



RIVER CITY

FOOTBALL CLUB

Principles of Play

This document provides a clear, simple, and detailed explanation of the 10 Principles of Play used in football (soccer). It is designed as a practical reference for coaches working with players aged U10–U18. The principles are divided into Attacking (in possession) and Defensive (out of possession). Each principle includes a short explanation followed by key coaching points.

Attacking Principles (In Possession)

Penetration

Penetration is the primary attacking objective. It refers to the team's ability to move the ball forward to break defensive lines and get closer to the opponent's goal.

- ❖ Play forward whenever possible
- ❖ Use forward passes, dribbles, or runs in behind
- ❖ Look to break lines rather than circulate the ball unnecessarily
- ❖ The aim is to create goal-scoring opportunities

Support

Support refers to players providing the ball carrier with safe and effective passing options so the team can keep possession and progress play.

- ❖ Support should be at good angles and distances
- ❖ Players can support behind, beside, or ahead of the ball
- ❖ Movement after passing is key to maintaining support
- ❖ Good support prevents the ball carrier from becoming isolated

Width

Width is created by using the full width of the pitch to stretch the opposition and create space in central areas.

- ❖ Wide players stay wide when appropriate
- ❖ Stretching the defence opens space between and behind defenders
- ❖ Width helps create opportunities to switch play
- ❖ Good width makes the opposition defend larger spaces

Mobility

Mobility is the movement of players off the ball to create space, disrupt defenders, and open passing lanes.

- ❖ Includes rotations, overlaps, underlaps, and runs off the ball
- ❖ Movement can pull defenders out of position
- ❖ Players move to create space for teammates, not just themselves
- ❖ Mobility makes the attack less predictable

Improvisation / Creativity

Improvisation and creativity allow players to solve attacking problems in unpredictable ways, especially when structured play alone is not enough.

- ❖ Encourage confidence in 1v1 situations
- ❖ Players are allowed to try unexpected passes, dribbles, or combinations
- ❖ Creativity is most important in the attacking third
- ❖ Decision-making should still consider team balance

Defensive Principles (Out of Possession)

Delay

Delay is the action of the first defender slowing down the attacker with the ball to prevent immediate penetration.

- ❖ Slow the attacker rather than diving in
- ❖ Prevent forward passes, dribbles, or shots
- ❖ Show the attacker away from goal or into wide areas
- ❖ Buy time for teammates to recover and reorganise

Depth

Depth provides cover behind the player applying pressure and protects space behind the defensive line.

- ❖ Defenders position themselves goal-side of attackers
- ❖ Covering defenders support the pressing player
- ❖ Protect against runs in behind
- ❖ Ensure the defensive line is staggered, not flat

Concentration (Compaction)

Concentration, also known as compaction, means the team defends with small distances between players to deny space.

- ❖ Team stays compact vertically and horizontally
- ❖ Central areas are protected first
- ❖ The team shifts together toward the ball
- ❖ Compact defending makes penetration difficult

Balance

Balance ensures the team is protected away from the ball and can deal with switches of play.

- ❖ Weak side players stay connected to the team shape
- ❖ Not all players chase the ball
- ❖ The team remains organised if the ball is switched
- ❖ Good balance prevents overloads on the far side

Discipline / Patience

Discipline and patience allow the team to defend effectively without losing shape or structure.

- ❖ Players hold their positions and responsibilities
- ❖ Pressing happens on clear triggers, not individually
- ❖ Defending is done collectively as a team
- ❖ Patience prevents gaps appearing in the defensive shape