



SYSTEMS OF PLAY

21 MODERN SOCCER FORMATIONS

BY TOM SAUDER

Print & Go Line Ups & Strategies

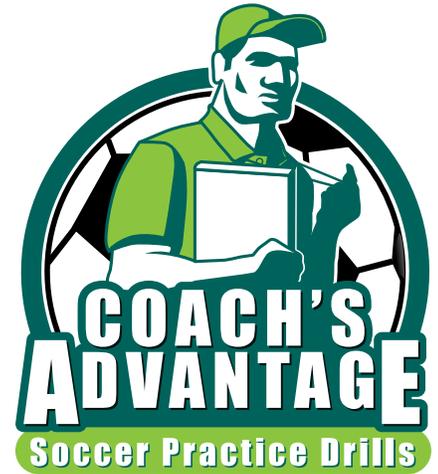
- full and small field soccer
- an essential guide for all soccer coaches



SAMPLE

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This is a **sample book**.

At Coach's Advantage, we know our products speak for themselves.

So we have given you the tools for **two systems of play**.

This sample includes:
 - One 4-4-3 System
 - One 4-2-3-1 System



FORMATIONS & STRATEGY

4-4-2: flat back four; flat midfield; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is very popular and used by such great teams as the Dutch National and Manchester United. It is a very effective and versatile attacking system based on coming down the sides as well as spreading the defense and then penetrating through the center. With overlapping outside defenders and midfielders the 4-4-2 quickly converts to a 4-2-4 or 2-4-4 putting immense pressure on the opposing defensive units. The vulnerability of the 4-4-2 lies in its flat back defense which can be torn apart by diagonal runs through its center.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 4-4-2 system must have outside defenders and midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to chase back in the team's transition to defense. The zonal system requires a high degree of verbal and visual communication, particularly when defending, to ensure that opposing attackers are challenged and covered.

This system relies on the off-side trap and that is where defenders need to be alert to ensure they step up just before the ball is played in behind them. This requires almost automatic mechanisms because there is little time to provide each other with instructions.

When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and central midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.

Inside midfielders are the strategists who read the play, decide when to come back to support the defenders, where to distribute the ball and when to make penetrating runs down the middle. They require excellent vision and ability to read the opposition.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

First and foremost, coaches need lots of time before the season starts to train the key elements of this system. Emphasis needs to be on keeping players in their zones and on getting them to make the right decisions regarding challenging penetrating opponents. Much work will be required to coordinate the off-side trap, which again requires verbal and visual communication.

Players with ability to beat opponents 1v1 on the wings with the ability to play effective crosses into the target area need to be developed.

Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

STRATEGY

This system works very well when attacking just about any other system an opponent might play. It is particularly effective against other zonal 4-4-2 systems or a 4-3-3 system because it outnumbers it in the critical midfield area.

The weakness of this 4-4-2 lies in defense, particularly against a 3-5-2 system which can outnumber it in central midfield, thus pulling out a central defender causing difficulty with the integrity of the flat back zone. A 3-4-3 system can also cause difficulties, particularly if its three forwards get additional support from overlapping midfielders.

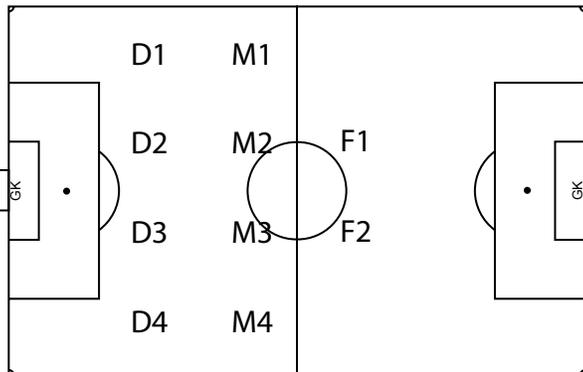
Ultimately, the strength of your own team will determine if the opponent is forced to make an adjustment to their system during the game or if you need to adjust because the opponent's system is dominating.

This 4-4-2 is a very attractive attacking system with risks on defense.



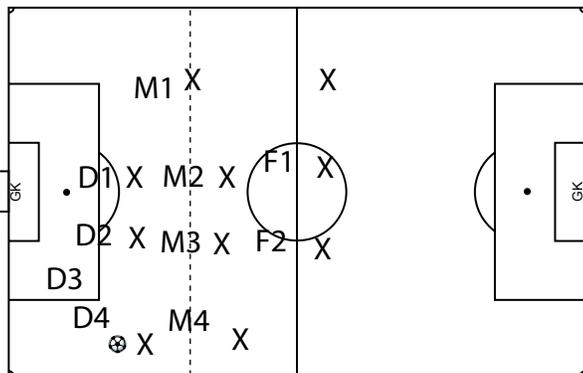
FORMATIONS & STRATEGY

4-4-2: flat back four; flat midfield; zonal system



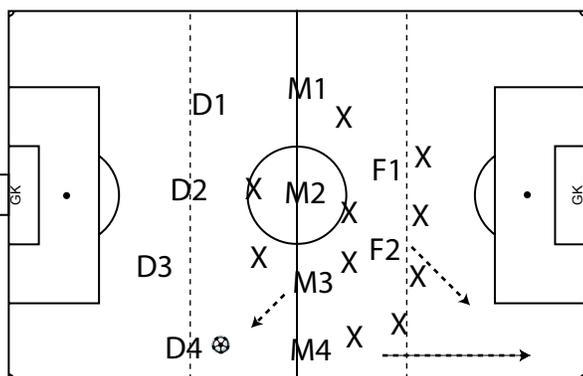
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1 & D4 challenge attackers on their side, cover for D2 & D3, overlap when attacking.
3. D2 & D3 mark central attackers if play is in middle.
4. M1 & M4 are wingers when attacking, defend against overlapping defenders or outside midfielders.
5. M2 & M3 control play, attack and defend centrally.
6. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



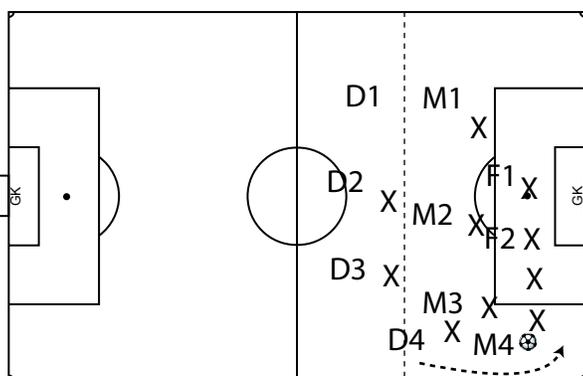
Defending:

1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D3 provides support to D4.
3. D2 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M4 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M3 comes to ball for a pass.
4. D3 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to D3, M3 or deep to right. Depending on where on the field the play is, the player in possession should have at least three passing options to players either coming towards the ball or making runs into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing with M4 in possession.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping defender D4 who will then cross. If ball were in center of field with M2 in possession, then M2 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or F2 making runs into space. M2 could also pass wide to overlapping M1/D1 or M4/D4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.



FORMATIONS & STRATEGY

4-2-3-1: flat back four; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is one of the many emerging variations of the basic systems used by today's pro teams. It is a very effective and versatile attacking system based on four attackers. With overlapping outside defenders and midfielders it converts to a 4-2-4, 4-3-3, 3-4-3, 3-3-4 or 2-4-4 putting immense pressure on the opposing defensive units who must be extremely alert and in constant communication. The vulnerability of the 4-2-3-1 lies in its flat back defense which can be torn apart by diagonal runs through its center. Transition to defending is easily forgotten with the mindset on attacking.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this system must have midfielders who have attacking skills equal to forwards. Outside defenders must be in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to chase back in the team's transition to defense. The zonal system requires a high degree of verbal and visual communication to ensure that opposing attackers are challenged and covered. The inside midfielders are defensive and strategy specialists and need to be disciplined in positional play. This system relies on the off-side trap and that is where defenders need to be alert to ensure they step up just before the ball is played in behind them. This requires almost automatic mechanisms because there is little time to provide each other with instructions. When attacking, the offensive midfielders and the forward need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and midfielders must have goal scoring skills. After loss of possession in the opponent's half, the attacking midfielders need to make decisions as to whom to challenge. Should they pressure defenders or drop back to cover midfielders? A key team requirement is to have players that can think, solve problems, improvise and make decisions.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

First and foremost, coaches need lots of time before the season starts to train the key elements of this system. Emphasis needs to be on keeping players in their zones and on getting them to make the right decisions regarding challenging penetrating opponents. Much work will be required to coordinate the off-side trap, which again requires verbal and visual communication. Midfielders with the ability to attack and defend need to be recruited or developed. Tactical training to ensure the offensive midfielders transition optimally will be the focus of every practice session. Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

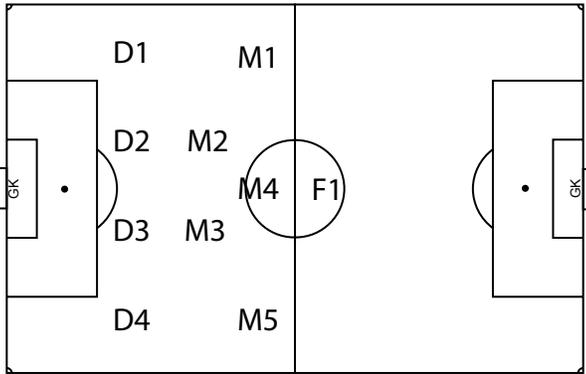
STRATEGY

This system is highly effective in attacking and challenging opponents' defenses. Opponents will find it difficult to respond to four attackers being unpredictable in their runs and positions. The weakness of the 4-2-3-1 lies in transitioning to defense because while providing attacking variability, midfielders might find it difficult to get into defensive position. On the other hand, the two central midfielders and four defenders should provide some security. A 3-5-2 system can outnumber it in central midfield, thus pulling out a central defender causing difficulty with the integrity of the flat back zone. A 3-4-3 system can also cause difficulties, particularly if its three forwards get additional support from overlapping midfielders. If struggling defensively in midfield, conversion to a 4-4-2 is likely the best tactical response. Ultimately, the strength of your own team will determine if the opponent is forced to make an adjustment to their system during the game or if you need to adjust because the opponent's system is dominating.



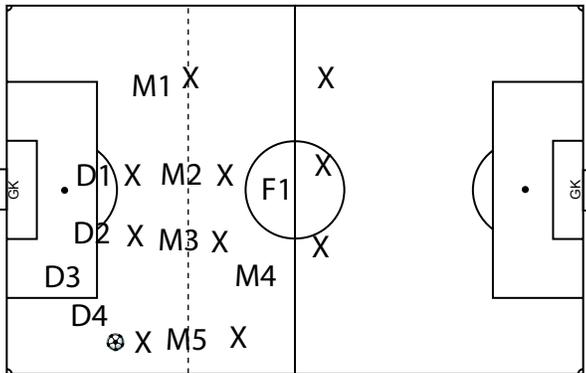
FORMATIONS & STRATEGY

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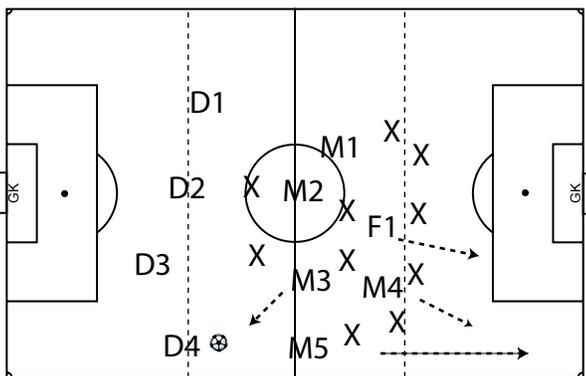
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1 & D4 challenge attackers, cover for D2 & D3.
3. D2 & D3 mark central attackers if play is in middle.
4. M1 & M5 are outside forwards when in possession, defend against overlapping defenders or midfielders.
5. M4 is playmaker as well as second centre forward.
6. M2 & M3 control play, mostly defend centrally.
7. F1 is target player supported on wings by M1, M5.



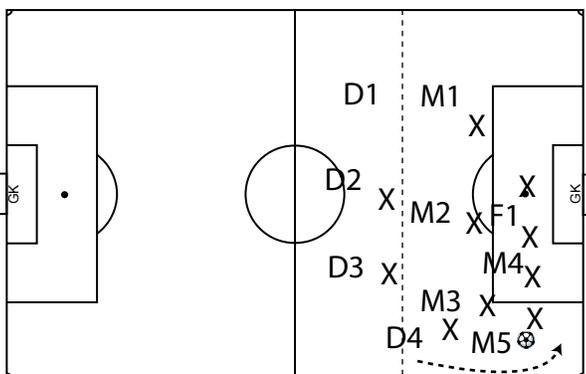
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4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M5 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & M4 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M5 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. M4 & F1 get ready to make diagonal through runs.
3. M3 comes to ball for a pass.
4. D3 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to D3, M3 or deep to right wing. Depending on where on the field the play is, the player in possession should have at least three passing options to players either coming towards the ball or making runs into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing with M5 in possession.
2. M5 can go 1v1 and cross the ball or
3. pass it to overlapping defender D4 who will then cross. If ball were in center of field with M2 in possession, then M2 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or M4 making runs into space. M2 could also pass wide to overlapping M1/D1 or M5/D4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.