Penetrating with Killer Passes

Barcelona v Getafe – Barcelona’s timing of movement off the ball to receive ‘killer passes’

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Barcelona in the 2012/2013 season have been almost unplayable. Last season, they became slightly predictable, they suffered from no width or balance, especially on the left side, which Jordi Alba has fixed this season, and suffered from being too focussed on playing centrally, and retaining possession when penetration opportunities have become available. This season, Alba has contributed to the width and balance issue on the left side, but more noticeable has been the massive amount of ‘killer passes’ being played from all over the field. In this game, Alexis, Messi and Villa all scored from a killer pass from different areas of the field.

Alexis’ goal – Iniesta plays a through ball 40 yards from goal between the centre backs

Iniesta dribbles forward with Alba in support on the left to make a 2v1. As Iniesta cuts inside, Alexis knows that a space between the full backs is open for a pass behind the defence. Alexis makes the run and Iniesta makes a perfect pass for Alexis to receive and pass around the GK for 1-0.

This goal is created because of the way Villa, Alexis and Messi have positioned themselves to leave spaces between the defence and use penetrating passes to get behind the back 4. Vital to this is the
timing of the runs, and the triggers of when to make them – the cut inside triggers the run from the far side to offer a central through ball.

**Messi’s goal – Iniesta chips a pass into the run of Thiago after Messi makes the space**

As Iniesta receives, again he has Alba offering support on the left side, Villa moves inside to occupy the defender and leave Alba spare. Messi will hold position as Alexis runs past him, this allows Alexis to occupy the other full back and leave Messi free as both centre backs will stay in position, hoping a defensive midfielder will mark him.

As Alba moves forward with the ball, Getafe re-set. Iniesta receives the pass away from the opposition and Barcelona have a 6v6. Messi sees Thiago making a run from deep as Alexis stays wide, so Messi drags away his marker and leaves the space for a chipped Pass into Thiago.
As Iniesta’s pass over the defence is weighted perfectly, Thiago receives and touches it to Messi who is now in space as his marker doesn’t know where he is, and he scores into the far post. 2-0.

**Villa’s goal – Alba plays an early through pass for Villa behind the full back**

This time, Alba receives the ball from Iniesta, so Villa moves inside. As Villa is between the narrow full back and centre back, there is space on the outside for a pass behind the defence for Villa.
Alba looks for the early penetration as the ball is in flight to him, and he quickly settles the ball to pass into the run of Villa for another goal from a good killer pass with the movements made on time.

This game was an example of quick and regular penetrating forward passes from Barcelona, and this has been the case all season; players making runs to the right places at the right times, with perfectly played passes from different areas and angles from last season, making them much more dangerous and capable of scoring several goals against anyone.

**Penetration Training Session**

In this session, players will pass the ball into midfield and the attackers will look for combinations to penetrate the defence.
Penetration from midfield; 3v2 in the final 3rd.

Mark out a 70 yard long zone, by 50 yards wide. Mark out a 10 yard deep central zone with 30 yard deep zones on either side with goals at either end. Penetration players have 3 touches.

Above, the ball is passed into midfield, the penetration player turns and spots the wide to centre diagonal run, as the central striker moves to make space for a through ball.

If the defence intercept the pass, they pass into the other penetration player who looks to penetrate from a new position.

Coaching Points:

- Players in attack should anticipate the pass into the central zone and make early moves to offer up penetration options
- If no early penetration is available, the penetration player can simply play a 1-2 with an attacker and look to penetrate from a new angle in a 3v3
- Attackers should look to see where each other are moving to, communicating as they move to open up spaces for penetration
- Monitor the movements of the defenders, changing starting positions in each new attack to create different possibilities depending on the ball position

Progressions/Variations:

- An attacker can enter the central zone to pressure the penetration players
- The other penetration player can enter the final 3rd to play 3v3
Defence v Attack – 10 Attacks Penetration Game

Mark out a zone around the field where the attack can receive and retain possession from, but also look for penetrating passes into the attack or behind the defence. The ball can be passed into the 4 attackers who can look for intricate combinations to create an opportunity to pass behind the defence.

If the defence win possession, they must pass into one of the outside players who turn and play a 1-2 with a close team mate and move over the half way line – the coach will pass to a player on the outside and restart with the 2 spare outside players.

Coaching Points:

- Anticipate early penetration opportunities from around the field
- Make runs to create space for others to receive
- When receiving with back to goal, look to lay off for a 3rd man runner behind the defence

Progressions/Variations:

- Add in 3 small goals across the half way line – the counter attack can be passed into the wide players and must be finished by one of the wide external players or the defensive midfielder in a 3v2 counter attack
- Change the game to a normal match up to 60m with an offside line 25 yards from each goal to allow penetrating passes and runs behind the defensive offside line
By Stevie Grieve, Author of *Coaching the 4-2-3-1, Modern Soccer Tactics* and *Winning Soccer Tactics*. Check out his new book, *Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Advanced Tactics* here.