

Hi Coach Todd,

Last month we talked about decision-making when dealing with distribution out of the back, and I wanted to elaborate on that even more...How do decisions differ depending on the area of the field you are looking to play?

So, what exactly is your role and demands while in possession? Below are some of the different decisions that you will be asked to make and think about while your team is in possession and you are building from the back (also see diagram below):

#### Support – in/around the 18-yard box

Looking to play the optimal ball where the player can receive it while maintaining possession. You must be able to think a few passes ahead here and recognize what options players will have once they receive the ball as well as how much immediate pressure they will be under (Risk vs Reward). All the while there needs to be constant movement to support each pass made in this area of the field.

#### Play Around – top of the 18-yard box

Looking to circulate the ball quickly to spread out the opposition to create an opportunity to play a ball that will penetrate pressure. The pace of the ball played is important, as it needs to get to your player quickly to reduce how soon they are under pressure. Also, the quality of the ball is vital, as it needs to be a ball they can control and settle quickly (Risk vs Reward). Constant movement and support are still important in this area of the field.

#### Play Through – middle 1/3 of the half

Looking to play penetrating passes between opposing players in order to break the initial press (Risk vs Reward). You still need to be moving and supporting the play, as you may be needed as a longer outlet to relieve pressure and then build again.

#### Play Into – near side of circle to midfield

Playing a penetrating ball over the opposition players directly into your teammate while looking to keep possession. The texture and pace of this ball is key. A lot of times this is a ball that changes the point of attack. Make sure once this ball is played that you are moving up the field to support the play.

#### Play Onto – midfield to top side of circle

Looking to directly hit a teammate in the air and increase the chances of them being able to win the aerial battle. Be aware of the player you are serving here and know their aerial abilities. The type of service and texture of this ball can help them know what you want them to do with the service. For example: a driven ball would mean to flick it on, while a clipped ball may mean they can knock it back to the player underneath them in support.

#### Play Beyond – into the attacking half

Trying to hit the space behind the opposition's back line to exploit space or break pressure. This is where reading the game is essential and being able to play what the opposition is giving you will help break pressure and keep them honest. Ideally, this ball should be kept wide enough that it will not roll on to the goalkeeper. Sometimes you will be looking to hit a forward or midfielder running behind, other times you will just be looking to clear the ball out of danger and give your team a chance to reorganize.

Have you been watching the Premier League games these past few weeks? If so, you will have noticed that even some of these keepers at the top of the game still make poor decisions on the ball. Oftentimes, it is trying to overplay out of the back when it is not on to do so (Risk vs Reward). Hence, resulting in turnovers in dangerous areas and even a few goals. So, start to think about all these things when your team is in possession and working to build out of the back. You must always weigh the risk versus the reward of each decision you have and choose the option that will lead to the best outcome while allowing your team to keep the ball and build up the field if it is on to do so.

Have fun! Challenge yourself! Own your journey!

– Nicole Barnhart (“Barnie”)

