

TEACHING TACTICS TO YOUNG PLAYERS

***disclaimer** The following is NOT an official explanation of automatism from an FC Barcelona youth coach. Also, I am not professing to be an expert on the concept. This is just my interpretation based on my observations at La Masia and my experiences coaching youth players.*



AUTOMATISM vs TACTICS

It is said that FC Barcelona does not directly teach tactics to young players at La Masia, and instead they focus on **automatism**. Check out this [article](#) for further background on the concept and the context.

Here is a dictionary definition of **automatism**:

"The performance of actions without conscious thought or intention."

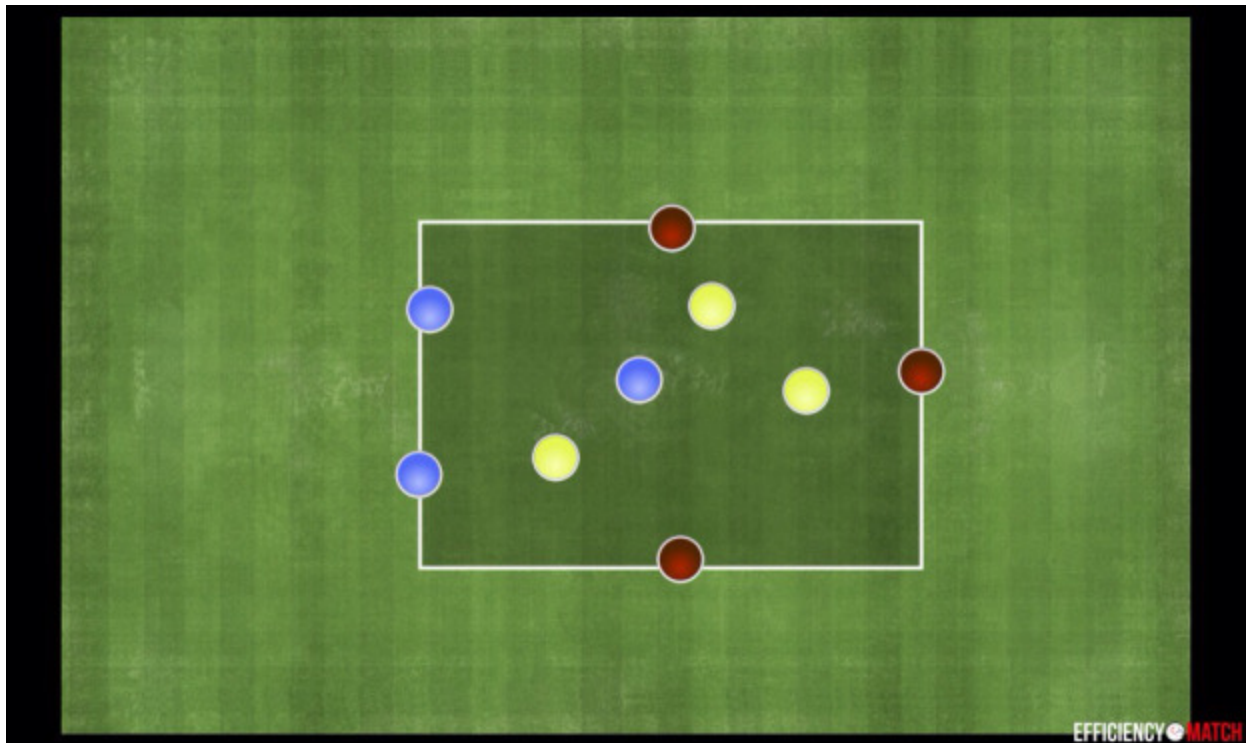
The take away for many youth soccer “experts” is that FC Barcelona does not teach tactics to young players. Full stop. They use this to justify their belief that technique alone should be the primary focus at the young ages. However, to say that FC Barcelona does not teach tactics does not do the academy, it’s teams, or it’s players justice.

The idea is to design training sessions and exercises that train tactical concepts and patterns so that players are receiving tactical instruction without realizing it.

This is where **rondos** and **positional possession games** come into play. They are used to train players what to do when they have the ball, what to do when they don’t have the ball, and how to transition between those two moments.

For those that do not know, a **positional possession game** places players in specific spaces within the playing area to best replicate the responsibilities and situations they will face in a game. One of my favorite positional possession games is this 3v3+3 game:

3v3+3



In this game, the blue players are neutrals and are set up by position. The two on the end line are the center backs, and the one in the middle is a center defensive mid. The teams in red and yellow are a combination of wing players out wide (wing backs or wingers) and central attacking players up top (either center attacking mids or center forwards). This game can be used to train several functions. First, it is training repetitive movement patterns in the CBs and CDM that will translate directly to the game. It can be used to reinforce how to move the ball along the back four and CDM when playing around the back. It is also training a transition to defense AND a transition to attack for the non-neutrals. By manipulating conditions I can use this to train how to use ball circulation

for the purpose of disorganizing the opponent in order to find penetrating passes to the CAMs and CFs. This exercise can be used over and over throughout the entire season to train a variety of concepts.

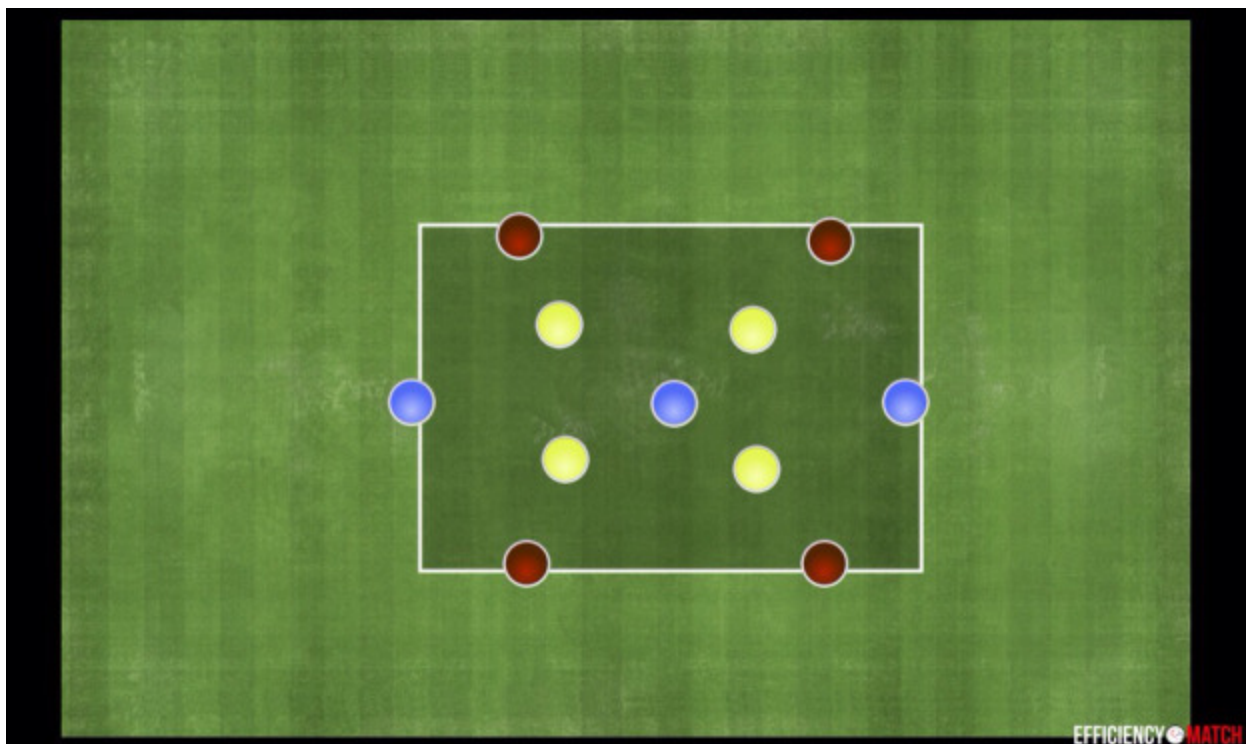
If we are not direct with the players then yes, this could result in automatism; performance of actions without conscious thought.

Regardless, it is still a form of training tactical patterns.

And best of all? These games are not devoid of technical training. It is just training **technique within context of the game**, another concept entirely, but I will get into that another day.

Another common positional possession game used at La Masia and that Pep Guardiola still consistently uses even at FC Bayern Munich:

4v4+3



How would you use this activity to train automatism in your team?