

Critical factors for success in training sessions at FC Barcelona

International Coaching Course in Barcelona: It's a sunny afternoon in September 2012 and Sergi Domenech, long-time youth coach at FC Barcelona, has a group of coaches from Germany, the UK, Ireland, Mexico, Kuwait and the USA in front of him. They want to know exactly what areas are focused on in the training of the youths at FC Barcelona. The most important features, then, that will be heavily underlined in the coaches' notebooks after the seminar.

During the Master Class with Sergi Domenech as part of the International Coaching Course in Barcelona, the most important training exercises were carried out in practical units and built upon with an observation at La Masia. The further analysis and discussion followed during the 6-day BARCELONA SEMINAR in Hanover-Langenhagen with the former youth coach at FC Barcelona, Joan Marmol, and the coach from the FC Barcelona School, Josep Roches Ribas. During the seminar with coaches from Germany and Austria, from which the official mouthpiece of the DFB, Fussballtraining, also produced a 14-page report, the following list of the most important critical factors for success was compiled.

Factors for success from FC Barcelona youth training

1. Ball control with the "further leg"
2. Connecting with clear passing lines
3. Actions before, during and after possession of the ball
4. Winning back the ball in 3 seconds
5. First option: short pass for goalkeepers

1. Ball control with the further leg

Training exercises and forms of game play that improve ball control with the correct foot in an open playing position are a fundamental part of training practice. The ball must be controlled in such a manner that the players have the pitch or the direction in which things should continue in front of them as they control the ball.

The most important exercises and concepts for imparting this skill, which is fundamental for effective short passing games, will be published soon in part 3 of this series: Basic exercises and forms of game play: ball control with the furthest leg.

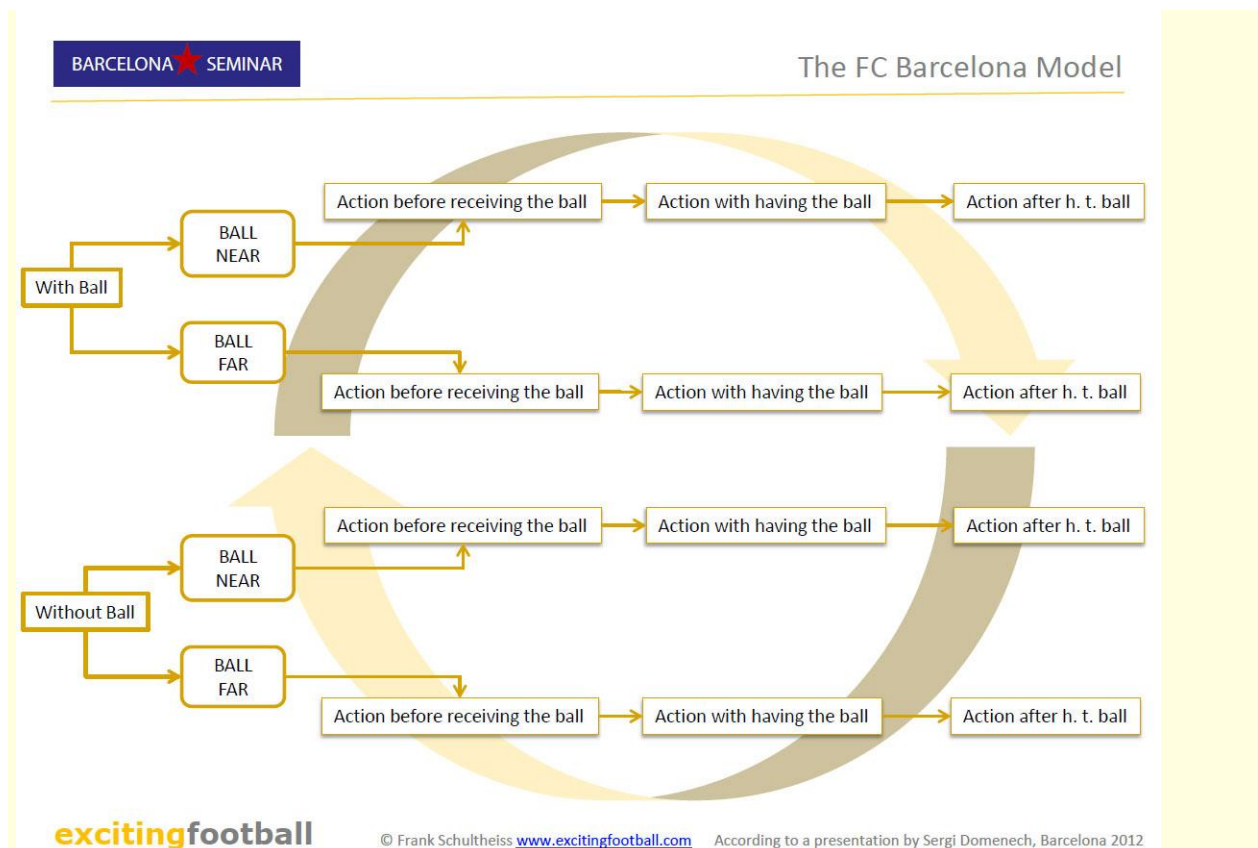
2. Connecting with clear passing lines

The phrase 'passing lines' is rarely heard in many countries outside Spain. In Germany, for instance, connecting with passing lines is explained as 'coming out of protective cover', and using light and shadow cones. The learning materials from the German Football Association talk of "moving out of the covered area and offering a gap". In comparison, the image of the passing line seems simpler and thus easier to understand for the young players.

3. Actions before, during and after possession of the ball

The tasks of the training units and during the matches should fundamentally follow a three-part thinking model. Before this, the player has to ask himself the key questions for all further actions, (a) which team is in possession of the ball and (b) am I near to or far from the ball, and answer them.

1. **Action before possession of the ball:** e.g. a fake run and a sprint in the open space to connect with a passing line
2. **Action during possession of the ball:** e.g. ball control and the subsequent pass
3. **Action after possession of the ball:** e.g. offering for a double pass or a sprint further down the pitch



Ideally, this thought process takes place during the match automatically at lightning speed. However, in order to promote the ability to concentrate on this focus even at a young age, the three action phases should also be incorporated into training exercises. During a passing drill, e.g. expecting the ball with the right body position and tiptoeing (1), then controlling the ball and passing (2) and then a sprint to the next position (3). As this is a cycle of actions, it should help the players internalize that actions are always required from all players at any time throughout the training exercise or the match.

4. Winning back the ball in 3 seconds

The 3-second rule when losing the ball describes the immediate switch in behavior on losing the ball and thus the collective attempt to win back the ball within the next 3 seconds. Fundamentally, a fast switch in behavior on loss of possession is nothing new, but instead forms part of basic knowledge. However, using the 3-second rule, FC Barcelona creates a clear anchor point that should be internalized by the constant presence of the players. Josép Roches Ribas, coach at the FC Barcelona School, explains the rules in the video created at the Barcelona Seminar in Hanover-Langenhagen in July 2013:

5. First option: short pass for goalkeepers

In order to switch the playing style 'to ball possession' and move forwards with short pass combinations, the corresponding technical skills are a key factor for success. It is obvious that play development using the first line is fundamentally always the first option. Only in exceptional cases when absolutely all options for controlled play development have been exhausted are longer balls played. It is clear that the youth players achieve more ball contact and thus better learning effects through controlled play development and ball circulation. This also reduces the probability of the ball actually reaching the intended player with the length of the distance. By applying this rule, leaving things to chance should be ruled out as far as possible in play development and the possession of the ball should be ensured