

Principles of Play: Attack

When attacking in football, improvisation, penetration and mobility are the factors you need to work on.

In a paper published by FIFA titled *Trends of Modern Day Football*, the following findings were made relating to attacking play:

- 40% of goals from open play were the result of a quick break (less than 10 seconds in duration, as is the ability of a team to get the ball forward as quickly as possible).
- In the 2006 World Cup in Germany and in the Champions League, 72% of goals were scored from open play.
- Crossing and short passes are the most effective ways to score goals. 50% of goals are scored from crosses.
- 70% of goals are the result of accelerated or counter attacks.
- A strong team has the capacity to alternate controlled build-up with accelerated collective attacks.

Based on these statistics, it's quite evident that the world's best attacking teams will score goals by demonstrating these components in their play:

- Penetration can be explained as the ability of the attacking team to get the ball beyond their opponents by shooting, dribbling or passing.
- Depth is an important part of attack as it gives support, both from behind and in front, to the first attacker.
- Width allows penetration as it has the effect of stretching and unbalancing the best-organised defences.
- Mobility is the ability of attacking players to penetrate and unbalance defences through a series of well-timed runs.
- Improvisation is the ability of an individual player to do the unexpected and create a goal-scoring opportunity.

PENETRATION

- A penetrating pass can eliminate opposition defenders.

MOBILITY

This is the ability of players to move and create passing angles and thus create working space for themselves and their teammates. A defender who is marking the same opponent in the same part of the field for the whole game presents the defender with an easy task.

When applying the principle of mobility:

- Support your teammate who has the ball.
- Run to pull the defender away from a covering position and create space for your teammate to exploit.

When to make runs:

- If you run too early, you may run into an offside position or your teammate in possession may not be ready to release the ball.
- If the run is too late, your teammate in possession may be closed down before the pass can be attempted.

How to make runs:

- Running across defenders or crossing over will distract defenders.
- Darting runs behind defenders and out of their vision is effective in gaining space.
- Run in the opposite direction and then check your run into where you want the ball played.

IMPROVISATION

In some situations, something unique may have to be attempted that was not part of the initial game plan. For example, a free-kick deflected off the wall may be bouncing awkwardly, so the striker re-adjusts and attempts a scissor kick. Improvisation can be best described as "expect the unexpected and try an alternative".