

Advantages and Disadvantages of Systems of Play

3-4-3 or Wide Midfield System

History

Developed by Herbert Chapman of Arsenal in the 1950's to counteract the goal - scoring of opposition center forwards against his team.

Overview

Three back players:	One on each flank, with one in the middle.
Four midfielders:	Two attacking, two defending.
Three forwards:	One on each wing with a striker in the middle.

Advantages

- Strong midfield.
- Favors both defensive cover and offensive improvisation.
- Excellent support available on both attack and defense.
- If work rate and speed of midfield players is sufficient, system can generate five attackers - four midfielders and conversely, five defenders.

Disadvantages

- Defense is vulnerable against a 4-2-4.
- Tall, powerful, and mentally solid center back is required.
- Defenders are limited to their responsibilities. Improvisation on defensive end and counter attacks are limited.

4-2-4 System

History

Created by the great Hungarian team of the 1950's. Purpose was to strengthen the typical (at the time) 3-man defensive unit, which was especially vulnerable to cross-field passes. The two midfielders act as a link between the defensive and

offensive thirds of the field. To help out the midfielders, the two wingers drop back, increasing the reliance on the two strikers for scoring.

Overview

Four Defenders: One on each flank, with two in the middle.
Two midfielders: Left and Right.
Four forwards: Left and right wingers, and left and right strikers.

Advantages

- Outside backers have freedom to move up and attack.
- Width and support in offensive third.
- Depth and balance in defensive third.
- Adjustments can result in six defenders and/or six attackers.

Disadvantages

- Opposition may control midfield, and as a result control flow of game.
- Burden on midfielders is immense.
- Difficult to transition ball from defensive third to offensive third.
- Midfielders must know their responsibilities. Because counterattacks will result in superior numbers for the opposition, midfielders must quickly diffuse them when possession is lost in the midfield or offensive third.

4-3-3 System

History

This system was developed by the Brazilians in the late 1950's and early 1960's. It began as a modified 4-2-4, where one of the forwards was pulled back to strengthen the midfield. Fullbacks are then encouraged to take part in the attack.

Overview

Four Defenders: One on each flank, with two in the middle.
Three midfielders: Left, right, and center.
Three forwards: Left, right, and center.

Advantages

- Balanced.
- All sections of the field are easily connected.
- Places emphasis on ball control, and development of attack from back to front.

Disadvantages

- Opposing defense may have numerical superiority at all times.
- Vulnerable to overlapping fullbacks.

4-4-2 System

History

Introduced to the world with great success by the English National Team, coached by Sir Alf Ramsey, in their victory over Germany in the 1966 World Cup. Coach Ramsey lacked enough wingers to play the preferred 4-2-4, and he had two tall, powerful forwards.

Therefore, he decided to play two additional midfielders. The forwards, or target players, would play the ball back to onrushing midfielders for scoring opportunities. Fullbacks also moved into the attacking third, overlapping and crossing the ball into the scoring zone.

Overview

Four Defenders: One on each flank, with two in the middle.
Four midfielders: One on each flank, with two in the middle. They can play abreast of each other or in a "diamond".
Two forwards: Left and right. Often referred to as target players.

Advantages

- Solid defensive core.
- Strong link between defense and midfield.
- Much room for diversity and creativity in attack.

Disadvantages

- Limits attack. Low scoring game usually results.
- Can cause bunching of players in defensive third and midfield, especially with inexperienced players and teams.
- Requires at least one very strong forward or scoring will be very difficult.

3-5-2 Team Formation

The most recent formation to pop on the scene is that of the 3-5-2. This formation is often used by higher levels of competitors such as collegiate or professional teams.

To be successful with this formation you must have exactly the right amount of talent. Because the talent is so precise to fit this formation, youth teams who randomly select members, often don't have the luxury and talent to use this formation.

Defenders in the 3-5-2 formation consist of three athletes: a left fullback, right fullback and a sweeper (or center fullback). These three defenders must stay tightly together, no more than 10-25 yards apart from each other at all times. They form a slight triangle in shape with the sweeper nearest his own goal.

That means, from left fullback to right fullback the distance should be no more than 50 yards. These three fullbacks must work together, sliding back and forth across the field supporting each other and making sure that all attackers are accounted for. Generally, the two outside fullbacks will mark the two opposing forwards "man to man" all game long, leaving the sweeper free to help out whenever necessary.

Because there are only three defenders, they are much less likely to make offensive runs. Only if they are absolutely sure that they will score or assist in a goal should they make an offensive run and leave the man their marking. Again, this defensive strategy is only for the most skilled of teams and very confident defenders.

Midfielders in the 3-5-2 formation consist of five athletes. This formation allows for three central midfielders and two outside midfielders. Again, skill level comes into play here.

This type of formation can not be run by a team unless the skill level is excellent. With three players in the middle it is critical that they all have tight ball skills as well as communication skills. They must all work together in attacking, defending, maintaining possession, winning 50/50 balls and controlling the overall pace of the game. These 5 midfielders can be murder on the opposing team if skilled, but

they can also ruin a team's chemistry and ability if not properly trained. It takes a very special group of individuals to create a successful 5 person midfield.

Forwards in the 3-5-2 formation consist of 2 athletes. These two athletes have a very unique job. They must work together the entire game, rarely separating themselves by more than 10 to 20 yards.

Together they must work to close off angles and defenders from clearing the ball out of the defensive areas. These two forwards must become so comfortable with each other that they can predict where the others next move will be. It is very important for these players to be fast and agile. It is also important that these two players are in fairly good shape.

Now that there are only two of them up there they have to pick up some of the slack for the missing third forward. With the additional, fifth player, in the midfield the forwards receive a little bit more help than they would from the 4-4-2 formation but still need to work together to produce.

The 3-5-2 formation is definitely not for everyone. In fact it is not for the majority. It is good however to be familiar with it. Picking a formation is simply up to the coaching staff. You want to pick the system that will best exploit your talents and support your less talented individuals.

Keep an open mind though when picking formations and don't be afraid to try something totally new and unorthodox because who knows it could be the best formation yet.

4-3-3 Team Formation

The 4-3-3 consists of four defenders, three midfielders and three forwards.. At one time this formation was the dominant style of play for teams at all levels. Currently it is a formation that is being used for younger groups of athletes just starting to play the game. It is the easiest and least complex formation to learn, understand and play within. Lately, due to the lack of scoring in American soccer this formation is making a slight come back in higher ranks, yet still plays second fiddle to the very popular 4-4-2, which will be explained later.

Defenders in the 4-3-3 formation consists of four athletes. The defensive positions consist of a left and right fullback, a sweeper and a stopper. The left and right fullbacks play in front of the keeper and behind the midfielders on their respective sides of the field.

The sweeper plays in the middle of the field and is the very last defender. The only player behind him is the keeper, so this player needs to be very reliable.

The stopper also plays in the middle of the field. He/she is positioned approximately 10 yards in front of the sweeper. Set up correctly these four players should form a diamond shape.

Left and Right Fullback Responsibilities

These two positions are probably the most varied positions in the game when it comes to skill level. What I mean by that is, at young ages (5-12) these players should focus mainly on defending their side of the field, and clearing the ball when necessary.

They are responsible for sending balls long into space for the forwards to run onto as well as looking to play the ball into the feet of open midfielders. Speed is not all that essential for outside fullbacks at a young age. Now as the level of play increases (ages 13 through college) the outside fullbacks become much more than just defensive players. These outside fullbacks become essential members of the offense making runs up the sideline, at appropriate times, and looking for crossed balls for scoring opportunities.

They can also carry the ball down the sideline and look to get crosses in themselves. In this case it is very important to have speedy outside fullbacks. They must be able to get up and down the field very quickly in case of a counter attack. It is very important that outside fullbacks do not get carried away with the amount of offensive runs. They must judge the opportunity and only go on the occasions they feel will actually result in them touching the ball or taking a shot. If an outside fullback makes too many unproductive runs, they run the chance of getting tired and not being able to get back and defend their goal, like their job description indicates.

Sweeper Responsibilities

The sweeper position is one of the most crucial positions on the field and should be manned accordingly. A sweeper needs to be smart, fast, skilled and very comfortable with his/her ability. Because they are the last line of defense they very rarely make offensive type runs. Their job is to control the back. They are the leader of the other three defenders and it is their job to back the other three up at all times.

If the opposing team is coming down the right side of the field the sweeper needs to be ready and able to back up his right fullback if he/she gets beat. The sweeper needs to do it all. He/she must be able to clear the ball, send the ball to open space for the forwards (generally aiming for the corner flags), clear balls out with his/her head, control the other defenders, stop breakaways from happening as well as work with the keeper in setting up defensive situations such as corner kicks, free kicks etc. The sweeper is an extremely important player.

Stopper Responsibilities

The stopper is generally a bigger player. Speed is not a must here but one thing that is a must is consistency. This player must do things the same way constantly and not be sporadic. I say this because if he/she gets beat in an unexpected manner, his/her only safety net is the sweeper who will most likely be so caught off guard by the mistake that they too will miss the ball and then a breakaway occurs.

This player's role is to simply stop attacks from happening. He/she is to strip the opposing team of the ball and distribute. The stopper is not a play maker or a showboat. He/she is the simplest player on the field. Win possession of the ball and get it to another player on your team. Although his/her tasks are limited, the stopper is still an extremely important player.

Midfielders in the 4-3-3 consist of three players. A right midfielder, left midfielder and a center midfielder. These three players are generally the nucleus of your team. They are always in the middle of things and more often than not create most of a team's scoring opportunities. Midfielders must be able to play great defense as well as offense. These players must be versatile and very athletic.

Outside Midfielders Responsibilities

The left and right midfielders should be the most fit players on the team. They will be asked to do an awesome amount of running during the course of a game. They must support the forward in front of them and complement the defender behind them to be successful. These two players are often the ones who cross the ball in and around the goal. They must have strong legs and be very unselfish when it comes to scoring.

They should not be shooting too much from their corners of the field. If they do wander into the middle of the field then they should be ready to shoot, but in most cases they will be running up and down the sideline hitting crosses in for the forwards to convert into goals.

Center Midfielder Responsibilities

The center midfielder should be the most talented player on the field as well as the athlete with the strongest work ethic. Everything should essentially work through him and his presence must be known by all.

He is responsible for switching the field of play from side to side, setting up forwards for shots, winning all 50/50 balls, playing great defense, shooting from distance and basically playing the role of "player coach" while on the field.

He must be a very vocal leader and instructor. The center midfielder has an advantage over every other player on his team, that being he is closer to every other player than anyone else. He can turn 360 degrees and should always have someone within 10 -15 yards to which to pass. They also have the opportunity to play the long ball into space for on-running forwards. This position is the most crucial and should be looked upon as such.

Forwards in a 4-3-3 formation consist of 3 athletes. They are very similar to the midfielders in that they play straight across the field in a right forward, center forward, left forward fashion. There is a grave misconception about the forward position. Many believe that you are only an effective forward if you can score goals. Scoring goals is obviously an incredible attribute but a forward who sets goals up and collects assists is also very valuable. Some of the greatest forwards in the world are the ones who set big time goal scores up for all of their goals. That behind the scenes forward is important.

Outside Forwards Responsibilities

These two forwards should always be looking to score. Their first thought should be to shoot, but their second thought should always be, "Is there a better way.?"

These forwards are often the ones setting plays up. Often times the angles on goal that these players run into don't equate into quality shots. Because of this they simply pass the ball towards the middle and allow the center forward to finish the job. These players should be good dribblers, and have at least one solid move that they can use to beat defenders. Speed is a nice attribute to a outside forward, but good skills can replace speed sometimes.

Center Forward Responsibilities

This player should be the teams best shooter. The center forward will be, or at least in theory, should be shooting the ball more times than anyone else on the team. This player should be fast and crafty with the ball. His/Her small ball skills should be excellent. They should be able to dribble and control the ball very close to their bodies and work well in tight places. More often than not, when coaching a team you will notice a player who just seems to have a knack for the goal. That is the player you want to play at center forward. He/She should be the most selfish player on the field. This doesn't mean that they never pass the ball, but it does mean, when they have a mediocre shot, they take it. All other players should (most of the time) pass off mediocre shots but the center forward should always take the chance and use his/her abilities to the fullest.

4-4-2 Team Formation

The 4-4-2 formation is the most popular formation in today's game. It consists of four defenders, four midfielders, and two forwards. At first glance one might think that this formation would limit scoring due to the lack of forward power. This is not always true. In this formation, the midfielders and outside defenders are much more active in the offensive attack, thus resulting in goals.

Defenders in the 4-4-2 can play many different ways. They can play in the diamond formation, much like they would in the 4-3-3 formation. They can play flat across the back of the field in a line. They can play in an arc shape, eliminating the stopper position and forming a double sweeper. They can also play three flat across the field with the sweeper hanging behind in the middle ready to clean up any mistakes.

Which way you want to set your players depends a little bit on personnel and comfort. As far as responsibilities go, they are very similar to the responsibilities the defenders have in the 4-3-3 formation. The only difference occurs when you play in the arc with the double sweeper or if you play the flat back four. In these cases the position of stopper is eliminated and you are left with two players that fulfill the role of sweeper.

Generally you will use one of your sweepers as strictly a man marker. You pick the opposing teams best attacker and have your extra sweeper mark him all game long. Other than that, the defensive rolls are all the same.

Midfielders in the 4-4-2 consist of four athletes. The right and left midfielders still exist and carry out the same duties as with the 4-3-3 but a new member of the midfield moves in. This addition to the midfield plays in the middle of the field alongside the center midfielder. The two become an offensive/defensive duo and do their best to hold the middle of the field and control the game.

These two central midfielders may swap roles as long as they communicate and let the other know when a switch is occurring. These four midfielders start looking a little bit like the defensive diamond mentioned in the 4-3-3 formation. Because the middle of the field is now occupied with two central players, the defense can afford to eliminate the stopper position, due to the excess help in the central midfield.

The attacking midfielder is expected to also step up the other way and help produce some offensive scoring power though, now that the extra forward slot has been removed.

Forwards in the 4-4-2 consist of only two athletes. These two athletes have a very unique job. They must work together the entire game, rarely separating

themselves by more than 10 to 20 yards. Together they must work to close off angles and defenders from clearing the ball out of the defensive areas. These two forwards must become so comfortable with each other that they can predict where the others next move will be. It is very important for these players to be fast and agile. It is also important that these two players are in fairly good shape. Now that there are only two of them up there they have to pick up some of the slack for the missing third forward.

The attacking midfielder, as mentioned above, should also help pick up some of the slack but the responsibility of scoring goals is still that of the forward so they must really work hard and work together to accomplish their goal