

3-4-3 SYSTEM OF PLAY

INTRODUCTION

The 3-4-3 consists of three defenders, four midfielders, and three forwards. This is a system recommended for junior (youth) players. This system offers a good balance between the attacking, midfield, and defending lines. Furthermore, it allows for a series of diamonds and triangles all over the field that always allows the ball to be played in one of three ways: (1) forward; (2) lateral; and (3) back. The 3-4-3 is also a natural progression from 4v4 and 8v8.

ATTACKING

The 3-4-3 presents plenty of forward passing opportunities and allows numbers to attack in the box. There is also an equal distribution of players across the field. This system gives players a ready-made series of diamonds and triangles.

DEFENDING

The 3-4-3 enables the back three to develop good defending habits and discipline. Furthermore, it puts pressure on the opponent's fullbacks and allows for good double-teaming opportunities.

FORWARDS

There is a grave misconception about the forward position. Many believe that you are only an effective forward if you can score goals. Scoring goals is obviously an incredible attribute but a forward who sets goals up and collects assists is also very valuable. Some of the greatest forwards in the world are the ones who set big time goals up for all of their goals. That behind the scenes forward is important.

OUTSIDE FORWARD RESPONSIBILITIES

These two forwards should always be looking to score. Their first thought should be to shoot, but their second thought should always be, is there a better way. These forwards are often the ones setting plays up. Oftentimes the angles on goal that these players run into don't equate into quality shots. Because of this they simply pass the ball towards the middle and allow the center forward to finish the job. These players should be good dribblers, and have at least one solid move that they can use to beat defenders. Speed is a nice attribute to an outside forward, but good skills can sometimes replace speed.

CENTER FORWARD RESPONSIBILITIES

This player should be the team's best shooter. The center forward will be, or at least in theory, should be shooting the ball more times than anyone else on the team. This player should be fast and craft with the ball. His/her small ball skills should be excellent. They

should be able to dribble and control the ball very close to their bodies and work well in tight spaces. More often than not, when coaching a team you will notice a player who just seems to have a knack for the goal. That is the player you want to play center forward. He/she should be the most selfish player on the field. This doesn't mean that they never pass the ball, but it doesn't mean when they have a mediocre shot, they take it. All other players should (most of the time) pass off mediocre shots but the center forward should always take the chance and use his/her abilities to the fullest.

MIDFIELDERS

Midfielders of the 3-4-3 consist of four athletes: The left and right midfielders still exist and carry out the same duties as with the 4-3-3 but with a new member of the midfield moves in. This addition to the midfield plays in the middle of the field along side the center midfielder. The two become an offensive/defensive duo and do their best to hold the middle of the field and control the game. Often one player will take the role of the attacking midfielder and the other the role of the defensive midfielder, although those labels are not branded in stone. These two midfielders may swap roles as long as they communicate and let the other know when a switch is going to occur. These four midfielders start looking a bit like the defensive diamond mentioned in the 4-3-3. Because the middle of the field is now occupied with two central players, the defense can afford to eliminate the stopper position, due to the excess help in the central midfield. The attacking midfielder is expected to also step up the other way and help produce some offensive scoring power when possible.

DEFENDERS

Defenders in this system consist of three athletes: a left and right fullback and a sweeper (central defender). These defenders must stay tightly together, no more than 10-25 yards apart from each other at all times. They form a slight triangle in shape with the sweeper nearest to his own goal. That means, from left fullback to right fullback the distance should be no more than 50 yards. These three fullbacks must work together, sliding back and forth across the field supporting each other and making sure that all attackers are accounted for. Generally, the two outside fullbacks will mark the two opposing forwards "man to man" all game long, leaving the sweeper free to help out whenever necessary. Because there are only three defenders, they are much less likely to make offensive runs. Only if they are absolutely sure that they will score or assist in a goal should they make an offensive run and leave the man their marking. Again, this defensive strategy is only for the most skilled of teams and very confident defenders.