

Foreword

To be able to play a positive role in the development, guidance, training and coaching of football players from beginners to top level players, having an extensive knowledge of the game is a necessity. This does not entail the opinions of co-workers in the office about a random match, or opinions given by the media. This does include having a true understanding of the pertinent matter in all its facets. In this the competitive match is the starting point. Only then do you get an understanding of the performance of a player, of a team against the background of the opponent. Simply put: what is he/she capable of? What should he/she be able to execute? What are the pitfalls? What do we do to overcome them and how do we do that? This concerns just as much the simple small sided games as it does the top-level complex football matches.

This know-how we qualify as football theory. Practice and theory are an interconnected entity. The special feature of this book lies in the fact that the writer, from a purely theoretical view point manages to highlight this interconnectivity, to clarify it and to prove it conclusively.

This book takes us to the 'mother-theory' of football, to the concept of football actions. From purely theoretical starting points in the labyrinth of visions, ideas, clichés, methods of operation, does he pave the way to the overarching truth with regard to the practical-theoretical interconnectivity. The football actions can only then be understood, when taking the goal of the game, the why of it into account with the total game in mind. The foundation here, which runs like a red line through the message in the book, should be placed in a frame and be in possession of any person who plays a role in managing the game. It states: 'the (football) action by an individual player at any level, with and without ball, can only be understood in light of his team task and the team function'. This applies as well to the 'small sided' football games in the 4:4, 5:5, 7:7 leagues.

In the translation to the practical, this 'primal theory' leaves no room for isolating a specific group of actions. And thus give them too big of a significance to the whole, where it is most about a small part.

The author makes clear to us that the game of football has a fixed structure, regardless of the level. A team attacks with a buildup, defends, and constantly transitions. You recognize the player in his/her task. How he/she performs that task, in close cooperation with their teammates, distinguishes the player in a wide range of qualities, and shows the differences in level. Based on his/her technical-tactical performance, defensive value, game insight and qualities as team player. Each level is characterized by specific conditioning demands.

Trainers, coaches, specialists, team managers, and educators cultivate the football actions. You are only doing a good job if you can place 'the actions' in the overall picture of the structure and level of the game of football. The why is made clear in this book into an unshakable conclusion and truth. An admirable piece of work.

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1.1 Football as a global sport

This book covers the characteristics of the sport of football/soccer. Since the mid-19th century, the sport of football has developed from a sport mainly played in England, to a global sport. Football is played in practically every country in the world. And in many countries, including The Netherlands, football is the most popular sport. This applies both to the number of active participants and for the many millions of people who regularly watch games, either in a stadium or in front of the television and provide their 'expert' commentary.

The term 'popular' also means that the sport is a game of the masses, a national pastime. About a century ago, football in The Netherlands was a rather elitist activity of the upper class, who had enough spare time as true 'gentlemen' to cross swords with each other on the soccer field. They could afford to be true lovers of the game, be amateurs. Now that time is long gone.

Active soccer players come from all walks of life and can be both male and female, boy or girl. The majority of members of soccer clubs play exclusively for fun, pay club dues, and often play a role within the organization of their club. A small minority of football players have special talents and are capable of playing professional football. This does not mean that they

Figure 1.1a, b and c

Football as an institutionalized competitive sport, does not exclude that certain adjustments can be made.



opponent (and thus win). This goal of football can itself also be formulated in the language of move-actions, that is in accordance with the rules, more often than the opposing team, *displace the ball into the opponent's goal*. All move-actions that are executed during the game of football, support and are subordinate to this ultimate objective. They are an extension of it, derive their meaning, and cannot be well understood without taking this into account. It could also be said that the goal of the game is the common thread across all move-actions and transforms them into *football* actions. Thus, when describing the move-actions in football the relationship with the goal of the game must always be stated.

(2) The concept of acting was characterized in the previous chapter as a way of dealing with the environment, in the sense of realizing certain relations of meaning (or 'in-order-to-relations').

In the case of move-actions, this dealing with the environment is *displacing* in nature. The *environment* is therefore not neutral or meaningless, but needs to be described in terms that are *relevant for the way of displacing*. From an action theoretical point of view the environment it is not an external factor, a kind of side-effect, which could be ignored, but is an intrinsic part of the description in action language.

In football, the for displacing relevant environment first of all consists of the *ball*, the *match field*, the *players* and the *opponents*. Without these minimum necessary means of the game (see chapter 2), the game cannot be played and when describing the move-actions in football this environment must play a central role, always again in relation to the goal and the laws of the game.

(3) From an action theoretical viewpoint, 'displacing' is not understood as displacement of body parts (see chapter 3), but as a relational term, by which a time-spatial change in relation to the environment is indicated.

When describing move-actions the *mode of displacement* can be described in more detail in terms of *time-spatial relationships*. Focused on football, this means that when describing the way of handling the ball, the match field, the players and the opponents, attention should be paid, in particular, to temporal and spatial aspects (as recognizable in such formulations as: at the right time, at the right pace, too fast or too slow, at the right place, in the width or in the depth, play for-

ward or play backward, etc.). Because *time* and *space* are inextricably linked, we speak of this connection always about time-spatial *relationships*, even though in some cases the temporal or spatial aspect comes to the forefront more (for example in verbs like slowing down or making the field wide).

In a general sense in football actions, it is always about ways of dealing in a displacing way with the ball, the playing field, the teammates and the opponents. These ways of dealing can be described in more detail in terms of time-spatial relationships and are ultimately focused on, in accordance with the rules, realizing the goal of the game.

These general characteristics will now be described in more concrete terms, resulting in a logical and systematic classification of football actions. As mentioned previously the role of actions, other than move-actions, will be addressed later.

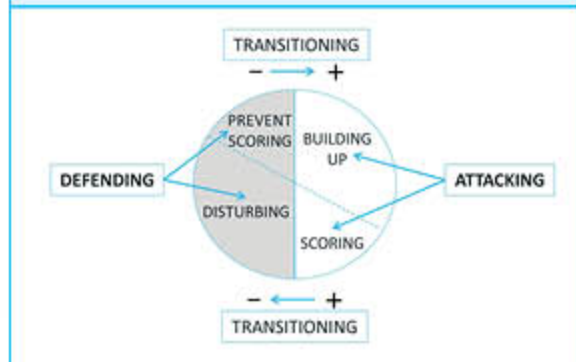
Team and individual

Football is a team sport, and it is therefore obvious that when describing the logical structure of football, the starting point will be the actions which must be performed *at the team level*. Only as a team can the goal of the game be realized, and can the match be won. However a team at the same time, is something abstract and can actually not exist without the input of individuals. And if each of those individuals cannot play the ball very well, than not much can be expected of the performance of the team. One particularly talented player can sometimes take a team in tow and can have a decisive impact on realizing the goal of the game. Nevertheless, one player by definition, cannot win a match on his own. Just as speed skating does not become a team sport by adding the individual performances together, neither does football become an individual sport because of the outstanding contribution of an individual player. If we take our point of departure in the actions made at the team level, then this links to the intrinsic characteristics of the game of football. The role of the individual in the game is hereby however, certainly not denied or underestimated. However, we begin at the level of the team and from there review the contributions of the individual players.

In a football team, every player cannot execute the same actions, and certainly not at the same time. A certain degree of cooperated *division of tasks*, and

Figure 4.9

During a match both teams constantly have to transition from attacking to defending or vice versa. Possession of the ball is always threatened and never a secure factor.



ball, and the opposite regaining possession of the ball are move-actions, which take place on the border of the discussed team functions *attacking* and *defending*. Therefore, where ball possession transitions from one team to the other team, both teams must then *transition*. In addition to attacking and defending, transitioning can be designated as a separate *team function*. Schematically this can be displayed as showed in figure 4.9.

In this circle, the vertical center line drawn in the model represents the contrast between *having possession of the ball* or *not having possession of the ball* (plus or minus). It shows the moment where each team must transition. In fact, this line is not static, but rotates in various directions (remember the previous image of the revolving door!). In other words, the need for *transitioning* can occur during the execution of all team tasks, which we have distinguished. During the *buildup* of one team, for example, the *disturbing* actions of the other team may cause that an inaccurate pass is given, or that the ball is won in a one against one duel. And if the opposing team tries to score by taking a shot on goal, the ball may be caught by the goalkeeper or blocked and *intercepted* by a field player. If one team is successful and scores, then the other team automatically gets possession of the ball, as is described in the laws of the game. Also, if there is a violation of the laws of the game and a free kick is awarded, then automatically there will be a change of ball possession.

During many moments in a match and in a variety of ways, *ball possession* can change over in *loss of possession*, and of course then the ball can be won again.

One team must transition from attacking to defending, and the other from defending to attacking. Generally speaking, both teams must *act quickly* during these transition situations. After losing the ball, when transitioning from attacking to defending, it is important that the playing field is made as small as possible as soon as possible and that the possibility of giving a deep pass is prevented by getting immediate pressure on the ball. In the opposite case, when the ball is won, there should be a quick change over from defending to attacking, and the players should spread out and find depth as soon as possible.

We have divided the *team functions* attacking and defending into two *team tasks*, building up and scoring, and disturbing the buildup and preventing goals against. For the team function *transitioning* a similar subdivision does not make sense. Due to the fact that the transitions flow in two directions, it automatically turns into attacking or defending, and therefore the above-mentioned team tasks apply again. The transition moments occur frequently in a football match, but they nevertheless only last a second. After which we can again speak of attacking and defending. Those seconds are however often the crucial moments in a match.

Figure 4.10

A violation of the laws of the game also leads automatically to a change of ball possession.

