

***“[Soccer] is a game you play with your brain.” – Johan Cruyff***



# Tactics

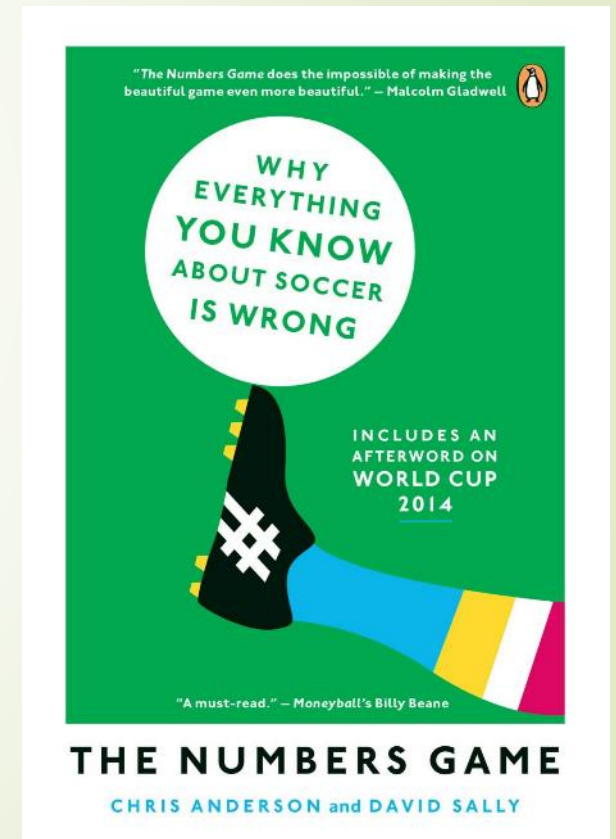
Region 1472 Coaches' Corner

DR

# Reference

Chris Anderson and David Sally  
The Numbers Game: Why Everything You Know  
About Soccer Is Wrong  
Penguin Books, 2013

An excellent book that will change your thinking...

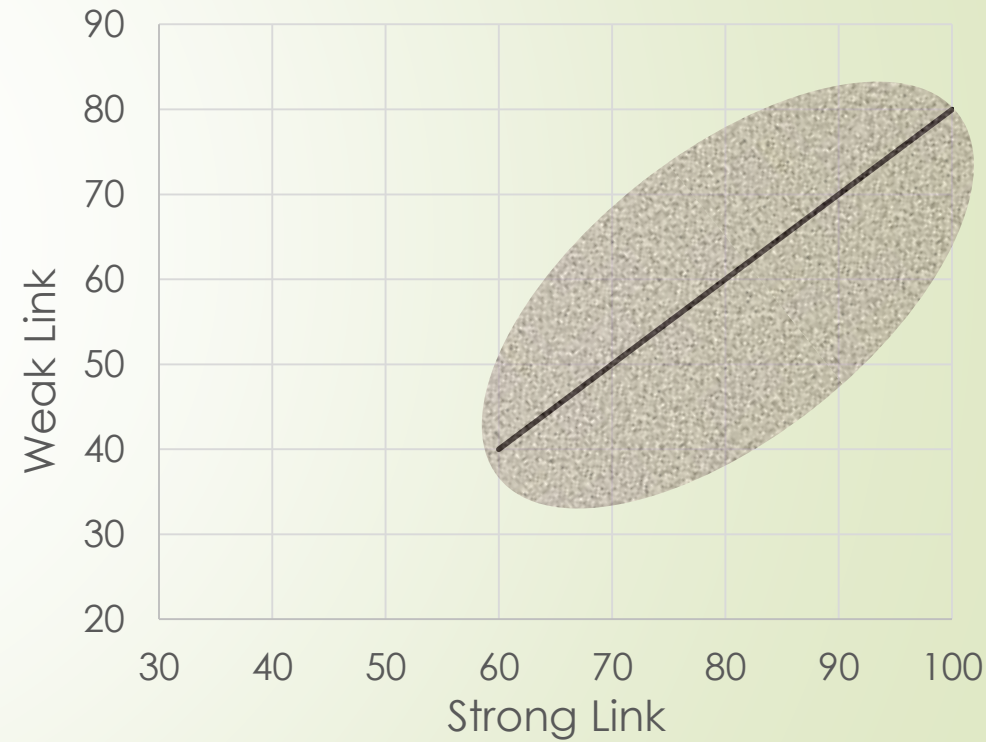


# Eliminating Mistakes

- ▶ Soccer is a weakest-link game
- ▶ Success is determined not just by what you do well but what you don't do badly
- ▶ “A team that commits errors in no more than 15 to 18 percent of its actions is unbeatable.” – Valeriy Lobanovskyi
- ▶ “Toeval is logisch.” [“Coincidence is logical.”] – Johan Cruyff
  - ▶ A lot of the results in soccer are by chance; focus on the processes

# Soccer is a Weakest Link Game

- ▶ In a pick-up game or a game of younger players, the side with the best one or two players will usually win
  - ▶ Small number of players on the pitch
  - ▶ Lots of open space
- ▶ As players get older and the level of play gets higher,
  - ▶ There are more players on the pitch
  - ▶ Players' talents are more equal
  - ▶ Outstanding players get less outstanding
- ▶ Superstar players
  - ▶ Provide the glamor, genius, and inspiration
  - ▶ Sell the shirts and fill the seats (in the professional game)
  - ▶ DO NOT decide who wins games of championships
- ▶ The honor of deciding games "falls to the incompetents at the heart of the defense or the miscommunicating clowns in midfield"
- ▶ Soccer is a weak -link game.
- ▶ Analysis
  - ▶ The match is decided by luck, then by who's at home, then by which team has the higher average talent level, and then by which club has the narrower spread of talent
  - ▶ It is better to have a team of all 70 percent players than it is to have a team where two players are 100 percent



# How to Deal with the Weakest Link

- Ignore him/her
  - put him/her in the position where he/she can do the least damage
  - instruct your other, competent players to ignore him/her
- Hide him/her (NO!)
  - The manager has transformed a player of some talent, however modest, into little more than a fan with a particularly good view
  - In actual fact, he might have taken his weakest link's output of, say, 40 percent and turned it into a zero
  - "Artisans are as important as artists."
    - Don't overlook the supporting cast on your team
- Support him/her (A NICE THOUGHT)
  - Get your other players to help him out
- Get rid of him/her (NO!)
  - Play him/her half of the game
  - Ridicule until he/she no longer wants to play
- THE RIGHT WAY
  - IMPROVE HIM/HER
  - upgrading its weak link can help a club more than improving its best player.



# Improving the Weakest Link

- ▶ Coaches should:
  - ▶ Develop tactics to try and conceal the extent of their weakest links
  - ▶ Coach weaknesses out of players
- ▶ There are two categories of weakness—effort and skill
  - ▶ EFFORT requires the Coach to motivate
  - ▶ SKILL requires the Coach to teach.
- ▶ Talent is not innate, it is nurtured
- ▶ Less talented players learn from more talented players
- ▶ The Coach, then, should try to establish a club culture in which the weak links are willing to ask for help and will listen to advice.
- ▶ Improve your weakest players
  - ▶ Pair during training sessions with more capable partners
  - ▶ “Indispensability” condition: individuals do not want to hold back the group and feel that their contribution is crucial to collective performance
  - ▶ The Köhler effect occurs because weak links work harder to keep up, to match their more talented colleagues, or because they think their role is just as essential

# Truths About Coaching

- ▶ “I never realized that in order to become a jockey you have to have been a horse first.” – Arrigo Sacchi
  - ▶ You need not have been a star player to be a good Coach
- ▶ In fact, some superstar players are not good Coaches
  - ▶ Successful players are more likely to hark back to the methods that made their careers glorious, rather than adapting and innovating, as managers at all clubs must, since there is no permanently winning formula.
- ▶ “In sports, what is true is more powerful than what you believe, because what is true will give you an edge.” – Bill James
  - ▶ Unfortunately, failure is accepted if you do so in a recognizable way
  - ▶ The way things are “always” done is not necessarily the way they should be done
- ▶ “The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it is the same problem you had last year.” – John Foster Dulles

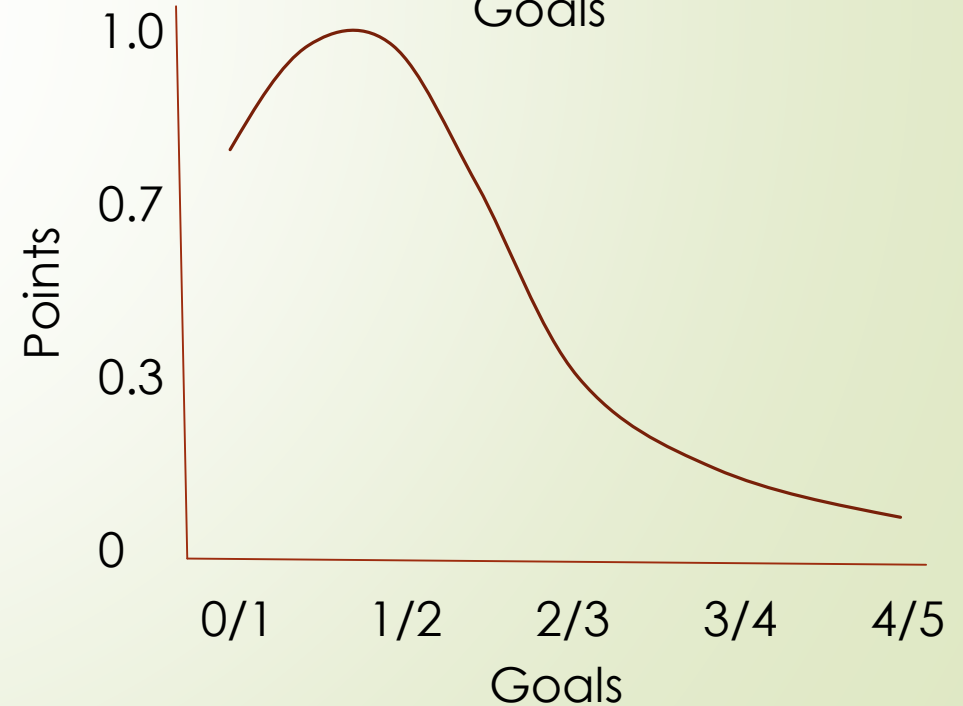
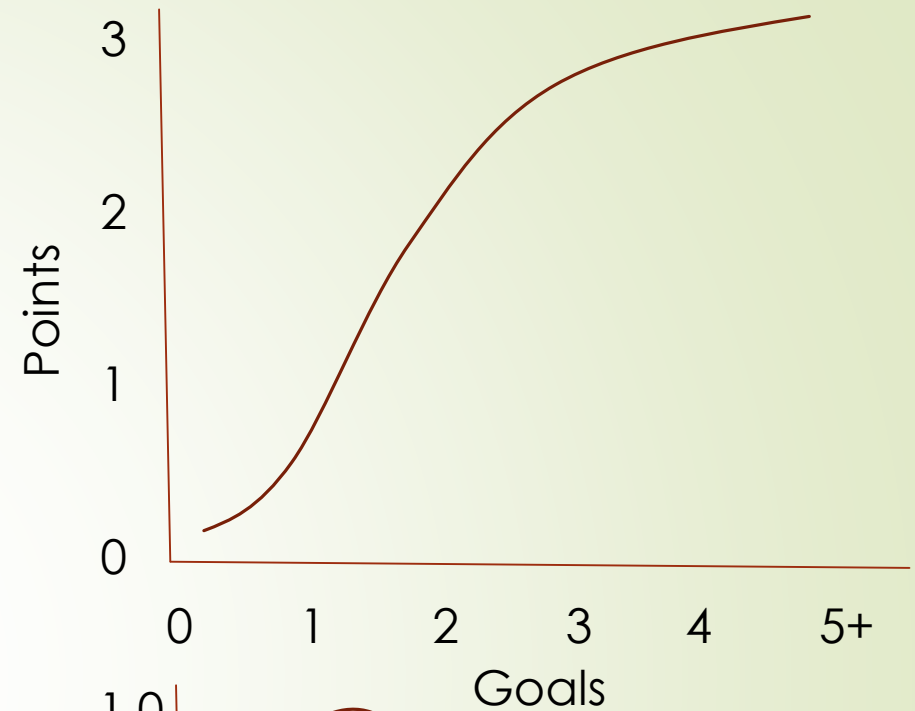
# The Role of Tactics

- ▶ Tactics
  - ▶ Achieve a multiplying effect on the players' abilities
  - ▶ Minimize a team's weaknesses while maximizing its strengths
  - ▶ Gains an advantage over your opponent
    - ▶ "Know your enemies and know yourself, you can win a hundred battles without a single loss."  
- Sun Tzu
  - ▶ Are not the same as strategy: your strategy is what you plan to do over the entire season
  - ▶ Are what you do in the course of an individual game
  - ▶ Support your strategy
  - ▶ Must always fit your team and your opponent.



# The Value of Goals

- ▶ Do Teams that score lots of goals always win championships? No!
- ▶ Based on Analysis of English Premiership Games:
  - ▶ A single goal virtually guarantees at least a point
  - ▶ two goals gets a team closer to a win than a draw
  - ▶ Two goals gets a team close to a win
  - ▶ Goals are not equal in value:
    - ▶ the most valuable goal is the second (increasing the team's predicted point value by 0.99)
    - ▶ In contrast, going from a likely thrashing to a probable stomping (that is, a fifth goal) is exchanged for only 0.1 points

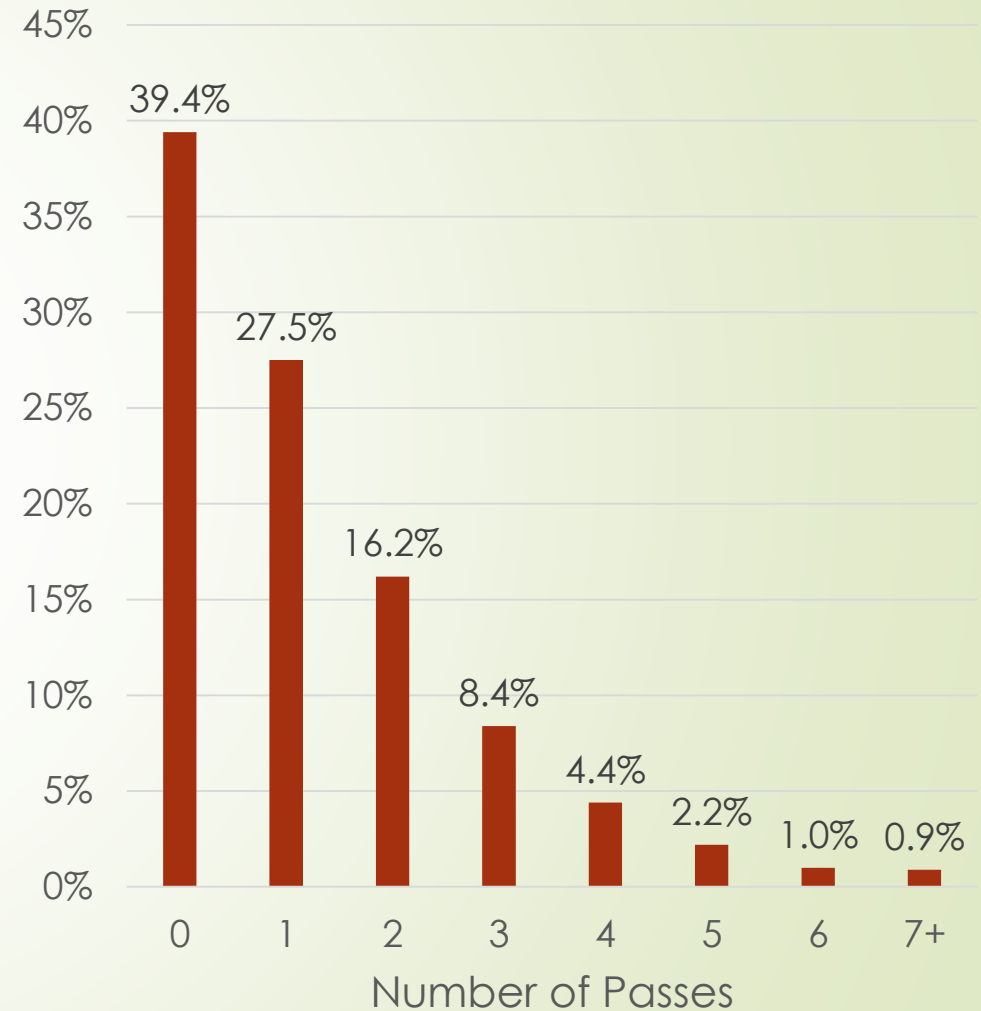


# Does Possession Lead to Goals?

- ▶ “If we have the ball, they can’t score” – Johan Cruyff
- ▶ But, as long-time Arsenal Manager Herbert Chapman observed, “A team can attack for too long”
- ▶ Does possession lead to goals? NO, NOT REALLY
- ▶ Analysis (English Premiership):
  - ▶ Players had the ball for a total of 53.4 seconds and ran 191 meters (about 209 yards) with it during the course of a match
  - ▶ The average player spent with the ball made up only about 1 percent of the time he spent on the pitch.
  - ▶ Also, the total distance covered by the average player in a match is around 11 kilometers (about 6.8 miles)—so running with the ball made up about 1.5 percent of the total distance run

# Short Possessions

- Most possessions last only a few passes, even at top levels of play
- Teams simply needed to be more efficient
  - Score more goals with fewer possessions, fewer passes, fewer shots and fewer touches, not more
  - Only two of every nine goals came from a move involving more than three passes
  - It takes nine shots to produce one goal



# Long Ball vs. Short Ball Play



- ▶ “It’s not about the long ball or the short ball; it’s about the right ball.” – Bob Paisley
- ▶ Longer passing make shots more frequent
- ▶ There is a trade-off: longer passing sequences mean more shots for the attacking team, but they also mean lower rates of conversion of shots into goals

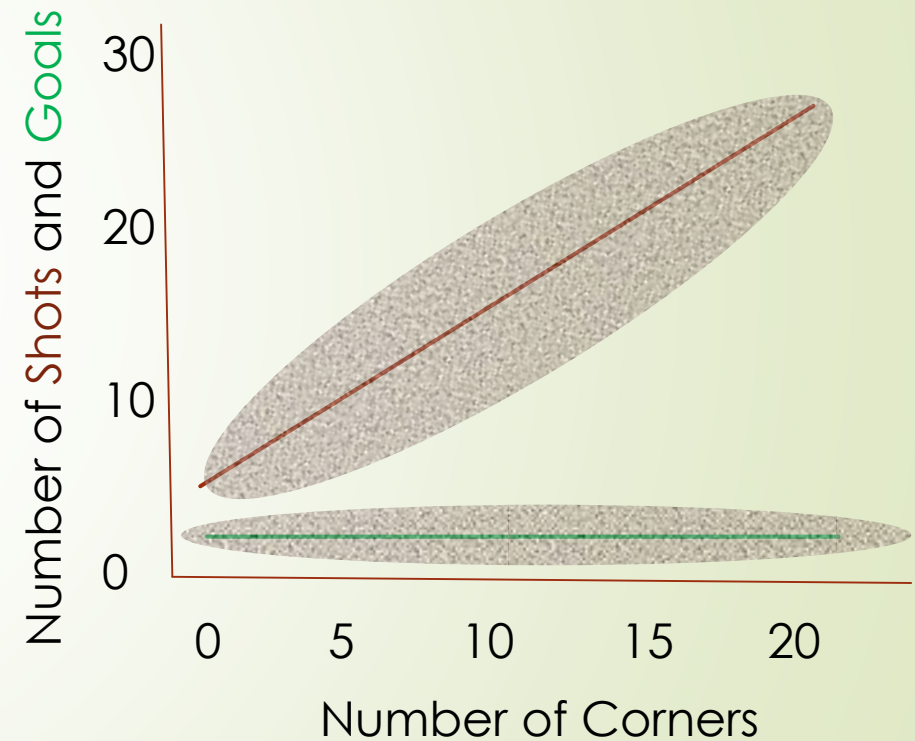
# Do Shots Lead to Wins?

- ▶ NO!
- ▶ The team that shoots more actually wins less than half the time
- ▶ the team with more shots ON TARGET wins somewhere between 50 and 58 percent of the time, depending on the league



# Do Corner Kicks Lead to Goals, and Wins?

- ▶ NO!
- ▶ One of every five corners leads to a shot
- ▶ One in nine of those shots leads to a goal
- ▶ A corner is worth 0.022 goals.



# What, Then, Does Lead to Goals, and Wins?

- ▶ Half the goals you see are down not to skill and ability but to random chance
- ▶ In the Premier League, since 2009:
  - ▶ About 65% of goals have come from open play
  - ▶ About 8% have come from penalties
- ▶ Open-play goals, in other words, are more than eight times as frequent as those from the mark
- ▶ The odds of scoring from a shot in open play are 12%, whereas from penalties, the chance is 77%
- ▶ With a shorter move, a goal is scored one in every nine attempts
- ▶ For longer moves, it rises to one goal for every fifteen shots a team takes
- ▶ Pressing in the opponents half
  - ▶ 30% of all goals came from what we now know as “final-third regains”
  - ▶ This is the rationale behind the long-ball game
- ▶ Successful teams produce about 1/3 more shots than unsuccessful teams

# How Do We Make Possession Effective?

- ▶ Possession soccer:
  - ▶ Is more than just being able to pass the ball
  - ▶ It is about being in the right place to receive it, helping a teammate position himself in the right place in the right way, and helping him get rid of the ball in order to maintain control
  - ▶ Triangles
    - ▶ The player currently touching the ball, the one about to receive it, and the off-ball player currently causing the greatest deformation in the defense's shape
- ▶ As countless coaches have yelled to many a struggling player, you don't pass with your feet, you pass with your eyes and your brain
- ▶ Truths
  - ▶ Good teams are not better at passing than bad ones
  - ▶ Good teams simply make easy passes in better locations, and therefore limit their turnovers
- ▶ Possession is more important than position
  - ▶ Youth soccer can still be a very territorial game.
    - ▶ Each corner is celebrated as if it were a last-minute winning goal
    - ▶ 'Box'em in!' the coach screams when the opposition have a throw-in near their own goal

# “Piggy In The Middle”

- ▶ Good teams:
  - ▶ Don't give the ball back to the opposition as much
  - ▶ Know how to play “piggy in the middle”
  - ▶ Can pass more safely around their opponents
  - ▶ Have more touches of the ball per possession than unsuccessful teams
  - ▶ Attack efficiently through the central areas of the pitch, while the unsuccessful teams played significantly more to the wings
  - ▶ Lose the ball less at both ends of the pitch
  - ▶ Have better possession QUALITY
- ▶ Keeping possession is less about the fine calibration of the passer's foot than about the shared coordination of passer and receiver to create simple connections in difficult locations

# Avoid Turnovers

- ▶ Soccer is not about having the ball so much as it is about managing a succession of inevitable turnovers
- ▶ Analysis (Premier League, compared with other sports)
  - ▶ Premier League sides turn the ball over about 190 times per match (380 turnovers per game)
  - ▶ In American Football, there are 10-13 changes of possession
  - ▶ In Basketball, there are 90-100 changes of possession
  - ▶ In the average match, 10 of 100 possessions yield a shot on goal
  - ▶ Only 1.3 in 100 possessions yield a goal
- ▶ The teams that had fewer turnovers in any given match won around 44% of the games.
- ▶ Having the ball is good, but not giving it back is better

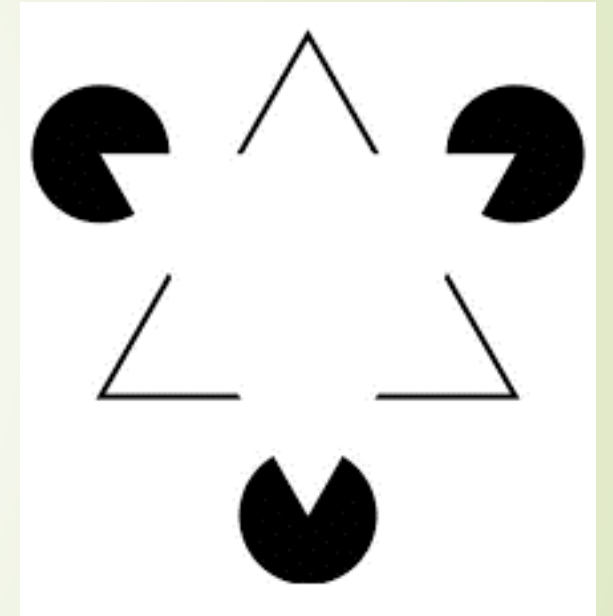


# The “Dark” Side

- ▶ Attacking actions (passes, assists, crosses, shots, and goals — are easily spotted and counted)
- ▶ Defensive actions that can be measured — tackles, and clearances — have the feel of one-off preventive actions, rather than positive things
- ▶ Possession soccer can be defensive
  - ▶ Even the tiki-taka style perfected by Barcelona and Spain has been labeled a primarily defensive approach, “passenaccio”
  - ▶ Its emphasis is on starving the opposition of the ball
- ▶ Some Coaches work under the misguided belief that all supporters want to see are goals
- ▶ People want to see matches in which every goal is essential and decisive

# Defending

- It is easier for us to find something that does exist – the dash – than something that does not
- Dogs that do not bark
  - “The best defenders are those who never tackle.” – Paolo Maldini
- “Tackling is a [last] resort and you will need it, but it isn’t a quality to aspire to, a definition.” – Xabi Alonso
- Tackling happens when something goes wrong, not right
- Strikers are loved, defenders respected



# To Attack Or To Defend?

- Goals created and goals prevented are about equal in producing wins
  - Scoring an additional ten goals reduced a club's expected number of defeats per season by 1.76
  - Conceding ten fewer goals reduced defeats by 2.35
  - To avoid defeat, goals not conceded were 33 percent more valuable than the goals scored
- Compared to scoring a goal, which on average earns a team about one point per match, not conceding is more than twice as valuable. And even conceding only one goal still gives a team around 1.5 points on average , about 30 percent more in value than scoring one.
- $0 > 1$ 
  - Goals that don't happen are more valuable than those that do.

# Tactical Philosophies

- ▶ “Strike a balance between the light of attack and the dark of defense.”
- ▶ Some teams just don't want the ball and spend “most of their time in the dark”
  - ▶ Counterattacking sides of José Mourinho
  - ▶ Frenetic , swarming teams of Zdenek Zeman and Antonio Conte and Jürgen Klopp's Borussia Dortmund
  - ▶ And there is ugliness, too: the charge often leveled at teams like the Wimbledon of the 1980s, Graham Taylor's Watford or, more recently, Tony Pulis' Stoke/West Brom
- ▶ “Ugliness is no barrier to success.”
  - ▶ Beautiful style does not necessarily win games
- ▶ “If God had meant [soccer] to be played in the air, he would have put grass in the sky” – Brian Clough

# Extra: Penalty Kicks, or Kicks From The Mark

- ▶ Penalties, or Kicks From The Mark
  - ▶ The team that gets to shoot first wins more than 60% of the time
  - ▶ Shoot first to put pressure on your opponent
- ▶ For penalty kicks, the goalkeeper
  - ▶ Can stand two and a half to four inches off-center in the goal and induce 10 percent more kicks into the wider area, meaning his dives in that direction are more effective
  - ▶ Can make the kicker believe he is bigger than he is by holding his arms out and above his shoulders
  - ▶ This provides a human equivalent of the famous Müller-Lyer illusion
  - ▶ Can use the Bruce Grobbelaar and Jerzy Dudek technique: dance, wave your arms, and generally clown around to distract the kick taker
- ▶ For penalty kicks, the kick taker
  - ▶ Can walk backward after placing the ball
  - ▶ Focus on the open area of the goal and not the goalkeeper
    - ▶ The more likely he is to look at the goalkeeper—something that is there—rather than the space around him.
    - ▶ The effort not to do something (shoot at the goalkeeper) makes doing so even more likely.

