

La Pausa: Part 1 - Introduction & Timing

Written by The Coaching Manual

In this article, we introduce the concept of "La Pausa" and begin to detail the elements of this method of play and how it can develop your players' game understanding.

Positional Profile

In Latin America the term 'La Pausa' is related to a specific style of play, generally from the player positioned behind the striker. In Spain, this type of player is referred to as "Media Punta", whilst in Latin America, they are known as "Enganche" (the hook). Other common phrases to describe a player with La Pausa include Playmaker, Trequartista and even a player "in the hole".

Regardless of what we call them, "La Pausa" should always be present within this type of player. The Playmaker has the ability to pause the game and wait for their team mates to find space and positions in opposition areas so that the Playmaker can attempt to find them.

Players who use La Pausa

South American players like Maradona, Messi, Recoba, Riquelme, Ronaldinho and Pele are considered masters of La Pausa. European footballers including Zidane, Scholes, Pirlo and Xavi also have La Pausa in common.

In the modern game, attacking players are required to be more dynamic with the ability to run, pass, shoot and defend from the front, as well as create chances for themselves and teammates.

Nevertheless, a number of players have the ability to demonstrate "La Pausa" and display the attacking characteristics needed. We can see this in players such as Özil, Busquets, Iniesta, Modrić and David Silva to name a few.

Definition

The "waiting" or "pausing" in attack is essentially what this skill is; waiting for the moment to execute the through ball or to play to a teammate in a positional advantage. However, La Pausa will not just happen by itself, rather it requires players to recognise and understand when, where and how La Pausa can be implemented to advantage.

Pele's delayed pass for Carlos Alberto's goal in the 1970 World Cup Final is a well-recognised example of La Pausa being executed with success.

We can break La Pausa down into 3 categories within the framework of the game; Timing, Positioning and Execution.

La Pausa - Timing

La Pausa has to be created, as waiting for spaces to appear to release attacking players won't automatically happen. Timing can also be interpreted as dictating the rhythm or pace of the game and recognising when and where the opportunities to break defensive lines occur.

A common coaching point is "play slow to be quick". This directly relates to La Pausa as the slow is the pause, also known as a delay. There are 3 methods at a player's disposal when waiting for the defence to make a mistake or to move them out of position to create space behind. These include ;

1. Keeping possession of the ball
2. Dribbling at defenders
3. Combination play and Short Passes

Timing: Keeping Possession of the Ball

Maintaining possession as a player and doing "nothing" often draws in defenders and entices them towards the ball in an attempt to regain possession.

The ability to stay on the ball can create the optimum time and space needed to find players in advantageous attacking positions behind the line of pressure, as the opposition move towards the ball and become unbalanced.

This may involve the player protecting and putting their body in between the ball and the defender as they turn and shield the ball. This turn can be performed throughout any rotation of a 360 angle, and the 360 turn is known as "La Pelopina" in Spain.

When La Pelopina turn is performed it maintains possession for the individual and creates the pause to allow the attackers to gain a positional advantage as a defender, or multiple defenders, move away from their unit to close the ball down.

This animation demonstrates how a simple turn can create space for others in behind defensive units.

Timing: Dribbling to Engage Defenders

Dominating 1v1 situations is a critical part of executing La Pausa. When faced with a defender, we can see players running at the opponents even in unfavourable positions in the centre of the field. The reality is that travelling with the ball in any area of the field forces defenders to engage with the player on the ball because if they don't, the attack could theoretically lead all the way to goal.

As the engaging defender moves out of a defensive unit to close down the ball, space is created behind or to the side of the unit giving potential advantages to the attacking team.

Timing: Combination Play & Short Passes to Draw out Defenders

Passes are not often seen as the definition of "La Pausa", as we generally define it to one player. However, short passes in a particular space can encourage the opposition to press, creating a pause in the attack to draw in and unbalance the opposition.

We could often see this in the Pep Guardiola era of Barcelona. Very often passes would be played between two or three players, namely Xavi, Iniesta and Busquets. These passes would then encourage the opposition to press, unbalancing the defence and moving them out of position.

The "La Pausa" of the attack, through short combinations, can support numerical and positional superiority in spaces behind the defensive line and allows the attacking team to progress forward and find players taking position behind the line of pressure.

Here we can see how the attacking team maintain possession and combine with short passes to encourage the opposition midfield unit to press, creating gaps in their units vertically and allowing the Centre Forward to drop and receive the ball, behind the midfield line of pressure.