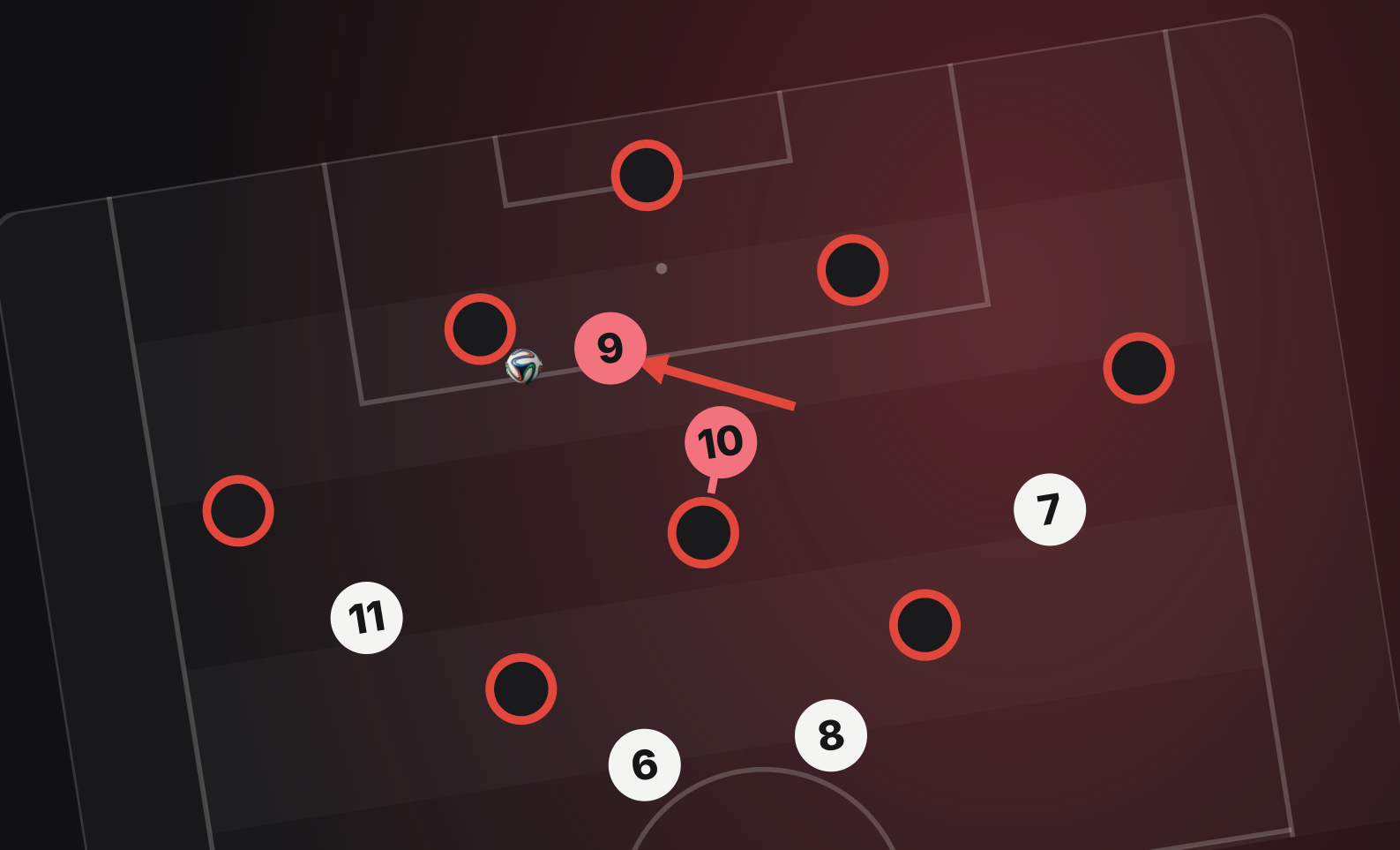




The Pressing Playbook

When to jump, where to trap and how to win it back:
the high press, the counter-press and the block.



The Pressing Playbook

When to jump, where to trap and how to win it back: the high press, the counter-press and the block.

By the Total Football Studio coaching team



Total Football Studio

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The Pressing Playbook

When to jump, where to trap and how to win it back: the high press, the counter-press and the block.

The Playbook Series, No. 04

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

A field guide to pressing, written for the people who coach it.

Every team says it wants to press. Few agree on what that means: when to go, who goes first, where the ball should end up, and what happens if the press is beaten. This book gives your staff one answer to each of those questions, drawn to scale and tied to a session.

Who it is for

Head coaches, assistants, analysts and academy staff. It assumes you know the game and want a shared language for the moments without the ball: the press, the counter-press and the block.

How every chapter works

Problem, principle, picture, session, cost. Every idea is drawn on a real-scale pitch, every pattern links to a session in [chapter 12](#), and every choice ends with what it costs you when it goes wrong.

About the numbers

Every figure comes from a named public source: Opta via The Analyst and the Premier League, FIFA's own tournament analysis, and peer-reviewed studies of the Bundesliga. The list is at the back. Distances on the boards are real metres on a 105 × 68 m pitch, measured by our board check, not estimated.

THREE WAYS TO USE IT**1 · Read it front to back**

The six steps build on each other. Read before Shape, Shape before Jump.

2 · Prepare for Saturday

Find how your opponent builds up in the matrix ([chapter 10](#)). It tells you who presses whom and where to set the trap.

3 · Plan the week

Use the session finder in [chapter 12](#). Every session trains one step and names the problem it solves.

THUMB TABS

The coloured tabs on the right edge of every page match the six steps. Flip to a colour to find a step.



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BEFORE YOU START

Reading the boards

Every board is drawn to scale on a 105 × 68 m pitch. We always attack up the page, so in this book the opponent builds up from the top, towards us, and our pressing runs go up the page. Opponents are the white chips with a red ring.

9

Our player and role number



Opponent: the team on the ball



The spare or free player



Pass (theirs or ours)



Long or lofted ball



Run without the ball



Cover shadow: the lane a presser blocks



Trap or danger zone

10

The key players in the move



Joker / neutral (sessions)



Where a player started



A pass the press has taken away



Pressing run



The block shifts or steps up



Man-to-man: a marker and his man



Cones and mini-goals (sessions)

Role numbers

Our numbers stay the same in every chapter: **1** keeper, **2** right-back, **3** left-back, **4** left centre-back, **5** right centre-back, **6** and **8** the central midfielders, **10** the second forward or attacking midfielder, **11** the left-sided and **7** the right-sided wide player, **9** the striker. Most boards press from a 4-4-2, the shape almost every 4-2-3-1 and 4-4-2 team presses in.

Words we use

Trigger: the moment the whole team jumps. **Block:** our shape without the ball, and how high it stands. **Trap:** the place we steer the ball to win it. **Counter-press:** pressing straight after we lose the ball. **Rest defence:** who stays behind the ball. Full glossary at the back.



Drawn in Total Football Studio

Every board in this book was built in our tactics board, at real scale. Open it and draw your own press the same way, phase by phase.

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INTRODUCTION

Every press is a bet.

When eleven players step up together they bet that the ball will be won before it is played past them. Win the bet and the chance starts within 40 metres of goal. Lose it and the space behind them is empty. This book is about setting the odds.

Pressing has never been more common. At the 2025 Club World Cup, teams spent 5% more of their time in a high press than at the 2022 World Cup, and the share of goal kicks pressed by two or more opponents almost doubled, from 23% to 40%.⁷ In the Premier League, 2023/24 produced 2.8 shot-ending high turnovers per game, the highest rate of the previous ten seasons.³

But pressing is not just running. Teams that press well run at the same moment, in the same direction, to a place they chose before the game. Teams that press badly run just as hard and arrive one at a time. The difference is organisation, and organisation can be coached.

This book is built on six steps. We call it the spine. Every chapter answers one of them, every pattern belongs to one of them, and every session trains one of them.

Read the trigger. Keep the block short. Jump on a curve. Steer it into the trap. Hunt it when you lose it. Cover the space behind.

THE WHOLE BOOK IN ONE LINE

40%

Goal kicks pressed by two or more players
at the 2025 Club World Cup, up from 23% at the 2022 World Cup.

FIFA TRAINING CENTRE

THE SPINE: SIX STEPS, IN ORDER

STEP 1

Read

Know the triggers, so the whole team jumps at the same moment.

STEP 2

Shape

Choose the height of the block and keep it short and narrow.

STEP 3

Jump

Press the first line on a curve, so every run cuts a pass.

STEP 4

Trap

Steer the ball to the place where we have chosen to win it.

STEP 5

Hunt

Win it back in the first seconds after we lose it.

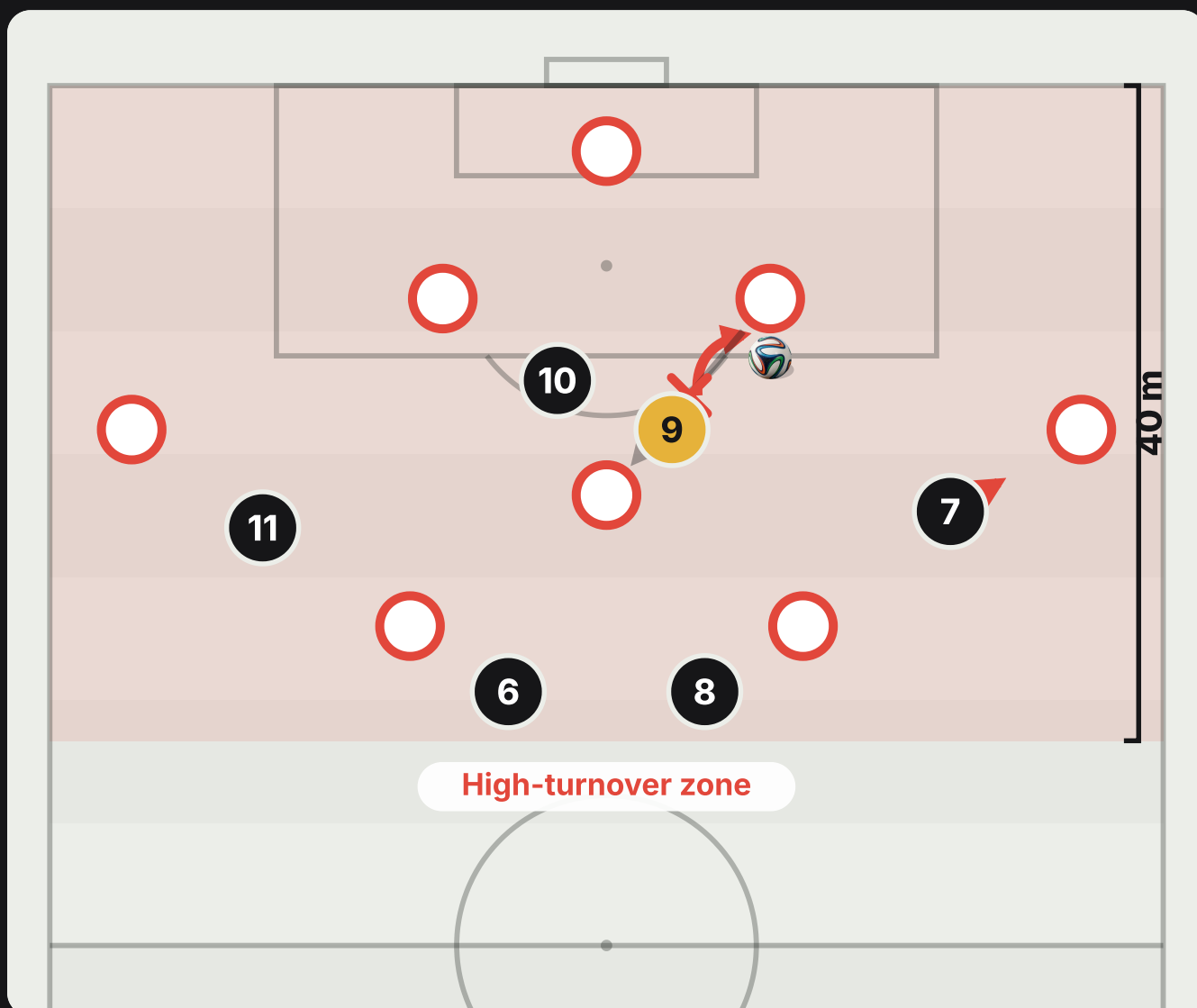
STEP 6

Cover

Protect the space behind the press, and know when to stop.

Why press

A ball won high is a chance that does not need to be built. This chapter shows what those chances are worth, who creates them, and how to measure your own press without a data department.



A high turnover: the ball won in open play within 40 m of the opponent's goal.

IN THIS CHAPTER

01 What winning it high is worth

02 Volume is not the goal

03 Measuring your own press

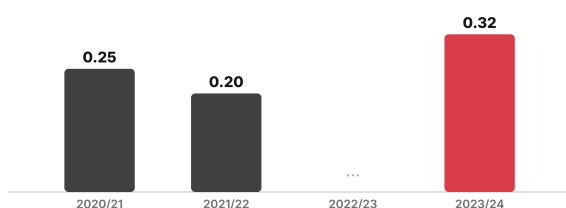
THE DATA

What winning it high is worth

Opta calls it a high turnover: a possession that starts in open play within 40 m of the opponent's goal.¹ Every number on this page is about that zone.

Errors leading to an opposition goal

PREMIER LEAGUE, PER GAME



In 2023/24, the season with the most shot-ending high turnovers in ten years, errors that led to goals rose to 0.32 per game. 2022/23 is not given in the source.³

2.8

Shot-ending high turnovers per game in the 2023/24 Premier League, the highest rate of the previous ten seasons.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

0.171_{xG}

Average chance after a final-third turnover at the 2025 Club World Cup, against 0.139 for all attempts.

FIFA TRAINING CENTRE

Better chances, not better finishing

FIFA's analysts found that attempts in the same possession as a final-third turnover were worth more, but were not finished any better: 11.6% of them went in, against 11.3% of all attempts.⁷ The press does not make your strikers sharper. It gives them shots closer to goal, against a defence that is not set. That is the whole case for it.

Everyone is pressing more

Between the 2022 World Cup and the 2025 Club World Cup the time teams spent in a high press rose by 5%. Uncontested restarts fell from 48% to 31%, and the share of goal kicks pressed by two or more players rose from 23% to 40%.⁷ If you play out from the back, you will be pressed. If you do not press, you are giving the opponent something most teams no longer give.

Selecting the moment to press is key because it is hard to press for the full 90 minutes.

FIFA TRAINING CENTRE, ON THE HIGH PRESS²⁰

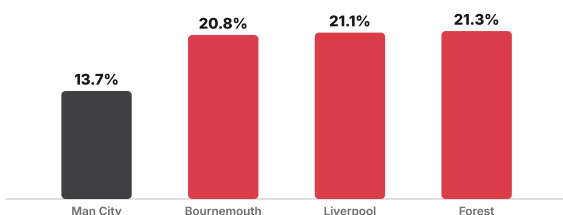
THE DATA

Volume is not the goal

In 2024/25 the Premier League teams that won the ball high most often were not the teams that did most with it.¹

High turnovers that ended in a shot

PREMIER LEAGUE
2024/25, MID-APRIL



Arsenal (285 high turnovers) and Tottenham (287) were in the bottom half for shots from them; the source gives no exact share.¹

TEAM	HIGH TURNOVERS	ENDED IN A SHOT
Man City	300	13.7%
Bournemouth	298	20.8%
Tottenham	287	bottom half
Arsenal	285	bottom half

City won the ball high two more times than Bournemouth. Bournemouth had 21 more shots from those wins.¹

9.9

Bournemouth's PPDA over the 2024/25 season, the lowest in the Premier League.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

68

Shot-ending high turnovers for Bournemouth in 2024/25, the most in the league.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

300

High turnovers for Man City by mid-April 2024/25, the most in the league.

THE ANALYST · OPTA

Where the difference comes from

A ball won high is only worth something if the players near it are ready to attack. Almost the same number of regains produced 41 shots for City and 62 for Bournemouth. What decides it is where the ball is won, which way the winner is facing, and who is already moving forward. Chapter 6 shows how to set the trap so the regain and the attack are one move.

What to count

Count your regains, but count what follows them too. A high turnover that ends in a back-pass is a defensive success and an attacking failure. The best pressing teams plan the first pass after the regain as carefully as the press itself.

THE POINT

Press to score, not only to defend. Every trap in this book ends with where the ball goes next.

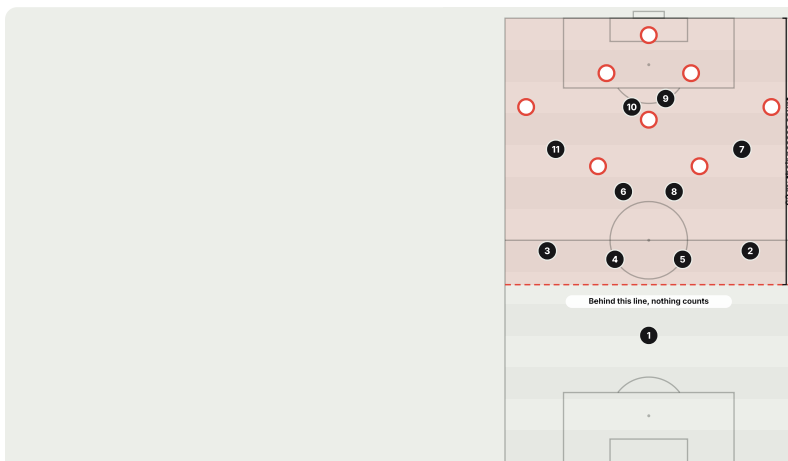
MEASURING

Measuring your own press

PPDA is the most common number for how hard a team presses. It is simple enough to count yourself.^{4,5}

The PPDA zone

60% OF THE PITCH



Their passes and our defensive actions only count in the 60% of the pitch nearest their goal: their half and a fifth of ours.

How it works

Passes per defensive action. Count the opponent's passes in the zone and divide by our tackles, interceptions, challenges and fouls in the same zone. A low number means they made few passes before we acted.⁴ Colin Trainor introduced it in 2014.⁵ It measures how soon you act, not whether you win the ball: a team that fouls a lot can have a low PPDA and a poor press.

TEAM	SEASON	PPDA
Man City	2017/18	8.3
Liverpool	2021/22	8.62
Leeds	2020/21	9.3
Bournemouth	2024/25	9.9
Wolves	2021/22	14.78
Norwich	2021/22	16.93

Sources: Premier League, The Analyst.^{2,4,6}

Count it yourself: four numbers per game

1 · High regains

Balls won in open play in their last 40 m. Opta's high turnover, counted from video.

2 · Five-second regains

Balls won back within five seconds of losing them. Chapter 8 explains why five.

3 · Shots in ten

Shots within ten seconds of a regain: Rangnick's clock at Hoffenheim.¹⁴

4 · Beaten by one pass

Times one pass took the ball past our first two lines. This is the cost column.



SESSION 1 · READ

Trigger rondo

The first habit of every press: two players who see the same trigger and jump on it together.

5 V 2

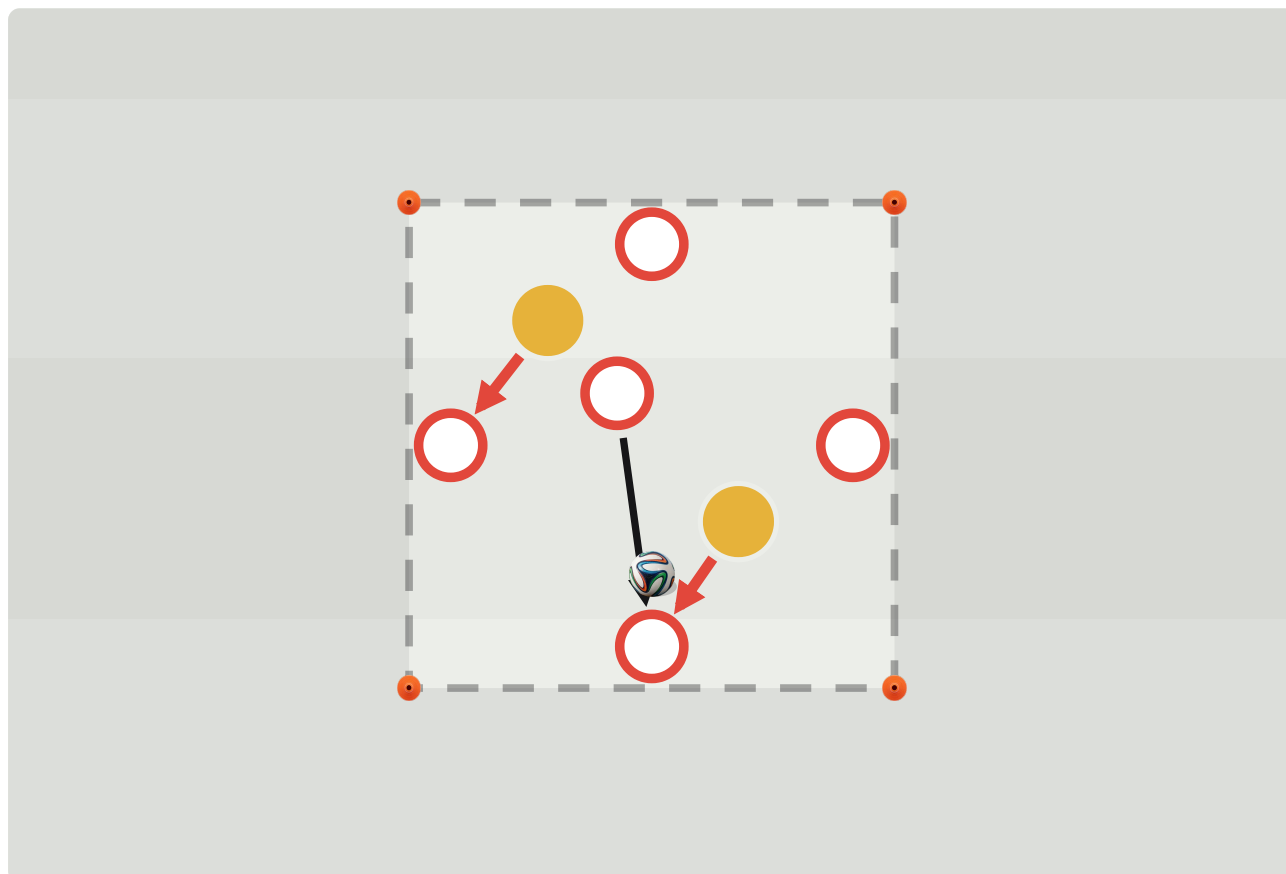
14 × 14 M

6 × 2 MIN

WARM-UP

Setup

14 × 14 M



Four on the sides, one inside, two pressers. On a back pass to the side, both pressers jump.

HOW IT RUNS

- 1 Five keep the ball with two touches; two press.
- 2 The pressers may only sprint after a trigger: a back pass, a bad touch or a bouncing ball.
- 3 A presser who wins it swaps with the player who lost it.

RULES

- Win the ball within three seconds of a trigger: 2 points.
- A presser who sprints without a trigger gives the five a point.
- Ten passes in a row: 1 point to the five.

COACHING POINTS

- 1 The nearer presser shouts "Now!" and goes; the other goes on the word.
- 2 First presser on the ball, second on the nearest support.
- 3 Arrive on a curve, not straight.

PROGRESS

One touch for the five on the outside.

REGRESS

A 16 × 16 m square, or three touches.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

The pressers go at the same moment, every time, and say the word before they run.

"Now!"

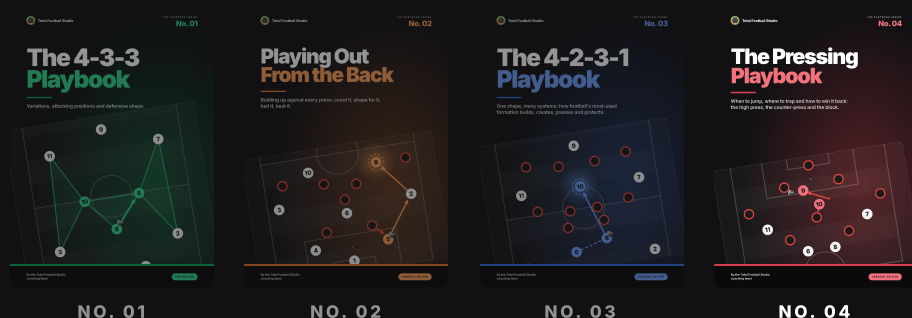


Every press is a bet. This book shows you how to set the odds.

Pressing is not just running. It is eleven players who see the same trigger, jump at the same moment and steer the ball to the place they chose before the game. This playbook gives your staff one language for every moment without the ball, with the cost of every choice and a session for every idea.

INSIDE

- 01 The triggers: when to jump, and when to wait
- 02 The block: three heights and the distances that hold them
- 03 The curved run and the press against every back line
- 04 Four traps: the touchline, the centre, the keeper and the long ball
- 05 Zonal, man-to-man and the hybrid press
- 06 The counter-press, rest defence and the delay
- 07 An opponent matrix for six build-ups
- 08 20 sessions, from rondo to 11 v 11



Four books, one way of drawing the game. The Playbook Series from Total Football Studio.