behaviors in the defensive stage facing situations that might end up in a ball recovery. For example, behaviors in which players know how to identify when to press by doing a good reading of the game situation: identifying the speed or height in a pass among opponents, which will lead the receiver to have a bad control, or identifying that, in front of a player in a bad position (completely on

his/her back) who will receive the ball, there is a need to press him/her to anticipate.

3) **Intentionality:** it could be trained, from the point of view of bringing about situations that could end up on an opponent's behavior that will later benefit us. This is what is known as **organizing for disorganizing,** or in other words, playing short from one side to the other to attract opponents, to disorganize them and weaken them in other areas in the field of which we will later try to take advantage by delivering the ball directly to that area (Egurza, 2020).

   Player's intentionality can be trained by modifying an internal game variable for generating behaviors that we try to foster. For example, by changing a task's rule that could have an influence in **the game´s directionality**. For example, by prohibiting passes to the goalkeeper, we can strengthen the intention and habit of moving the ball forwards.

Game structural constants:

1) the **space** is considered a dynamic and action element, where all players occupy a space that is characterized as:

   a) Shared and invasive: the space is shared with teammates and opponents, not as in other sports in which each team uses a space and cannot invade the opponent's space.
   b) Polarized: the attack is done in one direction and the defense in the opposite one.

2) **The time and the scoreboard (score):** they are some other structural modifications we can carry out in our tasks (favoring the emergence of game actions in relation to time and score):

   a) The result: by varying the scoring system, for example, in which recovering is equal to 1 point and scoring a goal is equal to 3 points, etc.

   b) The time: fostering the solution for game actions and situations at a certain time (10 passes in 30 seconds).

3) The **teammates and opponents** structural element should be present in a high percent in the design of training scenarios. This is like this, since it is an essential element in the game.

As we can observe, modifications to these two types of game variables can be made for:

a) Favoring or strengthening some determined behaviors on players.
b) Increasing or decreasing the task's specificity level.
c) Increasing or decreasing the task's perceptive demands that are the ones that make the level of difficulty increases or decreases.

3.3.2. Task design for training

As we can observe, there are many variables to take into account in the design of training tasks. One or various small modifications in these variables can cause a task to be oriented towards a certain aim, to have an appropriate specificity level, to make the perceptive-cognitive demand to be more or less high, or the difficulty level to be higher or lower.

All in all, in relation to how we modify certain game variables, we can get closer to or move away from **improvements in behaviors we want our players to manifest.**

Once the game "ingredients" have been seen, the next step is to see **how we can handle these variables in order to modify a task´s level of specificity and the perceptive-cognitive demand:**

1. The numerical relation between teammates and opponents (equal, inferior and/or superior).

2. The space relation between offensive and defensive players.

    a. The space the players with ball possession (the offensive players) have.
    b. The space the defensive players have to defend or occupy in order to recover the ball (the defensive players).

3. The space modification (reducing and/or enlarging the game space): coaches can modify spaces in the task designed in relation to their needs. For example:

    a) Wide spaces for favoring offensive actions and complicating the defensive ones.
    b) Reduced spaces for complicating offensive actions and favoring the defensive ones.
    c) To modify the total task's space in order to condition the distance players cover in the task.
    d) To decrease or increase the size of the goal area.
    e) The space is wider for facilitating the game in width (orientation changes).

f) To locate marking spaces or areas, so that intended movements are made (to favor the forward game directionality or the space break movements).

g) The game space shape is modified (not always rectangular, tasks can be with square, circular, triangular and even pentagonal or hexagonal spaces).

4. Mobility allowed to players in the diverse task's areas:

    a. If they can come in the area or invade it or not.
    b. If they can come in or not in relation to the number of players that are in that area.

5. The way to score goals or get points:

    a. By scoring goals in goals defended by a goalkeeper, on small goals.
    b. By scoring goals reaching an area with the balled being controlled, etc.

6. The specific position or the special order in which we place players.

7. The passes limitation or obligation at a certain area in the field.

8. Touches limitation in the whole space or in a certain area for the task.
9. The work time and recovery ratio.

10. Many other modifications that can be made.

All in all, the training situations that are used should relate the internal game logic and the way of training that is proposed.

The coach will make decisions about the presence and absence of diverse functional and structural elements that each of the tasks should have, so that training scenarios are contextualized and significant, and they would facilitate the players´ cognitive involvement, as well as the development of an autonomous and intentional game action.

Unit 3.4. The design of tasks for high-press work

We consider that the training task's design, explanation, direction, assessment and analysis are some of the most important functions that are implied when coaching a football team and, as a consequence, the coach and the coaching staff should have a good command of them.

It is very important that coaches greatly increase their knowledge about the game, but it is more relevant that they know how to organize that knowledge and show it to their players, not only in the technical talks (through the usage of audio-visual aids and their communication skills), but also in the training field through the development of the task designed for working it. "Tasks in training are coaches´ language for transmitting and producing changes at the individual and collective level on the individuals we work with" (Efficient Football, 2020b, https://www.efficientfootball.com/tareas-en-el-entrenamiento-futbol/).

As we have said on previous items, we should support a cognitive training based on perceptive-decisive aspects and with a correct structuring of the means for designing situations that are as similar as possible to the game reality (structured training method). We will achieve this if we can consider the characteristics in the opponent against we are going to play (tactical periodization method).

But, regardless the method used, the difference will be made when **coaches know how to design training tasks adapted to the content they want to work (high-press in this case) and doing it with the highest level of specificity in order to generate the behaviors they want their players to manifest.**

In order to reproduce, as many times as possible, high-press behaviors we want our players to adopt, we should try to recreate, in our tasks, the situations we believe players will face in the next match against their next opponent. In order to do that, the tasks we are suggesting should include:

a) Variables involved in the game: ball, space, teammates, opponents, rules, etc.

b) The necessary context: for reproducing game situations that we expect for the next match.

    a. Attack one goal and defend the other one.
    b. Establishing training situations on significant areas in the game field (so that players are located and get used to their habitual work area).

c. A correct set-up of working teams. That is to say, players act and participate in the task in their habitual position and surrounded by a similar structure, in relation to teammates and opponents (respecting the game system and its offensive and defensive structures).
d. Own and opponent's team tactical structures and the opponent's team game patterns in the build-up play.
e. Respecting the offside rule in the suggested tasks. Not using this rule means that the task is distorted and distant from the competitive reality. (Tenorio and Del Pino, 2008, pp. 106-107)

There is a great variety of tasks for working high-press, so they can be organized and/or structured in different ways in relation to:

a) The type of methodology used: methodological progression that goes from what is more analytical to what is more global, integrated, structured and in relation to the opponent (tactical periodization).

b) The involved demarcations or team lines: tasks for individual fragmented work, with one or two lines (work for strikers, tasks for the midfielders and the strikers line) and tasks for the three lines working together (strikers, midfielders and defensive line).

Regardless the way we will structure the chosen tasks, for the team to display a clear high-press behavior established in its game model, it will be necessary **to train it progressively from the beginning of the season, going through the different stages for building** a defensive identity. In order to do that, we are going to structure the following work progression:

a) Individual work: where every player should meet some basic requirements about positioning, harassing and pressing movements and with the necessary attitude and aggressiveness, so they are not broken through, adapting all these basic individual principles in relation to the situation. Examples of these are the typical defensive training situations in 1v1, 1v2, etc. , where we will be able to practice, correct and improve some defensive tactical principles like the cross, the anticipation, the interception and timing (in order not to be overtaken).

b) Collective segmented work (by lines): fragmented work with the ones that are part of the line (defensive line, midfielders line and strikers line). It will be important that every player works in coordination with his/her line teammate or teammates for doing the defensive press work. Work can be done with only one line or with two.

c) Team's collective work (all the lines): a collective work with the three lines together, coordinating and synchronizing all the pressing movements and mechanisms the coach want to implement in the team.

3.4.1. Tasks for the individual work in high-press

The first step in this progression, which goes from the individual to the collective, will be to individually work a series of tactical defensive concepts that are basic for the player's defensive performance and that can be applied to every defensive game situation. For example, to defend dropping back in the own half court, to be on a recovery of defensive shape in the midfield or to apply high-press in the opponent's half court.

They are very highly analytical tasks because their purpose is to practice the repetition and the correction of the appropriate basic defensive technique. For example, to perform a cross in 1v1 situations, to anticipate trying to intercept a pass or to do the timing to avoid being beaten.

Some examples of analytical tasks for working the defensive concept for pressure at the individual level can be found on warm-ups as an introduction or preparation for a later high-press collective work. These tasks achieve the aim of a technical-coordinative defensive learning for pressing and timing in defensive 1v1 situations.

Figure 7: High-press task for individual defensive work (pressing)

Source: Football Canal World (2015). [Print screen about a high-press task for individual defensive work] Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nh09-ZDg8VA&ab_channel=footballcanalworld.

Figure 8: High-press task for individual defensive work (defensive 1v1)

Source: ImagineFootball6 [User] (2014). [Print screen about a high-press task for individual defensive work] Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5Tq0y0Yjcc&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=ImagineFootball6.

An example of a global task for working the defensive concept for pressure at the individual level could be the following task by David Moyes, in which two players face each other in a 1v1, using a played pattern.

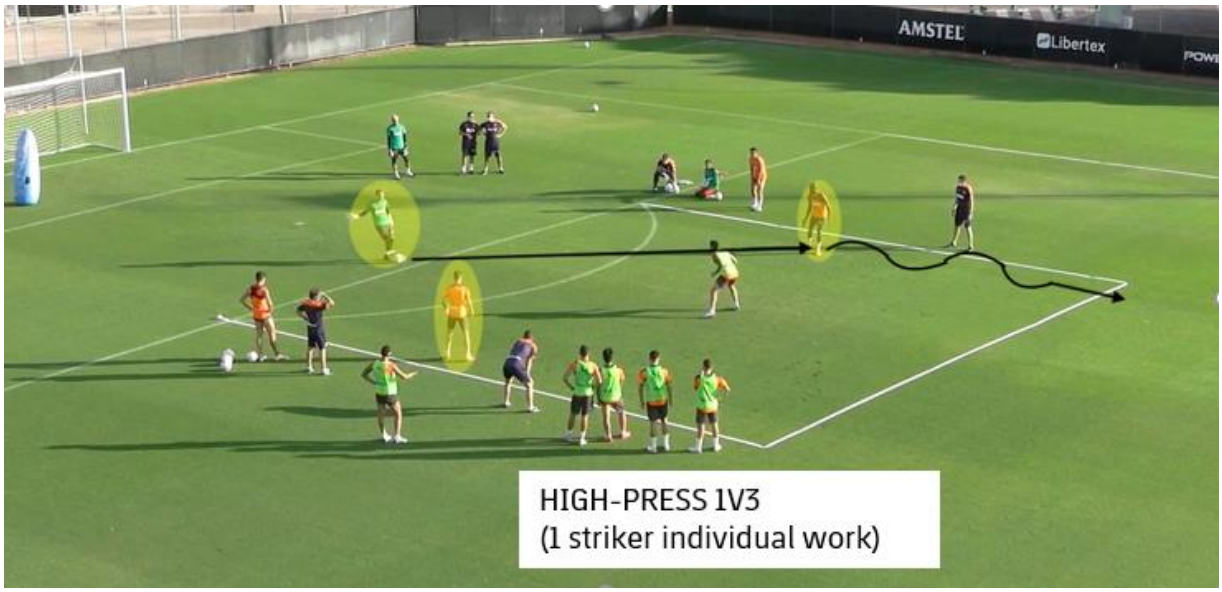
Figure 9: High-press task for individual defensive work (defensive 1v1) (part 2)

Source: The Coaching Manual (2018). [Print screen about a high-press task for individual defensive work (part 2)]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1Kj5v1xDrU&ab_channel=TheCoachingManual.

These types of tasks are used a lot in education stages as part of the teaching-learning process of the defensive technical content. We can also perform tasks for the individual high-press defensive work with the global method, in which the opponent´s situation, space and presence are similar to the competitive reality.

In relation to this last thing, Javi Gracia´s task in Valencia CF (2020-21) is useful as an example (figure 10). In that task, the striker should prevent the two center-backs from crossing with dribbling the line that is defended by the striker. The center-backs, for their part, get the goalkeeper´s help to move around, which resembles even more the competitive reality.

Figure 10: Example of a high-press task for individual defensive work (1 striker)



Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

3.4.2. Tasks for the collective segmented work in high-press: work by lines (forwards line and midfielders line)

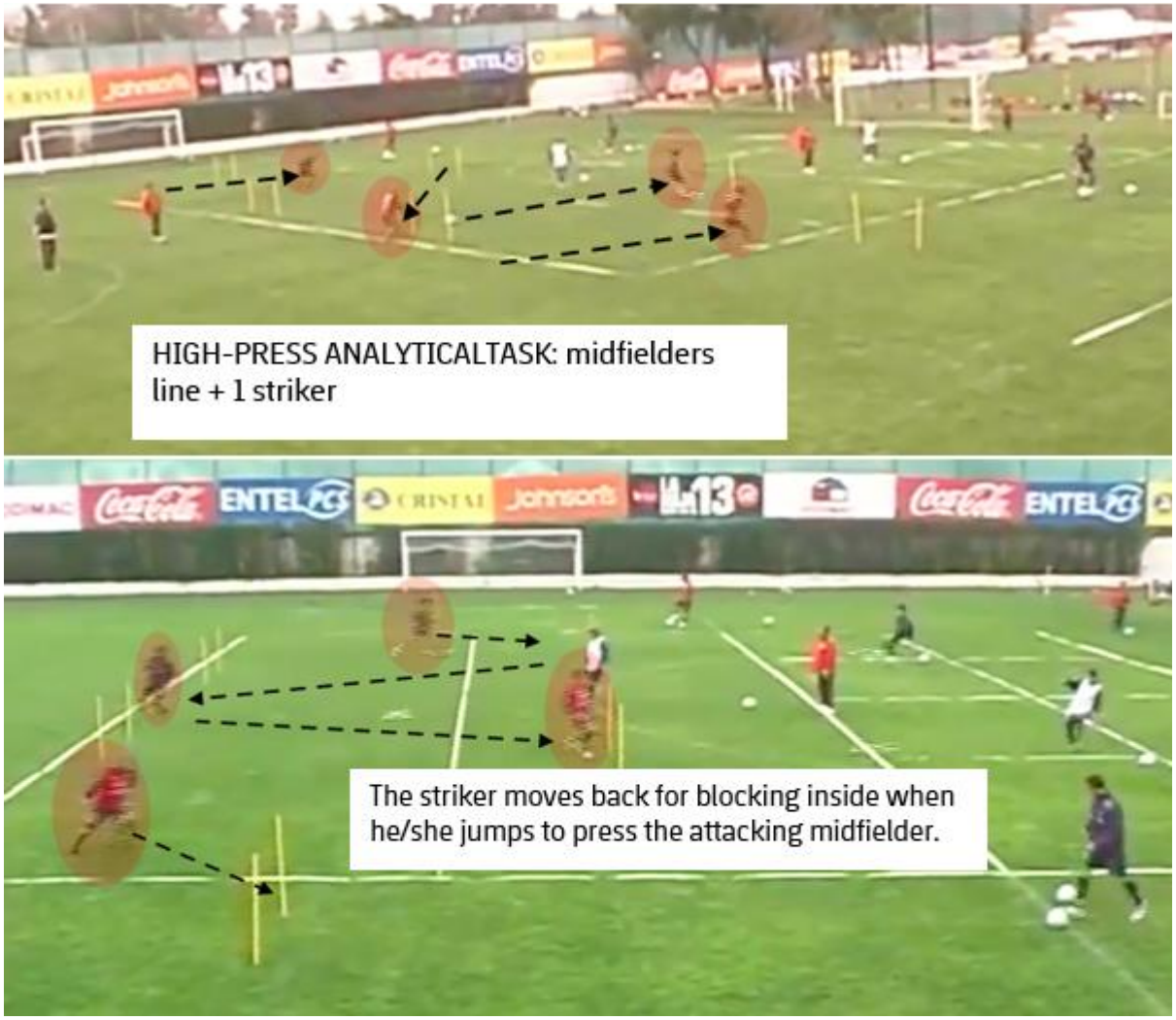
This means working collectively, even though in a fragmented way. That is to say, working the different team lines (forwards line, midfielders line and defensive line).

Tasks for defensive structures that use a forward (14231, 14141, 1451 or 1541 game systems)

Following the tasks' progression for working high-press, now we can add tasks in which the midfielders line also works. This work might be indicated for defensive structures that play with a forward and a midfielders line of 3, 4 or 5 players behind.

A task that combines the presence of two lines (the midfielders line plus the strikers line) is the Marcelo Bielsa's task with the Chile national football team (2007-11), which is useful as an example for the high-press defensive work of two lines (midfielders line plus a striker), working in a fragmented and analytical way, quite distant from the competitive reality. The wing midfielders always jump to press, whereas the striker and the attacking midfielder exchange positions blocking a possible pass behind (when a player jumps to press, the other one moves back and block a possible pass to the opponent's pivot).

Figure 11: Analytical task for the collective work by lines (3 midfielders line plus 1 striker)



Source: adapted from La Pizarra De Bielsa (Bielsa´s board), 2018.

An example of a task that is closer to reality is the evolution of the previous task, in which Marcelo Bielsa (Bilbao Athletic Club, 2011-2012) works high-press with the two lines (midfielders line plus one striker) in a fragmented way. As we can see, it is about a task that is closer to the competitive reality than the previous one, in which there were no opponents.

Figure 12: High-press global task for the collective work by lines: 4v5 situation (3 midfielders line plus 1 striker)

Source: Mister Scouting (2017). [Print screen about high-press global task for collective work by lines: 4v5 situation]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZITTdI-GtPE&ab_channel=MisterScouting

Before this work with two lines (midfielders line and striker), we could have worked with midfielders exclusively. An example of that could be the task of blocking passing lines with the three midfielders. They should avoid being beaten through a pass, with one or various opponents at their backs, ready for receiving and marking. In this task, midfielders work defensive content like the shuffle over and the defensive staggering position.

Figure 13: Task for the collective work by lines (midfielders line): blocking a pass line

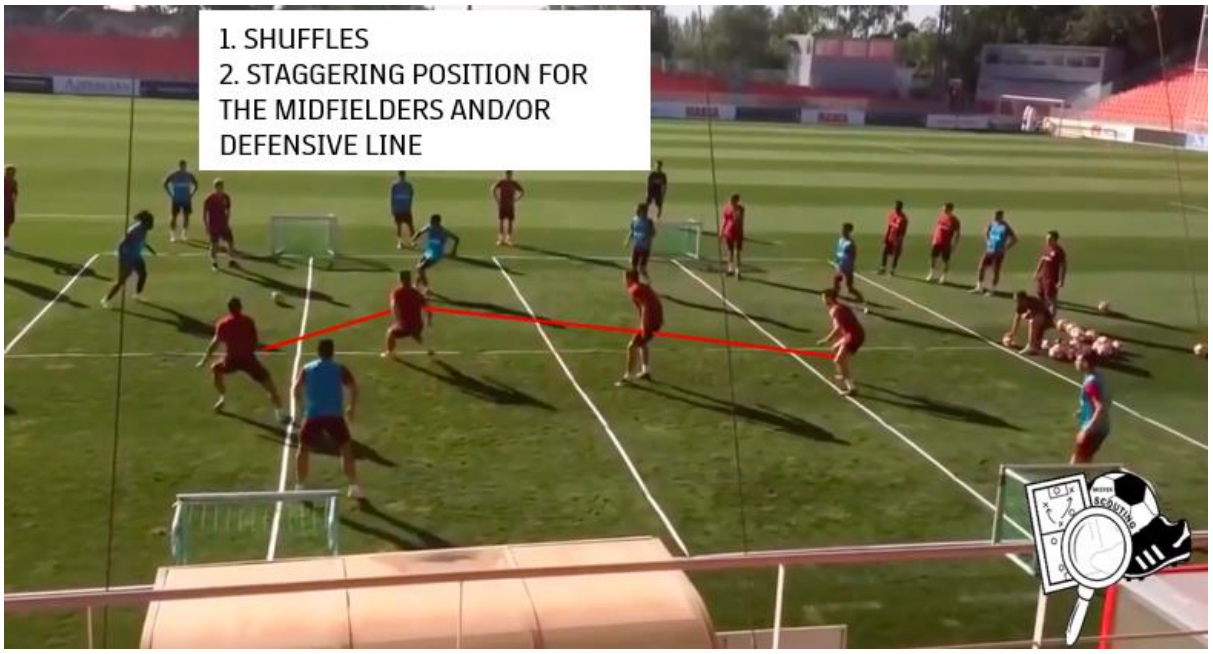
Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

We can also apply these tasks when doing high-press defensive work in the game systems that put pressure with four midfielders and a striker.

In these defensive line work tasks, **we can modify not only the number of players on the line, but also the space. This is achieved by changing the shape or by marking the areas for each of the players on the line. Besides, we can modify the action after** being beaten (defending the goal is allowed) or after recovering the ball (it is allowed to finish by passing the ball forward towards a small goal, simulating a counterattack action)

In the example we present below, we will see a task proposed by "Cholo" Simeone in Atlético de Madrid, in which the four midfielders have their acting area marked and they should block passing lines, so that opponents do not receive the ball at their backs. If they receive the ball, they can react and avoid marking on small goals. As we can see, the defensive shuffle over and the line staggering position are worked.

Figure 14: Task for the collective work by lines (four midfielders line): blocking passing lines

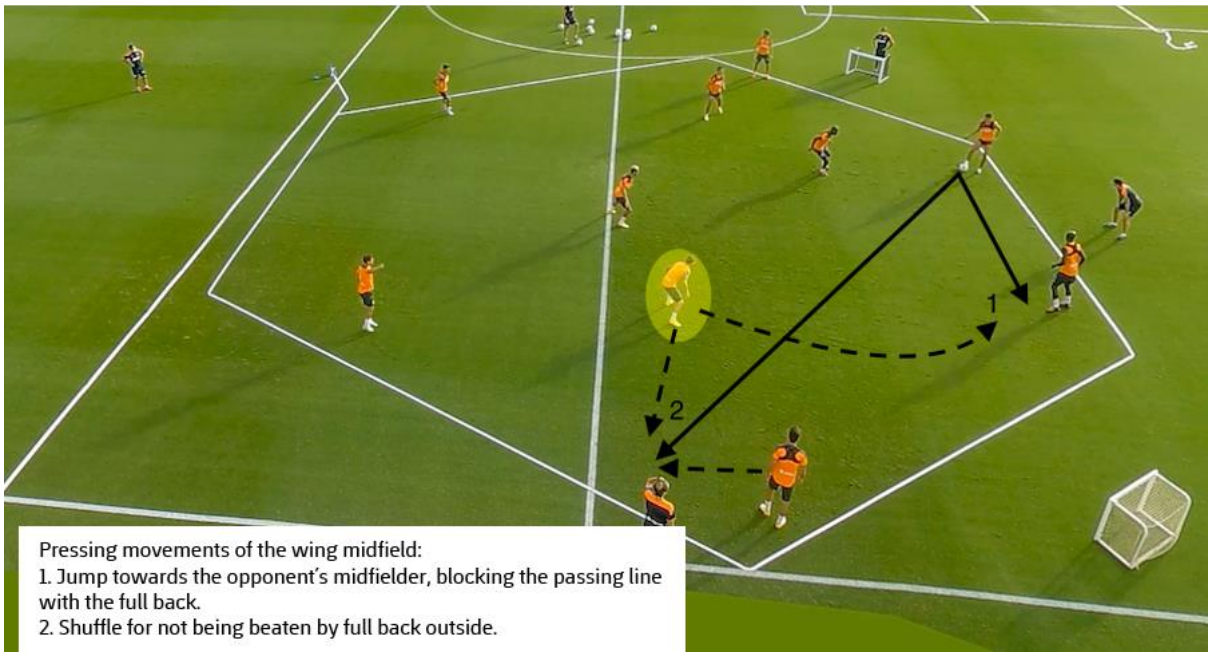


Source: adapted from Mister Scouting, 2017b.

Another possibility is to **modify the space shape**, for example, by making the control area larger, or by expanding the range of movement to make in shuffles.

In the next task, we can see how the space shape is changed, in order to force the wing midfielders to be on alert to the open opponents that are at their same height. In other words, the line is forced to shuffle a bit more. This situation is more similar to what happens in a real match.

Figure 15: Task for the collective work by lines (four midfielders line): blocking passing lines



Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie

The progression for a structure of four midfielders consists in adding the striker line. In order to work with both lines, more global tasks can be designed, like the one below, in which two 4 plus 1 structures play against each other. The team working on defense should avoid the scoring in the small goal. Scoring may vary, for example, for rewarding ball recoveries with one point and opponent's goals with two or three points.

Figure 16: Task for the collective work by lines (four midfielders line plus one striker)

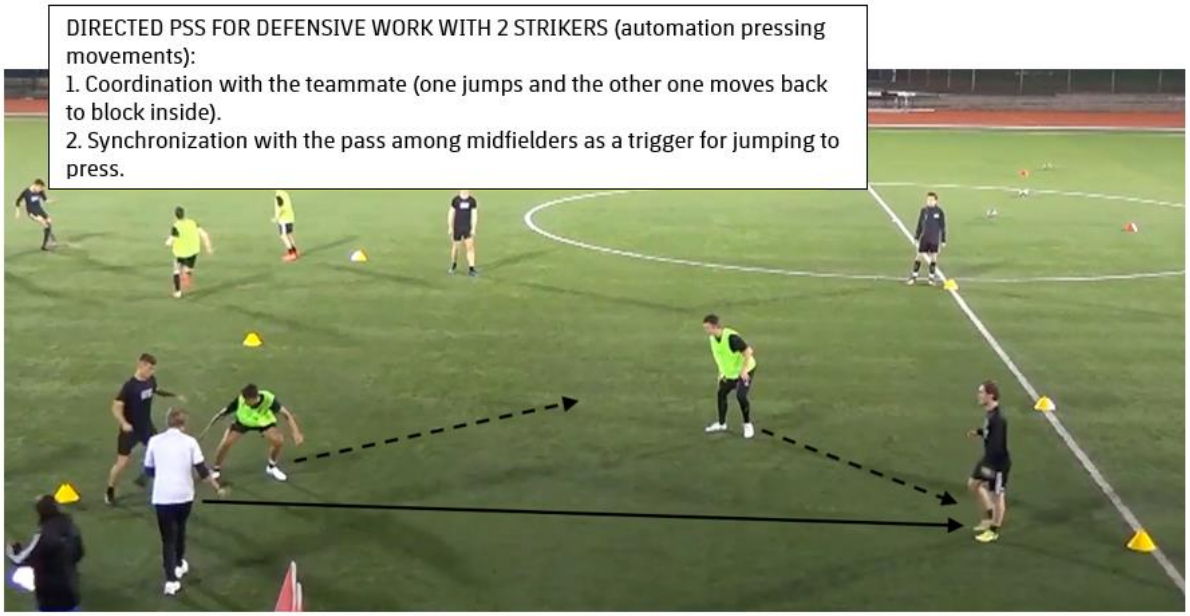
Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

Tasks for defensive structures that use two forwards

We have spoken about the work of lines with only one striker. Following the tasks progression for working high-press, now we are going to see the lines work for those game systems and defensive structures that use two strikers for exerting high-press.

Besides the analytical tasks that can be designed, repeating and automatizing the two strikers movements when they press the two midfielders (as in Marcelo Bielsa´s tasks without opposition), here we have an example of what can be added to a task, in order to create situations that are more similar to the ones in a match. In this case (Liverpool FC [2019] academy), we can see a directed task or PSS in which the two strikers are restricted to make harassing movements and to get back to their positions. Besides, they coordinate actions with their teammate´s line and they synchronize with the passing moment between two opponents.

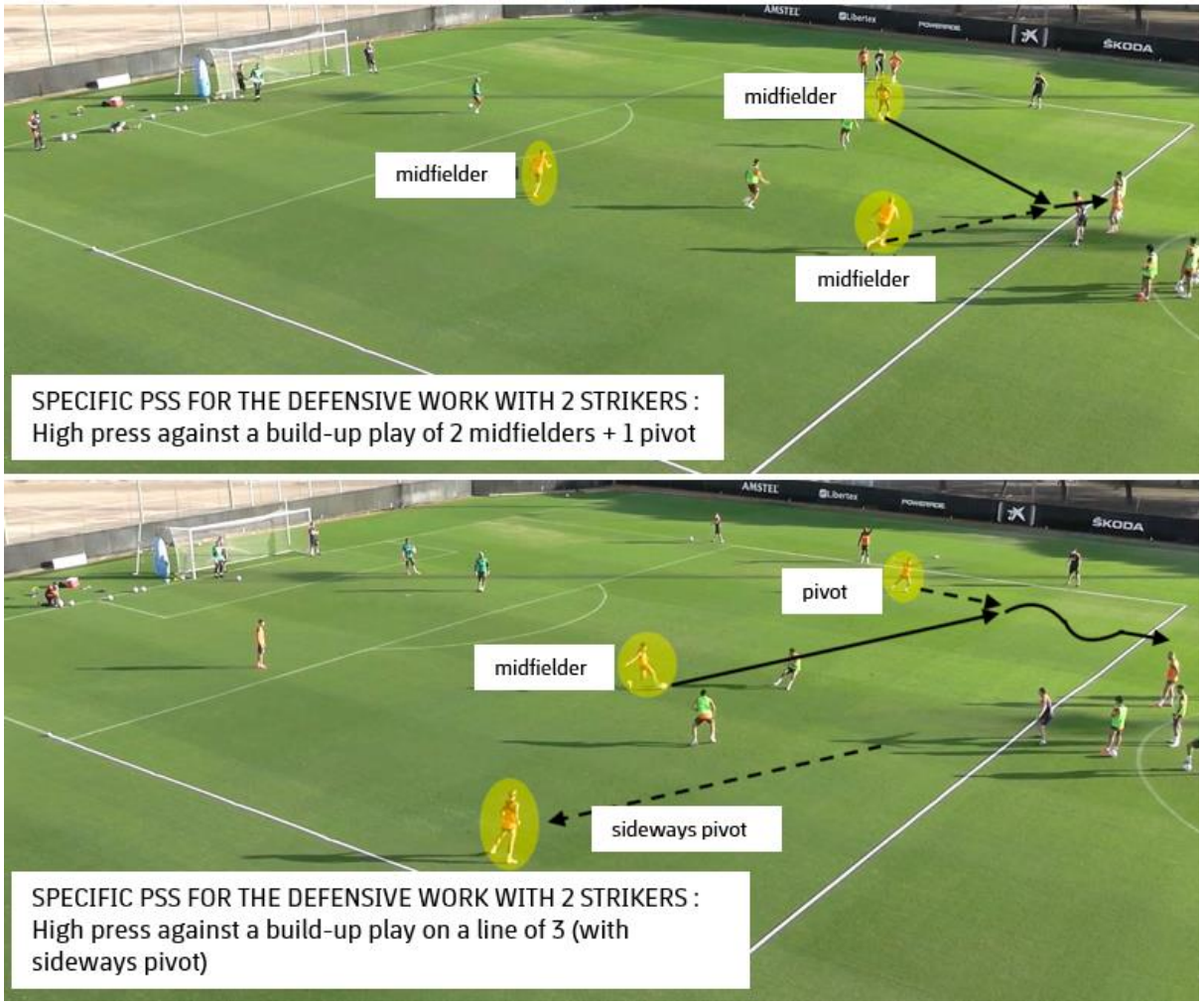
Figure 17: Directed task or PSS for collective work by lines (two strikers line)



Source: adapted from SoccerCoachTV, 2019.

Another interesting task for high-press defensive work of the two strikers could be the following global task in 2v4 inferiority, in which the two strikers play against the opponent goalkeeper, the two midfielders and a pivot at the start of play. As we can see, they work on a large space and with the presence of teammates and opponents, that is why they defend in game situations that are similar to the competition, as with the opponent´s pivot presence behind his/her position or in a build-up play with three players with the opponent´s pivot movement sideways.

Figure 18: Specific task or PSS for collective work by lines (two strikers line)



Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

The next step in the progression for working the two strikers high-press would be to play along with the midfielders line.

Figure 19: Task for the collective work by lines (four midfielders line plus two strikers)

Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

As we can observe, it is about working on lines through a global task (integrated method), in which the four midfielders line and two strikers train in the high-press defensive stage is trained in a 6v8 inferiority situation. The main aim pursued is to put high pressure for recovering and counterattack, in order to score a goal in the opponent's goal as quickly as possible. The secondary aim is timing when protecting the three small goals at their backs, in case of being overtaken in pressure.

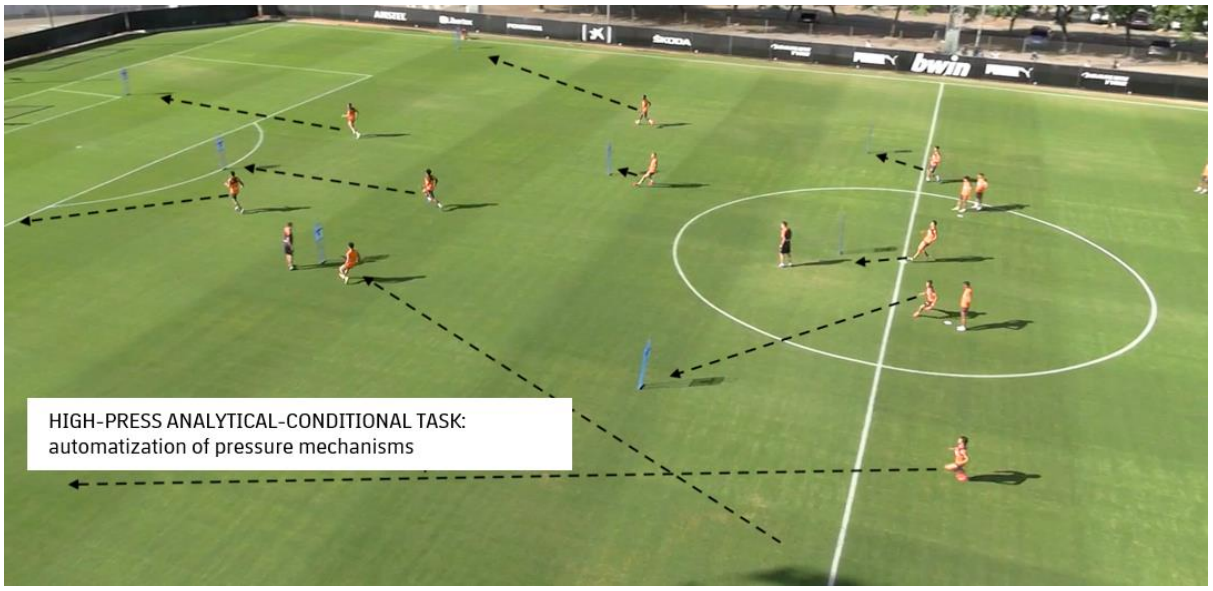
This task's intention is to try to recreate, as specifically as possible, the game situations players are going to face during the next match. Besides adapting some nuances of their own game model (one or various players' roles and movements, or even the defensive structure) to try to stop the opponent's build-up play.

3.4.3. Tasks for the team collective work in high-press: work of all lines altogether

Once we arrived here, all that remains is talking about the whole team's collective defensive work, in which the three lines (defensive line, midfielders line and forwards line) work altogether and synchronously those pressing mechanisms in their game model.

As we have seen during this whole module, we can work analytically with the intention of automatizing the team's pressing movements. Besides, we can combine what was previously mentioned with a conditional goal. Below, we will present various examples of these types of tasks.

Figure 20: Conditional analytical task for the defensive collective work of the high-press



Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

On figure 20, we can see a Javi Gracia's task in Valencia CF (2020-21), in which, from a recovery of defense shape on their own half court, when signaled, players start a build-up play doing sprints to occupy the positions in which they will exert high press in the next match at the goal kick moment. Once they get to their positions, the opponent's goalkeeper kicks and when they recover the ball, they go back to high intensity to their initial positions.

Another example can be found on a task exposed on figure 2 (page 3 in this file) by Jorge Sampaoli with the Chile national football team (2012-16). In that task, trajectories are shorter, but they have the same tactical-conditional goals.

As we have discussed in the whole of this module, these tasks are not similar to real match situations and they are only useful, on the one hand, for achieving the conditional improvement that is so necessary for holding the opponent's harassing circuits during high-press, through the improvement of the resistance to high-intensity efforts (conditional goal). On the other hand, they also allow for improving the collective coordination for high-press mechanisms by automatizing the trajectories and the positions to occupy by each team player (tactical-collective goal).

The only specificity point for these analytical-conditional tasks is given by the fact that players act in their positions and they make the movements and the distances they generally make in a match.

The next step is to look for an approach to a match real situation in high-press, through tasks that are more global and structured. This can be achieved by partially reproducing the high-press situations with the whole team pressing four opponents plus a goalkeeper that tries a build-up play controlling the ball at the initial stage. When they recover the ball, they start a counter-attack against the four opponents plus the goalkeeper and they try to score a goal.

This task's aim is to practice the pressing behavior, as well as to coordinate and synchronize the three team lines (defensive line, midfielders line and strikers line) in relation to moments that mark the beginning of pressing mechanisms (trigger moments), such as:

a) A pass to the opponent's full back.
b) The return of the ball to the goalkeeper by the midfielder.

Let's see this specific preferential simulation situation (PSS) in the example below:

Figure 21: Example of high-press specific task or PSS

Source: adapted from CoachesEYE [User], n.d.

In conclusion, we present an example of maximum specificity for working high-press (task that uses the tactical periodization method) This task by Javi Gracia used at Valencia CF (2020-21) shows how he faces his team's defensive structure in high-press stage against the structure that presumably will be used by the next opponent's team.

Figure 22: Example of maximum specificity for a high-press task

Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

This task's intention is to reproduce, as specifically as possible, the high-press situations that players will find during the next match, adapting some nuances of their own game model (roles, one or various players' trajectories and movements, the structure, etc.) to try to stop the opponent's build-up play. Besides, it reproduces high-press moments based on two situations:

a) At the goal kick (set pieces situation).
b) With the ball in play (where the trigger is a pass backwards to the goalkeeper).

This would be the maximum specificity application on a task for high-press, worked as close as possible to the competitive reality.

Beyond what is exposed, **we cannot omit other global tasks that are less structured and with less specificity**, more distant to the game reality, but they can be very useful for improving wrong pressing behaviors, establishing individual and collective high-press bases, or simply creating collective habits and behaviors when jumping to pressure in non-specific situations. Below, we show an example of these types of tasks.

Figure 23: Example of global tasks with lower level of structuring and specificity

Source: Valencia CF recording. Own edition with iMovie.

Unit 3.5. Conclusions

Finally, and in relation to Tenorio and Del Pino (2008) considerations, we have arrived at the following conclusions:

1. That the intention of designing more specific tasks that are closer to the game reality implies a lot bigger work and effort than what is demanded by the design of more analytical or global and non-specific tasks. Besides, specific and structured tasks are more complex to be designed, because they involve studying the internal game logic and a deeper knowledge of all its variables.

   > The complexity in the creation of structured training situations is determined by the difficulty and the work that game situations identification and consideration generate, which later will be present in a match, with the proper organization and order of all the elements that will be part of it, and all of it inside the observance of the game rules. (Tenorio and Del Pino, 2008, p. 107)

2. The second conclusion refers to the usage of traditional methodologies, which should not disappear for tasks' design. Rather, we should understand when to use them (on warm-ups and on education stages for learning about them more automatically, for example). Using current methodologies that are more structured and tactically periodized does not mean that we will eradicate from our everyday life the tasks that are more analytical and global, of general and non-specific nature. "Betting on the structured model should not remove the option of getting the analytical and global methods provided that, as it happens with the structured model, using it turns out to be convenient, due to a fair and reasonable reason" (Tenorio and Del Pino, 2008, pp. 107-108).

3. The third conclusion is related to the fact that, as in every process, an excess of game constraints, limitations and rules can make it difficult when putting the designed tasks in practice: "It will happen, on occasion, that the own limitations for areas and restrictions we put on the design of training situations could greatly condition the possible structuring of a globalized situation" (Tenorio and Del Pino, 2008, p. 108).

4. The last conclusion highlights the need of coaches to be updated in relation to football knowledge, tactical content, training methodologies, etc.

   > The possible modification of the proposed alternatives, as well as the creation of new situations, is a perfectly laudable aim. The articles, notes, books, various publications and more should be useful as a means for

inquiry and stimulus, so that each coach personally built those training situations that would be significant for their team, taking into account the following aspects: players in the squad, their training needs and goals to achieve. (Tenorio and Del Pino, 2008, p. 108)

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