

# Tactical Styles

The Specific Team Instructions guide looked at the tactical effects of each of the specific team instructions, and how they can be used with the two main categories of mentality; more defensive and more attacking. Now we can look at how specific team instructions can be combined to form particular styles of defending and attacking football.

Each defensive and attacking style tends to naturally suit either more defensive or more attacking mentalities. A common approach, discussed earlier in the Mentality guide, is to choose a mentality to suit your desired attacking style. As we saw then, this mentality will itself encourage a way of playing, and you may find this is largely sufficient for your attacking style. However, in many cases you will want to define your style more precisely with appropriate specific team instructions.

You can then choose to adopt a defensive style that also suits your mentality and chosen attacking style, possibly again using appropriate team instructions to define this more precisely than the mentality itself will. Alternatively, you may prefer to use specific team instructions to modify the natural defending style of your mentality to fit an alternative style that better suits your players and desired approach.

Listed below are some suggested defensive and attacking styles, along with appropriate specific team instructions and explanations. This is not meant to be a definitive list, and you may want to come up with your own styles or modify the ones here. Furthermore, the styles are not to be considered as mutually exclusive; you may, for example, want to combine more than one attacking style.

You should also note that the specific team instructions mentioned here are not to be treated as necessary in order to adopt a particular style. Many of them simply intensify the basic instructions of the related mentality type. They can therefore be used where a more explicit adoption of a style, or aspect of a style, is desired, or to adopt the style when not using the related mentality type.

Read Soccer Systems and Strategies to learn more about tactical strategies.

## Defensive Styles

The following defensive styles tend to suit more defensive mentalities. More defensive mentalities will instruct the team to defend deeper and encourage more men to get behind the ball.

### Defending Cautiously

This is the typical approach to defending with more defensive mentalities.

Drop Deeper or Much Deeper Defensive Line, Stand Off Opponents, Stay On Feet

Your players will hold their defensive positions rather than trying to win the ball.

### Defending The Middle

This is for use against opposition playing with a narrower formation than yours.

Exploit The Flanks, Play Narrower, Drop Deeper or Much Deeper Defensive Line, Use Tighter Marking

Your players will tighten up and hold their defensive positions. After winning possession they will attempt to play counter attacking passes into the wide areas where there will be more space and less possibility of being caught offside. You may want to use Hassle Opponents and Get Stuck In to encourage more aggressive defending.

### **Keeping Possession**

This is a way of defending when in possession by slowing down the game.

Retain Possession, Work Ball Into Box, Play Narrower, Stick To Positions, Take A Breather, Lower Tempo or Much Lower Tempo, Be More Disciplined

Your players will stay tight and try to keep hold of the ball, rather than trying to penetrate the opposition. This can help them conserve energy, while a technically capable team can use it to prevent the opposition from getting any of the ball and tire them out, before later attacking with more purpose. Alternatively, a technically capable team can use this style to waste time when in the lead, in which case you may want to add the Waste Time instruction.

### **Time Wasting**

This is a way of defending when in possession by employing time wasting tactics.

Clear Ball To Flanks, Shoot On Sight, Stick To Positions, Play Even Safer (with the contain mentality), Be More Disciplined

Your players will try to waste as much time as possible. This can be a more effective way of running down the clock for technically poor teams than trying to keep possession.

### **Clearing The Danger**

This is a way of defending when under heavy pressure.

Go Route One, Pass Into Space, Clear Ball to Flanks, Much Higher Tempo or Higher Tempo

Your players will attempt to clear the ball quickly into safer areas, perhaps with some intention to counter attack.

The following defensive styles tend to suit more attacking mentalities. More attacking mentalities instruct your team to defend higher up and encourage more of your players to stay in front of the ball ready for when it is won back.

### **Defending Aggressively**

This is the typical approach to defending with more attacking mentalities.

Play Narrower, Much Higher Defensive Line or Push Higher Up, Hassle Opponents, Get Stuck In, Use Tighter Marking

Your players will reduce the time and space available for the opposition as much as possible and try to win the ball back quickly, rather than holding their defensive positions. Aggressive tackles can be discouraged by not using Get Stuck In.

### **Defending the Flanks**

This is for use against opposition playing with a wider formation than yours.

Exploit the Middle, Play Wider, Much Higher Defensive Line or Push Higher Up

Your players will reduce space in the wide areas and keep the opposition's wide attackers deeper, where they will be less effective, by defending higher and wider. After winning possession they will attempt to play counter attacking passes into the central areas.

### **Defending In Wet Conditions**

This is for use on a poor pitch in wet conditions.

Go Route One or More Direct Passing, Clear Ball To Flanks, Play Wider, Much Higher Defensive Line or Push Higher Up, Hassle Opponents, Get Stuck In, Much Higher Tempo or Higher Tempo

Your players will defend higher up and more aggressively, keeping the opposition further away from goal and attempting to counter attack quickly in the wide areas where the pitch is less muddy.

# Attacking Styles

The following attacking styles tend to suit more defensive mentalities. More defensive mentalities will instruct your team to play deeper and encourage more of your players to stay behind the ball. This means creative attacking players will be more involved in build up play, while your team will be more patient and controlled in possession.

## Counter Attacking

This is the typical approach to attacking with more defensive mentalities.

Play Narrower, Drop Deeper or Much Deeper Defensive Line, Stick To Positions, Lower Tempo or Much Lower Tempo, Be More Disciplined

Pump Ball Into Box or Clear Ball To Flanks can also be used to encourage direct passes from defensive players, but make sure that you are aware of their other effects.

A counter mentality will encourage counter attacking play after possession is won.

Your defensive players will play direct passes in an attempt to release quick, skilful or creative attacking players against a higher and more exposed opposition defence. A strong striker may be used as a target for the direct passes, not only to help relieve pressure, but to hold up the ball before playing simple passes to quick, skilful attackers, or back to a creative midfielder to release the attackers behind the defence. Passes among your more attacking players will be shorter in order to build up attacks more patiently and help keep possession when not counter attacking.

## Passing Through The Defence

This is a more patient approach suited to more intelligent and technically capable teams.

Retain Possession or Shorter Passing, Pass Into Space, Work Ball Into Box, Play Out Of Defence, Play Wider, Lower Tempo or Much Lower Tempo

Your players will build up attacking play slowly, try to find more space, and attempt to pass through the opposition using through balls. In particular, Play Out Of Defence encourages your defenders to pass short to supporting players, helping to prevent direct attacks launched from deep.

Additional options are: Run At Defence, Roam From Positions, Be More Expressive

These will incorporate more variety, unpredictability and fluidity of movement.

## Attacking With Creative Widemen

This is for use with advanced playmakers or inside forwards in the wide attacking positions.

Retain Possession or Shorter Passing, Play Out Of Defence, Run At Defence, Exploit The Flanks, Play Narrower

This is similar to the Play Through The Defence style, but you will be using the creativity and skill of your wide attackers to play through the opposition, rather than the creativity and through balls of central players as would be more typical of the Play Through The Defence style.

You will require your wide defenders to provide width when your team is attacking, which can be done by giving at least one of them an attack duty, with the other a support or another attack duty. A defend duty for your central or defensive midfielder closest to the more attacking wide defender can be used to accommodate his forward runs, while two defend duties can even be used in midfield if both wide defenders are given attack duties.

You may want to also use Look For Overlap to encourage your wide defenders forward, but this can have the undesired effect of making your wide attackers hold up the ball and play less creatively. This is more appropriate when using less creative and skilful wide attackers.

The following attacking styles tend to suit more attacking mentalities. More attacking mentalities will instruct your team to play higher and encourage more of your players to get ahead of the ball. Therefore, deeper players will be required to be more creative and more attacking players will need to be more skilful or physical.

### **Attacking The Flanks**

This is for use with quick, skilful wingers in wide attacking positions.

Go Route One or More Direct Passing, Exploit The Flanks, Play Wider, Much Higher Defensive Line or Push Higher Up, Much Higher Tempo or Higher Tempo

Your players will play the ball quickly to skilful wingers positioned high up the pitch, where they can be most effective. You would benefit from having a central attacker with good aerial ability to provide a target for crosses, especially if you choose to play wider as this will cause your wingers to be more isolated.

### **Running At The Defence**

This is for use with quick, skilful attackers in all areas.

More Direct Passing, Work Ball Into Box, Run At Defence, Play Wider, Much Higher Defensive Line or Push Higher Up, Much Higher Tempo or Higher Tempo

Your deeper players will play the ball quickly to very high ability attacking players who will attempt to use their speed and skill to penetrate the opposition defence and create chances close to goal.

Additional Options are: Roam From Positions, Be More Expressive

These will give your team more fluidity in movement and your players will attempt to use flair and intelligence to penetrate the opposition. You might also want to use Shorter Passing with a highly technical and intelligent team to create quick, fluid, passing moves through the opposition high up the pitch.

### **Playing To A Target Man**

This is for use with a strong striker with good aerial ability.

Go Route One or More Direct Passing, Pump Ball Into Box, Hit Early Crosses, Float Crosses, Play Narrower, Much Higher Defensive Line or Push Higher Up, Stick To Positions, Much Higher Tempo or Higher Tempo, Be More Disciplined

Your team will play direct balls to a target man, who will attempt to use his physical presence and ability to create chances for teammates close to goal with flick-ons and knock downs, or by holding the ball up to bring other attackers into the game. Playing higher up the pitch will mean the target man will be playing closer to the opposition's goal where he can be more effective, while it will also, along with the narrower width, give him closer attacking support from teammates.

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