



# Thinking beyond the press

## Part 2: Complex exercises: Fast attack after pressing and attack-building by Stefan Lottermann, German sports scientist

In Part 1 of this series (SIS 3/2006), Stefan Lottermann explained how to train small groups to counterattack after pressing and winning the ball. In the current installment, he shows us how to systematically teach this tactic to the entire team.

To round out the article, we also have some exercises on an alternative to the counterattack: a sudden acceleration following a positional attack or gradual attack-building. Both alternatives depend on the ability to think ahead, instantly assess game situations and respond appropriately with high game action speed.

### Complex counterattack training

In Part 1, we gave you structured exercises for small groups (up to 4 v. 4) to practice the fast attack after pressing and winning the ball. Now, our next step is to show how the same tactics apply to larger groups and to the team as a whole. To review, here are the skills you need to execute this strategy successfully:

- aggressive pressing requiring minimal time and running, focused on winning the ball
- interruption of pressing (players return to their own half) if the ball cannot be won quickly
- determined, fast attack if the ball is won, finishing in a few passes

- interruption of the fast attack if a breakthrough to the goal seems unlikely (players switch to positional play to set up a new fast attack).

For more information on the alternatives to pressing and fast attack, see the section on “The ‘If/then principle’” in Part 1 of this series. There you’ll also find essential tips and systematic training principles that apply to the exercises in this article as well.

### Sudden acceleration after gradual attack-building

In professional soccer, FC Bayern Munich is a great example of this approach: After winning the ball, they start out with positional play, gradually building their attack, then suddenly pick up speed and finish with two or three fast plays.

Figure 1 shows the basic tactical requirements for pressing and sudden acceleration. Each exercise description covers basic setup, sequence, tips, common mistakes and corrections.

Numbers-up games facilitate a gradual building phase and sudden acceleration.

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### Tips to remember

- Precision and ball control are top priorities (direct passes tend to be inaccurate).
- Don't overestimate your own technical and tactical skills.
- Don't worry about the occasional mistake—your opponents make them too!
- Your instructions and commands should be loud and clear.
- There's no need to risk a predictable or unnecessary loss of the ball: Break off your press or counterattack, and focus on securing the ball instead.
- Drop back into your own half when you're unable to press.



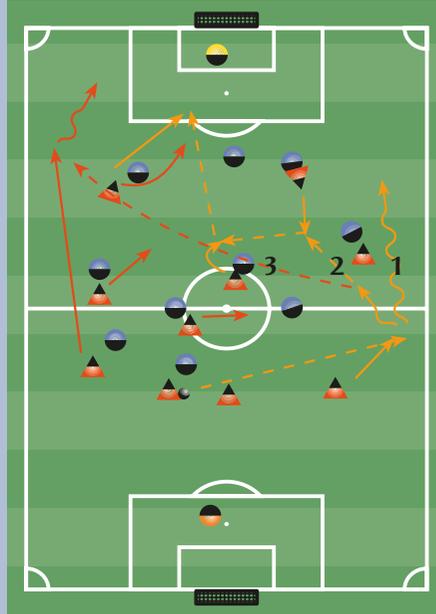
**FIG. 1** BASIC PREREQUISITES FOR PRESSING AND POSITIONAL PLAY/ACCELERATION



**Pressing**

The ideal prerequisites for successful pressing:

- Several players are in or near a wing zone.
- Opposition plays a back pass or hangs on to the ball too long.
- All players near the ball simultaneously move up as a single unit.
- They immediately block all potential passes and runs (short paths).



**Fast attack**

Acceleration begins near the centerline after first winning the ball in your own half and moving it around there a few times. Possible options:

- Break through to the endline or straight to the goal (1 and 2).
- Quickly shift the point of attack forward with one or two passes (3).

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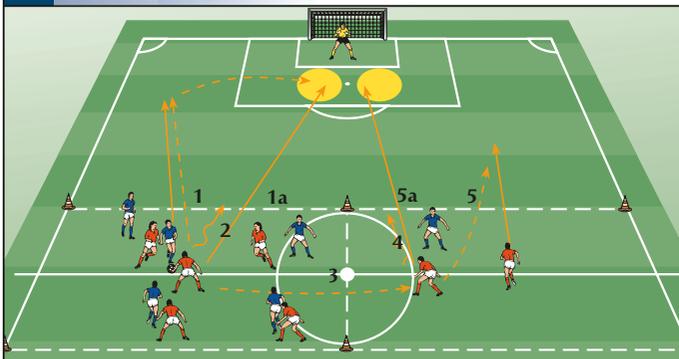
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## FAST ATTACK AFTER SUCCESSFUL PRESSING

### 1 Midfield pressing



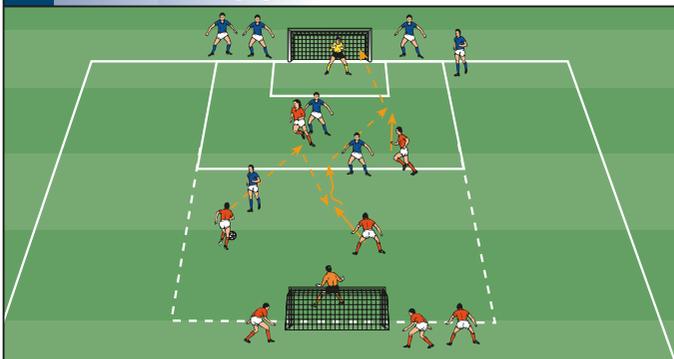
#### Description

- Teams play 5 v. 5 on one side near the centerline. One blue player and two red players are on the opposite side.
- Blue team plays to maintain possession.
- After winning the ball, red has the following options: Pass into the path of a wing player and cross (1, 1a), try a solo dribbling run (2) or shift the point of attack (3). Each pass gives the receiver the same options (4, 5, 5a).

#### Common mistakes and corrections (attackers)

- Bad timing, wrong running paths, attackers offside
- Attack is too slow after winning the ball: Set time limit.

### 2 Numbers-up game



#### Description

- Two teams of seven play 4 v. 3 in a field twice the size of the penalty box; extra players wait by the goals.
- The offside rule does not apply.
- If the team of four scores, teams remain the same.
- If the team of three scores, they get two points and gain one player while their opponents lose one.
- Goals scored from outside the penalty box also count double.

#### Common mistake and correction

- Counterattack is lacking in confidence: Play the first pass forward.

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## FAST ATTACK AFTER SUCCESSFUL PRESSING

### 3 8 v. 8 with pressing zones



#### Description

- Teams play 8 v. 8 in three-quarters of a field.
- Divide the field between the two "penalty boxes" into six zones.
- The defending team tries to create pressing situations in the wing zones and then finish quickly after winning the ball.

#### Common mistake

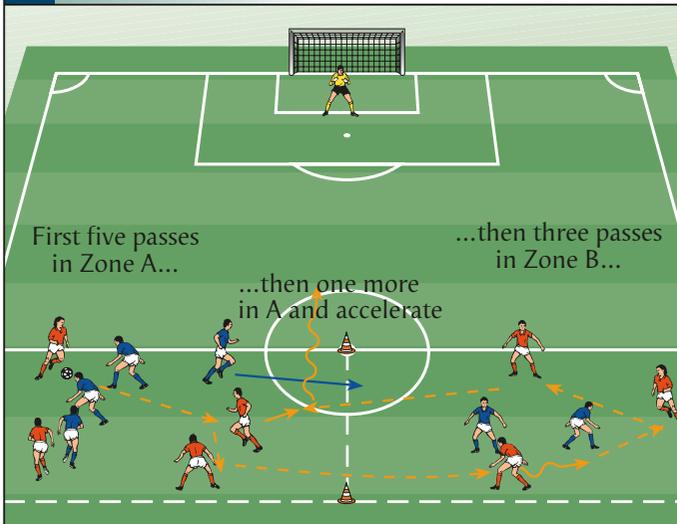
- The attempt to press fails even though defenders outnumber attackers in the wing zones; attackers are able to pass to the middle in time.

#### Correction

- Defenders on the far side have to move into the middle zone at the same time.

## FAST ATTACK AFTER POSITIONAL PLAY

### 1 4 v. 4 to 4 v. 3



#### Description

- Mark out two zones between centerline and penalty box. In Zone A, four attackers play to maintain possession against four defenders.
- After five passes (or seven if defenders get a touch on the ball in between), they pass to their teammates in Zone B.
- These three play against two defenders plus one who moves over from Zone A; they try to complete three passes (or five).
- After one final pass to Zone A, they can immediately start a fast attack on the goal.

#### Common mistake and correction

- Attackers fail to take advantage of available space, making it easier for defenders to win the ball: Coordinate attempts to get open and show for the ball (one short, one long).

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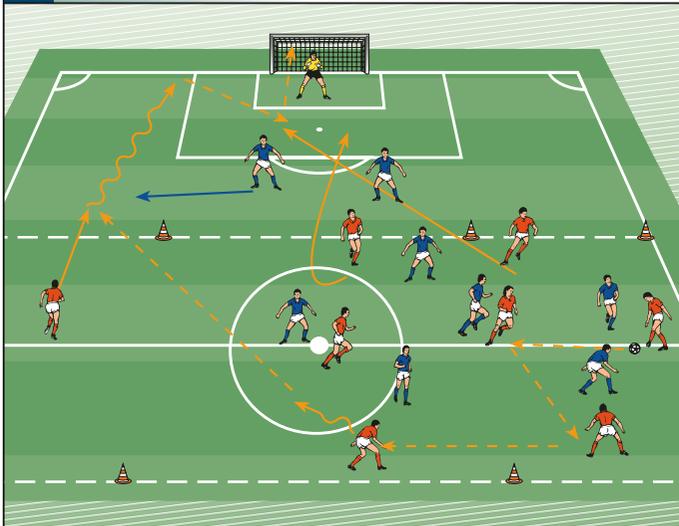
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## ATTACKING SOCCER

## FAST ATTACK AFTER POSITIONAL PLAY

### 2 8 v. 6 plus 2



#### Description

- Teams play 8 v. 6 in a zone in the middle of a standard field.
- Two more defenders stand between middle zone and penalty box; they are not allowed to move beyond the penalty box sidelines.
- The team of eight plays to maintain possession at first. After seven passes (or 10 if defenders get a touch on the ball in between), they can start a fast attack on the goal.
- Depending on the situation (location of last pass and position/behavior of defenders), they can take advantage of their superior numbers on the wings or else try a fast breakthrough in the middle.

#### Common mistakes and corrections

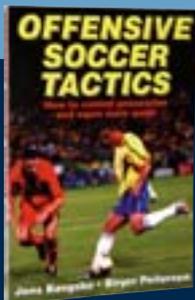
- Attackers fail to take advantage of available space, making it easier for defenders to win the ball: Cover corners and lines as well as “interior” space; coordinate attempts to get open and show for the ball (one short, one long).
- The first pass of the fast attack (or the last one before shifting the point of attack) is poorly aimed because players are in a hurry: Point out that the fast attack or shift doesn’t have to happen on the next pass.

#### Variations

- Change team sizes in relation to one another, e.g. add another defender in front of the penalty box.
- Two defenders try to interfere with the two forwards.



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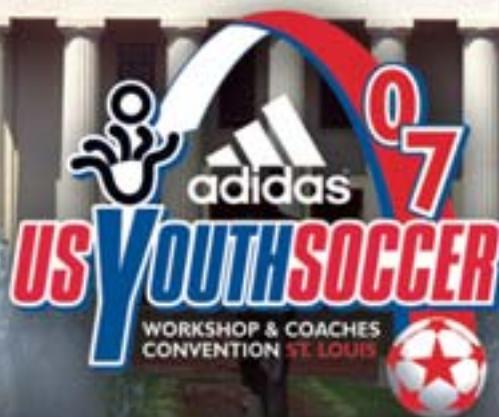
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