

LET THEM PLAY!

A DIDACTICAL PERIODISATION FOR FOOTBALL



Anjo Coppus

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Foreword

What is more important when assessing an athlete: a technically good performance or the ability to play with others? The debate about the importance of technique and tactics is still ongoing and will continue to play a role in analyses and selection procedures in the years to come. Ultimately, there is no clear-cut answer. That is because the two skills are closely linked. Player training often focuses on improving technical skills. Tactical skills often remain underexposed due to their cognitive nature (they take place in the player's head) and are only addressed when the level of the group requires it. It is clear to me that technical skills create opportunities to execute tactics. When the game with its rules is understood by the players, technique becomes more important. Therefore, in this didactic periodisation, the focus is on developing the understanding of the game and tactics.

Tactical periodisation and training with fixed principles¹ is not new. It has been around for about thirty years. Vitor Frade from Portugal is considered its founder. This type of training is becoming more and more popular. José Mourinho and André Vilas Boas have learned a lot from Vitor Frade and have become successful with this type of periodisation. Other coaches have also had success with a training method in which structure and principles of play are more important than the execution of tasks. The bottom line is that you take the football game with its decisions as the starting point for your training. The decisions that the players make in the game are transformed into principles and trained in specific exercises where these principles are clearly expressed. To create a learning environment, you use exercises and implement rules of the game. This is called didactics. Therefore, in addition to tactical periodisation (the what), I also talk about didactic periodisation (the how).

Tactical periodisation uses (main) principles, sub-principles and sub-sub-principles. The principles are based on the perspective and style of play that a coach has in mind. From there, the exercises used during the season form a common thread. The personal way of tactical periodisation that coaches use ensures that there are practically no written programmes. When I talk to coaches about training sessions, they often keep the exercises to themselves. Due to the length of a season, the weekly change of opponents and the two or three training periods, the coach does not have a clear overview of the team's progress during the season. A season unintentionally becomes a string of individual practises and training sessions. In this book, I have developed a style of play (1-4-3-3 midfield with a single six) into a practical training programme. The exercises and principles can be adopted and applied one-to-one. They represent the style of play that I have in mind with my team and thus provide a common thread that can serve as a guide. However, the exercises can also serve as an example for your own style of play and help you, the coach, to develop exercises with your own principles. Everything should be aimed at making the development visible to the players.

I. Why this periodisation?

Freedom of choice, the influence of the brain, tactics and technique as well as clear learning lines play an important role if you want to periodise didactically. For me, these factors were decisive for the development of the exercise material and the basis for my conception of football. In this chapter I will explain them one by one and thus give an answer to the question: What do I think exercises need in modern football practice?

Freedom of choice

The performance and results of football teams are increasingly under scrutiny. For both professional and amateur teams, the pressure to win and perform is increasing. At the same time, there is a trend where the coach's responsibility for performance is increasing. Football players are often sent onto the pitch with tactical instructions after a pre-match meeting. Football behaviour is then assessed and judged as the tasks are carried out. Training focuses on set patterns and in stationary game situations where the game tasks are transferred. Grinding in patterns is the magic word. This leaves little room for initiative or tactically inspired ideas from the players. A football match is therefore no longer a game, but seems like a rehearsed play. On the field, however, I notice that the players have difficulty with these obligatory tasks that the coach sets from the sidelines. In my opinion, they also take the element of freedom out of the game. So I am not talking about the tasks on the pitch, but the roles in the team. The positions (the different roles) come about because they help the team, not because they are written down as a formation. Depending on the situation in the game, a defender has to play as an attacker or an attacker who retreats becomes a defender. The change from tasks to roles has the advantage that players can more easily switch from plan A to plan B. The roles become dynamic and can change depending on the situation and the course of the game. Therefore, I advocate freedom of choice for the players. With the help of my exercises, understanding of the game is developed. The players on the field learn to make decisions and influence the game tactically.

Successful coaches like Guardiola, Klopp, Nagelsmann and Bielsa give the freedom of the game back to the players. The teams coached by these coaches thank the coach with mutual trust and commitment. The public appreciates good games and enjoys watching them in large numbers. Teams that play their games dutifully and do not exude joy are less successful and attract fewer spectators. Administrators and the press are more involved in the game and push for performance from the outside. This is noticeable at youth games because parents and fans intervene in the game from the sidelines when things are not going "right" and there is no sign of discernible play or fun. Coaches' instructions are shouted from the sidelines when the game is not going well and the game plan is not being executed properly. However, the opposite is true and often leads to them causing confusion and worsening the mood in the team.

3. Tactics within didactical periodisation

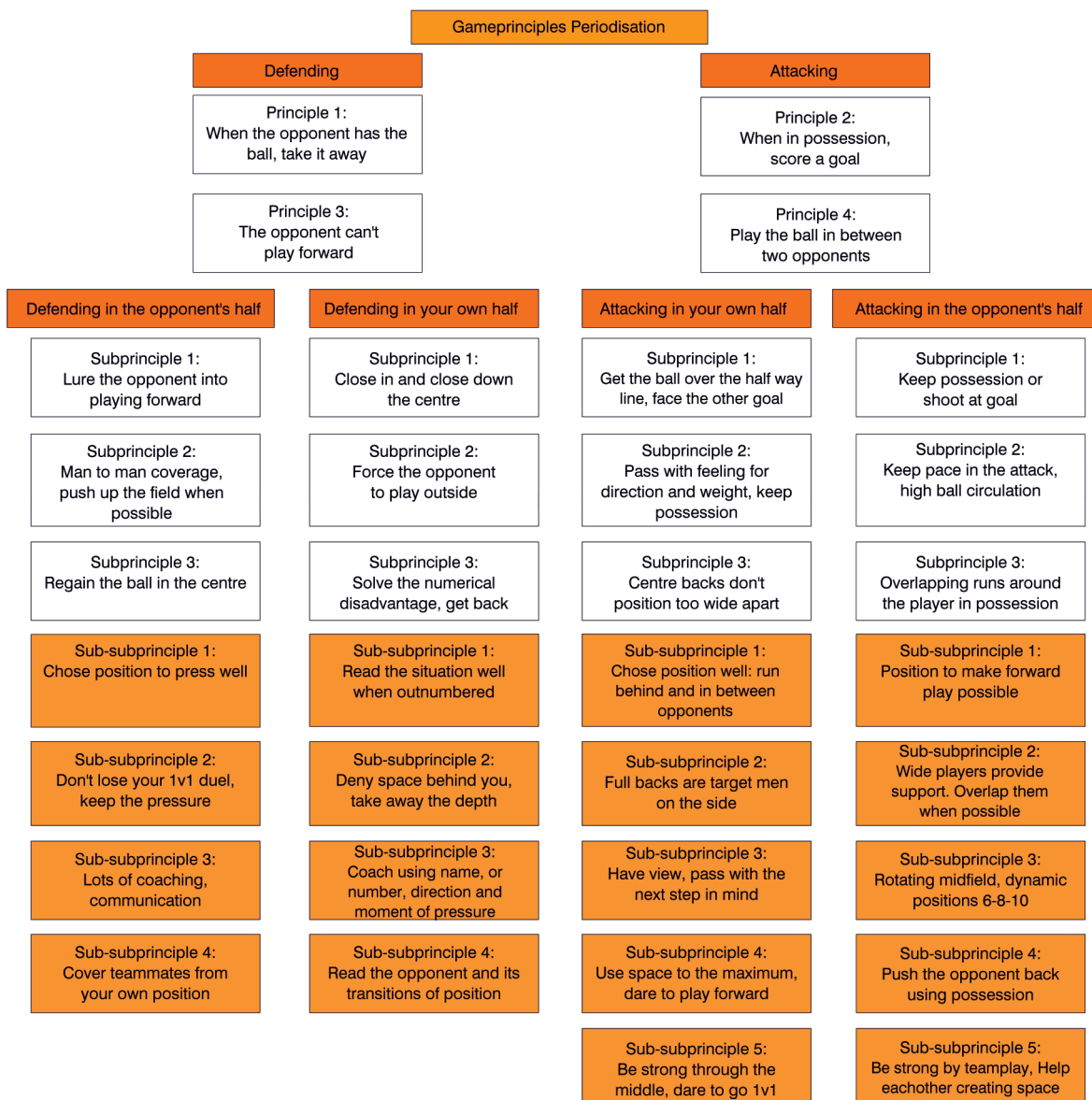
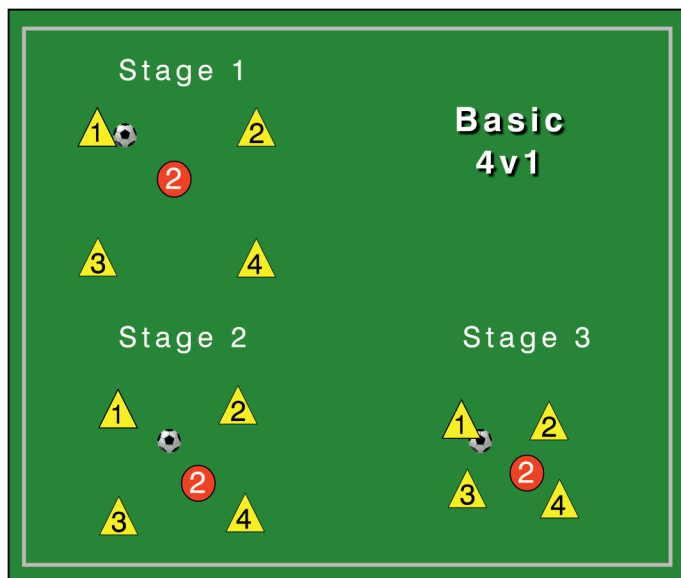


Fig. 1.0.3 Overview principles, subprinciples and sub-subprinciples

I. Rondo 3.O: Basic - 4v1



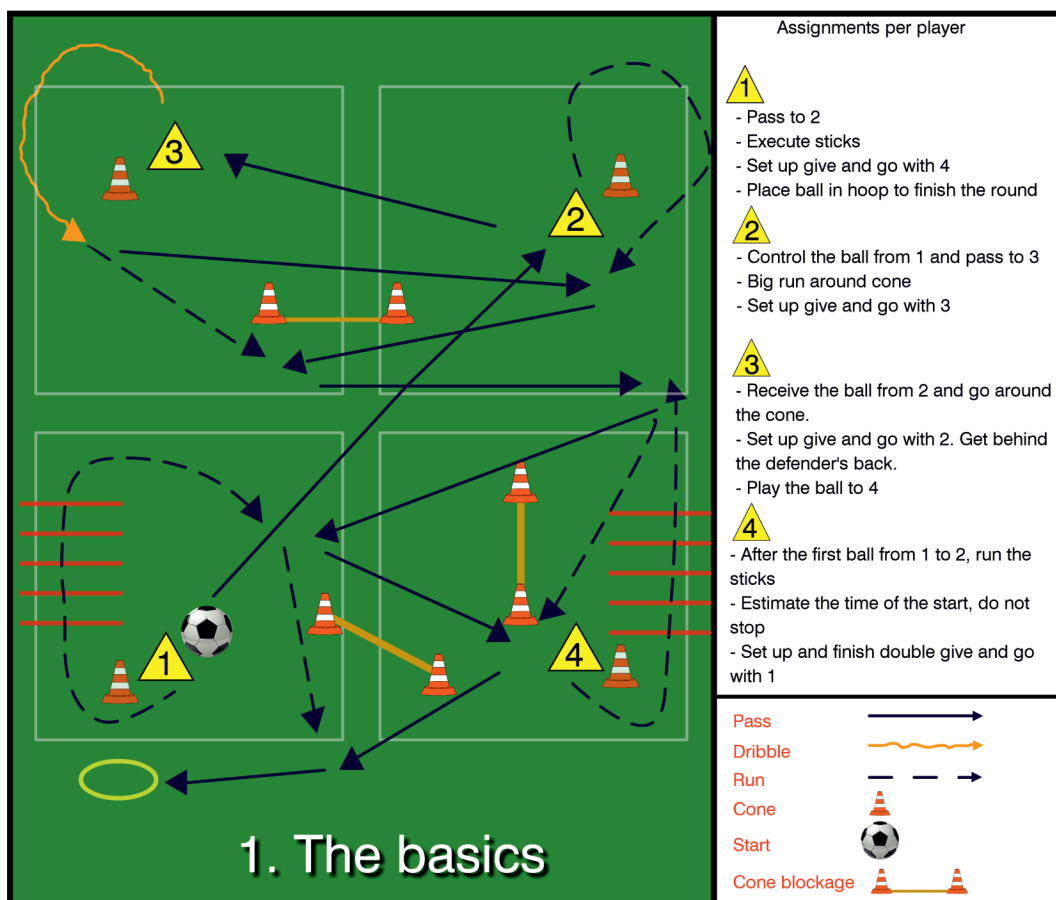
Img 1.1.2 Rondo basic 4v1

Players position themselves in relation to their teammates, the opponent and the ball. As they do not want the defenders to touch the ball, they position themselves very far apart. The moment the players manage to pass the ball to each other a few times without the defender interfering, I motivate them to move closer together. This creates a new environment where better ball handling skills are required. I consider defenders who put less energy into defending as a reward for the attackers' good team play. A defender who feels he can win the ball will do so. A defender who feels he has no chance of getting the ball will not put pressure on the ball.

In Image 1.1.2 I distinguish the different levels of players in stages 1,2 and 3. Stage 1 means that the players have little confidence in their quick ball handling. They opt for safety by giving themselves a lot of space and time. They do this by standing far apart. Stage 2 indicates a different level. These players have more confidence in themselves and face the challenge of having to play faster and better. Stage 3 is my last level. The players stand close together, there is almost no movement any more. The reaction speed and the playing tempo are high here.

A tip to make the Rondo an entertaining game: I make the defenders stand in the middle for one minute. Each touch of the ball by a defender or each loss of control by the attackers

2. Fast footwork



Img 2.1.4

Fast footwork: The basis

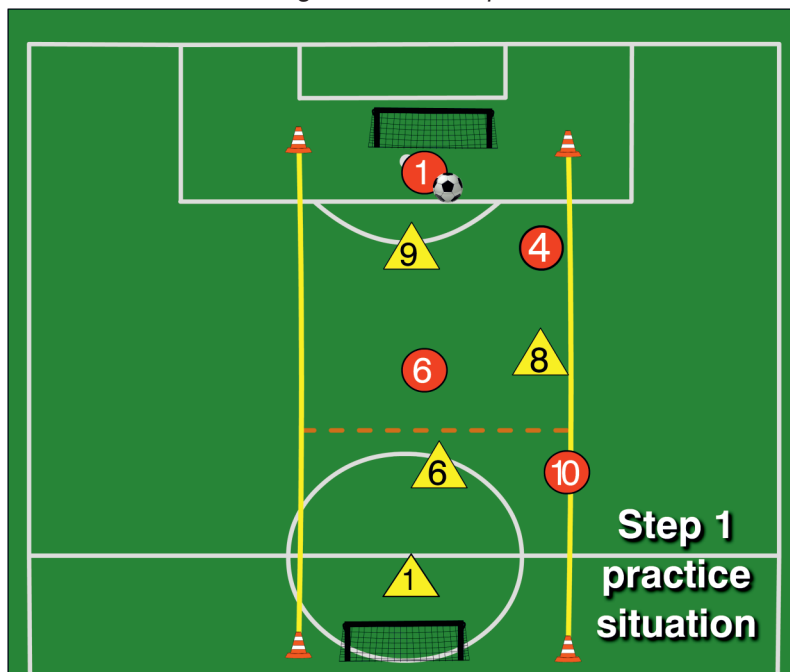
In this basic exercise, openness, passing, dribbling, finishing and changing positions occur repeatedly. The first time players will often be confused, make mistakes or finish the exercise a little sloppily. This is not a bad thing because the exercise is not called 'The Brain Crusher' for nothing. It is difficult to process all the information at once. I give a few hints after each round so that the players can apply perfection and strive for it. It also reduces stress because the players get a mental break, which helps concentration during the exercise.

The exercise is a first introduction to technical skills where players learn to act faster, help each other and want to win. But losing and the desire to do better afterwards are also part of the experience. Every mistake that can be made can be corrected. To do this, a player must not be disappointed for too long, but keep going and finish the exercise. That is what the

5a. Defending in opponent's half: step 1



Img. 5.1.1 dioh step 1a



Img. 5.1.2 dioh step 1b

5a. Defending in opponent's half: step 1

The first step is to become familiar with how to apply pressure. We work on the main principle one: if you do not have the ball, take it away from the opponent. That is the principle I want to see reflected in the players' behaviour. A team will learn how to do that best and most effectively. To do this, the players must first know who is involved in winning the ball. In an ideal field formation, not all players can run towards the ball at the same time. The chance of being outplayed increases if pressure is not used strategically. Unlike very young players who tend to think individually, players over the age of ten naturally keep more distance from each other. This distance can be trained and coached and gives players more importance to team spirit and teamwork on the field.

The game situation is shown in 5.1.1. In numbers, the game situation is 6v7+1. There are so many game options that you can never let the players experience them all at once. Outside forwards pushing inside, penetrating midfielders, overlapping runs, pressure from the centre forward or leaving the opposing full-back open to receive the ball... one can think of many more tactical examples of winning the ball back. You can simplify the complexity of the game-like situation by reducing the number of players. The yellow lines indicate which players are involved in the game situation. If you find seven players outside the yellow lines, all game ideas related to these players are deleted.

This is how image 5.1.2 is created. This will be the training situation. The orange dotted line separates the creative midfield from the holding midfield. By using different sections on the field, the players choose differently and the 2v2+g duel is separated from the g+1v1 duel. The situation starts with a 2v2+g duel and can end with a g+1v1 duel. For younger youth teams, you could leave out the players behind the dotted line and place the goal closer. The situation then becomes easier.

The game can begin. The goalkeeper of the red team (1) can start the game as he likes. However, practise shows that the first ball is always played to the central player (4) when the red central player (4) is free and the red holding midfielder (6) is covered. This is done because it seems to be the safest pass. The way the yellow team applies pressure is shown by the result of the one-on-one duels that will take place. When the red team manages to score, too many duels are lost. Defensively, too many mistakes have been made. The coach can then give instructions and point out what the players should have done differently. If the defending team scores a goal, it is well defended, well attacked and well finished. If this is the case, your team is making good plays. This shows the team's progress in each situation.