

Punch Football

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Different responsibility

Living in another country is a great experience and I would recommend people to do so if the opportunity opens. One of the most interesting things is speaking to people from different origins, cultures and experiences. I've spent the last few years living in Spain and had the privilege to witness their nation experience success with both their national and domestic teams.

Some years ago during a 7-a-side leisure game on a sunny Madrid evening, I was once told by an Argentine player to pass harder to him. I was confused, my passes had been accurate and well timed. After the game I asked him why he had said such a thing. He said it was his responsibility to control the ball at the pace I passed it, as long as the pass was accurate. He continued to say that the pace of the ball was critical as with a good touch he could take a defender out of the game with the pace of the ball. I was fascinated by what he had said and I confirmed this with another player who had played with this man before, my findings were the same.

If you watch any Spanish or South American game, domestic or international, the ball moves at a tremendous speed with crisp one and two touch passes. These passes move like a ping pong ball and are especially prominent in the final third of the field. The idea of slow to be fast, if you will.

In the UK, we are sometimes told how passes should be played to our teammates. We discuss concepts of the weight, speed, accuracy, timing and disguise of a pass, and quite rightly so. However, after my interactions with more than one player I have come to learn that the responsibilities of the passer and receive can sometimes change especially when we discuss playing into spaces and feet. This sounds obvious but playing into space, the weight and speed of the pass need to be well controlled almost like a golf shot. When discussing playing into feet the speed of the ball when arriving at the receiver can be stronger than previously thought.

When a player can't control a pass in the UK we often "blame" the passer of the ball, but not the receiver. We often hear outcries of "the pass was bad", "it wasn't to feet" or "it was too hard/soft". We also see sessions stopped and reenacted to play the pass again, perfectly. However, the game doesn't stop for perfect passes and training shouldn't always be the same. From what I have experienced, with South American players in particular, the responsibility lies with the receiver to control the ball, regardless of the speed. They seem to want the ball played into them hard so they can control the ball at speed and move out of compact spaces efficiently. We can see this with many examples of player who have fabulous first touches like Messi, Agüero and Sanchez.

The game is full of errors with matches being decided on these situations. However, a ball to feet at a fast pace is not an error, it is a show of confidence that the receiver can control the pass at pace. Therefore we should be educating our players to receive accurate passes at speed, sometimes faster than we normally would perceive.

When do we use fast football?

Speed of thought and play are becoming more and more important in the game and will only continue to get faster. In game situations we can often see this when players are trying to bypass defensive units with playing forward passes.

In this video we can see how the attacking team may need to "Punch" the ball into players, bypassing the defensive units. If the ball isn't quick enough, the ball may never reach the intended target and may be intercepted. This gives context to the reason why players may want to have the ball played into them at great pace.

Alexis Sanchez Example

In his first goal, Alexis Sánchez's touch not only maintained possession for himself but it also took the ball away from the defender, who is immediately on the back foot once Sánchez turns. This provides a fraction of a second against the defender to make the run he needs to score.

Punching the ball into the areas and the receiver taking responsibility should be taught to all players at early ages. This doesn't mean kicking the ball as hard as you can at each other, but rather giving extremely firm passes with no "weight". Weighted passes gives the impression of the pass beginning to slow as it approaches the receiver, and this is something that we don't want. We can describe punch pass as "fizzing" the ball into areas. [View Warm Up Drill \(https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/Content/4921705065611264\)](https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/Content/4921705065611264)

Conclusion

Punch football is not exclusive to South America, we can find the same idea in the UK and other countries. With that said, I have felt it is more commonly discussed by South Americans. Punching the ball with speed can be an effective way of helping players deal with receiving the ball well and at speed. Though not always necessary to have strong passes, if players can deal with these passes, it gives them another tool in their box.

Bad passes can also be overlooked, dealing with difficult height, weight, accuracy of passes also needs to be coached as the game is full of poor passes. Teaching your players to deal with these is vital to their development.

Receiving the ball is a topic that sometimes is overlooked as the fashion of passing often outshines "receiving".

