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# RIVER CITY

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## FOOTBALL CLUB

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### **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