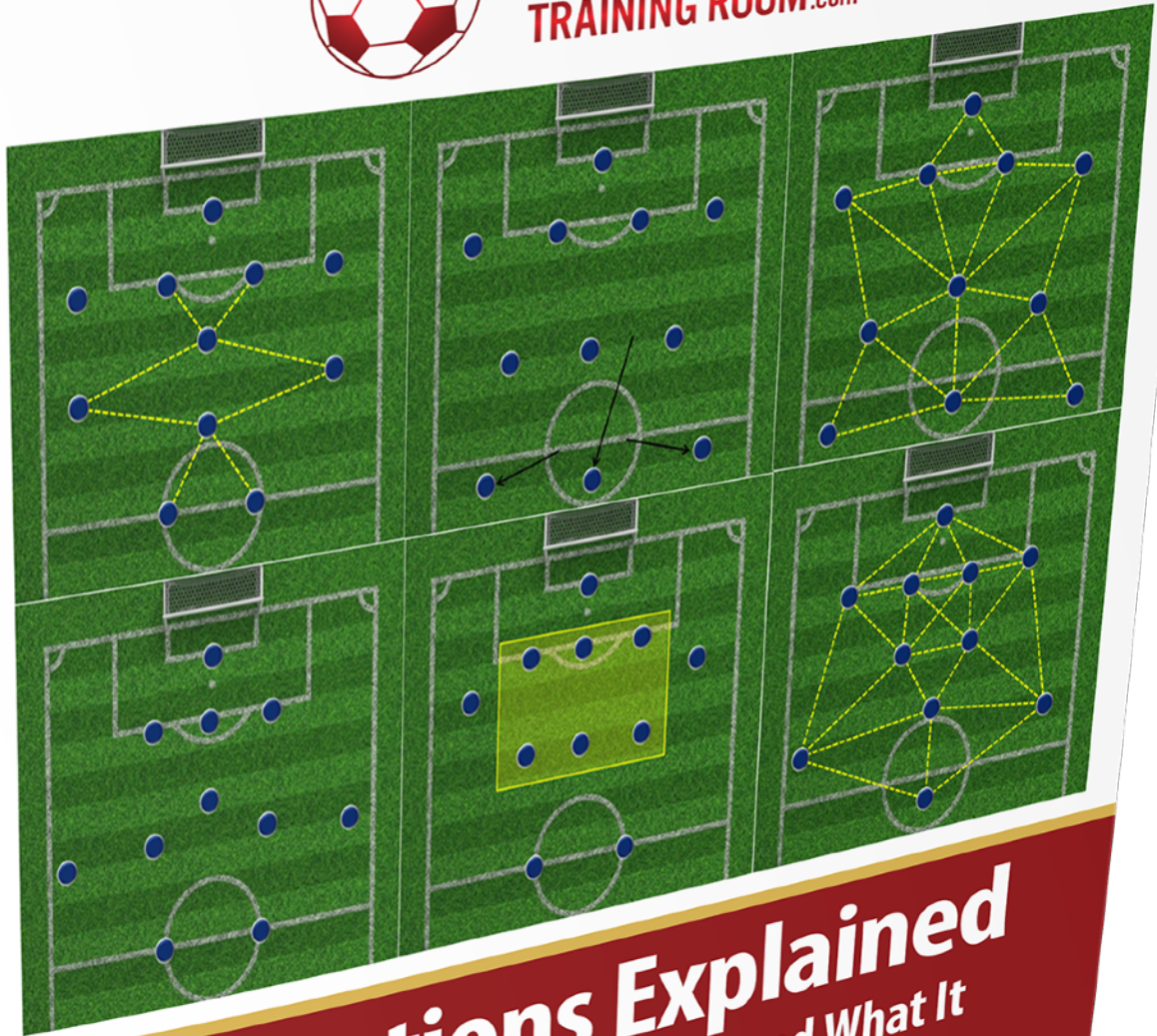




COACHES
TRAINING ROOM.com

Formations Explained



Formations Explained

Helping Your Players Understand What It
Means To Operate Efficiently As A Team

Author: Coach Mark Higginbotham

Formations Explained

Helping your players understand what it means to operate efficiently in a team.

The starting formation is typically used by broadcasters to show a team line up prior to the start of a match. A Coach will also use a formation to discuss roles and responsibilities with their players before kick-off. The formation, when shown on screen or on paper is where it is most rigid, in reality, a formation is nothing more than a series of numbers. During a match it becomes increasingly difficult to visualize the neat lines of a 4-3-3 formation due to the fluidity of the situations of play. So, if the formation in its purest form starts and ends on paper, then why do we use them and analyze them so often? The answer is simple, the formation of the team determines the shape of the team, and the shape of the team influences the style of play the Coach wishes to impart.

There are examples of teams who play with different formations based on their opposition, playing to their strengths and hoping to expose weaknesses within the opposition, often teams will change formations during transitions between attack and defense. Some Coaches are steadfast in their coaching methods and take their style and formation with them wherever they manage; Antonio Conte has become synonymous with the 1-3-5-2, Jurgen Klopp, for example favors a 1-4-3-3. These managers look to sign the right personnel for their individual systems, and with large financial backing, they are able to create a unit ready to implement their style to good effect.

At youth level, with player development at the forefront of our minds, focusing on optimal player positioning in favor of results is a missed opportunity to help our players improve. There are development models used by the likes of Luis Van Gaal which work on the principle of Universality – all players are adept at playing each position, and able to fill in for team mates when required during a game, for example; a holding midfielder steps into the opposition half and into an advanced position, a central defender could step up to fill the gap they left in the holding midfield and is therefore able to apply pressure to the ball carrier if possession was overturned to prevent the quick counter attack.

Being able to understand what is expected of you in all positions while you are young will give you a deeper understanding of the field in full. You will be able to have a better grasp of where you are in relation to the ever-changing threats and opportunities every time the ball moves. Raising your Soccer IQ in this way will help you to be a better teammate, encourage leadership skills and add accountability, leading to increases in enjoyment, team camaraderie and squad unity.

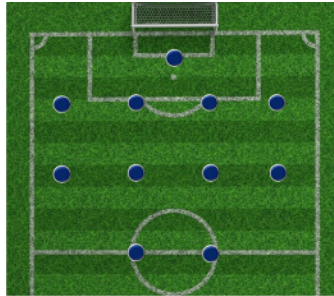
For our players to work well as a team, they need to understand the positions they will play in, in order to understand the position, they need to know what will be asked of them in order to play there. Here is a list of positions including roles and responsibilities, plus some technical/tactical considerations. While this isn't a complete list of possible positions, it will work as an ideal reference point for both players and coaches alike to get a basic understanding of the positional requirements. The exact roles and responsibilities will be dictated by the system you wish to play and can be refined accordingly.

	Goalkeeper	
Roles & Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop the opposition from scoring • Build attacks • Organize defenders • Communicate 	Partnerships & Ref Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central defenders • The goal and the area • The opposition 	Technical & Tactical Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance • Handling • Composure • Bravery • Leadership
	Full back/Wing back	
Roles & Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defensive duties as part of the back line • Provide attacking width and support for midfield and forwards • Create numerical superiority in defense and attack. • Provide defensive balance 	Partnerships & Ref Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central defender • Remain connected to the midfield • Ability to cross the ball in to attackers • Goalkeeper • The touchline and the area • Opposition wingers/midfielders 	Technical & Tactical Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Speed • Good fitness levels • Determination • Game intelligence • Support
	Center back	
Roles & Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary defensive duties of marking, delaying, coverage and depth • General organization of the defensive unit 	Partnerships & Ref Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central defensive partner • Full back • Goalkeeper • Midfielder/holding midfielder • The opposition strikers 	Technical & Tactical Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defensive key skills • Organization • Leadership • Composure • Bravery • Determination • Technical proficiency on the ball
	Holding Midfielder	
Roles & Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide cover for the back line • Screen passing lanes • Break up attacks • Disrupt the opposition • Pivot player responsibilities to build attacks • Recycle possession 	Partnerships & Ref Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central defenders • Midfielders • Forward line • Key connector for all team mates • Off the ball runs by the opposition midfielders/number 10 	Technical & Tactical Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good understanding of the field • Ability to play a range of passes • Comfortable on the ball • Good defensive understanding • Positioning

	Midfielder	
Roles & Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build attacks • Support in both attack and defense • Control the tempo and pace • Bring other players into the game 	Partnerships & Ref Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other midfielders, typically shaping a support triangle • Attacking players • Defenders • Relief passes out wide • The opposition 	Technical & Tactical Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good understanding of the field • Ability to play a range of passes • Comfortable on the ball • Ability to see the field • Good fitness levels • Confidence
	Attacking Midfielder	
Roles & Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build attacks • Provide key passes • Get forward and attempt to score 	Partnerships & Ref Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attackers • Midfielders • Other wide players • The opposition 	Technical & Tactical Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to play in tight areas • Confidence to play with limited time on the ball • Ability and confidence to play key passes and take players on
	Wide Midfielder/Winger	
Roles & Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide width and passing outlets • Attempt to isolate the opposition full back • Make runs with and without the ball to benefit the team 	Partnerships & Ref Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full back • Midfielders • Attacking line • Opposition wide players and midfielders • The touchline and opposition box 	Technical & Tactical Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pace • Positioning • Fitness • Confidence to beat a player • Creativity and skill • Passing range and shooting ability
	Striker/ Center Forward	
Roles & Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main source of goals • Ability to control the ball in tight areas • Bring others into play • Operate between the opposition goalposts • Create space through movement 	Partnerships & Ref Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midfielders • Full backs • Wingers • The goal • The box • Opposition defenders • Other strikers 	Technical & Tactical Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus • Ability to brush off missed chances • Confidence • Field awareness and ability to create space • Technical ability to finish under pressure with any legal surface -head/knee/shin/foot etc

Basic Formations and Adaptations

The 1-4-4-2



Probably one of the more traditional formations in which teams have had genuine successes with over the years. It is comprised of two banks of four in defense and midfield, with two dedicated strikers.

Strengths:

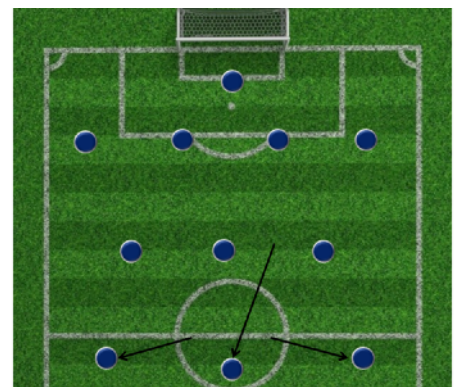
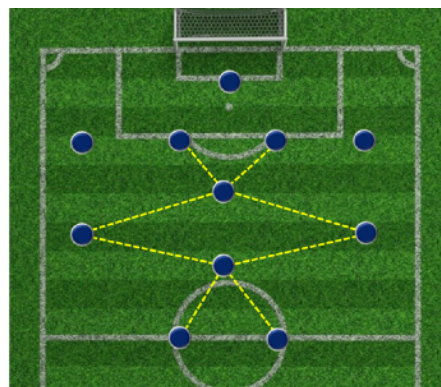
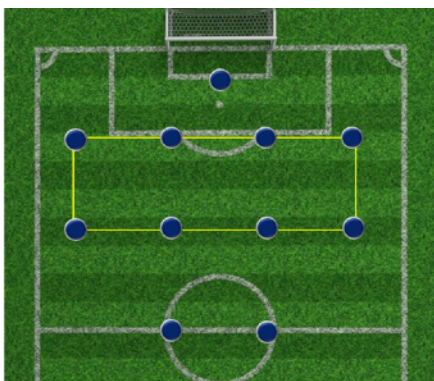
Easy to implement and comfortably structured with two banks of 4 players mean it is defensively strong and easy to understand, with two designated Strikers, it is well balanced and means players can get the ball forward quickly knowing the strikers have support, in formations with one Striker, it is usually the job of the midfield players to get forward and support. It's clear structure is a good grounding to adjust to a different formation with relative ease.

Weaknesses:

The ease of use can be limiting as the formation lacks the complex passing lanes of some of the more sophisticated formations. Two players in the central midfield can leave this formation light in a crucial area and can lead to more long balls with a lower success rate as players try to find the forwards quickly.

Adaptations:

The midfield two can play as a flat two, but are generally more effective when one plays advanced of the other. A midfield diamond leaves one player connected to the defense and one midfielder playing more advanced, connecting with the attacking line. With one positional change this formation can become a 1-4-3-3 in no time at all, some teams will set up in a 4-4-2 in some form when defending, and quickly adjust to a more attacking 4-3-3 when they win the ball back.



The 1-4-3-3



Widely adopted throughout the world, a highly adaptable and well-balanced formation which allows for expression and control when implemented properly.

Strengths:

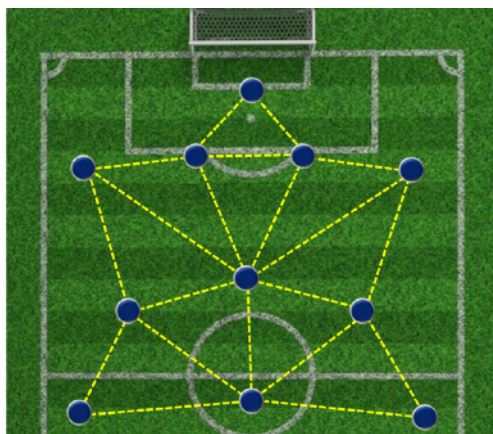
The forward line has three players and a lot of width designed to stretch the opposition. The three midfielders shape a natural possession triangle, allowing greater control of tempo and team shape. This shape can be easily tweaked to be more defense centric or attack minded. The positioning of all the players creates lots of natural triangles of support and good passing angles.

Weaknesses:

This formation relies heavily on teamwork and quality of distribution and will not be nearly as effective if the team is not comfortable in possession. There is a weight of responsibility on the central striker and defensive midfielder in this formation. If these players aren't properly supplied or supported, things can break down.

Adaptations:

The formation can easily revert to a more defensive 4-4-2 without the ball. One of the central midfielders can play more as a number 10 to support the striker. Pep Guardiola has been known to adjust a standard 4-3-3 into an ultra-attacking 4-2-4 when he is able to control the possession and the tempo.



The 1-3-5-2



Enjoyed real popularity in Italy over the years and adopted by many managers worldwide. Can be changed to a very defensive back five with ease and relies heavily on athletic and tactically astute wingers.

Strengths:

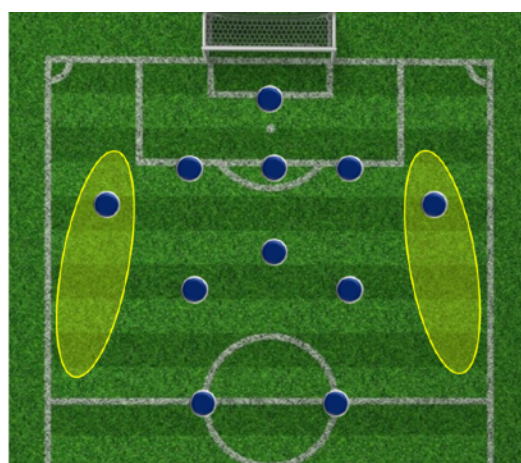
Three central defenders always maintain numerical superiority over the opposition attackers. The defense is protected further by a designated holding midfielder, there is also a natural formation of two banks of three through the middle, meaning lots of passing options to beat a press and strong defensive support. The wingers add weight of numbers where required and are tasked with defensive duties, midfield support and are encouraged to get forward as much as possible. This formation is also an effective base for counter attacks and midfield control. Two strikers always offer an option even if there is no support from midfield.

Weaknesses:

The demands of the formation are complex, and coverage of positions is often required to make sure there are no gaps appearing. This means players need a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and a high game IQ to respond to changing situations. The formation relies heavily on the fitness of wingers. The defensive players must understand their individual roles and at least one must have a good range of passing otherwise build up play becomes a target for the opposition press.

Adaptations:

The formation can be easily adjusted by giving the wingers more defensive duties, the formation becomes a 1-5-3-2. More tactical adjustments can create a 4-4-2 with ease and can easily revert to a more attack minded 3-4-3 if the team are able to control the possession and readily prevent counter attacks.



The 1-4-2-3-1



The formation of choice for many of the top-level teams all over the world, the clear lines create visual reference points for players and give a sense of structure and balance. Purpose built for passing teams due to the natural creation of passing lanes between the lines.

Strengths:

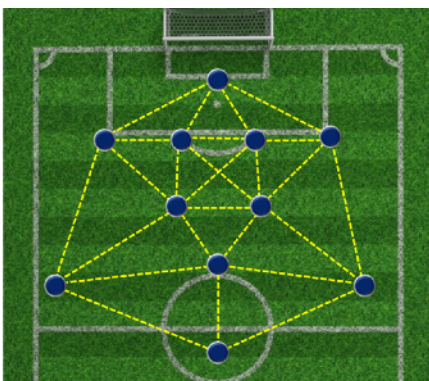
The natural triangles make it easier to pass the ball through the lines, bypassing opposition players and creating numerical superiorities in dangerous areas, the staggered midfield of five which form a more defensive minded 2 working with the more attacking 3 means there should always be a good number of players in the midfield which gives a better chance of controlling the game and dictating play. The formation is well balanced in both attack and defense and the natural set up makes it difficult for teams to counter attack.

Weaknesses:

There are many physical demands of this formation, it does not encourage long balls and as a result, teams who are most effective with this formation generally build up play from deep and make a number of passes before a chance is created, teams who don't have a high enough technical proficiency to maintain possession typically struggle to benefit from this position in an attacking sense.

Adaptations:

Positional adjustments can quickly form a variation of a 4-4-2 with more natural passing angles and connecting points between the lines. This adjustment would look like a 4-1-4-1 shown below. A holding midfielder can drop into the defensive line to shape a defensive 5-1-3-1.



Introduction to Systems of Play

You have your formation, your players understand their roles within the formation, you can now start to focus on your shape and system. This is where your beliefs and methodology as a coach are put into practice by your players. It should be authentic to you and carefully adapted to the players you have. This can be defined as a set of tactical instructions assigned to individuals which overlay their general roles and responsibilities. This can range from individual instruction or component role such as ***'get forward' with and without the ball***, instruction in pairs such as ***change positions or cover for the winger if you are the central midfielder***, to tactical triggers based on areas of the field, the position of the ball, teammates and the opposition.

Simple cues remind players of their roles within the system and proper implementation of basic rules will give players a greater sense of purpose within the team, real accountability and a strong collective bond.

Systems can work their way up in complexity to become collective team triggers based on when the opposition are considered to be their most vulnerable.

Key terms for further research:

- Structured Playing Systems
- Fluid Playing Systems
- Tactical Balance
- Tactical structure
- Positional specialization
- Positional responsibility
- Universality

Further reading recommendations:

Understanding and Implementing the 1-3-5-2 - Attacking with Cohesion and Structure

CoachesTrainingRoom.com/1352

Understanding The 1-4-2-3-1

Tactical Analysis of the Most Feared Teams to Use This System and Ways to Train Like Them

CoachesTrainingRoom.com/14231

The 1-4-3-3 ATTACKING BLUEPRINT

Total Football, Positional Fluidity & Potent Attacks

CoachesTrainingRoom.com/1433



ABOUT COACHES TRAINING ROOM

Coaches Training Room was founded in 2012 and provides beginner, the best soccer coaching video sessions, session PDF downloads, webinars, articles, books and more!

**FOR MORE RESOURCES BY
COACHES TRAINING ROOM VISIT:**

CoachesTrainingRoom.com

COME JOIN US ON:

facebook.com/coachestrainingroom

twitter.com/coachestrngroom

instagram.com/coachestrainingroom

When sharing our content on social media please use

HASHTAG: #CoachesTrainingRoom

CONTACT US:

info@coachestrainingroom.com

801-810-4423



COACHES
TRAINING ROOM.com