

## Switching Play

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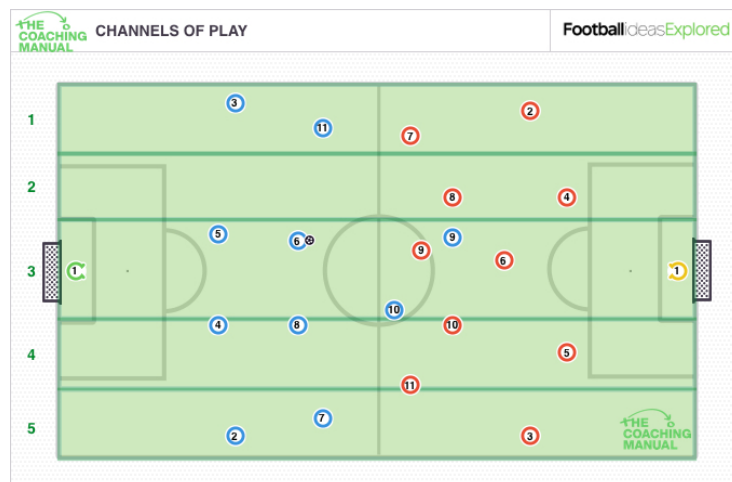
Whilst the game is constantly evolving, with teams trying to find different ways to break down or repel the opposition, some things never change. Switching play, or changing the point of attack, has been a fundamental part of the game since it was invented. Switching play can help teams open up their opposition, create space inside or find space out wide to attack.

On the field we can see 5 "channels" for field reference. They can help us both defensively and in attack. We can see how switches of play are extremely effective when defences leave the wide channels 1 or 5 open to attack.

### Finding spaces around compact defences

Oppositions often set up to be compact in the defensive phase of the game.

As we can see in the video, teams in the defensive phase of the game look to condense space and occupy 3 channels. This means that if the ball is in channel 2, 3 or 4 teams often stay in those channels, or if the ball is in channel 1 or 5 they will move to the three channels adjacent to where the ball is (if the ball is channel on 1 the defence would be in 1,2 and 3. For channel 5 the defence would be compact in channels 3, 4 and 5). This leaves 2 channels potentially "open" on the other side of the pitch for the attacking team to try and exploit.



### Why do we switch play?

The reason for switching play can be interpreted in a number of ways. However, there are 2 main ideas of why switching play can be an effective tactic.

Attacking teams often have wingers or full backs in wide positions to try and create space in the middle. If the defence stays compact, it opens space in wide areas as we have discussed. This allows the full back or the winger to take advantage of this space to receive the ball, creating 1v0 situations (open space to run into) if the ball is moved quickly enough, or 1v1 situations with the attacking winger v the opposition full back. If the attacking full back also stays wide, then 2v1 situations can occur, creating an attacking overload.

The above video demonstrates how the switch opens both a 1v1 and a 2v1 situation for the teams to exploit. This is something we can see with teams such as Real Madrid, who use Kroos and Modric to switch the ball with long passes to Ronaldo and Bale to exploit spaces in wide areas and get in behind defences.

Another reason for switching play is to create space centrally. We can see teams such as Barcelona and Manchester City under Pep Guardiola, play the ball from side to side. This is linked to 3 fundamental ideas; 1) to move the opposition from side to side, tiring them to create opportunities horizontally 2) for the attacking team to attempt to draw out the opposition towards them (for the defence to press) creating space vertically 3) to disorganise the defence to find players centrally in free space and in between the lines.

This scenario shows the attacking team moving the opposition from side to side across the back consistently switching play, waiting for the moment for them to make mistakes and to lose their compactness. When this happens the attacking team can play centrally.

### Support

When switching play, support is important. It is true that a switch of play can be an effective strategy on its own, however, supporting the player on the ball can create passing options in advanced areas of the field and disorganise the opposition further.

Ideally, there should always be support in 3 key areas BEHIND, TO THE SIDE and IN FRONT. Support would be in the same channel or the next two channels adjacent to the wide channels (1 or 5). The main reason for this is actually a pragmatic one. If the ball is lost, players can press and try to recover the ball quickly.

Support behind the ball is critical, not only to block any clear runs to goal if the ball is lost, but also for a passing option. If the defender puts pressure on the switch, then the player behind can offer an option to receive the ball and potentially switch again or look inside for options. Supporting to the side can offer an option inside if the defence is disorganised, exploiting spaces to attack the goal. Supporting in front is for forward movement for the players to try and penetrate the defence and get in behind the defensive back line.

### How to switch the play

The quickest way to switch play is for long pass to the opposite side of the field. Players like David Beckham, Xabi Alonso and Andrea Pirlo are masters at this and currently, Paul Pogba can hit unbelievable 60/70 yard passes. There's a selection below:

However, a long pass switch of play is not the only way to change the direction of the attack. Combining in areas, such as one side of the field, can also be an effective way to switch the play.

In this scenario we can see how quick combinations draw in the defence to one side of the field and into one area of the pitch. This then opens space in wide areas for the attacking team to switch the ball and expose the space on the 'weak side' (where there are a small number of defenders or not at all).

Another example of this is the combination play from Villarreal v Valencia. This famous video gained extreme notoriety in 2012, when Villarreal demonstrated seamless one touch passing in a tight area to then switch the play and have an opportunity on Valencia's goal.

### **Playing behind the defence when switching play - third man runs**

A piece of play that is often neglected when switching play is the third man run. When the ball is being switched, the defence are often focused on sliding over to protect the ball and the channel to remain compact.

This allows opportunities for the attacking team to make third man runs behind the defensive line. If the ball is passed forwards and towards goal first time, the opposition defence must recover and may be facing their own goal.

In the rondos and drills related to the article, you will be able to help your players switch play in various ways.