

Soccer Playing Styles

British

The no-nonsense British style incorporates a lot of traditional values that have been present in England since the emergence of football. Attacks unfold quickly and with few touches. This fast-paced mentality often leads to fierce fighting over 50/50 balls. The players are quick, physical and prefer to send direct passes that move the game forward. Passes are direct, often sent over the defense and crosses are served from any situation.

Let's look at a concrete example of direct football from the 2010 UEFA Champions League match between Manchester United versus AC Milan:

Rooney heads the cross into the back of the net.

The Premier League with its direct style of play is currently the most popular football competition in the world. More recently, the country has been trying to adopt a more continental approach and the FA has even appointed a foreign manager, Sven-Goran Eriksson.

Italian

The players are renowned for being technical, cunning and possess a variety of skills. Consequently, the pace of the game changes often during buildup. Attackers make runs at indirect angles which is unpredictable and difficult to contain. Defenders prefer to slow down the tempo by shielding and playing the ball back. Italian teams are very cautious about the number of players they are committing forward. Most teams like to saturate their own half and shut down their opposition. Italian clubs like Milan, Juventus, Roma and Inter have been very successful in European competition.

Latin

The Latin game is very distinctive because of its possession-oriented character. Attacks develop through possession. The ball moves spontaneously with a lot of individual-based plays. The players are creative with the ball and many of them are talented dribblers. Latin teams such as Spain, Portugal, Brazil and Argentina are typical examples. Brazil takes this style to the extreme through improvisational and free-flowing movement. Spanish clubs have been very dominant in Europe while Brazil's national squad has dominated in the World Cup.

Northern

The game is played in a very direct way with forceful, although predictable attacks. In defense, a definite shape is always preserved. The players are well organized, yet often aggressive and fast. Players have very specific roles within their team and rarely improvise. Northern teams, such as Germany or Sweden, either keep possession or attack by hammering forward. There is no in-between!

Germany is a powerful side that has been representing the Northern style for years. Although it may not always look attractive, this style of football can be quite effective.

Continental

The continental style is all about collectivism and sharing the ball without reservation. Attacks develop with creativity, yet there is a sense of composure and team coordination. Positioning is not very strict, so there is plenty of movement without the ball in order to accommodate.

Here is an example from the 1974 World Cup match between Holland and Brazil. The example demonstrates how the players can interchange positions or roles in the course of an attack:

Kw who typically plays as a left defender, crosses the ball for a volley finish by Cruyff.

Holland's "total football" has revolutionized the game and its collectivist mentality remains the essence of the continental style. Furthermore, the style has been successfully adopted by many other European countries.

Central American

Central American players are crafty and resourceful. Typically, the ball is distributed using short passes. Attacks often advance through dribbling. Players like to carry the ball and rarely make quick runs. Overall, the tempo is slow during buildup except for the occasional and unexpected long pass forward.

Among the Central American nations, Mexico is currently the most noteworthy representative of this style of football.

African

One-on-one skills are praised in African football, so the game is played with both flair and pace. Stereotypes of the past claim that African teams are too finicky and struggle when it comes to finishing. However, those claims have recently subsided considering the presence in the international stage of players like Drogba, Eto'o and Okocha.