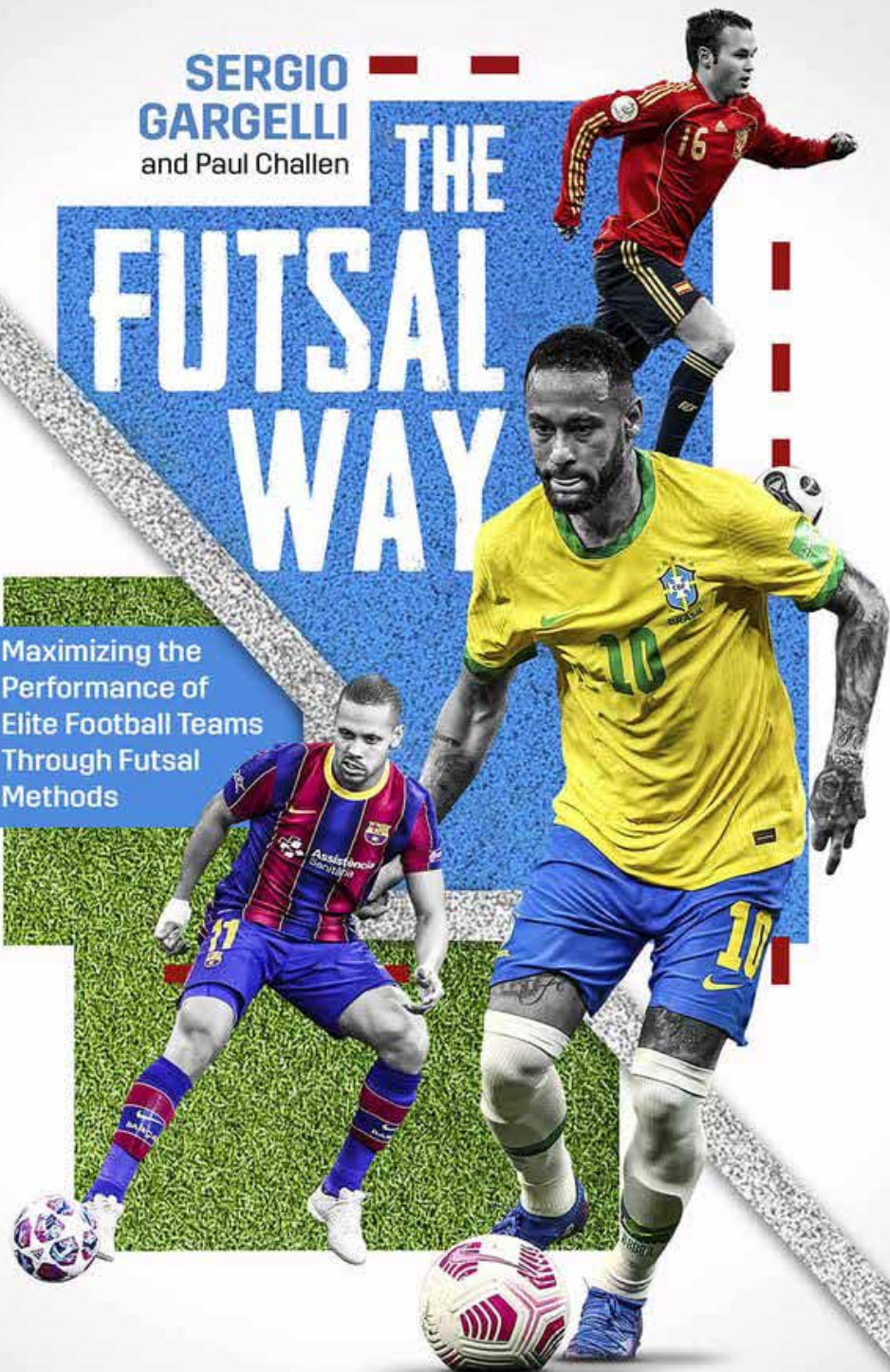


**SERGIO  
GARGELLI**  
and Paul Challen

# THE FUTSAL WAY

Maximizing the  
Performance of  
Elite Football Teams  
Through Futsal  
Methods



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## 6

# **Two-player combinations in the finishing phase**

I LIKE to call the last third of the football pitch the 'red zone'.

This is where the main objective of an attacking team is to create chances - and finish those chances by scoring goals.

The attacking team can enter the red zone via a rapid counter-attack. But if the approach is more gradual, the defence in this part of the field is usually well organised, and often the spaces in which to attack are closed. So how does an attacking team open up a defence?

Futsal can support football very well in this stage of the game, because it offers a wide range of attacking combinations between two and three players that can lead to scoring chances. In this chapter we will focus on two-player combinations.

In futsal the red zone is even smaller, and the attacking space is reduced even further. This means that creativity takes on even more importance, and the communication required to co-ordinate movements between two players who understand each other ('speaking the same language'), and organising themselves in timing and in occupying space, can all come together to produce a very dangerous and effective weapon for the attacking team.

Two-player combinations are important in football as well. Although the 11-a-side game affords more space and

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time on the ball, it is easy to see in any top-level match that dynamic movement, precise communication and rapid exchanges by two players are vital for attacking success. However, among coaches, it is clear that there is not the same detailed development of the concept of two-player attacking patterns in football, and equally clear that they do not pay the same attention to this as do their counterparts in futsal.

There are several fundamental tactical means that a team can use to create goalscoring chances, and to finish those chances more effectively.

The one on one is a fundamental tactical skill in futsal, and as we have seen in Chapter 5, in modern football all players must be good in these situations. The futsal methodology of training can help football players to improve their one on one skills, and as we have seen, spatial awareness during dribbling is crucial, as one on one attacking can only be done effectively if a player can see what is happening all around them, increasing the chance that the dribbler can play a killing pass, or execute a shot.

The parallel, meanwhile, is a movement that Pep Guardiola has defined as 'impossible to defend' for any form of defence.

The parallel in futsal is a co-ordinated movement between two players. In it, a player without the ball after making a feint goes to attack open space, and receives a pass in parallel with the sideline.

An example of perfect movement can be seen in the 2019-20 Premier League match between Manchester City and Newcastle, by City's David Silva, at minute 21:35 (Video 17).

After Silva approaches the ball slowly to simulate a one-two movement with the team-mate in possession of the ball, he suddenly changes both his direction and speed, attacking the open space to receive a parallel pass - a movement that almost instantly eliminates the defence and leads to a goal by Gabriel Jesus.

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**Images 46 and 47**

There are many details we can observe with regard to the movement of parallels. These include the slow approach towards the ball by the player without the ball; the sudden change of speed and direction of the player without the ball

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to attack the space; the continuous visual contact between passer and receiver; the movement of the player without ball, who can attack space in front of or behind the direct opponent; the passer must always continue movement after the pass, to give support to the continuation of play.

For example, many times in the great Barcelona team of Messi, Iniesta and Dani Alves it was possible to see this movement executed several times; it is also very common with Guardiola's Manchester City and Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool.

This chart shows the various aims of the parallel attack:

Target	Attack a free space in finishing area behind offside line
Zone of Actuation	Near penalty area
	Last 20/30 metres
	In first third of court
Tactical Intention	Finishing
	Exploit a free space cutting out two defenders
	Avoid offside trap
	To escape from pressing

The parallel, together with the 'diagonal' movement (see below), is extremely important to master - both in counter-attacking situations, and as a movement used to unlock an organised closed defence. In both cases, these are movements that can be game-changers.

The diagonal is a movement that can be seen as the opposite to the parallel. In this movement, after a feint with change speed and direction, the player without the ball moves to open space, receiving a pass on a diagonal angle to the sideline. During the change of speed and direction, the attacker manages to separate themselves from the defender, opening up a passing line and receiving the ball. The diagonal

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is another movement that is a vital part of the attack in the futsal system, in co-ordination between two players.



**Image 48**

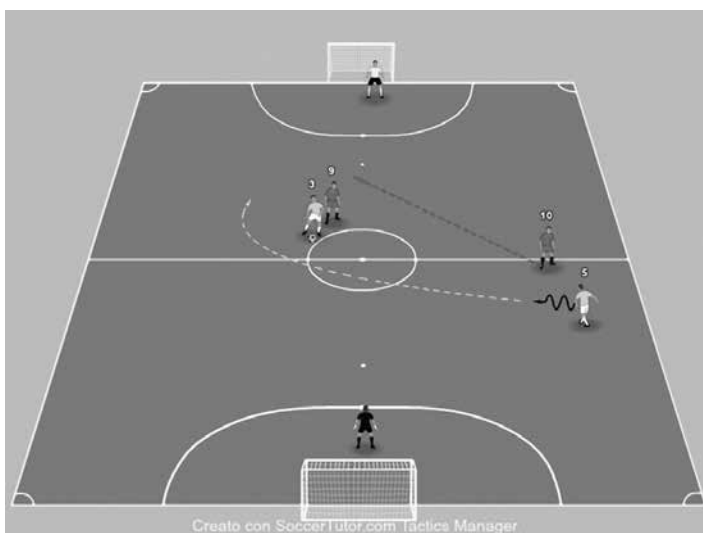
The same movement of **Image 48** can also be seen in football, from the El Clásico match between Barcelona and Real Madrid in the 2009/10 season. Pedro executes a perfect diagonal movement to separate from his opponent, to score the second goal for Barça. (Video 18 at 2:25.)

As with the parallel, there are some important details to consider in the execution of the diagonal move:

- The player without the ball must start with a vertical run, and then change direction and speed to move further from the opponent
- Visual contact should be maintained between passer and receiver
- The body of the player without the ball should be orientated as facing the opponent's goal, moving the neck during the run to keep visual contact with passer; this orientation allows the receiver to control the ball and be ready to shoot to goal



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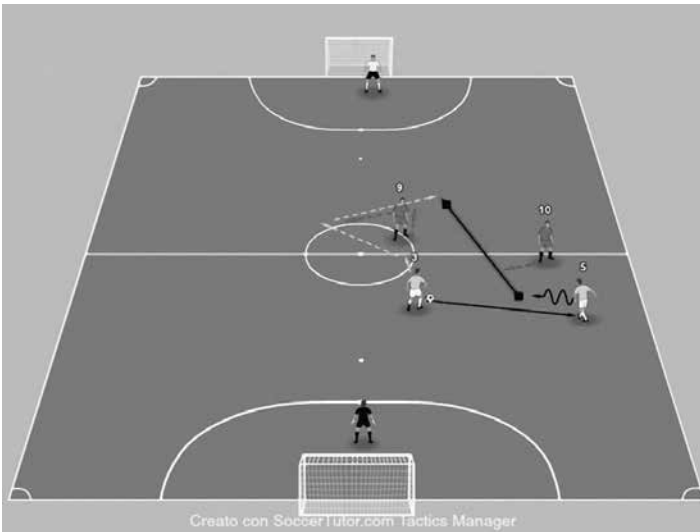
**Images 49 and 50**

- The passer should continue the attack by giving support to receiver, if the receiver ends up not shooting
- As a variation, the attacker without the ball can make a sudden break, to separate from the defender and receive

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the ball with back to goal - playing as a pivot positioned with back to the opponents' goal, and continuing the collaboration with passer

If the diagonal is not effective, the player without the ball can change direction again towards the opposite side, 'breaking the diagonal' and opening a new pass line to receive a killing pass behind the defender.



**Image 51**

An example of a broken diagonal can be seen via the goal scored by Gonzalo Higuaín for Napoli against Bologna (Video 19). The combination between Marek Hamšík and Higuaín, who 'breaks' the diagonal and cuts in front of defender to score his team's second goal in a 3-2 loss to Bologna (see minute 3:22 in the video), is an application of this movement, and one not often trained in football.

The following chart shows the key elements of the broken diagonal sequence:

## TWO-PLAYER COMBINATIONS IN THE FINISHING PHASE

Target	Separate from opponent to open a pass lane
Zone of Actuation	Near penalty area
	Last 20/30 metres
Tactical Intention	Finish
	Pass the opponent in one on one
When Used	When defender is near in proximity of penalty area
	When the defender looks at the attacker and not the ball

### Playing with the pivot (with players positioned back to goal)

Playing with pivot (or striker) with their back to goal is a two- or three-player combination that looks to exploit the attack strengths of that central player. This movement is very effective against a tight defence and it can produce dangerous chances by midfielders who are facing the opponent's goal.



In this **Image 52** between O Parrulo and Barcelona in the LNFS, there is combination between Marcenio (number 89 of

Barça) and the pivot Ferrao. After making a pass to the pivot, Marcenio starts a zigzag run, to reach a positional advantage on his direct defender and after two changes of direction gain the space for a winning shot.

A great example of a combination between a striker playing with back to goal and a combining player can be seen in the match between Manchester City against Cardiff City in the 2018/19 season (Video 20). In the 44th minute, İlkay Gündoğan passes to Raheem Sterling in the pivot position and then gets behind his direct opponent to receive a pass back from Sterling for a shot in the top-right corner of the goal, to make the score 3-0 in this eventual 5-0 game. This combination with pivot is a very useful combination to open a close defence.

These pivot combinations offer several possibilities:

- The pivot can receive the ball with their back to goal, turn, and attack the goal
- The pivot can pass back to an attacking team-mate with a one-two pass that can lead to a shooting chance for a midfielder
- A third player can join in. In futsal, when the ball reaches the pivot, we can have one, two or three players joining the attack to exploit a finishing chance. We call this the first, second or third 'entry', as one player can come to receive the back pass or overlap, and the other two can attack the free space (see more details in the chapter on third player attacking)

There are some important details to keep in mind for effective combinations using a striker playing with back to goal. One of these is that if the striker does not play with one touch, but wants to control the ball, the best approach is to control the ball using the sole of the foot, which allows the ball to be kept nearer to the foot and offers better protection.

## TWO-PLAYER COMBINATIONS IN THE FINISHING PHASE

The following chart shows some considerations regarding effective attacking combinations with the pivot:

Target	Play with striker back to goal
Zone of Actuation:	Border of penalty area
	Inside penalty area
Tactical Intention	Open a close defence
	Exploit a striker with good protection of the ball
	Give a midfielder a clear chance of scoring in a dangerous area

### **Curved movement of the attacker**

As you can see in the diagram below, this movement involves the run of two attacking players. One of the attackers is engaging the defender or driving the ball towards the penalty area, and the other - without the ball - runs in a curved movement, appearing at the last minute in the defender's line of sight to create a goalscoring chance.



*Image 53*

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An example of this concept in football is seen via the amazing goal by Messi for Barcelona against Espanyol in the Copa Del Rey in January 2016 (Video 21). Messi combines with Iniesta to execute a parabolic movement starting from outside the visual field of his opponent, and at the moment he does enter into the visual field of the defender, who finally realises the pass is coming, the defender is completely cut out, with Messi scoring to make it 1-1 (see minute 0:42 in the video).

There are some important details to keep in mind when executing this movement:

- Maintaining visual contact between the attackers
- Correct timing of the pass
- Separation from a defender who, while watching the ball, usually doesn't follow the attacker, allowing the defender to get free with a sudden break as the ball approaches
- Body orientation to shoot in one touch
- Strength of the pass to allow the shooter to do so at first touch
- Directional control if a first-time shot is not possible, to maintain running speed and keeping the advantage over the defender, with a feint to trick defender reaction

The following chart shows some key concepts regarding this movement:

Target	Get space for shot at border of penalty area
Zone of Actuation	Borders of penalty box
Tactical Intention	Losing a marker
	Surprise the defender
	Gain advantage on the defender
	Creating a clear chance of clean shoot

### **Horizontal crossover movements**

In this movement, two players work together to attract defenders to the player with the ball, creating a strong and

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weak side of the defence. The player with ball usually drives from the side towards the centre (the classic situation of the inverted winger who moves towards the centre to look for a shot) attracting two or three, and sometimes even four or five, defenders. The second player, without the ball, runs towards their team-mate, in the opposite direction, always on the same line. At the moment of the cross there is the choice of player with the ball (to continue, looking to finish on their own) or to pass to a team-mate to exploit the weak side of defence leading to a finishing chance.



**Image 54**

This situation is from Brazil vs Mexico in the 2018 World Cup, at minute 00:50 (Video 22).

Here, Neymar runs from the side of the pitch to the centre in his typical movement, attracting to him four defenders, with team-mate Willian running in the opposite direction. Neymar makes a heel pass to Willian and continues towards the far post, ending the combination with a goal after receiving the pass from Willian. This pure futsal movement broke through the Mexico defence and opened up the game for Brazil.

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These combinations of crossing on horizontal lines are typical of the Brazilian national futsal team too. They allow the ability to draw many defenders to the ball while creating a weak side that can be exploited to open a closed defence.

This co-ordinated movement between two players has the objective of creating doubts in minds of the defenders, who usually tend to concentrate on the attacker with the ball. The movement creates a space at the edge of the penalty box (central or on the side) which can be exploited in finishing.

Features of the movement include:

- The attacker with the ball moves from side to centre, driving with the ball and looking for a finishing chance - this should always be considered the first option
- The attacker without ball must move in the opposite direction of the attacker with the ball, moving behind them
- At the moment the two cross over, the attacker with ball leaves the ball to their team-mate, with a sole pass or heel pass, exploiting the weak side of the defence or feint the heel pass and continue if there is a shooting option
- After the pass, the player with the ball can look to finish at the far post, and the player who made the pass can continue by running on to the far post as well in an effort to finish the attack by scoring from a return pass

The chart below summarises some of the key aspects of this attacking move:

Target	Look for finishing after movement of inverted winger from side to centre at the border of the penalty area
Zone of Actuation	Border or penalty area
Tactical Intention	Create doubts in defenders
	Create free space at the border of penalty box
	Exploit the weak side of defence