

History Of The Rondo

Written by The Coaching Manual



Rondo as a coaching tool

Rondos have become a fashionable coaching tool in football with many coaches referring to them as piggy in the middle, ball retention, possession exercises and overload activities.

The difference between these sessions and the "Rondo" delivered in Spain is the methodology of why they are used and delivered.

Creator of the Rondo

Rondos can not be accredited to any one individual as positional-based exercises have been used by coaches for many years and in various ways. However, one name that has to be credited with the development of the Rondo is Laureano Ruiz.

Former Racing Santander and Gimnástica player Ruiz always had an interest in coaching, often taking on coaching responsibilities whilst still active as a player. He has been accredited as the 'inventor' of the Rondo in 1957, analysing patterns of play demonstrated in Hungarian football and designed practices to reproduce this with his players.

Ruiz also claims that this translated into a model of play that dominated attacks, penetrated centrally, and drew out teams from deep positions if there wasn't an opportunity to attack; a concept that is commonly identified in positional play.

Ruiz and FC Barcelona

Ruiz joined Barcelona in 1972 and was a prominent figure throughout the decade, working with the Cantera (youth team). Ruiz actually took charge of the Barça first team in 1976 following Hennes Weisweiler's removal, rumour has it, for daring to sub Johan Cruyff vs. Sevilla and the Dutch player stating to the club president "Either he goes or I do!"

Ruiz experimented and delivered Rondo exercises to the first team players, and seemingly this had a lasting effect on Johan Cruyff. Ruiz left the club in 1978 when José Luis Núñez became president, subsequently taking on the managerial role at Celta Vigo (1978-79), then Racing Santander (1979-80) his home town club. However he had already laid down the foundations of a playing philosophy at the Catalan club.

Cruyff's coaching methods

If Ruiz had invented the Rondo, it was Cruyff who progressed it on to the next level. According to Joan Vilà, FC Barcelona Head of Methodology, the Rondo took on a whole new dimension when Cruyff joined in 1988.

Through working with Cruyff, Ruiz said the Dutch player was a lover of the combative nature of English football of the mid-1970s, though when he returned, he had the ideas of a positional game of elegance and debonair.

Cruyff was set on assessing and implementing a new rondo and to progress it from the Ruiz practice's of the 1970s. With Cruyff, the exercise advanced from a "fun before you train game" and became a "technical, strategic and speed of circulation tool" advocated by José Ramón Alexanko, then Captain of Barça and now Academy Director at Valencia CF.

This new look Rondo helped found the modern principles of positional play that FC Barcelona demonstrate today, and also helped to create the formidably successful "Dream Team" of the late 80s and early 90s.

Cruyff's protégé - Guardiola

In 2008 a "Cruyffista" continued the reign of positional play and Rondos. After a successful period coaching Barcelona B, former player Pep Guardiola was promoted to the first team.

Guardiola transformed the team, ridding them of players who he felt had passed their peak (Ronaldinho and Deco) and promoting players from the Barça B team, in Busquets and Pedro. He also trusted players from the current team, many of whom had been brought through the clubs La Masia youth program, to control the quality on the field. This included Iniesta, Xavi and Messi.

Within this period, the Rondo became a key coaching tool for Guardiola to relay his vision of how he wanted his team to play. Cruyff had adapted the original Rondo, but Pep had given it a whole new meaning. Guardiola made the Rondo even more player-specific, controlling the exercise and allowing players to experience the Rondo on a micro pitch to understand their responsibilities.

Guardiola also refined the techniques and strategies of the positional play style of football within the Rondo, such as manipulating space and drawing in players to create space in between lines, something that Ruiz had discussed 35 years previously.

Utilising the Rondo activity in his training, Guardiola created a dynasty from 2008 - 2012 that may be remembered as one of the greatest teams to play the game.

