



Coaching the 4-3-3 Presented by Randy Waldrum University of Notre Dame

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Randy Waldrum

Head Coach, Randy Waldrum's first 10 Notre Dame teams (1999-2008) combined for a 211-30-8 (.863) record while winning nine BIG EAST regular-season and six BIG EAST Tournament titles, and advancing to the NCAAs each year - including College Cup semifinal trips in 2000 and 2007, runner-up finishes in 1999, 2006 and 2008, and the 2004 title. The Irish also posted a 62-22-3 (.730) record against NSCAA Top 25 teams in the first decade of the Waldrum era.

Waldrum's .785 career winning percentage is fourth all-time among women's soccer coaches with 10-plus seasons on the Division I level.

These sessions were presented during the 2010 Nebraska WORLD CLASS COACHING International Seminar in Lincoln, NE.

Session Topics - Shape, Movement, Passing, Possession, Patterns, Pattern Play, Attacking

This entire session was recorded during the seminar. Click [here](#) to see more information about this DVDs.

Warm-Up

Players began by passing the ball and moving in any way or order they wanted to. They did this for 5-10 minutes before setting the players in the session.

First Pattern

Begins as shadow play with 7 players in position on the field. The seven players are set up with three midfield players in the shape of a triangle (2 attacking and 1 defending), three forwards, and one supporting player behind the midfielders.

The drill begins with the target player (player with the ball) passing it in to the wide attacker on the right. The team needs to then quickly switch the ball to the opposite side attacker with clean possession as quickly as possible. Alternate sides.



Coaching Point

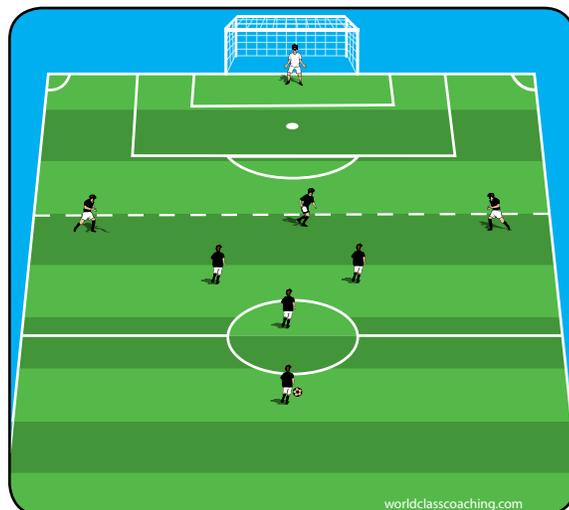
Focus on strong crisp passes that are accurate and appropriate. Make sure that players are keeping their shape when possessing and shifting from one side to the other.

Second Pattern

The function is the same as previous, except the players look to go to goal. Place a goalkeeper in the goal. The players must use the restraining line (dotted line) as an off sides line.

Coaching Points

We don't care how other teams defend, we want to teach players what to do. Emphasize after the attack that the players need to get their shape back behind the restraining line as quickly as possible.





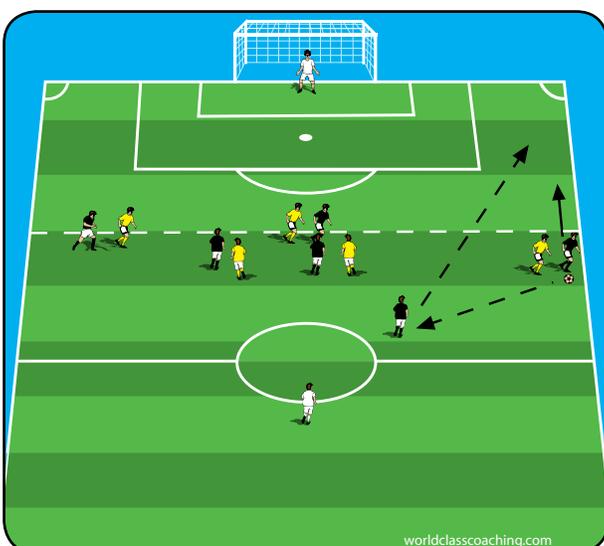
Third Pattern

Change the drill by adding three defenders and two defending midfielders. If the defending team wins possession, then they look to pass the ball to the back player that begins the possession. The back player becomes a target player and plays with the team with possession. Once the defending team plays into the target player, then possession goes back to the attacking team. Alternate sides.



Fourth Pattern (Beating Pressure)

The ball begins with the target player passing the ball to the outside right forward. The defensive central midfielder shifts over to support the ball. The right forward receives immediate pressure from the opposing defender. The two attacking central midfielders shift slightly wide and forward to create space for the pass.

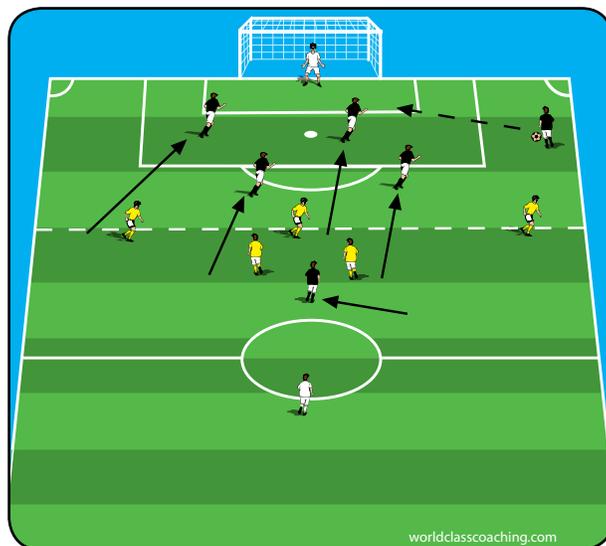


The right forward passes the ball to the supporting defensive central midfielder, the turns outside and begins to make a run behind the defender. The defensive central midfielder passes the ball into the space in front of the forward and behind the defender.

Coaching Points

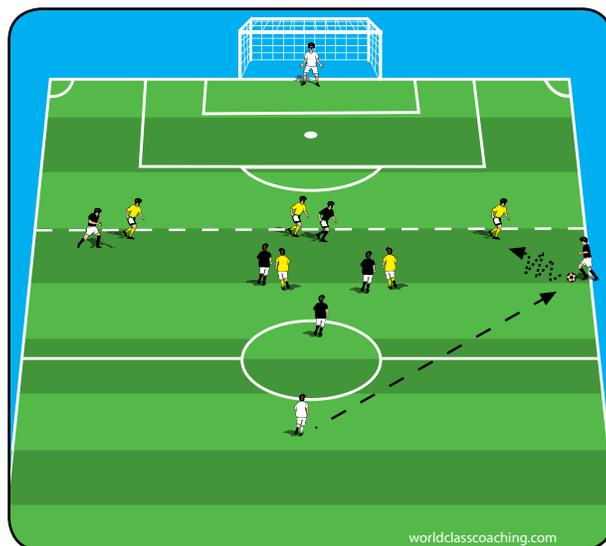
Work on the pattern of beating pressure first without going to goal. Be sure to watch for off sides.

Once the pattern is consistently successful, then have the forwards and midfielders go to goal and prepare for the service from the right forward. Alternate sides.



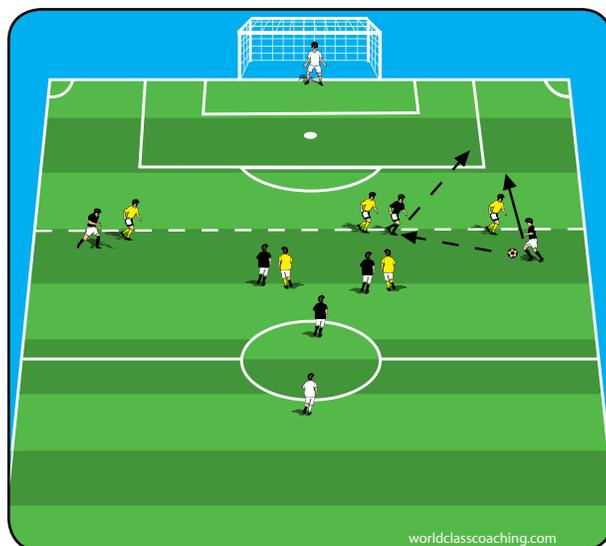
Fifth Pattern (Low Pressure)

The ball begins with the target player passing the ball to the outside right forward. The wide defender stays inside and does not immediately pressure the forward receiving the ball. The right forward then turns and faces the wide defender and begins dribbling inside towards the defender.



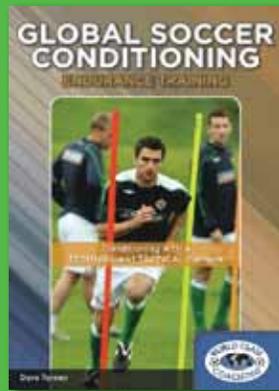
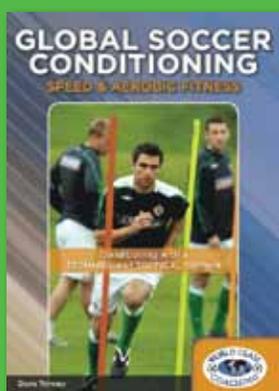
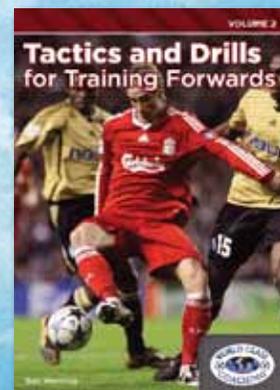
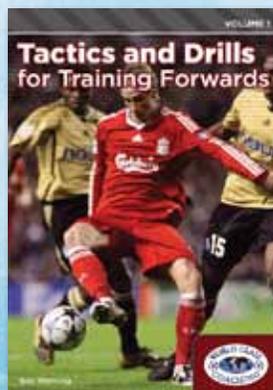
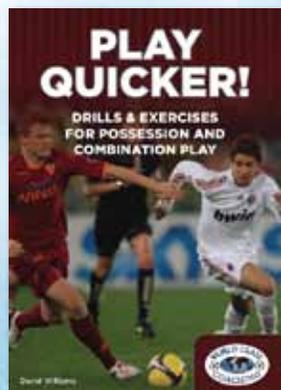
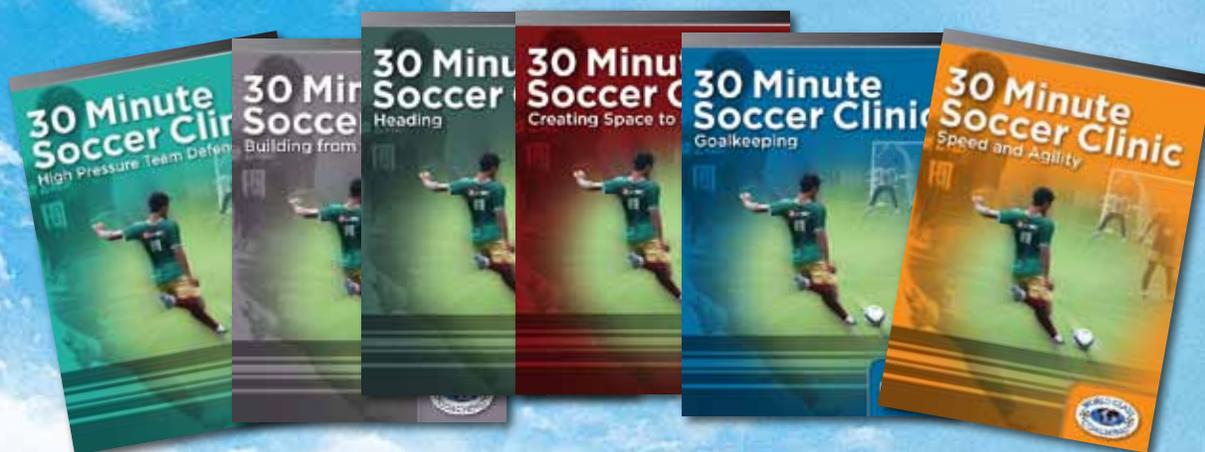
The central forward delays, but then checks toward the ball as an option for the right forward. The right forward passes the ball to the central forward and begins to make a run behind the defense. The central forward makes a one-touch pass to the space behind the defense and in front of the forward. The right forward makes the bending run around the wide defender to receive the ball and go to goal.

Once the pattern is consistently successful, then have the forward and supporting players go to goal. The defenders should try to recover and defend. Alternate sides



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The 4-3-3 is not only one of the most commonly used formations around the world, it is also one of the most successful, with teams like Chelsea, Inter Milan, Ajax, the Dutch National Team and the U.S. Women's National Team all utilizing the 4-3-3.

Randy Waldrum, head coach of the University of Notre Dame Women's Team, is a strong advocate of the 4-3-3 and has used it with his Notre Dame teams with great success over the years. Waldrum has guided the Notre Dame Women's team to the NCAA National Championship in 2004 and to the semi-finals for five consecutive years since 2006, including runner-up finishes in 2006, 2008 & 2009...all while playing with a 4-3-3.

These DVDs break down the 4-3-3 from both an attacking and defending perspective.

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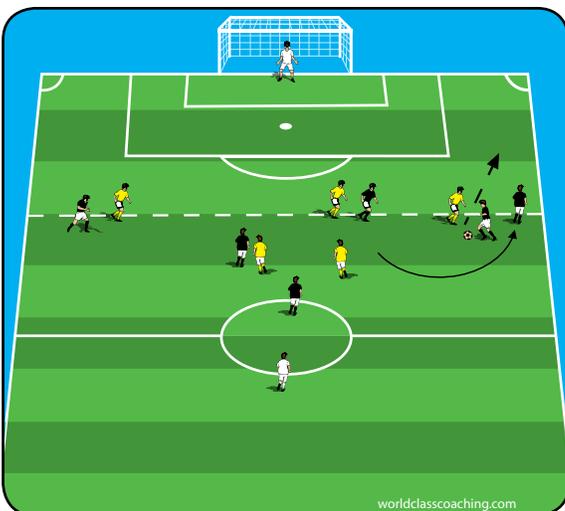


Sixth Pattern (Low Pressure2)

The ball begins with the target player passing the ball to the outside right forward. The wide defender stays inside and does not immediately pressure the forward receiving the ball. The right forward then turns and faces the wide defender and begins dribbling inside towards the defender.



The central forward checks to be available as an option for the right forward. The attacking right side midfielder makes an overlapping run around the right forward as they check inside. The right forward then has two options:



1. Touch the ball behind the defender for the overlapping attacking right central midfielder.

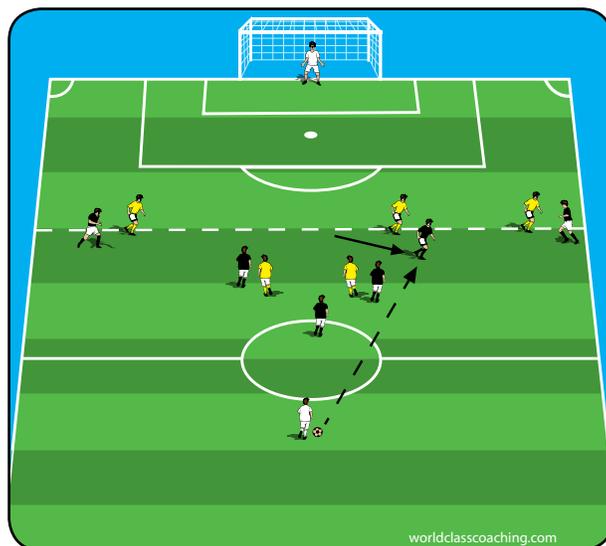
2. Pass the ball to the checking central forward who passes to the space behind the defense for the overlapping attacking central midfielder.

Work on the pattern and timing of the runs. Once you have the pattern and timing down, then go to goal. Alternate sides.

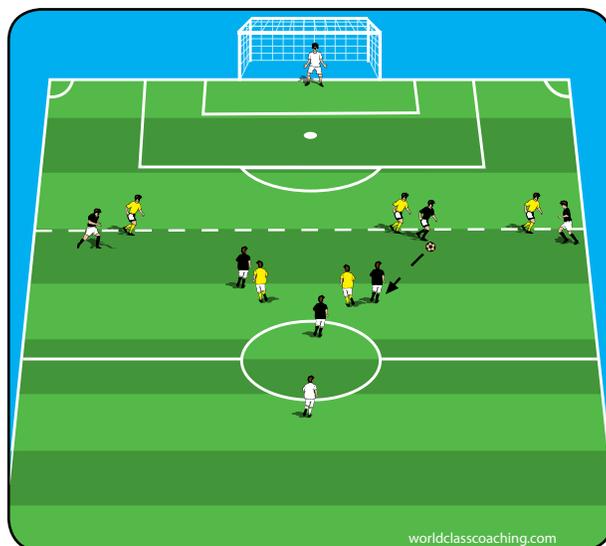


Seventh Pattern

The play begins with the target player passing the ball into the central forward who has checked to the side and back to receive the ball



The central forward receives the ball at their feet and passes it back to the attacking central midfielder on that side.





The attacking central midfielder passes the ball behind the defense wide for the wide attacking forward to run onto.

Coaching Points

Work with the two attacking central midfielders to make sure they are not flat (i.e. in the same line). They need to be staggered as much as possible during the flow of play.



Eighth Pattern

The final pattern is to add a defending player between the defensive central midfielder and the Target Player. Also, add two supporting wing defenders, one on each side, for the attacking team. Let the players play and encourage them to look for the patterns they've just worked on.

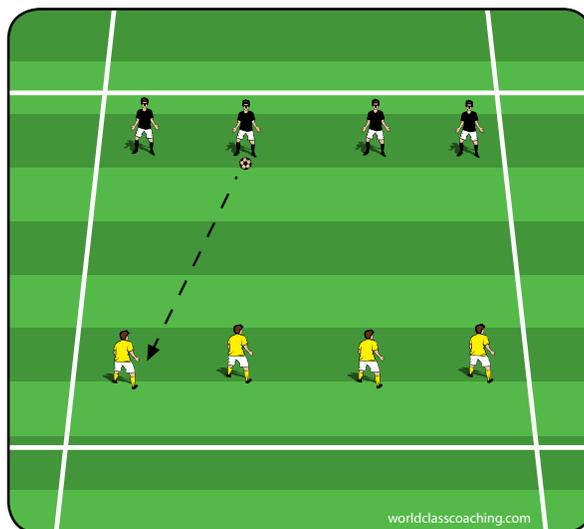
Coaching Points

- Have the players keep possession and protect the ball. Keep the ball moving and look for the opportunities to go forward. When the moment to go forward presents itself, then go quickly.
- When the team approaches the final third, look to play faster (i.e. more 1-2 touch play).
- At Notre Dame, they keep a stat of how many times they are able to get behind their opponent's back line vs. how many times their opponent is able to get behind their back line. Your team should be focused that in the attack the objective is to get behind the opponent's back line.
- Explained how his three forwards worked together, that they look to begin wide, but attack inside with possession to open up overlapping opportunities and to create combinations with the central forward. Discussed the four different ways you can play with three forwards:
 1. Wide- Have the three forwards spread wide to stretch out the opponent's defense and create 1v1 situations.
 2. Compact- have the forwards look to play closer together to create combinations with one another and to create space wide for overlaps from the midfielders or defenders.
 3. 1 Up and 2 Back- This usually means that the central attacker is high and the two wide players are withdrawn slightly. This creates opportunities for through balls and combinations with the central forward and the attacking central midfielder(s).
 4. 2 Up and 1 Floating- The floating attacker looks for seams and weaknesses in the opponent's defense. They are more dangerous as they are constantly shifting and are harder to mark.

Session Topics - Shape, Movement, Passing, Possession, Patterns, Pattern Play, Defending

Warm-Up

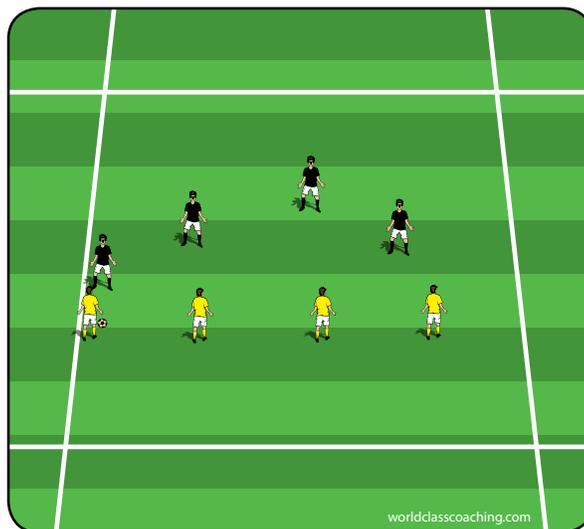
The warm-up takes place in a 15x30 grid with 8 players. Four players are on one side of the long part of the grid and four players on the other long part. The group of four with the ball pass the ball to the other group, they then organize and defend. The team with possession tries to dribble the ball over the opposing team's end line. The defending team tries to win the ball and dribble over the other team's end line.



Coaching Points

The objective in the warm-up is to begin working on player positioning. The shape of the defense when the ball is wide on either side is a check mark (as illustrated in the diagram below).

The drill was run for 5-6 minutes to help create the picture he wanted for the players.



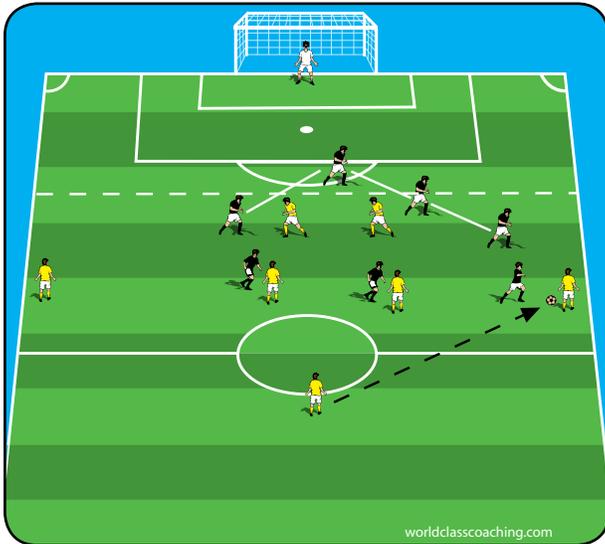
Progression

Using half of the field, set up to play 7v7. The team he is working with is the defending team. They are set up with four flat defenders in the back and three midfielders playing centrally. The three midfielders are set in a triangle with two high and one low. The opposing team is set up with two attackers playing deep against the flat line of the defense, four midfielders playing flat across, and a supporting central defender behind the midfielders. The drill is also set up with a restraining line that is approximately 30 yards from goal.

Area of Concern - The Wide Midfields

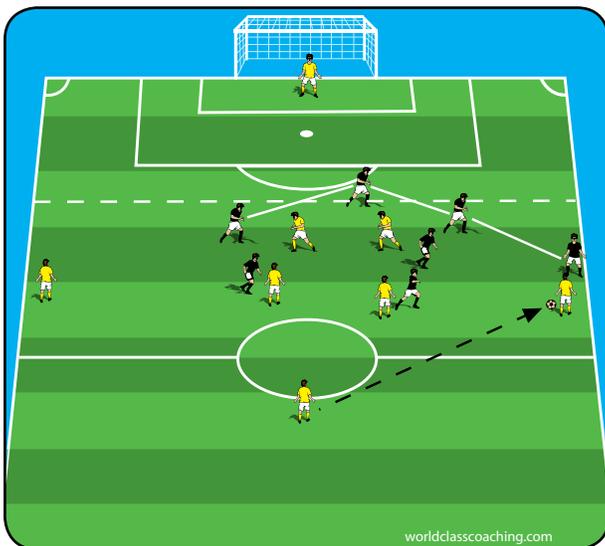
At Notre Dame, they look to get one of their high midfield players out quickly to pressure the ball. The other two central midfielders then have the responsibility to mark man-to-man with the two central midfielders of the opposing team.





You can see from the diagram that the four defenders position themselves to keep the ball wide. The far side midfielder for the opposing team is not marked because they are the least threatening player on the field and because pressure has been applied to the ball to prevent a quick switch of the ball. You can also see the checkmark, as indicated by the solid white lines in the diagram.

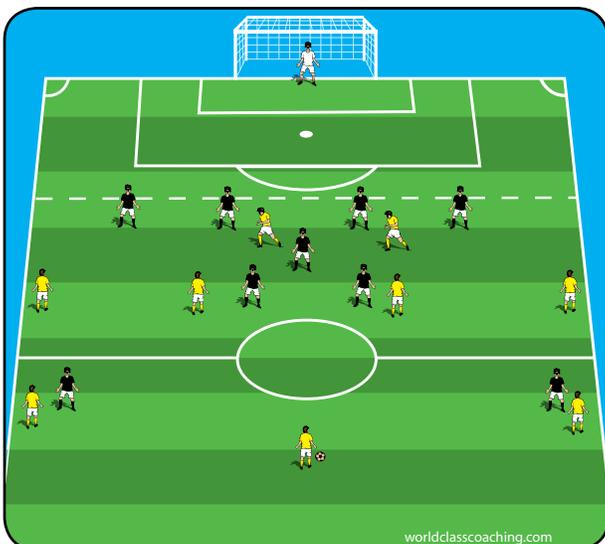
If the high central midfielder is not able to get wide to pressure because they were too far inside at the time the ball was played wide, then the outside defender on that side steps up to pressure the player with the ball to force them inside. The two high midfielders are then responsible for marking the two central midfielders on the opposing team. The low central midfielder is responsible for blocking the passing lane to the two forwards and acts as a screen. The defenders get their shape like a checkmark again.



The diagram above shows how the wide defender has taken up position to force the player with the ball inside while the other defenders have gotten their shape (i.e. a checkmark outline by the solid white lines). The two high midfielders you can see are marking the opposing central midfielders man-to-man while the defensive central midfielder acts as a screen to close down the passing lane to the forwards.

Progression

Expands the field he is using to approximately two-thirds of the field and adds in two wide forwards to help defend and two wide defenders to support the opposing team in the attack.



Coaching Points

Now the focus is for the wing attackers to try and double the pressure when the ball is played to the wide midfielder for the attacking team. The diagram below shows this.

CP: When the ball is being played back by the opposing team and they are in possession, then the two central defenders are yelling for the defense to get up. They look to step up until right before the ball arrives at the next player. The defense then looks to position themselves side on so they can look across and see the opposing team's forwards and they can gauge if they are trying to play a ball over the top. They can also read if the player with the ball is attempting to play a quick counter-attack ball over the top of the defense.

CP: The reason he plays two high central midfielders and one low central midfielder with his team at Notre Dame is that it creates another line of opposition for the opposing team to beat.

CP: You will also notice that the opposite side forward has dropped inside and back. This is done so that he/she can read the ball and is back far enough to see the wide midfield player on the weak side. Their positioning is such that they can quickly get forward and are in position to take advantage of the space forward, but they are also in position to handle a ball that is attempted to be switched to the opposite side midfield player.

CP: If an attacking player is checking back, then the central defender must stay with them until the player can be picked up by one of the central midfield players. The central defender would then drop off and recover back into shape. You cannot allow a forward to check back to receive the ball so they can turn and attack. They must have pressure to keep forcing them back.



Defending in the 4-3-3

This DVD breaks down the 4-3-3 from a defensive standpoint and looks at the defensive responsibilities of the back four, midfield three and the three attackers. It explains the roles of each unit and shows exercises you can use to train your team to understand the defensive responsibilities that are important when playing the 4-3-3 formation.

