

4.1 The game as a process

Introduction:

"The most beautiful thing in life is to play, but the closest thing to that feeling is to train" (Johan Cruyff in Castaños, 2007)

In reference to **the process**, FC Barcelona (FCB) carries this out by using training as the key concept. It is therefore possible to identify different aspects that the player needs for his/her training and to experience game scenarios that allow for optimal self-organization.

From the training sessions that take place in an institution such as FCB, different configurating elements emerge with the objective of expanding the athlete's knowledge of the identity of "our game". The training process will include sessions that are entertaining and dynamic, with content and ideas for reflection to encourage comprehension of the game, promoting optimization of the different characteristics that form part of each player, as well as in the interaction between them and the environment. The player should feel motivated to train again the next day. To this end, it is necessary for the coach to be passionate about the design of exercises based on the game and have a desire for competition, and at the same time, understand not only the sport, but also the needs that arise in each of the structures that make up the athlete, in a non-linear and variable context such as soccer.

In soccer teams that train under a **traditional perspective**, their players are organized in lines in relation to the goal areas, in order to achieve a balance in both the possession and recovery stages. That is, they play arranged in different lines (3-4 according to the game system) to find balance in the team playing style.

The FCB playing style. Barcelona's objective is to organize the players into zones and sides around the ball, so that the team achieves stability throughout the field. The team will have to constantly organize and reorganize itself in order to obtain a certain degree of superiority in the game space being created, and be able to disorganize the opposing team. This is the consequence and the final objective of our organization.

During the **training process**, we must try to understand one another and disorientate the opponent.

If we can understand each other as the game plays out, but are not able to deceive the opponent, then we will not optimize our possibilities within the playing field.

And if, on the contrary, we manage to trick the opponent, but we don't understand one another then the game, our game, will not be complete (Vilà, 2017).

We start with a prescribed organization that we know and are prepared for, to continue reorganizing ourselves in each new space of the stage succession, depending on the unforeseen events that may arise.

The organizational capacity of a team determines whether or not it is possible to master the game. At the same time, the ability to self-organize allows us to adapt to each game situation which, by definition, is unique and incomparable and allows for different actions in response to this. This adaptation is essential in a changing context and will allow the player to perform optimal motor actions based on his/her abilities and characteristics, whether he/she has possession of the ball or has to recover it.

As was mentioned in the previous module, in order for a team to be able to organize itself as it wishes, it is necessary for each player to comprehend the concepts of **our game**. It is also necessary to understand that in order to play the game as a team, everyone must participate and play as a **functional unit** in light of the unpredictability and chaos that the game itself entails. This is the only way to understand that the team performs in constant interaction between all of its elements, resulting in actions to achieve the objective.

Figure 1: Methodology for our practice



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Our training stages:

Every team has certain guidelines that verify the specificity of its organization. We can talk about habits generated from certain relationship conditions. Rather than constricting freedom, this necessary automation enables it (Cano, 2012, p. 43).

If we take Guindos (2015) as a reference, it is important to describe the characteristics that this author expounds on regarding new and different stages that appear within the session. These should be closely related and their objectives made secondary to the **main objective** of the particular session:

- I. Introductory subdynamic: the goal is to promote a predisposition and awareness in all of the systems of the player towards the objective to be achieved or enhanced in the session.
- II. Optimization subdynamic: the main objective is to expand on the contents provided in the session so that the tactical, conditional, technical and psychological dimensions are contextualized in all

of these, despite being able to promote a greater tendency towards some of these dimensions.

- III. Finishing subdynamic: with the aim of consolidating, optimizing or reinforcing the contents that have not been correctly absorbed, and restore the levels of the player in all emotional, conditional, and psychological contexts.

Several stages can be identified within each training session, each with a different format, but with interconnected content for the achievement of the overall objective of the session through **our game situations**.

- brief explanation of the objective, values, etc.
- 1st stage: coordination and cognitive exercises with the ball.
- 2nd stage: rondos (different types) and position games (small and large).
- 3rd stage: games (short and in real space).
- reflection and evaluation of the training.

For a long time in soccer, we have spent more time training certain aspects that least occur in a real game, so for us, there are several key features that should guide our training towards assimilating to a real game:

I. Intensity over volume

The most important moments in the game are those in which the most intense actions predominate; thus achieving more complete training sessions that refer to all of the structures, and not only the term "intensity" as a synonym specific to the game.

II. Quality over quantity (technical)

Fewer training situations are preferred (preferential simulating situations) with clarifying, sequenced and quality objectives; rather than many situations with diverse objectives that are not interrelated.

III. Specificity over generality

In the field of training, it is optimal to create special and competitive situations before general or directed ones, especially during the main days of **our microcycle** where the goal is optimization of **our game model**.

IV. Fundamentals of the game are always present

Basic, unique and differentiating aspects that enable us to train **our model and methodology** through the playing style.

V. Aspects related to the state of the team

Previous games, scores and state of the season and the team, as well as upcoming competitions and rivals, must be taken into account ahead of time.

VI. Individual and group visual support

Resources for visualizing training sessions, games, rivals and teams to follow are essential as supporting and optimization tools for the players, both individually and collectively.

VII. Analysis of individual training load

An appropriate control of the load (not only physical) and a good fitness level of the player will enable him/her to achieve the training objectives on a conditional level: on the one hand, to optimize sporting performance and, on the other hand reduce or prevent injuries in **our athletes**.

VIII. 95% with the ball

The ball is the focal point of **our game**, so keeping possession of it will be the best way to develop **our model**. It will also enable players to optimize their performance and have fun winning collectively as a team. Preferential simulating situations should therefore be sought, where the ball is involved 95% of the time and underscores its importance in the game and in training.

Oscar Cano (2017), in the *Tactical Room* magazine, also indicates the relevance of 3 features of the training sessions under our methodology: **complexity, uncertainty, and surprise**. He offers the following reflection:

If I finish a training session and something unexpected didn't happen, then I haven't trained correctly. I have simplified something that is complex and I have over-managed, so although it seems like we've trained well because I used a previous lesson and it went well, it is actually bad training. Because if you play or train well, which ultimately has to do with playing, you will likely encounter new developments that will surprise you. Therefore, the more I am surprised, the more satisfied I am with the training session <https://www.martiperarnau.com/oscar-cano-ser-formador-tiene-mas-que-ver-con-no-desperdiciar-el-talento-que-con-proporcionarlo/>

For this reason, in addition to the features mentioned above, the factors of uncertainty, complexity and surprise must, in some cases, form part of our sessions and, above all, of the behavior of our players. As this still involves training in complexity, we must propose contexts that constrain the player to practice what we want him/her to optimize, but always be prepared for unexpected situations.

In the words of Santos Gorostiaga (2007), it is the subdivision of the training process. Subdivision is understood as an order that is repeated

on different scales, giving rise to self-similar time structures or dynamics (Balagué and Torrents 2011, p. 45). We are interested in understanding that any training strategy comprised of planning units with more than one level has a fractal structure, i.e. at any of its levels, the **pursued, desired and achieved effects** must be formulated for each level of transfer and for each relevant dimension of the motor behavior; although this qualitative identity corresponds to a quantitative difference directly proportional to the level of precision of the training strategy. In short, the closer you are to the session, the more precise the strategy with more formidable outcomes.

In the words of Seirullo (2010) "soccer is in a subzone boundary between order and dissipative chaos, and therefore fully belongs to the field of complexity; concluding that information and interactions are its most notable emerging factors" (p. 19).

During this period, collective learning about the **game model** is complex and **requires** more time and energy than typical game models. If a club or a coach supports the idea of developing this new **methodology** and playing it, he/she must be aware of the short, medium and long-term implications, as well as the required maturation time (Peraita, 2015).

During training, the **pedagogical process** that involves the player, coach, game and institution (under the construction of configurating elements that will be manifested through the exercises) must seek individual creation or in collaboration with teammates (collective), in order to experience different scenarios. With this, the athlete moves through different states within the game, and thus optimizes his/her different abilities.

The **player profile** (developed in module 2) is important because it allows for advising and reflecting on the various aspects that the coach intends to optimize in each athlete. The pedagogical approach and intervention by the coach can be carried out in different ways, depending on the specific context. For example, short, 1-minute talks (meetings) can be carried out so that after each training session, the players are informed of their **individual tasks** that will be assessed after each session. The coach has a process that allows him/her to observe the players' perception of the individual objective that they must **achieve**.

This format of the player profile is centered on defining the abilities or skills to enhance the **ideal** aspects that should be optimized in every player, both individually and collectively.

It is essential to keep in mind that we should focus not only on technical, tactical or conditional elements, but also contemplate the socio-affective and emotional-volitional elements, among others, in **our game**. These

form part of the other structures that make up the players in the sports of interaction in shared spaces.

According to Cesar (2014), the coach must design a wide range of exercises in developing the established game model, in which the players acquire the ability to make individual and collective decisions when faced with changing situations. He/she can manipulate the degree of freedom of the players at all times, keeping in mind that each exercise is an element that will enhance a sense of the game, a style.

Table 1: Pedagogical process that the player experiences

You want to be a player (before)		You know how to be a player (during)		You can be a player (after)	
Current conditions to be enhanced (optimized)	Conditions we want/would like to optimize	Aspect to be removed (corrected)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The athlete receives the necessary conditions to be able to play with F. C. Barcelona, according to the selection criteria. • Confidence in him and his possibilities. • It is necessary for the athlete to be willing to accept the challenge of modifying his/her own aspects in order to grow as a player. • We will assist you with this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particular skills of the player that we must enhance, train and optimize (identify their talent). • Understand how to showcase his talent. • The player should know it too. • It refers to all of the structures that make up the athlete. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficiencies of the player that we must train and optimize. • It also depends on their position in more advanced stages. • Prioritize those that are most important. • Refers to each of the player's structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some habits, defects or other aspects of behavior or conduct that need to be modified. • In some cases, it may not be necessary or even possible to completely eliminate these, but at least try to minimize them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe the player's willingness to become a Barcelona soccer player: • effort, receptiveness, ambition, commitment, trust, teamwork, etc. • Carefully observe his progression as a player and as a person. • Optimize all aspects of this individual player profile. • In this stage, we will observe and decide if he can be a player with our institution. 	

Source: Prepared by the authors.



As stated above, this **player profile**, within the framework of the training process, aims to enable the coach and his/her team to better understand the player. To this end, it is essential to follow-up on this progression and on all of the different aspects that are considered important for the player to optimize; whether this refers to their talents, their skills, or something that must be rebuilt to be better.

In short, the player and the coach, within the process of training and mutual collaboration, have a main objective or challenge to build interactions that are associated with **our game**, with a clear identity that conveys a sense of belonging linked to the institution, which begins in training and is demonstrated during competition.

Figure 2: Interaction between the player, coach and game during the training process



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Within the contextual reality that emerges from the day-to-day training and under a systemic perspective, there are various particularities that must be taken into account when selecting elements for the development of exercises during the training session.

Table 2: Characteristics emerging from the training process

Internal structure of the exercise and training session
• Spatial and temporal efficiency.
• Specificity in game situations.
• Rules.
• Submaximal intensity.
• High level of concentration required throughout training.
• Communication between teammates.
• Search for unpredictability and chaotic situations.
• Encourage group behaviors to resolve this.
• Transition between exercises.
• Fast-paced playing.
• Beginning of the series, taking into account the principle of variety.
• Create stress situations.
• Competitive exercises
• Duration of the session: 1 hour 30 minutes.

Source: prepared by the authors based on Guindos, 2015.

Management of the space, time and pace of the game:

In explaining the term **pace of play**, reference is made to the velocity of ball circulation (V), which is related to space (S) and time (T).

Conceptually, the physics formula: $V = S/T$ is associated with this idea.

Where **S** is the game space used by the players and **T** is the time that they possess the ball.

A. In the possession stage (we want to take possession of the ball):

The optimal choice is to increase **S** and decrease **T** in order to achieve a faster circulation of the ball and make the opponent run =>**V**

B. In the recovery stage (we want to recover the ball quickly):

The best thing is to decrease both **S** and **T** to bring the team together, do not give ball circulation time to the opposing team and be able to recover it as soon as possible.

Possession of the ball is the foundation that is based on a game idea, and this approach gives rise to the calculation of the pace of play. Thus, possession is defined by a number of individual and collective technical-tactical actions that are carried out in a given time. In this way the basic concept of **pace** emerges: a number of actions carried out in one half (Solé, 2014).

The duration of possession establishes one of the most visible aspects of the pace of play in the context of collective sports: the frequency of alternation between the possession stage and recovery stage. In order to evaluate this first element, we must determine the relationship between the total number of possessions and the time of possession (Solé, 2014).

The second aspect that defines the pace is the number of technical-tactical actions carried out in each possession. That is, the coach will detect a greater pace if his team executes five technical-tactical actions in 10" of possession, rather than only three actions. Although most trainers direct their efforts towards strategically achieving the number of pre-planned actions in less time, maintaining a high level of efficiency.

This second level of approach to pace involves a high level of ambiguity. The technical-tactical elements are too complex to generalize, and will be approached in different ways in each sport involving interaction in a shared space. For this reason, it is not intended to reduce this proposal by defining which actions should be recorded. On the contrary, each coach and his team will have the opportunity to carry out the exercises according to the specific context and depending on the needs foreseen in both the sport and the team. In other words, the analysis and reflection on pace will be subject to the game model to be carried out (Solé, 2014).

The permanent search for pace in terms of the game model and the technical/tactical level will allow the team to create the so-called **optimal pace**, i.e. to maintain possession of the ball for as long as possible and, when it is lost, to recover it as efficiently and quickly as possible in order to take possession again.

Values, our values:

When talking about values, from an institution such as F.C. Barcelona, the integral training of the players is considered essential with respect to the characteristics that each one contributes with his/her own life experience. At the same time, the goal is to introduce them to what the club considers to be **its values**. These belong not only to those who work in the institution under the perspective of sport as an educational tool,

but also to all those who form part of our history, including leaders, fans, etc. Thus, different questions arise: how is training carried out through the values that we consider to be essential for the institution? In other words, how is it put into practice?

As education professionals (through sports), there is a key tool when working together in the training process, which enables us to approach the needs of each player. This tool is **training**, and with it, is possible to develop and put into practice those values that are considered essential to an athlete's preparation. Among these are:

- Friendship.
- Communication.
- Tolerance to frustration.
- Responsibility.
- Effort.
- Dignity.
- Respect.
- Integration.
- Leadership.
- Courage.
- Know how to play competitively but respectfully.
- Sportsmanship.
- Confidence.
- Solidarity.
- Desire to succeed.
- Commitment.
- Honesty.
- Teamwork.
- Excellence.

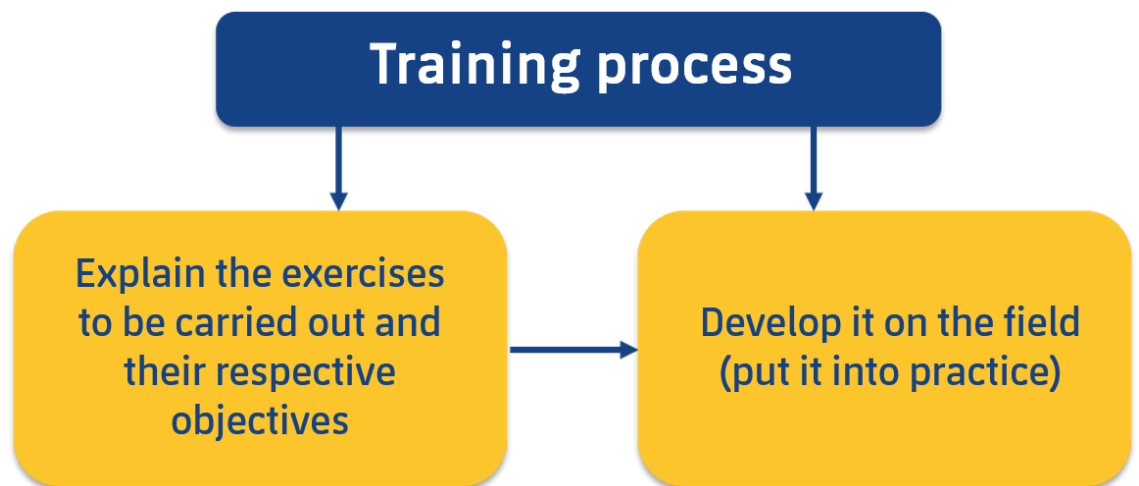
Therefore, if **our club** really wants to transmit these values to each person who passes through **our institution** from the academy, it is important to keep in mind that everything must be cultivated and built. In other words, it must be put into practice every day throughout their training.

From this point of view, during the training process it is essential to take into account the different structures that make up the athlete (multidimensional realm). This results in the **training of values**; the practice of values in training with the intention of not wasting a moment of it. This supports the idea of creating **game identity**, i.e. a game model that involves the player, coach or fan, among others, in a complex, chaotic and changing network that is common in collective sports.

It is necessary to consider that the designed exercises should maintain the functionality of competition, although not necessarily its conditions; that is, they must maintain the relationship between perception and the current action in the sport. For example, the variations of practice (distances, game rules, number of players, etc.) must respect the fundamental structure of the perception-action cycle to perform and, in turn, coincide with the criteria to be carried out throughout the game (Balagué and Torrents, 2011).

For this reason, during the next course, the interaction that emerges from training will be developed in a practical manner, between the structures of the players and the values that comprise them.

Figure 3: Training process



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Finally, and in accordance with the values that FCB seeks to transmit in the training process of the athletes, we consider it pertinent to express those values that a national team has put into practice over many years, and which has been an example to follow in sports in general, but for athletes in particular. This is what we mean by the All Blacks.

Values that the All Blacks have promoted:

- **Integrity:** Express it with your actions.
- **Respect:** Treat others as they wish to be treated (sympathy).
- **Team first:** The team before the individual. Everyone must be united.
- **Loyalty:** 100% committed to the team and its objectives.
- **Work ethic:** Not only linked to the desire to succeed, but also the commitment to preparation.

- **Equality:** Of rights, without preferential treatment.
- **Enjoy:** Satisfaction comes when you give it your best. Not when you win, but when you do your best.

Their values emerged as a result of their needs; first as theoretical premises, which were then trained and put into practice.

- What happened during the years 2003 - 2004? They had been very successful, with a record 76% of victories throughout their history.
- But in 2004, something wasn't going well and they didn't perform as expected in the World Cup.
- **Graham Henry** quickly took over, becoming coach of the All Blacks and emphasizing **individual character and personal leadership**.
- What was his mantra, his idea? **"Better people make better All Blacks."**
- **The result: 86% (of victories) and a new World Cup** after 2004.
- **Its leaders**, not 1 or 2 but **7-8 players represent a continuation of the coach**, who ensure that everything is under control at all times.
- **They are the ones who manage the training sessions, the locker room, the pre-game preparations work perfectly and** who help the young players in their integration into the team.
- **It is an established rule that they always leave the locker room as clean as they found it.** The first to clean it up is the captain himself.
- **There is an extremely important person** who specializes in attracting new talents and leaders who will give continuity to and ensure that the training is sufficient to be able to carry out the generational change that is needed.
- They look for **talent** along with **character**. These are the 2 fundamental aspects in the selection process.
- Its principles are based on **commitment, feeling and teamwork**.
- The new players coming in have **2 years to shape** their form and character, and to understand what it means to be an All Black. After these two years, if no progress is made, then they are let go. In the 12 years that he was coach, he had to let go of only 2 players.



- When a young player joins the national team, they **devote much of their time to training and offer their talent in service of the team.**
- **They must live and play in New Zealand** to understand what this means.
- **There is a high level of collaboration between the national team and the clubs.** Practically every week, the clubs meet with several All Black and national team players to establish this element of union between clubs and the Federation.
- **The national team comes first. The All Blacks are a religion, and being a member of the team is the greatest achievement and pride for a "Kiwi", for a New Zealander.**

Five life lessons from the All Blacks

What are the five life lessons of the All Blacks? They are considered commandments, and no one fails to honor them.

1. "Sweeping the sheds"

- They call it sweeping the shed. Before leaving the locker rooms and anywhere else they've been, the different players on the team stop and tidy up everything themselves. They literally and figuratively "sweep the sheds".
- This is described as **personal humility**, a key value within the All Blacks.
- Although it may seem strange that a team with such power and competitiveness would have humility as the core of its culture. No one has imposed it on them, they impose it on themselves.

2. Follow the "spearhead"

- The word Whanau means "extended family" and is symbolized by a spearhead. It is their **Game Model**.
- Although it has 3 forwards, in order to be effective, its entire force must move in one direction only. Therefore, this is a term drawn from the ancestral culture of the Maori. **All together, one goal.**



- Character and talent are the virtues that bring players closer to being part of the All Blacks family.
- Players with greater chances of reaching the national team have been ruled out, since their inclusion would have been detrimental to the team, that is, for this *Whanau* (extended family) this is where its spearhead lives.

3. Champions always do something extra

- Champions are permanently in search of growth, hence the reference "**do something more**". This is the idea when you want to achieve things. It is ambition well-understood, as they understand it. Continuously optimize, creating environments where learning processes are permanent, i.e. a willingness to **do extra things**, brings you closer to optimization as an athlete and as a person.
- In the words of Vilá (2017), an experience I had in Santiago, Chile when we went with the youth many years ago, in the locker room of Colo-Colo there was a saying about the "**second wind**". I liked it very much and I have always kept it in mind to comment on whenever I can. Throughout the game, there comes a time when the players or a certain player is just physically worn out. There are many times when my body can't go any further; I can't, I can't take it anymore. If you are able to overcome that critical moment, this depends on your own effort, your own work, your own commitment and will, in a given moment, you get a *second wind* that will allow you to reach the end, even better than you were before that moment. The people who have experienced these situations can corroborate it. This *second wind* is only for those who want to achieve something, those who face this dramatic moment. If you are able to overcome that *second wind*, then you can challenge yourself with something else. So, this *second wind* is what we have to pursue if we really want to achieve something. (Joan Vilà exhibition at Barcelona Coach Academy, unpublished).

4. Keep a cool head

- In expressing that phrase, the point is to understand how the brain works under pressure. The All Blacks worked with a psychiatrist to **understand how the brain worked under pressure.**

- ✓ "*Hot Head*" is a state of mind in which the player is not focused on the exercise, going through a panic scenario and acting ineffectively; i.e. in a stressful situation.
- ✓ "*A cool head*" is an **optimal** state in which every player is active and concentrated, which is how we should be every day on the field, right? This feeling of participation, whether close to or far from the ball. I'm always participating, I'm always part of the team, aren't I?
- This is the feeling they want to establish in all players. They each use their own active technique to keep an optimal state or a "cool head", avoiding moving to a "hot head" state. In short, it's about not watching the game, but living it; being focused on everything, and keeping a cool head rather than being a hot head.

5. Leaving the shirt in better conditions

- They are governed by the motto: "**You must leave the shirt in a better place than it was when you took it**". Something that is imposed by all of the All Blacks. I can't put on a shirt and leave it the same or worse after wearing it.
- Therefore, being an All Black means being a role model for all New Zealand children. This creates a sense of higher purpose: **if we play a bigger game, it will be more effective**.
- **Better people make better All Blacks**, and under this rationale, the selection becomes a culture, because for them it does not end with being better coaches, but also managers, doctors, physicists. The All Blacks are an example for New Zealand society.
- Much of this society is infused with these All Blacks values, without a doubt. According to Kerr (2013), it was a great experience, in which it was possible to observe the **responsibility and challenge taken on by all** in New Zealand. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c_id=4&objectid=11158017.

All Blacks: a culture, a sporting legend

- Together we are stronger.
- United by our values, defined by our actions.
- Better people make better All Blacks.



In this regard, Barça can be considered an All Black. It's the way to go. Everyone who forms part of an institution like Football Club Barcelona should feel that sense of responsibility: to be, in this sense, like the *All Blacks*. It is a culture, a way of life and therefore an example to follow.



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