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SYSTEMS OF PLAY

THE FUNCTION AND ROLE OF PLAYERS IN TODAY'S FORMATIONS



by **Chris Kouns**



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Chris Kouns

Published by

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First published September, 2016 by
WORLD CLASS COACHING 12851 Flint St Overland Park, KS 66213

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In terms of football the Summer of 2016 could not have gotten much better for fans, coaches and pundits alike. This “Summer of Soccer” allowed us to witness the best players in the world showcased in preseason tours with their club teams, the CONMEBOL Copa America Centenario, the UEFA European Championships and the 2016 Rio Olympics. These great football events showcased some of the best players and soccer that the beautiful game had to offer!

As one would imagine in this technologically driven world each event offered TV commentators worldwide opportunities to enlighten the general public on what they would witness each match. Every day they used their Smart Boards to fill our eyes with anticipated formations, systems of play and/or ideal positions for the starting players. After watching a television football broadcast a novice may think figuring out how to best utilize your talent required little more than to put the players on the field. Although we may have heard the experts speak about the 1-4-2-3-1 of Germany, the 1-4-4-2 of Iceland or the 1-4-3-3-1 of Barcelona but the biggest question that often went unanswered was WHY?

Within the pages of this book I will share with you reasoning and methodology behind the three most common systems of play showcased in the 2016 Summer of Soccer. In addition I will also cover two additional formations which teams may be considering. Utilizing the most up to date information available I hope to offer football coaches a fresh new look at the information thrown about daily on their televisions. By sharing the background information on why coaches chose players for a certain system I am giving the reader the information necessary to delve into the countless video clips available on the internet. I believe if you see the formation in action then it will reinforce your understanding of what it should look like! Through a combination of two different learning methods (reading the information and seeing it in action) I hope the reader will have a better understanding of the players necessary to employ each system as they are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of any formation.

Good luck with your efforts and I am looking forward to seeing how this information can help your players reach their personal and team goals!

CHAPTER 1

THE MODERN 1 – 4 – 4 – 2 FORMATION



In 2016 one of the oldest and most often used formations in the world again rose to prominence as a number of teams found success with a variation of the 1-4-4-2.

Although not directly involved with the major international tournaments of 2016 the posterchild for the 1-4-4-2 kicked off their year in one of the most unlikely success stories in all of sport. The formation probably most often associated with English football saw Leicester City crowned the English Premier League champions after dusting off the system of play and playing their version of it to perfection. As if coaches needed more reason to reexamine the 1-4-4-2 than the success of Leicester City the footballing world was given another lesson in its timelessness with the success that the tiny footballing nation of Iceland enjoyed in the UEFA European Championships.

Iceland entered into the 2016 UEFA European Championships as the runner up in their Euro 2016 qualifying group. Although Iceland has slightly more than 320,000 inhabitants their qualifying journey saw them face off against much larger and more powerful footballing nations such as the Czech Republic, Turkey and The Netherlands. To maximize their potential when competing against more “refined” soccer nations these descendants of the Vikings decided the 1-4-4-2 would suit their personality and strengths. After twice besting one of the historically great football nations in the world, the Netherlands, in qualifying the Icelandic 1-4-4-2 arrived at the European Championships full of confidence in their ability to play this formation to perfection.

The European Championship Round Robin competition saw Iceland draw their first game against mighty Portugal and the one time World Footballer of the Year Cristiano Ronaldo. In their next match they again drew with another nation which enjoys a great football pedigree, Hungary, and they completed their round with a win against Austria. At the end of the round robin Iceland found themselves advancing into the European Championship Quarter-finals for the first time ever. Their story would not stop in the quarterfinals though as, in the round of sixteen against England, they claimed yet another win with a 2-1 defeat of the Three Lions. Ultimately falling to the host French 5-2 in the Round of 8 Iceland showed everyone the 1-4-4-2 is still a capable system of play even in a major international tournament.

The Icelandic version of the 1-4-4-2 formation is simplistic in its implementation as a style of play. For the most part they defend in the very traditional block of four defenders, four midfielders and two strikers. In addition, more often than not, they do not look to build from the back with the ball instead opting to play a more direct, long ball forward to their strikers. However, adding their own Icelandic twist to the formation they rarely looked to have their midfielders swing crosses into the box as in a traditional “English” 1-4-4-2. Instead Iceland opted to focus on sharp interchanges in and around the box to create scoring opportunities. In addition they also implemented a brilliant set piece strategy that allowed them to make their 1-4-4-2 so difficult to deal with in the 2016 European Championships.

Prior to beginning a discussion of the “Iceland” 1-4-4-2 we should first review some generalities that a coach should consider if they would like to see their team compete in this system of play.

The 1-4-4-2 formation is one of the most commonly used in the world game.

The 1-4-4-2 is a system of play that allows teams to have strength in midfield and plenty of width to open up the opposition.

The 1-4-4-2 is one of the most adaptable systems of play in the world due to the fact that the central midfielders and full-backs can easily move within the formation depending on how much emphasis a team is putting on defense or offense.

The 1-4-4-2 formation can be one of the most effective systems of play because it can be easily adapted with an attacking or defending mind set.

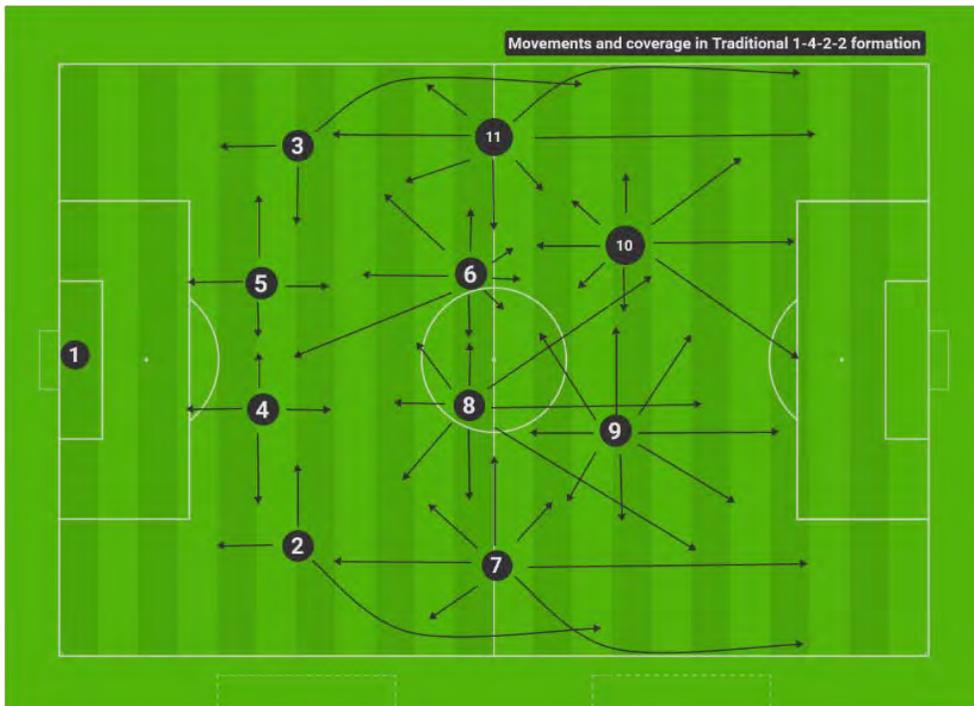
The 1-4-4-2 formation is easy to understand. This simplicity allows an organized and well coached team to find success against teams that may have more talented individual players.

The 1-4-4-2 is a system of play that forces opponents to open up seams in their defensive shape to deal with the width of the attacking midfielders and defenders.

Coaching considerations when playing a 1-4-4-2 formation:

DEFENSIVELY:

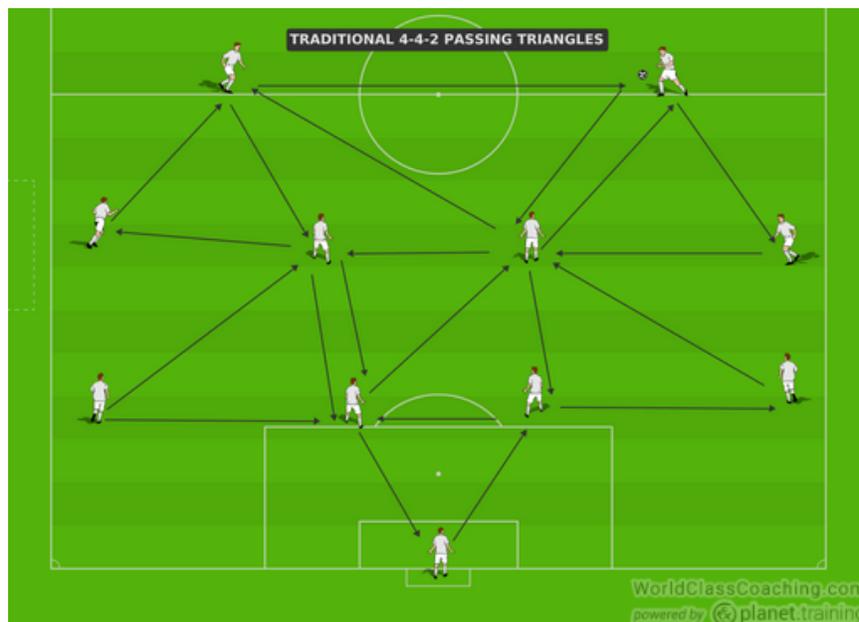
- 1) Where will your team establish their line of restraint?
- 2) Will your team utilize immediate (high) pressure or delayed (low) pressure defending?
- 3) How will you play your back four? Will they be Zonal or will they be Man to Man?
- 4) Will your goal keeper be actively covering behind the back four or will they hold more to their line?
- 5) Will your midfield defensive shape be flat, box or will they be in a diamond?
- 6) What players in the midfield will be responsible for covering the back four?
- 7) Will you use a double screen in front of the backs and if so will one drop into cover when an outside back goes forward?
- 8) Where will your two strikers default as their starting positions?
- 9) Will your strikers choose to push the opponent wide or push them central?
- 10) In what part of the field will your strikers press and in what part will they lay back?
- 11) Depending on the formation you are playing who will be responsible for the flanks up top, in the midfield and the final third?



Coaching considerations when playing a 1-4-4-2 formation:

OFFENSIVELY:

- 1) Will your team attack from this formation directly or indirectly?
- 2) Which blocks of players will be responsible for supporting your attack?
- 3) Is your goal keeper capable of starting an attack with their punt / drop kick? If so what areas of the field do you want to try to exploit or players should you target?
- 4) Do your central defenders and wide backs have the technical and tactical understanding to play from the back in possession?
- 5) If the wide defenders are capable will you choose to send one or both of them at the same time? If you send both of them who will be covering the extra space?
- 6) Where should your midfielders look to move in order to create the most effective number up situations in the attack?
- 7) Are there certain passing patterns between players that are more effective?
- 8) Do your strikers finish better within the box or outside the box?
- 9) What types of service will be most effective for your attacking players to finish?
- 10) What cues will you set for your attacking players to understand when to switch the point of attack and when to stride forward?
- 11) Is your team capable of combination play to break down defenders or will they rely on individual abilities?



Along with the systemic considerations and generalities there are also generalities in terms of player roles.

The **TWO STRIKERS** will most often be found with one of them playing higher up the field and another striker who works underneath the highest option.

Traditional High Striker Characteristics:

1. The highest striker should be capable playing with their back to goal, holding the ball up and then combining with the striker underneath or the midfielders joining the attack.
2. This player is often a big, tall, strong player who is good in the air and physical enough to hold off defenders when in possession of the ball.

Non-Traditional High Striker Characteristics:

1. The highest striker may have the pace to stretch defenses vertically and to disrupt the attacking defenders of the other team as they must be careful not to overcommit and fall victim to their pace.
2. This player may have a “special” ability (technical or goal scoring) that can be utilized by dropping a bit deeper into the midfield. Today this player may be referred to as a “False 9”.

The **FOUR MIDFIELDERS** will most often be found in a block that sits in front of the back four. This block will typically contain two central midfielders, with one attacking and one defending, as well as two wide midfielders who are responsible for covering the space from box to box.

Traditional Central Midfielder Characteristics:

1. Although the two central midfielders are typically “flat” in their formation there is often a more defensive minded central player who is responsible for breaking up the opponents attack and assisting the back line if need be. This player typically acts as a “screen” to protect the team against counter attacks when possession is lost.
2. The other central midfielder will often be more attacking minded and will find themselves farther up the field supporting the strikers. This player is typically a

technically gifted player who can combine with the strikers or create scoring opportunities for themselves.

Traditional Wide Midfielder Characteristics:

1. The traditional wide midfielder, also known as a “winger”, would find themselves taking on full-backs and serving crosses into the box after they beat their player.
2. The traditional wide midfielder may also cut inside from the width and serve balls into the box if they are not on their favored foot.
3. The “wingers” are also responsible for halting the opposing teams attacking wide midfielders or full backs when their team is not in possession.
4. Traditional wide midfielders must be very fit as they are required to cover a great deal of the pitch.

The **FOUR DEFENDERS** will most often be found in a block of four that is well organized and compacted in defending. This block includes two wide defenders, who assist with service into the box in the attack, as well as two central defenders who are focused on disruption of the opponents attack.

Traditional Full Back Characteristics:

1. The traditional wide defender must deal with the attack of the opposing teams’ wide midfielders and strikers.
2. The traditional full back is a capable 1 v 1 defender and solid in the tackle.
3. The wide defender must also be able to communicate with their central defenders and cover when those players are pulled out of position.
4. In the attack traditional full backs would possess pace, power and the ability to swing crosses into the strikers from wide areas.
5. Traditional wide defenders are the counter attacking “stop-gap” on corner kicks as they are not normally included in attacking corners when compared to taller central defenders.

Traditional Central Defender Characteristics:

1. The traditional center back uses their size to clear balls driven or swung into the heart of the defense.
2. The traditional center back does not “play” out of the back but focuses on clearance of the ball or short passes to midfielders.

3. Traditional center backs are technically solid in defending and may be called on to man mark
4. The traditional center back must have a solid tactical understanding of the game as they must read the game and recognize threats that may be appearing in different parts of the back third.
5. Central defenders are traditionally strong, tall and brave making them useful in terms of defending corner kicks and acting as an attacking threat on offensive corner kicks.

Traditional Goal Keeper Characteristics:

1. The traditional goal keeper in a 1-4-4-2 must have the ability to eliminate lines of defenders with long goal kicks, punts or thrown distributions.
2. The traditional goal keeper is tall, fills the frame of the goal and is a solid shot stopper.

CHALLENGES PLAYING THE 1-4-4-2 FORMATION:

1. Due to the longevity of the formation most coaches are aware of its weaknesses and how to attack the formation.
 - a) The most common challenge a coach may face is the choice of what to do if the opponent outnumbers the two center midfielders with a three man or triangle midfield set up. If the two central midfielders are given help by pinching in the wide midfielders then the flank space will be exposed. If a striker drops into the midfield to help then the lone striker left in the attack is severely hampered in going to goal.
 - b) In addition when a team sets their traditional three lines of players an opponent can find spaces “between the lines” to attack. This is especially dangerous if an opponent can expose gaps between the midfield and defensive lines.

Please note that all of the characteristics and traits above are considered “traditional” in their roles and responsibilities of the 1-4-4-2 formation but in the “Modern” game there are other options to consider!

THE ICELAND MODEL of the 1-4-4-2 formation

A case study on why a team chooses a formation and system of play



When deciding that Iceland was best suited for a 1-4-4-2 there were several considerations their part-time coach, and part-time dentist, Lars Lagerbäck took into account while constructing one of the most surprising team at the 2016 UEFA European Championships.

To begin with Lagerbäck understood who it was that he was coaching. This should be the first step for any coach when they are considering a formation or system of play as it is vital the traits of the players fit what the system has to offer in terms of strengths and weaknesses. As a country Iceland has a long and storied history of combat harkening back to their Viking ancestors. However, it was not their hardened spirit which allowed them to rise to prominence from a land with more volcanos than cities. Rather it was the fact their people exist within the realm of “Duglegur” Even though the word “Duglegur”

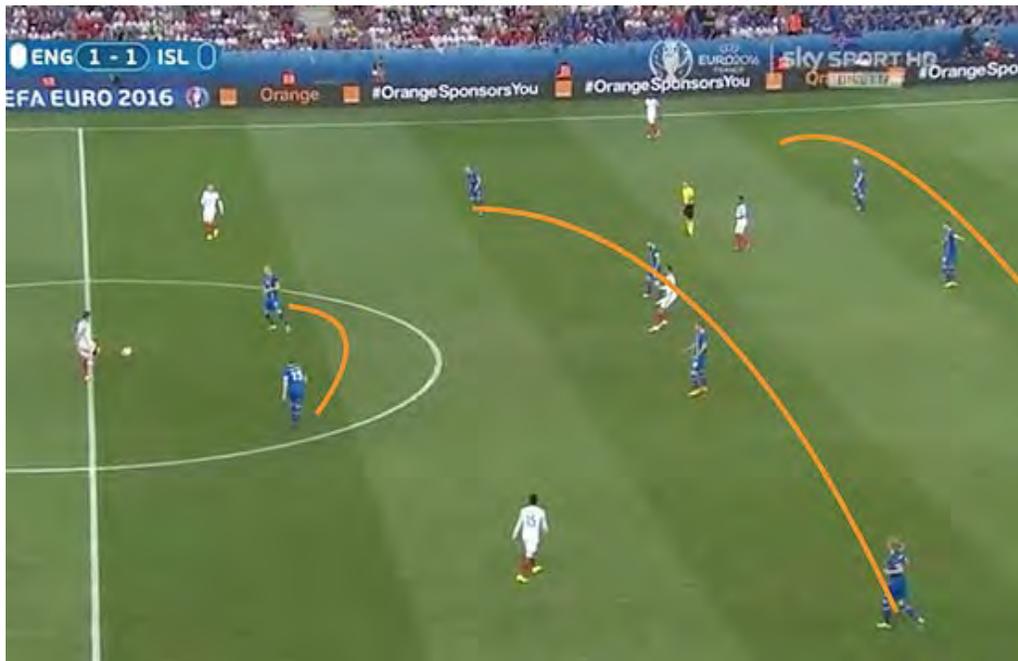
sounds like something from Game of Thrones, and it does not have an exact translation in the English language, but its essence refers to THE CORE VALUE of ICELAND HARD WORK!

Lagerbäck recognized that from his best player to his most inexperienced player they all exemplified the Duglegur spirit! As such the 1-4-4-2 formation allowed the team a simplified defensive formation that honors and rewards a never ending work rate. The tight blocks of defenders would all tackle, cover and fight for every inch of turf knowing they were in a formation which allowed them to work hard enough as a unit to overcome more skillful players. He was also very aware that Iceland possessed a player with a very unique talent which could be highlighted as a result of their hard work. Central midfielder, and Captain, Aron Gunnarsson possesses the ability to throw the ball 40 yards with great accuracy and velocity. This Icelandic weapon came into play every time Iceland earned a throw in near their opponent's goal. Thus, they had the chance to "outwork" their opponents and then fight to score half chances in the penalty box.

In addition to Duglegur Lagerbäck also knew the players he had at his disposal were products of the Icelandic system of player development. The tiny nation of just over 320,000 produced a core group of players who had been working together, and learning to play with one another, for years. This cohesion was exemplified by a great sense of comradery as well as an understanding of their individual strengths and weaknesses. This relationship was on display for everyone to see throughout the European Championships with Iceland being the only nation to start the same line up for five consecutive games.

ICELAND'S 1-4-4-2 DEFENSIVE SHAPE

The strength of the Icelandic defending shape was their center back pairing of Ragnar Sigurdsson and Kári Árnason. These two central defenders co-anchored the back line of the national team for the four year period heading into the European Championships. As such then possessed a great understanding of one another and how to play with one another. In addition they were able to communicate effectively with all team members and maintain the overall team shape until their matchup with France in the Final Eight.



Iceland players defend within a very tight block of four defenders, four midfielders and two strikers. Because of their organization and hard work they rely on compacting the space within their defending block to just 25 yards.

In defense the 1-4-4-2 formation of Iceland was based on the two strikers dropping deep in their own half to take on the role of two extra central midfielders. With numbers near the ball Iceland utilized zonal marking within three very compact lines. Across the board individual play was not a strength for Iceland, so, they seldom allowed themselves to be drawn from their team shape which allowed them to count on one another. In addition to the defending role the two strikers played Iceland's most talented and well known central midfielder player, Gylfi Sigurdsson, recorded the more than 10 defensive duels per match

at the Euros which was more than all four of their defenders. As a testimony to the cohesive defensive mentality Iceland possessed they gave up just two goals in the opening rounds and both were when their wide backs were caught out of shape unbalancing their cohesive defensive block. As a total defensive philosophy Icelandic players had no issue simply clearing balls out of bounds or up the field. These players relied on the fact their team would work harder in defending than their opponents would work to continually try to break them down. As a unit Iceland led the entire field of participants at the Euros with around 22 clearances per game.

ICELAND'S 1-4-4-2 ATTACKING SHAPE

In conjunction with their defending principles Iceland attacked utilizing a more traditional manner of striking long balls to their forwards and looking for them to keep it long enough for other players to join. Since this method of attack utilized a risky ball forward, as opposed to working the ball up the field in possession, Iceland enjoyed a possession percentage of just 39% for the European Championships which also placed them dead last in terms of possession!

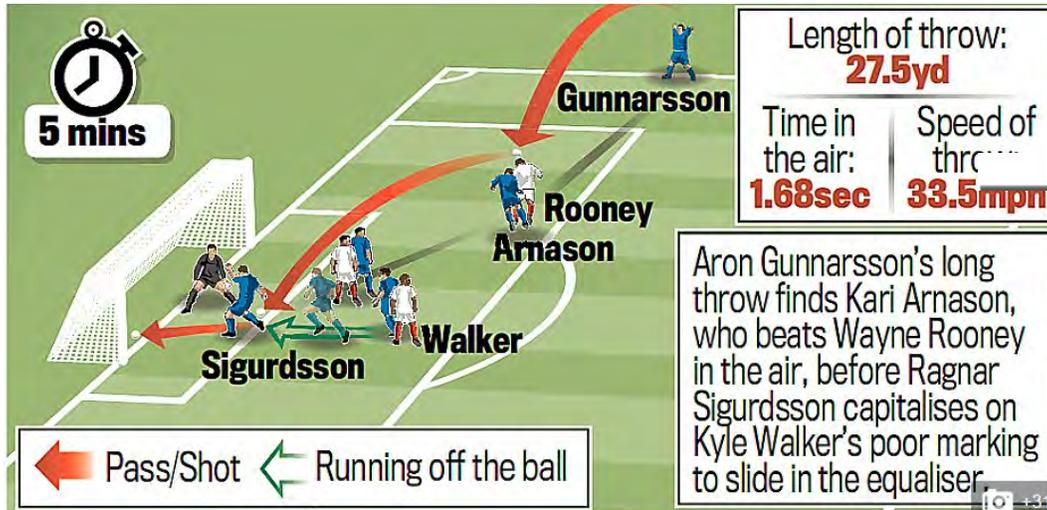
For his part when Iceland's goalkeeper, Hannes Halldórsson, made a save or received the ball he too did not try to build up from the back. In fact throughout the entire European Championship his most common outlet pass was over the top to striker Kolbeinn Sigthórsson. Halldórsson undertook that pass more than 10 times per match throughout the tournament. Although it was risky, and certainly led to more fragmented attacks, it often led to a desired outcome for Iceland, set pieces. By quickly moving the ball into forward positions Iceland overcame their inability to consistently create multiple scoring chances from open play!

With the ball advanced into their opponents defensive third Iceland worked to create scoring chances in a very unique manner for the UEFA Championships throw in set pieces. At the conclusion of the European Championships Iceland would lead the rest of the field with more than 80 throw ins during their campaign. For their efforts they were rewarded with one penalty kick and three goals off of the set piece skills of Captain Aron

Gunnarsson. In truth this plan worked because Iceland was the only team at the Euros who had the personnel and ability to score a goal from a long throw in.



Iceland players focus on creating goal scoring chances based on their strengths. Inside the box they await the long throw of Captain Aron Gunnarsson. With eight players involved in the set piece they flick the ball on from the front post and beat the English goalkeeper and defenders to the back post.



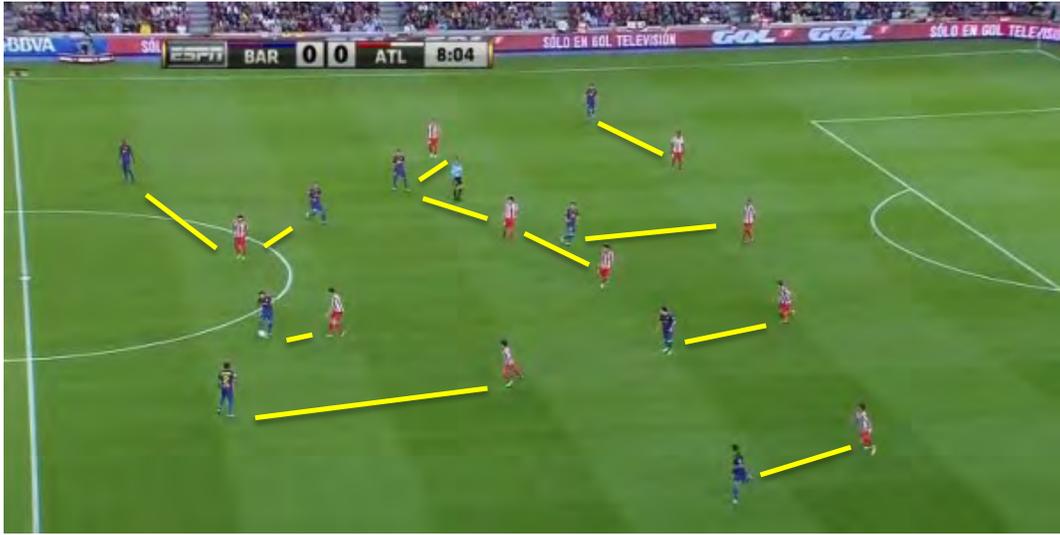
When Iceland was able to allow players to join the attack their 1-4-4-2 utilized the abilities of their two wide midfielders, Birkir Bjarnason and Johann Berg Gudmundsson. Again, focusing on their strengths these players did not drive to the end line and swing crosses into the box as a regular method of attack. Rather, they worked to find combination play options that allowed them to break down their opponents and find scoring chances. Recognizing the likelihood of scoring inside the box is greater than outside the box Iceland the Icelandic midfielders worked very hard to complete passes into that scoring area. Their combination play resulted in an astounding success rate for pass completing in the final third. Midfielder Bjarnason and striker Jón Dadi Bödvarsson ended the tournament with close to a 100% accuracy rate for their passes in this area. As a team Iceland averaged the highest scoring percentage of the tournament with a 27% success rate, a percentage that far surpassed the second most proficient team in the European championships, Wales.

1-4-4-2 formation variations

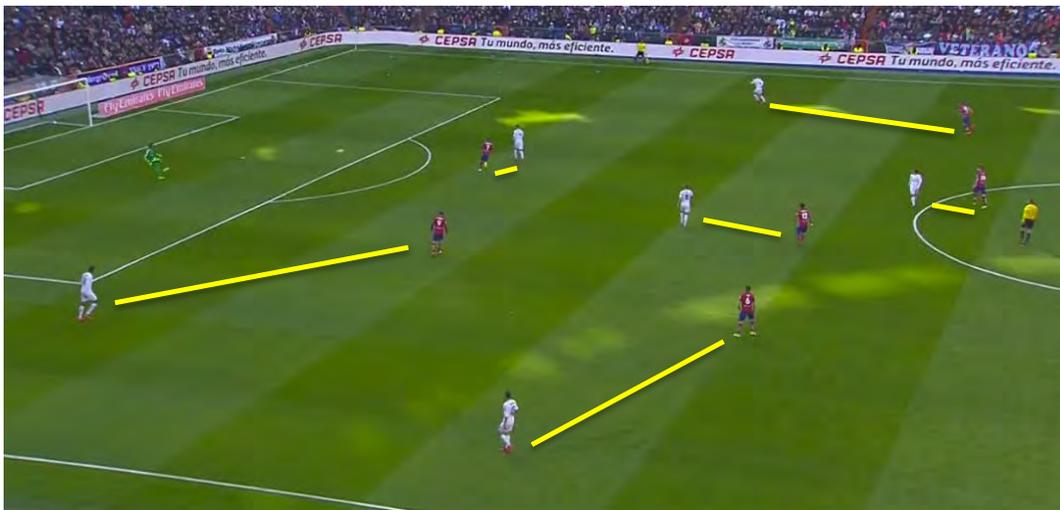
Traditional Midfield w/ Pressure & Man Marking: Atlético Madrid, Diego Simeone.

Unlike Iceland Atlético Madrid and their coach Diego Simeone were aware they possessed very skillful and special players in their attacking arsenal. With the likes of French International Antoine Griezmann at his disposal this 1-4-4-2 utilized high pressure, man marking, defense as a way to win the ball closer to the goal and help create scoring opportunities.

Diego Simeone recognized that, like Iceland, he had a very cohesive center back pairing considered by some the most sound in Europe. Miranda and Diego Godin are two South American players that not only understand and communicate well with each other, but, are also willing to cover every blade of grass while doing so. Each player is blessed with speed, athleticism, tactical awareness and physical strength not to mention a propensity for hard work! As if Simeone needed another reason to cherish his defensive duo each player is also very good on the ball and are a constant aerial threat on set-pieces.



As opposed to the Iceland 1-4-4-2 Atlético Madrid choose to press higher up the field working to win the ball back in an area where their quality players can create goal scoring opportunities. When they defend as a block on their own side of the field they do maintain a shape similar to Iceland, but, they are still focused more on taking away player options and focusing on utilizing the sideline to help them win the ball.



Without a doubt Atlético Madrid have been so successful using the 1-4-4-2 because it fits their player traits. Their personnel are athletic enough to consistently maintain compactness. Their players are precise enough in their man-marking to cut off the opponent's passing options. In addition, the players within the team are also

hardworking, disciplined and alert enough to press and win the ball in the right areas of the pitch. Much like Iceland their system of play dictates they keep the center of the field compact and force their opponents to play the ball out wide. Atlético Madrid have also proven a team can still find success in the modern game with the 1-4-4-2 formation as they have won the UEFA Super Cup, Europa League, Copa del Rey, Spanish Super Copa and a La Liga title over the past three years.

Diamond Midfield – 2014 Liverpool under Brendan Rodgers



The 2014 version of Liverpool saw Brendan Rodgers lead his troops on a march towards the Premier League title utilizing a 1-4-4-2 formation with a Diamond in the midfield. The shape of the team allowed strikers Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge to roam and attack with a very compact midfield beneath them. A midfield which also included the flexibility to allow Raheem Sterling and Steven Gerrard to get into the attack from deeper lying positions. The diamond midfield approach was especially effective for Liverpool because Gerrard was exceptional at playing balls to and through the attacking trio ahead of him. In addition their team shape saw “wide” midfielders, Joe Allen and Jordan Henderson, tucked inside allowing Liverpool to dominate the central midfield and deal

fairly easily with opposing wingers. As a defending philosophy this formation allowed Liverpool to utilize high pressure defending as a way to spark their deadly attack.

Within this diamond Brendan Rogers “wide” midfielders also benefitted from the fact that Sterling’s pace as an attacking mid, coupled with the pace of Suarez & Sturridge, was a constant worry for opposing sides. Having such a mobile player at the top of the diamond meant he also played the vital role of preoccupying the other team’s midfielders. While defenders were forced to pay attention to Suarez, Sturridge and Sterling they were not able to stretch to the touchlines in attacking transition for fear of exposing themselves to the blistering pace of Liverpool. As a result Allen and Henderson were free to find space in the midfield and get the attacking three players the ball in situations where they could face up and run at people.

1-4-4-2 Diamond Midfield Generalities:

- 1) The width in this system is not provided by the strikers or midfielders, rather, it is provided by the wide defenders who must move forward into the opposing side of the field.
- 2) The defensive midfielder is normally located at the base of the diamond in order to protect the center backs from a quick vertical counter attack or transition.
- 3) While all of the midfielders support play through the middle the attacking midfielder at the top of the diamond will link the midfielders and the strikers.
- 4) The twin strikers have the freedom to interchange with one typically assuming the supporting striker role and providing crosses to the other striker who provides a target.
- 5) When the midfield diamond defends as a unit it will often appear to be a 1-4-3-3 formation. This happens because the central midfielder at the top of the diamond will join the two strikers in leading the press. That is the cue for the two “wide” midfielders to drop in alongside the holding midfielder and provide a screen in front of the defensive line.

**ROLE SPECIFIC TRAINING
SESSIONS
FOR PLAYERS IN THE
1-4-4-2 FORMATION
AND SYSTEM OF PLAY**

Team Defending Shape and Balance in a 1-4-2-2 Formation

Description

This session will offer players the opportunity to coordinate their movements within their blocks of players (according to their roles) so that they will keep proper balance and shape in their defending.

Activity 1 – Establishing shape and movement of player blocks



Setup:

In the area between the 18 yard box and midfield you will have a block of four players in a defending shape with their back to goal. Behind that block you will have the other players on the team also arranged in blocks of four according to the roles they are expected to complete.

Execution:

There will be cones with balls placed on them spread throughout the area (representing attacking players) and the defending block will move as a unit to the different attackers while keeping shape.

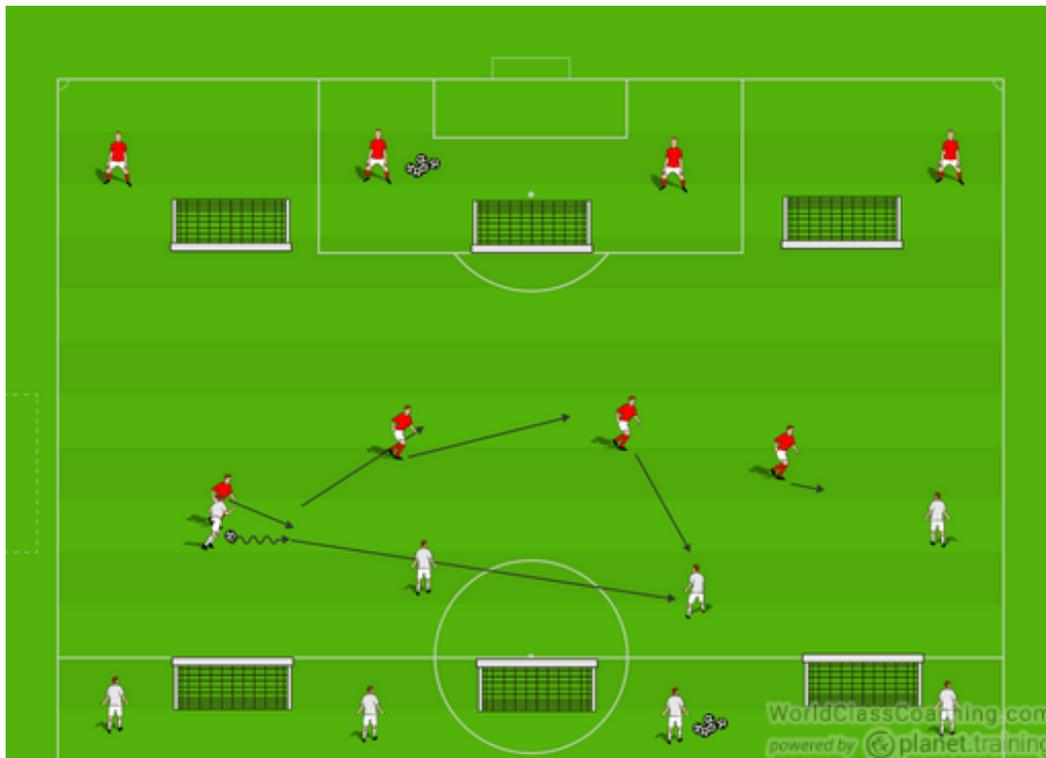
The coach will direct players to a cone/ball that will represent attackers. The block of players should move as a unit and close down that attacker while maintaining their defensive shape and balance.

COACHING POINTS:

The blocks of players should move quickly and with a vision of mimicking the body shape of the player in front of each person.

The closest player to the ball should determine the pace of the block movement and all members should duplicate in order to deny penetration opportunities.

1-4-4-2 Defending Shape Activity 2



In an area roughly 45 yards deep and 65 yards wide you will have two teams (4 v 4) with each one defending three goals on their sideline. In addition, you will have an additional team of four players on each sideline behind the goals for a total of 16 players involved in the activity.

Execution:

Each team will attempt to score in one of the three goals on the opposite sideline. The goal must be scored on the ground. The opposing team will work to defend the three goals while maintaining their balance.

Should a team allow a goal then the block of four behind the goals that was scored on will bring a ball onto the field and attack the team that just scored. The team that allowed the goal will step off the field and assume the position of the team that just brought the ball onto the field.

Variations:

You can choose to incorporate two central midfielders per team for a total of 6 v 6. If you choose to include those players in the block make sure you open the depth to at least 60 deep and open the width to at least 70 wide.

COACHING POINTS:

When the group is defending work to move as a solid unit both side to side and forward & back.

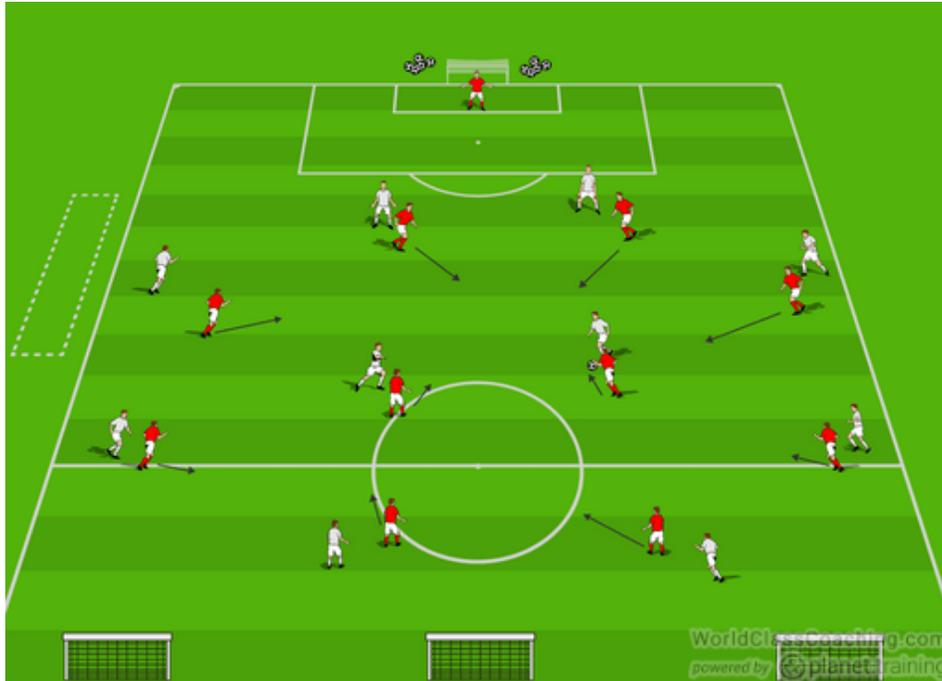
The number one priority of the shape is to deny vertical penetration by the ball or the player on the ball.

When balls are played backward then the block of players should step forward to compact the space.

When the ball is at a players feet the block should not move but should be prepared to address a pass or dribble based on the body position of the player on the ball.

If a player is dribbling and a defender is engaged they should stay with the dribbler rather than worry about dropping into the defending shape.

1-4-4-2 Shape and Balance in Defending Activity 3



Setup:

You will have two teams of 10 playing against each other. One team will be going to one large goal with a goal keeper in the net. The other team will be going to three counter goals.

Execution:

The team defending the large goal will begin with a ball played from their goal keeper. The opposing team will try to maintain a defending shape that will stop them from scoring on the three counter goals. When the defending team wins the ball they should attack the one large goal.

Variations:

You can give each team five minutes as the team attacking the large goal. You can also say that when a team scores in the three counter goals the field is flipped and that team is now going to the big goal and the other team is now attacking the counter goals.

COACHING POINTS:

If the ball is in front of the strikers then they should shepherd the ball to an area where the team will compact on the ball.

If the ball bypasses the strikers their shape should discourage passes back to the defenders and still be open to doubling down on the player in the midfield if they feel they can win the ball.

When the ball is travelling the entire block of players should move with it. When the ball stops at a players feet the block should work to be in a good position but not be travelling.

Communication within the block is vital as players talk about the players they have, the space they are denying or the area of the field the ball should be forced.

TRAINING TWIN STRIKERS IN A 1-4-4-2 FORMATION

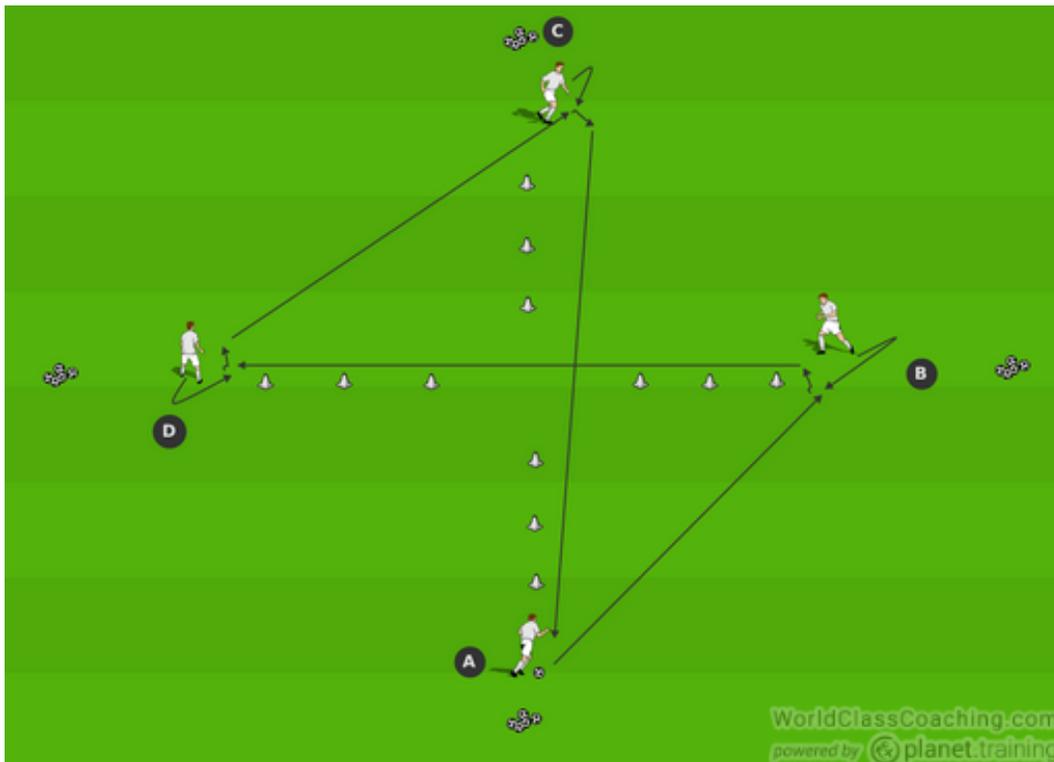
Description

This session will offer potential combinations for the #9 and #10 players to use in order to create scoring opportunities.

INTRODUCTION OF MOVEMENT Activity 1

Setup:

There are three sets of cones set up in a cross pattern (as shown below). The distances for the crosses are eight (8) yards – five (5) yards – two (2) yards. You will divide your team up into four groups with one group behind each of the four corners of the cross.



Execution:

There will be two patterns to follow, but, they are basically the same pattern just completed in different directions. The first pattern will be repeat A - B - D - C - A. When switching to the other direction the pattern will repeat A - D - B - C - A. After players pass the ball they will rotate in a clockwise manner (even when the pattern direction switches)

COACHING POINTS:

As the ball travels to each player the next player set to receive the ball should begin to check away and make physical contact with the player behind them in line. For instance as the ball travels from A to B player C will begin checking away and not come for the ball until B is prepared to play it. This coordination of movement between a #9 and #10 is vital to set up combination and finishing opportunities.

To help your teammates with the speed of play in combination (which is vital in the Box) players should receive the ball with the foot that is across their body and take their first touch in the direction of the person they are playing the ball to.

For this to be successful your #9 and #10 must be paying attention to the body, and eyes, of the player on the ball. They must focus on not arriving for the ball until their body tells them they are prepared to pass it. Otherwise the twin striker will kill the space and not be able to recover from a bad ball.

Variations:

After going in both directions focusing on receiving the ball across your body then assign pairs of lines specific feet they must receive the ball with. For instance D & B must only receive it with the left foot while A & C must only receive it with the right foot. Make sure both pairs have to do both feet.

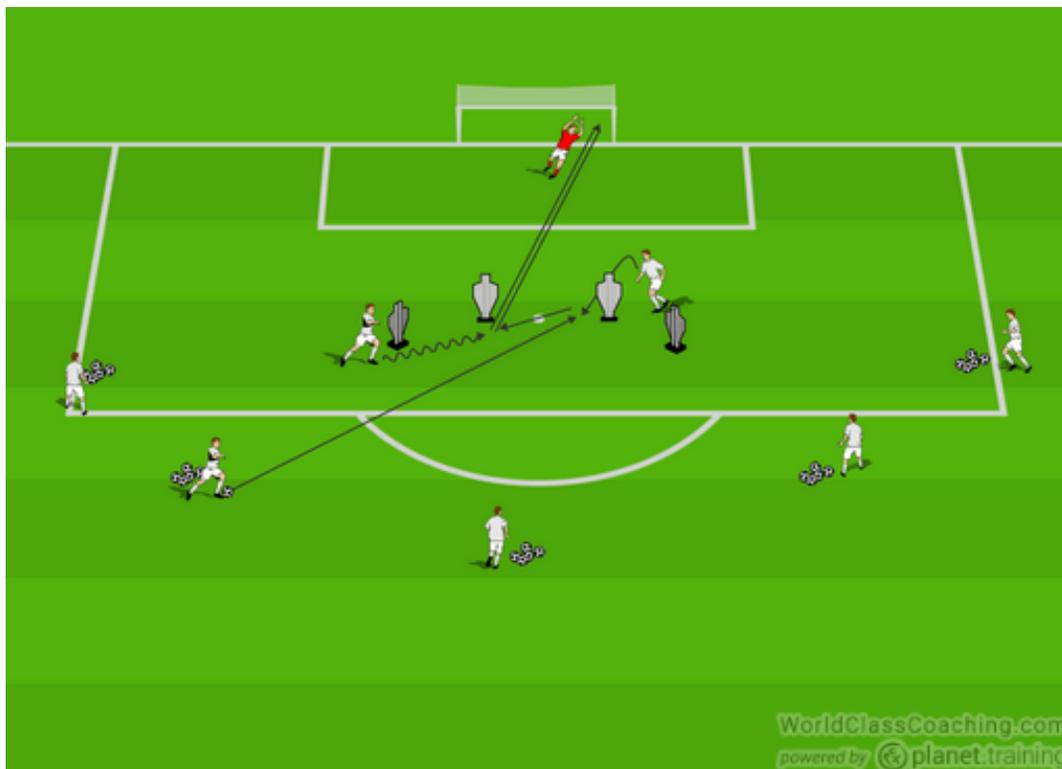
Move inward towards the next smaller cross and follow the same directions. After successfully managing that cross go to the smallest cross. This one requires either two very fast touches or a one touch pass to be successful.

Another option is to increase the difficulty in terms of thought process by having the players pass based off the number of touches that the person in front of them took. So, if the person who gave them the ball took two touches then they must play the next ball in one touch. If it was in three touches they must take two touches, etc. This will encourage them to be very cognizant of the player giving them the ball and their actions.

TRAINING TWIN STRIKERS IN A 1-4-4-2 FORMATION – Activity 1

Setup:

Set up four coaching figures (or even trash cans if you do not actually have the coaching equipment) in the area between the six yard box and the penalty mark. Outside the six yard box (at the top) and then outside the 18 yard box positions five midfield or flank players with at least three or four balls each. Then, place your #9 and #10 players inside the area between the figures and the top of the 18.



Execution:

In succession the midfielders and wingers will serve balls to the twin strikers who must use what they worked on in the previous activity in order to combine and finish it one time if possible but two touch at most. Any ball that the player checking for the first pass cannot control and play in one touch (or two quick touch max) does not earn them the right to finish. There is a premium put on playing balls quickly and with a purpose in the

area so you can take advantage of the opportunities that arise. The next ball should not be played till the players in the middle are prepared to check away and receive the ball.

COACHING POINTS:

Each pair of strikers in the finishing area must work in tandem so that the player checking for the ball has their body open to an area where they can lay off, or slip a ball in, to be struck right away while their partner must read their body and adjust to be able to strike the lay off quickly.

Encourage all types of creativity by the #9 and #10 in the box. If the player checking for the ball does not see their partner in front of them challenge them to find a way to make it work. Dummy the ball, flick it with a back heel, etc. This will require your twin strikers to develop a level of communication (both verbal and non-verbal) that will be required to maximize goal scoring opportunities.

The player who is finishing the ball should take a peek at the space the “defenders” are giving them as finishing lanes and then make sure they put the ball on frame very quickly to take advantage of the fact they are so close to the goal and the GK will have limited reaction time.

Variations:

You can increase the fitness component of this activity by giving each tandem a time limit to finish as many balls as possible in, however, I would not start that way so they can get a good grasp of what it takes in the box to finish first before worrying about speed. Also, you can make it a contest with the tandems each keeping track of their goals. You can give 1 point for a successful goal off a two touch lay off or finish and three points for a successful one touch lay off and finish.

TRAINING TWIN STRIKERS IN A 1-4-4-2 FORMATION – Activity 3

Setup:

This activity will require two full size goals facing each other at a distance of 46 yards (creating two finishing zones of 23 yards each). There will be two wide areas marked off with a 3 v 1 in each area (distances vary according to the technical and tactical level of your players). Within each finishing area there will be a 2 v 1 (#9 & #10 vs #4/#5) plus a GK.



Execution:

Both 3 v 1 grids are keeping possession at the same time. When they are prepared to play an entry pass into one of the finishing areas they can play the entry ball. Make sure your grid for the 3 v 1 is big enough to allow them to successfully keep possession and still offer visual cues for the attacking tandem to read and check off of. 3 v 1 is allowed to play to either attacking tandem so their body position should be open to either

option. When the tandem gets the ball the striker pair focus should be to finish in less than two touches per person.

COACHING POINTS:

As the players are keeping possession in the 3 v 1 grids the attacking pair should be moving off of each other in order to create a “scoring” pocket where they can check into and receive the ball with enough room to find their partner and finish.

One visual cue you can work with your partners on is the attacking player who is closest to the defender should drive them away by putting their shoulder in their chest. Then, that movement offers a visual cue to their partner to begin preparation of their body for a shot. They should also begin to read the space where the shot will most likely take place so they can choose their finishing area in the goal.

Players in the 3 v 1 grid should work to put themselves in positions where they can play a positive entry ball into the attacking pair. For this activity a “positive entry ball” is one that the striking partnership can finish from in minimal touches. This requires them to keep their heads up, receive the ball in a positive manner going forward when facing the attacking tandem and focus on playing a ball that can be handled in one or two touches max.

Variations:

If your players are having a hard time focusing on where to go and who to check to because there is too much activity you can just have one 3 v 1 grid active at a time. Then, when a ball is played in to one attacking tandem the other 3 v 1 grid can become active and will play in the direction of the other tandem.

TRAINING ATTACKING PLAY (FOR MIDFIELDER AND BACKS) IN A 1-4-4-2 FORMATION

Description

This session will offer potential combinations for the #6, #8, #7, #11, #2 AND #3 players to use in order to create attacking opportunities.

INITIAL INTRODUCTION OF MOVEMENTS Activity 1

Setup:

Players will be split into groups of five with a ball for each group. There will be one defending player and four players looking to keep possession of the ball without allowing the defender to touch it.



Execution:

The players keeping possession of the ball must keep it while executing the following restrictions:

- 1) Following every pass the passer must overlap the player who received the ball.
- 2) Following every pass the passer must backpedal three steps and then must re-position themselves to be an option for the ball.
- 3) At least once every five passes the players in possession must complete a wall pass or give and go to maintain possession.

COACHING POINTS:

The player on the ball should work to receive it so that they are always facing their teammates. This would allow them the most options with the ball.

The player receiving the ball should take a diagonal first touch towards the area the ball came from to open up the space and opportunity for combination play.

The player on the ball should use the following visual cues for their decision making: If the defender steps with the ball play the overlapping player. If the defender cheats to the overlapping player then the player on the ball should keep it and dribble.

The player who played the ball and is overlapping should do so at full pace to maximize the pressure of decision the defender must make on who to take (ball or man).

The player who played the ball and is backpedaling should drift (via a backpedal) diagonally away from the direction they played the ball so the defender cannot easily choose which option to take.

The player who is received the ball should look at the body position of the defender to go at them if they are dropping or pass around them if they are stationary.

The player that plays the ball and then is moving for a wall pass option must make their run so that they are even with the defender and can easily play a ball in behind breaking their pressure.

Variations:

You can restrict the players in this activity to a grid (suggested size 15 x 15) or you can allow them to use free flowing space and simply encourage them not to get too spread out so it becomes too easy to keep possession.

You can also reward the defender, and make it harder for the group in possession, by allowing the defender to change on a touch on the ball, a ball forced out of the grid or a ball they win.

TRAINING ATTACKING PLAY (FOR MIDFIELDER AND BACKS) IN A 1-4-4-2 FORMATION – PART 2

Setup:

On a half field there will be two teams with one in a 3-4-2 formation and the other in a 2-4-1 formation. The 3-4-2 team will be going to a big goal while the 2-4-1 team will be attacking counter attack areas above midfield.



Execution:

The ball always begins with the three defenders in the 3-4-2. They are required to play the ball to a midfielder for the activity to begin. Once the midfielder touches the ball their team is live to goal.

When the 2-4-1 team wins the ball, in the flow of play or from the goal keeper then they are looking to spring forward and get the ball into the counter attack area.

COACHING POINTS:

The #6 player should work to make themselves the easiest option for the defenders by checking into the vacant areas of the midfield allowed by having just two opposing players.

The #8 player should assume a position that is visible to the defenders, however, is opposite of the position the #6 is taking. This should offer both a long and short midfield option for the defender.

Both the #6 and the #8 should receive the ball side on and facing forward so they can attack and find options in as little time as possible.

The #7 and #11 players should work to maintain as much width as possible but recognize the visual cue that their position should make a triangle between the striker closest to them and the #6 player.

Both the #7 and #11 player should recognize they must work up the line and back down the line as those two players move within the confines of the field.

When the #7 and #11 players get the ball they must recognize the two options available to them which is to bring the ball diagonally towards the post (dribble or pass) or bring the ball down the line (dribble or pass)

The #2 and #3 players will begin in a position that offer closer support to the one central defender, however, they are looking for opportunities to join the attack with the wide midfielder on their side and move up the field as an attacking unit.

The #2 and #3 must be aware of their options and constantly be moving in a manner that allows them to form passing angles (triangles) with the #6 player and the wide midfielder on their side.

The #9 and #10 players should focus on a high starting position to stretch the defenders and offer themselves as constantly available tips of the passing triangles.

OPTIONS THAT MAY BECOME AVAILABLE:

- A) OVERLAPPING #2 OR #3
- B) OVERLAPPING OR WALL PASS #7 OR #11
- C) DRIFTING AND SLASHING #9 OR #10

Variations:

The defenders in the 3-4-2 can play a ball directly to one of the twin strikers if that option is available.

The ball can begin from a throw in with the defenders and midfielders starting their attack off a pass restart.

TRAINING ATTACKING PLAY (FOR MIDFIELDER AND BACKS) IN A 1-4-4-2 FORMATION Activity 3

Set Up:

9 v 9 including Goal Keepers: The two teams will play in an area from the top of the 18 yard boxes. There will be a full sized goal at the top of each box with a keeper in play.

Execution:

Both teams will be aligned in a 1-3-4-1 formation. The back line should consist of a #2, #4 and #3. The Midfield should include a #7, #6, #8 and #11. The lone player up top should be represented by a #9. There will be three phases of the activity that will be run for a 15 minute duration. Each phase will have a distinct focus for the teams to emphasize in order to involve their backs and midfielders in breaking the defensive line of the opposing team.

Time Phase One: The main area of focus for this period will be to have the two teams keep the ball through a compact structure. Their proximity in terms of compactness should allow the interjection of defenders into the attacking third. This interjection should be completed through combinations between the #2 & #3 with their accompanying #7 & #11.

** See two diagrams that script out possible combination opportunities





COACHING POINTS:

The #2 and #3 players must be acutely aware of the body positioning of the #7 or #11 in front of them. Should the body position cut off the sideline then their avenue for joining would be cut off. However, if the body position is open to the field and creating a crease then they should mentally prepare to join forward.

The #7 and #11 players must work to receive balls facing forward or at a minimum towards the far post. In addition their first touch should come in at an angle towards one of the posts of the goal they are attacking so they will open the door for the back to join.

The #9 player and the #8 player can assist the inclusion of the #2 or #3 by dragging their defenders away from the space that the defender wants to exploit. They must avoid the natural instinct to come to the ball as that would bring more defenders into the area.

The #6 and #8 players must be aware of their opportunities to break the back line with a third man running combination to the #2 or #3.



Timed Phase Two: The main area of focus for this period will be to have the two teams pay special attention to the entry passes they are giving to the midfielders. In order for the midfielders to easily eliminate lines of pressure they must have balls that will allow them to play in the gaps to both the near side and far side wide midfielders. This will require acute awareness of the parts of the field susceptible to being broken by a pass from the #6 or #8 players.

** See diagram above offering potential options for this coordinated attack

COACHING POINTS:

The entry pass into the center of the midfield should arrive at the #6 or the #8 in a position where they would be capable of hitting a one-time ball to the diagonal runs of the #7 and #11. It must not be behind them and must also have the proper pace for redirection before a defender closes them down in the center of the park.

The #7 and #11 players must maintain their width and not attempt to break the line with their runs until the space has been made available for them. The patience to stay long

enough to allow the #9 or the other attacking mid to move the central defenders and open those gaps that can be exploited is vital.

To help offset the defensive focus the opposite side wide midfielder may decide to go at the same time as the near side midfielder forcing the defenders to make a quick decision on the greatest threat. This is predicated by the body position of the #6 and #8 when they get the ball and their ability to play the right textured ball into the path of either player.

The recognition of visual cue to break the line is for the #7 and #11 player to watch the head of the defenders. When their head turns to focus on the midfielder with the ball that is their cue to get in on the blind side.

Timed Phase Three: In this period each team will have a designated method they are looking to train for breaking the lines of defense they are facing. One of the teams should look to break the defensive units by utilizing their wide defenders in the appropriate time and manner. The other team should look to break the defensive blocks mainly utilizing the movement of the midfielders. *Please note this does not mean that a team cannot break through with a player that is not their focus that time period, but, that the majority of teachable moments should focus on that block of players.

CHAPTER 2

THE MODERN 1 – 4 – 2 – 3 – 1 FORMATION



Prior to beginning a discussion of the German 1-4-2-3-1 we should first review some generalities that a coach should consider if they would like to see their team compete in this system of play.

The 1-4-3-2-1 system has the ability to be manipulated in several different fashions, thus, it is one of the more complex formations utilized today. This complexity requires the players and coaches involved have similar work rate, skill and footballing intelligence as compared to other systems. As a formation it is unforgiving of players who only want

to play on one side of the ball and will punish teams who do not consistently work on both sides of the ball. In addition this formation may challenge a team culture as there is not a great deal of individual freedom due to the gaps that could be exposed if a player goes out on their own.

The 1-4-2-3-1 formation is one of the most flexible formations in use today.

The 1-4-2-3-1 is a system of play that gained notoriety after its introduction to the world by Spain in the 1990's and by the 2000's was being used throughout the world.

The 1-4-2-3-1 ensures that midfield numbers should be greater than any opponent and covers for potential midfield weaknesses.

The 1-4-2-3-1 formation is typically played using zonal defending with specific roles. The only player with much freedom defending in this system is typically the lone striker.

The 1-4-2-3-1 formation system of play can be used against most other soccer formations and the strength of this formation lies in the midfield and the attacking presence of the outside defenders.

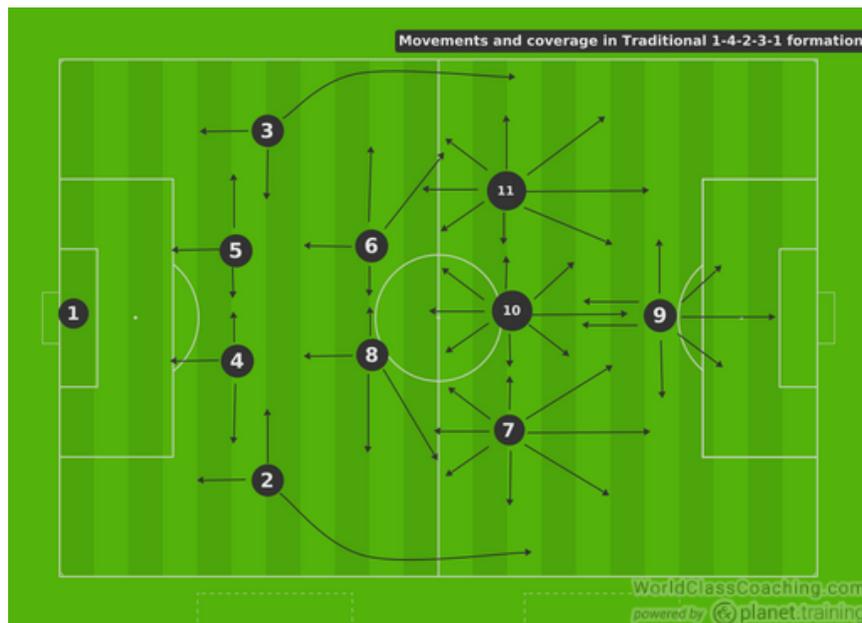
The 1-4-2-3-1 is a formation that makes it very difficult for the opponent to have successful build up play through the midfield.

Coaching considerations when playing a 1-4-2-3-1 formation:

DEFENSIVELY:

- 1) What areas of the field will trigger your players to press and win the ball?
- 2) Will your team utilize immediate (high) pressure or delayed (low) pressure defending?
- 3) If you depend on your wide backs to get forward who is responsible for their cover?
- 4) Since the formation lacks width in some areas how will you account for who covers the width in certain parts of the field?
- 5) In terms of your lone #9 will they be steering play or will they simply be positioning themselves as an outlet?

- 6) Do your attacking three players have the aerobic capacity to transition from attacking to defending and still cover the width in front of the outside backs?
- 7) With the double pivot in play will you choose to allow one of them to cover more of the width in front of the full backs or do you want to keep them central?
- 8) Is the interchange of positions in covering between your double pivot and your central defenders must be well coordinated to ensure no lapse in coverage?
- 9) What is the safe distance between your lines that you feel will still offer you adequate coverage in the midfield?

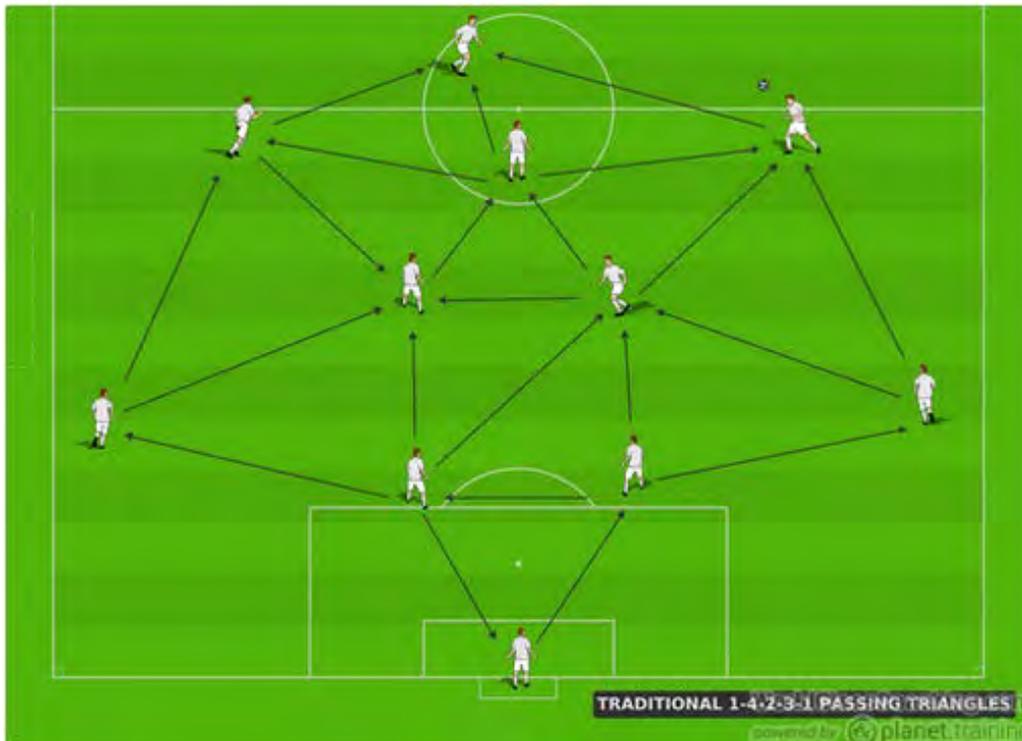


Coaching considerations when playing a 1-4-2-3-1 formation:

OFFENSIVELY:

- 1) Will you choose to play your #9 player as a target or a more mobile "False 9"?
- 2) Will you choose to attack with a block of four players or will you add in more numbers?
- 3) Is your goal keeper capable of starting an attack with their punt / drop kick? If so what areas of the field do you want to try to exploit or players should you target?
- 4) Are your central defenders capable of playing wider and aiding in possession?
- 5) If you are sending your wide backs forward which of the double pivots will need to drop to keep attacking shape?
- 6) Will your three attacking players be positioned more as strikers and interchange the space with the #9? If not will they play more as midfielders and fill the width for service?

- 7) Do your attacking three players have the 1 v 1 ability to challenge the back line?
- 8) Will your attacking block look to overwhelm opponents will runs into the box or combinations on the periphery?
- 9) What are the attacking attributes you want from the players in the 3 – 1 as well as the outside backs?
- 10) Do you have specific attacking pockets you would like your players to find with the ball to start the attack?



In terms of the player characteristics that a coach may look for in terms of utilizing this formation the following are generally accepted in a traditional 1-4-2-3-1 formation

The **ONE STRIKER** will most often be found playing with their back to goal and checking to balls as a target for outlet play or combination play.

Traditional Striker Characteristics:

1. Traditionally the striker in this formation would be tall and good at heading.

2. In this formation the lone striker may be used as a "false nine" which includes the pace or guile necessary to be a more flexible attacker.
3. This player would typically be an excellent finisher which maximizes the fact they will get numerous balls served into the penalty area.
4. Traditionally this striker will be physically and mentally strong as they will often find themselves alone in holding off players and carving out chances.

The **THREE ATTACKING MIDFIELDERS** will most often be made up of players who have varying attacking abilities so that they are able to create havoc and difficulties for defenders.

1. Traditionally one of these midfielders will have the ability to be a true "10" who can act as a playmaker for their team.
2. Additionally there will also be players within this line who have the ability to play as wingers or wide attackers and will alternate their starting positions throughout the block of three.
3. These three players must have great engines as they will be required to cover lots of ground on both sides of the ball.
4. The traditional three attacking midfielders would also possess an extremely high tactical IQ in order to maintain both the discipline and flexibility the formation offers.
5. The starting positions for these three players would typically be deeper in the midfield which allows for more confusion on who defenders will mark in the attack.
6. The wide players in this group of three traditionally would cover for their outside defenders and help protect the team flanks from opposing marauding defenders.
7. Traditionally these players possess the finishing ability to net goals from outside the box and beat a keeper from distance.
8. In terms of "touches" in the flow of play this block of three would be the most likely to lead the team in their influence on the ball.

The **TWO DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDERS** or “**DOUBLE PIVOT**” would maintain the traditional role of a “6” or defensive midfielder.

1. The players in the double pivot are traditionally intelligent defenders who have the ability to read threats early in the buildup of play.
2. Traditionally there will be a more offensively minded player in this screen who can serve as a more deep lying playmaker for the three attacking midfielders.
3. There would also traditionally be a more defensive minded member of the duo who would be responsible for ensuring the back four are never exposed to central counter attacks.
4. Those two players should be interchangeable and have very similar abilities as the formation requires them to have the flexibility to swap their roles which makes their contributions a bit unpredictable for opposing defenders.
5. In a traditional 1-4-2-3-1 formation the double pivot players would typically form triangles with two of the four defenders that would close the space available for their opponents to maintain possession.
6. Players in these roles will traditionally be sound tacklers, in addition to their ability to read the game, due to the fact if balls are not intercepted then these players must be up for individual duels.
7. These players would normally be sound heading the ball and should disrupt vertical balls played in the air before they get to the back line.
8. Traditional double pivots must be calm in possession and comfortable with pressure on them in possession as they are the outlet for the backs to clear the zone.

The **FOUR DEFENDERS** will most often be found in a block of four that is well organized and compacted in defending. This block includes two wide defenders who assist with service into the box as two central defenders who are focused on disruption of the opponents attack.

Traditional Full Back Characteristics:

1. Due to the fact that these wide defenders must get forward and overlap into the attack these players will traditionally be quick and agile.
2. Their roles in the formation require them to be confident with the ball at their feet and technical enough to offer a number of different service options to the attacking four.
3. The amount of distance the wide backs cover is immense so they must have a terrific aerobic capacity.
4. Due to the fact there are not true wingers in front of them they must be competent in the skills of both delay and tackling.
5. With the likelihood that space wide will allow for balls to be served into the defending areas these players must also be competent in the air and comfortable with aerial clearances.

Traditional Central Defender Characteristics:

1. As with most formations these two players need to possess the ability to marshal their defenders in both man to man and zonal defending units.
2. These players are traditionally tall, strong and brave which serves them well as they are the focal point for clearing set pieces on the defensive end and finishing set pieces on the attacking end.
3. Traditionally these players must be focused and offer specific communication to the defender players both in front of them and on their width.
4. Typically these two players must have a good relationship with the double pivot in front of them as that is their most frequent passing option.

Traditional Goal Keeper Characteristics:

1. Due to the block of six players in front of them the goal keeper in the 1-4-2-3-1 formation must possess a keen understanding of the space that could be exploited between their defending block and the goal.
2. Traditionally the goal keeper will be specific in their communication and demanding in their command of the players in front of them.

3. This player will often assume the role of a “sweeper keeper” as their starting position in the flow of play may be 10 to 15 yards behind the center backs.
4. Traditionally this player would possess good size and be brave as they may be called on for 1 v 1 duels with a striker if the back four plays an offside trap.

CHALLENGES PLAYING THE 1-4-2-3-1 FORMATION:

The most obvious challenge that a team would face in playing the 1-4-2-3-1 formation would be the fact that their outside backs have very little cover. This occurs because there are no true wide midfielders and as such your defenders must be very adept at dealing with players running at them and their individual 1 v 1 abilities.

In addition the midfield may have issues as well depending on the tactical I.Q and fitness of the players in those roles. The three attacking midfielders may have difficulty assisting on the width in terms of defending against full backs coming forward. In addition, since they are in attack mode a great deal of time they are also susceptible to the counter attack. Thus, you need to make sure the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

In terms of the attack the challenge is the service forward to the target or False Nine. There is heavy reliance on the attacking mid to provide that service and if that service is choked off then the attack can stall. In addition, since there is just one player in the forward position the types of service must be very specific to find success. If balls are played into areas where the lone striker cannot be effective it will provide numerous counter attacking opportunities for the opponent.

THE GERMAN MODEL of the 1-4-2-3-1 formation

A case study on why a team chooses a formation and system of play



When deciding that Germany was best suited for a 1-4-2-3-1 there were several considerations their coach, Joachim Löw, took into account while constructing the reigning World Cup Champions and one of the favorites to win the 2016 UEFA European Championships.

Much like Lagerbäck and Iceland, Löw, lined up Die Nationalmannschaft (The German Machine) with the same focus on player characteristics which had proved successful in capturing the 2014 World Cup. One of the most widely recognized traits of the German people is that they possess a tremendous focus on task and order. Recognizing the underlying strength of this characteristic Löw combined the trait with the outstanding technical ability of his players in order for his side became a possession oriented monster. Throughout the UEFA Championships the Germans were able to complete an astonishing pass completion rate of 91%. Through an intense attention to detail Löw incorporated the passing talents of Toni Kroos and Julian Weigl to keep the ball and mercilessly pummel their opponents with possession. By the end of the tournament

Germany led all teams in the European Championships with an overall possession percentage of 66% in their 1-4-2-3-1!

In addition Joachim Löw enjoyed the luxury of choosing his players from a pool which included virtually every top league in the world. With such savvy players at his disposal he could allow his striker, and three attacking midfielders, the freedom to press high into the midfield area. The 1-4-2-3-1 formation allowed these talented players to capitalize on gaining possession in their opponents half through intricate combination and build up play highlighted by the precision of Mesut Ozil and Toni Kroos. However, as confident as Löw was in their abilities he also had to take into account a psychological vacuum that had developed in the period between the World Cup and the Euros. During that time period Löw witnessed the departure of three of their long term pillars of strength: Per Mertesacker, Phillip Lahm and Miroslav Klose. These three players had been starters for Die Nationalmannschaft every game, as well as, the emotional leaders and glue that held the team together over the last decade. Thus, Löw had to make sure that his team selection included players who would have the necessary traits to help fill the void of continuity and moral fiber that accompanied their departure. In the core of his defensive unit he knew his goalkeeper, Manuel Neuer, and center back, Jerome Boateng, were tremendous defensive players. But, as good as those two players were they still needed those around them to pick up the pieces left from those vital departures. As Löw looked at his squad he realized no one player could fill the individual holes. So, he decided to utilize a mixture of Sami Khedira, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Joshua Kimmich and Emre Can to fill the void. As a result the choice of the 1-4-2-3-1 formation allowed Löw the luxury of the “Double Pivot” which he believed would provide the cover he needed with the personnel he had access to!

The final characteristic Löw took into account in deciding how to best use his squad was the ruthless nature of Germany’s finishers. At his disposal were lethal finishers such as Thomas Muller. In addition to being deadly as a deep lying play-maker Muller is also a pure finisher who tallied nine goals in European Championship qualifying, Joachim Löw had good reason to believe his side was capable of seeing lesser teams away. His confidence came not just because of the prowess of Muller, but also from a host of other strikers and attacking midfielders, like Julian Draxler, Leroy Sane, Marco Reus, Bastian

Schweinsteiger and Mario Gomez. Each of those players were not only accomplished goal scorers for the respective club teams, but, also had a knack for finding the net for their homeland. Löw recognized a 1-4-2-3-1 would be successful because he was able to field a host of attacking players who were confident and clinical finishers in the most timely of situations.

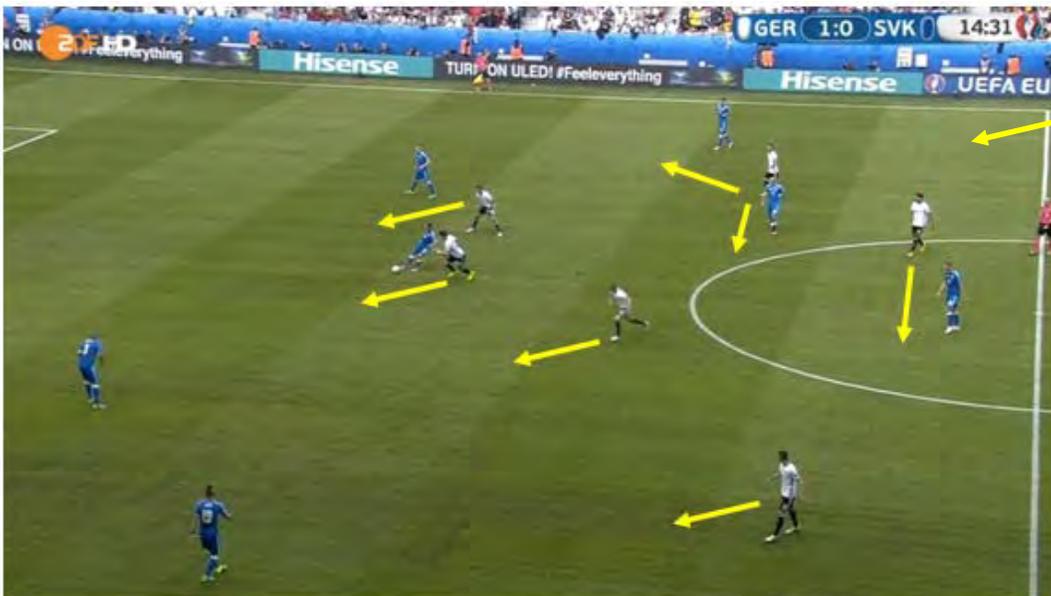
Thus, recognizing the above mentioned strengths of his team Joachim Löw decided to continue the 1-4-2-3-1 system that was so successful in the last World Cup even though not all the pieces of that puzzle were still around!

GERMANY'S 1-4-2-3-1 DEFENDING SHAPE

Germany's 1-4-2-3-1 formation is ultimately built on the foundation of a goalkeeper that many consider the best in the world, Manuel Neuer. Neuer is an athletic shot stopper who revolutionized the "sweeper keeper" position in modern soccer. With him in the net the team can afford to press knowing he will clean up behind them and not allow huge gaps behind their team shape. The man who marshalled the space in front of Neuer is one of his Bayern Munich teammates, Jérôme Boateng. Through the central defending partnership of Boateng & Neuer the German defense allowed 0 goals in the EURO round robin competitions. Surrounding these two vital cogs were wide defenders that were athletic, capable of getting into the attack and able to press high up the pitch in order to intercept balls from opposing wingers. The most potent of the German wide defenders proved to be Jonas Hector. Indeed it was Hector who seemed most capable of filling the departed Lahm's shoes on the flank and nowhere was that on display more than his inclusion as a potential man of the match in the Euro semi-final against France.



German players defend within a very tight block of four defenders, the “Double Pivot” of two defensive midfielders, three attacking midfielders and one striker. Their organization chokes off the middle of the field and forces their opponents to the flanks.



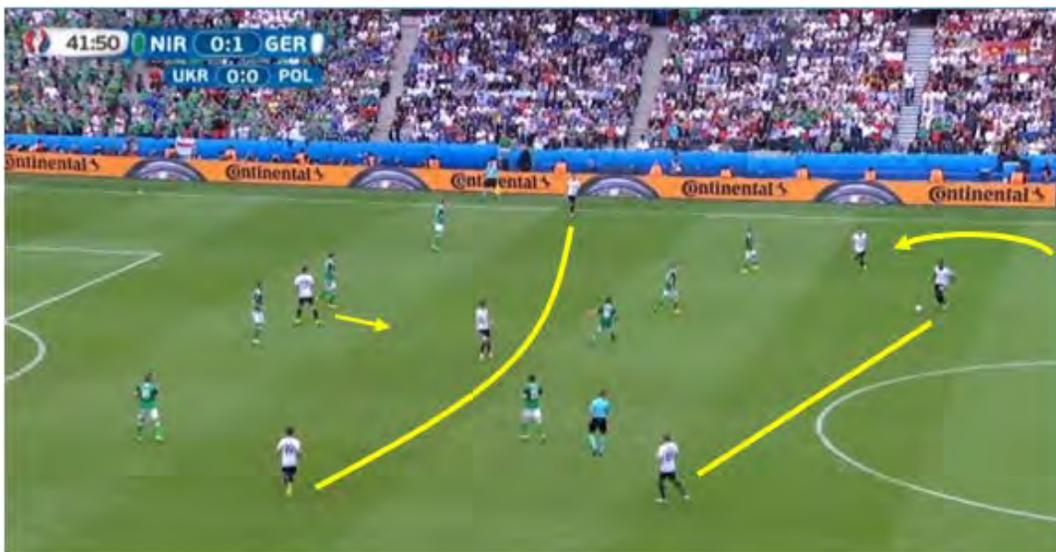
Germany press high up the field utilizing their coordinated movements to pressure the opponent's defenders and cut off their escape options. This pressing allows them to win the ball and counter to goal quickly which led to 24 qualifying goals.

GERMANY'S 1-4-2-3-1 ATTACKING SHAPE

Joachim Löw has the advantage of a number of different attacking players to implement into his attacking shape. Thus, when it came to deciding how to best attack from the 1-4-2-3-1 he naturally defaulted to their individual strengths.

To begin with Germany utilized pressing to begin the attack from their 1-4-2-3-1 better than any other country at the Euros. With such a great reliance on the pressing system to start their attack there were an abundance of pressing options and triggers for the world champions. The most obvious trigger was the boundless energy of Muller who is the footballing equivalent of the “Energizer Bunny”. If Muller was able to get to a ball and press it then the team would immediately follow suit. His relentless pace enabled him to trigger the German press while covering the 5th greatest distance at the European Championships, 334,159 km.

Outside of the press Löw had two options to choose from in terms of the way he wanted the striker position to attack. One on hand he could choose to have a traditional Number Nine that would just hold the ball up and be a target for the attack. However, more often than not in the European Championships he utilized a “False Nine”. This attacking focus made sense for Löw because he had a striker in Mari, Götze who had the ability on the ball to link up and create dynamic interchanges with the three attackers beneath him. At times Götze will actually drop into the #10 role in the midfield to open the defenders up and create space for the attacking combinations of his teammates.



Beneath Götze were three players with very unique abilities which allowed this system of play to work for Germany. To begin with the player with the intelligence and playmaking ability to run the attack would be Mesut Ozil. Ozil possesses tremendous vision and technical ability so his opportunities to link up with Götze and his fellow midfielders made for a myriad of attacking options. Ozil also had the tactical ability to drift into wider positions in the midfield and create from there. To the left and right of Ozil were more dynamic players who like to run at defenders and also had the tactical understanding to pop into the gaps that are opened up by Götze's movement. The players Löw most often opts for are Draxler, Schurrle and Muller and they have rewarded him with excellent finishing off of the interchange of passes and positioning. Muller was most often be the player you would see exchanging positions with Götze as his ability to time his runs from a deep lying positions were difficult for defenses to deal with. However, it was not just the top four players' abilities that encouraged Löw to attack in this manner. Within the double pivot he had a player with tremendous passing ability that could find break the defensive line with one ball in Tony Kroos. Kroos composure on the ball and calm demeanor belied the fact that he had the ability to join under the front four and was a very capable attacker in his own right. In addition the attacking four also enjoy the assistance of full backs that press high up the width to create passing triangles. With back who possessed the passing ability to exploit the space between the lines, and the fitness to overlap at a consistent pace, the Germans were a very dangerous all around attacking unit.

Please note that all of the characteristics and traits above are considered "traditional" in their roles and responsibilities of the 1-4-2-3-1 formation but in the "Modern" game there are other options to consider!

1-4-2-3-1 formation variations

Flexibility of Carlo Ancelotti's Real Madrid



Unlike the German National Team Ancelotti utilized the 1-4-2-3-1 as part of his rotation of formations. Real Madrid put in place a plethora of gifted attacking players at Carlo Ancelotti's disposal. As a result of the overflowing offensive talent he would utilize a 1-4-2-3-1 formation to help accommodate three of the most talented players in the world; Cristiano Ronaldo, James Rodriguez and Gareth Bale. This formation was often undertaken by Ancelotti if the team Real Madrid was playing did not have the offensive fire power to match their own and would not necessarily prove to be a threat to Real Madrid via the counter attack. With an attacking unit that could easily be considered one of the best in the world in terms of club football Ancelotti chose to utilize a counter attacking philosophy to take full advantage of the three attacking players who enjoyed world class pace and a wonderful goal scoring touch.



In this system Bale would primarily attack from the right and his slicing runs from wide positions would open up even the tidiest defensive shapes. On the other flank roamed Ronaldo who is widely considered one of the world's best 1v1 players. With the ball at his feet he would slice and dice his way into goal scoring opportunities on a regular basis. Then, in the central attacking midfield role Rodriguez plied his dynamic ball skills and creative attacking flair. Just knowing that there was a possibility that this three headed attacking monster could come flying forward on a counter attack would make even the stoutest defender weak in their knees. In addition Carlo Ancelotti also added a bit of a different twist in that he allowed Ronaldo and Bale to swap positions at will so there is also a sense of unpredictability to their attack that may not have been seen in the precision of the German 1-4-2-3-1. Although they were given the freedom to roam there was also an understanding that their success required a striker who was capable of holding the ball and then distributing to the onrushing attacking midfielders. Ancelotti found in Karim Benzema a player with the size and ability to not only provide a target for the quicker players to work off of, but, also a very potent finisher in the box who was

capable of getting on the end of balls that were available after the defenses collapsed on the big three.

In addition to Bale, Rodriguez and Ronaldo Ancelotti also found the box to box abilities of Lukas Modric, coupled with the tremendous vision and passing range of Tony Kroos, to be the perfect “Double Pivot” complimenting the abilities of his dynamic trio. Only slightly different than the German “Double Pivot” the Real Madrid version featured the gifted Modric with the pace, and engine, to make overlapping runs from the midfield in order to combine with Bale on the right side of the attack. On the flip side both Germany and Madrid featured the precise passing and distribution of Kroos. This deep lying midfield general served to be an excellent foil for the engine of Modric and kept opposing midfielders on edge with his ability to eliminate them with a wide array of passes. One additional aspect of the Real Madrid make up was the fact that these attacking players were also tremendous at capitalizing on set piece opportunities. With three dangerous players running at defenders, or slicing in behind them to receive balls, this formation afforded them a great number of fouls and set piece opportunities. As a result during the 2014/2015 season Ancelotti’s troops tallied 30 goals off of set pieces.

In terms of his defensive unit he too enjoyed a back four unit that was blessed with a long period of continuity. But, the backline proved to be a bit of an Achilles heel for Ancelotti as their ability to keep clean sheets were relatively weak as compared to their goal scoring abilities. On the left flank he could employ a very stable and consistent wide player like Fabio Coentrao or he was able to opt for a more attacking oriented wide defender like Marcelo. In the center of his defense Ancelotti partnered a finesse oriented Sergio Ramos with the destroyer Pepe to provide an experienced duo. Although they were talented and capable they would struggle to keep the back line compact, especially in their recovery against counter attacks. On the right flank Ancelotti left the attacking responsibilities to Daniel Carvajal. Carvajal was a player with great pace and stamina who could bomb forward and keep width when the midfielders cut in towards goal. The last piece of the defensive puzzle for Real Madrid was the ability of their goal keeper, Keylor Navas, to play higher up the pitch and stay connected to his back line. With the attacking midfielders streaking into the attack his role is vital, along with that of Modric and Kroos, in keeping their opponents pressed into less useful attacking areas.

ROLE SPECIFIC TRAINING
SESSIONS
FOR PLAYERS IN THE
1-4-2-3-1 FORMATION
AND SYSTEM OF PLAY

Attacking Shape and Build up in 1-4-2-3-1

Description:

Enable players within the 1-4-2-3-1 formation to link the different lines within the formation and build into the attack

Attacking Shape 1-4-2-3-1 Activity 1



Setup:

In an area roughly 50 yards wide by 35 yards deep you will have two teams with one target player. The target player can be a GK or you can incorporate the #9 player who would be your usual target at the top of this formation. The two teams should be made up of your four backs (#2, #3, #4 and #5), your midfielders (Double Pivot #6 / #8 with the three attacking midfielders #10, #7 and #11). One team will be playing to a two yard end zone and one team will be playing to the target in a gate.

Execution:

The team of five midfielders will try to play the ball to the target in the gate. The team of four defenders will try to deny the penetration and then work the ball into the end zone once they gain possession.

COACHING POINTS:

The unit of five players should move the ball quickly to find the numerical advantage and then exploit it by going forward in that area.

The #7 and #11 players must maintain their width and not attempt to break the line with their runs until the space has been made available for them. The patience to stay long enough to allow the #9 or the other attacking mid to move the central defenders and open those gaps that can be exploited is vital.

When the opportunity presents itself to eliminate the lines of defenders it must be seized immediately.

Attacking Shape and Build up in 1-4-2-3-1 Activity 2



Setup:

On 3/4 of a field (roughly 75 yards long and 75 wide - if available) you will play to one big goal with a goal keeper and to a target player in a gate goal. The length of the field will be divided into three (3) 25 yard long sections with players stationed in each area based on their roles within the system.

The team attacking the big goal will have a defender in the target goal who will initiate play. If you have a specific defender that you like in the attack I would suggest using this player to breed familiarity with their targets. In the zone closest to the defender will be the double pivot (#6 / #8). In the central zone will be your attacking trio (#7, #10 and #11). In the final third there will be your #9. The team defending the big goal will have two defenders in the grid with the #9. I suggest these two defenders be a #4 and #5. They will have four players in the middle zone and that can be any combination of midfield players. Finally in the top zone there will be one player against the double pivot. This would most likely be a #10 or #9.

Execution:

The team attacking the big goal has a couple options in order to score. They can: 1) Play the #9 who will lay the ball back to the attacking trio and then they are free to score. 2) Play the #9 and then have the #7 or #11 joining him in the final grid for a third man running combination. 3) The Double Pivot can carry the ball forward and combine with the attacking trio to eliminate the midfielders. The players defending the big goal must stay in their zones defensively, but, they can move freely when in possession of the ball in order to hit their target.

COACHING POINTS:

The midfield trio must look to find the #9 as soon as that player is available. This will trigger a defensive shift which will allow those players more room to get forward and force the opposing midfielders to face their own goal.

The movement in support of the attacking trio and the two defending players must be constant in order to provide supporting options and overcome eliminate the opposing team.

When the ball moves forward it is vital that the players do as well to continue providing the supporting passing angles. In addition their runs forward in support should be in areas that will exploit the space vacated by the defending unit.

Attacking shape in 1-4-2-3-1 Activity 3



Setup:

Full size field with both teams playing 11 v 11 to two big goals. The field itself will still remain divided into zones, this time four zones of roughly 25 to 30 yards each depending on your field length.

Execution:

In order for a team to score the following conditions should be met: 1) The ball must transition through each zone and not skip any zones. 2) Players should advance with the ball compacting the team into no more than three zones once the ball has reached the

second zone. That means with the defenders coming into that zone to support play it is vital the GK supports play off their line.

COACHING POINTS:

When the ball is played into the #9 at least one member of the attacking trio must maintain the width while another must be available centrally for any potential combination opportunities.

When the attacking trio does move into the final third to support the ball the double pivot must be close enough to maintain possession if the attack stalls but still deep enough to prevent any counter attacking opportunities should it be lost.

Defending shape and Execution for 1-4-2-3-1 Part 1

Description:

Assisting players in the coordinated movements and shape of their defensive unit in the 1-4-2-3-1

Defending timing and shape in the 1-4-2-3-1 Part 1



Setup:

Each grid will be divided into two equal sections of 15 x 20. Within each grid there will be a team of four players for a total of eight players for the activity.

Execution:

One of the groups of four will send two players across to try to win the ball from the four players in possession. If they are able to win the ball they will play it back over to their side and then two of the previous players in possession will come across and defend. I recommend combining players in certain roles into your group of four. For instance you may have your double pivot (#6 and #8) with your two center backs (#4 and #5) in a group of four. This will allow the working relationship to grow within the unit.

COACHING POINTS:

The two players defending should not go full out on every pass. Work to recognize the cues that they can get to the ball and affect the pass or possession, then go with pace.

Patience when the ball is at a players feet but close the space as the ball travels and especially should the player take a bad touch (bouncing) receive a pass that makes them face out of bounds or puts them in a spot without support.

Defending Timing and Shape in 1-4-2-3-1 Part 2



Setup:

You will have one big goal with a goal keeper and a counter line for the team not going to goal to cross in possession. The team going to goal will consist of a bank of five players. Again, when implementing encourage the relationship of roles and blocks of defenders such as the double pivot (#6 and #8 with the Attacking trio #7, #10 and #11). You may also want to consider setting them up in an elongated role with the #9, #7, #10, #11 and #6 in the five player unit. That block is working to stop a team of eight from possessing the ball to the counter attack line.

Execution:

The back four of the block of eight should be limited to one touch. The midfield block of four (which can be deployed as a diamond, flat or box) will be limited to two touch. They will always start with the ball with a distribution from the goal keeper in the big net they are defending.

Variations:

You can increase the five to a bank of seven which will give them more vertical pressure. That would mean adding a #9 and #4 to the double pivot and attacking trio.

COACHING POINTS:

The block of five should constantly be communicating with one another as to their purpose of pressing or holding.

All of the players in that unit must be cognizant of the visual cues for them to press (i.e. balls to the sideline, balls that are dropped, balls to the GK, etc.) and should be prepared to step forward quickly onto players previously identified as capable of receiving the ball easily.

While the attacking trio is actively defending the double pivot must assume positions that split their shape so that there will always be a player in the field of vision for the possessing team.

Defending Timing and Shape in the 1-4-2-3-1 Part 3



Setup:

There will be two teams playing a regular game of soccer with one team going to a big goal and one team defending counter attack gates. The team defending the big goal will consist of eight players. This unit should include a back line of #2, #4, #5 and #3, as well as the double pivot (#6 and #8) an attacking trip member #10 and the target #9. The attacking unit can consist of any combination of nine players in a formation of your choosing.

Execution:

In this activity the block of eight will be defending in their own half of the field. They must work together to not only win the ball, but, then to transition out to the attack based off their defending shape.

COACHING POINTS:

When defending in your own end you will take fewer chances than you would when you were in the attacking third (last activity). Err on the side of caution with the top focus being not to be beaten by vertical balls.

The #9 and #10 players must be vigilant to not allow the ball to change the point of attack once it is pressed to a side. With the players behind them addressing their defensive shape based on where those players send the ball that would be devastating to their balance.

In terms of a visual point of reference for the back four and the double pivot the #5 and #3 can work with the #6 on their half of the field and then the #4 and #2 can work with the #8 on their half. This will allow for mini wolf packs to hunt the ball and force it wide of the goal.

Balls in this defensive end should be forced wide of play as it gives the goal keeper a better opportunity to see shots and crosses coming into the box as opposed to balls coming vertically at them.

1-4-2-3-1 Transition play training sessions

Description:

Offering players the tools to transition through the different zones and recognize the options in each area. In addition players will be exposed to the opportunities offered by pressing and low pressure defending within the 1-4-2-3-1 formation.

1-4-2-3-1 Transition Play Part 1



Setup:

On 3/4 of a field you will play two teams of 6 v 6 with two neutral wingers and two goalkeepers. The 6 v 6 will take place in an area 44 yards wide (width of the box) that has been divided into three zones. Each team will have two defenders in a zone, three midfielders in a zone and one striker in a zone. The neutral wingers will occupy the flank zones.

Execution:

One of the teams will play to goal while the other one is the designated defending team for the period of play. As the attacking team progresses through each zone the defenders in that zone will become inactive. The designated attacking team can move between zones to overload and attack. However, if the defending team wins the ball then the game becomes free play until a goal is scored or possession is lost. At that time the game will restart with the frozen role zones.

The neutral players will be limited to two touch on the flanks and should be focused on creating overload opportunities for the attacking teams.

COACHING POINTS:

When winning the ball the players off the ball should make sure their movement allows their body position to play a ball first time into another player in another zone.

The central player's movements should allow for overloading options (this would include using the wide players in the flank zones that represent the #2 and #3 players in a regular game).

Players both ahead of the ball and behind the ball should support the attack at angles and focus on their timing of runs into space so that they do not arrive too early and kill the space.

The speed of play after winning the ball should increase for the transition to be successful.

1-4-2-3-1 Transition Play Part 2



Setup:

In a field roughly 3/4 of a full field two teams will play 8 v 8 with a goal keeper in a big goal and then a target player on the other end line with two counter attack gate goals on the flanks.

Each team should have their eight players consist of #2, #3 as wide backs, #6 and #8 as the double pivot, #7, #10 and #11 as attacking trio and a #9. This will allow for your team to transition with all of the most important components of the formation.

Execution:

The team building from the big goal will score by putting the ball in either of the two gate goals or hitting the target player. The team defending the counter goals will score past the goal keeper in the big net. They should utilize a combination of low pressure defending and pressing to offer two scenarios when their transition will happen.

COACHING POINTS:

Players should look to recognize the opportunities to play out after winning the ball with a quick transition into another zone and with the inclusion of another level of players.

The #2 and #3 players should maintain the width as soon as the transition opportunity presents itself. The #6 and #8 players should make sure they avail themselves as linking players from side to side and vertically. The #7, #10 and #11 players must utilize movements that will enable them to receive the ball facing forward to increase the speed of their transition attacking.

In this transition the weight of the ball passed and the placement of the ball should be firm and to the front foot of the player so they will not need to slow down or stop in possession.

Transition by players in the defending area should be undertaken with greater safety than in the attacking area. If there is a doubt as to the successful transition the defending area requires possession over balls that may eliminate opponents.

1-4-2-3-1 Transition Play Part 3



Setup:

Regular game of 11 v 11 with the team starting in possession in a 1-4-2-3-1 while their opposing team will play in another formation (1-4-3-3 or 1-4-4-2).

Execution:

The team in the 1-4-2-3-1 should play one 15 minute period in a high pressing system to develop those transition opportunities and then one 15 minute period in a low pressure system recognizing those transition chances.

COACHING POINTS:

Attacking players should focus on isolating and occupying the defenders in their area. Their movements would then focus on eliminating the lines of defenders once they have them isolated or outnumbered.

Players should recognize the triggers for pressing (balls on the sideline, balls dropped or balls to goal keepers) as well as recognize the areas where the opponents in the different formations might try to escape the press.

CHAPTER 3

THE MODERN 1 – 4 – 3 – 3 FORMATION



Prior to beginning a discussion of Barcelona's 1-4-3-3 we should first review some generalities that a coach should consider if they would like to see their team compete in this system of play.

The 1-4-3-3 system is really an amalgamation of several other systems. It has a fairly successful history with France winning the 1998 World Cup in this formation, Barcelona winning the Champions League and of course the great "Clockwork Orange" Dutch National Teams (Netherlands) enjoying their greatest success in the 1970's. However, no matter what country the formation is utilized in there is one standard truth. For a team to find success in a 1-4-3-3 as their full time system of play they must have

dynamic and special attacking players. That said, with adaptation throughout the game, well organized teams can use its attacking pressure in spells to achieve great success.

The 1-4-3-3 formation is one of the most attacking oriented formations in the world today due to the fact that the strikers try to intercept the ball rather than steer their opponents.

The 1-4-3-3 puts opposing defenders under immense amounts of pressure. This is never truer than when playing opponents who do not have the technical ability to serve long balls.

The 1-4-3-3 enables a team to hide players that are slow offensively or defensively due to the three strikers pressing ability.

The 1-4-3-3 offers easy defending responsibilities as they will outnumber systems with one, two or three strikers.

The 1-4-3-3 formation is most effective with teams that have the technical ability to possess the ball and the tactical understanding to maximize the passing angles offered.

The 1-4-3-3 stifles an opponent's ability to build up play from the defensive third to the attacking third.

Unlike the 1-4-4-2 and 1-4-2-3-1 the 1-4-3-3 does not lend itself to as much adaptability and movement thus the roles within the system are somewhat rigid in design.

In terms of the attacking shape of this formation the attacking width will come from the three forwards (#7, #9 and #11) and the outside backs (#2 and #3). The three front runners do have the freedom to exchange positions and even drop into pockets below their starting positions, but, it is very rare to find the #6, #8 or #10 offering width. In fact, the midfield triangle will primarily remain in the center of the field so that their proximity to one another will allow them to combine and eliminate lines of defenders with vertical balls or connect with the advancing wide backs in the attack. The #2 and #3 who come forward to provide width in the attack may also have specific roles that they are expected to fulfill to make the formation successful. Those roles may be for one of them to serve early while the other player looks to carry the ball into the final third. The 1-4-3-3 does

not really allow for a traditional defensive minded wide back. The outside players are expected to bomb forward on the flanks offering build up options and penetration options on a regular basis.

The main reason for not allowing the midfield players to offer width is that they are the defensive lynch pins of the formation. The #6, #8 and #10 carry the great responsibility of preventing counter attacks should the pressing three in front of them fail. If the midfield triangle finds itself spread across the width then their ability to do that task would be severely compromised. In addition the midfield is also given the role of pressure relief for the formation. The three midfielders are expected to provide options to relieve pressure on the backs as well as play balls forward that will ease the pressure their team is under. Although they are very seldom out wide the midfield is not solely a stop gap in this formation. At least one of the midfield trio, typically the #10, should be capable of finishing in the box with an eye towards late arriving runs and finishing drawn back services.

In the 1-4-3-3 formation the #9 player will always be responsible for attacking the near post on crosses due to their central location and the speed that balls tend to arrive at the near post. That will leave the #7 and #11 on the off side of the ball responsible for the far post runs. The #10, and potentially the #8, will be coming in late from the midfield and will fill in the gaps between those runners. Each of the players in this system also must understand there is a fairly specific order for the balls that will be played when possession is won. No matter which line earns the ball the first option in the 1-4-3-3 will always be to play forward to a player or to penetrating space. As a result at least one if not two of the forwards must always be bumped against the defensive restraining line as a threat to get in behind. If that is not on then the next ball should transition out the other side of the formation away from pressure. This is where a very active #2 or #3 come into play as they must be getting forward every time for this option to be available. Finally, if neither of those options are on then the escape valve will be a negative ball. Many times negative balls in this formation will result in long clearances.

In addition to an almost choreographed checklist of passing options when possession is gained the 1-4-3-3 also enjoys a relatively specific pattern of movement among the

attacking players. For instance if the ball is in a wide position the #7 or #11 closest to the ball should assume the width on the ball side and stretch the defensive area that must be covered. The #9 player will then be expected to assume a position pressing the deepest central defender on the opposing team and the off side #7 or #11 would pinch across to be a diagonal threat running from the backside. However, the roles will change slightly when the ball is in a more central position. Here all three attacking players (#7, #9 and #11) will push the very limits of the defensive restraining line and dance right on the offside position. The #7 and #11 though will push this line from the width of the field forcing the defenders to open up gaps in their coverage. Those players will then look to exploit the gaps with diagonal runs or balls that are slipped in from the midfield or #9.

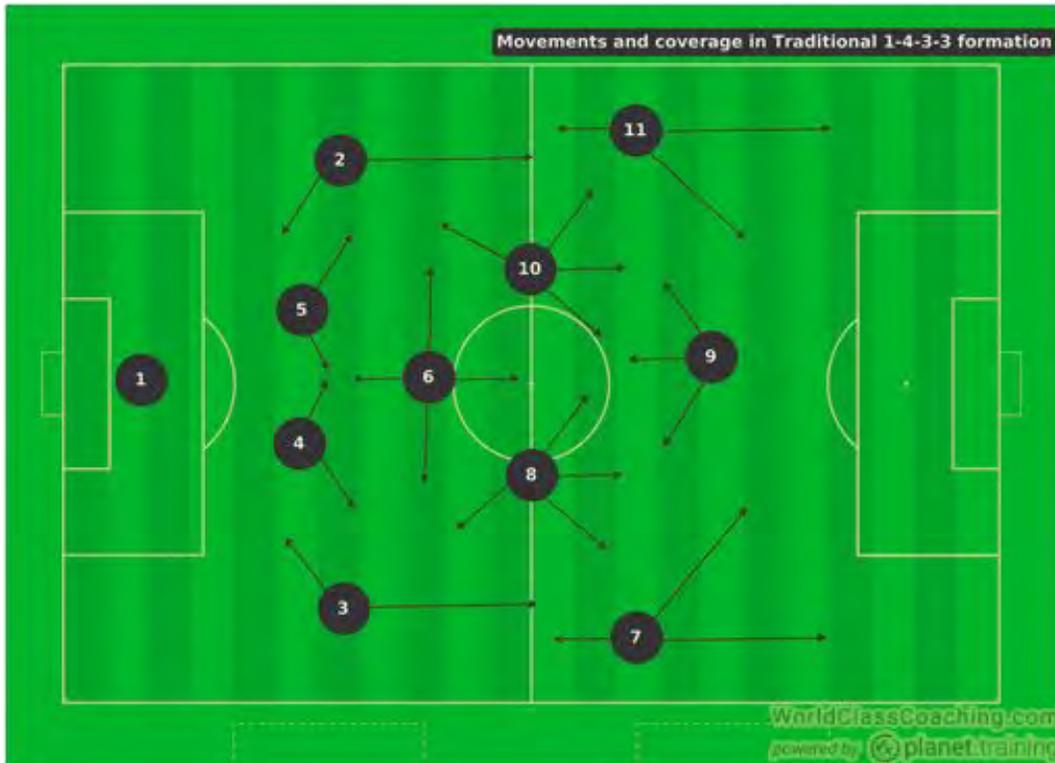
The #7, #9 and #11 also have a coordinated series of movements that reoccur throughout the game and in various parts of the field. Of the three players one of them will always check to the ball. Once the player checks to the ball the space that has been vacated then the next attacker can slash into the space or drift wide and come in on a delayed run. Thus, the 1-4-3-3 formation offers a check, slash and drift option on almost every single possession.

Coaching considerations when playing a 1-4-3-3 formation:

DEFENSIVELY:

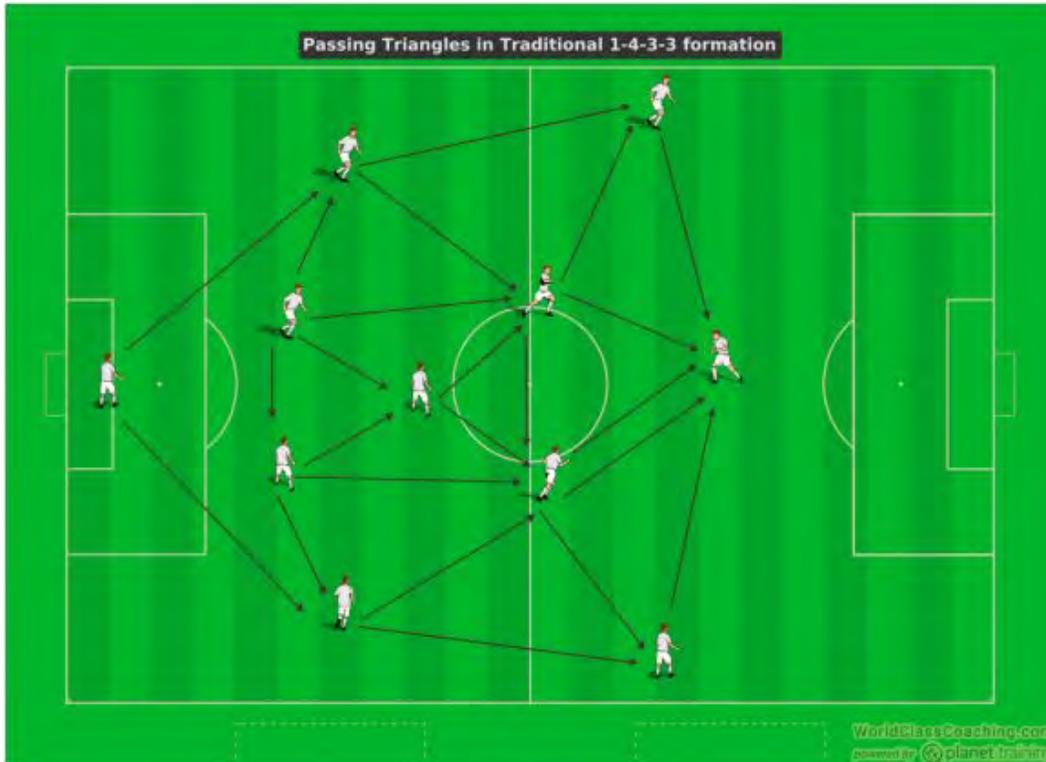
- 1) Where will you establish a line of restraint for your attacking trio?
- 2) Do you feel that your attacking players are dedicated enough, and good enough, defenders to press high and try to gain possession closer to the goal?
- 3) Since you are lacking width in the midfield how will you choose to cover that space and what position will be responsible for the support?
- 4) Are you willing to concede the space on the flank and have your back four deal with crosses or are you willing to send your backs wide to press service?
- 5) Do you plan to disrupt your opponents attack by picking off balls from their defenders or are you going to allow them to play centrally and then suffocate them in that pocket?
- 6) How will your midfield and backs deal with the possibility that one pass can eliminate the attacking trio up top?
- 7) If the three attacking players are eliminated what is the recovery shape and position for those players?

8) Will you choose to defend in a set block of five, keeping your #6 home, or will you choose to allow the #6 and #8 to interchange and share the responsibilities?



- 1) Will your team attack from this formation directly or indirectly?
- 2) Will you choose to attack mainly with a block of six attacking players or will you also incorporate in the wide defenders?
- 3) Will you choose to use your #6 player as a play maker or will you bypass them for the #8 and #10 in that role?
- 4) Are there certain times and areas where you would like to have your midfielders overlap or attack beyond your striking trio??
- 5) Will you choose to play your #9 player above your other strikers or will you play them below your wide strikers?
- 6) Are your attacking players going to be most effective receiving balls in the box or on the edge of the box and combining to break down the defenders?
- 7) If your wide defenders have the ability to serve balls over distance will you choose to play in the air or have them look for feet?

8) Do you want the #9 player to be your focus or would you like to have a more creative #10 come from a deep position to open up defenders?



Traditional Striker Characteristics:

1. Traditionally the trio of strikers in this formation must be unselfish as they will be required to play defense and aid the team by intercepting balls not just guiding play to an area.
2. In this formation the central striker may be used as a "false nine" which includes playing underneath the #7 and #11 attackers on the flanks providing width.
3. This formation also allows the strikers the flexibility to play with a true #9 ahead of the #7 and #11 players and work off that player and their back to goal abilities.
4. Three strikers should be capable finishers from the flow of play and the cross.
5. Traditionally the players in this attacking trio will be fearless taking players on around the box and will keep defenders on edge due to that individual attacking ability.

The **THREE MIDFIELDERS** will most often be made up of players who have varying attacking abilities so that they are able to create havoc and difficulties for defenders.

Traditional Midfielder Characteristics:

1. Traditionally one of these midfielders will have the ability to be a true “10” who has the technical ability to eliminate the last line of defenders with a penetrating pass.
2. Additionally there may also be players within the three who have the ability to attack from wider positions, as well as, combine underneath with the strikers.
3. These three players must be extremely fit as they are required to put in a great deal of work going forward in support of the strikers. This is especially true for the #8 and #10 in the midfield.
4. In addition their fitness must be coupled with an ability to read the building threats that require them to assist their backs in dealing with the space afforded by such an attacking system.
5. The traditional three attacking midfielders would also possess an extremely high tactical IQ as their starting positions often come from deeper in the midfield which allows them to create more confusion for the defenders they are facing.
6. Depending on how they are deployed these players may also require the ability to transition quickly while covering for outside defenders and protecting the flanks, although it’s more common for them to protect the vertical heart of the field.
7. Traditionally these players possess the finishing ability to pose a threat from distance and to also finish driven balls around the area.
8. Players in these roles will traditionally be sound tacklers as they will be called upon to break up play, especially the #6 who sits in the hole in front of his center backs.
9. If these players are sound in the air it will be beneficial for both defending long clearances as well as for finishing crossed balls from their late arriving runs.

The **FOUR DEFENDERS**: Because the 1-4-3-3 does not have outside midfielders, the two central defenders will often find themselves staggered but in close proximity.

Although you will often hear the term “flat back four” associated with this block the four defenders will very rarely be flat. Playing with 2 center backs will allow the outside backs to step into wide spaces more effectively defensively—addressing an inherent weakness within the system which is space in front of the full backs.

Traditional Back Four Characteristics:

1. Due to the fact that the wide defenders, #2 and #3, may find themselves isolated wide so they must be very adept defenders who possess both quickness and agility.
2. The wide backs will often be confident with the ball at their feet and technical enough to offer a number of different service options to the midfielders and the strikers.
3. Due to attacking mind set of this formation the back four must be athletic enough to handle opposing attackers in buildup play and in counter attacking situations.
4. All of these players must have the ability to both delay and tackle.
5. Although less so on the wide positions the central defenders, #4 and #5, must also be competent in the air and comfortable with aerial clearances.
6. Depending on the system of play this defending unit will often need to possess competencies in both man to man and zonal defending units.
7. The central defensive players are traditionally tall, strong and brave which serves them well as they are the focal point for clearing set pieces on the defensive end and finishing set pieces on the attacking end.

Traditional Goal Keeper Characteristics:

1. Typically a goal keeper in the 1-4-3-3 formation will need to be very confident with their feet. In this possession oriented attacking system the goal keeper will often find themselves playing an important role as the first attacker.

2. You will also find the most successful goal keepers in this system of play are athletic enough to cover a good bit of ground behind the backs. Due to the space that is available in the wide midfield area the full backs may get drawn up leaving room in behind for balls to be played. In the 1-4-3-3 a goal keeper who is mobile can make life that much better for their central defenders if they are able to help them clean up.

CHALLENGES PLAYING THE 1-4-3-3 FORMATION:

The most obvious challenge that a team would face in playing the 1-4-3-3 formation would be the fact that the team will be lacking in numbers in the midfield. Against a 1-4-4-2 or a 1-4-5-1 the midfielders not only can be overwhelmed in the center of the park, but, can also be stretched out of positions on the flanks.

In addition the three strikers must be in tune with one another in terms of their pressing because one well timed ball has the potential to eliminate all three players. If the striker's line of pressure is bypassed easily then a team will find great gaps to expose and attack.

In terms of defending the space behind the strikers there are also weaknesses that can be exposed. For instance in this formation there will normally be a block of six players who defend as opposed to the usual eight player defending block they will go against. Should the coach ask the two wide defenders to assist in making it a block of eight defending there must be very clear communication between the #6, #4 and #5 as they are open to potential counter attacks once pressure is broken.

THE BARCELONA MODEL of the 1-4-3-3 formation

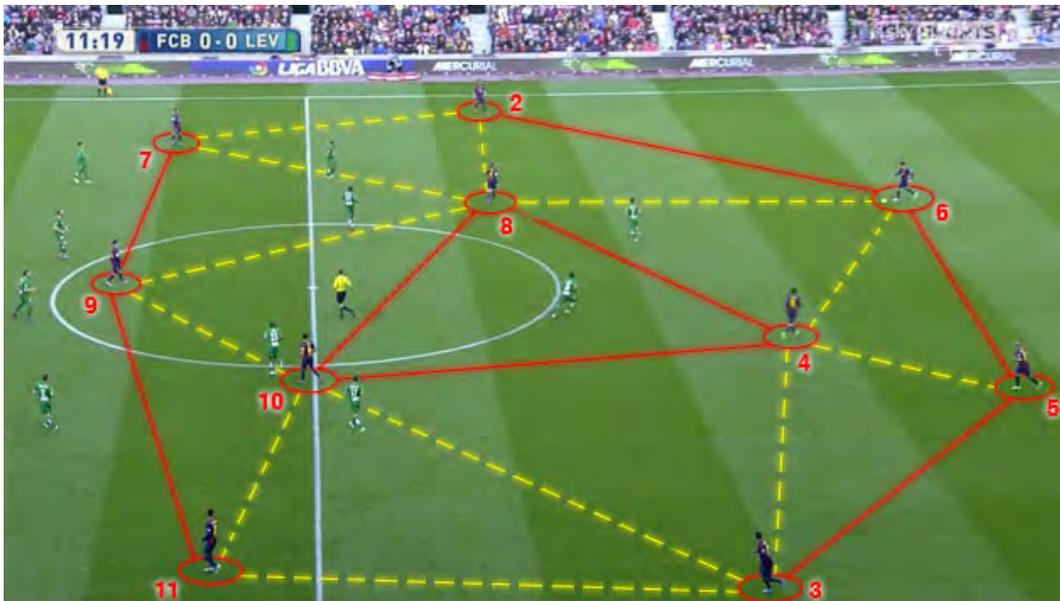
A case study on why a team chooses a formation and system of play



Although he inherited a great team from Pep Guardiola, Luis Enrique's Barcelona side climbed to the summit of European football in 2014/15 by tweaking the traditional 1-4-3-3 formation to suit their current strengths and weaknesses. Although both sides featured many of the same players, and both took home the treble (championships) Enrique's version proved statistically better than Guardiola's with 8 more wins from 2 less games which equaled a 16% higher win percentage and 18 more goals scored. So, what was it that Luis Enrique's saw to improve on an already great side?

To begin with Enrique understood the strength of Barcelona has always been the fact that they are the most outstanding possession team in world football. From the earliest ages the home grown players that come through the La Mas Academy are taught to value the ball on a level seldom replicated. Thus, maintaining the 1-4-3-3 system which offers so many passing triangles and opportunities to keep the ball from your opponent made perfect sense.

Coupled with their unbelievable ability to keep the ball in the tightest of spaces Enrique also had at his disposal the most potent attacking trio in all of football. Their combination of technical, tactical and psychological brilliance enables Lionel Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez to terrorize opposing defenses while interchanging positions all across the front line. Each player has the ability to come from a deeper position with the ball at their feet. Each player has the ability to break down defensive blocks with well-timed runs. Each has a tremendous engine and the ability to finish a wide array of chances from all over the field. Thus, they have the ability to overload areas of the field, and defenders, from a number of different starting points and each with devastating outcomes. The very fact that this “Three Headed Monster” is on the pitch for Barcelona makes teams hesitate to commit any players forward for fear they will be left one versus one against their attacking prowess.



down the flanks at will. It is rare to allow both backs to go freely, but, in both Alba and Alves he saw the athleticism and work rate that would be necessary to keep the attacking machine running on all cylinders. Enrique also felt that each player possessed the tactical awareness necessary to offer them the green light as he was confident they would be smart enough not to go forward at inopportune moments. If he did not feel that his outside defenders possessed this combination of traits it would have been useless to

allow them the freedom to roam as they surely would be caught on the counter as many times as they would tally in the attack.

In the midfield Enrique decided to utilize Ivan Rakitic as the key to his counter attacking threat. This proved to be a decision which complimented his front three perfectly. Rakitic possessed terrific timing and seemed to arrive on the ball at just the right moment to dish an assist for his dynamic front runners or score a goal himself. This counter attacking midfield tweak served the Enrique version of the 1-4-3-3 well with Rakitic netting from delayed runs in the Champions League against both Manchester City and Juventus. But, for Rakitic to be effective he too needed to be complimented in the midfield by players who could make up for his attacking minded presence. His foil in the midfield tended to be one of two players, Andrés Iniesta or Rafinha. In each Enrique found a player who was able to continue the tradition of short passing triangles that made Barcelona such a force from the beginning. Both Iniesta and Rafinha's ability for pin point accuracy in passing, as well as their ability to set up their teammates for success with their passing and runs forward. Thus, Enrique's version of the 1-4-3-3 enjoyed a vertical threat to complement their previous possession dominance making it slightly more dangerous than the previous version under Guardiola.

While Rakitic and Iniesta or Rafinha were primarily going forward that meant the third midfield choice needed to have a very specific set of defensive traits. On one hand this player was going to need to have the defensive presence to fill in the back for Alba and Alves when they went forward. A player not capable of swiftly transitioning from midfield to the back would lead to the team defensive shape ultimately suffering. Yet, this same player needed to possess the technical and tactical ability to connect the backs and midfield in possession and provide service to his more attacking oriented teammates. The player he felt was best suited to assume that defensive minded role was Sergio Busquets. Busquets had been the player under previous coach Pep Guardiola who anchored the midfield pivot for Barcelona and as such he learned the nuances of the position from one of the best to play the position in his former coach. In reality Busquets may not be a world class defensive player, but he was a world class deep lying midfielder and athletic enough to deal with the counter attacking threats his central defenders, Gerard Piqué and Javier Mascherano, may be facing. As amazing as the Barcelona attack was considered their defensive corps were not quite as well thought of

and was prone to letting in more goals than they should have allowed. That said, Enrique's player selections complimented his formation choice and still allowed him to win the treble with a world class attack and a competent defensive structure who knew their roles well.

The final aspect to speak of in terms of his player selection and formation is Enrique's total dedication to the "Team" concept. He realized he had great players. As he looked around he recognized that other teams also had great player but those great players may not feel they need to put in work on every shift or on both ends of the field. Enrique made it clear to his players if you would like to stay in his good graces you must be a player who is involved in every play. At Barcelona their dedication to counter pressing, or winning the ball as soon as they lose it is central to their success. Thus, those players willing to sacrifice their glory by defending for the good of the team found places at his table on a regular basis. However, those players who were content to watch others work for them did not last within the framework of his formation and system of play.

**ROLE SPECIFIC TRAINING
SESSIONS
FOR PLAYERS IN THE
1-4-3-3 FORMATION
AND SYSTEM OF PLAY**

Attacking in a 1-4-3-3

Description:

Offering players options to attack out of the 1-4-3-3- formation

Attacking in a 1-4-3-3 Formation Activity 1



Setup:

Players will be in groups of four in a grid that is about 20 yards long and 10 yards wide. There will be a player starting with the ball, two players in the middle (one attacking and one defending) and then one target on the other end of the grid.

Execution:

The attacking player in the middle will drive the defending player away from the ball with a checking movement. When they are ready to receive the ball then will check back for the ball at an angle from the passer. The ball will be played to the checking player who

can turn and play it to the target or can lay it back to the passer who is joining them in the grid. If they lay the ball back the attacker will then backpedal wide of the defender and prepare to receive the ball from the oncoming player with the ball.

COACHING POINTS:

When the attacking player checks away they should put their shoulder in the chest of the defender to push them away.

When they are prepared to check to the ball use the momentum pushing off the defender to gain the space necessary to receive the ball.

Focus on popping off the defender at an angle so that you can receive the ball on your front foot and run with the first touch if going past them.

If laying the ball back backpedal away on a level even with the defender so as not to be off side but in a position where the ball can still be passed to eliminate the defender.

Attacking in a 1-4-3-3 Activity 2



Setup:

There will be two teams playing 5 v 5 in an area approximately 30 x 30 with the top of the grid at mid field and the other end outside the 18 yard box. At the end of the grid there will be one target player in the 30 yard area leading to the big goal and the goal keeper.

Execution:

Inside the grid the 5 v 5 must connect five passes in order to play the ball into the target player, typically the #9. The five players in the grid will most often be the #6, #8, #10, #7 and #11. However, you can incorporate wing backs into that mix as well (#2 and #3). When the ball goes into the target three of the five players will join them in the attacking grid where the target will lay the ball back to one of the on rushing players, backpedal out after laying it off and then the group must get a shot off within the next two touches. As soon as the shot is taken the coach will restart a new ball in the 5 v 5 grid so those players that joined must work back to the ball quickly on defense.

COACHING POINTS:

In possession the 5 v 5 should make the field as wide as possible to assist in creating passing lanes to the #9.

The ball played to the #9 should be at a pace and weight that allows them to handle it in one touch.

The #9 must work to play a ball to the players joining them that can be struck for a first time shot, or if passed, not require them to stop to receive it.

When the ball is played back if there is another pass before the shot it must be at an angle that would allow the attacking team to stride onto the ball and finish in one touch.

Attacking in a 1-4-3-3 Activity 3



Setup:

On 3/4 of a field there will be 8 v 6 with each team defending a big goal with a goal keeper.

Execution:

The ball begins with the goal keeper on the team of 8. Once the ball gets into play use regular soccer rules and no restrictions on passes. If the team of 6 goal keeper saves the ball or it goes out of bounds on the end line then they will distribute to their team for the counter attack.

The team of six will include a back four (#2, #4, #5 and #3) along with two defensive midfielders (#6 and #8). The team of eight will include a front three (#7, #9 and #11) three midfielders (#10, #8 and #6) and two wing backs (#2 and #3).

COACHING POINTS:

Wide players should work on their movement to create numbers up situations.

When in numbers up situations the player on the ball should drive at the defender to make them make a choice. If there is space behind they can take them on the dribble and if the defender steps towards them it is the cue to play the pass.

The midfielders should be conduits to change the point of attack as quickly as possible.

The #10 player should also be looking for opportunities to make runs joining with the front three. If the #8 and #6 join those runs should be delayed and late arriving.

Defending in a 1-4-3-3 formation

Description:

helping players understand their roles and the team dynamic involved in defending in the 1-4-3-3 formation.

Defending in a 1-4-3-3 Activity 1



Setup:

On a half field there will be four defenders and a goal keeper who are defending a big goal. Then, there will be three strikers who are in attacking positions in front of the defenders with five servers spread out across the area on half of a field. At the half field line will be two gate goals for the defenders to counter attack when they win possession.

Execution:

The activity begins with the servers playing balls into the three strikers in a given pattern. The pattern of service should be known, or called out in advance, so that the defenders and goal keeper will have time to prepare their defending shape to deal with the ball being played in to the strikers.

If the strikers successfully receive the service then they should go to the big goal. However, if the defenders win the ball they should quickly look to transition and play the ball through the counter gates.

COACHING POINTS:

COMMUNICATION IS KING! The back four and the goal keeper must have a very specific and direct line of communication with one another to deal with the balls they are facing.

The goal keeper should call "Keep" early and loud if they are going to be dealing with the service themselves or "Away" if they want the defenders to deal with it.

The movement and shape of the four defenders and goal keeper must be in unison and with an understanding of their purpose. This unit cannot allow any service, especially vertical balls, to arrive uncontested in their area.

Defending in a 1-4-3-3 Formation Activity 2



Setup:

In just over half a field you will have four defenders (#2, #3, #4 and #5) paired with their three midfielders (#6, #8 and #10) with a goal keeper behind them protecting a big goal. They will be facing three strikers and four midfielders who are trying to score on the big goal. Those players will be protecting two gate goals.

Execution:

The team attacking the big goal will begin with the ball. Each unit will be confined to their zone to begin with (4 defenders against three strikers and 3 midfielders against four midfielders). The team defending the big goal will work to keep a positive defending shape in their zones and deny any penetrating balls through their zones. When they win the ball the outside backs are allowed to leave their zones and move forward to help play the ball through the gate counter goals.

COACHING POINTS:

The depth of the defending team should be no more than 30 yards from top to bottom so the space to possess and attack is very compacted.

The communication between the goal keeper, defenders and midfielders in the zone ahead of them must be specific and concise.

The pressure on the ball must be immediate and active so as not to allow the attacking team time to play balls that will break the defensive unit.

The goal keeper should be active in covering the space behind the back zone and any balls over or through the zone should be cut out by the keeper.

As the defenders shift to deal with the ball movement the midfielders should focus on shutting off any other movement of the ball, as well as, denying any time or opportunity to make decisions on the ball.

Defending in the 1-4-3-3 Formation Activity 3

Setup:

On a full field teams will play 11 v 11 for an allotted amount of time. A defending team will be in a 1-4-3-3 formation with a specific defensive philosophy. The attacking team can be in a 1-4-3-3 if you would like to work on two topics at a time. However, the attacking team can also take the shape of any formation that you will be facing in the coming game.

Execution:

For a ten minute period the defending team will work to keep their shape and win the ball utilizing low pressure defending system.

For a ten minute period the defending team will work to keep their shape and win the ball utilizing a high pressure defending system.



COACHING POINTS:

Low Pressure system:

As soon as the ball is lost the entire unit must retreat to a designated line of confrontation where the team will begin to defend based on the position of the ball.

The line of confrontation should be at a level that will compact the team defensive shape by its very implementation.

Communication for the team to get into the shape must be demanding and exact so that the opponent will need to defeat a block of 11 players in a tight space and with little room behind to play balls.

The goal keeper must be vigilant and protect their line from more long range shots.

The defenders must recognize their individual roles in case of a dribbler as opposed to a passer (Do you want them to stay engaged on the player or pass them onto the next player in the zone)



High Pressure system:

As soon as it "appears" the ball is going to be lost the closest players should immediately press the ball winner and deny them time or space to make good decisions on where to release the ball.

The team should not drop but should assume more of a man to man marking stance with all players who can get the ball with an inside foot pass eliminated as options.

The strikers in this system are constantly looking to double down or cut off any back passes so that they can win the ball closer to their opponent's goal and create more scoring chances.

The compactness of the group in their opponents defending end will require the goal keeper to play farther off her line and assume a more active role in thwarting through balls.

1-4-3-3 Team Possession Session

Description:

Help team better understand how to play a 1-4-3-3

1-4-3-3 Possession Activity 1



Setup:

Players are divided into groups of three. There will be two groups working together for a total of six players involved. The groups should be approximately 25 yards apart from one another.

Setup:

Divide an area 60 x 44 into six grids. Within the grids will be two teams of seven players trying to keep possession for their team.

Execution:

Within the seven players it would be advised to mix in a pair of wide defenders (#2 and #3), a central defender (#4), and three attacking players including a central striker (#9). The players must complete five passes in order to get a point. No more than two passes may be made in any grid or the team in possession must begin their count to five over.

COACHING POINTS:

Players within the same grid should offer support at angles where they can be seen and receive balls that need to be played in one or two touches.

Players outside the grid the ball is in should seek to find angles of support with a clear line of vision from the ball to their feet.

Each team of seven players will look to draw their opponents in and then change the point of attack quickly to their teammates in grids that are farther away.

1-4-3-3 Possession Part 3



Setup:

In an area from the top of the 18 yard boxes to the full width of your field divide that space into six sections as in the previous activity. At the top of each 18 yard box will be a big goal with a goal keeper. The field players will be playing 8 v 8.

Execution:

Play a regular soccer game with the stipulation that teams must make a minimum of three passes before they are able to score a goal. In addition, any goal that is scored as a direct result of a short ball and then a longer driven ball that eliminates the defending unit will be worth 2 points. Each team of eight should include two defenders and then three midfielders and three strikers (if possible). If those positions are not possible use three defenders and the other five players as a combination of the attacking lines.

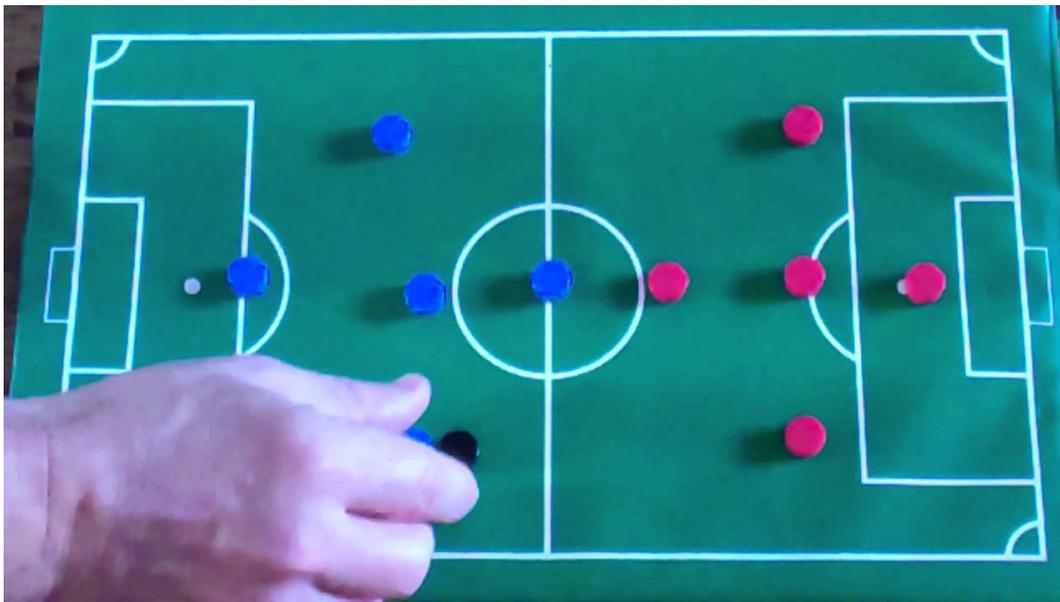
COACHING POINTS:

Keeping the ball is the top priority as you cannot score if you rush into the attack and give it to your opponents.

The eight players should look to suck the defending unit into one area and then keep a positive attacking shape which will allow the driven ball to result in a numbers up situation.

CHAPTER 4

ADDITIONAL FORMATION OPTIONS



The **1-3-4-3 formation** is probably most often associated with women's soccer and specifically the vaunted University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Tar Heel Women's Soccer Program. Utilizing this high pressure, very attacking oriented, system Coach Anson Dorrance has won an unprecedented 22 National Championships. However, after 2010 the formation began to creep into the world of international soccer as well. As you might expect the Italians, with their tremendous defensive heritage, initially took to the three man backline and it began to take hold in the Serie A first. But, by 2012 it crossed the channel and worked it's way into the English Premier League via Coach Roberto Martinez and his Wigan Athletic side.

The key to success with the 1-3-4-3 formation is understanding that communication and total defensive pressure are undoubtedly the keys to the success of the formation. It is, in effect, a system where your attacking seven players look to overwhelm your opponents and put them under such intense pressure that they are not capable of playing their way out of it. For this to be successful players must combine superb athleticism and a competitive mentality that will not allow any ball to go unchallenged.

GOALKEEPER:

To begin with the goal keeper in this system must be very alert and engaged in the flow of the game. Due to the fact that there are just three defenders in front of them to cover the entire width of the field they will be called upon to clean up balls that are lumped over the backline as well as connect with their defenders to relieve pressure. In addition players in this role must be excellent communicators as their direction must aid the team in covering when central players leave the middle to play balls and their vision of the oncoming dangers must help the midfielders drop into the back line to assist in coverage.

To execute a 1-3-4-3 system defensively a team must possess defenders who are not easily beaten off the dribble in the forward and midfield positions. When using a 1-3-4-3 system you have more numbers higher up the field, therefore it is better to adopt a higher pressure system rather than to sit back and allow a team to try and expose your 3 man back line.



DEFENDERS:

In this formation the three players in the back will be required to play narrow and in close proximity to one another for support. These players must all share the characteristics of being solid central defenders with outstanding pace and athleticism. In addition the back three will need to have an excellent understanding of one another and how to communicate with one another both verbally and non verbally because they are often covering each other when balls are in wide positions. In order to be successful as a member of a three back the players must be very disciplined and confident in their positioning. These three players will not be worried about getting forward to support the attack. They only need to worry about keeping the total team depth to a minimum in the attack.

MIDFIELDERS:

The central midfielders in a 1-3-4-3 formation are very similar in their defending responsibilities to the same position in other formations. A major responsibility is to ensure that any ball in the center of the park is pressured as high up the field as

possible, and most importantly immediately, so that balls cannot be played vertically to the forwards. One of the central midfielders will also be required to provide coverage for the backline and drop into their shape should a defender be sucked into a wide space. This “holding” midfielder (#6) should be accomplished dealing with balls in the air and have the ability to disrupt and destroy attacks through their ability to read the game. In contrast the wide midfielders in this system will be called on defensively to cover a great deal of ground defensively and make up for the fact that the formation is vulnerable in the wide areas of their backline. In order to effectively deal with those spaces the wide midfielders (#8 and #2) must possess the ability to track their players back into the potential danger areas and when balls are in the back. When they do this it would actually appear as if there is now a unit of five defenders. On average the way to stop balls from getting into the danger areas the midfielders are also expected to have the ability to be ball winners, especially when it comes to second balls. These players must have good field awareness and the vision to identify threats prior to their actual development. Additionally midfielders in a 1-3-4-3 formation must be excellent tacklers and they will be called on to win the ball high up the field so they will not end up needing to drop into the defensive five shape.

In terms of attacking the midfielders must have an extremely high aerobic capacity. They will be called on to support the forwards in their pressing, but, also to get forward when in possession and create an attacking overload for the opposing defenders to deal with. The flank midfielders are going to be expected to support the wide forwards with overlapping runs throughout the game. So, they should probably be the fittest of all the players in order to continually overlap and still be able to get back to defend the width. When balls are being played into the final third the midfielders will seldom make the deepest runs but will find themselves on the edge of the area. Due to their increased defensive role the fringe attacking positions around the box provide the best fit for all of their responsibilities. The attacking central midfielder (#10) will be required to get lots of touches on the ball and must have the technical ability to spring the three front runners with a single ball. This player should also have the ability to score from distance and from late arriving positions.

FORWARDS:

The true strength of the 1-3-4-3 formation is the defending ability of the strikers. While strikers may be asked to press or defend in other systems of play in this one it is an absolute necessity. Defensively the #9 player is required to take responsibility for the two center backs as well as the goal keeper. The #7 and #11 players are responsible for pressuring and defending the outside backs. All three roles must be very aggressive in their defending and willing to take chances or risks in order to gain interceptions. One very important aspect necessary for allowing the three strikers to play this type of aggressive defensive system is that the entire defending unit (team) should be no more than 30 yards in depth so there is always immediate cover to continue the pressure if the strikers miss a tackle or interception.

In terms of their attacking presence the wide strikers (#7 and #11) must have above average 1 v 1 ability and be fearless when it comes to taking on defenders on the dribble. The #9 player will find themselves the deepest in the box when attacking and should not only be a good finisher, but, also have the ability to deal with a variety of different services with all of the surfaces of their body. When you look at the attacking shape (when not intercepting the ball) the three strikers should all look to make attacking runs into the box. They must be poachers and very hungry for the goal and allow the midfielders to deal with balls on the edge of the area.

DIFFICULTIES AND CONCERNS FOR THE 1-3-4-3

To begin with the very nature of the system requires a great deal of coordination, and an extreme amount of understanding of zonal defending. If the entire team does not know where to go and what to do in specific defending situations then there are too many areas of danger for the team to be successful in the system.

Another difficulty playing this formation is that it will have difficulties matching up against teams with three strikers. Although the defenders must be athletic and competent should they be forced to man mark for an entire game intelligent attacking players can drag them out of their tight positioning. Just about the only way to deal with that type of issue is to drop a holding midfielder deeper in the shape to help the backs deal with the front three of the other team, but, that will unbalance their pressing shape and negate

the advantage the 1-3-4-3 offers with an aggressive block of seven defending by going forward.

The **1-4-5-1 formation** is typically a more defensive minded formation, however, by tweaking the wide midfielders it can also have a more attacking look and be somewhat similar to the 1-4-3-3. As a formation this option actually has several different implementations ranging from complete defensive focus and counter attacking options to the more attacking minded 1-4-3-3. This formation has popped up from time to time in modern football with Liverpool utilizing it in 2005 to win the UEFA Champions League and Italy utilizing it on their way to the 2006 World Cup Championship.

Much like the 1-3-4-3 this formation is also based on its strength in defense. However, this formation does not encourage the players to defend high up the pitch by pressing their opponents. Rather, you will more often find it used in one of two situations. In the first instance it would be employed as a method of dealing with teams that have superior technical ability or talent. When a team is not able to match up well with an opponent in the midfield, or up top, then the 1-4-5-1 can place nine players in their defending third making it virtually impossible for any one player to be exposed due to the abundant defensive coverage there are offered. Another reason that a team may opt for a 1-4-5-1 formation is to grind down their opponent's ability to build through the midfield. This formation allows the midfielders and backs to basically choke off the other team's service to their forwards with a block of nine players eliminating the typical passing lanes through the midfield. This type of 1-4-5-1 can also be adapted to account for a special playmaker who would be able to spring an attack from within the formation and this is probably the most often use of the formation.

FORWARD:

In this formation the lone player up top (#9) has a very thankless job. They will find themselves up against a minimum of two defenders every time they have the ball and if support is slow they may face even more. In order for this player to have success they must possess a very specific set of physical characteristics. They must be good with their back to goal and strong enough to hold the ball up under intense pressure. In addition this player should possess either great pace, or a terrific tactical understanding

of the game, so they can find space or a combination of both. The other characteristic, which is more often seen in attacking versions of this formation, would be speed. If you do not want to utilize this player for hold up play then it is vital they have the speed and agility to dance along the back line and pose enough of a threat to make opposing defenders stay compact and focused.

MIDFIELDERS:

The five midfielders can be employed in a variety of different fashions and that is what gives the formation its flexibility to be defensive or attacking in nature. If the formation is to be used as a **complete defensive mindset**, in an attempt to grind out a 0-0 tie or do nothing more than preserve a lead, then the midfield will only designate one attacking midfield player (#10) as having the freedom to support the lone striker. The wide midfielders will look for opportunities to play the #9 and #10 players almost exclusively on the counter attack and will not make long runs forward in support. The team using this formation will deploy two defensive central midfielders (#6 & #8) and combine them with two wide midfielders (#7 and #11) who will very rarely venture forward or try to drive forward on a service. Behind this midfield block the traditional defenders (#2, #3, #4 and #5) will stay in close proximity to their midfielders and the entire unit will have no real ambition to come forward from their defensive responsibilities. When a team is utilizing this type of 1-4-5-1 formation their communication with one another is vital so that they will not overcrowd an area and accidentally leave space available to be exploited between the lines.

1-4-5-1 DEFENSIVE MINDSET FORMATION



If the midfielders are going to be deployed with a **more balanced mindset** then there will be a designated defensive midfielder (#6) who will have the responsibility to provide a screen for the back four at all times. This midfielder might be used in a man to man situation picking up players who are in between the lines, or, they may be more of a screen in the middle of a defending zone. With this player deployed as a designated helper the other four midfielders can be allowed to assume a slightly more advanced starting position. The two central midfielders (#8 and #10) will look to work off of and with the lone striker. This will give the team a focused plan of attack with at least three players who can aid in creating chances. The two wide midfielders would now take limited opportunities to get forward but they are not going to be focused on service into the box. With just one target and two supporting players balls served in the air will have little chance of success so they must look to serve to feet or combine with the three attacking players should the opportunity arise.

1-4-5-1 BALANCED MINDSET FORMATION



If the midfielders are going to be deployed with a **more attacking mindset** then the midfield will again be deployed with a designated #6 who is responsible for full time defensive duties. This player will be charged with solidifying a unit of five defenders at all times for the system of play. Ahead of the #6 will again be the two central midfielders (#8 and #10) as well as the two wide midfielders (#7 and #11). However, these players will have priorities slightly different than in the balanced formation. In this mindset the central midfield players will be dedicated to the attack and will be constantly looking for opportunities to get into scoring areas. The wide players will be more likely to swing service into the scoring area in this formation because of the three dedicated attackers and the opposite wide midfielder who will attack the back side of the box with late arriving runs should the opportunity arise.

1-4-5-1 ATTACKING MINDSET FORMATION



DEFENDERS:

No matter which mindset a team chooses to use when deploying the 1-4-5-1 the defenders roles and characteristics remain fairly constant. To begin with these players must be composed and dedicated defenders. They will very rarely venture forward and will be required to stay focused and vigilant for the duration of the contest. At a minimum the two central defenders (#4 and #5) should be athletic, have good size and be able to deal with balls in the air and on the ground. The two wide backs (#2 and #3) do not have to have the same size, but, should be strong and athletic to deal with the fact that they are going to be engaged in defensive battles at a higher rate than in other formations. It should go without saying that in this formation all four backs must be extremely sound individual defenders and excellent communicators as their unit organization can make or break the system. In the 1-4-5-1 the defending unit will basically halt their progress forward at the midline, so, they are not required to possess the ability to place pin point service into the box from flank positions. However, they

should be capable of striking big balls from the back into dangerous areas behind the opponent's backline.

DIFFICULTIES AND CONCERNS FOR THE 1-4-5-1

In terms of using this formation as a full time system of play the 1-4-5-1 simply does not offer, even in its most attacking form, enough scoring opportunities for the majority of teams to find it a successful formation for winning games. In some rare circumstances a coach may have the personnel to use it and still create enough goal scoring chances that they can consistently convert on, to win on a regular basis. But, overall it is more of a maintenance system than a full time philosophy.

An additional difficulty the formation may experience is that the complete discipline players must play with in order for the system to be successful is very hard to instill. Due to the lack of attacking options if just one player is not willing to do their job every single time goal scoring opportunities may be absent all together. In terms of defending if an outside back decides to jaunt forward or the outside midfielders go forward on too regular of a basis the continuity of the defending block will be compromised and that is the one reason a team may choose this formation!

Team Anticipated Formation: _____

Striker Traits Necessary for this formation: _____

Midfield Traits Necessary for this formation: _____

Defense Traits Necessary for this formation: _____

Keeper Foot Skill Necessary for formation: _____

Shape Considerations for formation:	Flat	Diamond	Box
Pressure Considerations for formation:	High	Low	
Adaptations considerations for my team:	_____		

My Current Team Strengths Attacking:

My Current Team Strengths Defending:

Number of Players I have capable of successfully accomplishing requirements for players in the following roles:

Strikers: _____

Midfielders: _____

Defenders: _____

Do I have enough players available to compete in the formation if my team takes injuries?

Forward Player Evaluation Form: **NAME:** _____

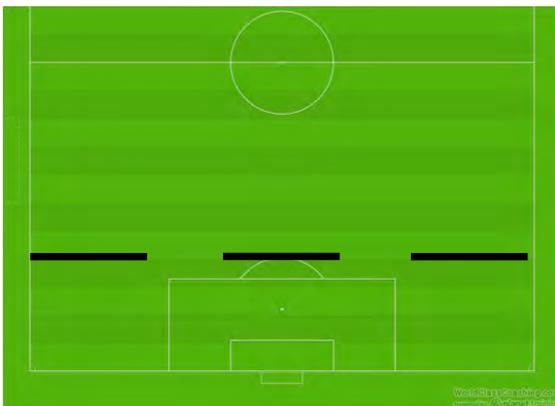
Defensive Traits or Abilities: _____

Attacking Traits or Abilities: _____

Role Anticipated in formation: _____

Roles capable of playing in formation: _____

Striker Formation, Movement Patterns or Areas of Coverage:



Midfield Player Evaluation Form: **NAME:** _____

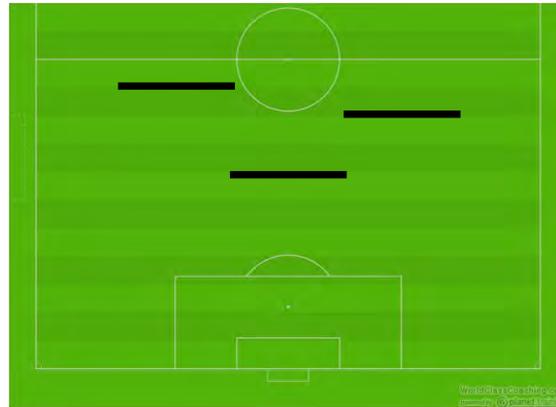
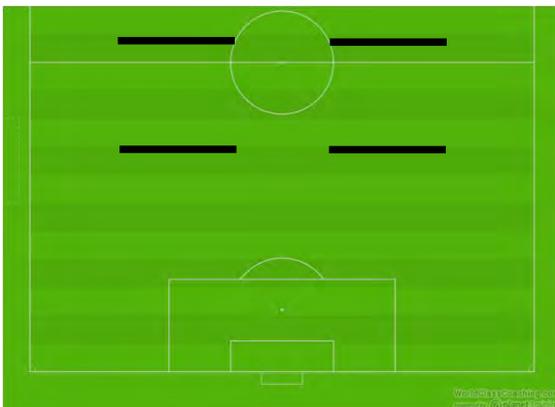
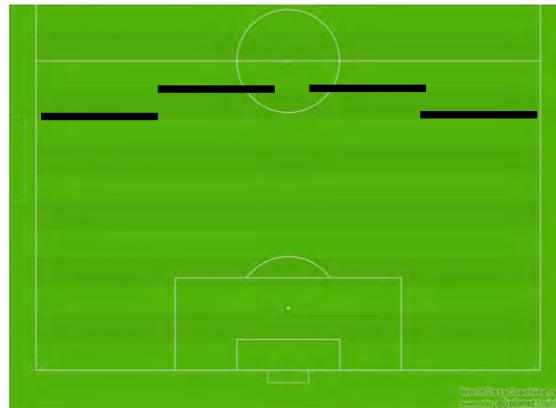
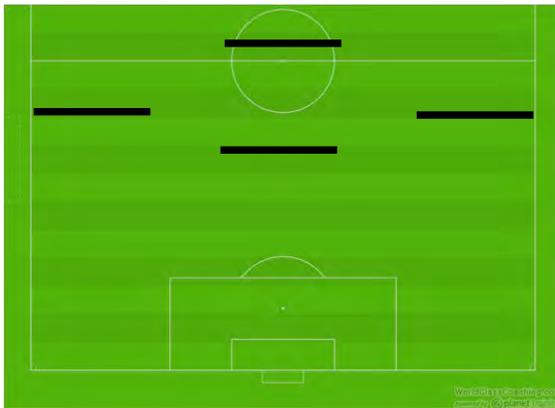
Defensive Traits or Abilities: _____

Attacking Traits or Abilities: _____

Role Anticipated in formation: _____

Roles capable of playing in formation: _____

Midfielder Formation, Movement Patterns or Areas of Coverage:



Defender Player Evaluation Form: **NAME:** _____

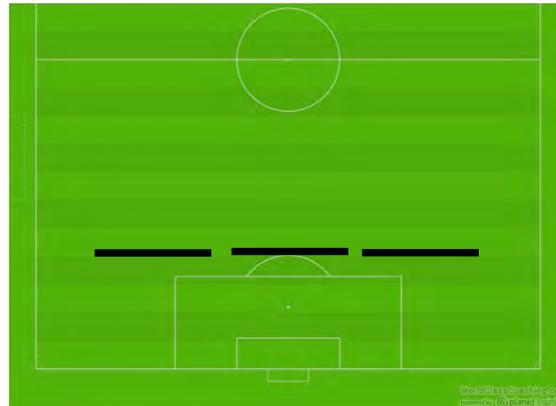
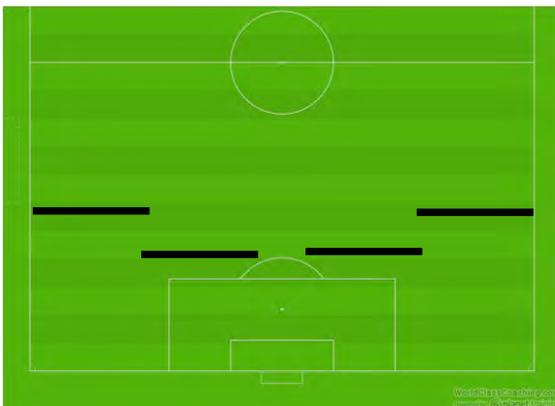
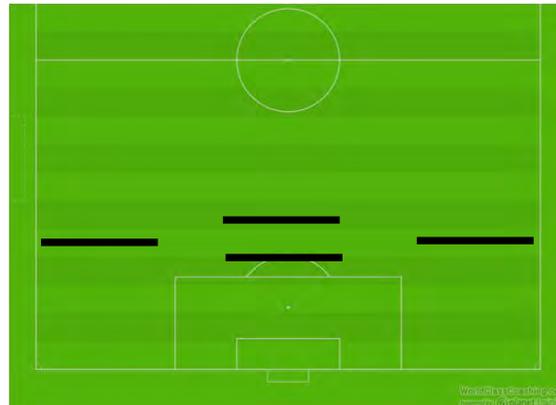
Defensive Traits or Abilities: _____

Attacking Traits or Abilities: _____

Role Anticipated in formation: _____

Roles capable of playing in formation: _____

Defender Formation, Movement Patterns or Areas of Coverage:



About the Author:

Georgia Gwinnett College Director of Athletics Dr. Darin S. Wilson named Chris Kouns as the GGC's second-ever women's soccer head coach on February 18, 2015. In just his first year with the Grizzlies Kouns led the program to their first ever A.I.I. Final and their first ever NAIA National Women's Soccer Tournament. Along the way to the National Tournament his GGC squad netted the most goals in program history, earned the most A.I.I. All Conference players and garnered three student athletes places on the NSCAA All East Regional Team members.

With over 22 years of college experience, including ten as a head coach at the NCAA Division I and III levels, prior to Georgia Gwinnett College Kouns served as the head women's coach at Division III Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. At Capital he immediately turned the program into a NCAA Division III contender with three Ohio Athletic Conference titles in four seasons, two NCAA Regional Finals and the program's first ever trip to the NCAA Women's Soccer Final Four in the 2013.

For his efforts in 2013, Kouns was named Ohio Athletic Conference Coach of the Year, Ohio Collegiate Soccer Coaches Association Coach of the Year and was a national finalist for the National Soccer Coaches Association of America Division III Coach of the Year. In his time at Capital, he developed a pair of All-Americans and seven all-region honorees, guiding the team to it's most-ever wins in a season, its first-ever national tournament victory and first-ever national ranking.

Prior to arriving at Capital Kouns spent ten years at the NCAA Division I level. From 2008 to 2010 Kouns was the Associate Head Coach at the University of Cincinnati (OH) in the Big East Conference. Kouns arrived at Cincinnati after a four year stint as the Head Women's Soccer Coach at Jacksonville University (FL). At JU Kouns Dolphins earned four trips to the Atlantic Sun Conference Tournament, two trips to the Atlantic Sun Conference Semi-Finals and an Atlantic Sun Conference title in 2006. His A-Sun Championship Dolphin squad was just the second soccer team in JU history to make it to the NCAA Division I women's soccer national tournament with their berth in 2006. In the years leading up to his head coaching stints at three NCAA Division I institutions. Kouns was an Assistant Women's Soccer Coach at the University of Pennsylvania (Ivy League), Georgia State University (Atlantic Sun Conference) and Samford University (AL) (Atlantic Sun Conference).

Kouns began his collegiate coaching career as the Head Women's Soccer Coach at Union College (Ky.). In his only season with the Bulldogs he led them to the Mid South Conference Championship and a berth in the NAIA National Women's Soccer Tournament.

A 1992 graduate of Mars Hill College (N.C.), Kouns played soccer for the Lions and was an NAIA Academic All American and GTE-Co-Sida All-American nominee in 1991. He is active in national coaching education instruction through the NSCAA and US Soccer as well as a published author with World Class Coaching writing Counter Attacking in the Modern Game in 2016.

Kouns and his wife, Tammy Allen-Kouns, have one son, Caden.



CAREER RECORD

<i>School</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Record</i>
Union (Ky.)	1999	15-9
Jacksonville (Fla.)	2004	5-9-5
Jacksonville (Fla.)	2005	8-10-3
Jacksonville (Fla.)	2006	11-10-1
Jacksonville (Fla.)	2007	7-12-1
Capital (Ohio)	2011	13-8-2
Capital (Ohio)	2012	10-8-2
Capital (Ohio)	2013	19-5-2
Capital (Ohio)	2014	16-6-2
Georgia Gwinnett	2015	10-9-1
TOTAL	10 yrs	114-86-19