

Key Ingredients to Counter Attacking Soccer

www.betersoccermorefun.com

Rinus Michels: Team Building



"The accent in the counter attack style of play lays on the defensive team function, with the emphasis being on the defender's own half of the field and letting the opponents keep the initiative of the game. This is to take advantage of the space behind their defense for the buildup and the attack."

Rinus Michels, former Dutch National Team Player & Coach

1. The team's defensive organization is in its own half

Teams will want to "limit the space behind the back line and the goal." The 'defending' will start around the midfield line. It's important that individuals don't chase the ball too deeply into the opponents half and leave gaps between the lines. Each line must stay compact and avoid getting separated from the other's creating a 'block' defense. "In the first place, a good counter attack team needs to have a strong defensive line with players who will remain calm even under high pressure. These players are good technical defenders; these players do not fear having to play defense in their own penalty box

2. Use the organization to stop the opponents build up and attack

With so many players committed to defending in such a small area the attackers are faced with significant problems. A big one is how to penetrate the defense for a shot. With the players ahead of the ball tightly marked and the space for dribbling through the defense reduced attackers can become frustrated and impatient. "... It is also required that the tactical coherence between the defenders is optimal. In that manner, you can close down the operational attacking space of the opponents." Attackers who become impatient have taken the first step towards making a mistake in judgment which is what the defenders are looking for.

3. Defenders keep the play in front of them

By limiting the space behind them, defenders can be content to allow the attackers possession as long as they play in front of them and just outside shooting range. While the player with the ball must be pressurized it is not at the expense of the defensive organization. Patience is a virtue and choosing the correct moment to win the ball is an art. Protecting the goal and controlling the attackers is more important than immediately chasing after the ball.

4. Launching the counter attack

The decision of whether to counter or build up the attack must be made immediately. As soon as the ball is won or even better, before the team and the players should have made a decision. Good players will read the situation, calculate the probabilities, make a decision and act. Speed of thought and action is essential for successful counter attacks. It's vital that counter attacking teams use the few seconds that they have before the opponents can reorganize into their defensive shape.



Rinus Michels, made the Dutch National Team a formidable counter attacking team as well as being credited with the invention of "Total Football". This style still remains within the Dutch Soccer programs and during Euro 2008 their counter attacking play resulted in some fantastic goals being scored including the one pictured being scored by Wesley Sneijder

the counter is on when:

Key Ingredients to Counter Attacking Soccer

www.bettersoccermorefun.com

Rinus Michels: Team Building



The player who has won the ball can find a target forward. This means that they will have to be facing the opponent's goal and have the space to pass forward and a target player. Defenders who have to chase opponents towards their own goal, or trap the ball facing the side line, are in a poor position to start a counter, because they have a poor view of the field. Players who intercept a square pass while facing the opponents goal, win a tackle and their first touch is into the space behind their opponent towards their goal and players who intercept a through pass while the attacker has run past them are in a good position to start a counter attack. In the first case, the defender has beaten at least two players, and possibly an entire line and should have open space in front of them. If they a top player they might only have the goal keeper between them and the goal.

The player who wins the ball is usually moving into open space. They will need to get their vision up quickly and find a target. Finally, if the player who wins the ball is pressurized and cannot play it forward, has no idea or cannot make a deep pass, the counter can still be on if he quickly gets it to someone who can. Use supporting players quickly.

6. The runs

In counter attacking soccer teams can count on certain situations repeatedly. The ball is usually won in recurring situations and players are usually in certain positions. It has a predictable nature. "When a counter attack team regains possession of the ball, certain players will run set patterns (pattern play) so the counter attack will be successful and can be performed at a high tempo. On the other hand, every player can get involved in the counter attack as long as the situation allows for this. It is all about choosing the correct moment to get involved... Mostly, the fast target player who is good with the ball is the basis. With the big spaces around them they remain an important target to play the ball to. They take the pressure off the team by being able to quickly receive a long pass."

The requirement of choosing the correct moment presents a problem for youth teams. Almost everybody (coaches included) thinks that everyone should take every opportunity to go forward. When this happens the teams shape disintegrates due to a lot of unnecessary runs. Players become fatigued for no good reason. This also assumes that the attack will be over quickly and that the runs won't serve any useful purpose to the team. One solution is to limit the number of players that are allowed to go ahead of the ball in a counter attack. This helps to conserve energy and insure that the basic team shape is ready for the next assault.



During his time as the Chelsea FC head coach, Jose Mourinho liked to impose a counter attacking style.

Didier Drogba was used as the team's target player. He is still a Chelsea player and posses the attributes of a good target player. He helped Chelsea to win back to back English Premier League Championships when Mourinho was the head coach.

7. Strengths and weakness

Key Ingredients to Counter Attacking Soccer

www.bettersoccermorefun.com

Rinus Michels: Team Building



The counter attacking style is the easiest to organize and is the best guarantee of getting a result. Compared to the playmaking style the technical and physical requirements are lower. However, there is still a great demand on individual and team discipline and the need for speed on the break out is absolutely vital.

A big problem for teams that are dependent on the counter attacking style is how they adapt when they're behind. If your game is based on the opponents coming at you and they are content to hold the ball nothing is going to happen. The counter attacking team will have to change the way they play. "The situation in the match forces the team to change to this (playmaking) style of play. Usually the coach will substitute a player; for example a forward or an attacking midfielder takes the place of a defender. The coach can also choose to change the description of the tasks or the guidelines concerning the defensive, buildup or attacking team function."

8. Finally

In the diagram below the counter attacking team is concerned with not conceding any space behind it. A strong, confident back line with a defensive block in the center of the field, a good goal keeper and the team will give away very little. When the team wins the ball it must be passed forward quickly, usually to a fast target player.

Then, only a few players will look to get ahead of the ball depending on the situation. The rest of the team will close up quickly behind the ball to offer support and prevent a counter against them. Since the runs from deep inside your own half tend to be very long, in excess of 50 -70 yards, players will need to develop an 'eye' for when to follow up and when to let the attackers go on their own. 'Pick the runs that will bring a return on your investment. A match is no time for fitness training.'

