

Defending South, Away-match Style

There is a word in Portugal, “**Retranca**”, that means a defensive style of play. It’s usually used by coaches from the Southern of Portugal.

“Retranca” means locked and also defensive. Simply put, it is positioning most of one’s players (or all of them) behind the midfield line, or as Portuguese like to say, ALUGANDO MEIO-CAMPO (renting half a pitch).

The logic behind this way of positioning a team is that, when one has most of the players on one half of the pitch there’s very little space available (easier for the defense to close up space) and also the game’s pace tends to slow a lot.

Being too defensive might make one imagine that it invites the other team to go on the offensive, that it is a coward coach style, meant to avoid a humiliating defeat. Yet most Portuguese teams and teams from the South of Portugal use this style. And being defensive is not all there is to it.

The basic positioning is to have (at least) two lines of 4 players blocking the other teams movements. The two remaining players most of the time also helps marking. The main point here is to frustrate the other team’s offensive efforts, to make them nervous and make them miss passes or even argue among themselves.

Once they start to make mistakes it is time to exploit them. The opposition will try harder to attack, and this will make their defense weaker. One or two fast players running on the flanks will do much damage.

If the team wants to maintain most of its defensive shape, once a fast players gets the ball , he or she must try to protect it (hold it) or dribble past the opposition , practically asking for a foul. Once a foul is awarded, then it is time for the set pieces. Lethal set-pieces. The Portuguese like to cross the ball from the flank to the near post area for one of their forwards to head the ball backwards for another forward on the second post area or coming through the middle to finish. Or they might cross to the player at the far post for him to head the ball for someone coming through the middle or at the near post area.

That’s the biggest secrets – having a few killer moves (set-pieces or crossings from the flank, most of the times).

Once the opposition shows signs of fatigue, then it is time to put one or two fast players in to exploit the available space.

So it is an emotional battle as well as a battle for space. A battle of nerves. “Show them they can’t beat you. Then sting and see how they react. If they get confused, kill them without mercy” (“kill” of course meaning scoring the winner goal or goals)..

Many Portuguese club teams full of talented players have fallen to “less talented” sides using this kind of style. It’s especially useful during a second-leg, after having won the first leg home. The opposition will have to go on the attack, and, once they fail to be aggressive, its fans will start to complain – complicating matters even more for them.

How to beat this kind of style? By shooting from outside the box. By being patient and trying not to miss many passes. Talent can break this kind of defense. Unpredictable moves – there’s no amount of training that can stop magic. By effectively defending the mid-field line and not allowing

(or allowing very few) counter-attacks. Once the offensive team scores, then the defensive side will have to go on the offensive. The mood changes. The circumstances change.

There's a Portuguese name this kind of thing – a team that effectively exerts offensive pressure over a defensively shaped team – **Abafa**. It means choke them.

Retranca versus **Abafa**. Many matches can be described this way.

The main training concepts are:

- denial of space, more players distributed in less space
- defenders close to each other – easier to provide cover and passing
- three defenders in forming a triangular shape that's about to squeeze around the guy with the ball or about to receive the pass
- defenders closer to each other makes it easier to intercept the ball before it gets to the receiver
- having fast forwards to implement counter-attacking moves (to relieve pressure from the defense and also the exploit the opposition's defensive positioning).

Enjoy and hope you can implement this work with your team