

Positional Possession Games



Direct from
Xabi Alonso's
Training Sessions

Possession

“Possession football is not about keeping the ball for the sake of it. It's about patience, precision, and creating the right opportunities to break down the opposition.”

Xabi Alonso



10.1. Xabi Alonso Coaching Points for Opening Up Wide



Xabi Alonso Coaching Points (9.1)

- This diagram follows on from the practice on the previous page: **Build Up in 3-2 Shape and Play Through the Lines 8v8 (+4) Positional Possession Game**.
- Here we show what happened when **Xabi Alonso** paused his training session to explain some key points to his players.
- He describes the positional roles within the 3-2-5 build up shape, in which we have the 3-2-2 here with the 3 centre backs (**LCB, CB & RCB**), 2 defensive midfielders (**DM**), and 2 middle zone Jokers.
- Alonso stresses the importance of the **LCB** and **RCB** to open up in the corner of the area to maximise the width to provide support and create space to then play through pressure.
- This is also the focus of the practice on page 101: **Open Up and Spread Out to Maximise Space and Play Through Pressure 7v7 (+3) Positional Possession Game**.
- The aim is to draw in opponents to press, move the ball to the **DMs** behind the first line of pressure, then play to the middle zone Jokers to progress the play to the other side.

Source: Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen training session at Bayer 04 Leverkusen Training Ground - 2024

10.2. Xabi Alonso Coaching Points for Decision Making



Xabi Alonso Coaching Points (9.2)

- This diagram follows on from the positional possession game described on the previous 2 pages: **Build Up in 3-2 Shape and Play Through the Lines 8v8 (+4) Positional Possession Game.**
- Here we show what happened when **Xabi Alonso** paused his training session to explain some key points to his players.
- Alonso speaks to his players about their decision making when playing in their 3-2 shape, which forms part of Bayer Leverkusen's **3-2-5 build up shape shown on pages 60-62.**
- Alonso stresses the **importance of the LCB and RCB to provide support and receive in an open wide position** and try to attract an opponent to press.
- **If an opponent is drawn in to press, then the defender should play out.** If not, they can simply recycle possession of the ball (to reset).
- In addition, **Alonso stresses the importance of positional discipline.** This is not a normal possession game; it is a **positional possession game** with the focus on progressing the play in a structured shape.

Source: Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen training session at Bayer 04 Leverkusen Training Ground - 2024

10.3. Xabi Alonso Coaching Points for Quickly Breaking Lines



Xabi Alonso Coaching Points (9.3)

- This diagram follows on from the positional possession game described on the previous 3 pages: **Build Up in 3-2 Shape and Play Through the Lines 8v8 (+4) Positional Possession Game.**
- Here we illustrate the encouragement and coaching points **Xabi Alonso** shared with his players during the practice.
- The players were heavily encouraged to move the ball with a high speed of play and intensity, so that they could quickly break the lines and play to the other side, as shown in the diagram example.
- The key components are in place within this positional possession game; **playing out from the back within the 3-2 structure** from Bayer Leverkusen's 3-2-5 build up shape, **moving the ball to DMs behind the first line of pressure**, and moving the **ball to the AMs to progress the attack.**
- This way the players are **constantly practicing their positional roles within the team shape**, enabling them to progress the ball up the pitch quickly and decisively to play through their opponents.

Source: Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen training session at Bayer 04 Leverkusen Training Ground - 2024

Xabi Alonso's Coaching During Positional Possession Games



1. **Xabi Alonso actively leads Bayer Leverkusen's training**, especially during the positional possession games in this section.
2. Alonso often pauses the session to highlight key points, ensuring a **high attention to detail**.
3. The coaching staff and players maintain a strong focus, with **Alonso consistently praising and encouraging the players**, creating a positive atmosphere.
4. Prepared with his notes, **Alonso's training is highly structured**, with every detail preplanned for maximum effectiveness.
5. In positional possession practices, **players are assigned specific positions for targeted coaching, refining their understanding and execution of tactical roles**. He ensures each player's positioning and decision making align with the team's tactical plan.

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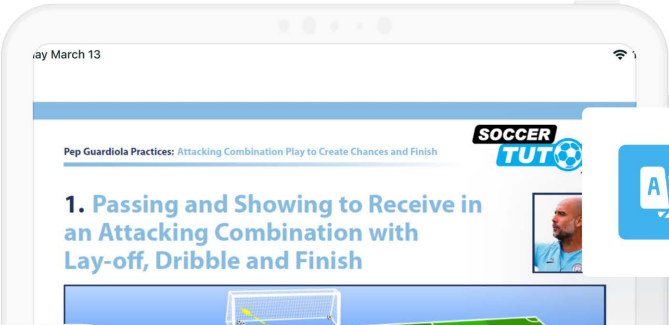
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Source: Pep Guardiola's Manchester City training session at Etihad Campus Training Ground, Manchester - 12th July 2017

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6. Player D plays a lay-off pass for E to move forward onto.

7. Player E receives and dribbles past the mannequin.

8. Player E shoots at goal.

9. The players rotate positions: (A -> B -> C -> D -> E -> A).

Player D sprints around the 2 red cones to take up Position E.

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Guardiola's Manchester City training session at Etihad Campus Training Ground, Manchester - 12th July 2017

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