

CIES Football Observatory

# Style of play of teams

April 2026

To determine teams' playing styles, the CIES Football Observatory's approach is based on a total of 27 indicators calculated using data provided by our partners [Impect](#), covering three phases of play (nine for each): defence, build up and attack.

Each of these phases was analysed according to three axes reflecting the tactical choices made by teams: a more or less high, aggressive or tight defence; a more or less short, horizontal or elaborate build up; and a more or less grounded, placed or grouped attack.

For each tactical option, teams are ranked using three complementary indicators, as a ratio to the average measured at the level of the corresponding league. The value of the axis is derived from the standardised average of these three ratios.

On the defensive side, based on the deviation from the average of the values of the three associated metrics, we calculate a composite metric on a scale of 100 reflecting the teams' propensity to apply pressure on opponents (pressuring propensity).

Similarly, for build up, the corresponding composite metric reflects the clubs' propensity to control the game (mastering propensity), whilst in attack, it reflects teams' propensity to advance as a compact unit (dominating propensity).

## Phase: Defence

### >>> Tactical option: Low / High

Performance indicators

- Distance from own goal of pressures on opponents
- Distance from own goal of ball recoveries
- % of time without the ball defending against opponents in "transition" attacking phase

### >>> Tactical option: Passive / Active

Performance indicators

- Average number of passes conceded before any defensive action
- Average duration of opponents' possessions before a defensive foul
- % of opponents' possessions from their first third with  $\geq 1$  pass in each third

### >>> Tactical option: Lenient / Tight

Performance indicators

- Passes conceded from own third per 90' of effective play
- Passes conceded from own box per 90' of effective play
- Shots conceded from own box central rectangle per 90' of effective play

## **Phase: Build up**

### **>>> Tactical option: Long / Short**

Performance indicators

- Average length of passes completed
- % of long passes (>30 meters)
- Average length of goalkeepers open play passes

### **>>> Tactical option: Vertical / Horizontal**

Performance indicators

- % of passes not directed forwards (lateral or backward)
- Average meters of ground won per successful pass forwards
- Average meters of ground won per pass between possessions' start and end

### **>>> Tactical option: Simple / Elaborate**

Performance indicators

- Average duration of possessions
- Passes completed per minute with the ball
- % of possessions from own third with  $\geq 1$  pass in each of the three thirds

## **Phase: Attack**

### **>>> Tactical option: Aerial / Grounded**

Performance indicators

- % of last third entry passes received below knee height
- % of corners taken short and on the ground
- % of throw-ins from last third not directed towards opponents' box

### **>>> Tactical option: Rapid / Placed**

Performance indicators

- % of time with the ball in an "in-possession" attacking phase
- % of shots resulting from an "in-possession" attacking phase
- % of xG resulting from an "in-possession" attacking phase

### **>>> Tactical option: Scattered / Grouped**

Performance indicators

- Average number of passes for possessions resulting in a shot
- Average length of passes from opponent half leaving  $\geq 3$  opponents farther from their goal than the ball
- Average length of last third entry passes