

The following interview has been extracted from the research paper:

Um Algoritmo do FUTEBOL (mais do que) TOTAL: algo que lhe dá o Ritmo! Uma reflexão sobre o “Jogar” de qualidade [“An Algorithm FOOTBALL (more than) TOTAL: anything that gives you the Rhythm! A reflection on the "Play" quality”]

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**Entrevista a Louis van Gaal (Inglês)
Treinador do AZ Alkmaar (Holanda)**

Gabinete do treinador no Estádio do AZ Alkmaar, 9 de Março de 2009

Pedro Daniel Sousa (P.D.S) - What features should present a team to be considered a Top team?

Louis van Gaal (L. van Gaal) –

First, the players ... must have individual qualities... not only as a football player but also as a human being. Because that is also very important, because you have to play in a team and not individually... and then you need a very good trainer coach, that can transfer an philosophy of football... a way of football... and then the eleven players has to perform that... so, the chemistry between the technical quality of the head coach, or the technical staff, with the players selection has to be very good.

(P.D.S) - What is dominant football?

(L. van Gaal) -

That you decide how the opponent play their football and not that the opponent decides where we have to play...

(P.D.S) - You decide the flow of the game, right!?

(L. van Gaal)

- yes, that's... the main trick; I believe... that always you decide where to play...

(P.D.S) - And a top team controls the game from the offensive or you can also do that by the defensive point of view?

(L. van Gaal) -

Yes, because there are different styles... in Italy they are always defensively... in England is always offensively... except when they are using a European coach... because of that, the coach is very important... so... I have always play very offensively as a trainer coach with my teams, but this season I play more defensively... to organize more and to create open space for my very faster strikers... but that's also dominant... only I like more the offensive style... because I like that. You have to deliver a product for the public... and with this product I don't like it, like the offensively style but... it's a very attractive style, when you do it with speed

P.D.S) – Is there a moment more important than another?

(L. van Gaal) -

I think the transition is the most important... aspect of the moments... so, I divide the game in four... in four, and not in three, in four... and you have ball possession opponent, then you have transition in ball possession ... then the opponent is not organized... so that is the moment that you have to benefit... because at that time they are not organized. When you have ball possession then your opponent it's in organization... and then it's more (less too late???) ... but top teams can create also, chances against organized teams, Barcelona can do that very well and Manchester United also and AZ I think also...

(P.D.S) - Because the other teams that play against top teams usually plays in defense so the transition doesn't...

(L. van Gaal) -

...work! Because they don't have enough individually qualities... because top teams press also in advance... or go backwards and press from the own half... that's a choice... so... then the opponent don't have individual quality to disorganize the defensive organization or your team...

(P.D.S) - There are lines and players of the team that are, more important than other's in the control of the game?

(L. van Gaal) -

No, no... Only dependable of your philosophy... how you have to defend... have to defend on the half of the opponent or backwards or between... that's your choice as a coach, but that's also dependable of the quality of the opponent so lines... there are lines... but this lines are from the pitch... not for the coach... is dependable on the quality of your own team and...

(P.D.S) - ... it's very dynamic, because depends of the flow of the game...

(L. van Gaal) -

Yes, yes... depends of the philosophy of trainer coach and the players of course, because I have to convince the players... of that tactics or philosophy.

(P.D.S) - Ok. But... to play offensively... you don't think that the midfield has a very important role?

(L. van Gaal) -

No... No... I think that every player have an important role... but... ok not only... ok... in the middle the strikers are very important they attract all the attention...

(P.D.S) - When I talk in the middle I don't talk about a player, but a space in the midfield, all that space in the middle...

(L. van Gaal) -

No is dependable of the tactic of the opponent. Sometimes my midfielders as to go in a deep, sometimes they have to play out of... the space... and dependable of the tactics, and you cannot said in advance... ok the players should go like that...no, no... it's dependable of the tactics, individually quality of the players, and therefore the game is very difficult to... difficult to... read for the public. (Entrevista interrompida por membro do clube)

(P.D.S) - Do you think that ball circulation it's an important feature on the offensive organization of a top team?

(L. van Gaal) -

Yes, one of the most important because you have to play together... and that, you do with the passing of the ball... I think every game need that the ball replaces, every time, and not speed of replaces is important but the replace itself... do you understand?

(P.D.S) -Yes...So one of the characteristics of that ball circulation is...

(L. van Gaal) -

... The pass, and not the speed. Every journalist said has to be a higher ball circulation... and I said that is not so important... because the replaces of the ball demands another organization defensively of the opponent

(P.D.S) - What risks should be taken by a top team?

(L. van Gaal) - No risk.

You have to avoid the risk. That's your organization defensively... and that's why... for example, Mourinho win's a lot... because he always has a very good defensive organization... so you have to avoid risk... So when you are in attack you have to think to defend...

(P.D.S) - Exactly... it's one of the questions that I gone do... but when you attack you increase the risks to lose the ball?

(L. van Gaal) -

Yes... it's true, because when you attack you take always risk because have a big space behind you... so that's true... because of that you need defensively thinking when you attack...

(P.D.S) - Is that question that I gone do you know... all players must take offensive and defensive tasks when the team is or is not in...

(L. van Gaal) -

Yes...

(P.D.S) - What is the importance of the system in the organization of the team?

(L. van Gaal) -

When the opponent has the ball has very important, when we have the ball, it's only general advisements... so... that you make the pitch open and big... because then you created space for yourself but also the creativity of your players... you have to freed him and not always what you think that they have to do...

(P.D.S) - You said that you want the pitch bigger... not in all moments of attack... if the ball it's in zone of finalization... near to the opponent goal... the defenders have to stay together...

(L. van Gaal) -

Yes together...when you have to across a phase... I divide also the attacking moment in the first phase, second phase, thirst phase and fourth phase... The first phase it's the construction, the second is the... circulation of the ball to create the pass... this is the third phase... the creative... and the fourth phase is the finalization

(P.D.S) - The second phase it's like creating disorganization on the opponent...

(L. van Gaal) -

The second phase is to replace the ball, so you can see the disorganization of the opponent... and then you need creativity to give the pass, to see that moment... that's the third phase.

(P.D.S) - And if the opponent is disorganized in the first phase?

(L. van Gaal) -

The opponent... is organized when we are in the first phase... because the first phase it's when the goal-keeper as the ball... and the opponent is always to avoid construction... that was the first phase... the second is the circulation on the midfield... to create opening...

(P.D.S) - When a top team is on the conclusion of offensive organization should appear with several players to finish or not necessarily? If... when you attack many players need to appear to finish...

(L. van Gaal) -

No... ((P.D.S) - Only the attackers?) No, it's dependable of the quality of your players... so, when you put in a line up more creative players or more finishing players... is dependable of your philosophy and your system. But you need always more than attackers... always, because when you have only the attackers then they can organize easily the opponent...

(P.D.S) - Because that's one of the characteristics of the top teams...

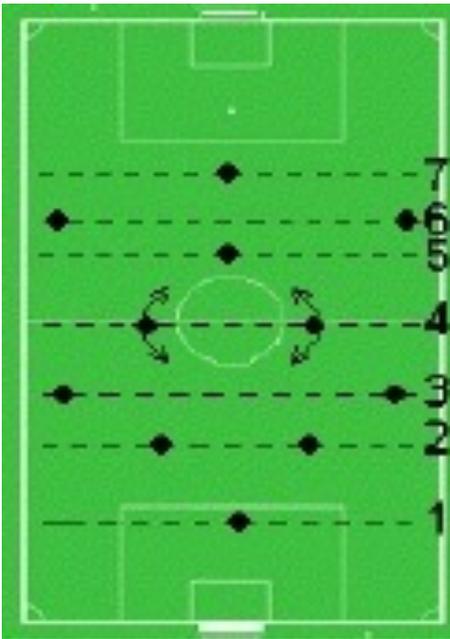
(L. van Gaal) -

Some of the most teams have just one striker (So you need to appear with midfielders...) yes...yes, but that's dependable of the system that you play... how many midfielders you want to be there...

(P.D.S) - What characteristics do you want that your team shows in the field?

(L. van Gaal) -

I want 8 lines... 8 lines... so many as possible... because then the occupation of the pitch it's better... so we are blue... the best occupation of the pitch is this system... 1,2,3,4,5,6,7... and with this dynamic one line more (Figure)... but depends where is the ball... when the ball is here he has to go here... so also form a line to pass, but when you play that system you have always triangles... you have always two options for here... here... two options...also more... it's the same here... two options... in the middle it's always more... here it's also a triangle... a triangle... so that's why 4-3-3, in my opinion, is the best system and you can play with a defensively player or an offensive player (triangle of midfield) it's dependable of the quality of your players. When you play a 4-4-2 a lot of teams are doing that, then you have not so much lines... you see... and it's easy to defend ... therefore I played... when I have two good strikers in a window, so then I have six lines, 1,2,3,4,5,6 (He doesn't count the GR) and dynamically more...



(P.D.S) - Other systems that don't define so many lines, such as 1-4-4-2 line, can likewise provide quality of the ball movement?

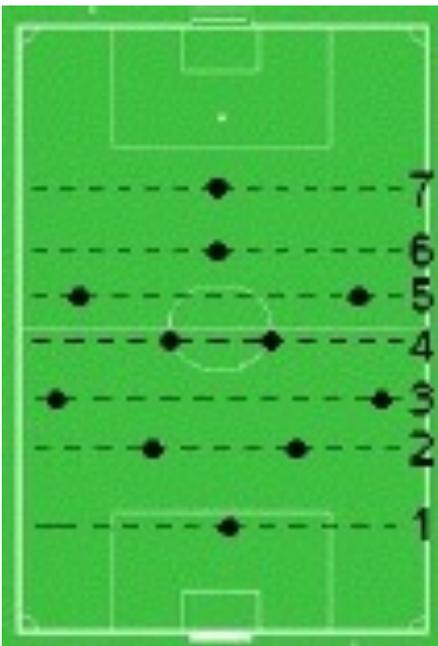
(L. van Gaal) -

It's not so good, because you have less lines... but it's a dynamic situation...so you can said... ok, this is also triangles but when this mathematically more triangles you have in your system then it's more easy, because the players without thinking they are, already, in the position but now they have to see the space... it's more difficult and they are more closely to each other it's not so big the pitch... Do you understand... so the space it's better divided when they placed like that... you can see it with your eyes... it's always more space...So the other systems are not so shut(?) for ball circulation.

(P.D.S) - Because, when we see arsenal, for example, they placed in 1-4-4-2 line...

(L. van Gaal) -

No, no... They played, for me, they play like this, they played like us... so 1,2,3,4,5,6,7... that is how I'm playing now.



(P.D.S) - How do you want that your team defensively compensates the risks taken in the offensive moment?

(L. van Gaal) -

Always three behind, he is going... then they have to close... and one of the midfielders has to stay... and they can go... but always make compact not making space... in the third phase you have to be compact... do you understand?! So when they are here... they have to be also compact... not like this because the opponent has a big space...

(P.D.S) – I already had been here in Holland and I saw some games, Utrecht, Vitesse... and one of the problems that I see was that... the teams are...

(L.van Gaal) –

Open. Yes I know.

(P.D.S) - When you are in defensive phase do you have offensive concerns?

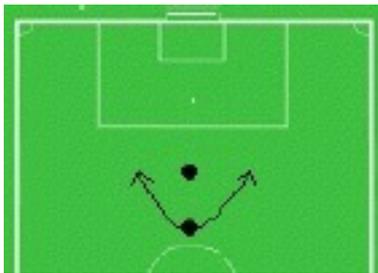
(L. van Gaal) -

Yes... (What kind?) I need always... because that's also depends of your system... but I want always a deep striker... and I want always one looking for the big space...

(P.D.S) - The big space!?

(L. van Gaal) -

Yes, not deep... that's one striker, and he has to tie the central defender to pick him up... because then the spaces here it's bigger... so that's why I played like this... and that's why I played in 4-3-3 with a second striker, the number 10, mostly... and dependable of the quality of the player he is a second striker or a third midfielder... So Litmanen in Ajax... has a third midfielder... Dennis Bergkamp is a second striker.



(P.D.S.) - When and how you want that your team does a fast attack or plays safe and then creates disorganization on the opponent?

(L. van Gaal) -

I think that when opponent it's disorganized and when we gain the ball, then you have to take benefits of the disorganization... but when you always pass wrongly and you lose the ball... then I said... no, no, no... patient, because you see that you always lost the ball, then you have to gain the ball again and again... that it cost us a lot of energy... so when the former is well you can do that and pass well...

(P.D.S) - Then you lose the control of the game...

(L. van Gaal) -

Then you lose the control of the game, then you always lose the ball, they dominate the game... so, ball possession it's always important... but it's not so important to score goals... that is not like that when you have 60-70% that you score goals... That it's not the consequence. Because when you have 70% of the ball, then you are playing near... and you cannot score... so you have to dictate where they defend and we can do that to go back... then they have to come, and then you have space...

(P.D.S) - One of the characteristics of the ball circulation is the verticality, it's very important...

(L. van Gaal) –

Yes... very important... because the transition it's verticality...

(P.D.S) - Exactly... and the circulation has to detect the disorganization by the verticality...

(L. van Gaal) –

Yes... But when you always lose the ball give a pass verticality... then it's wrong... because... then always you lose the ball...

(P.D.S) - I ask you the risks that you take on the offensive phase... that it's one of the risks?

(L. van Gaal) -

No, no... the vertical pass is not a risk because you always have people behind the ball... but when you lose the ball every time... then you have to run to the ball... and then you lose your dominance... so... that's not good... so the vertical is the pass without risk... the width pass it's always risky... That's why when they are here... and then you have to pass whitely... then you have a problem... then they can... go in a transition... and you have a lot of players in front of the ball...and then the space is big... that was against NEC in the cup I lost (in a transition) yes..

(P.D.S.) – How the systems can influence how the transitions take place?

(L. van Gaal) –

Yes... The system can “afford”(?) the transition, now with our way of playing it's more easy to defend because I have always two lines of four... and the line is easily to defend with four against five, six... because you can cover each other... or when to press the ball at the right time... then the ball cannot played here because here have the free man to...when you pressed the right time... and you can cover always... But I played sometimes with three in the back... and then, the line... it's more difficult to defend... but then I have to press more... so that's what you want, that's your tactics, that is dependable of your own quality and also the quality of your opponent. When your opponent don't want to play football... this is only with long balls, you can play better with four in the back... but when they want to play from out the construction then you can choose three or four... and you can place better...

(P.D.S.) – How do you want that your team (re)start the game from goal-keeper? Short or long?

(L. van Gaal) –

I played always from the goal-keeper, short...(But some situations you have to play long)... Yes, yesterday the pitch has very bad, he need an attacking point... because you cannot construct, they want to press us... and therefore, said to my goal-keeper: “Ok. Long balls on Pellè”... dependable of the quality I can put Ari in the striker position but Pellè it's an attacking point and therefore is played yesterday... because the opponent has a central defender like that... with your eight... so... and I said to Pellè: “look for him, go at that side”...

(P.D.S.) – If you played against other team, that have taller guys in the back, how do you positioned your team to gain the ball... the long ball... with numerical superiority?

(L. van Gaal) –

Yes... to close... and then the midfield have to win the second ball... and we have four in the midfield... so it's easily to win the ball... because you have a lot of players...

(P.D.S.) – And then you created superiority...

(L. van Gaal) –

We have the strikers always here and a second striker behind the midfield line of the opponents



(P.D.S.) – When in possession of the ball you want always players open on the sides?

(L. van Gaal) –

When we have the ball they (midfielders) have to open... always at the sides, it's very important... because of that they (opponent) have to defend width and then we have more space...

(P.D.S.) – This midfielders they go on deep?

(L. van Gaal) –

No... it's dependable... when they standing here (width in the midfield) they can easily here (deep in the wings) but then they have to defend and then this space are for the striker...

(P.D.S.) – This players need to have too much quality...

(L. van Gaal) –

A lot of quality... (...Because these players need to play inside and outside) ... inside defensively and outside when we have the ball... and they have to dribble... and then they have to be orientated for a lot of things when we attack.

(P.D.S.) – What profile of players do you want to occupy positions in the central corridor? The position that you define as number 4 and 10...

(L. van Gaal) –

Thinkers. Brain. But a lot of trainer coaches want to be here defender... always with me... thinkers. Guardiola, Xavi, Jong... always that kind of players.

(P.D.S.) - And number 10?

(L. van Gaal) –

Number 10 I liked more a midfielder that can go... (more a midfielder then a second striker that come back...) yes... Now I play with a second striker and defensively I doesn't not work for the team... but at this level in Netherlands we can keep the safety... but it's always more difficult... when is defensively... and he can go there also it's better... but he as to score... this man as to score... so our second striker scores 20 goals... this man has to score... Litmanen always twenty, twenty five goals, Bergkamp twenty, twenty five... not he (striker position)... he ten... because he takes benefits of him...

(P.D.S.) - For ball circulation he has an important role, because he plays...

(L. van Gaal) –

behind the midfield... (...with the back...)... No, no... I have to be open... he has to run always "contra"... "Contra" it's not in front of him (opponent midfielder) because then he can see the pass line... the ball and is opponent. When you play like that, he can't see the ball and him... so that's contra... very important what I'm saying now.



(P.D.S.) – One of things that we see sometimes it's this player playing here to devolve...

(L. van Gaal) –

I don't like it. He (second striker) have to be always behind the midfield line... so they (opponent) have the midfield line, they have a defensive line and then the strikers (our)... so he comes here it's easily to defend (in front of midfield line)... they can do also with four... it's easy "boom"... he has to be here... and always not to close of them (defenders line) because he defends him. So close to them (midfielder's line)...and then in a free space and open...

(P.D.S.) - We use an expression "the game between the lines"...

(L. van Gaal) –

Yes... but it's also with the 4-3-3, it's between the lines... in a window it's always between the lines... because of that this system it's difficult to beat and when you have individually quality.

(P.D.S.) - But if your team is defending...if the striker of the opponent moves... who defends him?

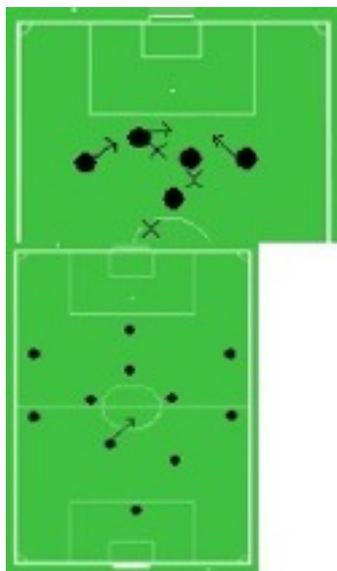
(L. van Gaal) –

This... they have to close... in my opinion...

(P.D.S.) - How do you want, that the backside defenders, get involved in the attack?

(L. van Gaal) –

Always, I want to create one man more... so, always one of the four (defenders) has to enter in the midfield... doesn't matter which... but one enters they (the other three) have to close. The difficulty is in the first phase (figure - bottom of the two) they have to make the space big and when they enter (one of the central defenders) they (backside defenders) cannot close... and they have to play the ball in the striker and not to him (play in width), because then "boom"... and then there is an open...



(P.D.S.) - You want this back(side) defenders go on deep?

(L. van Gaal) -

Yes... I liked that, but they (the other defenders) have to close...

(P.D.S.) - Never the two at same time?

(L. van Gaal) -

No... it happens against NEC, because of that they won...

(P.D.S.) - When your team attack and the opponent it's defensive organized, you want that your team stay with lines close to each other?

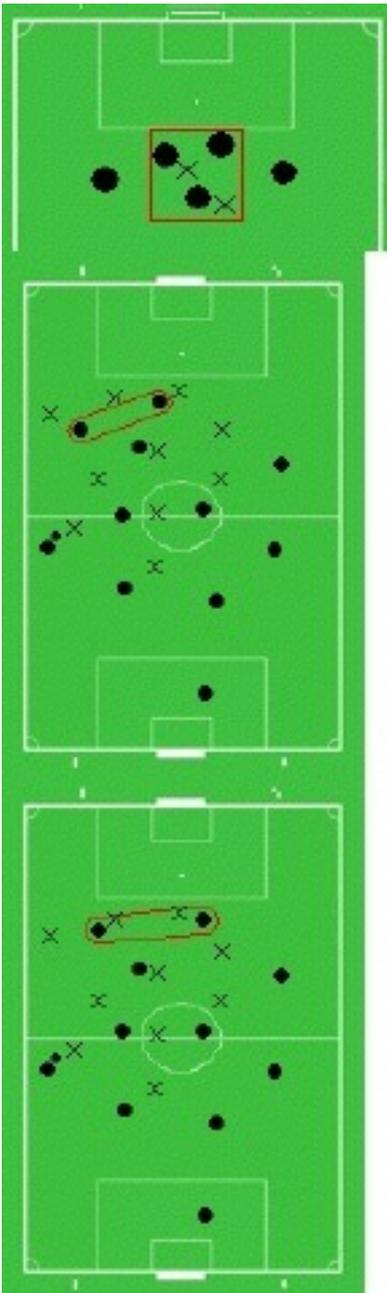
(L. van Gaal) -

Always together... When they are here... they have to contact... I already said to you... not space between... so when they go down, they have to go down... but not with space between the lines because the opponent wants to take benefit of that... but then you have more space behind you... you have to know that... and therefore it's very important when the ball it's here he is covering...

(P.D.S.) - What is the difference between playing with a center forward (striker) or two?

(L. van Gaal) -

The big difference is that you have two attacking points... when you play with only one attacking point... you need always an attacking point... with two... you have two... so one is always in the side of the ball... when the ball is here... he is here... but I think that is not good... a lot of strikers want to be here (fig.1 - bottom of the following image) ... I said: "no, no... you have to be here" (fig.2 - central of following image)... because normally is taking and then he is going... and then here is more space for you... but then he is coming also... but you have to be always the distance is also important... so it's not only the lines but also the distance between the players... so, this is, when we have the ball, this is not good, it's easy to defend... this is much better... distance... big, make the pitch big... Entrevista interrumpida por membro do clube.



(P.D.S.) – What is the difference between playing with three players in midfielder or four?

(L. van Gaal) –

To defend a line you have to defend a line, you don't defend a player only... but the player mostly is the same in all match... but you defend a line, and you do that with four... that's easily to defend with four then with three, because the space it's bigger now (with only three) then you have to run more and you're too late sometimes, because when I think that the second striker is to danger, I do a midfield player on him... and then, they have to do 2x3 (fig. - top of the above image)...And it's more difficult because you have one more... (then they cannot play between the lines)...then I have one man more...

(P.D.S.) – And in the offensive phase what is the difference between three or four?

(L. van Gaal) –

The difference is that they have a bigger space and they can do more... but he (one of the defenders) when we have the ball coming into the midfield again... so it's not much difference... but it's dependable of the way of playing... what are the task in that way of the system...

(P.D.S.) – Give me the example of your team... The tasks that you want for these players...

(L. van Gaal) –

I always explain all tasks and functions of the position... and also with relation with the opponent, the quality of the opponent... every game... (Nesta altura foram apresentados os slides de preparação do jogo contra o NEC onde evidenciou alguns pontos que aqui foram perguntados)

(P.D.S.) – In the system that you advocate there are more fixed positions and positions of greater mobility?

(L. van Gaal) –

Yes, that's true... the greater mobility are always the wings (the midfielders that go the wings...) and then they have to come inside... they have to run a lot... and the central midfielder also have to run a lot... and the laterals, the full backs... so, there are six that run a lot... the others: the striker, he always wants to run a lot but I don't like he has to stay... the second striker he needs more brain than running... and the two central midfielders I liked more brain than runners... and the central defenders more brain than running... (and the goal-keeper too) Yes

(P.D.S.) – In what situations you, strategically, define areas to gain the 2nd ball?

(L. van Gaal) –

You have seen that in the picture... because... you see the picture... I have several strikers, I have Pellè, I have Ari... I have Dembélé... who can play in a deep striker positions... and... I chose dependable of the opponent, the pitch, the referee, the individually quality of central defenders of the opponent... then I chose for one striker... so yesterday in a bad pitch I need an attacking point and Pellè it's more an attacking point than Ari...

(P.D.S.) – But, there are more situations in the game that you define some strategically areas to gain the second ball?

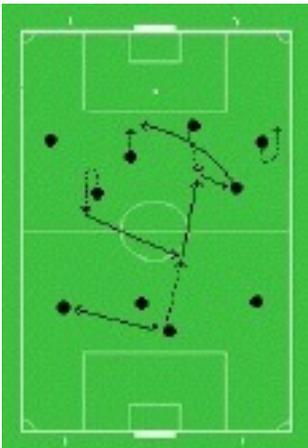
(L. van Gaal) –

No... that's the midfield line, our midfield line... so you have to play the ball to an attacking point in front of the midfield line... so I say then the third phase, not the second phase, the third phase... our he wins is duel with the central defender or the central defender wins, then the second line, the midfield line, can win the second ball...

(P.D.S.) – Do you recognize this image? It's from the book “Louis van Gaal, and Ajax Philosophy ”?

(L. van Gaal) –

This is more of the creativity of the players... because they have to do that... You cannot say go, go... because it's dependable of your opponent... and how they defend... and this is the way at the ball he is coming at the right time then the third men... I don't know what they want... “distância entre linhas”, “mobilidade dos jogadores”



(P.D.S.) – Exactly...What I wrote here is that some top teams like Arsenal, sometimes give that space to someone appear... to get the ball... because they if the opponent is positioned, sometimes...

(L. van Gaal) –

This is better when they recover the ball they can come to his space here... because this picture is not good because the opponent it's not here... this is nothing, is nothing... because... where is the opponent... and football is always with an opponent... this is without an opponent... this is picture doesn't mean anything...

(P.D.S.) – I put this picture... but when I imagine that, and what I tried to put here is exactly that... that depends too much of that... the opponent quality... the individual quality...

(L.van Gaal) –

Yes, Yes...when we have space like that and the opponent is in the midfield so we should win... I don't know if this space it's for me or for the opponent... when it's for me and I have space like and we have to score in that goal then we win... we win...