

4-3-3 SYSTEM OF PLAY

INTRODUCTION

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

DEFENDERS

The defensive positions consist of a left and right fullback, sweeper, and a stopper. The left and right fullbacks play in front of the goalkeeper and behind the midfielders on their respective sides of the field. The sweeper plays in the middle of the field and is the very last defender. The only player behind him is the keeper, so this player needs to be very reliable. The stopper also plays in the middle of the field. The stopper is positioned approximately 10 yards in front of the sweeper. The correct shape for these players should be the diamond shape.

LEFT AND RIGHT FULLBACK RESPONSIBILITIES

These two positions are probably the most varied in the game when it comes to skill level. What I mean by that is, at younger ages (5-12) these players should focus mainly on defending their side of the field and clearing the ball when necessary. They are responsible for sending balls long into space for the forwards to run onto as well as looking to play the ball into the feet of open midfielders. Speed is not that essential for outside fullbacks at a younger age. Now as the level of play increases (13 through college) the outside fullbacks become much more than just defensive players. These outside fullbacks become essential members of the offense making runs up the sideline, at appropriate times, and looking for crossed balls for scoring opportunities. They can also carry the ball down the sideline and look to get crosses in themselves. In this case it is important to have speedy outside fullbacks. They must be able to get up and down the field very quickly in case of a counter attack. It is very important that outside fullbacks do not get carried away with the amount of offensive runs. They must judge the opportunity and only go on the occasions they feel they will actually result in them touching the ball or taking a shot. If an outside fullback makes too many unproductive runs, they run the chance of getting tired and not being able to get back and defend their goal, like their job description indicates.

SWEEPER RESPONSIBILITIES

The sweeper position is one of the most crucial positions on the field and should be manned accordingly. A sweeper needs to be smart, fast, skilled, and very comfortable with his/her abilities. Because they are the last line of defense they very rarely make offensive type runs. Their job is to control the back. They are the leader of the other three defenders and it is their job to back the other three up at all times. If the opposing team is coming down the right side of the field the sweeper needs to be ready and able to back up his right fullback should they get beat. The sweeper needs to do it all. They must be able to clear the ball, send the ball to open space for the forwards (generally aiming for the corner flags), clear balls out with their heads, control the other defenders, stop breakaways from happening as well as work with the keeper in setting up defensive situations such as corner kicks, free kicks, etc. The sweeper is an extremely important position. This cannot be emphasized enough.

STOPPER RESPONSIBILITIES

The stopper is generally a bigger player. Speed is not a must here but one thing that is important is a must for consistency. This player must do things the same way constantly and not be sporadic. I say this because if they get beat in an unexpected manner, their only safety net is the sweeper who will most likely be so caught off guard by the mistake that they too will miss the ball and a breakaway occurs. This player's role is to simply stop attacks from happening. He/She is to strip the opposing team of the ball and distribute. The stopper is not a playmaker or a showboat. He/She is the simplest player on the field. Win possession of the ball and get it to another player on your team. Although his/her tasks are limited, the stopper is still an extremely important position.

MIDFIELDERS

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

OUTSIDE (FLANK) MIDFIELDER RESPONSIBILITIES

The left and right midfielders should be the most fit players on the team. They will be asked to do an awesome amount of running during the course of the game. They must support the forward in front of them and compliment the defender behind them to be successful. These two players are often the ones who cross the ball in and around the goal. They must have strong legs and be very unselfish when it comes to scoring. They should not be shooting too much from their corners of the field. If they do wander into the middle of the field then they should be ready to shoot, but in most cases they will be running up and down the sideline hitting crosses in for the forwards to convert into goals.

CENTER MIDFIELDER RESPONSIBILITIES

The center midfield player should be the most talented player on the field as well as the athlete with the hardest work ethic. Everything should essentially work through him and his presence must be known by all. He is responsible for switching the field of play from side to side, setting up forwards for shots, winning all 50/50 balls, playing great defense, shooting from distance and basically playing the role of “player coach” while on the field. He/She must be a very vocal leader and instructor. The center midfielder has an advantage over every other player on his team, that being he is closer to every other player than anyone else. He/She can turn 360 degrees and should always have someone within 10-15 yards away to pass to. They also have the opportunity to play the long ball into space for on-running forwards. This position is the most crucial and should be looked upon as so. This position is generally held by one of the captains on the team.

FORWARDS (WINGS)

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

OUTSIDE FORWARD (WING) RESPONSIBILITIES

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

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