

# *Game Principles*

By Filipe Teles

## Game Principles

From the stands, soccer may look like a single, 90-minute-long game that's broken into 45-minute chunks by halftime. In reality, each soccer match consists a series of smaller plays involving groups of players. Soccer consists of **ten basic tactical principles**, originally developed by soccer tactician Allen Wade in 1967 called “The F.A. Guide to Training and Coaching” and expounded upon by coach Alan Hargreaves, that both players and coaches can use to gain skills and evaluate performance on the field. These principles are classified as attacking - offense - or defending - defense - depending on which team has the ball.

***The five principles of attacking and defending are a fundamental basis for a soccer coach to focus his team’s broader objectives and strategies. According to Allen Wade and other proponents of the principles, every practice and match depends on the successful execution of the principles, so they are indispensable to success in the sport.***

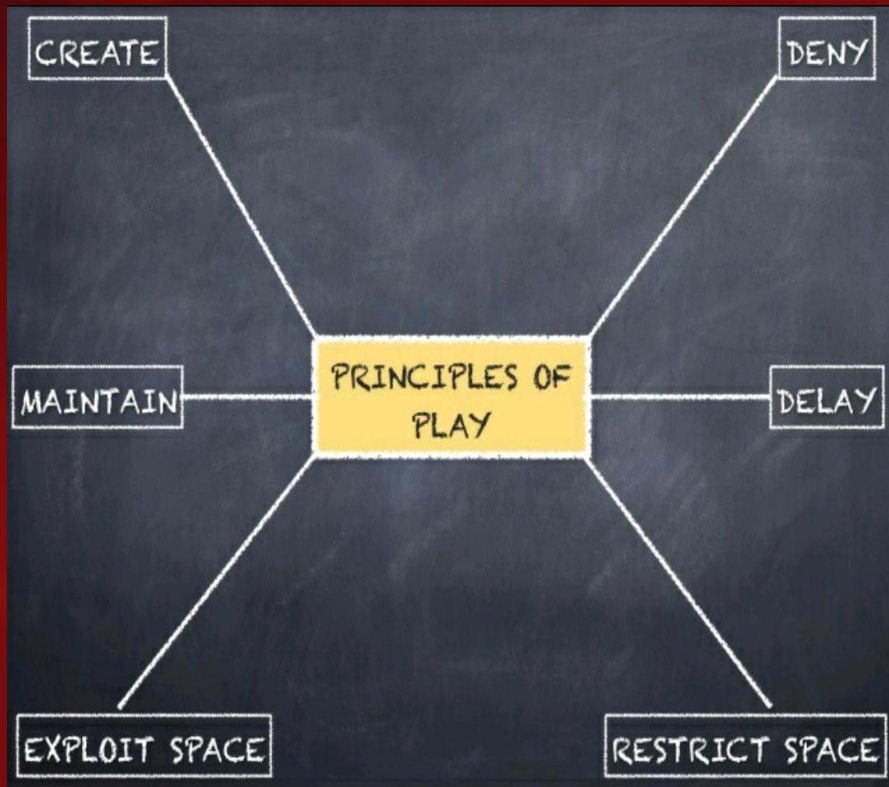
Effective attacking and defending depends simultaneously on individual and team actions. These actions consist of corresponding attacking and defending actions known as the “Principles of Play.”

### Fundamental Principles of Attack

When your team has the ball, everyone on the team becomes an attacker.

Your goals as attackers are:

- Keep possession of the ball
- Move the ball forward into an attacking position
- Create chances to score a goal

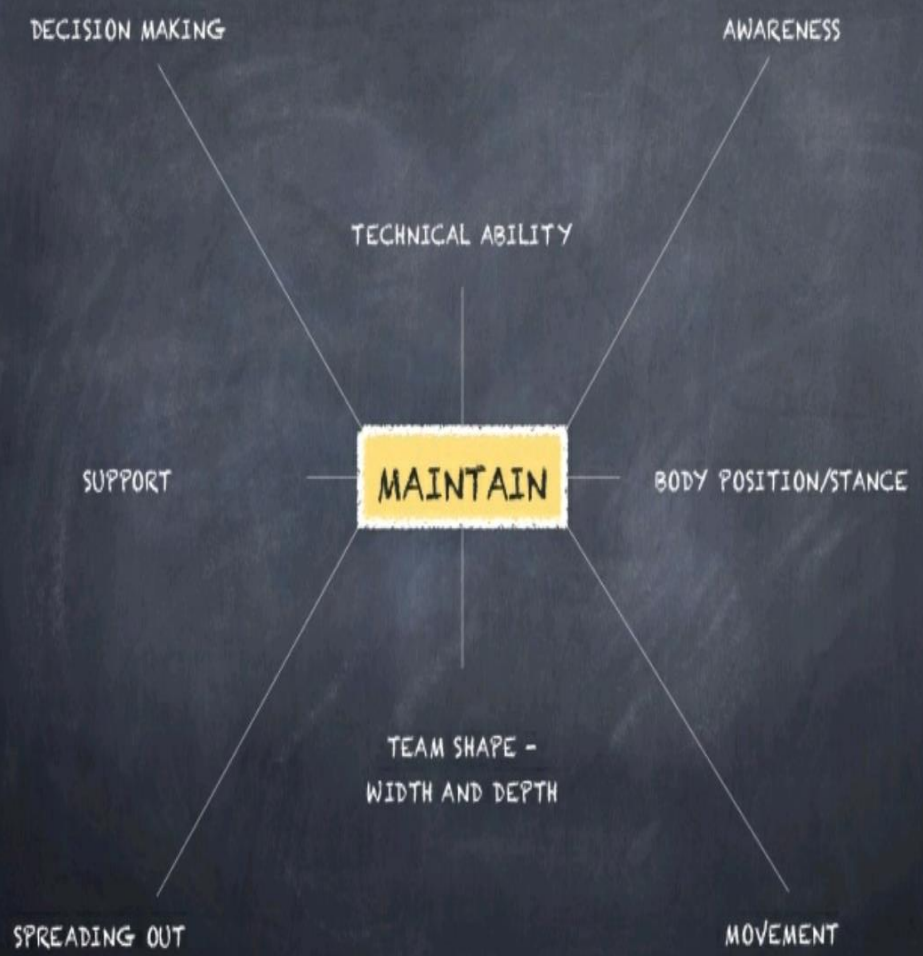


### Fundamental Principles of Defense

The moment your team loses possession of the ball, everyone on the team becomes a defender.

Your goals as defenders are:

- Stop the other team from creating chances to score a goal
- Limit the chances for the other team to get into attacking positions
- Regain possession



ATTACKING PATTERNS

THROUGH BALLS

OVERLOADS

PENETRATION

EXPLOIT SPACE

RUNNING WITH AND WITHOUT THE BALL

SPEED OF PLAY

PASSING / SUPPORT

COUNTER ATTACKS

FORWARD MOVEMENTS / PENETRATION

ANGLE OF APPROACH

SPEED OF APPROACH

TIME ON THE BALL

DENY

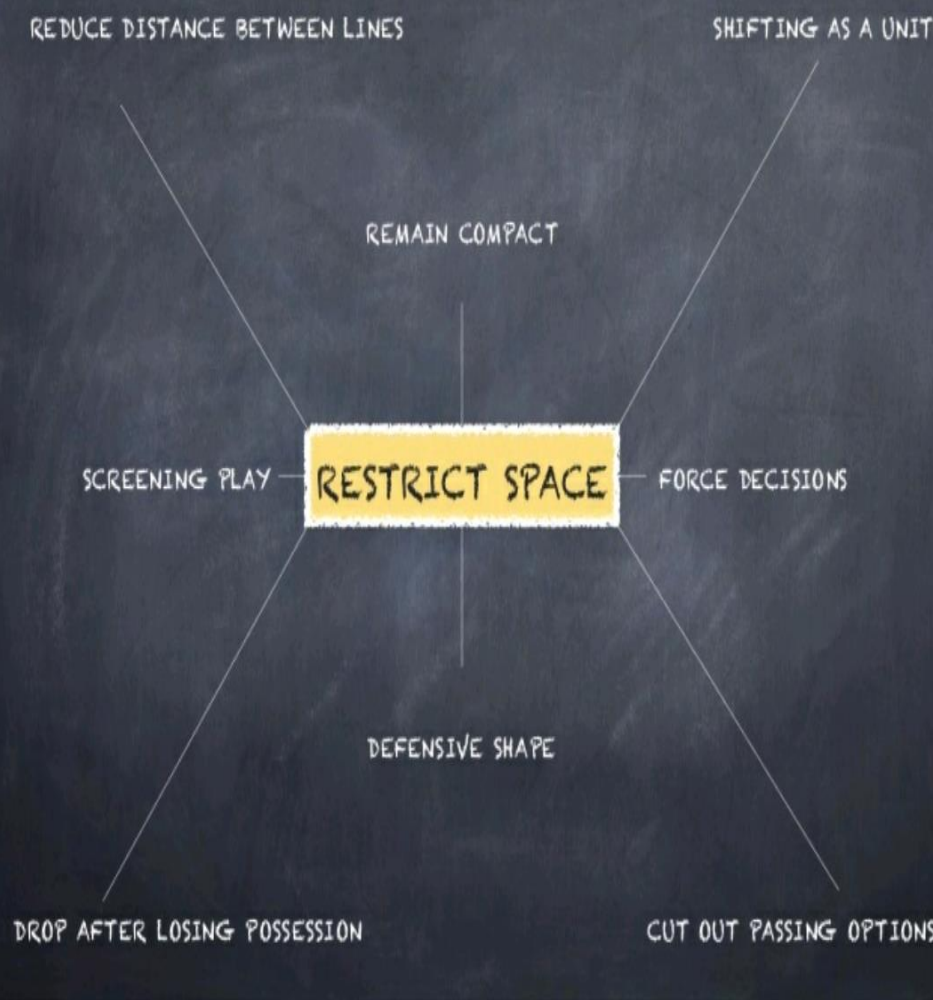
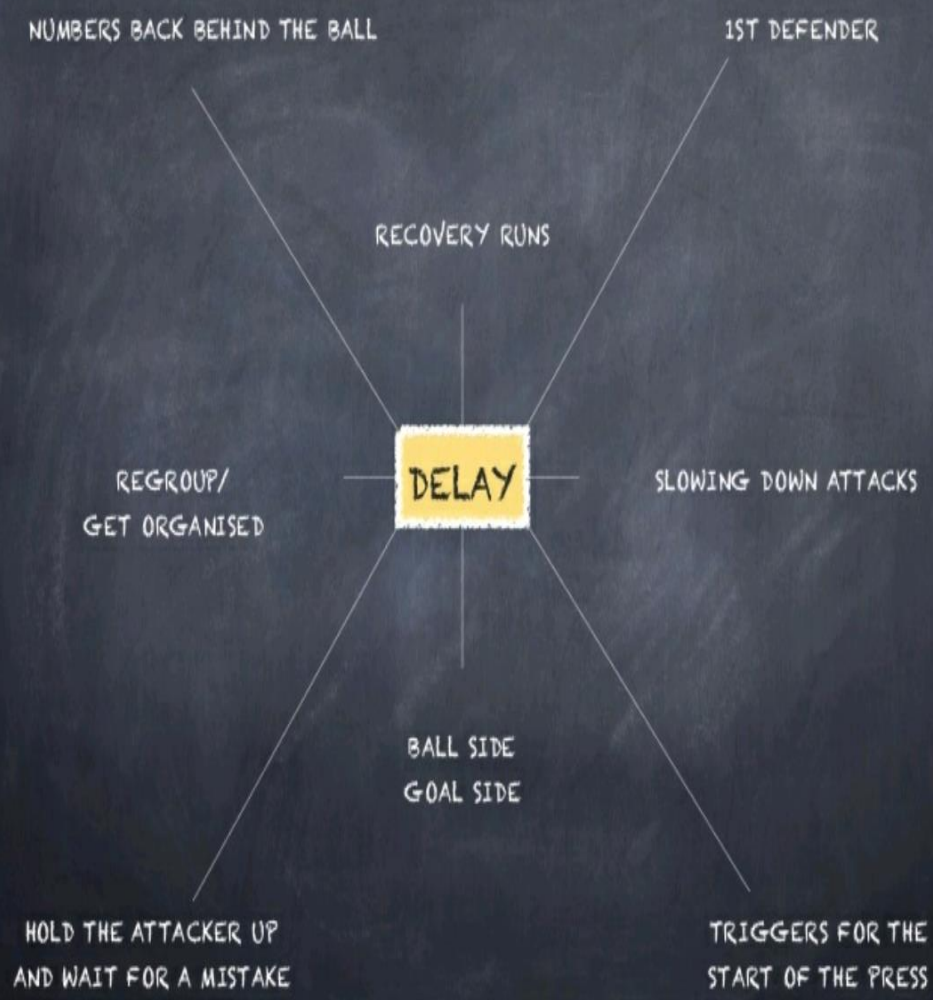
BODY POSITION

SHOTS

TRAVEL WHILE THE BALL IS TRAVELLING

APPLYING PRESSURE ON THE BALL





# Attacking Principles

PENETRATION

PENETRATION

SUPPORT

SUPPORT

CREATIVITY

PRINCIPLES OF ATTACK

WIDTH

WIDTH

MOBILITY

MOBILITY

IMPROVISATION/  
CREATIVITY





# Penetration

As soon as the ball is repossessed, the first thought should be, "Can I score?" If not, is there a forward player in an unmarked or advanced position where the question then is, "Can we play the ball to him or her?"

This is not "kick-and-hope." This is the quick counter-attack that so often catches teams off-guard. Even the goalkeeper, after making a save, or catching a cross, should look up field to see if a quick kick or throw could penetrate the opposition to produce a scoring opportunity.

The best and most free-flowing teams in the world always look forward first even though they won't necessarily play the ball forward.

How players are arranged in a team system of play will produce certain advantages and disadvantages to the principle of penetration, and we will discuss those later when we move back into systems.

## Support

To keep possession and to be able to move the ball down the field, the player with the ball (the 1st Attacker) needs support.

Forward support, back support, and side support, will allow the man-with-the ball options, and put doubts in the minds of the defending players.

The first "shape" of the tactical formation is now beginning to emerge – with triangles and diamonds emanating from the player with the ball in his/her immediate playing area. This is a very good reason to play 3 vs. 3 and 4 vs. 4 play for players of all ages as it helps to develop the triangular/diamond understanding necessary for team shape and for re-shaping.

The player with the ball is referred to as the "1st Attacker" as opposed to our "1st Defender." The player or players giving immediate support are called the "2nd Attacker or Attackers."

## Width

Stretching the defence is always in the minds of the attacking team. A defending team can be stretched vertically and laterally. The front players will try to push the defence back as far as they will go, but the other important way of stretching the defence is to use the width of the field.

The exploitation of the Width of the Field pulls defenders out of position and big holes appear in the back line between players.

Wide players on the weak side from the ball may not need to be fully wide. Whereas, generally speaking the wide player(s) on the side of the attacker with the ball will be fully wide – right out on the touchline(X2). In Northern England a coach may well advise a young player to “Get chalk on your boots, Lad!” Chalk being the sideline.

This way the wide player creates the space to receive the ball and to look to go forward. Or pulls a defender out to mark the wide attacker and therefore creates space inside for a player or the ball to move through.

## Mobility

Individual speed and the ability to interchange positions are so important in the modern game. As an attacker moves forward, sideways or diagonally, with or without the ball, the opposing team has to adjust and this can unbalance the defence.

Who goes with whom and how far should they go?

Whatever decisions are made there is the potential for uncertainty and confusion in the defence. Other considerations need to be addressed where among other things the offside rule will assume great importance. Also the system of defence – Zonal or a Sweeper/Man Marking system – will deal with the principle of Mobility in different ways.

The “Interchange” of positions requires good understanding from the attacking team in order to maintain the attacking shape, otherwise the team can be caught out on the counterattack if and when possession is lost.



## Improvisation/Creativity

This is the most exciting principle. Improvisation is not exclusively reserved for the attacking third, but this is where it is most effective. Twists, turns, back-heels, dribbles, volleys, overhead kicks, all have a place here with only limited risks. If the ball is given up in the Final Third, the opposition still has to penetrate through two-thirds of the field to even get a shot on goal.

When players use their own individual flair to create passing or shooting opportunities to themselves or for teammates. Clever dribbling or passing eliminates defenders and creates openings for attackers.

Trying dribbles and back-heels in the Defending Third of the field would not be too smart – unless the player was very accomplished and very aware, the same applies in the Middle Third where a little more creativity and improvisation should not be discouraged, particularly with the right players.

**Finishing** – Simply put, finishing is successfully scoring a goal on scoring opportunities. This means shooting when you should shoot, making sure your shots are on goal and not wide nor over the goal, getting the ball past the goalkeeper, etc.

# Defensive Principles

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENCE

DELAY

DELAY

DEPTH

DEPTH

RESTRAINT

BALANCE

BALANCE

CONCENTRATION

COMPACTNESS/  
CONCENTRATION

CONTROL AND  
RESTRAINT



## Delay

The defending team must do everything possible to prevent a quick counter-attack after losing the ball. This may be accomplished by one player going to the attacker with the ball and applying pressure and so preventing the forward ball.

However, unless the team cooperates, one player delaying will easily be by-passed by the ball being played away from the pressurizing player. As well, the defender nearest the ball may not be able to push in on the player with the ball if he is faced by two attackers – a classic 2 vs. 1 situation. In these circumstances it is normally advisable to keep both players – the player with the ball and the 2nd Attacker in front of the delaying defender.

The role of the defender nearest the ball is called the 1st Defender. When we discuss systems, we also need to decide the team philosophy with regard to delay. Do you pressure immediately? Or does the team fall back to “delay” collectively? *We'll discuss more about that in the defending principle of concentration.*



## *Depth (or Defensive Support)*

As the attacking team seeks to support their 1st Attacker, so does the defending team in its cat and mouse attitude by supporting their 1st Defender – the delaying player. We said earlier, if the delaying player is unsupported, he/she can be easily bypassed. The defensive support by the players nearest the challenging player tries to give close support. Their distance of support will depend on the situation and what part of the field they are supporting the player on the ball, but generally speaking, the defensive support is much tighter than the attacking support, as attackers are trying to create space and defenders are trying to restrict space.

Depending on what is happening in the game, and the situation in the defence, the 2nd Defenders would be angled behind the 1st Defender, (depending on the part of the field and how much advantage is being taken of the offside law).

## Concentration/Compactness

If attackers are trying to stretch the defence, it makes sense for defences to concentrate/compact themselves in the most vulnerable areas – the scoring zones. Concentration and the next defensive principle, Balance, work closely together, as do Delay and Defensive Support. If a defending team is in anyway unsure of itself, it should fall back to cover the goal, stay compact, and give away space in less dangerous parts of the field. The offside law, if skilfully applied by the defenders, assists in holding attackers out of the dangerous “scoring” zone (more about that later).

As you organize your defense, limit the time and space for the opponent by concentrating your defense in the general area of the ball. Defenders should also attempt to stay “goal side” in order to limit the other team’s ability to directly attack the goal. If a player is caught out on a transition from attack to defence, that player's immediate objective should be to recover as quickly as possible towards the goal in an attempt to get goal-side the ball. As a player recovers, he/she assesses just how far the recovery needs to be and looks for, and listens to, the advice of the rear-most defenders. "Pick him up!" "Come back!" Or "Hold there!"

## *Balance*

As your team concentrates their defense in the area of the ball, defenders not near the ball must position themselves to cover important spaces (normally central areas) in order to prevent attackers from making penetrating runs into these spaces.

If mobility is being used to try to unbalance teams then that principle of defensive “Balance” must be exercised to counter the attacking runs and maintain and retain the defensive shape. Now the picture is becoming more complex as more players are needed to give the team its balance.

In today’s game, one of the most important 3rd Defenders is often the goalkeeper playing the Sweeper Keeper role by policing the space behind the back defenders. Notice how “flat” the Back 4 is as they use of the offside rule to hold the attackers away from goal.

## *Discipline & Patience (Control and Restraint)*

If a defending team has observed all the previous four defending principles, it will find itself, for the moment, in good shape and ready to deal with most, if not all, contingencies.

Players often make poorly timed or off-balanced attempts to win the ball. You must play “under control” when challenging for the ball. In addition, you should refrain from tackling unless you are confident you will win the ball.



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