Attacking Principles

**Difficulty of the skill:** Red - a difficult core skill for ages 7-9 years and upwards. As players progress and develop, the difficulty of the skill should reduce.

**What are attacking principles?**
Players should have a good understanding of basic attacking principles and should be able to transfer these principles into practice on the pitch. When in possession of the ball, all players become attackers (with exception of the goalkeeper) regardless of their position on the pitch.

Attacking principles include; support and depth in attack, mobility in attack, width and space in attack and penetration including change of pace.

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<th>General Principles</th>
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<td>In order for teams to become excellent at attacking, players must be aware of what they are trying to do and the factors which can aid them with their attack. As a team, players should be looking to do the following whilst in attack:</td>
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**Create a numerical advantage against defenders**
A team with a numerical advantage over an opposing team whilst attacking should, in theory, always beat defenders. By creating a 2v1 or 3v2 situations for example, the attacking team will have the numerical advantage. Through isolating defenders; taking quick passes and free hits; timing leading runs; passing and following; and giving simple passes teams can make the most of numerical advantages.

**Ball carrier**
Teams need to support and provide passing and movement options for the ball carrier. When off the ball players should look to open up space which can be exploited through player’s passes and movements. A static player is easy for a defender to mark. By being mobile; leading and re-leading players off the ball can provide maximum support to the ball carrier.
A supportive attacking player may time a run in order to draw a defender away from the route the ball carrier wishes to take, therefore freeing up space for the ball carrier to move into, as well as creating space for the ball carrier to move into.
By moving away from defenders and making appropriate leading runs into space attacking players can offer their stick as a supportive passing option to the ball carrier. A higher player, both of which are likely to result in the opposing team gaining possession.

**Get ahead of the ball**
By getting ahead of the ball players can create danger in front of the ball for opposing defenders. A team which has attacking players ahead of the ball carrier will be able to move ahead at speed by passing to these players. Teams which can attack with depth by having players both in front and behind the ball carrier are more likely to retain possession. If the ball carrier has supportive players getting ahead of the ball then they use
Maintain possession

It may appear obvious but the more time a team has possession of the ball, the less time the opposition team have the ball and therefore the less time they have in which to score. This is not to say that a team should simply aim to keep possession and not look to move into a scoring position for the duration of the game.

Good teams use possession wisely in order to create scoring opportunities. For example if the right wing has possession of the ball in the opposing team’s half but is being channelled into the wing by two of the oppositions players (the two opposition players will most likely be looking to use the double teaming technique in which to win possession) and does not have a clear passing option forwards, then a backwards pass would probably be the best option in order to maintain possession. By passing the ball to the right midfield player, centre midfield player or inside right player the ball carrier is allowing for the ball to be transferred from right to left in order to attempt to find an alternative route into the opposition’s circle.

If the right wing continued to try and move forwards against two defending players they are likely to be dispossessed or make a poor pass to a higher player, both of which are likely to result in the opposing team gaining possession.

Support and depth in attack

Support and depth in attack is measured by the support offered both in front of and behind the ball carrier. It is important that support is received both in front of and behind the ball carrier. If a pass forward is blocked by members of the opposition, then a pass backwards is necessary in order to create new attacking options.

Players ahead of the ball carrier can provide support by stretching the game and then lead back towards the ball carrier to offer a passing option. In this situation if a pass is made to the player making a leading run towards the ball carrier, the player receiving the ball will do so with their back towards the goal in which they are shooting. This attacking technique is known as posting up. Further information on posting up is available in the elimination skills section.

Another type of leading run attacking players may use is the screened receipt. The screened receipt is a technique in which the receiving player protects the ball which is passed to them by placing their body between the ball and the defending player marking them. The difference between a screened receipt and posting up is that the receiver collects the ball facing towards the direction they are shooting in as opposed to facing away from the direction they are shooting in.

**Screened Receipt**

- The player must time their arrival into the space in which they want to receive the ball appropriately.
- The ball must be passed and received on an angle as it is very difficult to receive the ball in line with the ball carrier.

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The player making the leading run must keep mobile. If they arrive at the point where they want to receive the ball too early then they should keep moving. By keeping mobile, if the player making the leading run does not receive the ball by continuing to screen lead they will open up other passing or dribbling lanes.

Players may combine posting up with a screened lead. This technique sees players off the ball leading in opposing ways and working off one another’s leads in order to open up passing and dribbling lanes.

Example of a screened receipt

In this example the Centre Half player begins with the ball but is under pressure from a defending player. The Inside Left player makes a screened receipt from left to right away from their defending Inside Right player and collects the ball from the Centre Half. Once the ball has been received by the Inside Left player they continue their run whilst in flow forwards.

Key

Attacking players: AP, CH
Defending player: DP
Attacking player’s movement: AP to IL
Defending player’s movement: IR to CH
Passes: IL to CH
Ball: CH

Attacking direction: IL to CH
In this example the Centre Half player has possession of the ball and is under pressure from a defender. In order to try and support the Centre Half player the Inside Right player has made a screened receipt run with the intention of receiving the ball on the move. However in this situation the Inside Right player has lead too early, arriving in the space where they wish to receive the ball too quickly which results in the pass to the Inside Right player becoming contested by the oppositions Inside Left player.
Example of a screened receipt and post up (2)

As the Inside Right player is unable to receive the ball due to pressure from the oppositions Inside Left player the Inside Right continues to run towards the left which re-opens up the passing lane directly ahead of the Centre Half player.

The attacking Right Wing player identifies that this space has been created and timing their run well they are able to post up towards the Centre Half and receive the pass.
Mobility in attack

- The need for players to be mobile whilst attacking is a core skill which is echoed within all other attacking principles.
- Attacking players should look to run for most of the time they are on the pitch. Attackers who make leading runs whilst on the pitch do so to draw defenders out of position in order to open up passing and dribbling lanes, and to get into good attacking positions in which to receive the ball.
- For a defender, a mobile attacker is difficult to mark. The defender has to make the decision to either stay with the player but leave gaps in the defence or leave the attacker unmarked which could lead to them gaining possession of the ball. Both options could lead to a goal scoring opportunity if the attacker is mobile.
- An attacker who is static; does not make leading runs; and does not look to open up passing or dribbling options to receive the ball is less of a threat to the defender and easier to mark.
- As well as being mobile players should practice the following principles in order to capitalise on the problems they will cause on a defending team. These are:
  - **Timing** – players who make defined leading runs at the appropriate times are likely to be more successful.
  - **Support** – Being able to support a player who is about to receive the ball by moving into effective positions in which to support play and create space.
  - **Space** – Creating and maintaining space around the player in which the ball can be played.
  - **Effective movement** – Keep possession and play flowing by identifying what the next possible pass or movement options are. Making appropriate movements whilst receiving the ball will enable the receiver to keep play moving. Pre-scanning and scanning will help to identify passing and movement options.

Width and space in attack

Players should use and be aware of the width of the pitch. It is important that all players in a team understand the need to use width within attack.

By using the width players:-
- Stretch play and therefore stretch defenders. By stretching defenders over wider surface areas will result in the defenders having more space to cover and defend. Stretching play should create holes/space within the defence in which to attack. Defending teams will be looking to confine the space in which the ball can be played in order to gain possession.
- The space created by using width gives attackers more room to use their attacking skills, and also provides attacking players with more room to manoeuvre when faced with 1v1 situations.
- Players should recognise the space where team mates are able to pick the ball up whilst in flow and should play the ball into these spaces.
- Once a player has passed the ball to a team mate they should aim to move into space quickly in order to free themselves up to receive the ball once more.
Coaching Syllabus Points

Ball Carrier – Where to pass the ball?

When the ball carrier has possession of the ball they will undoubtedly need to pass it at some point in order to keep possession and the flow moving forwards. It is important that the ball carrier makes good decisions when passing in order to ensure that the pass is not intercepted or easily turned over by nearby opposing defenders. Space can be classified into three different types with regards to passing space, these being:

**Dangerous space**
This space is located behind the first line of defenders in closer proximity to the goal. This space will be very well defended by the opposition as there will be lines of defence both in width and depth across the pitch, therefore it is difficult space in which to keep possession. When passing into this space there is a high risk that the pass will be intercepted due to the increased amount of defenders. If successful, these passes can pose the greatest threat to an opposition’s defence as the attacking team have a greater chance of moving the ball into the circle and creating a scoring opportunity.

**Advantage space**
This is the space ahead of the ball carrier in the direction of attack, between the first line of defenders and the ball carrier. As the defending team will look to put pressure on the ball carrier this shorter pass will be well defended by the opposing team. Passing into this space enables the attacking team to move the ball forwards up the pitch which is necessary in order to attack.

**Possession space**
This is the easiest area for the attacking team to maintain possession as it will not have as much defensive pressure. This space is behind the ball carrier and is useful for teams who wish to maintain possession. Using this space can be useful for teams who wish to transfer the ball from one side of the pitch to the other.
Types of space

Dangerous Space  Advantage Space  Possession Space

Ball Carrier  Ball
Penetration including change of pace

In order to score goals whilst in attack possession alone is not enough. Teams must be able to understand and apply the following skills termed as ‘penetration’ skills in order to beat an oppositions defence:

- Support and depth
- Pace and change of pace
- Both creating and using width and space
- Mobility

Many teams are able to hold possession or build up a good attack, but have an inability to penetrate an opposition team’s defence. By passing the ball into space around a defender (for example past or behind a defender) the passing player is creating space for another attacking player moving forwards to pick the ball up whilst on the move or in ‘flow.’

By creating a 2v1 situation (two attackers against one defender) the attackers should in theory always beat the defender as they have more passing and movement options. When penetrating a team's defence identifying and using space is a key factor. The more space which can be created by players the higher the chances of successfully penetrating on the move.

Scanning and identifying where there is space available is a fundamental part of being able to effectively penetrate a team’s defence. It is paramount that the passes attacking players make are accurate and deceptive in order to effectively move the ball into the space identified.
Examples of attacking in two against one situations

Key
- Defending player
- Attacking player one receiving the ball
- Attacking player two
- Running direction
- Passing direction

Situation 1 – passing behind the defender

The ball carrier (yellow) moves towards the defending player (red) attacking towards their right foot. By attacking the defenders left foot it makes them believe that the ball carrier intends to pass them on this side. This movement should make the defender commit to trying to tackle the player on their strong side. The second attacking player identifies the space beyond the defender and runs into it. As the ball carrier gets near to the defending player and the defending player shifts towards their right hand side committing to the tackle this is when the ball carrier plays the ball past the defenders left foot passing to the supporting player (blue)
Situation 2 – Using a reverse pass

The ball carrier (yellow) moves the ball from right to left towards the defender (red). The supporting attacking player (blue) runs behind the ball carrier into the space available on the right hand side of the pitch. As the supporting player enters the space created by the angled run the ball carrier passes them the ball using a short reverse stick pass.
Situation 3 – Posting up towards the ball carrier

The ball carrier (yellow) moves with the ball towards the attacking goal. The second attacker/supporting player (blue) begins in a high position with a defender behind them. When the opportunity arises the supporting player makes a leading run towards the ball carrier leaving their defending player posting up towards the ball carrier.

The ball carrier passes the ball for the support player to receive in space whilst in flow. Upon receipt of the ball the support player who now is the ball carrier rolls out to their strong side (left hand side) taking the ball into space away from the defending player.
Situation 4 – Leading run behind the defender

The attacking player (yellow) carries the ball towards the defending player (red). At the same time the supporting player (blue) makes a run behind the defender into the space created on the right hand side. As the ball carrier approaches the defender they could add deception to the move by purposely attacking the defenders right foot. When the supporting player moves into position using the space behind the defender the ball carrier passes the ball to the supporting player who receives the ball whilst in flow.

Direction of attack