

4. Soccer-specific training II

4.1 Introduction

Position games: an idea originated from the game for the players (and vice versa!)

With the arrival of Johan Cruyff as coach of the first team (1988) and in accordance with the identity of F.C. Barcelona, a new approach emerged that best fit to develop a game idea based on the organization of players on the field depending on the ball.

In general terms, the idea expressed by Cruyff in the 80s and 90s included noteworthy characteristics for development and optimization.

According to Fernandez (2012) these characteristics are:

1. Players are arranged at different points making it easier to create passing lines.
2. It is fundamental for players to be spaced out so that interior corridors appear (either with backs or with wings).
3. The concept of "open man" is fundamental.
4. Players don't pass for the sake of it; they have mastered the concept of **when to dribble** and **when to pass**.
5. Dribbling makes it possible to attract rivals, thus causing the appearance of "open men".
6. The overall idea is to generate superiority behind the player trying to regain possession of the ball.
7. Formation of continuous passing triangles, which allow for play with the "third man".
8. It is essential that superiorities are built from behind, from the front line. Therefore, a fundamental principle of the idea of play is that the ball comes out clean from the alarm zone.
9. Moments with the ball and without the ball are not dissociated, they go together; the offensive idea conditions the rest of the game.

10. The possession of the ball is a constructed phenomenon because it is a possession that tries to destabilize and shakeup opponents and to condition their intended tactical balance, forcing them to play at the mercy of it and not as desired.
11. Position games allow players, positions and the ball to travel together.
12. The consequence of this is that the team, when it loses the ball, is together and can recover it, making it very difficult to make a move against them (Fernandez, 2012, <https://www.martiperarnau.com/el-juego-de-posicion/>).

In the words of Lillo (2012), the main pillar of the position game is that the players pass the ball in close spaces, leaving distant players open and enabling a long pass.

"Looking far. The first thing Johan asked of us is that we look far away, at Romario" (Guardiola en Fernandez 2012, <https://www.martiperarnau.com/el-juego-de-posicion/>)

For Castro (2017), the **position game** represents an idea, a style or even a way of understanding soccer. According to the author, there are teams that have marveled and triumphed with similar ideas throughout history, such as Ajax under Van Gaal and FC Barcelona in recent years. These teams have maintained the essence of the position game. "Similarly, although with results that emerge more from the synergies of complementary players, we have Wenger's Arsenal, Brazil in 1970 and 1982, Platini's France and even Hungary in the 1950s." (p. 1).

To train this game idea, we have position games, a procedure that includes the following concepts:

- Cognitive aspects of the game, with and without the ball (**perception**).
 - Look.
 - Anticipate.
 - Decide.
- **Possession** of the ball (owning the game).
- **Precision** and rhythm in combination.

- Triangulations and orientation (in-out, back-forward).
- Rational occupation of space (position).
- Make the opponent run.
- **Pressure** during the recovery stage.
- Individual and collective concepts.

"The big difference between position games and rondos is in the inner game" (Vilà, 2017).

4.2 Objectives for taking possession of the ball

At this stage, the same objectives are identified as those previously set out in the rondos and some more characteristics are added to take into account.

- The ball is ours, we can't lose it.
- The importance of everyone enjoying playing.
- Location, trajectories and profiles of the players on the field.
- The sense of possession and protection of the ball.
- The mobility of players without the ball (and if they are possible receivers).
- Precision (technical aspect, pass and control) and rhythm of the ball in associative and combination play.
- Triangulation of play from the inside players.
- Alternative plays (short and long; outside and inside; far pass).
- Attract to change the orientation of the game.
- Maintain communication between the possessor and potential recipients.
- Review individual and collective concepts.

Objectives to recover the ball:

- If the ball is lost, recover it as soon as possible.
- Place yourself in positions to obstruct passing lines.
- Maintain a collective sense of recovery of the ball.
- Perceive intervention distances and help each other in recovery.
- Avoid inside play by covering neutral players.
- Group together while waiting for the right moment for collective action.
- Reduce the possessor's space-time.
- Use profiles that keep pressure on the possessor.

- Maintain entry signals and criteria (1-on-1).

4.3 Position games from a practical point of view

Here are a few examples of position games. While there are many of these and this list is not intended to be exhaustive, it is a sample of possibilities that this exercise gives us.

Position games share common characteristics that define them. We highlight the incipient "demarcation" of the player, understood as the position they occupy on the playing field with respect to the other teammates. Players who, in possession of the ball, are on the outside and others on the inside appear in the same way as in a real game.

Another characteristic is that, unlike rondos, the playing field is significantly larger, so the distances between teammates are the same or very similar to those of a game. Players practice the coordination and socio-affective associations in mutual assistance in conditions that are very close to reality.

This is how the **triangles** emerge that will later appear in the game and, for an efficient possession of the ball, the players will optimize their positioning, the perception of superiorities, the pass to the teammate at and with an advantage, etc.

More features of the position game is that it has no end. The objective of this type of exercise is not to optimize the kick, or the attempt on goal, or anything like that. Here we want to focus on the possession of the ball, but not only in order not to lose it, but to continuously generate favorable stage spaces (understood as game situations), based on the above. In the rondo this is also true, but since there are (usually) no players inside and there are smaller distances, the favorable actions are based on attracting the opponent to look for a teammate; and it is not usually necessary to look for more distant spaces, because they do not exist in the simple rondos (although, in the previous module some rondos were presented halfway through the position games, as there was a distant teammate).

In addition to what has been said about rondos, the player must be in an optimal situation or attract the opponent in order to leave the teammate in an optimal situation. There is also the need to find a favorable stage space, which means one more degree in a sport such as soccer, as it is an important step in the foundation of the collective. For this reason, you should look not only at the individual but also at the space, and from there whatever comes with the orientation of the game you choose with each pass.

By having those incipient demarcations that we mentioned previously, you may be tempted to add directionality to the game. That is to say, to

add a point in the exercise, it is indicated to go from one player to another, which is the furthest from where the game starts. If we look at the primary objective of the position games (the self-organization of the players in possession and the orientation of the ball), this added directionality is not necessary; however, it can be added if the players understand that the primary thing is the possession of the ball and this self-organization, and, as a result, the moment to reach the final player to get a point will arrive. If the players have not yet internalized this, directionality can contaminate the objective and guide them to seek the point in suboptimal conditions.

As far as contact limitation is concerned, bear in mind that, if introduced, the objective becomes more about coordination, masking the objective of position games. We prefer that, instead of limitation, there be a space-time constraint that pushes the player to play to the number of contacts **needed** at any given moment.

The following position games show specific objectives and concepts that are prioritized in each game, but are elements that contribute to the primary objective of possessing the ball in search of favorable stage spaces. These objectives and criteria emerge as a result of the disposition given by each position game and the relationship between the number of possessors and the number of receivers that determine the available space-time.

4x2+1

Objectives (contents to practice):

- Supports, generate passing lines.
- Triangulation.
- Laterality.

Concepts, criteria and efficient information:

- Always generate passing lines (types of support).
- Form triangles to overcome opponents.
- Use laterality (position the body and use both legs).
- Concept of before, during and after.

Figure 1: 4x2+1



Source: Prepared by the authors.

3x3+2

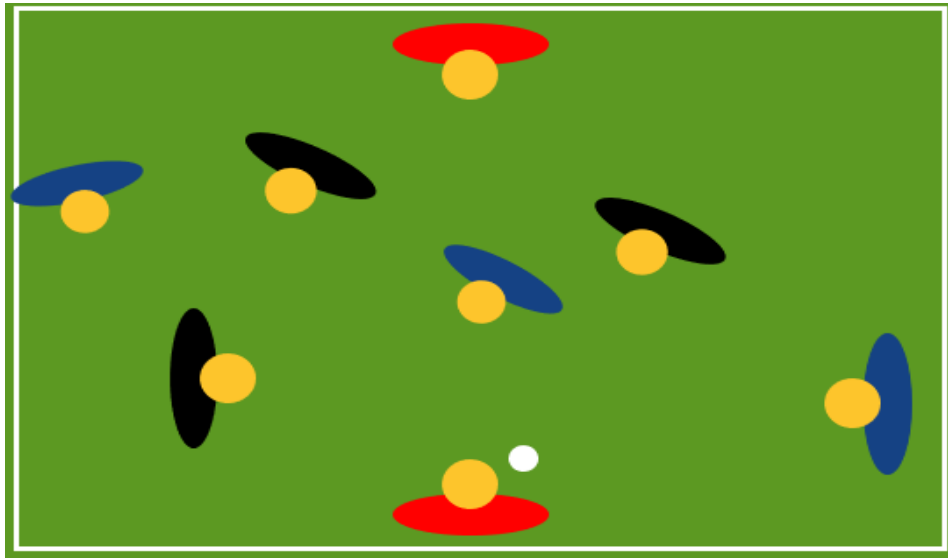
Objectives (contents to practice):

- Supports, generate passing lines.
- Triangulation.
- Participation of goalkeepers, start of play.

Concepts, criteria and efficient information:

- Always generate passing lines (types of support).
- Formation of triangles to overcome opponents.
- Laterality (position the body, use both legs).
- Concept of before, during and after.
- Initiate play from our goal.

Figure 2: 3x3+2



Source: Prepared by the authors.

6x3+2

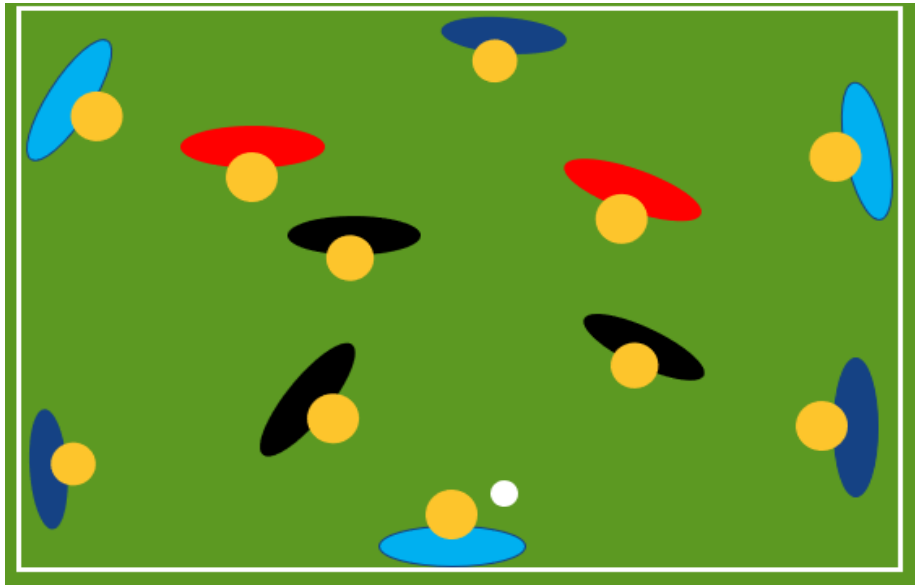
Objectives (contents to practice):

- Continuity in the game.
- Recovery stage:
 - If I lose the ball, I try to recover it as soon as possible. I try to make 3 passes and block.
 - In the loss of the ball, always a step forward.
 - Deceive the opponent.

Concepts, criteria and efficient and relevant information:

- Permanent concentration (live the game, don't watch it).
- Different recovery trajectories.
- Prior to the recovery of the ball (relating to the areas of intervention, mutual assistance and cooperation).
- After recovery: keep in mind that the ball is not considered ours until at least 3 passes are made between teammates to acquire a new formation. In turn, the recovering player must block the nearest opponent to avoid pressure.
- The team that loses the ball, made up of 3 of the 6 players who had the ball, will try to recover it. While the 3 who have recovered join the other 3 who still have possession of the ball.

Figure 3: 6x3+2



Source: Prepared by the authors.

3x3+3

Objectives to practice in the possession stage (select 1 or 2).

- Mobility and trajectories of the players without the ball (possible receivers).
- Attract the opponent to change the orientation of the game, from the inside out, from the front to the back.
- Optimize perceptual capacity by incorporating more receivers.
- Detect open space (divide the field into 4 parts).

Objectives to practice in the recovery stage (select 1 or 2).

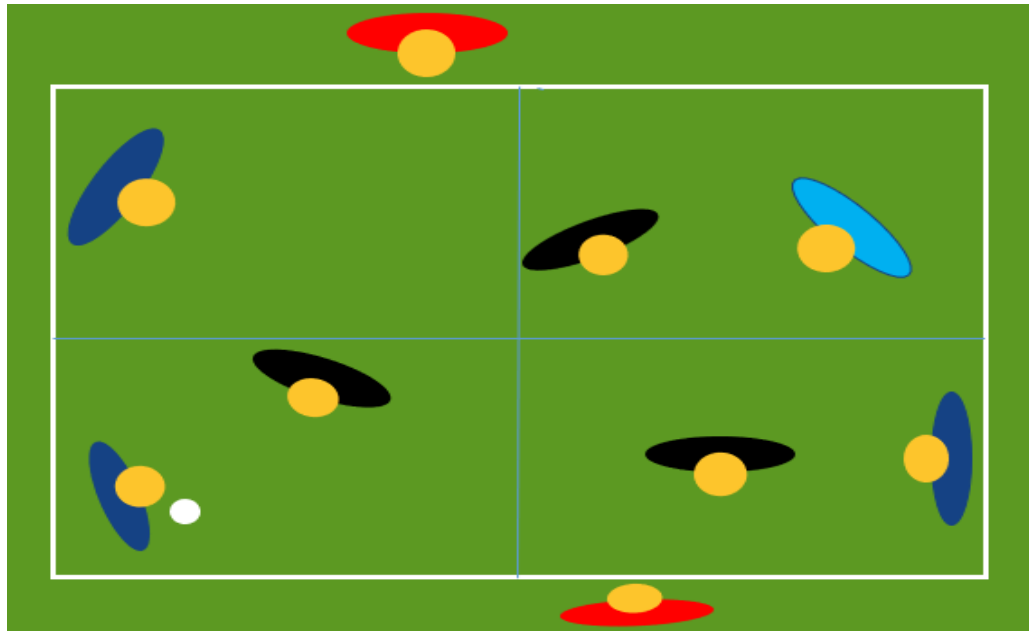
- Create a collective sense of recovery of the ball (generate superiorities).
- Perceive and understand the distances of intervention and mutual assistance.
- Reduce the possessor's space-time.

Concepts, criteria and efficient information (for the coach):

- Provide individualized information to the player when the game is stopped.
- Change the positions of the players.
- Keep in mind the fundamental concepts or elements of "our game" (1 or 2 kicks, short, direct pass, repeat pass, etc.).
- Always insist on the importance of perception (teach to look).

A player from one of the two teams in possession of the ball plays on the inside. This player can be chosen (staying inside) or it may be one on the outside who sees the opportunity to offer him/herself on the inside to give support to the possessor behind the player that is trying to recover.

Figure 5: 3x3+3



Source: Prepared by the authors.

4x4+3

Objectives to practice in the possession stage (select 1 or 2).

- Know aspects about the location, trajectories and profiles of the players on the field.
- Incorporate the concept of triangulation of play using the inside player(s).
- Encourage communication between the possessor and possible receivers.

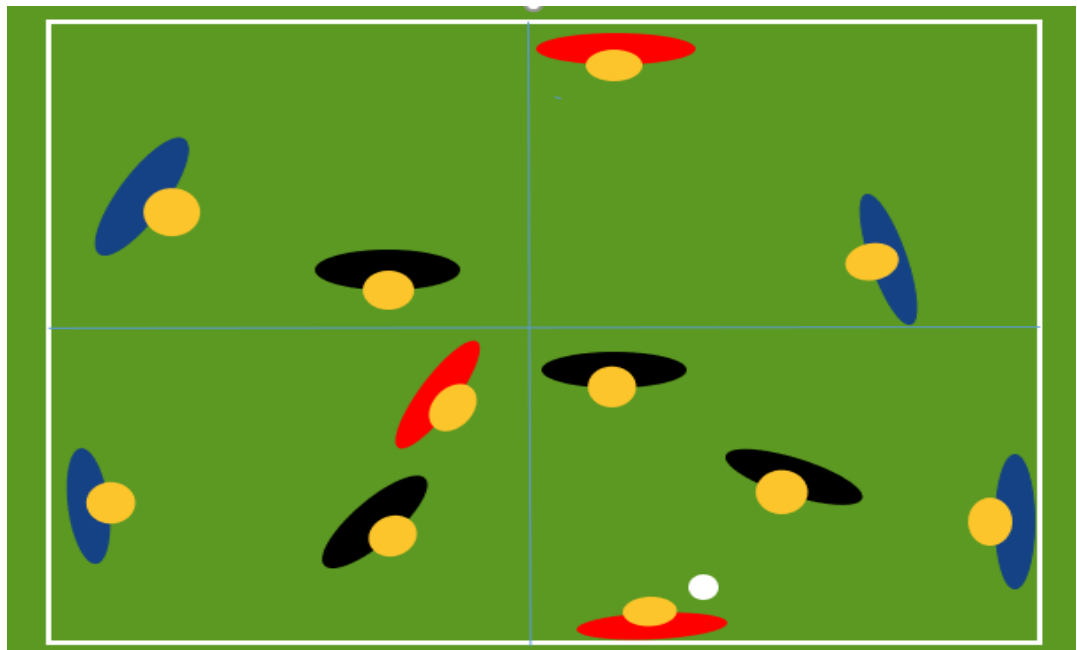
Objectives to practice in the recovery stage (select 1 or 2).

- Understand the location of positions to block passing lines.
- Identify how to group together to wait for the right moment for collective action.
- Use profiles that keep pressure on the possessor.

Concepts, criteria and efficient information (for the coach):

- Provide individualized information to the player when the game is stopped.
- Modify the dimensions of the playing field according to the objective.
- Keep in mind the fundamental concepts and elements of "our game" (1 or 2 kicks, short, direct pass, repeat pass, etc.).
- Insist on the importance of perception (teach how to look).

Figure 6: 4x4+3



Source: Prepared by the authors.

All position games presented have at least one player in possession of the ball on the inside, which allows play to alternate inside and outside. At the same time, this player, by his body positioning, movements and passing decisions, decides in which subspace to play. Therefore, he/she defines, to a certain degree, if play will be carried out confidently or, conversely, if the adversaries will be able to take possession of the ball: He/she is the one who can more easily decide in which subspaces it is possible to play, while he/she is the one who will have a harder time knowing which one offers greater security, superiority or better conditions. From this apparent contradiction arises the need to train players who master this type of game and specialize in the ability to perceive the formation of teammates and opponents all around them, which is required by the playing style of F.C. Barcelona.

Many players with these characteristics have emerged from the reserve team, the product of hours of training in rondos and position games, such as Luis Milla, Josep Guardiola, Albert Celades, Iván de la Peña, Cesc Fàbregas, Xavi Hernández, Andrés Iniesta, Oriol Romeu, Marc Crosas,

Mikel Arteta, Sergi Samper, Riqui Puig, Sergio Busquets, Thiago Alcántara, Gerard López, Guillermo Amor, Roger Garcia, Sergi Roberto, among many others.

The internal dynamics of the system will be in charge of translating the wealth of information produced by its connection with the environment into congruent guidelines. So much so that the development of the system is consistent with its increased complexity (Cano Moreno, 2012, p. 51).

In short, through position games we seek to provide players with different elements of interaction that allow them to associate, relate, allowing them to understand the game to flow under the same idea and around the same feeling. In this way, "the interventionism of the coach should not repress the innate abilities that each athlete brings with him; on the contrary, starting from what they do is a fundamental exercise" (Cano Moreno, 2012, p. 113).

The different game situations proposed to the players (static) and created by the players (dynamic), will provide them with rich communication, thus optimizing the different structures according to a game idea. Through the variability of the different elements proposed, the coach will be the one who, through his pedagogical process, open and flexible to the dynamics of the game, will interpret the demand of position games, according to the needs that emerge from the players and the possibilities of self-organization that arise from them, bearing in mind their history and context. In the words of Seirul-lo "You are not the first one to act on that individual. Since that subject was born, he/she has been supporting general, directed and specific workloads. When it comes to your team, that individual has hours, days and years of practice" (Seirul-lo , 2018).

In conclusion, the rondos, the position and situation games have as their main objective to optimize the relationship of the players with the game and the environment (which is presented as dynamic, changing and specific). This takes place permanently and in each session. As Pol (2014) tells us, it is the collective organization that should guide our training processes. In this way, through the identifying elements that emerge from the club (our history), we seek to configure a vehicle that is representative for and by the subject him/herself (player), and generate a significant link for him/her during practice, training and even in competition.

References

Castro, A. (2017). *Diplomado el juego posicional*. Deporte y actividad física. Chile: INAF. Santiago de Chile.

Cano Moreno, O. (2010). *El modelo de juego del F.C Barcelona: una red de significados interpretada desde el paradigma de la complejidad*. A Coruña: Mc Sports.

Cano Moreno, O. (2012). *El juego de posición del F. C. Barcelona. Conceptos y entrenamiento*. A Coruña: Mc Sports.

Fernandez, D. (2012). *El juego de posición*. Retrieved from <https://www.martiperarnau.com/el-juego-de-posicion/>

Pol, R. (2014). *La (in) utilidad de los juegos reducidos para preparar la competencia*. In Gomez, P. (Ed.) *El fútbol ;NO! Es así. ¿Quién dijo que estaba todo inventado?* (pp. 205-213). Spain. Futbol del Libro: www.futboldellibro.com

Seirullo, F. (2018). *Interview given to Futbol Revolucionario*. December. Barcelona.

Vilà, J. (2017). *Joan Vilà exhibition at Barça Coach Academy*.