

The use of terminology in soccer coaching

Written by Paul Bright

“Playing football is very simple, but playing simple football is the hardest thing there is.” - Johan Cruyff

Combined with developments in technology and access to coaching programs / courses, the opportunities for full time roles within the game of soccer have never been more abundant.

This has also led to clubs at all levels becoming more professional in how they operate and also how they deliver their 'message' to players and parents. In conjunction, there has been a host of game-based jargon and terminology introduced into the coaching arena and this subject is seen as a hot topic for many coaching educators.

Principles of the Game

The principles of the game were introduced in “The F.A. Guide to Training and Coaching” by Allen Wade in the 1960's and are seen by some practitioner's as essential in achieving a team's objectives and strategies, when successfully executed.

Below are The Coaching Manual's interpretation of the principles of the game;

Attacking Principles

Defending Principles

Personally, I think that the basis of all coaching should be the principles of the game and every session should focus on at least one of the principles. This will help players to understand WHAT they are working on, WHY it's important and WHERE it occurs in the game.

In my opinion, these principles also underpin every tactical strategy that is adopted in the game.

For example, on analysis of Guardiola's style of play when in possession, shows that his approach to positional play is centred around mobility and support of his players, using width to drag the opposition out of position, with the ultimate aim of penetrating their defence to create chances at goal.

Furthermore, Klopp's counterpressing style when out of possession utilises pressure and aggressively delaying the opposition attack in order to force the ball into certain areas of the field and make play predictable to regain possession.

Back to the discussion point of terminology, I have delivered coach education courses and asked coaches about “gegenpressing”, “inverted full backs” etc.. but when I asked about naming the principles of attack and defence there were few responses; yet these are the fundamentals that can be seen to underpin all of this tactical theory.

Therefore, this leads to the question; do coaches use complex terminology to develop their players OR to demonstrate their own knowledge to the audience?

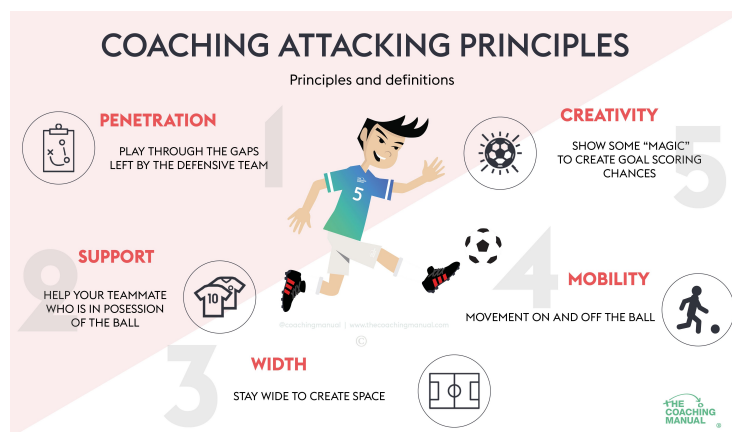
Communicating with Players

Complex terminology exists in every aspect of football. However, because coaching is ultimately about improving performance, coaches have a responsibility to ensure their messages are clearly understood and interpreted by players to help them improve.

Many coaches believe in simplifying terminology so that players clearly understand the objectives of the session. Being able to simplify the concepts and deliver to your target audience also demonstrates clear understanding of complex processes by the coach.

In this video example, Anthony Limbrick delivers a warm up activity on [pressing in the final third \(https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/Content/6473341592403968\)](https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/Content/6473341592403968). Note his consistent and simple messages to the players.

Anthony uses question and answer along with demonstrations to introduce the concept of pressing cues and triggers.



This in itself may be seen as complex terminology, however the coach uses his language to 'paint the picture' so that the players understand the objectives of the practice and also understand what a pressing cue is like.

"See the body shape and that is your cue to press and get out to the man on the ball" - Anthony Limbrick

Players are encouraged to become immersed in football language and terminology so that as they develop and progress they are aware of the concepts that are being discussed and taught at a competitive level of play.

It is easy for even the best coaches to fall in to the trap of using overly complex terminology, it is human nature. The reasons for this basically come down to ego and trying to 'demonstrate' your knowledge.

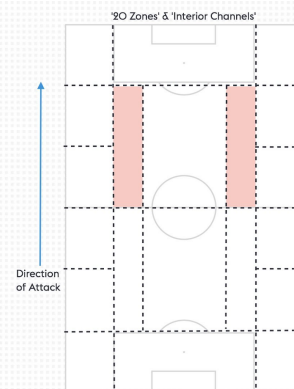
Real-Life Example

I recently delivered this session to a group of U14 players on '[Attacking through interior channels](https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/Session/5690886025379840)' and this may be interpreted as 'jargon' and complex coaching terminology.

However, the description of the space as an 'interior channel' made sense to me and I spent the opening 5 minutes of the session showing the players the image of a pitch with 'interior channels' marked out, asked the players questions on "what defenders may do if the ball was in this area of the field". I also walked through our set up, highlighting the channels with flat discs.

This was done so that I knew the players had a background and understanding of WHY this session was delivered, WHERE it would occur and HOW it links to the principles of the game (penetration, support, mobility, width).

The players were comfortable with the terminology and understood what we were referring to when we spoke about interior channels. Again, it made sense to the players and myself after the discussions and they had success attacking through these areas of the pitch so the objectives were met.



Dealing with complicated processes

Whilst soccer is a simple game to set up and play, the development of people in a sport that is so open and varied means that there are complicated processes that we, as coaches, may need to address.

Additionally, the point has been raised on social media that professions such as medicine and law contain terminology exclusive to those professions and if we are to view coaching as a credible 'profession', then the development of terminology is aligned with this viewpoint.

However, when a doctor or lawyer speak to a patient or client, do they use industry-specific terminology or do they simplify the language for the benefit of the target audience?

Coaching Example

Another great example of a coach who simplifies the process for his players is Terry Moore delivering this technical activity to develop [Spatial Awareness](https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/Content/5476726828171264).

Terry constantly uses positive and specific feedback "lovely pass" as well as setting challenges for the players to promote the objectives "as soon as I look, turn away and then look again he has to find another position."



Coach Opinions and Actions

National Governing Bodies are writing 'philosophies' and clubs are producing curriculums that contain specific words that must be referenced on coaching courses and in practice. Whilst I understand the need for consistency of message, forcing this terminology on to practitioners that are unfamiliar with it can also have a detrimental effect.

For example, I spoke with a coach who was undertaking his UEFA A Licence. The coach in question was a former professional player so had been around the dressing room and was familiar with 'football speak.'

He said that he was so concerned with hitting the 'correct terminology' that he missed key coaching points and moments within his session. This obviously affected the impact that the session had on the players.

Therefore, when coaches use key words or phrases, do players really understand what they mean? How do we check for understanding? Is it relevant for the age and level of the player? Is it relevant and meaningful to the coach?

Football Language Infographic

The Coaching Manual produced this infographic that may help young players understand the language coaches use during training and games and it would be fantastic if the coaching community also added their own versions in order to create a simplified list of phrases that coaches can use and players can understand.

Feel free to include your suggestions in the comments section below, along with your thoughts on the use of terminology in the beautiful game.



FOOTBALL LANGUAGE

THE
COACHING
MANUAL



“DELAY”

SLOW THE ATTACKER DOWN



“GOAL SIDE”

BE IN BETWEEN YOUR GOAL AND THE ATTACKER



“TUCK IN”

MOVE INSIDE TO BE CLOSER TO YOUR CENTRAL PLAYERS



“TURN OUT”

RECEIVE ON YOUR BACK FOOT



“MAN ON”

WHEN A DEFENDER IS APPROACHING YOU



“SWITCH”

MOVE THE BALL FROM ONE SIDE OF THE PITCH TO THE OTHER



“ROUND THE CORNER”

FLICK THE BALL AROUND THE CORNER TO A TEAMMATE



“SQUARE IT”

LOOK FOR A CUT BACK FOR A TEAMMATE TO SCORE



“SID”

STEP OVER THE BALL



“PRESS”

QUICKLY GET THE BALL BACK