



Field Awareness and Game Intelligence

Introduction

Passing, shooting, controlling and running with the ball are technical skills can be learned relatively easily with work on motor skills and physical development. Developing a players' game intelligence is a skill which can be developed which will merge with these physical and technical skills to take your game to the next level and allow yourself to be one step ahead of the competition.

A game intelligent player is able to quickly work out the potential playing opportunities and also assesses the danger. Understanding these situations and translating them into actions is all a product of game intelligence.

"You will never know how much a player understands until you ask them."

How Does Game intelligence and field awareness give players and teams an advantage?

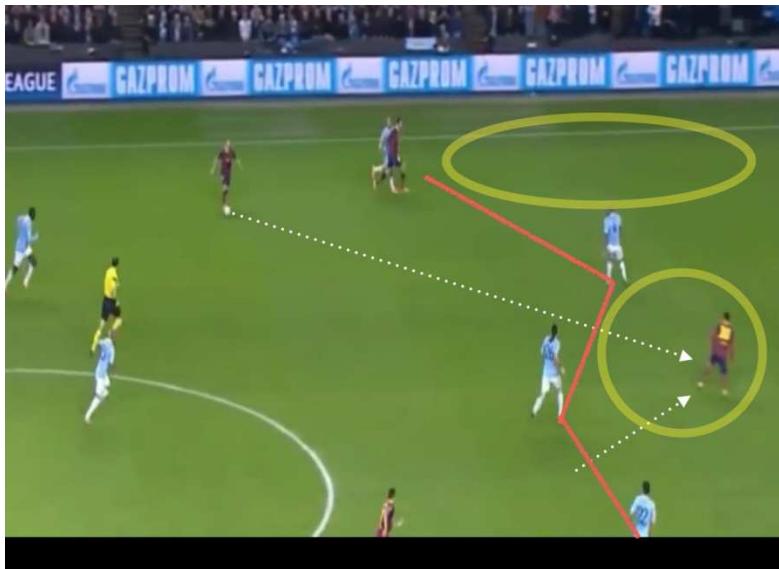
Players who are able to assess game situations quicker than opponents can play and think faster. This gives them more time to make better decisions, finding these game situations fast and picking the best option quickly allows you to remain a step ahead of your opponent and gain the upper hand.

Breaking down game intelligence into simple stages, questions for players.

1. Where is the ball? Where is it coming from? How could it be passed to me?
2. How is my body positioned? What can I see around me? Check your shoulders.
3. Where are my team mates?
4. Where is the opponent?
5. Is there space around me?
6. Decide what to do with the ball before the ball arrives, should I pass it away first time? Can I turn and run with it? How much time to I have to control it?
7. Where should my first touch take me? Where is the space/danger?
8. Decide your best option based on your field location and the objective of your team. Do you need to keep the ball? Do you need to attack quickly?

All this must be processed in the players mind BEFORE they get the ball.

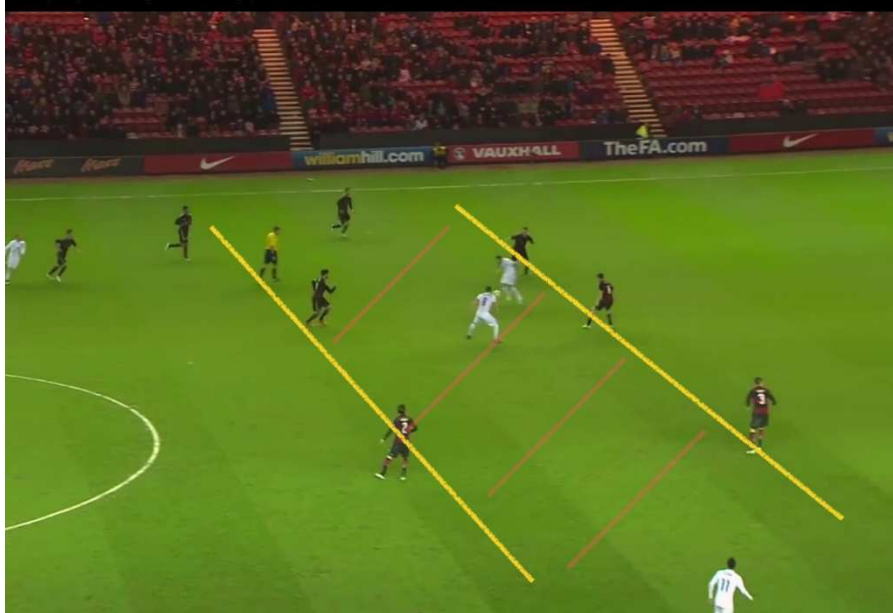
Due to the disjointed back line players are able to move to exploit pockets of space created in behind players. This particular attack ended up with a red card and penalty scored because the defender was unable to recover the ground successfully.



Play between the lines- Balls played long and direct with no real target play directly into the hands of an organised bank of 4 defenders and 4 midfielders, equally square passes with limited forward movement can be easy to marshal. I often catch Strikers playing on the line of the defenders, riding the offside line and giving the defenders something to think about, this is effective providing your level of movement as a striker is clever; playing off the blind shoulder of the defender, standing between defenders to throw doubt over who should mark you, making quick runs regardless of whether you will receive the ball to keep the defenders on their toes. It is also important that the supplies of passes into the striker are of good quality to make this method effective; through balls will be more effective than long passes into feet for example. We should take into consideration that when you play a through pass into a striker, you have committed that player to going it alone, they are now potentially through on goal with limited supporting options meaning they are often forced to take on the final defender to make space for the shot. If the striker can take the shot on goal quickly this method can be very effective, but what is a plan B?

We need to consider what happens to a flat back 4 when a striker drops short to receive a pass, they would drop between the lines of defenders and midfielders.

Players here are creating space between the lines of an organized defense and midfield line to allow themselves time on the ball to build an attack and allow players to join in support



Without a covering midfielder the receiving striker would be closed down by a defender who would have to close the ball down, breaking the line of defenders. That break in the line creates a disjointed line which, in turn, creates a pocket of space in behind the defender which can be exploited effectively by quick and clever play and off the ball runs.

The defender must step up to close the space in front of the attacker in possession to stop the shot, the space in behind is quickly taken by the forward thinking attacker and a simple pass is played in to create a shot on goal



The defender steps up to close the space in front of the attacker in possession to stop the shot, the space in behind can now be taken by the forward thinking attacker and a simple pass can be played in behind into the pocket of space to create a shot on goal.



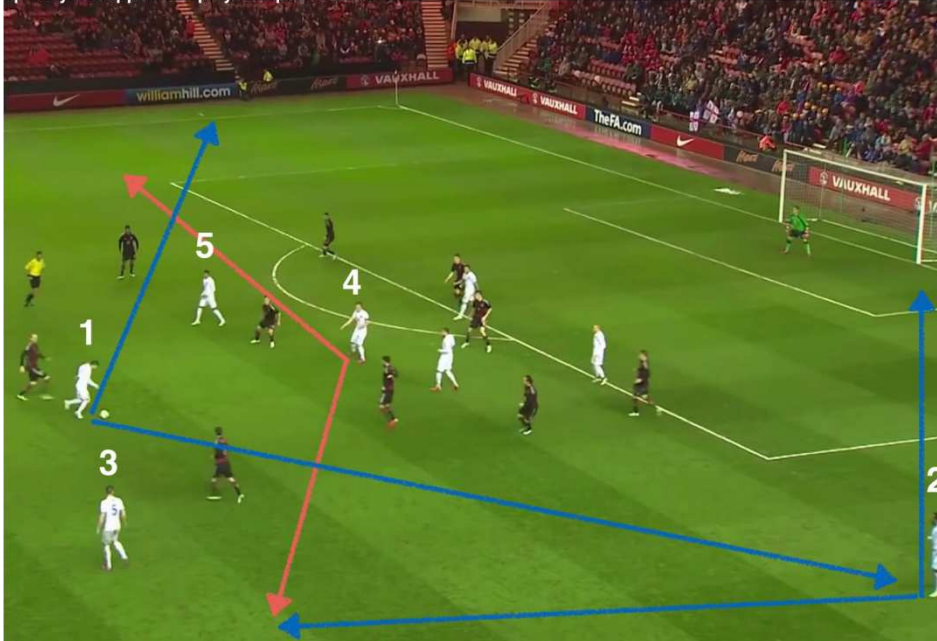
Pass with a purpose:

"I loathe all that passing for the sake of it, all that. It's so much rubbish and has no purpose. You have to pass the ball with a clear intention, with the aim of making it into the opposition's goal. It's not about passing for the sake of it." **Pep Guardiola**

Moving the ball around the field is important for creating the right opportunity and being patient in attack while waiting for opportunities and gaps in the opponents defence, however possession statistics don't always mean you are in control of the game, a well organised defensive unit will allow you to keep the ball and nullify your use of the possession unless you pass with purpose.

Passing with purpose effectively means the team works as a unit to be positive when possible to move the opponents around the field, the more you move the opponents the better chance you have of exploiting gaps and isolating players in a numbers up scenario, both of these give you a better chance of gaining the upper hand and creating more chances on goal.

Player 1 has a full view of the play ahead, of the two available passing options, player 4 is surrounded by players and will not have a lot of time on the ball, they also have a negative view of the field and will be forced to play back in most circumstances. Player two has created width and space which allows them time and a good view of the field for a positive pass. If player 1 chooses the pass to player 4, players 5 and 3 must move quickly to support the player in possession.



Play the way you're facing unless it's safe to turn. Retaining possession is vital when building attacks. Often we receive the ball and immediately want to advance towards the goal, that's the objective right? Well, yes and no. If the option is available to turn and face the goal you are attacking the do so. You can then see the field and advance into space looking for positive passes, however the option to turn and advance isn't always available, and it's common to see youth players receiving the ball, blindsided to whatever is behind them and immediately turn into an advancing defender which risks losing possession. Remember if you are receiving a pass with your back to the opponents goal, several of your team mates will have a better view of the field than you, remember to look for simple options to retain possession, your team mate may be able to see the next, more attacking pass which will allow you to move into a better position.

The receiving player's open body position allows him to see in field but not towards goal, if he plays simply the way he is facing to the player in his line of sight he passes to a player who is able to see a more advanced view of the field.

