



Direct vs. Indirect Style of Play

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Does your team have a style? Each game they play do they show a similar type of play? Have you noticed the style of opposing teams? To understand development of youth players it is important to be aware of some of the elements of styles of play. Although there are basically four components that make up style of play, in youth soccer the one component that should be understood clearly is that of direct and indirect playing style.

To understand this concept one should imagine a field of play with straight lines drawn between the two goals. The quicker a team plays along the lines the more direct their play. Conversely the slower a team plays along these lines, the more indirect their style. At the youth levels coaches should be able to clearly determine a team's direct or indirect style. It usually quickly becomes evident within the first 15 minutes of the opening whistle, once both teams have settled down.



Direct play at the youth level accompanies long, undirected kicks. Many times players just kick at the ball to put it into the opponent's defensive end. Shortly after a 30 yard "boot" comes the parental reward of cheers. Even though the kick went a long distance, your team must now win the ball back which takes great strategy in your opponents half since you will be numbers down most of the time.

Thus, direct play usually accompanies a higher risk of loss of possession. Since defender's in youth soccer may have difficulty with this high pressure on them all of the time, the success of scoring goals with this style can be great. The direct style not only produces goals but is easier for players to execute; they have limited responsibility. The goal for a defender is simplified by the fact that they only need to get the ball into the opponent's defensive third. The forwards need only to pressure the opponent's defenders or chase after loose or stray balls played in the other team's half.

The indirect style of play results in shorter and higher number of passes to penetrate towards the opponent's goal. This does not mean that there will be no long passes but does mean that most passes will have a tactical purpose! In contrast to direct play, usually possession of the ball will be paramount. The team will not want to just quickly give the ball away. Low risk passes and play will be emphasized. When a player utilizes the indirect style they must make conscious decisions and have the technical and tactical know-how to execute the next phase of play.



Currently, the teams within the club try to play direct soccer. Why? Simply, it is easier to comprehend for youngsters. "Get the ball forward and we will score more goals".

So what are the advantages for a young player to be placed in a team style of indirect play when direct soccer can and does produce goals and winning?

In the development of a youth player it is of the utmost importance that they acquire a sound base of technical abilities. As with all sports, the ability to perform technical movements is of little use if there is not proper tactical understanding of the game. Both aspects of the game are extremely important.

Indirect play forces players to use what skill and tactical knowledge they have to play a game. They must have the footwork, the ability to dribble, pass, shoot and control the ball in order to make the correct conscious decision for the next move. Players must have a purpose to their play. They must make constant tactical decisions. They must continually use their skills to execute these tactical decisions.



In youth teams, direct play requires few tactical decisions. Many times the ball will be kicked by the defenders, travel over the midfielders, to the forwards, thus the defenders and midfielders need only the technical ability to kick the ball in order to be successful. Players who have played years of the direct style will not be successful in playing indirect. They have not had the tactical fundamentals to make correct decisions. They have limited receiving, dribbling, and passing skills. Players who have been in a "direct team" will struggle when asked to play a short pass, indirect style of play. Conversely a player who has been educated thorough the indirect style of play will be able to very easily adapt to a direct style when needed. They should be even more successful in direct soccer as they have higher developed skills and tactical awareness and can make better decisions with resulting successful use of the appropriate technical performance.

While direct soccer can produce the short term success of winning at the youth levels, it under develops very important skills. As they grow older and other teams gain the necessary (technical and tactical) skills to handle the pressure of direct play, the more skillful team will have the greater chance for success. At age nine, a player needs to learn how to play and score goals not just win with blind intent. If a player learns how to play the game with skill and tactical awareness in its simplest form, winning will, in the long run, take care of itself.