

Passing in Soccer

Passing is the exploitation of possession by transferring the ball from one teammate to another. Passes could be offensive or defensive in their nature. Regardless of their purpose, passes are always executed with the desire to keep possession of the ball.

General principles

Old-timers often state that by passing, players "make the ball do the work," but that is not completely accurate. Aside from having conspicuous advantages, passing is a skill that demands good technical ability not only from the distributor but from the receiver as well. The latter is actually making up for the passer's relieved workload. The collectivist principles of passing therefore distribute the overall workload, demands and responsibility, more or less, evenly amongst players of the same team. That does not always mean that the overall energy exerted by a team is less.



Toe up, Ankle Locked, Strike through the middle of the ball

Precision

At young age, kids tend to kick the ball in direction of their teammate without much thought. But as skills are built up, players begin to look up and take mental notice of their teammates before executing a pass. Correspondingly, the receivers may want to answer with eye contact as to ensure that they want the ball. Passing will also become more of a responsibility and players must restrain themselves when the available passing lanes are inadequate for their skill.

Passing is a tool with great creative potential and does not always have to be directed at a teammate's feet. Imaginative passers target the ball into spaces where same-team players can reach it before the enemy.

A player may pass the ball either to a teammate's feet or in open space where it could be collected. Both methods are effective and applicable in particular situations. Passing ahead of a moving player is required when he is in the middle of a run. When a teammate is immobile, the ball can only be directed at his feet. It is way too often, that we see during matches, the mishandling of balls either because the receiver fails to move or the passer misinterprets the initiation of a run. Who's at fault is irrelevant in these cases, but we must be concerned of the situation and narrow our margin of error. From the position of the passing player, precision can be improved by good approach and settling the ball. That however consumes time, which could be very costly.

Time

Depending on the enemy pressure a player must be ready to make a quick pass at his first touch. If there is more than one person pressuring the player with the ball he must it (or dispose of by other means) right away. There is little sense in settling the ball if enemies are about to take it away.

Midfielders in particular must learn how to execute accurate passes in the least time possible. One way to save time is knowing what to do with the ball before actually getting it. By scanning for teammates before receiving the ball and tracking their movement mentally, one can save valuable time spent in looking around while in possession of the ball. Notice that this skill is for the highly advanced players, who use it only when under direct pressure. If there is no direct pressure on the ball, looking up for teammates to pass to enhances our precision.

Nature of the pass

The direction of the pass alone does not determine its nature. The situation or play, which is consequently developed by the pass, gives its nature.

Defensive passes are executed with the sole purpose of keeping possession and relieving enemy pressure. Passing the ball backward for example ensures possession and slows the game. Both of these advantages are especially beneficial if the enemy is exerting enough pressure as to cause concern of turnovers. If the opposing team has closed all passing lanes, defensive passes are the most secure way of preserving team control of the ball. It draws the enemy out of their compact arrangement and makes them work.

Defensive passes are always directed away from areas of concentrated enemies. Defending is based on compactness produced by decreased width and depth therefore playing away from the pressure of a defending team usually means passing the ball wide and backward.

All attacking passes must result in a more offensively advantageous situation. That means that the ball must be handed over to a player into a more dangerous position.

Support is the big prerequisite for making attacking passes. Having a lot of support may produce more dangerous attacks but

it also might leave "holes" at the back.

There are various options when it comes to building up with attacking passes. Some teams head straight to goal with the minimal number of passes, other teams are cautious and pass the ball around draining the enemy of patience and energy. Long or direct passes forward are a relatively simple way of suppressing turnovers. Even if the ball is lost, it would at least be away from our own goal. On the other hand, short passes are safer, in terms of interception, and provide more control over the game. Moving the ball around with short passes keeps it away from the enemy thus preventing them from scoring but it also demands a team comprised of skilled players. Direct attacks with few (but usually longer) passes are conversely based on speed and can be constructed by the involvement of fewer players. A smaller number of faster attackers is required for direct attacking (counter attacks are a classic example of direct attacking.)

Giving the ball to a player who is in position favorable for finishing is the most offensive type of pass. Crosses and piercing passes behind the enemy defensive line are common examples of assisting passes. Midfielders are typically expected to produce accurately placed assists that the attackers are supposed to finish.

Assists are usually the most risky type of passes.

Advanced players must not be simply aware of the various types of attacks and passes. They must analyze the current play and find the most logical way to distribute the ball. If the passing lanes available are unsatisfactory, the ball must be played back. But if there are open teammates, then the player with the ball must decide whether to initiate a fast break forward or pass safely to a nearby teammate. The correctness of this decision must be based on the current observable situation. For example, if the opposing team has been caught in a turnover with the ball ahead of most of their defenders, then a quick counter could prove very beneficial.

Different Types of Soccer Passes

Passing to a player

Passing exactly at the feet of a teammate is recommended in close quarters. More advanced players will target the ball at the preferred foot of their teammate. When passing to a marked teammate, the ball should be directed at the foot that is farther away from the marker. If the ball is moving slowly, the receiving player may want to check back to it. This is especially important if he is being tightly marked and is incapable of holding off the defender. Slower players may want to throw a fake before moving to the ball. Another method used to shake off markers is to use them as springboards and physically take off of them.

Passing into space

Passing into space must also be mastered, for it is used frequently when the game is played at high speed. The player without the ball must initiate the pass by making a run into space. The ball carrier has to look around and keep verbal communication for tracking the movement and runs of his teammates. The player passing must notice the pace and orientation of the target receiver and weigh and direct his pass accordingly. Timing and accuracy are essential. If a teammate moves toward you, the ball carrier, he's trying to tell you that he wants the ball. Such situations usually suggest the formation of a turnover combination or a wall pass.

Wall passes

One-two passes or wall passes are combinations where one of the attacking players passes to a teammate who frees himself into space. The player receiving the ball lays it off, with one touch, into the space in front of the first attacker. Wall passes can often unbalance slower defenses. Most chances for wall passes happen on the wing, as the ball is played inside and back out. The only way to stop a wall pass would be with careful and thigh marking where each defender follows his man instead of the ball. Going around the attacker, whose job is to set up his friend, is another method for interrupting this play. That however requires strength, speed and is only possible when the first pass is slow.

Double passes

These types of combinations are the same as the one-two, except that there is an extra pass involved. Notice that all passes are done with a single touch.

Turnover combinations

Do not confuse turnover combinations with taking the ball from the enemy. Turnover combinations occur between two teammates, where the player with the ball simply leaves it to the other one. Using turnovers is best in packed areas of the field, where the two attacking teammates are bunched up closely. Turnovers can be time consuming when dealing against a single opponent and are best against defending players who have a numerical advantage. These types of combinations are usually safe, because the ball remains between two players who are facing each other. Performing turnovers is not only confusing opposing defenses but may also decrease the visibility of the enemy goalkeeper.

Some turnovers are done with the use of physical force. Stronger attackers, for example, may simply stop the ball and push off their marker just to clear space for an oncoming teammate who can shoot. Deceptive turnovers can also be used. The

ball carrier for example can fake a dribble and runoff without the ball while his teammate collects it. Fake or "dummy" turnovers are also possible. In such, the potential ball receiver simply runs by, causing the enemy defenders to at least step back.

Piercing passes

Also known as tunnel passing, it will surely bring havoc (or at least some disorganization) to the enemy defense by taking some of them out of play. Piercing passes are usually executed without a preparation touch and require good timing. Ball movement in general leads to the opening of passing lanes. Organized defensemen will move as a whole unit, accordingly to the ball. If given the appropriate time, they will adjust, making it nearly impossible to move the ball directly through. If the ball, however, is played along the width of the defensive formation, opportunities for penetrating passes will likely arise until the opponents can rearrange. In practice, ball movement may be restricted by enemy pressure. Therefore, our attention is not only on penetrating the defense but also on avoiding the direct enemy pressure. Be on the lookout for piercing passes in a 45 to 90 degree angle of the direction in which the first enemy defender (the one who's pressuring the ball) is headed. Just by beating that first "on ball" opponent, the entire enemy defense line can be left unbalanced and would have to regroup.

Shots arising from piercing passes are seen in counter attacks where small-sided challenges are common. In a regular buildup attack the defending team usually has a large numerical advantage and is likely to apply pressure along with cover. Piercing passes are very tough to develop then, especially in shooting distance, because of the defensive enemy concentration. So, in order for piercing passes to become available, the ball has to be centered horizontally in front of the defensive line. That, however, isn't the only prerequisite, because that zone is extremely packed with enemy defenders. If we were to place an attacker who would service the piercing passes in front of the enemy defense he would get marked quickly. When he gets marked, his passing angles will decrease dramatically. Now, there are two factors we must consider - creating space in front of the enemy defense, or if there already is, exploiting that space. Generating the space can be done with a decoy attacker who drags his marker away from play. During the same time another player looms into the middle where he receives the ball and lays down a piercing pass, if hopefully the enemy defense hasn't predicted the combination. Here comes in the tricky part, which is the reading of play by the other attacker. At the time when the distributor in the middle of the field is about to receive the ball, they need to initiate penetrating runs. Keep in mind that all of this is highly theoretical and requires proficient levels of skill and midfield to attack collaboration.