

TRIANGLE MIDFIELD

FUNCTIONAL TRAINING FOR MIDFIELDERS
IN THE 4-2-3-1, 4-3-3, 3-5-2, 4-5-1
AND OTHER FORMATIONS



ROBERT PODEYN



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By
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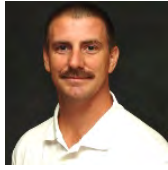
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About the Author



Robert Podeyn began as a soccer player in New York playing club soccer for Kings Park Soccer Club and Cow Harbor Soccer Club. He then played for LIU- C.W. Post College and helped them advance to the NCAA Division II Quarterfinals in 1987, earning All-Conference and Honorable Mention All-American Honors. That same year he found himself playing his fourth year of semi-professional soccer in the now defunct American Soccer League where he set a professional record of 973 shutout minutes en-route to a US Open Finals appearance by his team, the Long Island Stars, against the heavily favored Brooklyn Cosmos. An 18 save performance was not enough as his team lost a 1-0 decision in double overtime, but it did earn him team and league MVP Honors. His professional career ended in 1990 after seven seasons, three team MVP's and two league MVP's.

As a coach, he began with the very club he started with as a player, Kings Park Soccer Club, in 1982. He continued coaching youth, junior high school and high school soccer in New York until he was married and moved to Florida in 1990. He became the head girls' varsity soccer coach at Osceola High School in 1990 and quickly helped that team rise from 3 wins to 17 wins in three years and a #8 ranking in the Class AAAA State Rankings. He moved to the boys program and helped them establish their first winning record in 1996 and a brief State Ranking at #10 in late December 1995. His high school coaching record stands at 126-71-14. He then moved to the college coaching ranks in 2003 and has worked there ever since. In 2003, he began his collegiate coaching career at William Woods University and re-built that program into one of the top offensive programs in the country with 183 goals scored in 57 games. He then moved on to Northwood University in Texas and took them from a program on the brink of extinction to a team threatening to enter the NAIA Top 25 and known for its offensive abilities scoring 147 goals in just 55 games. Northwood set numerous records for wins (13), consecutive wins (9), shutouts (9), consecutive shutouts (7), and consecutive games played without being shutout (21). From Northwood University in Texas he moved into the NCAA Division II ranks and Southwest Baptist University in Missouri where he is again re-building another program into a competitive power. His current collegiate record stands at 77-86-18, but his conference record is an impressive 44-38-9.

Coach Podeyn advanced through the USSF Licenses beginning in 1992 with the 'F' License Course. He has taken every course and currently holds his USSF National 'A' License, having never failed any course or any portion of any course. He has also taken NSCAA Courses from State Diploma through to the National Goalkeeping Diploma and the National Youth Diploma, all earned with Distinction. He has ventured overseas to complete every level of the English Football Association Courses from Team Leaders Badge through to the Coaching License and

UEFA Coaching Certificate and UEFA 'B' License. He has also earned his Advanced Tactics Diploma through the KNVB and attended the basic instructional courses of the KNVB TC3 Coaching Course. He has traveled to Brazil where he observed and participated in sessions with the CBF and CAM, been to Italy where he worked with famed Italian development coach and national youth director at Fiorentina, Professor Vincenzo Vergine. His other experiences include working with Dutch Clubs AFC Ajax and Vitesse Arnhem, both of the Dutch Eredivisie. He has written over a dozen articles and published four books and eight journals on his experiences coaching on this planet.

Thank You

As always, without the support and trust of my players I wouldn't be the coach that I am. They believe in me and my unique way of doing things. I believe in them and their devotion to the game of soccer. Equally as important is the love and support I receive from my family. They have endured so much through my love and passion for this game. The endless hours I've spent and will spend on soccer fields around the world to learn as much as I can, the uprooting of my family to follow better and brighter opportunities in this gypsy-like profession, and the many hours spent on the phone or in front of a computer writing or recruiting. They believe in me and it is with their love and support that I keep pushing myself to be better.

To my mom who always supported and guided me through my early days in playing the game and later in life as I grew into a man with a beautiful family with a wonderful wife and two great kids. Every step has been a struggle and a battle to get better, earn respect and improve every facet of my life. Thank you for being the best mother anyone could ever have.

In addition to my family and the many players who have played for me, I must recognize a few others who have guided me lately and helped in the production of this latest book.

- 1) **Anson Dorrance-** What can you say about one of the best coaches in the United States that hasn't already been said. His North Carolina Tar Heels just won their 21st National Championship out of 30 tries and he has more wins at the college level than any other coach. He is a professional who is passionate about the game and someone who feels compelled to give back to the game through his players and to those who have that same passion. You have been a valuable resource, an inspiration, and a good friend when I've needed one. I will always remember the guidance and advice you gave me when I was struggling at my current position and it was this advice and the advice of your wonderful wife, M'Liss', that helped me through my most trying season in 30 years of coaching.
- 2) **M'Liss Dorrance-** Thank you for your help when I was struggling through my worst experience as a coach. It may have seemed like simple level-headed advice, but it helped me through that situation and I have now come off one of the best experiences I have ever had. I don't think I would have made it through that season and been able to re-kindle the passion for coaching without your help and Anson's help back then. I hope you are doing well and I am always keeping you both in my prayers. You are good people!
- 3) **Randy Waldrum-** I think my style of coaching is more modeled after your approach than any other. It wasn't done intentionally as my style and approach has just kind've evolved through the years, but it was re-assuring to think that if someone of your experience and success has a similar approach to training and player development, then I may actually have a chance at this game. I've always enjoyed the feedback and appreciate the guidance you have given me in the development of this book.

- 4) **Jeff Pill-** You have no idea how many discussions I've had about you and my experiences with you during my 'B' License and then the 'A' License. You have this dry sense of humor that we never really got, but always enjoyed after the fact. You have an incredible knowledge-base and are always willing to share and help others to improve and grow professionally. You are one of the few coaches on this planet that I truly respect when it comes to giving back to the game.
- 5) **Mike Cook-** Thank you for the help with putting this project together. I love that you are someone who really wants the best experience for their players and it is obvious you have a true passion for the game. I enjoy the competitive rivalry we are developing every season and always look forward to watching your team perform. They are always organized and passionate in their play, an obvious reflection of their love and loyalty for you.
- 6) **Terry Mowle-** He should be in every book I write as his hands and mind have guided me more than any other. Even though you have left this world for a better one your presence is still with me and your influence is stronger more today than it ever has been. Who would have thought an act of kindness on your part being rudely rejected by Osceola Youth Soccer would have blossomed into the friendship we shared and the knowledge you gave me. I've learned so much from you but, more importantly, you helped me to think about the game and to never stop wanting to learn.

I know there are many others, and I apologize for not recognizing everyone. I felt it was important to mention these few at this particular time in my life. Others have been significant in my professional growth. For those not listed, you are remembered and respected and I value the contributions you have made in my life as a professional. To the coaches out there reading this book; thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and passions with you. I hope this book helps you in some way to grow and develop your soccer intelligence. Remember, always look for opportunities to learn and improve. Good luck in your pursuit of your passion as a soccer coach.

INTRODUCTION

A Triangle is a shape that has three distinct points creating three sides that may be even or uneven to one another and form angles at each connection. A Triangle Midfield is a formation that includes three players centrally in a triangle formation that maintain the same or similar distances from one another while maintaining the same or a similar pace in the same direction staying with the flow and progression of the game.

This book will not be for basic or fundamental training or coaching, but is designed for more of a higher level of training and understanding. It will cover different formations associated with three central midfields and not only formations with JUST three central midfields. It will explain the functionality of the formation, how the formation is trained for possession and attacking roles and responsibilities, and training for defensive roles and responsibilities. Formations covered will include the 1-4-3-3, 1-4-2-3-1, 1-4-3-2-1, 1-3-5-2, and the 1-4-5-1.

One of the most successful examples of the triangle midfield can be found first at the club level with Barcelona. The last 15 years Barcelona have been considered the most successful club team in the world. Building on the teachings from Johan Cruyff, the Barcelona School and Academy have focused on the same development and training approaches as first introduced in the 1960's by famed Dutch Coach, Rinus Michels. Johan Cruyff was a player for Michels when



the creation of 'Total Soccer' was introduced to the world. Cruyff, considered one of the greatest players to ever play the game, brought this brand of soccer to Barcelona as a player, and later as a coach. His techniques and teachings are still

used there today and can be seen in the successes of Barcelona and in the Spanish National Team. The modern Barcelona team now also features one of the greatest players to ever play the game in Lionel Messi. At the time this book was being created, Messi had just broken the single season record of goals in a calendar year, a record held by famed German attacker Gerd Mueller. The record held by Mueller since 1972 when he scored 85 goals in one calendar year was eclipsed by Messi as he scored 2 goals against Real Betis in a league match to extend their league lead to 7 points and give Messi the record with 86 goals and still 3 to play before the end of the year. His legacy and success can be attributed to the strength of the triangle midfield and to the quality of supporting players, such as a triangle midfield of Xavi, Busquets, and Iniesta. Its philosophy surrounds keeping the shape of the triangle midfield, but shifting and

interacting other players so that marking becomes an impossibility. This is where the concept of 'Total Football' came from. The Triangle Midfield is the ENGINE of the system and must be firing perfectly. If it is, then the system you are playing will dominate your opponent in their half of the field.

The Progress of Formations

The game of soccer used to be very conservative as everyone played the same way. It was almost a matter of respect for your opponent that the play was exactly the same. It then came down to the quality of players alone at the positions on the field to determine who would win and who would lose. This philosophy was the same in other sports, such as American Football, where every team ran the ball. Even though the forward pass was first attempted and completed in 1876 by Walter Camp from Yale in a game against Princeton. The pass resulted in a touchdown and the play was allowed to stand. Later, forward passes were ruled illegal and remained until 1906. You can sometimes track the changing of times through changes in the sports we love and follow, and soccer is no different. The conservative game remained the same until the late 1950's and into the early 1960's. Prior to that time everyone played a 1-2-3-5 system, also known as a W-W or 1-2-3-2-3. To further explain the setup, the system included a goalkeeper and two defenders (a right fullback and a left fullback). The midfield included a right halfback, central halfback, and left halfback. That gives you the shape of the first 'W' in the system. The second part of the 'W' included a right inside and a left inside while the final pieces were the right wing, central forward, and left wing. Every club team, professional team and national team played this system from as far back as the early 1900's and through until the late 1950's and into the early 1960's.

In the 1950's, the game started to become more cerebral as the sport gained in popularity not only on the national level, but on an international level. Although the World Cup was the largest soccer event in the world, it wasn't fully supported by all nations initially, and so the game remained at the grass roots level. As media became more available and the game began to evolve in different countries, the desire to find new trends and the desire to evolve the game itself started taking on different shapes and forms. Players began to surface that had personality and character in their games. Teams and coaches began giving more thought to how the game should be played. You can see evidence of this in Brazil at clubs like Santos and Palmeiras and in their National Team at the 1958 World Cup where they began to play what has become known as a version of the 1-4-4-2. This was studied at length by famed England Coach



Alf Ramsey who began to create his own version of the 1-4-4-2 designing it to play to the strengths of the English Game so that they could win the 1966 World Cup as hosts. The plan was to build a formation that played centrally and wide in quick touches with two front-runners who would attack the goal on serves from the wings. It also focused on keeping large numbers behind the ball to prevent the opponent from countering or in creating chances forward. It was seen as a more defensive style as England set a record for fewest goals scored by a World Cup Champion scoring just 11 goals in six games, four of them coming in the Final. The

plan worked as they won the World Cup 4-2 at Wembley Stadium in extra time. Their record of fewest goals by a Champion stood until 1994 when Brazil won the World Cup scoring just 3 goals in seven games.

The 1966 World Cup was studied closely by many countries, but none more closely than by



Rinus Michels, famed Dutch Coach. Rinus Michels looked at how the English built their formation around the culture of their game and set out a plan to do the same with Holland. A country that is creative and artistic, he knew he had to develop a system of play that was fluid and free-flowing. The game had to be attractive and entertaining and designed to be more attack-minded. From this came the birth of the 1-4-3-3 and the creation of the Triangle

Midfield. Some would argue that the Brazilians had created this back in 1962 to take advantage of their creative midfield with Didi and the dangerous attackers in Pele and Mario Zagallo, but this formation was more of a 1-4-2-4 where players adjusted with attacking and defending responsibilities where it could look sort of like a 1-4-3-3. This, however, was not the same system nor did it have the same purpose in possession, flow and creativity. The difference is that the Dutch System was a possession-based system where players shifted, moved and filled in so that no one players had set responsibilities. Players had to be prepared to attack and/or defend and to fill in when space became available in front of them. This was the concept of 'Total Football'.

Formations are born out of necessity and the 1-3-5-2 was no exception to this. England had success winning the World Cup with the 1-4-4-2. Holland then created the 1-4-3-3, a creative system designed to break down the 1-4-4-2 system. Although they did not win the World Cup, they were considered the favorites and dominated World Soccer at the international level and the club level with AFC Ajax. The next system that gained popularity and was created initially as a defensive formation, its actual purpose was to dominate the midfield against European Powers West Germany and Italy, who were the perennial favorites to win every World Cup in



the late 1970's through to 1986. Argentine Coach Carlos Bilardo designed a modified system using a triangle midfield that would make it impossible for these countries to control the midfield, the most important part of their game. This system, the 1-3-5-2, was designed around a young attacking player who could dominate defenses with his abilities to control the ball and take on defenders. His speed made it difficult for defenses to keep up with him. The problem was going to be getting the ball to him consistently and, thus, the birth of the 1-3-5-2 came about. This formation allowed Carlos Bilardo to compliment a young and dangerous attacker known as Diego Maradona. It was successful in that Argentina won the 1986 World Cup and lost in the 1990

Final by virtue of a penalty kick. This formation was later used successfully by Brazil and other club teams in Brazil.

Formations are interesting in that you can track the changes in the game and the best players the game has seen. Formations are born out of necessity, as previously stated, because someone needs to create something to counter something or someone that is successful. The 1-4-4-2 was created for that reason. The 1-4-3-3 was created to highlight the talents of Johan Cruyff and to counter the English style of play, the current world champions. The 1-3-5-2 was also created to counter teams like West Germany and Italy and their dominance in the midfield. It was also an objective to highlight the talents of a young Diego Maradona, considered at the time to be the best player in Argentina.

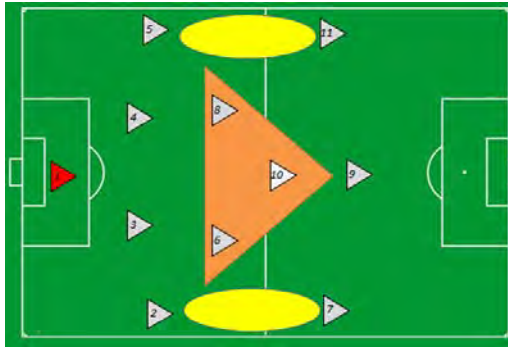
Other formations have been recently modified and have seen a lot of success also, such as the 1-4-2-3-1 and the 1-4-3-2-1. These formations begin to explore the possibility of having more lines of depth or opposition to make it more difficult for the opposing team to be successful. If your opponent has three lines in their system and your formation has four lines, then in theory it becomes more difficult to break your team down. This is the new cerebral thinking within the game and what we have seen recently on the international stage with a team like Spain in the last World Cup.

Formations That Use the Triangle Midfield

Any formation that has either three or five midfielders will most likely have a triangle midfield. It is widely considered that whoever dominates or controls midfield play will win the game 75% of the time. The reason is because these players have more touches on the ball than any other player on the field. If you are someone who charts possession like I do, then you will find that your central midfielders will have anywhere from 75-90 possession opportunities per game, the highest of any other position player on the field. It is for this reason that coaches will decide to go with a three-man midfield; to reduce the touches of the opposing midfield while increasing your touches in the same area. Since the most popular formation in the United States is the 1-4-4-2, that means that teams in this formation would have two central midfielders. Having a triangle midfield will give you three central midfielders to their two. It is easier for you to mark and easier for you to out-possess them. This gives a three-man midfield more advantage to possess and create chances, and since your playmakers are typically found in midfield, your ability to dominate your opponent and the ability to create more scoring opportunities is greatly increased.

The formations that follow will be covered in this book explaining how they triangulate their midfield, how their midfield is trained for possession and attack, and how they are trained to defend. Each of the formations will be briefly highlighted below to give you a better idea of its purpose and structure before going in-depth into each formation. This way you will have a better idea of the different formations and how they are being used today.

1-4-3-3 Formation



This formation became popular with the success of the Dutch National Team and through the concept of 'Total Football'. The whole strength of this system relied upon three central midfielders in the shape of the triangle. It also allowed flexibility in that you could decide to go with one attacking central midfielder and two holding midfielders, two attacking central midfielders and one holding midfielder, or one attacking midfielder and one holding midfielder with

one floater in the middle. It is a very popular formation that was used by Chelsea several years ago when they dominated the English Premier League and won the title by a large margin, by Barcelona who is arguably the best club team in the world, and by Holland as the main formation taught to all of its youth and adult players as part of their culture.

1-4-2-3-1 Formation



This is a relatively new approach as it builds off of the philosophies of the 1-4-3-3, but gives it more depth and lines of attack and opposition by pulling the wing attackers back level with the attacking central midfielder. You now have the advantages of the 1-4-3-3 formation, but four lines in opposition whereas most teams will have just three. This is what is making this an attractive option for coaches now. You still maintain the triangle midfield and the advantages that go along with it, but you have more protection centrally with two holding midfielders and three attacking midfielders. You also get more pressure on the back four of your opponent with delayed runs from midfield players. This is a system that was created to challenge the strengths and weaknesses of the 1-4-3-3 system. This is a system that teams may not start in, but adjust to as an option to unbalance your opponent. A good

example of this is the University of North Carolina Women's Soccer Team in this past National Championship Game. They started in their usual 1-3-4-3 formation, but the quality of play in Penn State's 1-4-3-3 formation was creating matchup problems for them and Penn State was starting to get good scoring chances against them. They switched into this formation late in the 1st half partly to protect the one-goal lead they had, but also to try and unbalance the Penn State Midfield who were having success at attacking them through middle options. The switch worked and North Carolina were able to keep the pressure on and force them into switching their game plan. It resulted in North Carolina scoring three 2nd half goals and winning in a rout 4-1. North Carolina won their 21st National Championship and are known for always playing a

3-4-3 system, but it was their commitment to switching and making their opponent unbalanced that changed the game and resulted in the victory.

1-4-3-2-1 Formation



Little is known about this formation and it was widely confused with the 4-5-1 initially. This was the case until Greece took this formation and adapted it into their National Teams and had a successful run through the EURO 2006 Tournament. They adapted this formation and played it to where they kept a strong defensive front behind the ball and funneled their opponents inside towards their strength. Once they won possession they looked to play it forward to the central forward who used the supporting central midfielders behind them. They worked on creative runs from withdrawn and central positions, but also used the width from wing defenders coming up to conservatively support the play. If the ball was played wide, the wing defenders would either immediately look to serve in, or would look for one of the attacking central midfielders or central forward breaking out to receive the ball. If they lost possession, then they kept their shape behind the ball and

looked to funnel everything inside where they had numbers and could double-team and win the ball back immediately. It was a very structured approach that was looked on as being more defensive-minded. The Greece National Teams did not have the same quality in their game as Germany, Italy or even England, but they could remain disciplined enough to dictate the opponent's play and maintain vigilance in theirs. It was a successful style that brought them to the brink of a European Championship.

1-3-5-2 Formation



Some formations are created to combat another formation. Other formations are built around special players to bring out their qualities and to use them to the advantage of the team as a whole. The 1-3-5-2 was created for both reasons.

Initially created to negate the strengths of the top European Teams such as West Germany and Italy, it was also created to bring out the strengths of a young Argentine named Diego Maradona. It was a successful plan that resulted in two trips to the World Cup Finals (1986 and 1990) and one World Cup Championship (1986). Both games were played against West Germany and although Argentina was the dominant team in

the 1990 Finals, they lost to West Germany on a penalty kick, 1-0. The system works on the

strengths of a triangle midfield while also offering the stability of outside midfielders and holding midfielders. The disadvantage is that teams that can bypass the midfield and get into the attacking 3rd, teams playing with three attackers will create chances as they are 1v1 at every position. The strength of the system is in the midfield and as long as the midfield works on attacking and defending collectively, then the system is very organized and difficult to beat.

1-4-5-1 Formation



This formation can be used in two different ways: It is first thought of as a defensive formation used to deny opportunities, prevent penetration behind the defense, and to slow midfield play and force the opponent into a game where they serve the ball from distance. This is often used in the 1-4-3-3 formation in either a defensive posture late in the game, or with wing players that are very fit and can track back to defend and sprint forward to attack. It is also used late in games to protect a one-goal lead or to play for an entire game and to grind out a 0-0 or 1-0 result. A second method is where the wing attackers drop to defend as soon as possession is lost, but once won they get forward quickly and look to make runs from withdrawn positions. It is especially effective with diagonal runs from the weak side. It requires patience and the ability to vary ball speed from slow to very fast

in a matter of seconds. Teams often have to train for this condition on a regular basis. It can be difficult to attack as its shape naturally funnels teams into the middle where they have strong numbers and can congest the field of play and force turnovers. It is a conservative system that will not allow many goals to be scored, but will also not produce many goals either.

These five formations will be covered in this book and be specific for the roles of players within the midfield. Again, it is recommended reading for use with advanced teams that have more of a technical base and keen tactical understanding. The focus will be on the midfield only. For a better understanding of training all aspects of different formations, please check out one of my other books called 'Three Dimensional Soccer Training', a book focusing on a different training concept that is formation-based. Otherwise, I hope you enjoy the information contained in this book. It was a lot of fun putting it together and involved the contributions of many of the best coaches in the country, ones that I respect and value in their knowledge and contributions to the game. Thank you for giving this book a chance and I hope it helps in your desire to become a better coach for your players and to make your teams better and more organized. Good luck in your pursuit of perfection.

1-4-3-3 FORMATION



2009 Manchester United



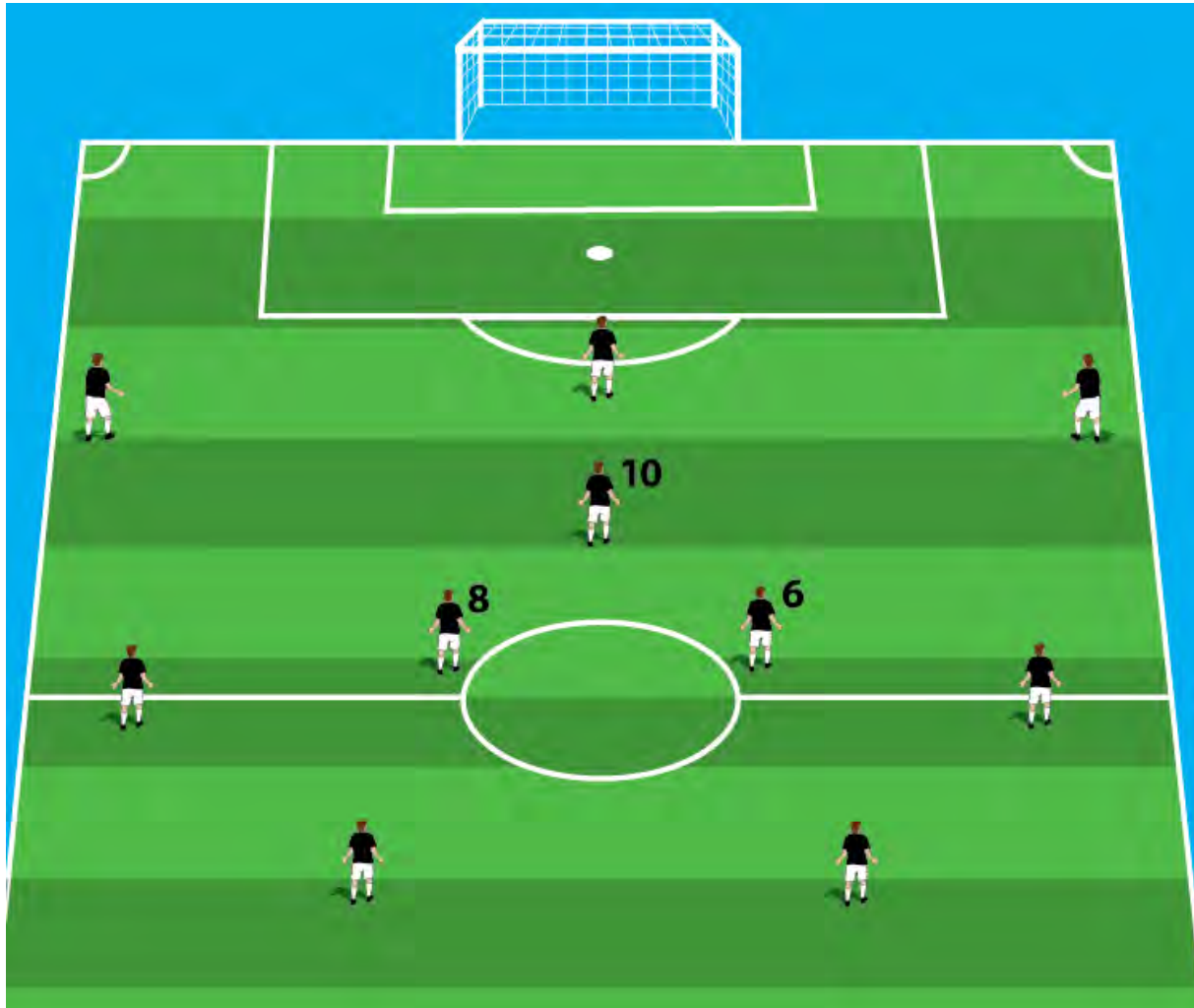
2010 Barcelona



2010 Chelsea

- **The Triangle Midfield with 1 Attacking Central Midfielder and 2 Holding Central Midfielders (Image Far Left)**
 - *How to Triangulate the Midfield*
 - *Training Possession and Penetration*
 - *Training Defensive Responsibilities*
- **The Triangle Midfield with 2 Attacking Central Midfielders and 1 Holding Central Midfielder (Central Image)**
 - *How to Triangulate the Midfield*
 - *Training Possession and Penetration*
 - *Training Defensive Responsibilities*
- **The Triangle Midfield with 1 Attacking Central Midfielders, 1 Holding Central Midfielder, and 1 Floating Central Midfielder (Image Far Right)**
 - *How to Triangulate the Midfield*
 - *Training Possession and Penetration*
 - *Training Defensive Responsibilities*

The Triangle Midfield with 1 Attacking Central Midfielder and 2 Holding Central Midfielders



This version of the formation is the most popular and the one that began the trend of ‘Total Football’ used by the Dutch in the late 1960s through to today. As you can see by the image above, the defense may have four players, but they do not play flat. One of the keys in this system is that you have wingbacks who will shift up ball side to become the outside midfielders in the system. This is how you counteract systems like the 1-4-4-2 that have outside midfielders.

The trick with this system is that you must have players to fit the qualities of the system by position or it will not work. Your wing attackers must be very fast and be very good in 1v1 situations. It helps if they are a scoring that and can deliver a driven ball for serves, but you can teach those things over time. Having the speed and ability to beat defenders 1v1 is critical for these positions. You must also have a central attacker who is a goal scorer and can play under constant pressure, usually with their back to goal. They must be good at reading the defense and making runs into spaces towards goal behind the defense. Your central defenders must be able to change roles with one being able to step forward to sometimes support the midfield,

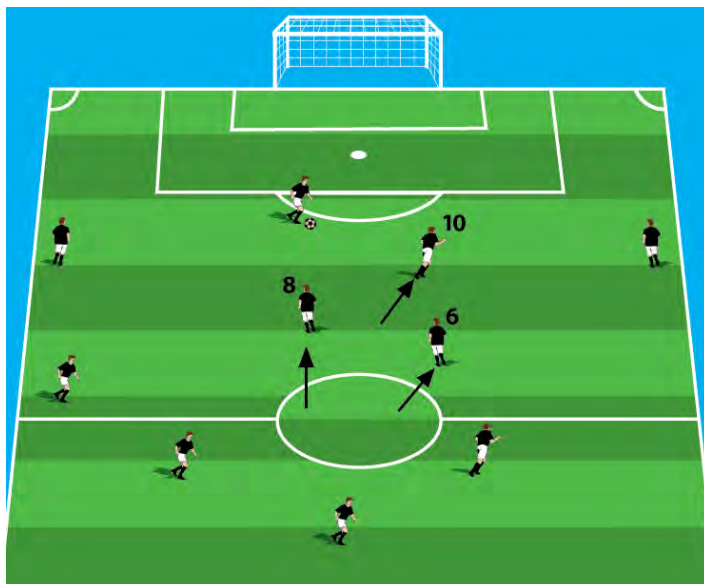
but mainly to challenge an opponent who has gotten in behind the midfield with possession. It is dangerous to have both central defenders flat. They need to stagger with one forward and one always covering behind the other to negate a through ball or diagonal runs from outside to the inside.

Now we move on to the triangle midfield. In any system you will find your playmakers in the central midfield. The triangle midfield is known as the ENGINE of this system. If your engine isn't working properly and firing on all cylinders, then you will not be successful and it won't matter what qualities you have in other positions. For more information on the dynamics of the triangle midfield, I recommend you read my other book, 'Coaching the Dutch 4-3-3'.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (IN POSSESSION)

As I always tell my teams as I am teaching them the triangle midfield; it is a living breathing thing. It is not meant to be rigid in its shape, it requires significant focus and reading when to adjust and fill and where to adjust and fill. In the high school game and youth levels players are focused for maybe 50-60% of the time. At the college level and advanced levels this is where we start demanding more focus, as much as 85-90%, in order for any system to have the success it needs.

The triangulation of the midfield with one attacking central midfielder and two holding central midfielders falls on the holding midfielders. The attacking central midfielder has the responsibility of always supporting and coordinating their movements off of the central attacker. They will always adjust and move off of this player. It is then up to the two holding midfielders to adjust their positions, maintain their distance from each other, and maintain depth behind the attacking central midfielder and central attacker. The following will give different examples of how the holding midfielders will adjust to maintain their shape.

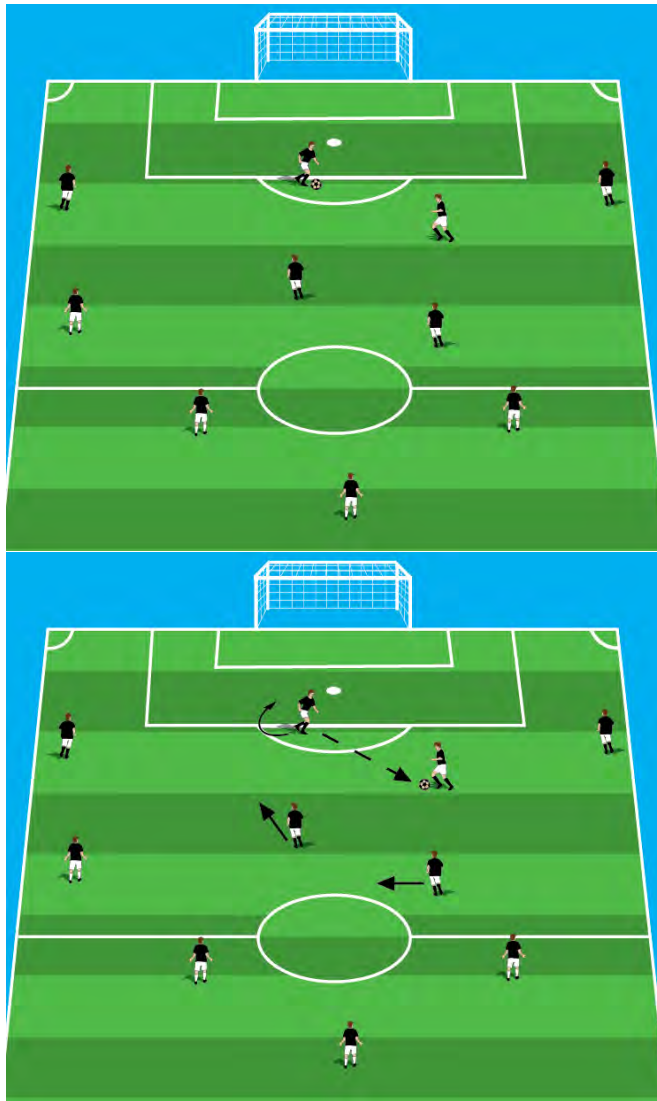


EXAMPLE 1

In the example shown, the central attacker has received the ball on the left side of the 18 yard box. The attacking CMF (#10) to support the central attacker, makes a run forward at an angle. To maintain the shape and to support the run of the attacking CMF, the #8 supports the central attacker directly behind the ball while the #6 stays slightly behind the #8, but supports behind the diagonal run of the #10. As you can see the shape remains a triangle, but it has rotated to

where there is actually one holding central midfielder, one true central midfielder, and one attacking central midfielder. The triangle will always shift and adjust based upon where the ball is and the runs of the attackers and how the attacking central midfielder adjusts.

As a general rule, the attacking central midfielder will always make runs forward at an angle opposite ball side when the central attacker receives the ball. They always look to maintain support behind the ball at an angle, but may sometimes make runs through depending upon the shape of the defense. The opposite side holding central midfielder will always slide in behind at an angle to maintain security in case possession is lost.



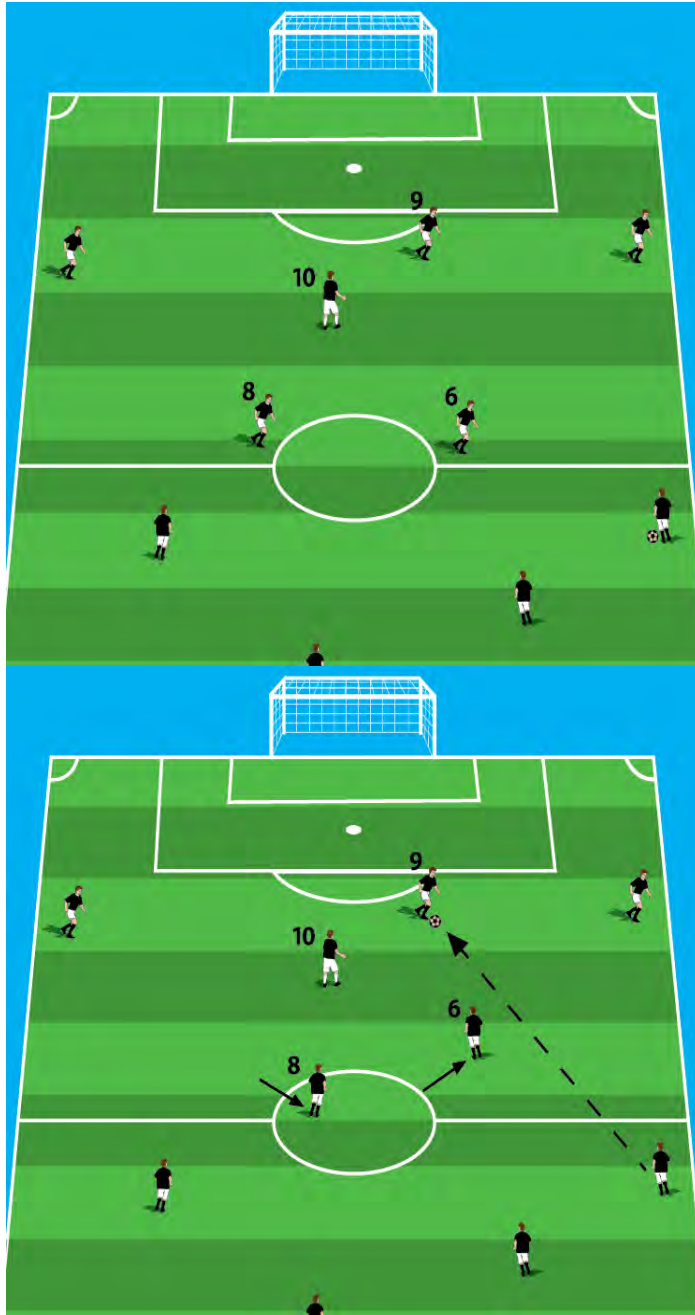
EXAMPLE 2

In this second example, it is similar to the first, but it differs in that the attacking central midfielder is static and has already made their run. The central attacker has possession of the ball and is looking for a supporting option behind. The two holding midfielders, as before, keep their shape behind the ball. To continue, the second image shows the ball being played to the attacking central midfielder. In this image you will see the central attacker turn and start making a run towards the goal. The two holding central midfielders adjust to support the ball and the run being made forward by the central attacker. The left side holding midfielder starts to make a run forward and to the left of the attacking central midfielder while the second holding midfielder slides in centrally behind the play. The triangle in this situation has now shifted to two attacking central midfielders and one holding central midfielder. It is always important to make sure you always have at least one holding midfielder behind the play. It is the responsibility of the two holding midfielders to always keep the

shape of the triangle behind the attacking central midfielder. They are responsible for adjusting to the runs that the attacking central midfielder makes and to maintain a distance of approximately 12-15 yards from one another. This means that they must stay 12-15 yards behind the attacking central midfielder and 12-15 yards distance from each other in their own width. When they adjust they have the same responsibility to keep this distance. Getting too

close limits options to get behind the opposing defense, getting too far and the speed of play will slow down and make it easier for the opposing team to defend you. The distance is very important.

EXAMPLE 3



In this example, possession starts with the wing defender on the right side. The first image indicates that the holding midfielders are adjusting to support the ball. The ball side holding midfield offers a supporting option forward and at an angle. It is important that they do not come too far wide as they will eliminate other forward options. In any possession situation your first option is always to try and find the #9, the central attacker. If the holding midfielder ball side shifts too far over, then this option will never be possible as they would block the passing lane to them. You will also see that the attacking central midfielder is focused on supporting the central attacker and their checking run to receive the ball. If they shifted ball side also, then they would also eliminate the option of playing directly into the central attacker. As the play progresses to the second image you can see that the ball has now been played into the #9. You can see the attacking central midfielder remains in support of the #9 at an angle slightly opposite ball side. The holding midfielder (#6) has shifted up behind the #9 to support the ball. The other holding midfielder (#8) shifts in behind the attacking central midfielder to support that player and to protect

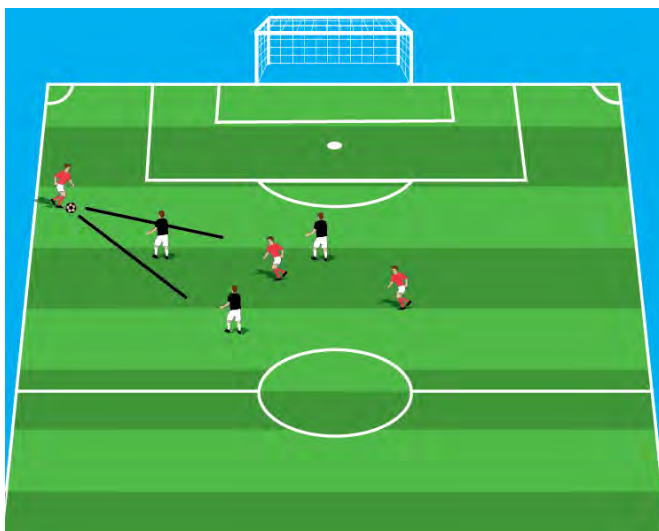
against losing possession. As stated before, the triangle is a living breathing thing and it shifts and adjusts according to the conditions within the game. Players need to remain focused at all times in the midfield so that they always maintain distance, and stay consistent in their role

within the triangle. In addition, the attacking central midfielder has the responsibility of directing the attack. They are the creative playmaker within the system and look to play the ball into positions and to players that either have scoring chances or can create scoring chances. This player usually has the most touches within the game and must make good decisions with the touches they get. They are also linked to the central attacker and are known within the system as the '*SHADOW STRIKER*' as they always shadow the central attacker and make runs based upon what that player does. The holding midfielders are known as '*LINKING PLAYERS*' as they are responsible for linking possession between the defense and the attackers. They are also the players who re-distribute the ball from one side to the other. They must look to possess the ball quickly and not hold onto the ball very long. They typically play 1-2 touch when they do have the ball and always look to make safe and simple passes. They must also never get caught holding onto the ball and forced to move with possession across the width of the field. This is dangerous as it is important for the holding midfielders to play the ball quickly and not get caught with possession.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (OUT OF POSSESSION)

Defending in the triangle midfield is all about denying their playmakers possession of the ball and make other players on their team work to beat you. There are two ways to accomplish this as a defending team:

- 1) The first method is to defend the central midfield space in a zonal way. This means that you keep the shape of the triangle, but shorten the distances between all three players to prevent your opponent from being able to play through the middle. It is important in this style of defending that you always keep a **TIP** on the ball at all times. That means

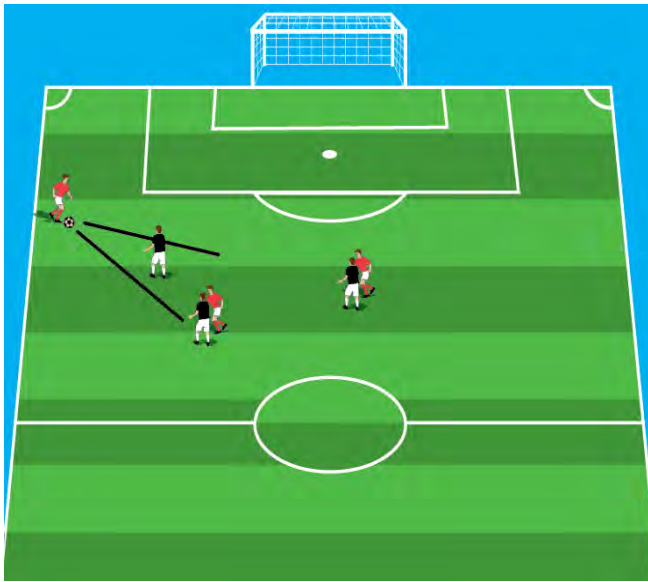


wherever the ball is there is always a central midfielder from the triangle blocking the passing lane into central options while the other two midfield players keep their shape, but shorten the distance to 8-10 yards. This will force the opposing central midfielders to start moving outside to get the ball, thus disrupting their shape and their game. It is still important that the back two midfielders are aware of the two central midfielders in case they need to adjust slightly to

further eliminate them as options, but for the most part, they play zonal and focus on the distance from one another and the space they are defending. Also, in most cases, the player acting as the **TIP** must stay within the width of the 18 yard box and allow other players to do their jobs in defending. If this player gets dragged outside, then the

triangle midfield in defending will fall apart and you can be beaten easily. The only case where this player would venture farther out wide is if there is a real danger if they don't (you are losing by a goal late and need the ball back quickly and have to force the play, or your opponent is in a position to hurt you from out there and you need to get immediate pressure on the ball), or if they have cover from another player shifting in to fill their space (i.e. one of the central defenders yells for them to switch or go and one of the holding midfielders shifts to their position).

- 2) The second method is almost opposite in that it combines man-to-man marking with zonal defending. It begins with the same principle of having the triangle midfield player closest to the ball acting as the **TIP**. The other two midfield players support behind as



before, but they look to mark man-to-man while still trying to keep shape behind. The two midfielders behind remain aware of the two central midfielders and mark them when they come into their area. It is important that they mark them, but stay behind them also. Do not allow them to get in behind your midfielder or they can gain an advantage in attacking your goal. If they gain possession, then the objective is to force them to play it back and re-set.

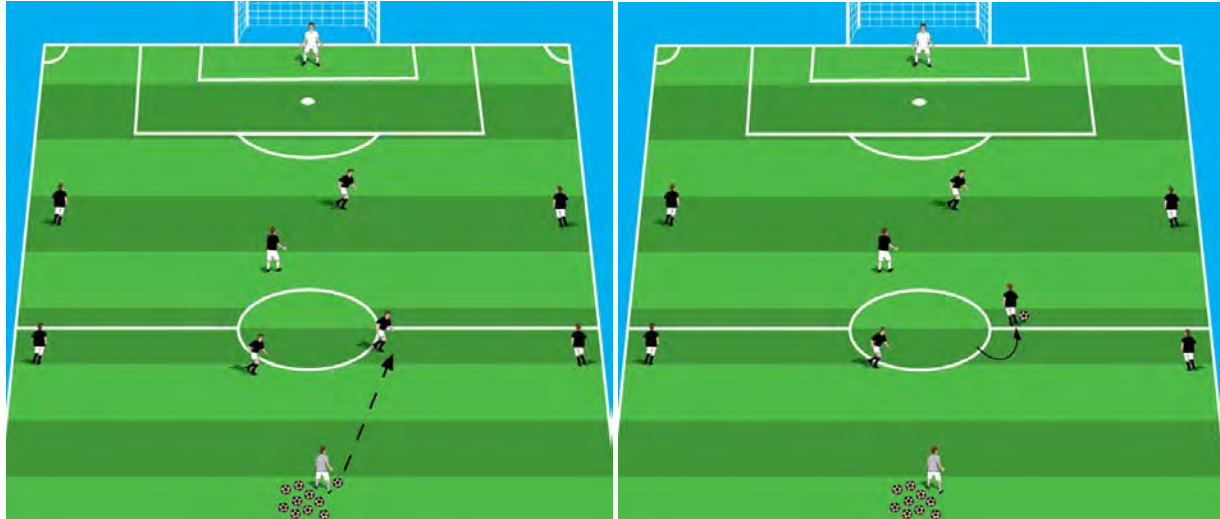
In both cases, it is important that the holding midfielders drop back to help the defenders when the opponent has possession in your defending third of the field. If that happens, the attacking central midfielder remains close to the central attacker (within 12-15 yards) so that this player always has support. As stated before, the attacking central midfielder is the **SHADOW STRIKER** and responsible for always supporting the central attacker.

The final comment on defending and triangulation has to do with the rigidity of the triangle midfield. It is important to keep stating that the triangle midfield is a living a breathing thing in possession, but also when adjusting to defend. If your #8 has shifted up to support and possession is lost near the #8, then it makes sense that they become the **TIP** in this situation while the other two players adjust behind him/her. The important thing is that the closest player becomes the **TIP** as quickly as possible while the other two shift quickly behind them.

TRAINING POSSESSION AND PENETRATION

The following represents examples of how to train for possession and/or penetration in a 1-4-3-3 Midfield with one attacking and two holding midfielders. There are a total of four (4) different exercises to accomplish what you need to in order to train or prepare your midfield to play this formation.

Exercise #1 (Possession and Penetration- MF Combinations)



Frame #1

Frame #2

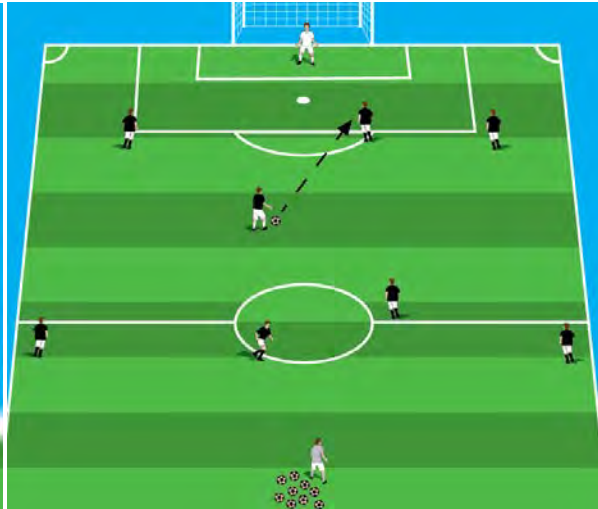
Frame #1- The exercise begins with the coach passing the ball to one of the holding midfielders. Make sure to watch the adjustments of the triangle midfield to make sure they are in position and adjusting to the ball.

Frame #2- The holding midfielder receives the ball and turns with possession to face towards the goal. The opposite holding midfielder is already shifting in behind the holding midfielder with possession as support and protection.

This is the basic setup of this exercise. The next two frames will show you just one pattern that can be run with this. However, there are dozens of different patterns you can run from this basic setup. In addition, begin the exercise with no defenders and work on locating your passes, the movement of the triangle midfielder and other players in the system, and the consistency of play. If you would like to see other examples of different midfield combinations, then please look at another World Class Coaching book, 'Dutch Drills for Total Team Training'.



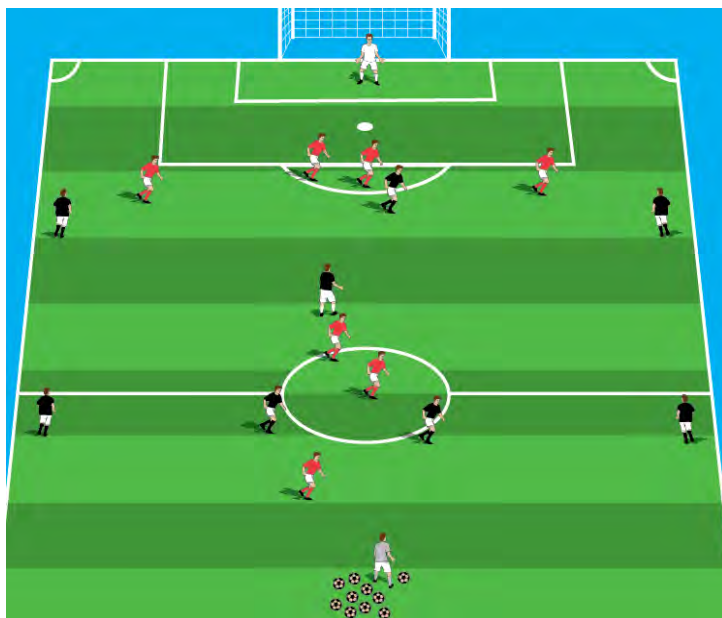
Frame #3



Frame #4

Frame #3- The ball has been received by the central attacker and passed to the attacking central midfielder. Once the pass is made by the central attacker, that player turns and begins to make an attacking run towards the goal. The holding midfielders would be ready in the system. For example, the right holding midfielder would be ready to make an attacking run into the space vacated by the central attacker, if the ball was played square into that space by the attacking central midfielder. The opposite side holding midfielder would need to also be ready to adjust to keep shape.

Frame #4- The attacking central midfielder after receiving the ball looks to play it forward into the space in front of the central attacker so they can attack the ball and the goal. The holding midfielders would need to adjust accordingly.



Once you run the patterns for a few minutes without defensive oppositions, begin to add in the defenders until you have a defensive line with four defenders, two central midfielders that begin inside the triangle to defend the passes, and an additional player to behind the triangle midfield who adjusts and defends as they want. By increasing the numbers slowly you can work with the triangle midfield to make sure they maintain shape and support. Your objective is to build to the final numbers shown where the play is 8v8 as shown in this diagram.

Exercise #2 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play to Targets)

In this first diagram, the team lines up with 9 players on the field against no opposition. Each touchline at the midfield line has a neutral player with one possessing the ball. The object is for the neutral with the ball to pass it into the team. The team then looks to quickly and cleanly possess the ball and play it to the open neutral player on the opposite side. Work with the triangle midfield to keep their shape and to adjust to the flow of play. Continue this pattern for 5-6 minutes until the team is comfortable with their possession and you feel as if the triangle midfield is doing their job of keeping shape and adjusting. Make sure

the players are moving and adjusting in a realistic fashion and as close to game speed as possible. Emphasize quick and clean possession before pressure is added. You may want to build in a pattern or purpose with possession. For example, the ball must be played through either the attacking central midfielder or central attacker before it can be played to the opposite side neutral player. Give them a purpose with possession, but make sure to focus on the shape of the triangle midfield as well as the teams' overall shape and movement.



This second diagram now sees the addition of pressure. The focus of the exercise is the same, to possess the ball quickly and cleanly from one neutral player to the neutral player on the opposite side. The opposition added is in three lines also playing a 1-2-1 formation. Having four players with shape to apply pressure will still give a significant advantage, but it will force them to remain focus and to seek out options away from pressure. Each goal on the full-sized field also has a goalkeeper and can be used to either maintain possession or deal with a quick counter attack. The objective of the defenders is to win possession and attack one of the goals. They can choose to

attack either goal, depending upon which one gives them a better advantage. If the team possessing the ball from neutral to neutral loses possession, they should work quickly to win it

back and to deny any possibility of an attack on either goal. As the coach, remember to focus on the triangle midfield and your team shape. They should look to play the ball quickly and cleanly and to be safe in possession (protect the ball and don't give it away). They should look to still play with a purpose, and it is a good idea to continue to emphasize playing through a certain player or by using a certain combination before playing into the next neutral player.



You should continue to build in opposing players to a 2-4-2. You won't go directly from a 1-2-1 to this formation, so be sure to build to this slowly so you can continue to work with the triangle midfield on their shape. Once you have reached this formation you will start to see breakdowns as they begin to force the play. Make sure you work with the team on some mental toughness and training exercises and remain positive yourself in the process. Work with the players on breathing as they play and in remaining calm under pressure. Give them simple choices in possession and continue to encourage them to play the ball quickly so that the pressure never

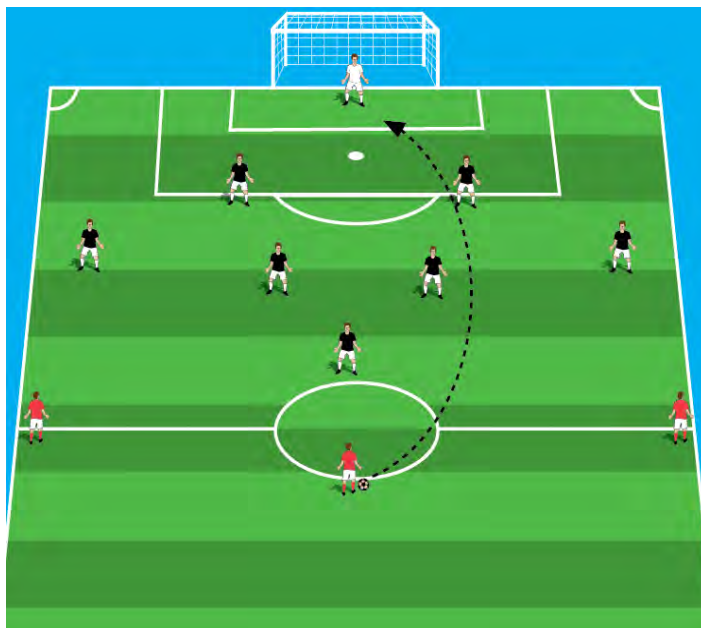
becomes too great. Focus the team on constant movement and shape, especially in the triangle midfield. Give them the responsibility for possession and its quality. Remind them that playing quickly and cleanly, as before, is what they need to continue to do. You will find that if you get them to breathe normally and focus on remaining calm and not panicking, that the quality of your team possession will significantly improve in this stage. As in the previous progression, if the opposition wins possession give them the ability to attack either goal as quickly as they can. To begin to focus your team on defensive responsibilities within the system as most teams you will play will try to counter attack you quickly, give a quick time limit on their ability to attack a goal (i.e. when you win possession from the team playing to the neutrals you have 10 seconds to create a shot at goal). In these situations, work with the team on transitional play to defending quickly and work with them on team pressure and marking. Work with the triangle midfield on their responsibilities with keeping a **TIP** on the ball and the other two midfielders getting shape quickly behind them. I would also recommend keeping your possession objective in this progression so that the team is continually looking for that option. My recommendation at this stage is that you are looking to play through the central attacker as this will always be your first option when in the games. Making your exercises as game realistic as possible is very important as you build towards the full game.



The final progression is to build to 11v11 while still using the neutral players. Have one team work on playing through the neutral players before they can attack one of the goals. You now specify direction for each team. The team playing through the neutral players defends one goal and attacks another goal. The defending team when they win possession can quickly attack the one goal, but they are still defending one goal all of the time. This way you are working with your team more on shape and quality of play than on finishing. Their play is more indirect. To change the game

slightly, make the team you are working with attack the goal within 15 seconds of receiving the ball back from the neutral player. This way they can also feel the pressure of time and work on changing their speed of attacking play. You don't want them always playing indirect and developing a slower more sluggish attitude towards attacking and finishing.

Exercise #3 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play Building out of the Back)



The exercise begins as shadow play with the team starting by building out of the back to forward targets. Focus on team shape and quick and clean possession as the team builds the ball to the targets. Encourage communication as they build up. Communication begins with talking, but it ultimately comes down to listening. The exercise starts with the central target driving the ball in the air back to the goalkeeper. The team quickly comes back and gets their shape as the goalkeeper then looks to distribute the ball. Once the ball is distributed the team needs to adjust

and support the ball. The ball needs to be played quickly and accurately until it is played to one

of the targets. If the ball is played to a wide target the ball is then quickly played to the middle target, who then receives and then drives the ball again to the goalkeeper. The drill is continuous.



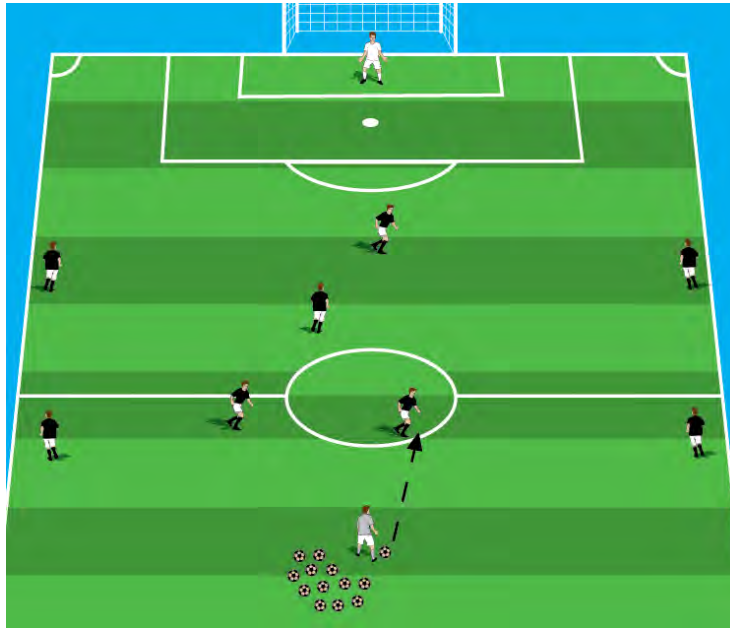
After approximately 5-6 minutes of playing with no opposition, add in 4 opposing players in a 1-2-1 formation. This way there are three lines of opposition as they would find in the game. Continue to work with the triangle midfield on supporting the ball. Remind the holding midfielders that they are the ones that link the defense to the attack when in possession. They need to always look to move the ball away from pressure, but must also be aware of where their first option is and play it as soon as it is available (central attacker). The holding midfielders must always

look to play quickly (1-2 touch) away from pressure. The attacking central midfielder needs to look to shift away from ball side as if they are supporting the central target player. If the defenders win it they should look to quickly go at goal and try to score.



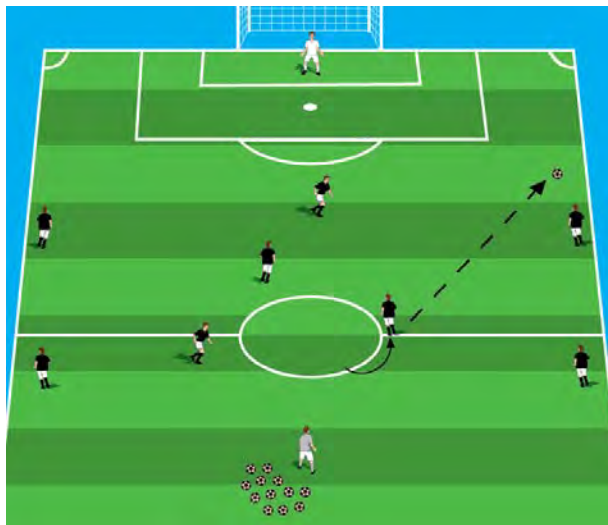
In the final progression switch the two target players on the outside and put them with the team building out of the back. The only remaining target player will be the central target. Increase the opposing numbers to where they are playing a 2-3-2 formation with 7 players. This will be more difficult for the team to build out and it is important for you as the coach to remind the players to keep calm and focus on their breathing. Then make sure that the team is shifting and staying organized, and that the triangle midfield is supporting the ball. It is

very important that possession is quick and clean, but that players have their heads up and are reading the environment so that they are not making mistakes in possession and giving it away too easily. The main objective with possession in the back is always to play simple and safe, but to always protect the ball.

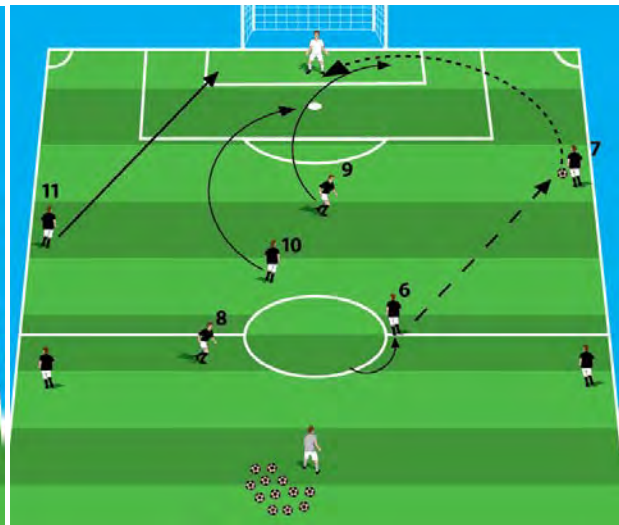
Exercise #4 (Possession and Penetration- Runs to Goal and Framing the Box)

This series of exercises focuses on quick play out wide, framing the box, and serves on goal. Everything mentioned in the previous three exercises applies here as well. Possession must be quick, clean, and accurate. The team must adjust to support possession. It is important that the triangle midfield focuses on the timings of their runs and their shape. The exercise begins with the coach passing the ball into one of the holding midfielders. The holding midfielder receives possession, turns and passes the ball wide to the wing attacker on their side. The wing

attacker gains possession and serves the ball into the box. Begin the exercise as shadow play and work on the runs and the timing of the runs. The above diagram shows how the exercise is set up.



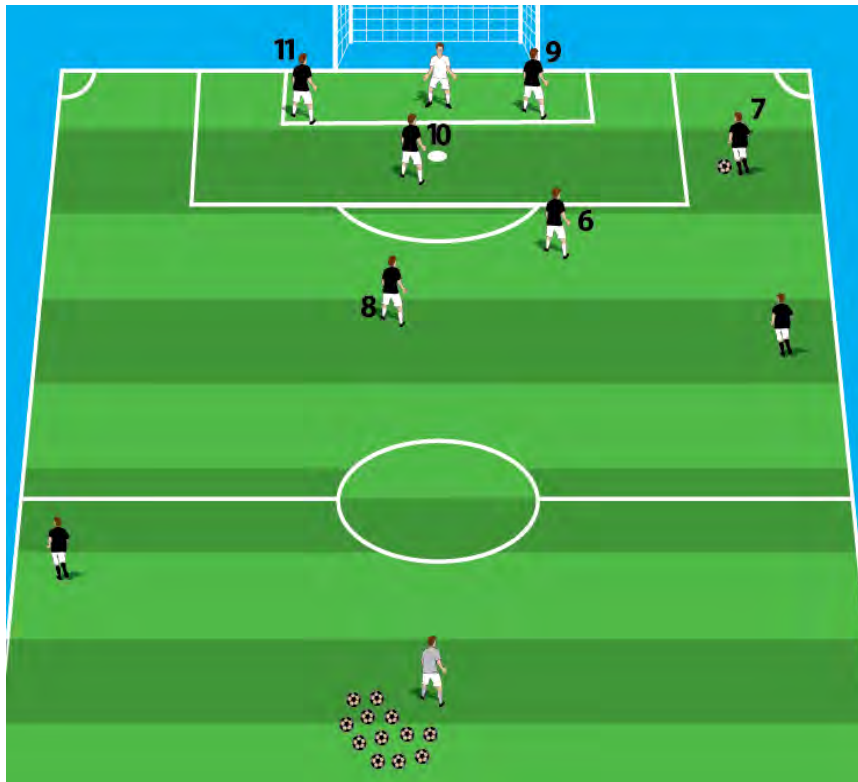
Frame #1



Frame #2

Frame #1- The drill begins with the coach passing the ball into one of the holding midfielders (be sure to alternate between them with each ball). The holding midfielder turns and passes the ball out wide to the wing attacker, then starts to support the ball they just played.

Frame #2- The wing attacker gains possession of the ball, takes a touch, then looks to drive a serve into the box while the rest of the players make their organized runs to goal. The holding midfielders support the ball, but also organize their shape behind the attacking central midfielder.



In this diagram, you see the positions of the players and where they should be when framing the box. Since the focus is on the triangle midfield, the attacking central midfielder (#10) always makes a withdrawn run to the penalty spot to slightly far post, but 10-12 yards from goal. Any ball played to them or in front of them is theirs to attack. The holding midfielder ball side (#6) shifts closer to the ball and closer to goal (20-22 yards). The opposite side holding midfielder drops in behind and central to

protect the middle of the field in case possession is lost or in case the ball is cleared out centrally. You can see the shape of the triangle midfield has shifted so there is one attacking, one middle, and one holding.



After working with the runs for 10-12 minutes in shadow play add in opposing players. Begin with adding all four defenders along with two midfielders centrally to defend. Set the defenders up 35 yards from goal so that they have to recover and defend at the same time. The coach starts by passing the ball into one of the holding midfielders. The holding midfielder receives and turns and plays a through ball splitting the defenders. The wing attacker on that

side makes the run and gains possession. The defenders are not allowed to defend until the

attackers cross the line of cones. They can then drop and defend as aggressively as they want. This will give the attackers enough of a start so that they can be successful most of the time. If the defenders are having too much success, then start them 3-5 yards back to give the attackers more of a chance to gain possession and frame the box. Work with the triangle midfield on their shape adjusting to the ball, as before.

These four exercises offer complete sessions and suggested progressions of other exercises where you could easily develop another 5 or 6 additional sessions from it. As you can see, all of the exercises focus on coaching from the game. The first exercise focuses on combining possession and penetration with different midfield combinations. There are more than 30 different combinations that can be used with this one exercise. The second exercise focuses mainly on possession and protecting the ball using indirect play. The third exercise works on building out of the back and using different combinations to play into targets. The fourth exercise works on penetration and framing the box using quick technical speed of play. The coaching points remain consistent throughout the four exercises and should be consistent in your direction to the triangle midfield as they learn and develop within this system.

TRAINING THE DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Defending is about accomplishing two things:

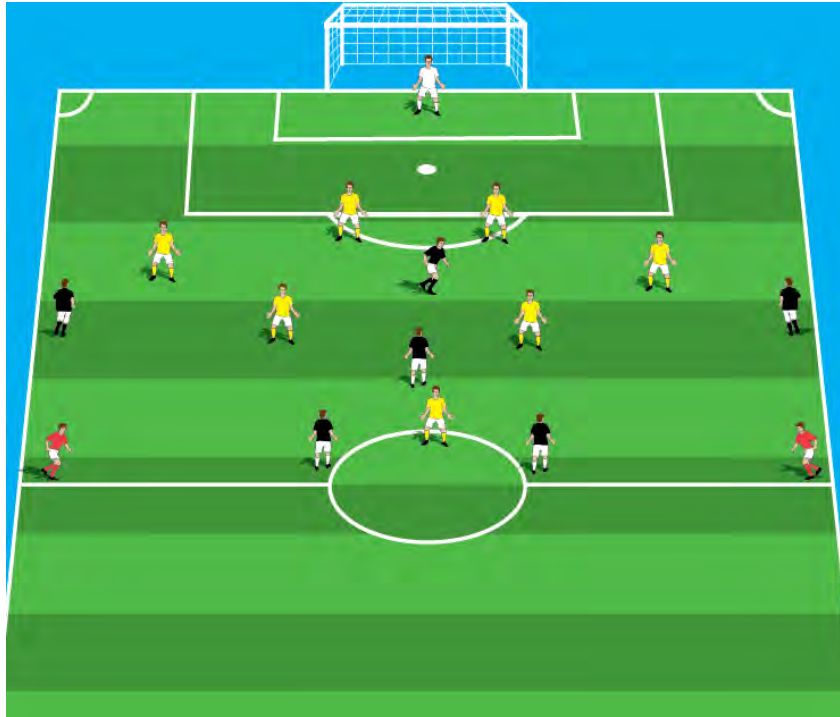
- 1) Keeping your opponent out of the middle or in switching the play through the midfield and
- 2) Keeping the central midfielders of the opposing team (their playmakers) the ability to possess the ball in the central part of the midfield.

These are the two main responsibilities of the triangle midfield. How you accomplish these can be done through either playing your triangle midfield in a zonal way, or by using the two holding midfielders or two back midfielders at the time to mark man-to-man while the attacking central midfielder or forward midfielder acts as a screen to block the passing lane into the central midfielders.

The following four drills will allow you to focus your triangle midfield defending using either structure. It is up to you to bring out and emphasize the important aspects of the triangle midfield defending. The four exercises are done within the game and will focus on a different aspect of the game, be it the attacking third, middle third, defending third, or overall team shape. The coaching points will remain consistent throughout all four exercises.

Exercise #1 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Play In and Out of the Triangle)

Since the main purpose of the triangle midfield is to deny the central midfielders possession in the central midfield, and to deny the opposing team the ability to transition through the middle of the field, this exercise focuses on working specifically on that concept.



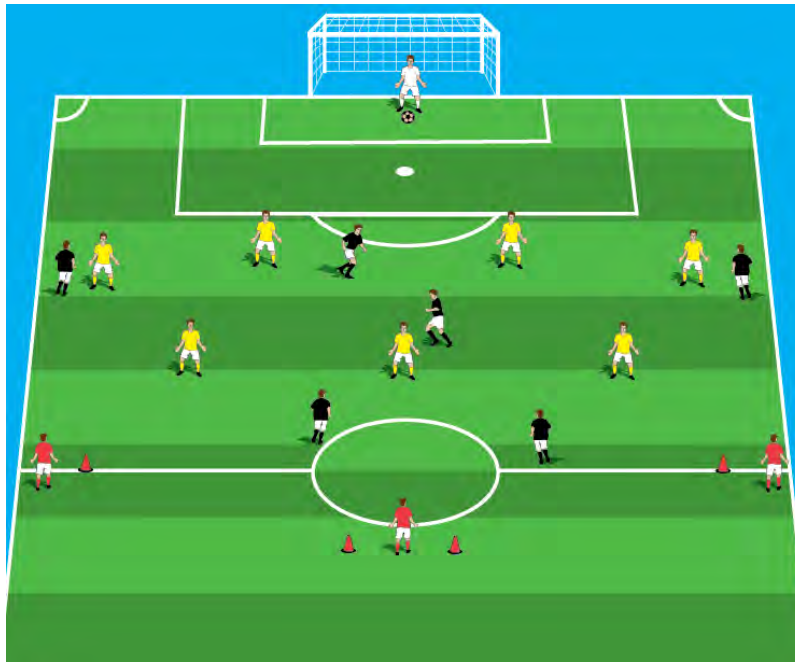
In this diagram, the team attacking the goal has the triangle midfield along with three attackers in their normal shape. There are two neutral players, one on the left at midfield and the other on the right at midfield. They would act as supporting wing defenders when this team has possession and support them as they try to attack the goal. The other team has four defenders in the back along with three midfielders. It is important that one of these midfielders is positioned

inside the triangle at all times. When this team wins the ball the neutral players support them as they try to pass the ball into the player inside the triangle and out again. The score for them only counts if they are able to pass into the player while they are inside the triangle and then they pass it out to another player successfully. The triangle midfield will get a lot of work in this drill and will not always be successful. It is important to remind them that their job is to prevent the other team from coming inside. To do this they must always keep a **TIP** on the ball to eliminate an open passing lane into the player inside. The holding midfielders must be quick to adjust and pick up other players. The holding midfielders must also be ready to switch roles to become the **TIP** should the ball be played to an area where the attacking central midfielder cannot get there in time. The most important thing is to close this passing lane as soon as possible. Be sure to stop and make coaching points often so that players understand that their shape in the triangle midfield is absolutely important. It is also important to give coaching points often as this exercise is very demanding with fitness and will wear players down quickly seriously diminishing the quality of the exercise. Encourage constant communication between the triangle midfielders and give the responsibility for organizing the triangle to the holding midfielders as they have the best vantage point. Players need to talk but, more importantly, they need to listen to one another and react quickly or they will get frustrated easily. This is a great exercise to begin with as you introduce the triangle midfield defending. Players quickly

get the idea of the demands and work rate required, along with how organized and unified the triangle midfield must be in order for the team to be successful.

Exercise #2 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Attacking 3rd)

I prefer to work from the top to the back because if the system with a triangle midfield is executed properly you will find the game happening more in the opponent's half of the field than in yours. This exercise is similar to the first one, but does have important differences.

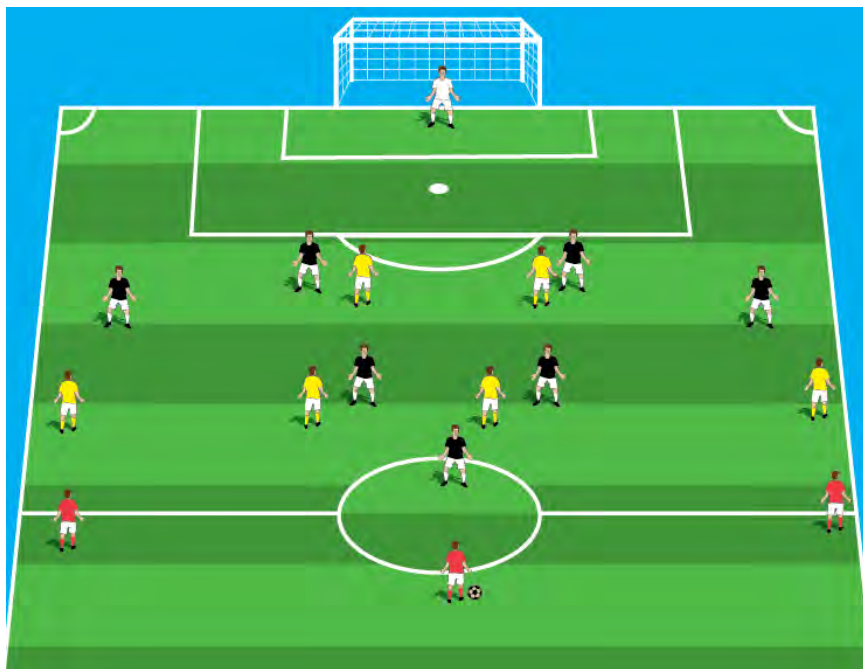


The team attacking the goal has the triangle midfield and three attackers. The team building out from their own goal has four defenders and three midfielders. There are also three supporting target players for the team building out of the back. The play begins with the GK passing the ball out to one of the defenders. They look to keep possession and pass it to one of the target players as quickly and as cleanly as possible. The team defending the ball works on putting the other team into a position

where they will lose the ball and they can attack the goal. The forwards job is to cut off the outside lanes and force the ball inside. The central attacker looks to support the defending forward on the wing and, when possible, double-team the ball. The triangle midfield denies passes into the central options and prepares to attack the goal as soon as their team wins possession. It is a coordinated effort in defending and can only work if everyone is doing their job. Continue to emphasize to the triangle midfield that they must adjust and react quickly. The holding midfielders are responsible for keeping the defensive shape and supporting the forwards as they defend. The attacking central midfielder looks to keep a **TIP** on the ball to close the passing lane. They must also be prepared to attack the space vacated centrally towards goal, if possession is won. This would be when the opponent is most vulnerable and goals can be scored. This is an effective formula used by Barcelona and one reason why they are so dangerous when they don't have possession; they are quick in transition. Keep the triangle midfield focused and calm, but they need to be ready to react quickly as the environment changes.

Exercise #3 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Final 3rd)

This exercise is almost the reverse of the previous one in that it sets up the same, just in the defensive third of the field. In working with the triangle make sure the attacking central midfielder does not get drawn back into the 18 yard box abandoning the central attacker. Their main responsibility still remains to support the central attacker, even when they are not in possession. This will make you more dangerous in the counter-attack as the central attacker will always have someone supporting them even if they have two or three defenders around them. It will be easier in this situation to exploit the space behind the defense and create chances. The worst case scenario is you stretch your opponent out and force them to collect possession back in their half allowing your team to re-gain composure and shape and to look to defend farther away from your own goal.



This exercise starts with four defenders and your triangle midfield playing against two attackers and four midfielders. There are three neutral players (one right, one central, and one left) who support the team with possession. The ball begins with the central neutral player who looks to pass it into one of the players attacking the goal. Concentrate on team shape and coordination with the triangle midfield and the

four defenders. Make sure they are focused at keeping a **TIP** on the ball to close central passing lanes, but also that the holding central midfielders are organizing quickly behind the ball and keeping the shape of the triangle. If the ball is served into the box, the holding midfielders may have to mark up man-to-man against the midfielders who may be looking to make runs into the box. The attacking central midfielder looks to stay about halfway between the 18 yard box and the central neutral player as they must look to still support the central attacker. If the ball is cleared, then they would look to either dribble and attack space, or support the central attacker in the game. In this drill, they would look to pass the ball quickly to the central neutral player. After you have had success in this format for 10-12 minutes and have worked with the triangle midfield to keep their shape and deny central options, add in another forward up top for the attacking team to put more pressure on. Continue to work on the defense and their overall team shape with the defenders adjusting behind the triangle midfield. It is all about shape, coordination and communication for your team to be successful at denying options for the attacking team.

Exercise #4 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Italian Shadow Play)

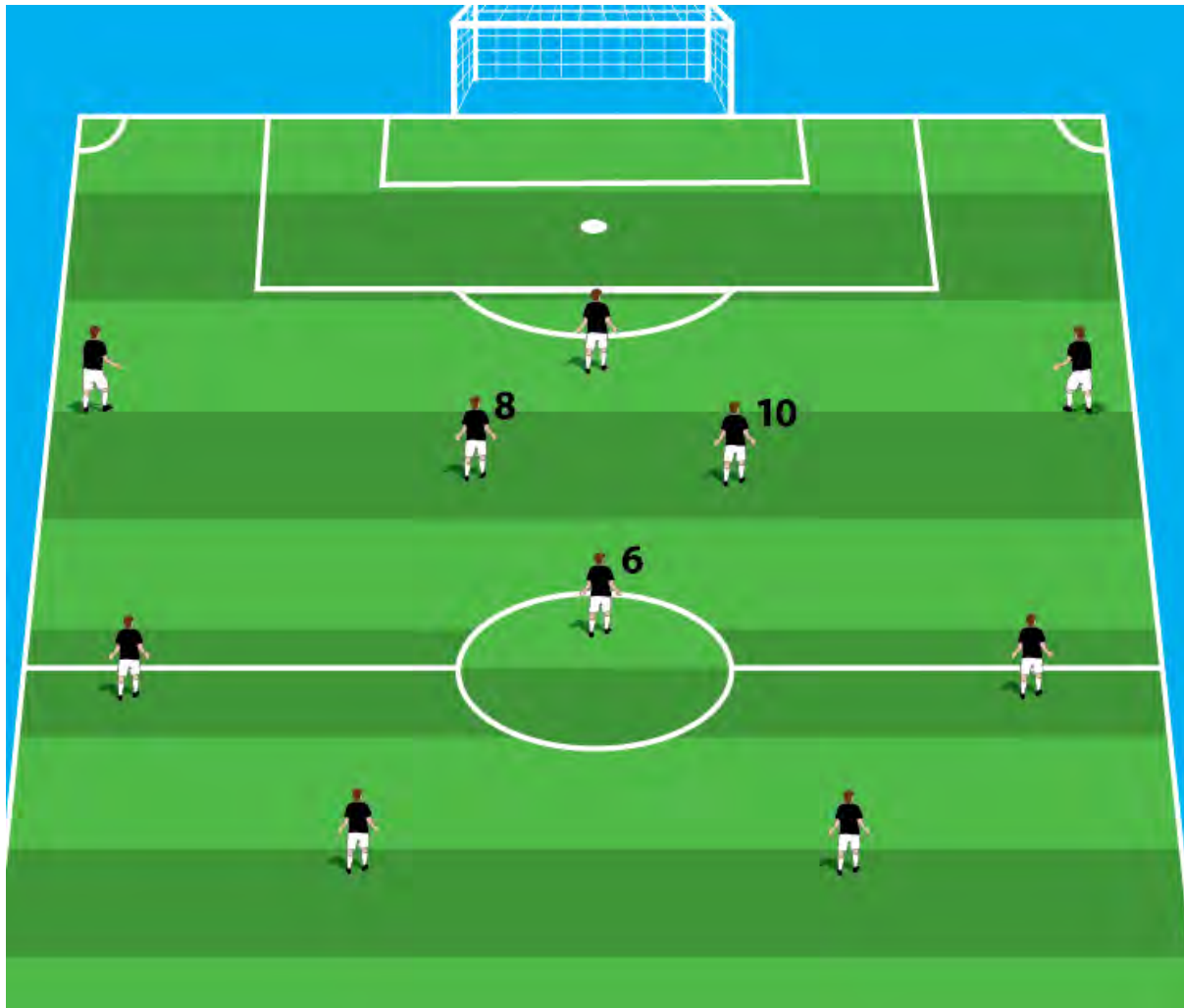
This is a version of shadow play that I picked up when I was in Italy taking a course at Fiorentina, and I use it in variations now very effectively. In the first three drills there was a focus on first getting the triangle midfield used to the demands of defending and what their roles and responsibilities were. As it progressed to the next two exercises you began working on coordinating with either the forwards or defenders in defensive shape. This last exercise is where you put it all together and work on not only the defensive shape of the triangle, but also of the team as a whole.



This diagram shows two teams of 11 set up a full field. If your numbers are restricted, then cut back on the numbers possessing the ball and work primarily on your team and triangle defending and shape. One team is set up with four defenders, the triangle midfield, and three attackers. It is less important how the other team is set up. The second team will possess the ball while the first team

will defend and keep shape. The way it works is that the one team can defend and can intercept passes, but cannot steal the ball from a player. The attacking team must look to beat the defense and score goals. They cannot attack 1v1, but must move the ball away from pressure. If they lose possession, then they stop playing and the other team quickly goes to goal and shoots. Give them a time limit when they intercept the ball and look to go to goal (i.e. 10 seconds to go to goal). Once the play is dead, then the ball starts with the GK on the second team and they look to again possess the ball away from pressure while the defending team keeps their shape behind the ball. Work with the triangle midfield on keeping a **TIP** on the ball and with the holding midfielders on keeping the shape and organization of the triangle while defending. When they win possession, emphasize a quick speed change and encourage them to all get up the field fast as a team to attack the other goal. Once the ball starts again with the GK, have them work on everything you have gone over in the other exercises.

The Triangle Midfield with 2 Attacking Central Midfielders and 1 Holding Central Midfielder



This variation of the 1-4-3-3 came about because the original formation became taxing on the #10 and the attack started to become predictable against certain systems, especially when facing other systems playing the same way. This created better match-up situations for two teams playing the same way. The advantage then went to the team playing with two attacking central midfielders. They matched up better defensively as it created a natural man-to-man marking situation, but it also gave them the advantage in the attack as runs from withdrawn positions by the central attackers put more pressure on the opposing triangle and defense.

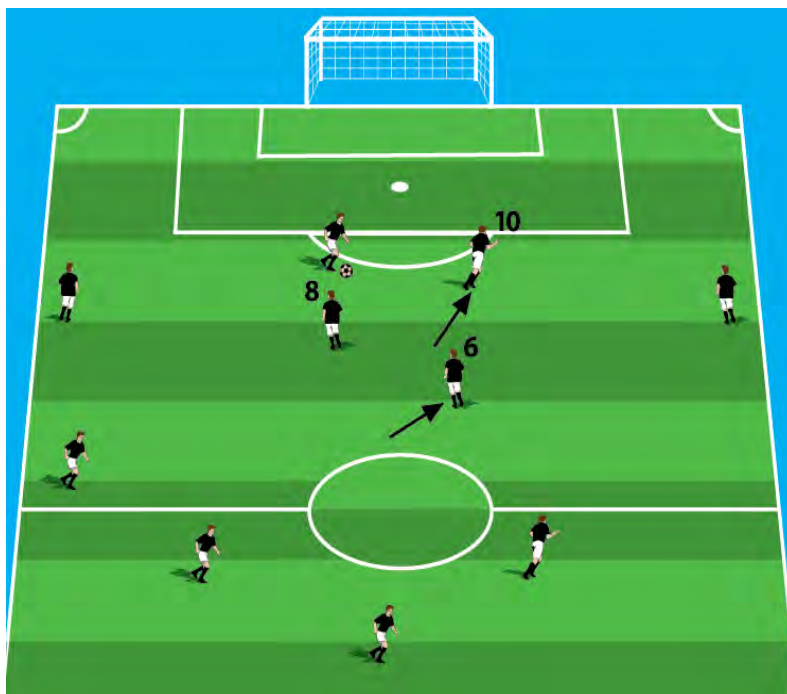
As with the original formation, fitness is in high demand and players must understand this. They must also have an attacking mentality and a desire to dominate and win EVERY ball. They must be focused and disciplined as shape and the coordination of runs is very important. They should have a mentality of RISK as they will look to defend in the opponent's half of the field more than their own, and will give away space behind them. This must also involve a lot of

trust among players as they must trust that every player is doing his or her own job when it comes to the system and how they are supposed to play.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (IN POSSESSION)

As with the original formation, I always tell my teams as I am teaching them the triangle midfield; it is a living breathing thing. It is not meant to be rigid in its shape, it requires significant focus and reading when to adjust and fill and where to adjust and fill. In the high school game and youth levels players are focused for maybe 50-60% of the time. At the college level and advanced levels this is where we start demanding more focus, as much as 85-90%, in order for any system to have the success it needs.

The triangulation of the midfield with two attacking central midfielders and one holding central midfielder falls again on the holding midfielder. The attacking central midfielders have the responsibility of always supporting and coordinating their movements off of the central attacker. They will always adjust and move off of this player. It is then up to the holding midfielder to adjust his or her position, maintain their distance from the two attacking central midfielders, and trying to stay as central as they can to protect the middle in case possession is lost. In addition, the two attacking central midfielders read when the central attacker gets possession and, based upon where and how they gain possession, one will support behind the ball and the other will make a penetrating run. While the attacking central midfielders are coordinating their movements, the holding midfielder will adjust and keep shape behind both midfielders while maintaining a central presence. The following will give different examples of how the holding midfielder will adjust to maintain their shape while adjusting to the runs of the two attacking central midfielders.



EXAMPLE 1

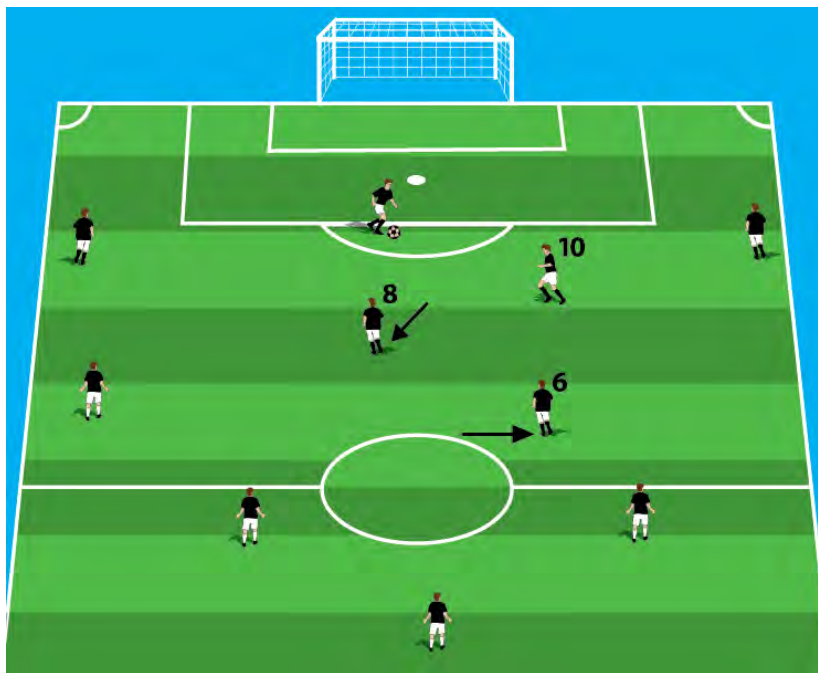
In the example shown, the central attacker has received the ball on the left side of the 18 yard box. The attacking CMF (#10) opposite ball side will make a penetrating run forward while the other attacking central midfielder(#8) drops in behind the ball to support. To maintain the shape and to support the movements of both attacking CMF's, the holding central midfielder(#6) shifts slightly to the right side to maintain the shape of the triangle midfield and to keep in a position to

protect the middle of the field. As you can see the shape remains a triangle, but it has rotated to where there is actually one holding central midfielder, one true central midfielder, and one attacking central midfielder. The triangle will always shift and adjust based upon where the ball is and the runs of the attackers and how the attacking central midfielders adjust.

As a general rule, when the central attacker wins possession the weak side attacking central midfielder will always look to make a penetrating run while the ball side attacking central midfielder will always tuck in behind the ball to provide support. As was the case with the original formation, it is always the responsibility of the holding central midfielder to be aware of and to keep the shape of the triangle.

EXAMPLE 2

In following the original formation and the 2nd example given, you will see it looks identical. The simple explanation is that it is. The roles and responsibilities don't really change by adjusting the triangle and, in many cases, it will still function exactly the same.

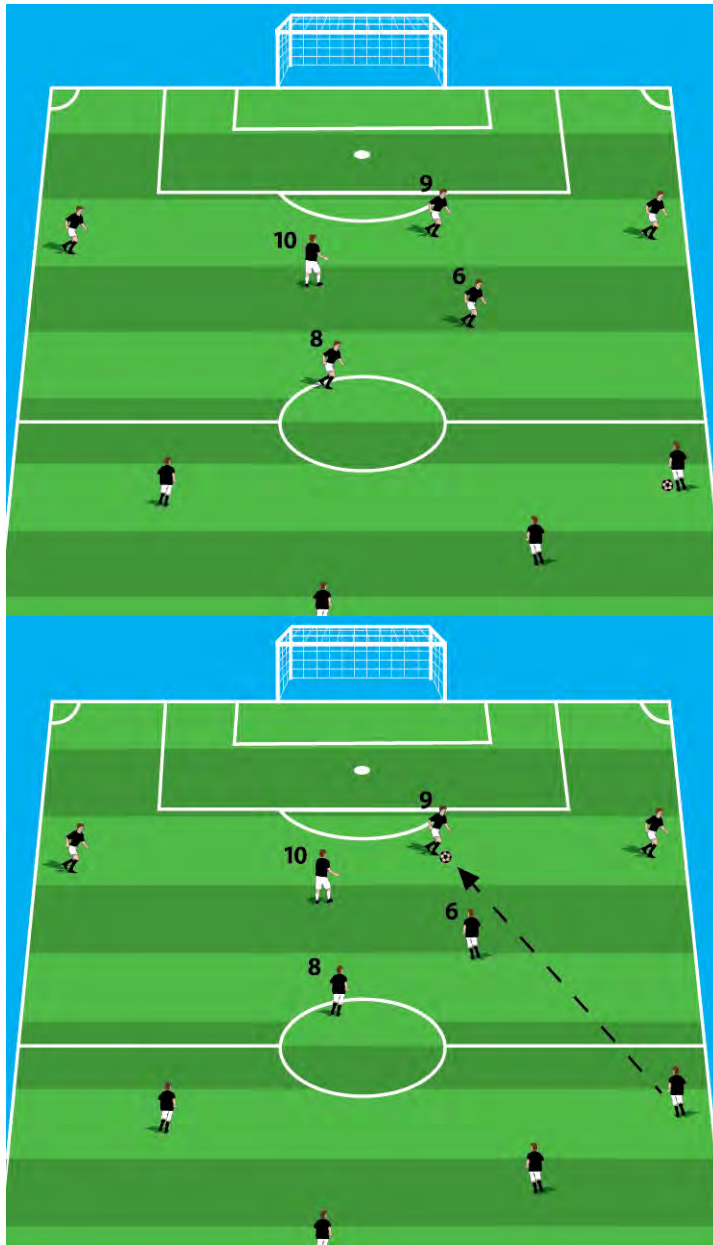


To review this example, the central attacker has possession of the ball and is looking for a supporting option. The holding midfielder, as before, keeps the shape of the triangle behind the ball. The attacking central midfielder on the weak side is in position slightly withdrawn to support the ball on an angle. The ball side attacking central midfielder has shifted in behind the ball to support, but remains ready to make a penetrating run based upon where the ball is played. It is

the responsibility of the holding midfielder to always keep the shape of the triangle behind the attacking central midfielders. He or she is responsible for adjusting to the runs that the attacking central midfielders make and to maintain a distance of approximately 12-15 yards from the attacking central midfielders. This means that he or she must stay 12-15 yards behind the attacking central midfielders and to stay focused on protecting the middle of the field. Getting too close limits options to get behind the opposing defense, getting too far and the speed of play will slow down and make it easier for the opposing team to defend you. The distance is very important.

EXAMPLE 3

In this example, possession starts with the right wing defender and the triangle midfield adjusting to the ball. The first image shows the defender in possession and the central attacker making a run to show for the ball. The ball side attacking central midfielder(#10) shows, but is careful to not cut off the passing lane to the central attacker(#9). The weak side attacking central midfielder(#8) looks to support at an angle the central attacker. The holding central midfielder(#6) is focused on keeping the shape of the triangle as the two attacking central midfielders shift and move. They must also keep the shape of the triangle while also focusing on protecting the middle should possession be lost.

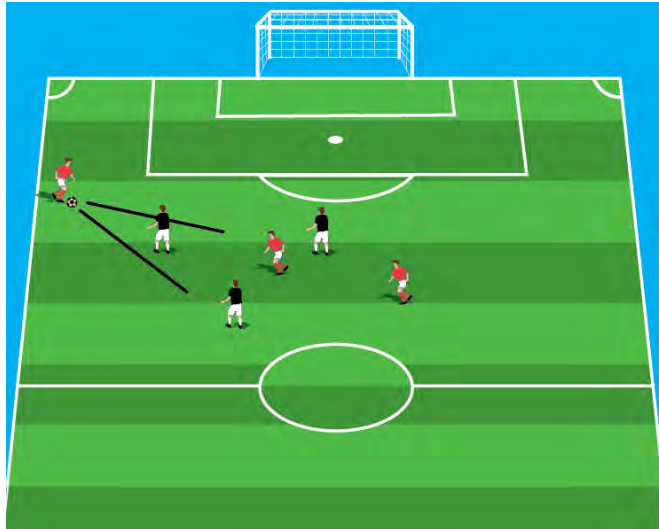


In the second image the central attacker has received possession. The ball side attacking central midfielder is now in position to support directly behind the ball. The weak side attacking central midfielder is now in a supporting angle and ready to make a penetrating run or to combine with the central attacker. The holding midfielder shifts and adjusts to keep their shape. One scenario would have the central attacker passing immediately to the weak side attacking central midfielder and then turning and making a penetrating run towards goal. The weak side attacking central midfielder then has the option of attacking the goal themselves or passing back across and behind the defense to the central attacker. Another option would be to pass the ball wide to the wing attacker who would collect the ball and serve into goal while the central attacker and attacking central midfielder continue their runs to goal. There are many options and possibilities that can occur simply by playing the ball into your central option(#9) when it is available. Conditioning your players to look for this player first is the key to play any system with the triangle midfield.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (OUT OF POSSESSION)

Defending in the triangle midfield is all about denying their playmakers possession of the ball and make other players on their team work to beat you. There are two ways to accomplish this as a defending team:

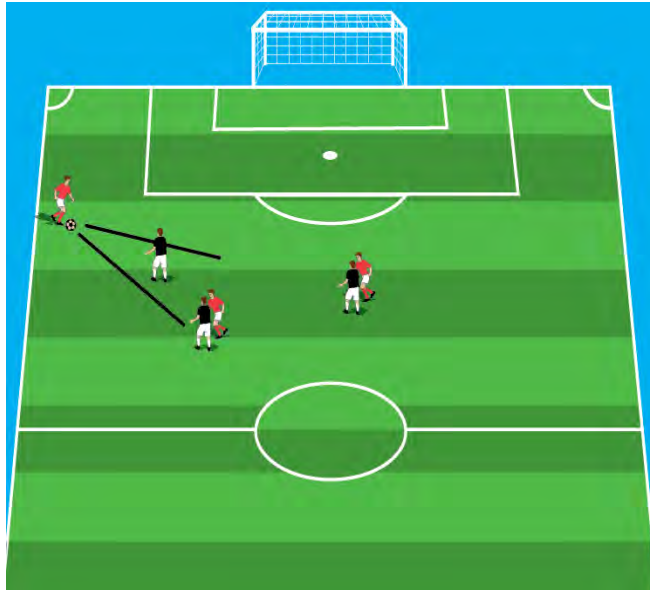
- 1) The first method is to defend the central midfield space in a zonal way. This means that you keep the shape of the triangle, but shorten the distances between all three players



to prevent your opponent from being able to play through the middle. It is important in this style of defending that you always keep a **TIP** on the ball at all times. That means wherever the ball is there is always a central midfielder from the triangle blocking the passing lane into central options while the other two midfield players keep their shape, but shorten the distance to 8-10 yards. This will force the opposing central midfielders to start moving outside

to get the ball, thus disrupting their shape and their game. It is still important that the back two midfielders are aware of the two central midfielders in case they need to adjust slightly to further eliminate them as options, but for the most part, they play zonal and focus on the distance from one another and the space they are defending. Also, in most cases, the player acting as the **TIP** must stay within the width of the 18 yard box and allow other players to do their jobs in defending. If this player gets dragged outside, then the triangle midfield in defending will fall apart and you can be beaten easily. The only case where this player would venture farther out wide is if there is a real danger if they don't (you are losing by a goal late and need the ball back quickly and have to force the play, or your opponent is in a position to hurt you from out there and you need to get immediate pressure on the ball), or if they have cover from another player shifting in to fill their space (i.e. one of the central defenders yells for them to switch or go and one of the holding midfielders shifts to their position).

- 2) The second method is almost opposite in that it combines man-to-man marking with zonal defending. It begins with the same principle of having the triangle midfield player closest to the ball acting as the **TIP**. The other two midfield players support behind as before, but they look to mark man-to-man while still trying to keep shape behind. The two midfielders behind remain aware of the two central midfielders and mark them when they come into their area. It is important that they mark them, but stay behind them also. Do not allow them to get in behind your midfielder or they can gain an advantage in attacking your goal. If they gain possession, then the objective is to force them to play it back and re-set.



In both cases, it is important that the holding midfielders drop back to help the defenders when the opponent has possession in your defending third of the field. If that happens, the attacking central midfielder remains close to the central attacker (within 12-15 yards) so that this player always has support. As stated before, the attacking central midfielder is the **SHADOW STRIKER** and responsible for always supporting the central attacker.

The final comment on defending and triangulation has to do with the rigidity of the triangle midfield. It is important to keep stating that the triangle midfield is a

living a breathing thing in possession, but also when adjusting to defend. If your #8 has shifted up to support and possession is lost near the #8, then it makes sense that they become the **TIP** in this situation while the other two players adjust behind him/her. The important thing is that the closest player becomes the **TIP** as quickly as possible while the other two shift quickly behind them.

TRAINING POSSESSION AND PENETRATION

The following represents examples of how to train for possession and/or penetration in a 1-4-3-3 Midfield with two attacking and one holding midfielder. There are a total of four (4) different exercises to accomplish what you need to in order to train or prepare your midfield to play this formation.

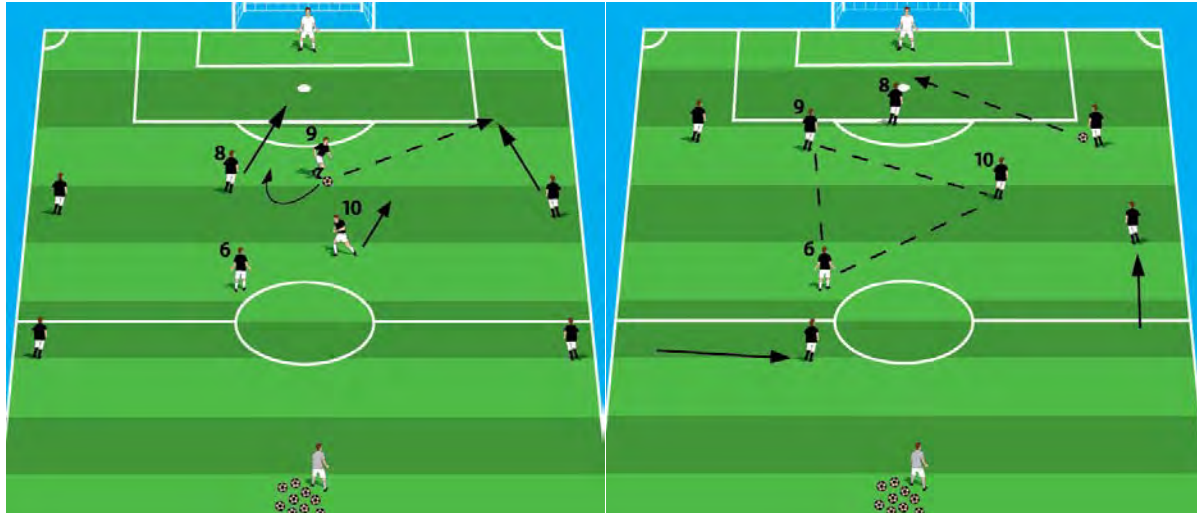
The examples used will be very similar to the ones used in prior formations to illustrate their similarities and differences. This is important so that you, as the coach, understand the actual differences in the formations and movements of the players using the same situations and examples. You will see that the training of possession and penetration is essentially the same. However, it is the differences in your own philosophy that will change the impact of every exercise.

Exercise #1 (Possession and Penetration- MF Combinations)*Frame #1**Frame #2*

Frame #1- The exercise begins with the coach passing the ball to the holding midfielder. Make sure to watch the adjustments of the triangle midfield to make sure they are in position and adjusting to the ball. You can see how the two attacking central midfielders are supporting forward at an angle to the ball. This opens up the main option of the central attacker (#9).

Frame #2- The holding midfielder receives the ball and turns with possession to face towards the goal. The two attacking central midfielders continue to support at an angle, but as a continuation, the holding midfielder passes the ball forward to the central attacker. The arrows in the diagram show the supporting runs each of the triangle midfielders would then make. The weak side attacking central midfielder would look to make a penetrating run forward, the ball side attacking central midfielder would tuck in behind the ball to give direct support, and the holding central midfielder would shift slightly to their right to maintain the shape of the triangle while also being in a position to protect the middle of the field.

This is the basic setup for this exercise. The next two frames will show you just one pattern that can be run with this. However, there are dozens of different patterns you can run from this basic setup. In addition, begin the exercise with no defenders and work on locating your passes, the movement of the triangle midfielder and other players in the system, and the consistency of play. If you would like to see other examples of different midfield combinations, then please look at another World Class Coaching book, 'Dutch Drills for Total Team Training'.



Frame #3

Frame #4

Frame #3- In this frame the ball is played to the wide attacker on the wing while the weak side attacking central midfielder continues his or her penetrating run towards goal towards the near post while the central attacker bends and makes a run also towards goal, but more towards the penalty spot. The ball side attacking central midfielder shifts over to support the ball, while the holding midfielder continues to keep the shape of the triangle while also protecting the middle of the field in case possession is lost.

Frame #4- In this frame you can see the positioning of the players and how the central attacker has now become the attacking central midfielder supporting the run of the attacking central midfielder (#8) who made the penetrating run forward. It is always more dangerous if a penetrating run comes from a withdrawn position like what occurs with this system with two attacking central midfielders.



Once you run the patterns for a few minutes without defensive oppositions, begin to add in the defenders until you have a defensive line with four defenders, two central midfielders that begin inside the triangle to defend the passes, and an additional player to behind the triangle midfield who adjusts and defends as they want. By increasing the numbers slowly you can work with the triangle midfield to make sure they maintain shape and support. Your objective is to build to the final numbers shown where the play is 8v8 as shown in this diagram.

Exercise #2 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play to Targets)

In this first diagram, the team lines up with 9 players on the field against no opposition. Each touchline at the midfield line has a neutral player with one possessing the ball. The object is for the neutral with the ball to pass it into the team. The team then looks to quickly and cleanly possess the ball and play it to the open neutral player on the opposite side. Work with the triangle midfield to keep their shape and to adjust to the flow of play. Continue this pattern for 5-6 minutes until the team is comfortable with their possession and you feel as if the triangle midfield is doing their job of

keeping shape and adjusting. Make sure the players are moving and adjusting in a realistic fashion and as close to game speed as possible. Emphasize quick and clean possession before pressure is added. You may want to build in a pattern or purpose with possession. For example, the ball must be played through either the attacking central midfielder or central attacker before it can be played to the opposite side neutral player. Give them a purpose with possession, but make sure to focus on the shape of the triangle midfield as well as the teams' overall shape and movement.



This second diagram now sees the addition of pressure. The focus of the exercise is the same, to possess the ball quickly and cleanly from one neutral player to the neutral player on the opposite side. The opposition added is in three lines also playing a 1-2-1 formation. Having four players with shape to apply pressure will still give a significant advantage, but it will force them to remain focus and to seek out options away from pressure. Each goal on the full-sized field also has a goalkeeper and can be used to either maintain possession or deal with a quick counter attack. The objective of the defenders is to win possession and

attack one of the goals. They can choose to attack either goal, depending upon which one gives

them a better advantage. If the team possessing the ball from neutral to neutral loses possession, they should work quickly to win it back and to deny any possibility of an attack on either goal. As the coach, remember to focus on the triangle midfield and your team shape. They should look to play the ball quickly and cleanly and to be safe in possession (protect the ball and don't give it away). They should look to still play with a purpose, and it is a good idea to continue to emphasize playing through a certain player or by using a certain combination before playing into the next neutral player.



You should continue to build in opposing players to a 2-4-2. You won't go directly from a 1-2-1 to this formation, so be sure to build to this slowly so you can continue to work with the triangle midfield on their shape. Once you have reached this formation you will start to see breakdowns as they begin to force the play. Make sure you work with the team on some mental toughness and training exercises and remain positive yourself in the process. Work with the players on breathing as they play and in remaining calm under pressure. Give them

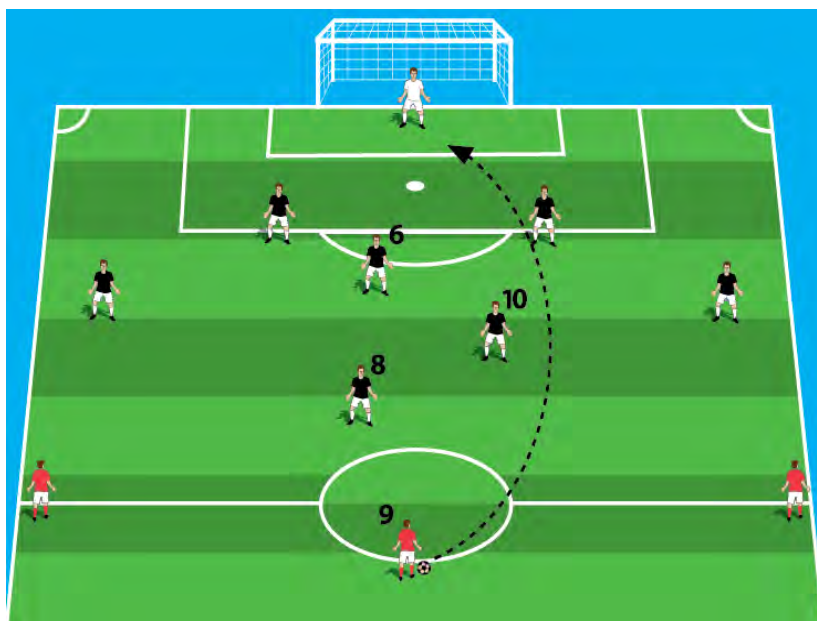
simple choices in possession and continue to encourage them to play the ball quickly so that the pressure never becomes too great. Focus the team on constant movement and shape, especially in the triangle midfield. Give them the responsibility for possession and its quality. Remind them that playing quickly and cleanly, as before, is what they need to continue to do. You will find that if you get them to breathe normally and focus on remaining calm and not panicking, that the quality of your team possession will significantly improve in this stage. As in the previous progression, if the opposition wins possession give them the ability to attack either goal as quickly as they can. To begin to focus your team on defensive responsibilities within the system as most teams you will play will try to counter attack you quickly, give a quick time limit on their ability to attack a goal (i.e. when you win possession from the team playing to the neutrals you have 10 seconds to create a shot at goal). In these situations, work with the team on transitional play to defending quickly and work with them on team pressure and marking. Work with the triangle midfield on their responsibilities with keeping a **TIP** on the ball and the other two midfielders getting shape quickly behind them. I would also recommend keeping your possession objective in this progression so that the team is continually looking for that option. My recommendation at this stage is that you are looking to play through the central attacker as this will always be your first option when in the games. Making your exercises as game realistic as possible is very important as you build towards the full game.



The final progression is to build to 11v11 while still using the neutral players. Have one team work on playing through the neutral players before they can attack one of the goals. You now specify direction for each team. The team playing through the neutral players defends one goal and attacks another goal. The defending team when they win possession can quickly attack the one goal, but they are still defending one goal all of the time. This way you are working with your team more on shape and quality of play than on finishing. Their play is more

indirect. To change the game slightly, make the team you are working with attack the goal within 15 seconds of receiving the ball back from the neutral player. This way they can also feel the pressure of time and work on changing their speed of attacking play. You don't want them always playing indirect and developing a slower more sluggish attitude towards attacking and finishing.

Exercise #3 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play Building out of the Back)



The exercise begins as shadow play with the team starting by building out of the back to forward targets. Focus on team shape and quick and clean possession as the team builds the ball to the targets. Encourage communication as they build up. Communication begins with talking, but it ultimately comes down to listening. The exercise starts with the central target driving the ball in the air back to the goalkeeper. The team quickly

comes back and gets their shape as the goalkeeper then looks to distribute the ball. Once the ball is distributed the team needs to adjust and support the ball. The ball needs to be played quickly and accurately until it is played to one of the targets. If the ball is played to a wide target the ball is then quickly played to the middle target, who then receives and then drives the ball again to the goalkeeper. It is important to focus on the two attacking central midfielders and their shape to make sure that they don't block the passing lane to the central attacker (#9). In a situation where the ball is played back into the defensive third of the field it is important that two roles are played by the attacking central midfielders:

- 1) The ball side attacking central midfielder always checks back to support the ball. There must be a clear link between the defense, the midfield and the attack. More importantly, there must be options when trying to build out of the back or your opponent will be able to break you down easily with mild pressure.
- 2) The opposite attacking central midfielder must always support the central attacker. You never want to leave the central attacker unsupported as they are always playing against a numbers down situation and needs to have some type of support immediately once they gain possession of the ball.

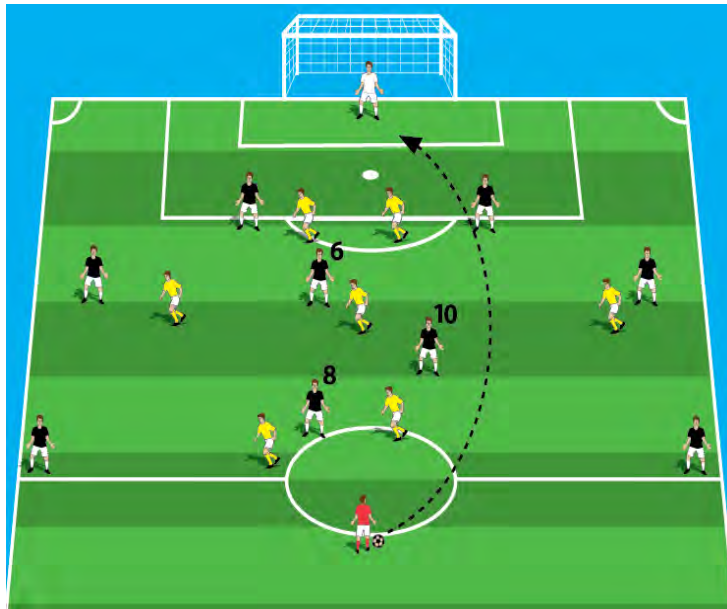
The drill is continuous.



After approximately 5-6 minutes of playing with no opposition, add in 4 opposing players in a 1-2-1 formation. This way there are three lines of opposition as they would find in the game. Continue to work with the triangle midfield on supporting the ball. Remind the holding midfielder that they look to support the ball at an angle and look to also create a triangle like shape with the two central defenders. They also look to support at an angle so that other options forward are

opened up. When they gain possession they need to always look to move the ball away from pressure very quickly and effectively, but must also be aware of where their first option is and play it as soon as it is available (central attacker). The holding midfielder must always look to

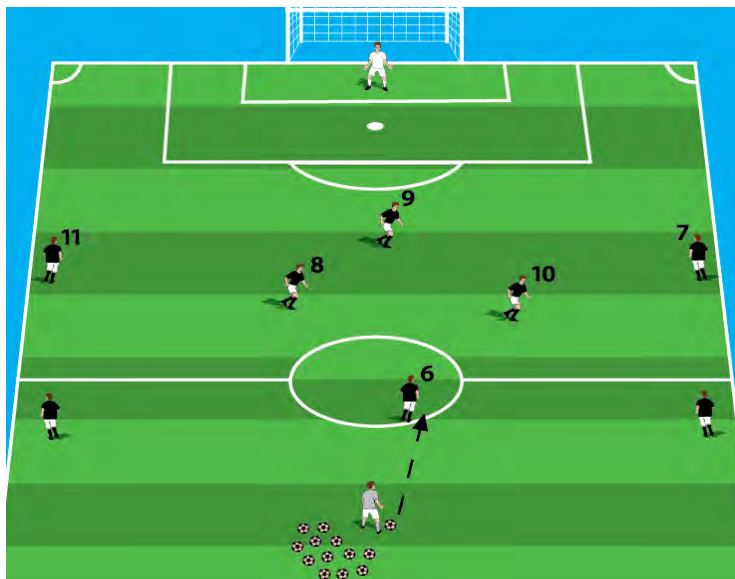
play quickly (1-2 touch) away from pressure. The attacking central midfielders need to be aware first support the central attacker and to support the ball weak side, but also to be ready to quickly move forward as the faster you transition between the different thirds of the field the more advantage you will have in your initial attack in the actual game. If the defenders win the ball in this exercise they should look to quickly go at goal and try to score.



In the final progression switch the two target players on the outside and put them with the team building out of the back. The only remaining target player will be the central target. Increase the opposing numbers to where they are playing a 2-3-2 formation with 7 players. This will be more difficult for the team to build out and it is important for you as the coach to remind the players to keep calm and focus on their breathing. Then make sure that the team is shifting and staying organized, and that the triangle midfield is supporting the ball. It is

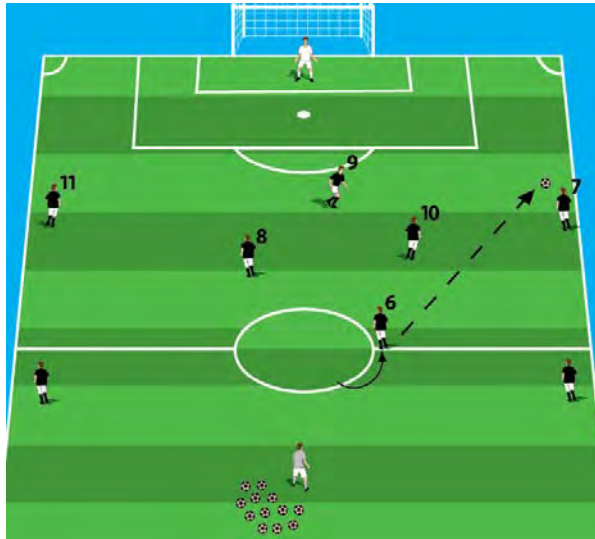
very important that possession is quick and clean, but that players have their heads up and are reading the environment so that they are not making mistakes in possession and giving it away too easily. The main objective with possession in the back is always to play simple and safe, but to always protect the ball.

Exercise #4 (Possession and Penetration- Runs to Goal and Framing the Box)

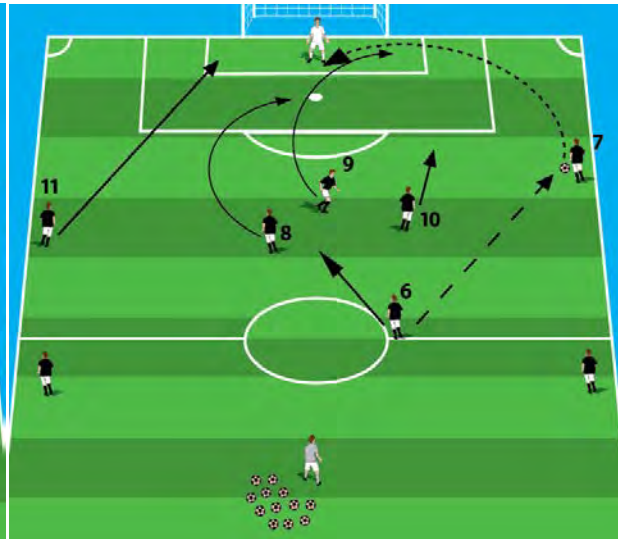


This series of exercises focuses on quick play out wide, framing the box, and serves on goal. Everything mentioned in the previous three exercises applies here as well. Possession must be quick, clean, and accurate. The team must adjust to support possession. It is important that the triangle midfield focuses on the timings of their runs and their shape. The exercise begins with the coach passing the ball into the holding midfielder. The holding midfielder receives possession, turns and passes the ball wide to the wing

attacker ball side. The wing attacker gains possession and serves the ball into the box. The ball side attacking central midfielder supports the ball while the weak side attacking central midfielder makes the run on goal. Begin the exercise as shadow play and work on the runs and the timing of the runs. The above diagram shows how the exercise is set up.



Frame #1



Frame #2

Frame #1- The drill begins with the coach passing the ball into the holding midfielder. The holding midfielder turns and passes the ball out wide to the wing attacker, then starts to support the ball they just played.

Frame #2- The wing attacker gains possession of the ball, takes a touch, then looks to drive a serve into the box while the rest of the players make their organized runs to goal. The weak side attacking central midfielder makes a run at goal while the ball side attacking central midfielder supports behind the ball at an angle 18-20 yards from goal. The holding central midfielder shifts over to support and keep the shape of the triangle while also looking to protect the middle of the field in case possession is lost.

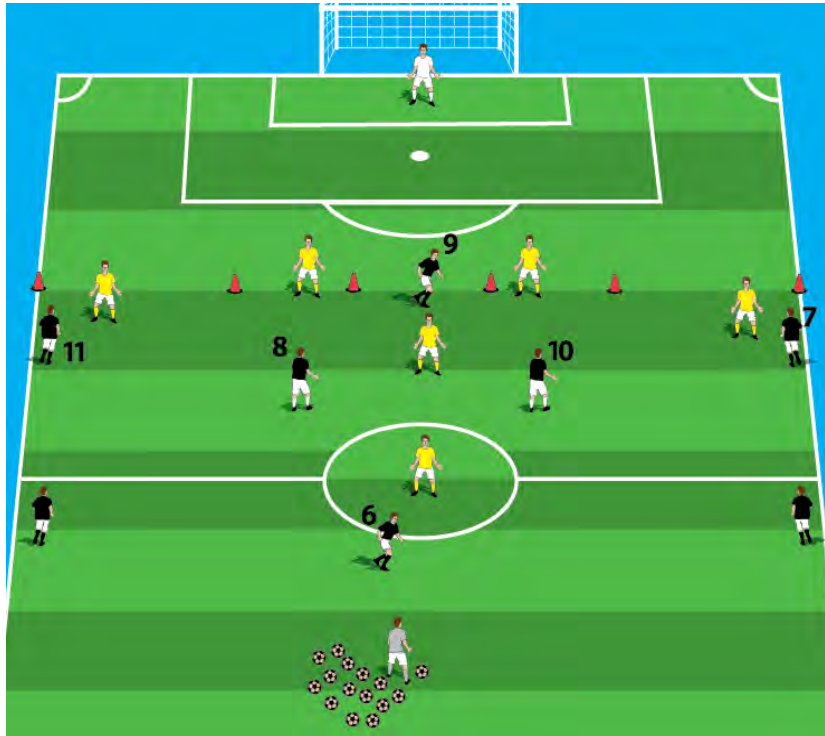


In this diagram, you see the positions of the players and where they should be when framing the box. Since the focus is on the triangle midfield, the attacking central midfielders (#10 and #8) will have one of two responsibilities:

- 1) The ball side attacking central midfielder always supports behind the ball at an angle. In this diagram the support is at an angle behind the ball about 18-20 yards from goal.
- 2) The opposite attacking central

midfielder makes the run in towards goal to about the penalty spot. Any ball played in behind the near post run and in front of the attacking central midfielder is their ball. They take everything forward.

The holding central midfielder shifts slightly right to keep the shape of the triangle, but also remains aware of the middle space so that they are in position to protect the midfield.



After working with the runs for 10-12 minutes in shadow play add in opposing players. Begin with adding all four defenders along with two midfielders centrally to defend. Set the defenders up 35 yards from goal so that they have to recover and defend at the same time. The coach starts by passing the ball into one of the holding midfielders. The holding midfielder receives and turns and plays a through ball splitting the defenders. The wing attacker on that side makes the run and gains possession. The

defenders are not allowed to defend until the attackers cross the line of cones. They can then drop and defend as aggressively as they want. This will give the attackers enough of a start so that they can be successful most of the time. If the defenders are having too much success, then start them 3-5 yards back to give the attackers more of a chance to gain possession and frame the box. Work with the triangle midfield on their shape adjusting to the ball, as before.

These four exercises offer complete sessions and suggested progressions of other exercises where you could easily develop another 5 or 6 additional sessions from it. As you can see, all of the exercises focus on coaching from the game. The first exercise focuses on combining possession and penetration with different midfield combinations. There are more than 30 different combinations that can be used with this one exercise. The second exercise focuses mainly on possession and protecting the ball using indirect play. The third exercise works on building out of the back and using different combinations to play into targets. The fourth exercise works on penetration and framing the box using quick technical speed of play. The coaching points remain consistent throughout the four exercises and should be consistent in your direction to the triangle midfield as they learn and develop within this system.

TRAINING THE DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Defending is about accomplishing two things:

- 1) Keeping your opponent out of the middle or in switching the play through the midfield and
- 2) Keeping the central midfielders of the opposing team (their playmakers) the ability to possess the ball in the central part of the midfield.

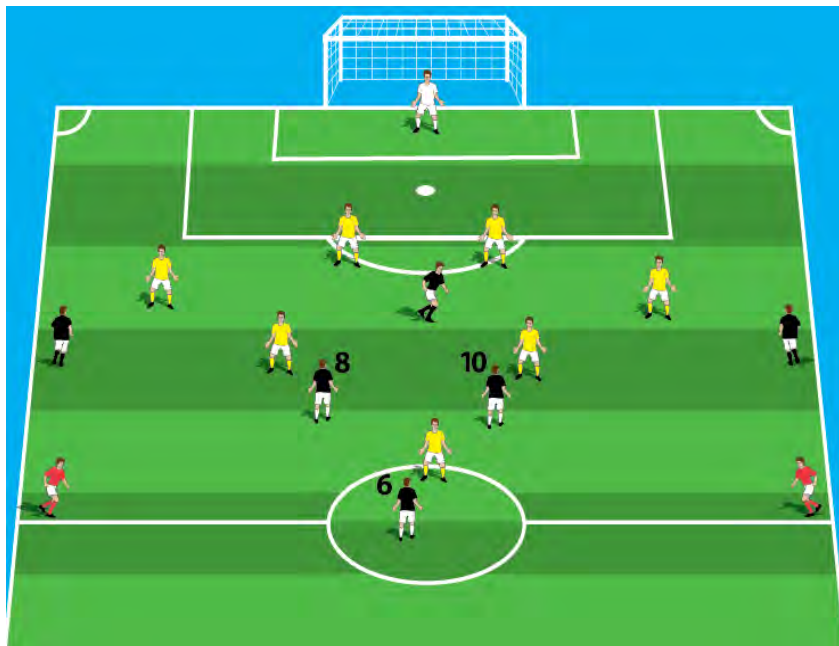
These are the two main responsibilities of the triangle midfield. How you accomplish these can be done through either playing your triangle midfield in a zonal way, or by using two of the midfielders to mark man-to-man while the forward midfielder acts as a screen to block the passing lane into the opposing central midfielders.

The following four drills will allow you to focus your triangle midfield defending using either structure. It is up to you to bring out and emphasize the important aspects of the triangle midfield defending. The four exercises are done within the game and will focus on a different aspect of the game, be it the attacking third, middle third, defending third, or overall team shape. The coaching points will remain consistent throughout all four exercises.

Exercise #1 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Play In and Out of the Triangle)

Since the main purpose of the triangle midfield is to deny the central midfielders possession in the central midfield, and to deny the opposing team the ability to transition through the middle of the field, this exercise focuses on working specifically on that concept.

In this diagram, the team attacking the goal has the triangle midfield along with three attackers in their normal shape.



in their normal shape.

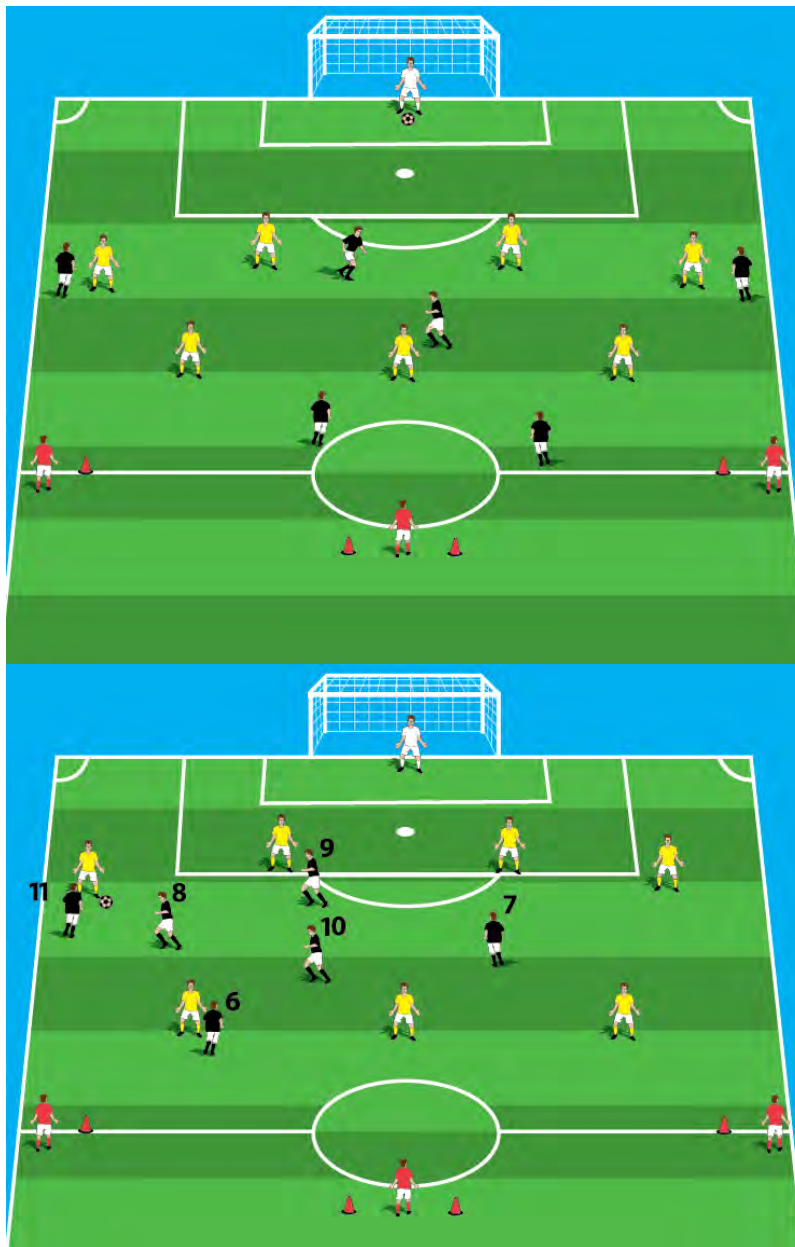
There are two neutral players, one on the left at midfield and the other on the right at midfield. They would act as supporting wing defenders when this team has possession and support them as they try to attack the goal. The other team has four defenders in the back along with three midfielders. It is important that one of these midfielders is positioned inside the triangle at all times. When this team wins

the ball the neutral players support them as they try to pass the ball into the player inside the triangle and out again. The score for them only counts if they are able to pass into the player while they are inside the triangle and then they pass it out to another player successfully. The triangle midfield will get a lot of work in this drill and will not always be successful. It is important to remind them that their job is to prevent the other team from coming inside. To do this they must always keep a **TIP** on the ball to eliminate an open passing lane into the player inside. The holding midfielders must be quick to adjust and pick up other players. The holding midfielders must also be ready to switch roles to become the **TIP** should the ball be played to an area where the attacking central midfielder cannot get there in time. The most important thing is to close this passing lane as soon as possible. Be sure to stop and make coaching points often so that players understand that their shape in the triangle midfield is absolutely important. It is also important to give coaching points often as this exercise is very demanding with fitness and will wear players down quickly seriously diminishing the quality of the exercise. Encourage constant communication between the triangle midfielders and give the responsibility for organizing the triangle to the holding midfielders as they have the best vantage point. Players need to talk but, more importantly, they need to listen to one another and react quickly or they will get frustrated easily. This is a great exercise to begin with as you introduce the triangle midfield defending. Players quickly get the idea of the demands and work rate required, along with how organized and unified the triangle midfield must be in order for the team to be successful. The players need to have a level of aggressiveness and determination that is unmatched. They have to have an immediate desire to win the ball back immediately, and not to just deny the opponent the ability to penetrate through the middle or the ability to move forward. They must have the attitude that they don't want the opponent to have possession of the ball at all. This is a unique mentality that can be trained, but must be demanded at every moment of training and play.

Exercise #2 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Attacking 3rd)

I prefer to start in the midfield, then switch to up top because if the system with a triangle midfield is executed properly you will find the game happening more in the opponent's half of the field than in yours. This exercise is similar to the first one and similar to the original formation, but does have important differences.

The team attacking the goal has the triangle midfield and three attackers. The team building out from their own goal has four defenders and three midfielders. There are also three supporting target players for the team building out of the back. The play begins with the GK passing the ball out to one of the defenders. They look to keep possession and pass it to one of the target players as quickly and as cleanly as possible. The team defending the ball works on putting the other team into a position where they will lose the ball and they can attack the goal. The forwards job is to cut off the outside lanes and force the ball inside. The central attacker looks to support the defending forward on the wing and, when possible, double-team the ball. The triangle midfield denies passes into the central options and prepares to attack the goal as soon as their team wins possession. It is a coordinated effort in defending and can only work if everyone is doing their job. Continue to emphasize to the triangle midfield that they must



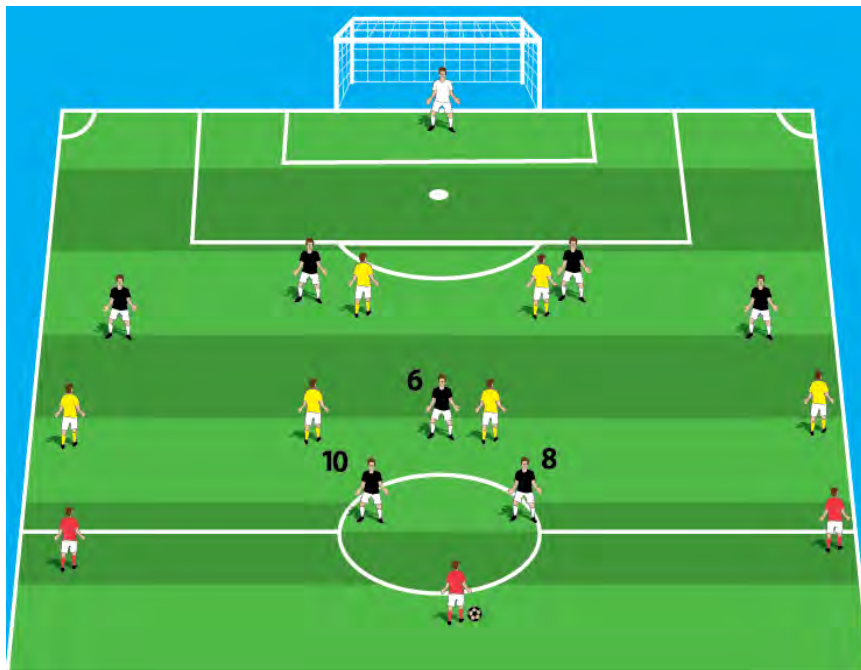
adjust and react quickly. The holding midfielders are responsible for keeping the defensive shape and supporting the forwards as they defend. The attacking central midfielder looks to keep a **TIP** on the ball to close the passing lane. They must also be prepared to attack the space vacated centrally towards goal, if possession is won. This would be when the opponent is most vulnerable and goals can be scored. This is an effective formula used by Barcelona and one reason why they are so dangerous when they don't have possession; they are quick in transition. Keep the triangle midfield focused and calm, but they need to be ready to react quickly as the environment changes. In the first frame you see the triangle midfield in their normal position of two attacking midfielders and one holding midfielder. They are in position to react quickly to deny penetration and play into central options. The second frame shows the ball played out

wide to a supporting wing defender. The left wing attacker (#11) immediately steps to pressure the ball inside towards the triangle midfield. The central attacker shifts over to close the distance between the wing defender with possession and the supporting central defender. The weak side attacker (#7) drops in towards the middle and behind the central attacker to protect from a ball attempting to be switched to the opposite side of the field. They need to be in position to defend against a ball played to the weak side wing defender or opposite side outside midfielder. The attacking central midfielder ball side shifts over to close the passing lane to any central options. If possible, they may look to double-team the ball if they sense panic in the player with possession. They should not just rush right in, though, as the player could beat the entire triangle midfield with just one pass. The weak side attacking central midfielder shifts over to a distance of between 10-12 yards and slightly behind the attacking central midfielder

pressuring the ball. The holding midfielder would also shift ball side while also being aware of any midfielders trying to find a seam. If this happens, then they would step up to mark that player. They would not continue to follow the player, though, if they rotate out of the seam as they could be attempting to pull the holding midfielder out of the middle in an attempt to open up space.

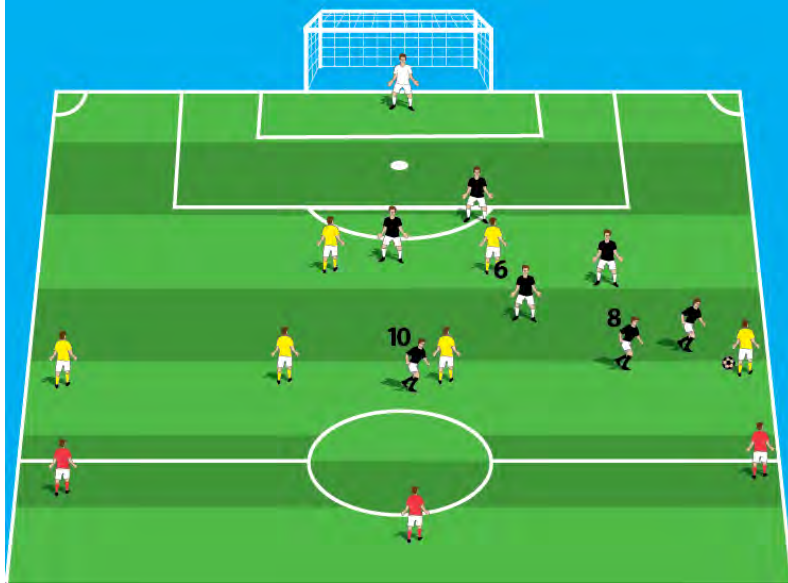
Exercise #3 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Final 3rd)

This exercise is almost the reverse of the previous one in that it sets up the same, just in the defensive third of the field. In working with the triangle make sure the attacking central midfielder does not get drawn back into the 18 yard box abandoning the central attacker. Their main responsibility still remains to support the central attacker, even when they are not in possession. This will make you more dangerous in the counter-attack as the central attacker will always have someone supporting them even if they have two or three defenders around them. It will be easier in this situation to exploit the space behind the defense and create chances. The worst case scenario is you stretch your opponent out and force them to collect possession back in their half allowing your team to re-gain composure and shape and to look to defend farther away from your own goal.



This exercise starts with four defenders and your triangle midfield playing against two attackers and four midfielders. There are three neutral players (one right, one central, and one left) who support the team with possession. The ball begins with the central neutral player who looks to pass it into one of the players attacking the goal. Concentrate on team shape and coordination with the triangle midfield and the

four defenders. Make sure they are focused at keeping a **TIP** on the ball to close central passing lanes, but also that the holding central midfielders are organizing quickly behind the ball and keeping the shape of the triangle. If the ball is served into the box, the holding midfielders may have to mark up man-to-man against the midfielders who may be looking to make runs into the box. The attacking central midfielder looks to stay about halfway between the 18 yard box and the central neutral player as they must look to still support the central attacker. If the ball is cleared, then they would look to either dribble and attack space, or support the central attacker in the game. In this drill, they would look to pass the ball quickly to the central neutral player.



After you have had success in this format for 10-12 minutes and have worked with the triangle midfield to keep their shape and deny central options, add in another forward up top for the attacking team to put more pressure on. Continue to work on the defense and their overall team shape with the defenders adjusting behind the triangle midfield. It is all about shape, coordination and communication for your team to be successful at denying options

for the attacking team. In the first frame you see the general set up of the system with two attacking central midfielders and one holding midfielder. This is done to begin the exercise so that they can work on adjusting quickly, it is not how they would be set if the ball were in the middle of the field. The second frame shows how they would adjust once the ball is played wide. In this frame you see the defender stepping up to force the ball wide. The closest central defender shifts in behind at an angle to support the player pressuring the ball. The weak side central defender shifts in behind both in a central position closer to the near post to act as a sweeper. The weak side wing defender steps up a little at an angle in front of the sweeper to defend not only the forward next to them, but also to defend against a ball that is quickly switched to the weak side for the outside midfield player. The shape of the defense should resemble a check mark. The triangle midfield shifts ball side with the same objective of denying the opponent the ability to play into central options. The ball side attacking central midfielder shifts over to block the central passing lane. If they read an opportunity to double-team the ball to win it immediately, then they will quickly do so. They need to be careful, though, as if they over commit to the pressure they expose the triangle midfield and leave themselves wide open for a ball switched to the opposite side where they would now have superior numbers to attack the goal. The holding midfielder drops in behind and is ready to mark man-to-man should the ball be possessed deep into the defending third of the field. The weak side attacking central midfielder positions themselves so they can quickly close any opposing central midfielder.

Exercise #4 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Italian Shadow Play)

This is a version of shadow play that I picked up when I was in Italy taking a course at Fiorentina, and I use it in variations now very effectively. In the first three drills there was a focus on first getting the triangle midfield used to the demands of defending and what their roles and responsibilities were. As it progressed to the next two exercises you began working on coordinating with either the forwards or defenders in defensive shape. This last exercise is

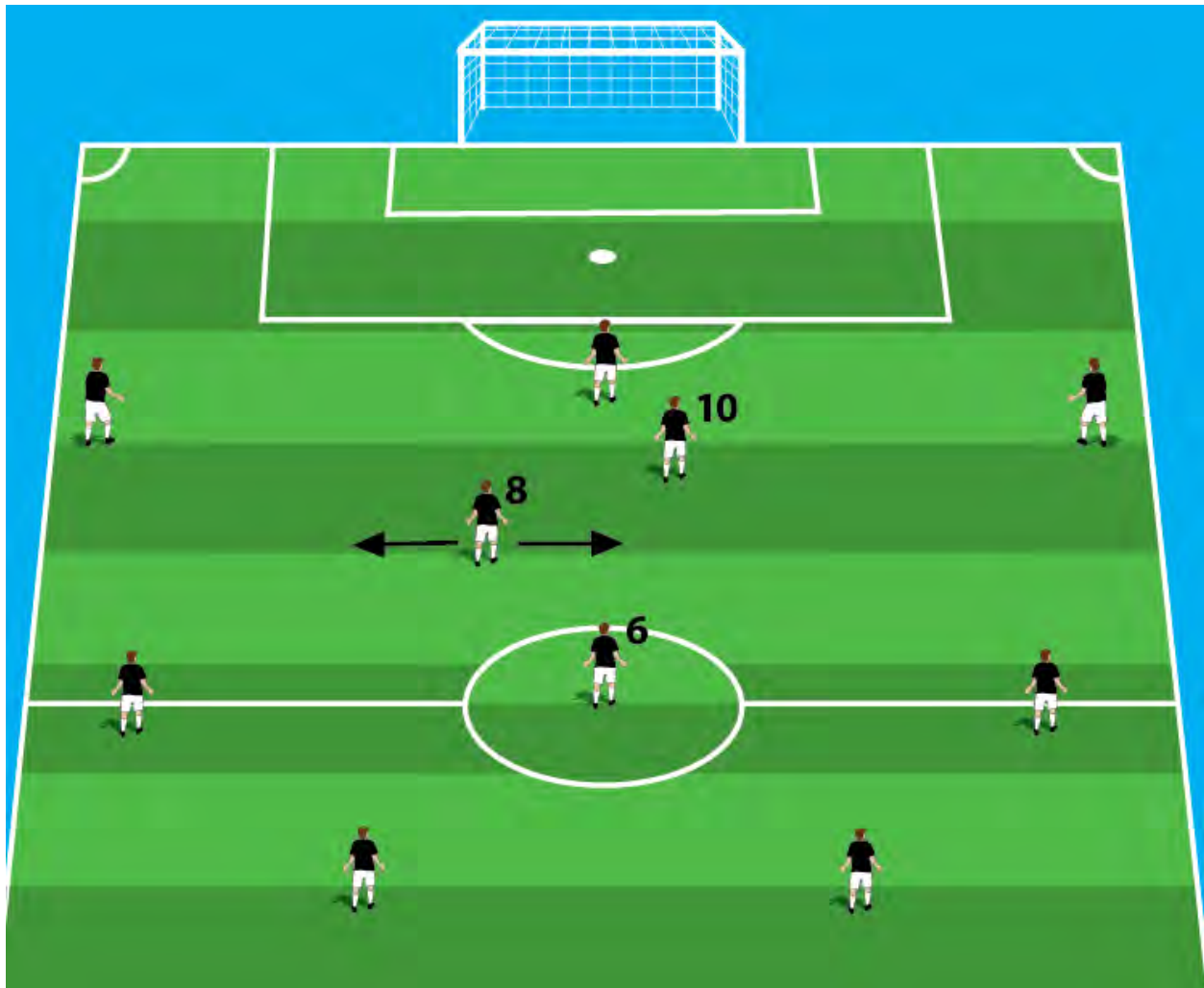
where you put it all together and work on not only the defensive shape of the triangle, but also of the team as a whole.



This diagram shows two teams of 11 set up a full field. If your numbers are restricted, then cut back on the numbers possessing the ball and work primarily on your team and triangle defending and shape. One team is set up with four defenders, the triangle midfield, and three attackers. It is less important how the other team is set up. The second team will possess the ball while the first team will defend and keep

shape. The way it works is that the one team can defend and can intercept passes, but cannot steal the ball from a player. The attacking team must look to beat the defense and score goals. They cannot attack 1v1, but must move the ball away from pressure. If they lose possession, then they stop playing and the other team quickly goes to goal and shoots. Give them a time limit when they intercept the ball and look to go to goal (i.e. 10 seconds to go to goal). Once the play is dead, then the ball starts with the GK on the second team and they look to again possess the ball away from pressure while the defending team keeps their shape behind the ball. Work with the triangle midfield on keeping a **TIP** on the ball and with the holding midfielders on keeping the shape and organization of the triangle while defending. When they win possession, emphasize a quick speed change and encourage them to all get up the field fast as a team to attack the other goal. Once the ball starts again with the GK, have them work on everything you have gone over in the other exercises.

The Triangle Midfield with 1 Attacking Central Midfielder, 1 Holding Central Midfielder, and 1 Roving Central Midfielder



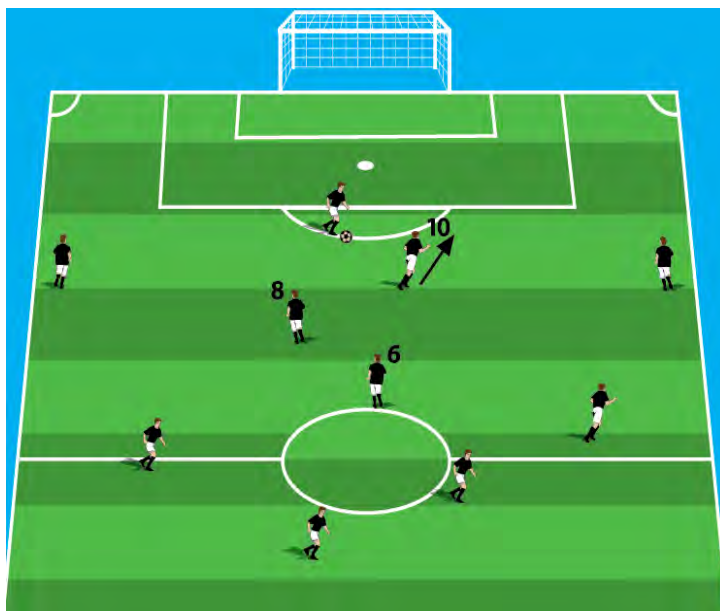
This variation of the 1-4-3-3 is the most recent variation and is starting to be seen more at the college and university levels. The advantage is that you have a true attacking central midfielder and true holding central midfielder, but the advantage of a withdrawn attacking central midfielder and a central player responsible for keeping the shape becomes more difficult to mark and defend. It is an effective switch that can disrupt your opponent's rhythm while still maintaining the same attacking and defending qualities found in both systems. It is almost like having the best of both variations, but it does make it more taxing on the central player and, if you don't have a very quick rover, will often find your triangle central midfielder out of shape and exposed. The rover has to be quick to read and react to the changes in the game. They must have excellent fitness and endurance as they will always be shifting and moving throughout the entire game. It is an excellent variation to use in different moments of the game to off-balance the opposition and confuse them.

As with the other variations of the formation, fitness is in high demand and players must understand this. They must also have an attacking mentality and a desire to dominate and win EVERY ball. They must be focused and disciplined as shape and the coordination of runs is very important. They should have a mentality of RISK as they will look to defend in the opponent's half of the field more than their own, and will give away space behind them. This must also involve a lot of trust among players as they must trust that every player is doing his or her own job when it comes to the system and how they are supposed to play.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (IN POSSESSION)

As with the original formation, I always tell my teams as I am teaching them the triangle midfield; it is a living breathing thing. It is not meant to be rigid in its shape, it requires significant focus and reading when to adjust and fill and where to adjust and fill. In the high school game and youth levels players are focused for maybe 50-60% of the time. At the college level and advanced levels this is where we start demanding more focus, as much as 85-90%, in order for any system to have the success it needs.

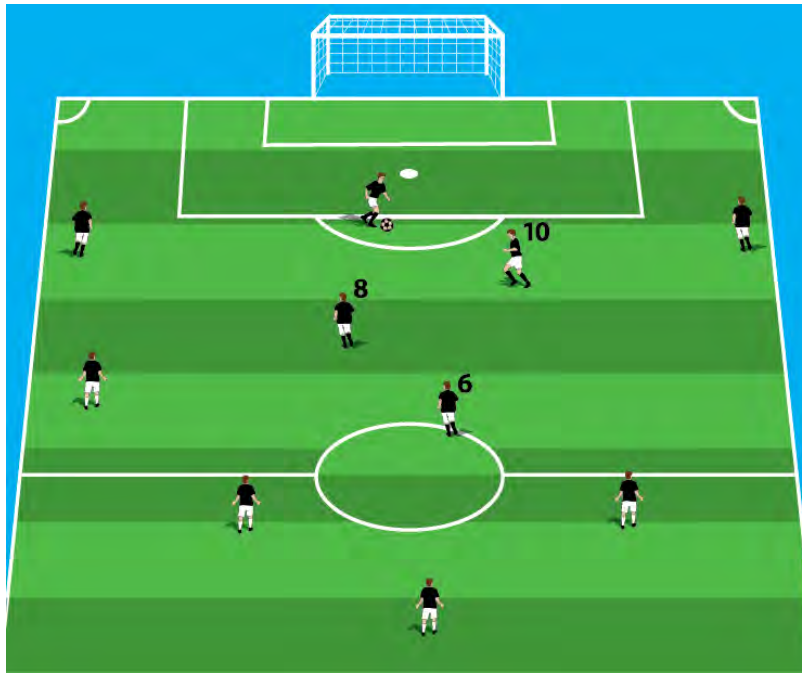
The triangulation of the midfield with one attacking central midfielder, one holding central midfielder and one roving central midfielder now falls to the roving central midfielder. The attacking central midfielder has the responsibility of always supporting and coordinating their movement off of the central attacker. They will always adjust and move off of this player. The holding central midfielder is responsible for remaining central to protect the middle. The roving central midfielder is responsible for shifting and moving to keep the shape of the triangle. In addition, the roving central midfielder reads opportunities in going forward from withdrawn positions when opportunities exist for them to attack. The following will give different examples of how the roving central midfielder will adjust and maintain their shape while adjusting to the movement of the attacking central midfielder and holding central midfielder.



EXAMPLE 1

In the example shown, the central attacker has received the ball around the 18 yard box. The attacking CMF (#10) opposite ball side will make a penetrating run forward while the roving central midfielder(#8) shifts ball side behind the ball to support. The holding central midfielder remains central to support and protect the middle of the field. As the image shows and in what is explained, the triangle midfield in this variation tends to be a little more rigid in that the attacking central midfielder

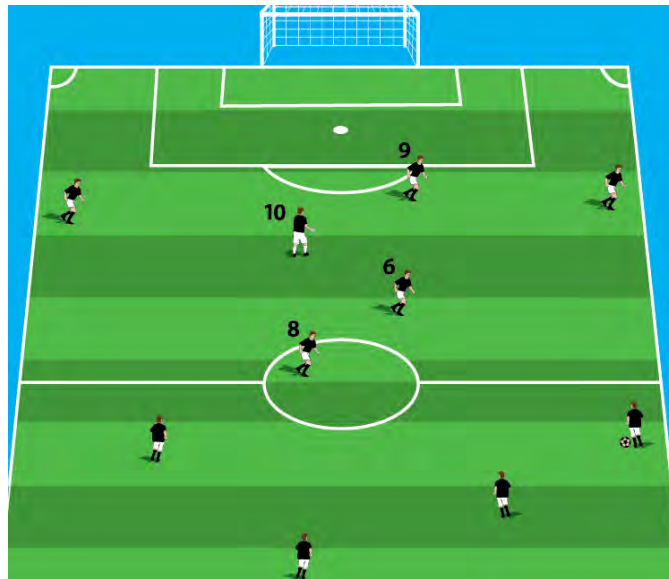
always supports opposite ball side, the roving central midfielder is the one always shifting and moving to first keep the shape of the triangle and second to support behind the ball. The holding central midfielder looks to always remain in a central position. There is less fluidity and movement with this triangle than in the other two variations.



EXAMPLE #2

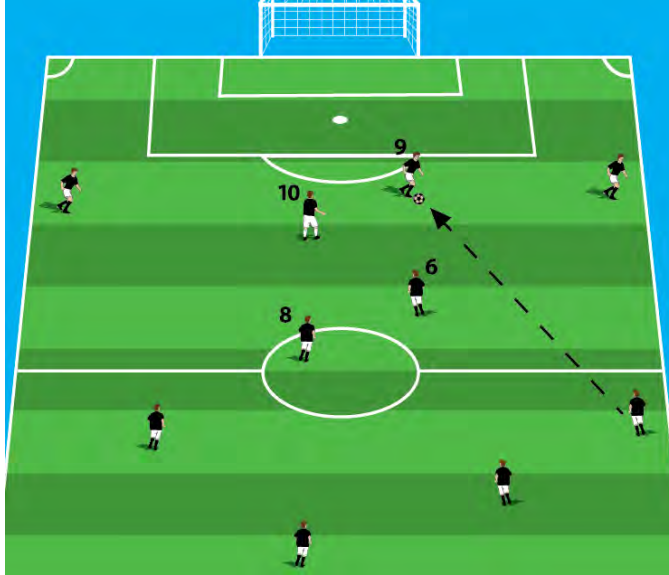
Following the format of the first two variations, this 2nd example also shows the central attacker winning possession around the 18 yard box and the central attacker holding behind the ball instead of making a penetrating run. The central attacker, in the diagram shown, supports the ball weak side. You will also see that the roving central midfielder is supporting the central attacker directly beneath the ball. They would also look for an opportunity to make a penetrating run should

the opportunity exist. This would be even more possible since the attacking central midfielder did not make their penetrating run. The holding central midfielder maintains their position in the middle to support the other two central midfielders, to help keep the shape of the triangle, and to protect the middle of the field. The distances between these three players would also be 12-15 yards.



EXAMPLE #3

In this example, possession starts with the right wing defender and the triangle midfield adjusting to the ball. The first image shows the defender in possession and the central attacker making a run to show for the ball. The attacking central midfielder(#10) supports the ball and the central attacker on the weak side. The roving central midfielder(#8) shifts ball side and supports the central attacker directly beneath the ball. The holding central midfielder(#6) supports the other two players in the triangle while also



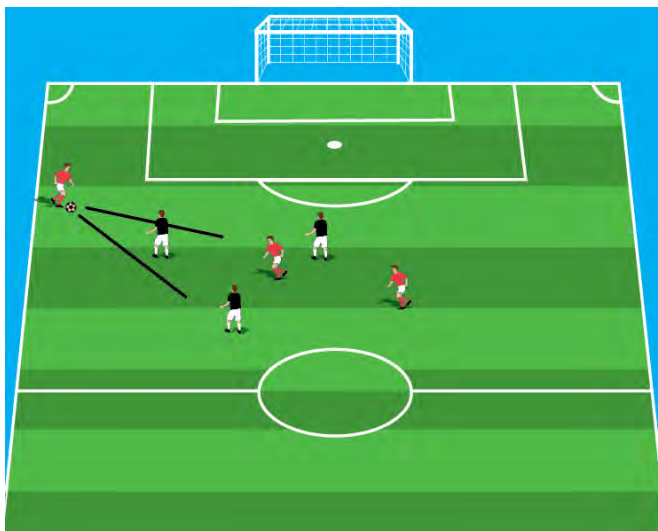
making sure to stay centrally to protect the middle of the field.

In the second image the central attacker has received possession. The attacking central midfielder is now in position to support at an angle to the ball on the weak side. The roving central midfielder shifts under the ball to support and to maintain the shape of the triangle. The holding midfielder maintains their position in the middle of the field while also supporting the other two central midfielders in the triangle. One scenario would have the central attacker passing

immediately to the weak side to the attacking central midfielder and then turning and making a penetrating run towards goal. The attacking central midfielder then has the option of attacking the goal themselves or passing back across and behind the defense to the central attacker. Another option would be to pass the ball wide to the wing attacker who would collect the ball and serve into goal while the central attacker and attacking central midfielder continue their runs to goal. There are many options and possibilities that can occur simply by playing the ball into your central option(#9) when it is available. Conditioning your players to look for this player first is the key to play any system with the triangle midfield.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (OUT OF POSSESSION)

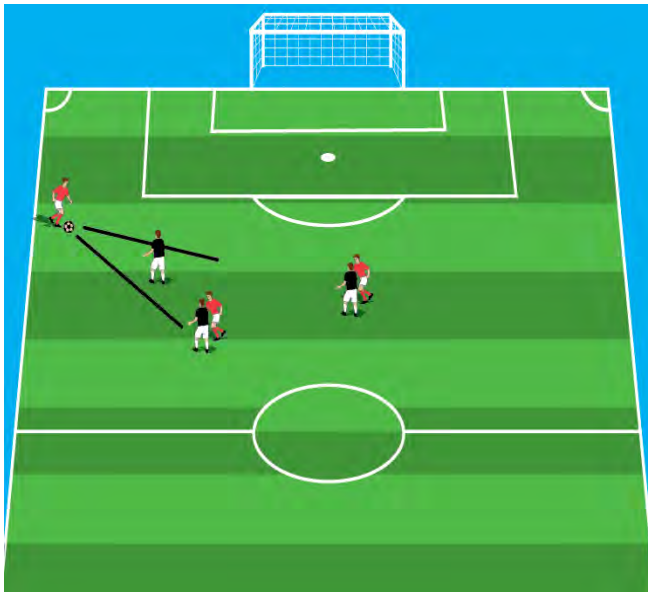
Defending in the triangle midfield is all about denying their playmakers possession of the ball and make other players on their team work to beat you. There are two ways to accomplish this as a defending team:



1) The first method is to defend the central midfield space in a zonal way. This means that you keep the shape of the triangle, but shorten the distances between all three players to prevent your opponent from being able to play through the middle. It is important in this style of defending that you always keep a **TIP** on the ball at all times. That means wherever the ball is there is always a central midfield player from the triangle blocking the passing lane into central options while the other two midfield players keep their shape, but shorten the distance to 8-10

yards. This will force the opposing central midfielders to start moving outside to get the ball, thus disrupting their shape and their game. It is still important that the back two midfielders are aware of the two central midfielders in case they need to adjust slightly to further eliminate them as options, but for the most part, they play zonal and focus on the distance from one another and the space they are defending. Also, in most cases, the player acting as the **TIP** must stay within the width of the 18 yard box and allow other players to do their jobs in defending. If this player gets dragged outside, then the triangle midfield in defending will fall apart and you can be beaten easily. The only case where this player would venture farther out wide is if there is a real danger if they don't (you are losing by a goal late and need the ball back quickly and have to force the play, or your opponent is in a position to hurt you from out there and you need to get immediate pressure on the ball), or if they have cover from another player shifting in to fill their space (i.e. one of the central defenders yells for them to switch or go and one of the holding midfielders shifts to their position).

- 2) The second method is almost opposite in that it combines man-to-man marking with zonal defending. It begins with the same principle of having the triangle midfield player closest to the ball acting as the **TIP**. The other two midfield players support behind as before, but they look to mark man-to-man while still trying to keep shape behind. The two midfielders behind remain aware of the two central midfielders and mark them when they come into their area. It is important that they mark them, but stay behind them also. Do not allow them to get in behind your midfielder or they can gain an advantage in attacking your goal. If they gain possession, then the objective is to force them to play it back and re-set.



In both cases, it is important that the holding midfielders drop back to help the defenders when the opponent has possession in your defending third of the field. If that happens, the attacking central midfielder remains close to the central attacker (within 12-15 yards) so that this player always has support. As stated before, the attacking central midfielder is the **SHADOW STRIKER** and responsible for always supporting the central attacker.

The final comment on defending and triangulation has to do with the rigidity of the triangle midfield. It is important to keep stating that the triangle midfield is a

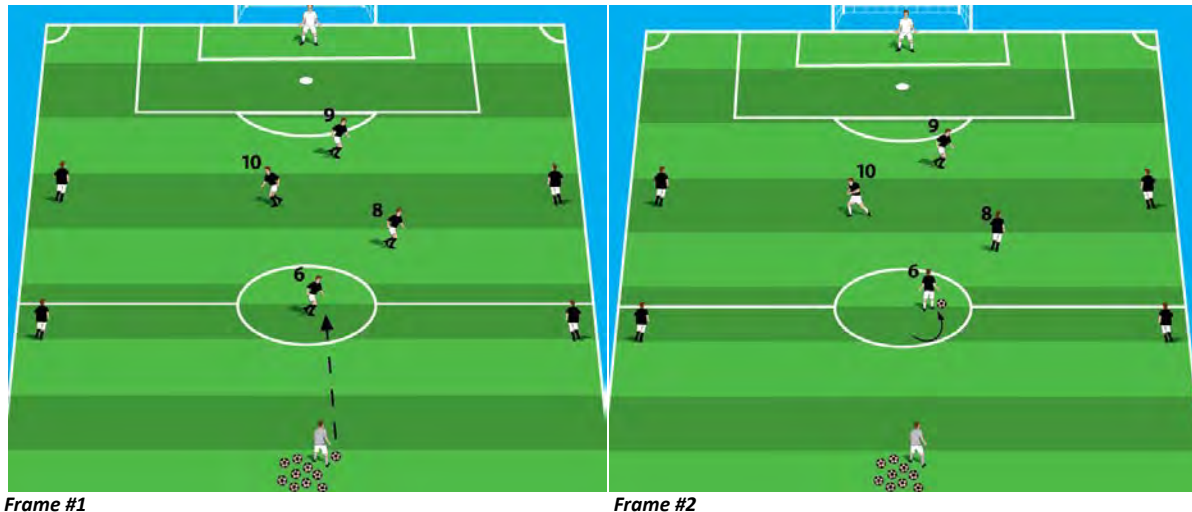
living a breathing thing in possession, but also when adjusting to defend. If your #8 has shifted up to support and possession is lost near the #8, then it makes sense that they become the **TIP** in this situation while the other two players adjust behind him/her. The important thing is that the closest player becomes the **TIP** as quickly as possible while the other two shift quickly behind them.

TRAINING POSSESSION AND PENETRATION

The following represents examples of how to train for possession and/or penetration in a 1-4-3-3 Midfield with two attacking and one holding midfielder. There are a total of four (4) different exercises to accomplish what you need to in order to train or prepare your midfield to play this formation.

The examples used will be very similar to the ones used in prior formations to illustrate their similarities and differences. This is important so that you, as the coach, understand the actual differences in the formations and movements of the players using the same situations and examples. You will see that the training of possession and penetration is essentially the same. However, it is the differences in your own philosophy that will change the impact of every exercise.

Exercise #1 (Possession and Penetration- MF Combinations)



Frame #1- The exercise begins with the coach passing the ball to the feet of the holding central midfielder (#6). In this first frame you will see that the roving central midfielder is moving ball side being sure to get wide enough to open the passing lane to the central attacker (#9). The attacking central midfielder (#10) shifts to the weak side to support the central attacker at angle behind them.

Frame #2- After the holding central midfielder (#6) receives the ball they turn to face their options. Their first option would be to play into the feet of the central attacker (#9), if they're open. If not, then they would look to play it forward at an angle to the attacking central midfielder (#10). The third option would be to play the ball into the feet of the roving central midfielder (#8). Finally, they would play the ball wide to either attacking wing player on either the right or left side. If everything is shut down forward, then they would play the ball wide to one of the supporting wing defenders.

This is the basic setup for this exercise. The next two frames will show you just one pattern that can be run with this. However, there are dozens of different patterns you can run from this basic setup. In addition, begin the exercise with no defenders and work on locating your passes, the movement of the triangle midfielder and other players in the system, and the consistency of play. If you would like to see other examples of different midfield combinations, then please look at another World Class Coaching book, 'Dutch Drills for Total Team Training'.



Moving on to this frame you see that the central attacker (#9) has received the ball while the triangle midfielder has maintained their shape behind the ball. The attacking central midfielder (#10) is in a position to support the central attacker (#9) weak side and at an angle behind the ball. The roving central midfielder (#8) is supporting the central attacker (#9) directly beneath the ball, and the holding central midfielder (#6) remains in a central position to support and keep the shape of the triangle midfield and to protect the middle of the field in case possession is lost and the

opposing team tries to transition into the attacking half of the field.



Once you run the patterns for a few minutes without defensive oppositions, begin to add in the defenders until you have a defensive line with four defenders, two central midfielders that begin inside the triangle to defend the passes, and an additional player to behind the triangle midfielder who adjusts and defends as they want. By increasing the numbers slowly you can work with the triangle midfield to make sure they maintain shape and support. Your objective is to build to the final numbers shown where the play is

8v8 as shown in this diagram.

Exercise #2 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play to Targets)



In this first diagram, the team lines up with 9 players on the field against no opposition. Each touchline at the midfield line has a neutral player with one possessing the ball. The object is for the neutral with the ball to pass it into the team. The team then looks to quickly and cleanly possess the ball and play it to the open neutral player on the opposite side. Work with the triangle midfield to keep their shape and to adjust to the flow of play. Continue this pattern for 5-6 minutes until the team is comfortable with their possession and you feel as if the triangle midfield is doing their job of

keeping shape and adjusting. Make sure the players are moving and adjusting in a realistic fashion and as close to game speed as possible. Emphasize quick and clean possession before pressure is added. You may want to build in a pattern or purpose with possession. For example, the ball must be played through either the attacking central midfielder or central attacker before it can be played to the opposite side neutral player. Give them a purpose with possession, but make sure to focus on the shape of the triangle midfield as well as the teams' overall shape and movement.



This second diagram now sees the addition of pressure. The focus of the exercise is the same, to possess the ball quickly and cleanly from one neutral player to the neutral player on the opposite side. The opposition added is in three lines also playing a 1-2-1 formation. Having four players with shape to apply pressure will still give a significant advantage, but it will force them to remain focus and to seek out options away from pressure. Each goal on the full-sized field also has a goalkeeper and can be used to either maintain possession or deal with a quick counter attack. The objective of

the defenders is to win possession and attack one of the goals. They can choose to attack either goal, depending upon which one gives them a better advantage. If the team possessing the ball from neutral to neutral loses possession, they should work quickly to win it back and to deny any possibility of an attack on either goal. As the coach, remember to focus on the triangle midfield and your team shape. They should look to play the ball quickly and cleanly and to be safe in possession (protect the ball and don't give it away). They should look to still play with a purpose, and it is a good idea to continue to emphasize playing through a certain player or by using a certain combination before playing into the next neutral player.



You should continue to build in opposing players to a 2-4-2. You won't go directly from a 1-2-1 to this formation, so be sure to build to this slowly so you can continue to work with the triangle midfield on their shape. Once you have reached this formation you will start to see breakdowns as they begin to force the play. Make sure you work with the team on some mental toughness and training exercises and remain positive yourself in the process. Work with the players on breathing as they play and in remaining clam under pressure. Give them

simple choices in possession and continue to encourage them to play the ball quickly so that the pressure never becomes too great. Focus the team on constant movement and shape, especially in the triangle midfield. Give them the responsibility for possession and its quality. Remind them that playing quickly and cleanly, as before, is what they need to continue to do. You will find that if you get them to breathe normally and focus on remaining calm and not panicking, that the quality of your team possession will significantly improve in this stage. As in the previous progression, if the opposition wins possession give them the ability to attack either goal as quickly as they can. To begin to focus your team on defensive responsibilities within the system as most teams you will play will try to counter attack you quickly, give a quick time limit on their ability to attack a goal (i.e. when you win possession from the team playing to the neutrals you have 10 seconds to create a shot at goal). In these situations, work with the team on transitional play to defending quickly and work with them on team pressure and marking. Work with the triangle midfield on their responsibilities with keeping a **TIP** on the ball and the other two midfielders getting shape quickly behind them. I would also recommend keeping your possession objective in this progression so that the team is continually looking for that option. My recommendation at this stage is that you are looking to play through the central

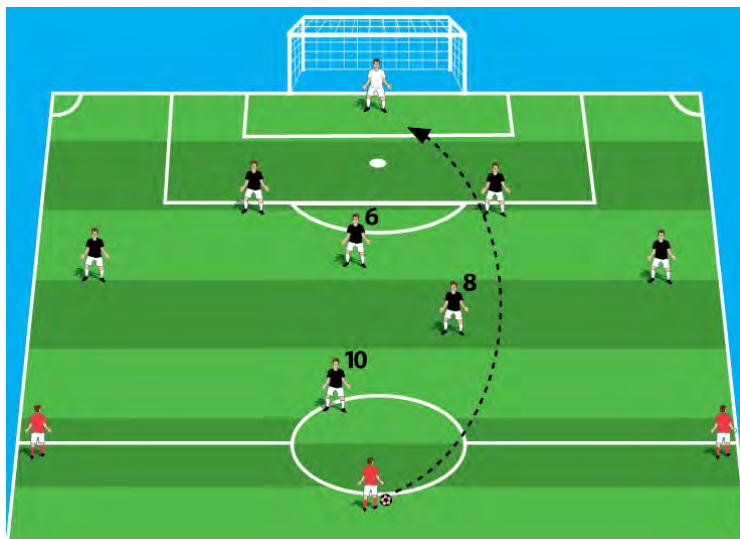
attacker as this will always be your first option when in the games. Making your exercises as game realistic as possible is very important as you build towards the full game.



The final progression is to build to 11v11 while still using the neutral players. Have one team work on playing through the neutral players before they can attack one of the goals. You now specify direction for each team. The team playing through the neutral players defends one goal and attacks another goal. The defending team when they win possession can quickly attack the one goal, but they are still defending one goal all of the time. This way you are working with your team more on shape and quality of play than on

finishing. Their play is more indirect. To change the game slightly, make the team you are working with attack the goal within 15 seconds of receiving the ball back from the neutral player. This way they can also feel the pressure of time and work on changing their speed of attacking play. You don't want them always playing indirect and developing a slower more sluggish attitude towards attacking and finishing.

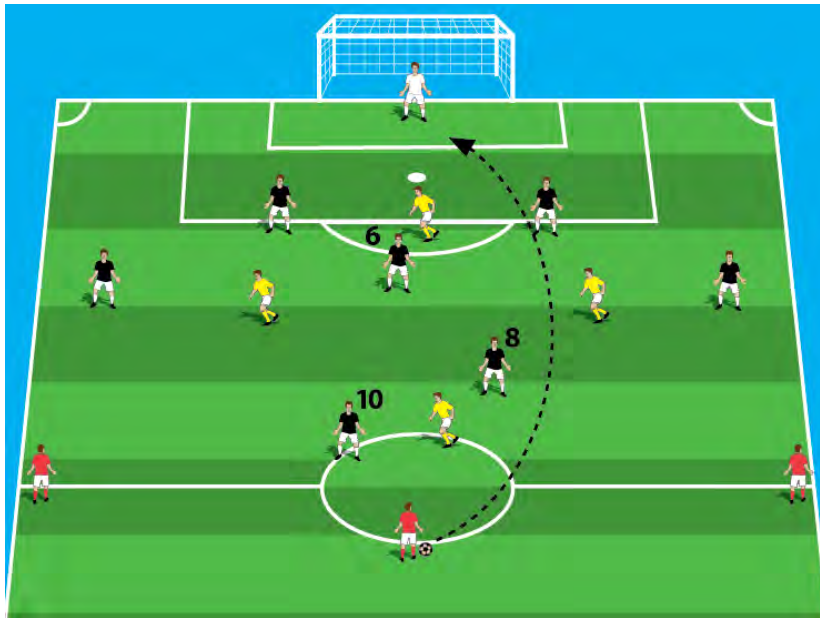
Exercise #3 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play Building out of the Back)



The exercise begins as shadow play with the team starting by building out of the back to forward targets. Focus on team shape and quick and clean possession as the team builds the ball to the targets. Encourage communication as they build up. Communication begins with talking, but it ultimately comes down to listening. The exercise starts with the central target driving the ball in the air back to the goalkeeper. The team quickly comes back and gets their shape as the goalkeeper then

looks to distribute the ball. Once the ball is distributed the team needs to adjust and support the ball. The ball needs to be played quickly and accurately until it is played to one of the targets. If the ball is played to a wide target the ball is then quickly played to the middle target who then receives and then drives the ball again to the goalkeeper. It is important to focus on the movement of the roving central midfielder and their ability to keep the shape of the triangle while also maintaining open passing lanes for the central attacker (#9) and the attacking central midfielder (#10). In a situation where the ball is being possessed by the opposing team in your own defensive 3rd the roving midfielder may need to drop back to mark. In possession, they must keep shape and be quick to receive and play into options.

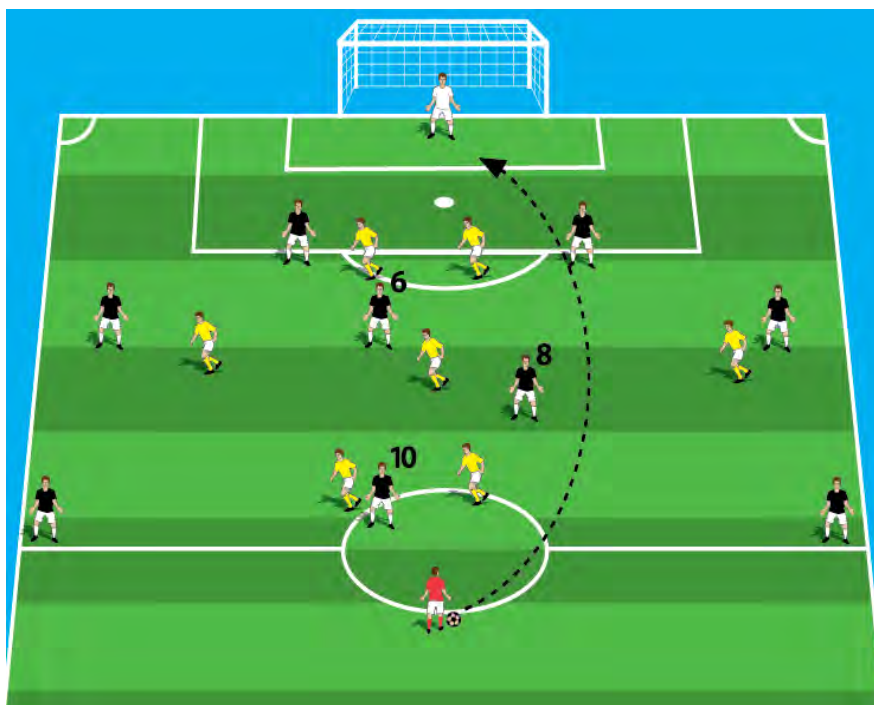
The drill is continuous.



After approximately 5-6 minutes of playing with no opposition, add in 4 opposing players in a 1-2-1 formation. This way there are three lines of opposition as they would find in the game. Continue to work with the triangle midfield on supporting the ball. Remind the holding midfielder that they look to support the ball at an angle and look to also create a triangle like shape with the two central defenders. They also look to support at an

angle so that other options forward are opened up. When they gain possession they need to always look to move the ball away from pressure very quickly and effectively, but must also be aware of where their first option is and play it as soon as it is available (central attacker). The holding midfielder must always look to play quickly (1-2 touch) away from pressure. The attacking central midfielder needs to be aware first support the central attacker and to support the ball weak side, but also to be ready to quickly move forward as the faster you transition between the different thirds of the field the more advantage you will have in your initial attack in the actual game. Work with the roving central midfielder to keep the shape of the triangle and to constantly move to keep the passing lanes open to the central attacker (#9) and the attacking central midfielder (#10). If the defenders win the ball in this exercise they should look to quickly go at goal and try to score.

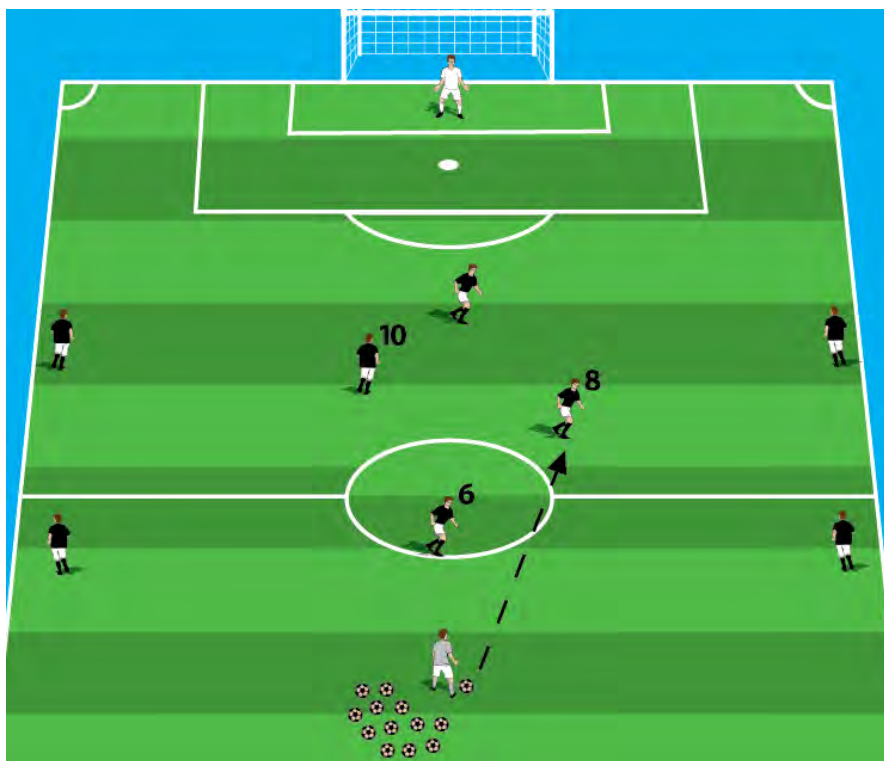
In the final progression switch the two target players on the outside and put them with the team building out of the back. The only remaining target player will be the central target. Increase the opposing numbers to where they are playing a 2-3-2 formation with 7 players.



This will be more difficult for the team to build out and it is important for you as the coach to remind the players to keep calm and focus on their breathing. Then make sure that the team is shifting and staying organized, and that the triangle midfield is supporting the ball. It is very important that possession is quick and clean, but that players have their heads up and are reading the environment so that they

are not making mistakes in possession and giving it away too easily. The main objective with possession in the back is always to play simple and safe, but to always protect the ball.

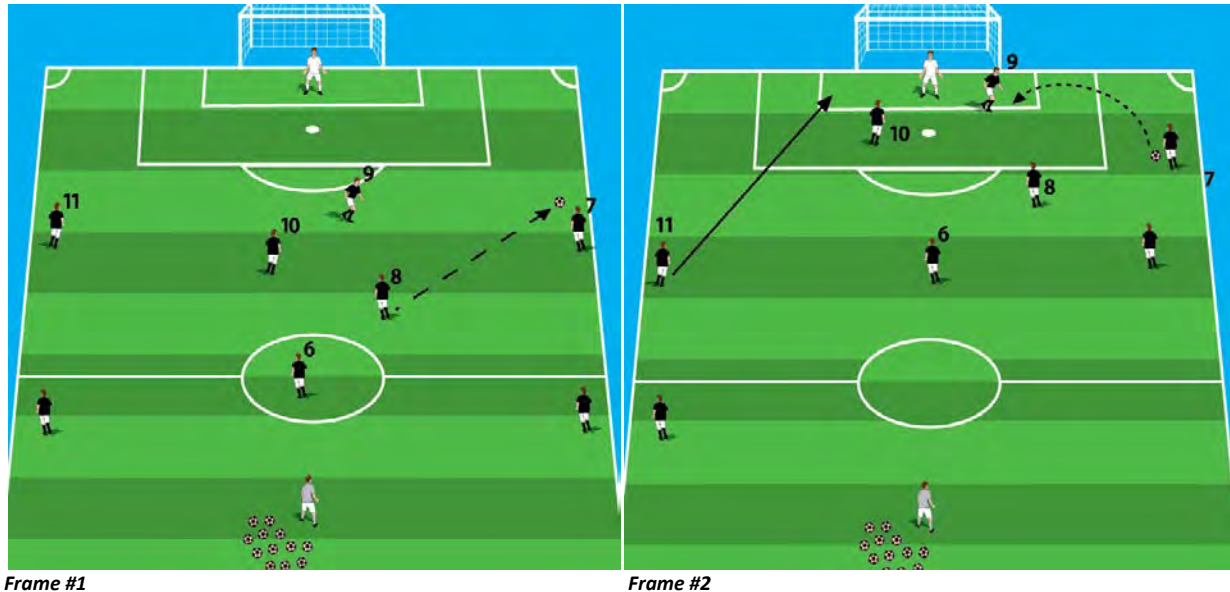
Exercise #4 (Possession and Penetration- Runs to Goal and Framing the Box)



This series of exercises focuses on quick play through the holding central midfielder and roving central midfielder, then out wide to the wing attackers. The remaining attacking players work on framing the box and serves on goal. Everything mentioned in the previous three exercises applies here as well. Possession must be quick, clean, and accurate. The team must adjust to support possession. It is important that the

triangle midfield focuses on the timings of their runs and their shape. The exercise begins with

the coach passing the ball into either the holding central midfielder or the roving central midfielder. The holding central midfielder or roving central midfielder receives possession, turns and passes the ball wide to the wing attacker ball side. The wing attacker gains possession and serves the ball into the box. The roving central midfielder supports the ball while the attacking central midfielder makes the run on goal to the penalty spot towards the back post. The central attacker always looks to make a run near post. Begin the exercise as shadow play and work on the runs and the timing of the runs. The above diagram shows how the exercise is set up.



Frame #1- The drill begins with the coach passing the ball into either the roving central midfielder or the holding central midfielder. The roving central midfielder turns and passes the ball out wide to the wing attacker, then starts to support the ball they just played.

Frame #2- The wing attacker gains possession of the ball, takes a touch, then looks to drive a serve into the box while the rest of the players make their organized runs to goal. The attacking central midfielder makes a run at goal while the central attacker makes the run near post. The holding central midfielder remains in a central position to keep the shape of the triangle while also looking to protect the middle of the field in case possession is lost.

After working with the runs for 10-12 minutes in shadow play add in opposing players. Begin with adding all four defenders along with two midfielders centrally to defend. Set the defenders up 35 yards from goal so that they have to recover and defend at the same time. The coach starts by passing the ball into either the roving central midfielder (#8) or the holding central midfielder (#6). The holding central midfielder (#6) receives and turns and plays a through ball splitting the defenders. The wing attacker on that side makes the run and gains possession. The defenders are not allowed to defend until the attackers cross the line of cones. They can then drop and defend as aggressively as they want. This will give the attackers enough of a start so that they can be successful most of the time. If the defenders are having too much success, then start them 3-5 yards back to give the attackers more of a chance to gain



possession and frame the box. Work with the triangle midfield on their shape adjusting to the ball, as before.

These four exercises offer complete sessions and suggested progressions of other exercises where you could easily develop another 5 or 6 additional sessions from it. As you can see, all of the exercises focus on coaching from the game. The first exercise focuses on combining possession and penetration with different midfield

combinations. There are more than 30 different combinations that can be used with this one exercise. The second exercise focuses mainly on possession and protecting the ball using indirect play. The third exercise works on building out of the back and using different combinations to play into targets. The fourth exercise works on penetration and framing the box using quick technical speed of play. The coaching points remain consistent throughout the four exercises and should be consistent in your direction to the triangle midfield as they learn and develop within this system.

TRAINING THE DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Defending is about accomplishing two things:

- 1) Keeping your opponent out of the middle or in switching the play through the midfield and
- 2) Keeping the central midfielders of the opposing team (their playmakers) the ability to possess the ball in the central part of the midfield.

These are the two main responsibilities of the triangle midfield. You would accomplish these through either playing your triangle midfield in a zonal way or by using two of the midfielders to mark man-to-man. The forward midfielder would act as a screen to block the passing lane into the opposing central midfielders.

The following four drills will allow you to focus your triangle midfield defending using either structure. It is up to you to bring out and emphasize the important aspects of the triangle

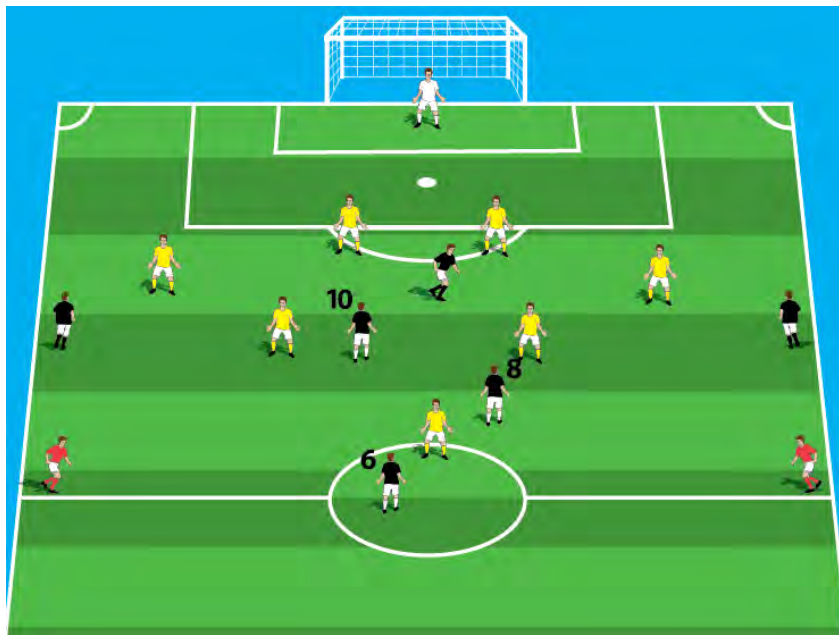
midfield defending. The four exercises are done within the game and will focus on a different aspect of the game, be it the attacking third, middle third, defending third, or overall team shape. The coaching points will remain consistent throughout all four exercises.

Exercise #1 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Play In and Out of the Triangle)

Since the main purpose of the triangle midfield is to deny the central midfielders possession in the central midfield, and to deny the opposing team the ability to transition through the middle of the field, this exercise focuses on working specifically on that concept.

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In this diagram, the team attacking the goal has the triangle midfield along with three attackers in their normal shape.

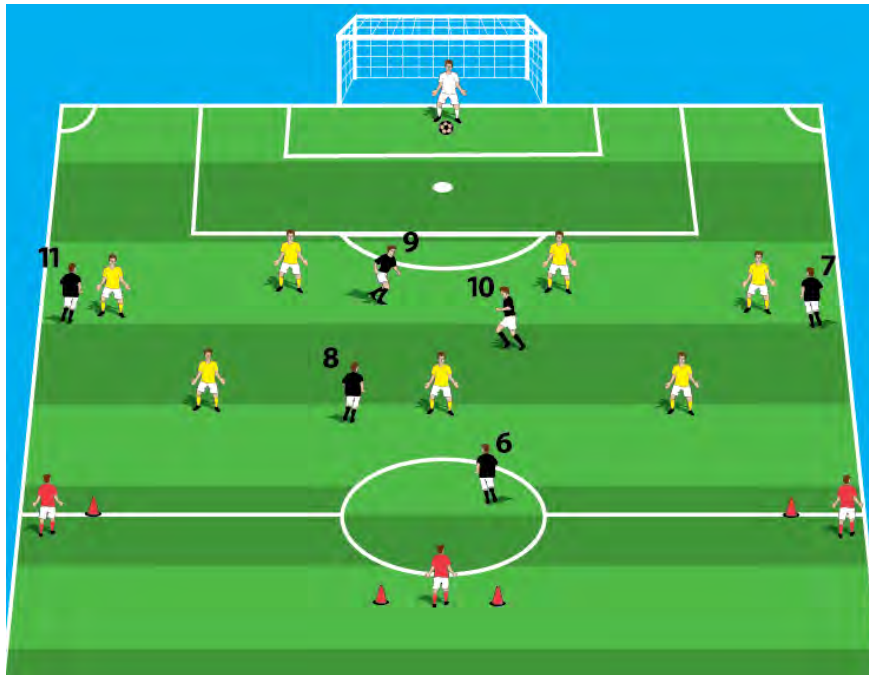


There are two neutral players, one on the left at midfield and the other on the right at midfield. They would act as supporting wing defenders when this team has possession and support them as they try to attack the goal. The other team has four defenders in the back along with three midfielders. It is important that one of these midfielders is positioned inside the triangle at all times. When this team wins

the ball the neutral players support them as they try to pass the ball into the player inside the triangle and out again. The score for them only counts if they are able to pass into the player while they are inside the triangle and then they pass it out to another player successfully. The triangle midfield will get a lot of work in this drill and will not always be successful. It is important to remind them that their job is to prevent the other team from coming inside. To do this they must always keep a **TIP** on the ball to eliminate an open passing lane into the player inside. The holding midfielder and the roving central midfielder must be quick to adjust and pick up other players. They must also be ready to switch roles to become the **TIP** should the ball be played to an area where the attacking central midfielder cannot get there in time. The most important thing is to close this passing lane as soon as possible. Be sure to stop and make coaching points often so that players understand that their shape in the triangle midfield is absolutely important. It is also important to give coaching points often as this exercise is very

demanding with fitness and will wear players down quickly seriously diminishing the quality of the exercise. Encourage constant communication between the triangle midfielders and make sure the roving central midfielder is keeping the shape of the triangle. Players need to talk but, more importantly, they need to listen to one another and react quickly or they will get frustrated easily. This is a great exercise to begin with as you introduce the triangle midfield defending. Players quickly get the idea of the demands and work rate required, along with how organized and unified the triangle midfield must be in order for the team to be successful. The players need to have a level of aggressiveness and determination that is unmatched. They have to have an immediate desire to win the ball back immediately, and not to just deny the opponent the ability to penetrate through the middle or the ability to move forward. They must have the attitude that they don't want the opponent to have possession of the ball at all. This is a unique mentality that can be trained, but must be demanded at every moment of training and play.

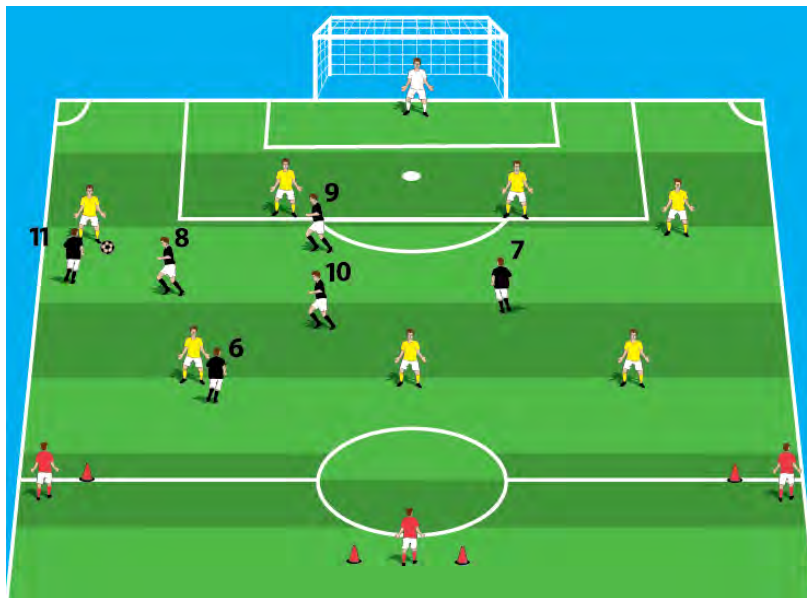
Exercise #2 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Attacking 3rd)



I prefer to start in the midfield, then switch to up top because if the system with a triangle midfield is executed properly you will find the game happening more in the opponent's half of the field than in yours. This exercise is similar to the first one and similar to the original formation, but does have important differences.

The team attacking the goal has the triangle midfield and three

attackers. The team building out from their own goal has four defenders and three midfielders. There are also three supporting target players for the team building out of the back. The play begins with the GK passing the ball out to one of the defenders. They look to keep possession and pass it to one of the target players as quickly and as cleanly as possible. The team defending the ball works on putting the other team into a position where they will lose the ball and they can attack the goal. The forwards job is to cut off the outside lanes and force the ball inside. The central attacker looks to support the defending forward on the wing and, when possible, double-team the ball. The triangle midfield denies passes into the central options and prepares to attack the goal as soon as their team wins possession. It is a coordinated effort in defending and can only work if everyone is doing their job. Continue to emphasize to the



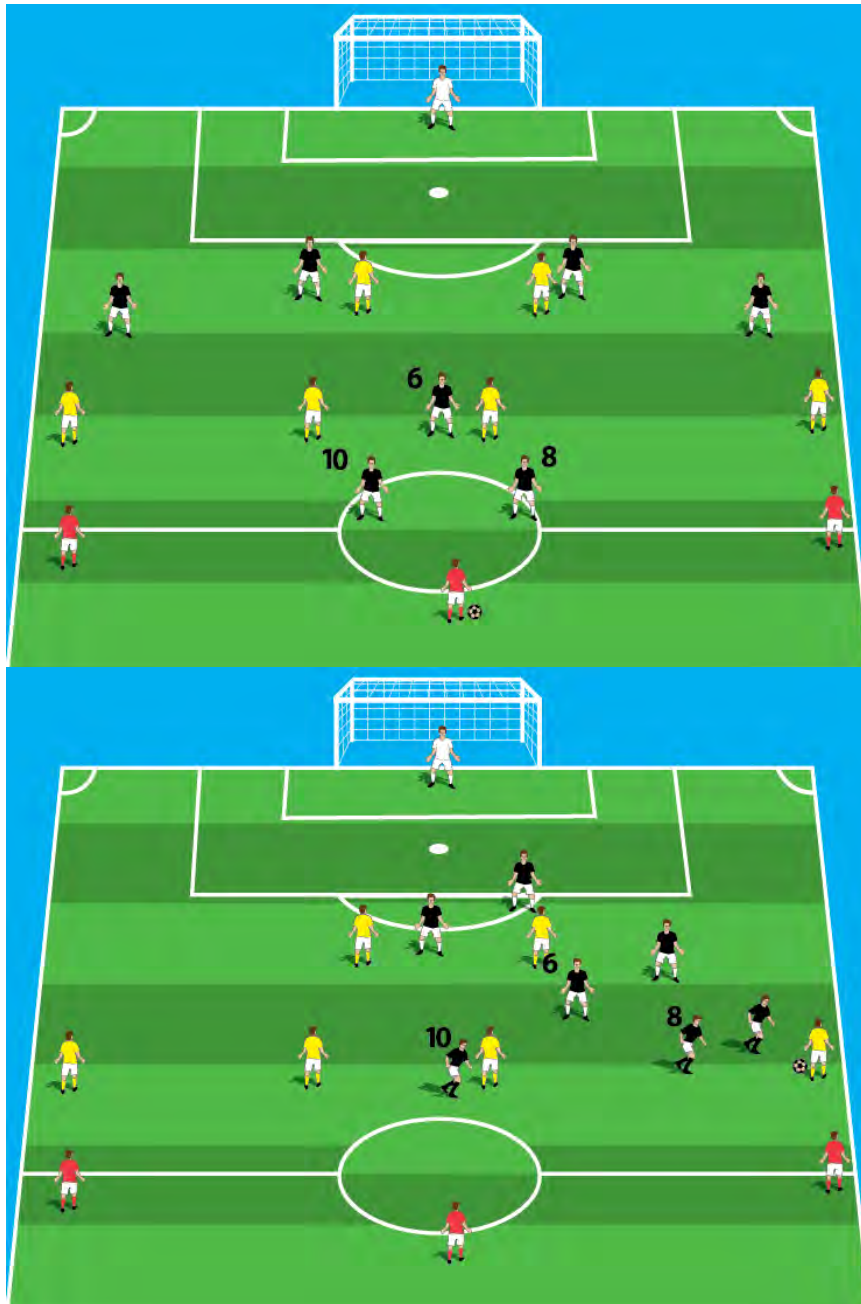
triangle midfield that they must adjust and react quickly. The holding midfielders are responsible for keeping the defensive shape and supporting the forwards as they defend. The attacking central midfielder looks to keep a **TIP** on the ball to close the passing lane. They must also be prepared to attack the space vacated centrally towards goal, if possession is won. This would be when the opponent is most vulnerable and goals can be scored. This

is an effective formula used by Barcelona and one reason why they are so dangerous when they don't have possession; they are quick in transition. Keep the triangle midfield focused and calm, but they need to be ready to react quickly as the environment changes. In the first frame you see the triangle midfield in their normal position of one attacking central midfielder, one roving central midfielder and one holding central midfielder. They are in position to react quickly to deny penetration and play into central options. The second frame shows the ball played out wide to a supporting wing defender. The left wing attacker (#11) immediately steps to pressure the ball inside towards the triangle midfield. The central attacker shifts over to close the distance between the wing defender with possession and the supporting central defender. The weak side attacker (#7) drops in towards the middle and behind the central attacker to protect from a ball attempting to be switched to the opposite side of the field. They need to be in position to defend against a ball played to the weak side wing defender or opposite side outside midfielder. The roving central midfielder shifts over to close the passing lane to any central options. If possible, they may look to double-team the ball if they sense panic in the player with possession. They should not just rush right in, though, as the player could beat the entire triangle midfield with just one pass. The attacking central midfielder shifts over to shifts over to a distance of between 10-12 yards and slightly behind the roving central midfielder pressuring the ball. The holding central midfielder would also shift ball side while also being aware of any midfielders trying to find a seam. If this happens, then they would step up to mark that player. They would not continue to follow the player, though, if they rotate out of the seam as they could be attempting to pull the holding midfielder out of the middle in an attempt to open up space.

Exercise #3 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Final 3rd)

This exercise is almost the reverse of the previous one in that it sets up the same, just in the defensive third of the field. In working with the triangle make sure the attacking central midfielder does not get drawn back into the 18 yard box abandoning the central attacker. Their

main responsibility still remains to support the central attacker, even when they are not in possession. This will make you more dangerous in the counter-attack as the central attacker will always have someone supporting them even if they have two or three defenders around them. It will be easier in this situation to exploit the space behind the defense and create chances. The worst case scenario is you stretch your opponent out and force them to collect possession back in their half allowing your team to re-gain composure and shape and to look to defend farther away from your own goal.



This exercise starts with four defenders and your triangle midfield playing against two attackers and four midfielders. There are three neutral players (one right, one central, and one left) who support the team with possession. The ball begins with the central neutral player who looks to pass it into one of the players attacking the goal. Concentrate on team shape and coordination with the triangle midfield and the four defenders. Make sure they are focused at keeping a **TIP** on the ball to close central passing lanes, but also that the roving central midfielder and the holding central midfielder are organizing quickly behind the ball and keeping the shape of the triangle. If the ball is served into the box, the holding midfielder must drop in to mark man-to-man while the roving central midfielder needs

to read the opposition's attack to determine if they have to drop and mark man-to-man. The attacking central midfielder looks to stay about halfway between the 18 yard box and the central neutral player as they must look to still support the central attacker. If the ball is

cleared, then they would look to either dribble and attack space, or support the central attacker in the game. In this drill, they would look to pass the ball quickly to the central neutral player. After you have had success in this format for 10-12 minutes and have worked with the triangle midfield to keep their shape and deny central options, add in another forward up top for the attacking team to put more pressure on. Continue to work on the defense and their overall team shape with the defenders adjusting behind the triangle midfield. It is all about shape, coordination and communication for your team to be successful at denying options for the attacking team. In the first frame you see the general set up of the system with the attacking central midfielder, the roving central midfielder and one holding midfielder. This is done to begin the exercise so that they can work on adjusting quickly, it is not how they would be set if the ball were in the middle of the field. The second frame shows how they would adjust once the ball is played wide. In this frame you see the defender stepping up to force the ball wide. The closest central defender shifts in behind at an angle to support the player pressuring the ball. The weak side central defender shifts in behind both in a central position closer to the near post to act as a sweeper. The weak side wing defender steps up a little at an angle in front of the sweeper to defend not only the forward next to them, but also to defend against a ball that is quickly switched to the weak side for the outside midfielder player. The shape of the defense should resemble a check mark. The triangle midfield shifts ball side with the same objective of denying the opponent the ability to play into central options. The roving central midfielder shifts over to block the central passing lane. If they read an opportunity to double-team the ball to win it immediately, then they will quickly do so. They need to be careful, though, as if they over commit to the pressure they expose the triangle midfield and leave themselves wide open for a ball switched to the opposite side where they would now have superior numbers to attack the goal. The holding midfielder drops in behind and is ready to mark man-to-man should the ball be possessed deep into the defending third of the field. The attacking central midfielder positions themselves so they can quickly close any opposing central midfielder.

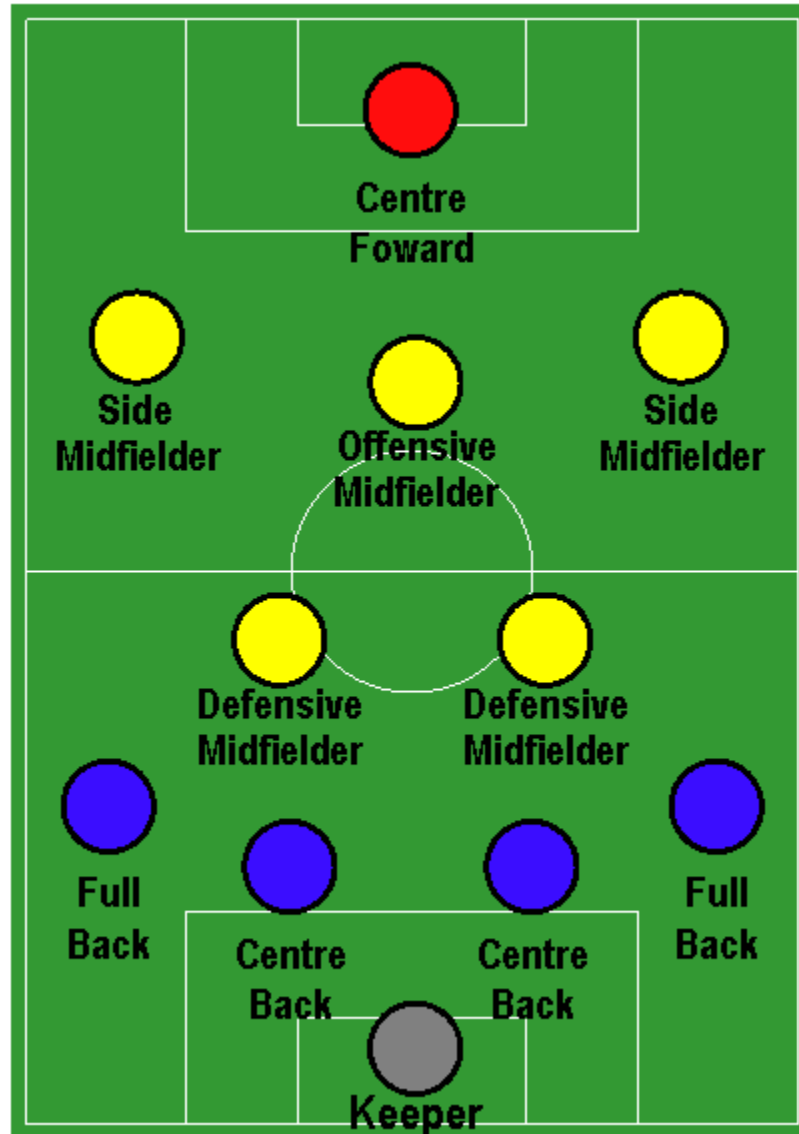
Exercise #4 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Italian Shadow Play)



This is a version of shadow play that I picked up when I was in Italy taking a course at Fiorentina, and I use it in variations now very effectively. In the first three drills there was a focus on first getting the triangle midfield used to the demands of defending and what their roles and responsibilities were. As it progressed to the next two exercises you began working on coordinating with either the forwards or defenders in defensive shape. This last exercise is where you put it all together and work on not only the defensive shape of the

triangle, but also of the team as a whole. This diagram shows two teams of 11 set up a full field. If your numbers are restricted, then cut back on the numbers possessing the ball and work primarily on your team and triangle defending and shape. One team is set up with four defenders, the triangle midfield, and three attackers. It is less important how the other team is set up. The second team will possess the ball while the first team will defend and keep shape. The way it works is that the one team can defend and can intercept passes, but cannot steal the ball from a player. The attacking team must look to beat the defense and score goals. They cannot attack 1v1, but must move the ball away from pressure. If they lose possession, then they stop playing and the other team quickly goes to goal and shoots. Give them a time limit when they intercept the ball and look to go to goal (i.e. 10 seconds to go to goal). Once the play is dead, then the ball starts with the GK on the second team and they look to again possess the ball away from pressure while the defending team keeps their shape behind the ball. Work with the triangle midfield on keeping a **TIP** on the ball and with the holding midfielders on keeping the shape and organization of the triangle while defending. When they win possession, emphasize a quick speed change and encourage them to all get up the field fast as a team to attack the other goal. Once the ball starts again with the GK, have them work on everything you have gone over in the other exercises.

1-4-2-3-1 FORMATION



- The Triangle Midfield consists of 1 Attacking Central Midfielder and 2 Holding Central Midfielders
 - *How to Triangulate the Midfield*
 - *Training Possession and Penetration*
 - *Training Defensive Responsibilities*

This formation has become one of the most popular formations in the university game today, especially in the women's game. It can also be found at the international club levels as teams like Barcelona have adjusted to it to combat other teams trying to attack their game. It offers some of the same benefits as the 1-4-3-3, but gives a little more safety by having outside midfielders in the formation. Like all systems, this system was created to combat the functions of other formations. The concern in why it was created came about because of two situations:

- 1) Many teams were playing the 1-4-3-3 formation and different variations were being born. It became the most common formation at the university and college levels, especially with women's programs. Also, at the international levels, the best professional club teams were also playing a 1-4-3-3 formation or version of it. Countries like Holland and Spain had dedicated their philosophy around playing the 1-4-3-3 and that their better professional clubs would play this formation (i.e. AFC Ajax and FC Barcelona). Out of necessity other clubs began looking for ways to combat this system and philosophy so that they could also experience success at the top levels of football.
- 2) The Brazilians began to dominate world football with something of their own approach called a Brazilian Box Midfield. Their dominance was so complete that they once held the #1 world ranking for almost 7 years straight. The formation that had dominated the world stage and international football was now being dominated using a more creative and fluid system. It became important to find a solution that would allow other countries and international clubs to close the gap and allow them to be more competitive on both levels.

It has become a system that is difficult to break down in that it provides four layers in the formation as opposed to the normal three layers found in most systems. It also provides more stability in the midfield positions because it has wide midfielders built into the formation whereas the 1-4-3-3 does not. It still dominates the central midfield with three central midfielders and provides more protection in the defensive third with two holding midfielders.

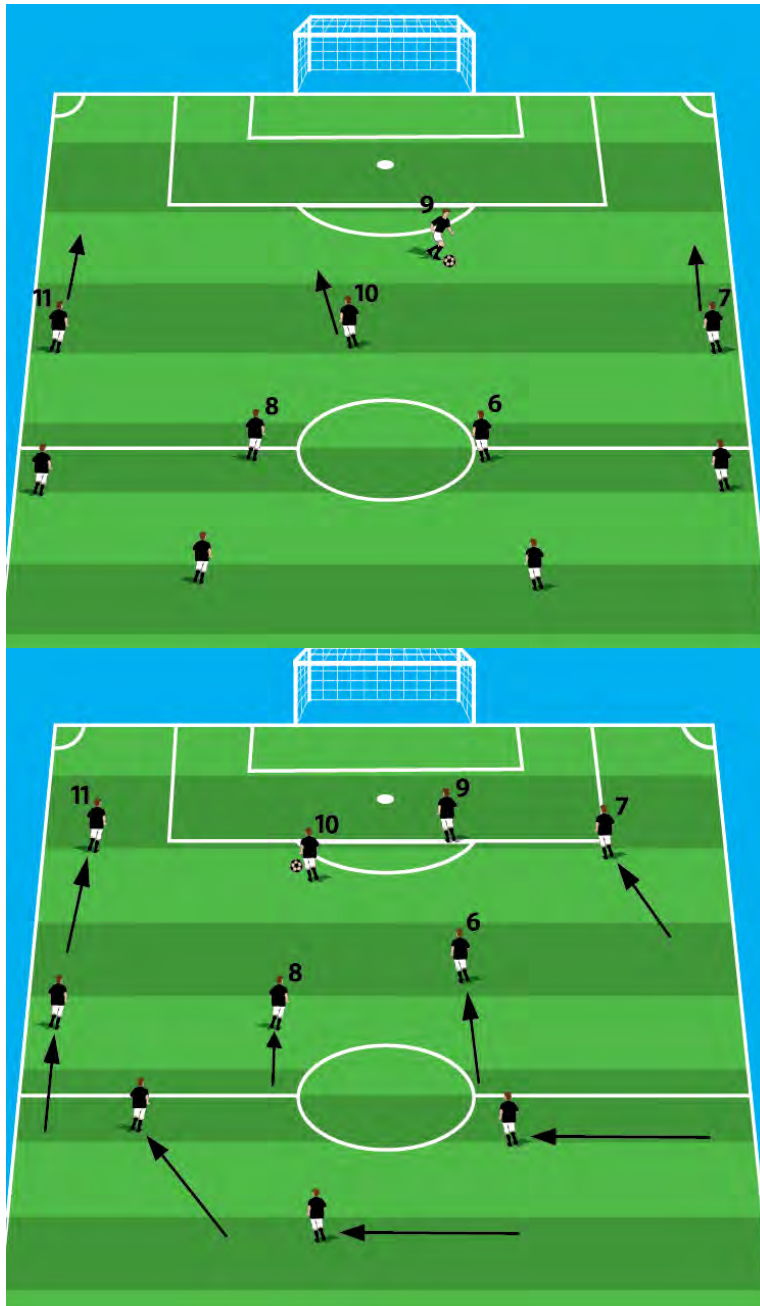
HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (IN POSSESSION)

The same principles of organizing and creating the triangle apply as is the same with similar formations using the triangle. The difference here is that the two holding central midfielders are more defensive in their movements and actions. It also dictates how the central defenders would play as there is not a need for one of them to shift forward and support. It gives more freedom to the attacking central midfielder to move and attack forward knowing there is more presence in the midfield.

The principles are the same in triangulating the midfield in that the attacking central midfielder (#10) acts as a shadow striker supporting the movements and runs of the central attacker (#9). The holding central midfielders (#6 and #8) will adjust to the movements of the attacking central midfielder, but will always keep their priority as protecting and filling the middle of the field. They will still be involved in the attack, but their movements are more conservative and

involve less risk in their forward actions. They still look to maintain the proper distance of 12-15 yards from one another when their team has possession. In this formation they will have moments when the holding central midfielders are flat and they adjust so they can see the field. They should be trained to play 1-2 touch but, more importantly, 1-2 second possession as ball movement and quick play to feet are critical in this formation. In addition, the triangle midfielders will often play the way they are facing encouraging more 1-touch play, similar to the style you would see from FC Barcelona.

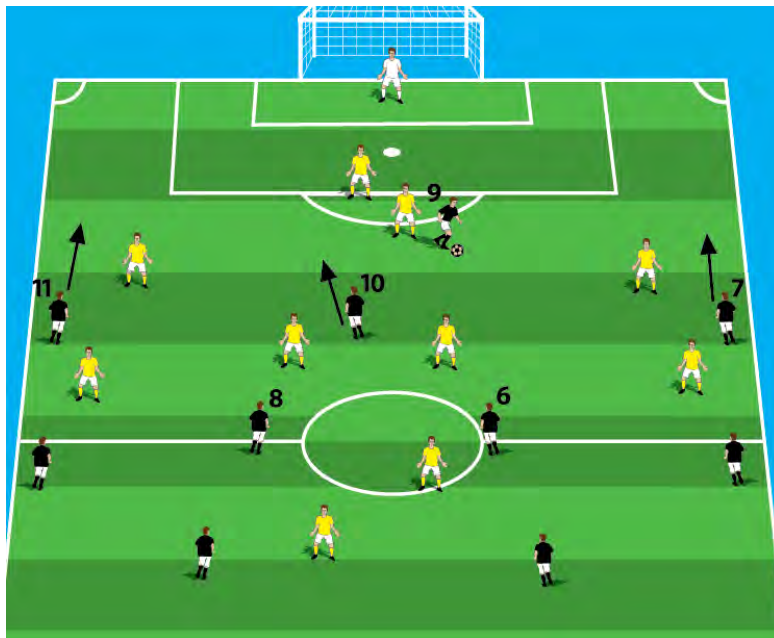
Example #1



This example is given without defenders shown to illustrate the shape and movement of this formation. In this example the central attacker has possession of the ball. The three midfielders in the system (#7, #10, and #11) all begin to make penetrating runs. The attacking central midfielder (#10) looks to make a penetrating run to the weak side of the ball possessed by the central attacker (#9). This way they give an immediate option at an angle while the option of playing wide ball side is also given by the run of the wide right midfielder (#7). Less obvious is the natural support given by the holding central midfielder on the right side (#6). Because they have maintained their shape to remain central and protect the middle they are naturally supporting directly under the ball possessed by the central attacker (#9). In addition, the holding central midfielder on the left side (#8) is in position to support the attacking central midfielder (#10) should the ball be played to them as an option. It also gives a quick outlet if the ball is played back to the holding right

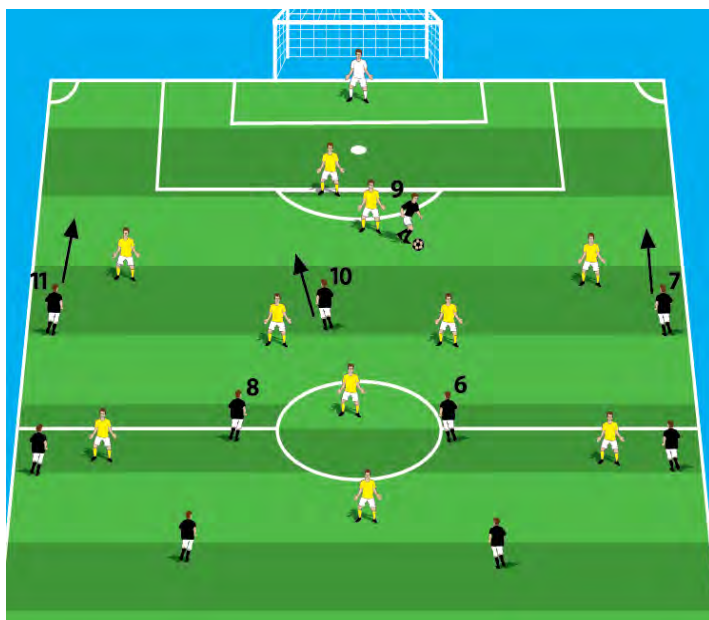
central midfielder (#6) as they can quickly play a one-touch pass to the opposite holding central midfielder on the left (#8) giving them the immediate options of playing into the attacking central midfielder (#10), the wide left midfielder (#11) or knocking it wide to the supporting wing defender on their side.

In the continuation of this first example (the 2nd frame) the ball has been played to the supporting attacking central midfielder (#10) who is now making a penetrating run into the box with possession. The central attacker (#9) after making the pass turns and also starts to make a penetrating run into the box. The ball side wing attacker (#11) makes a run to support the ball, but makes sure to stay wide in order to keep the opposing defense stretched out. The weak side holding central midfielder (#8) shifts up to give the triangle some shape, but also stays central to protect the middle. The ball side holding central midfielder (#6) stays behind the ball, but makes sure to stay central to also protect the middle.



The final two frames show the same, except with the inclusion of the opposing team. The first frame shows the example facing an opposing team playing a 1-4-4-2 formation. You can see the gaps that are created and exploited on the weak side of opposing team's formation. The run of the attacking central midfielder (#10) isolates their central defender or sweeper, as seen in this image. It may also force the opposing team's midfield to drop back and focus more on defending. This would invite the two holding central

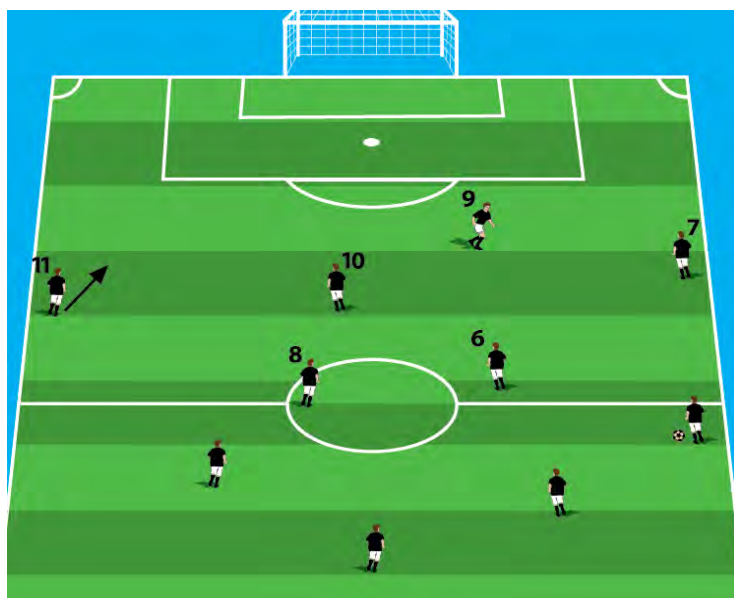
midfielders (#6 and #8) to step into the attack more to force more pressure on the opposition's goal. It also creates attacking opportunities on the attacking wings with the two wide midfielders (#7 and #11). Both would have spaces wide and force the opposing team's wing defenders to either drop back allowing the ball to be played to feet, or to drop out to mark which will create space behind them on through balls. This will force the opposing team's outside midfielders to drop to help defend, which will invite in the wing defenders to support. What all of these examples show is that it forces the opponent to adjust to your game and makes them lose shape. The result will be a team that only has the option of counter-attacking by trying to play long balls out of pressure. As long as your central defenders and weak side wing defender are keeping their shape of the 'check mark' then you should always be in position to recover when this happens. It is important that in this formation your team stays calm and doesn't give the ball away. Condition them to maintain possession through short passes either the way they are facing or away from pressure.



This next frame shows the system against a team playing an original 1-4-3-3 with a triangle midfield made up of one attacking central midfielder and two holding central midfielders. In any system you are playing against your goal is to get them to focus on how you play rather than on their own game. The same principles apply here against the 1-4-3-3. The attacking central midfielder makes a penetrating run weak side (#10) forcing the open central defender from the opposing team to pick them up and isolating the central attacker (#9) one against one. This is not a defensive situation most

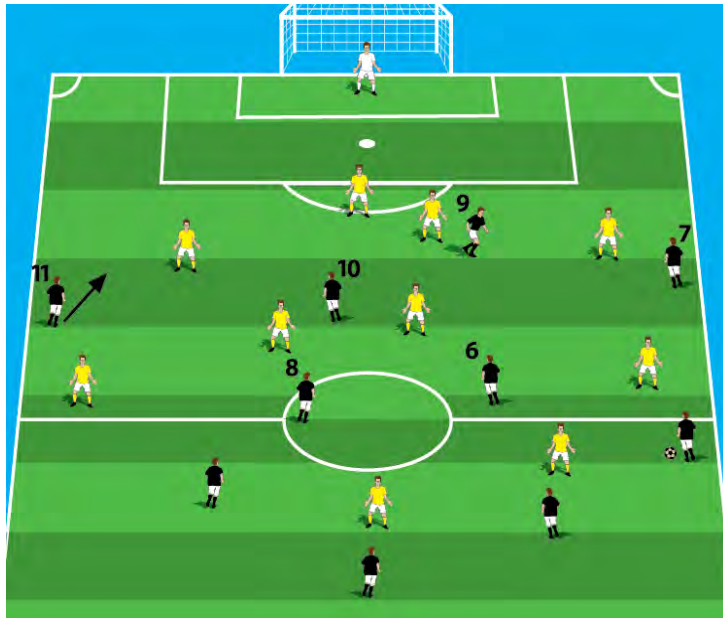
coaches would want, so the holding central midfielder would probably drop to mark the run of the #10. It would also force the other two open central midfielders in their triangle to mark the other open central midfielders. The match-up you would be looking for would be the two wide midfielders making penetrating runs to put pressure on the wing defenders of the opponent. This will force them into 1v1 situations. If this happens and you begin to have success, then the forward on the ball side of the field would start to drop back to help that defender. This would further damage their ability to build out and to find open options giving you the ability to dominate and possess the ball in the opponent's half of the field. It all starts, though, with the triangle midfield doing their job and staying within the parameters of what their roles and responsibilities are for their position.

Example #2

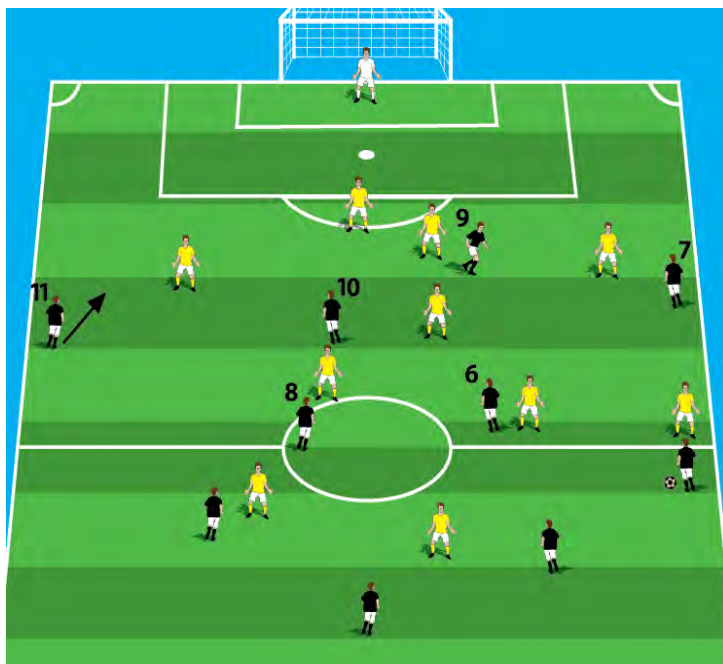


This example will begin with the right wing defender in possession of the ball. The image above shows the central attacker (#9) checking ball side as an option to receive it at feet. The attacking central midfielder supports weak side at an angle while the weak side wing attacker (#11) begins making a diagonal run. The two holding central midfielders (#6 and #8) shift slightly to support the ball and the runs of the other players. The right holding midfielder (#6) shifts over slightly to support the ball, but also positions themselves directly underneath the

central attacker (#9). The weak side holding central midfielder (#8) drops slightly behind the other holding central midfielder and looks to support directly beneath the attacking central midfielder (#10). Both holding central midfielders always look to position themselves to support the ball, but also to be in a position to protect the middle of the field. This example shows the movements and shape of the formation with no opposition so that these points can be better illustrated.



behind the defense. If the run of the central attacker is cut off, then the wing defender still has the option of passing the ball down the line to the wing attacker (#7) ball side or to the supporting holding central midfielder (#6) ball side. If the ball is played into the supporting

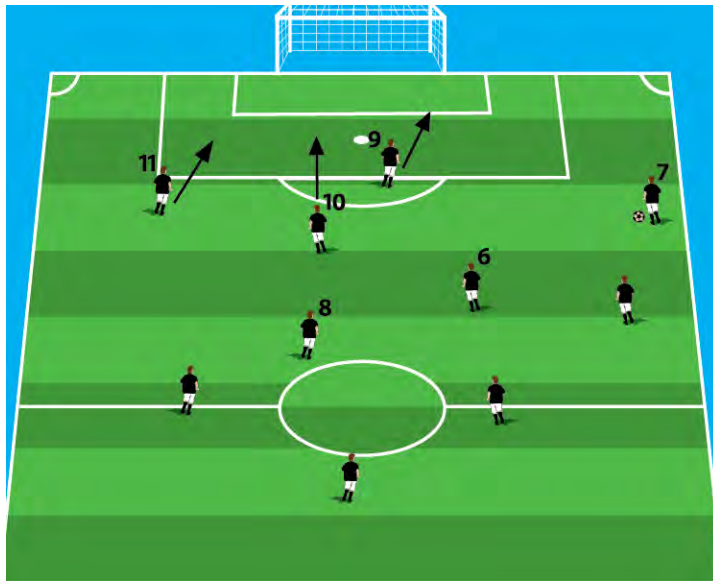


In the continuation, you see the formation and the same example as it matches up against a 1-4-4-2 formation. In this diagram you see the right wing defender with possession of the ball and the central attacker checking over towards the ball to receive it at feet. You can see the open lane that is naturally created by this run. In addition, the attacking central midfielder (#10) supports at an angle and is in perfect position to attack the other central defender, or to receive the ball and play it wide to the wing attacker (#11) who is beginning to make a diagonal run behind the defense. If the run of the central attacker is cut off, then the wing defender still has the option of passing the ball down the line to the wing attacker (#7) ball side or to the supporting holding central midfielder (#6) ball side. If the ball is played into the supporting holding midfielder, then an immediate pass to the central attacker becomes possible and a combination with the #9 and #10 become very real and dangerous in your ability to attack the opposing goal. In these combinations it becomes very easy to exploit and beat the midfield in a 1-4-4-2 formation.

In this final frame you see the same formation playing against a 1-4-3-3. Since this system matches up better against the 1-4-2-3-1 you can see that the options are more limited. It does open up the passing lane to the central attacker (#9) who checks to open up as an option. The other

possibility, depending upon what the forward ball side is doing (either forcing inside as the image shows or forcing the player wide), would be to play the ball down the line to the supporting wing attacker (#7) ball side. When playing a similar formation ball speed is important. You must demand that your players play the ball quickly in order to avoid marking and pressure and to open up options quickly in your possession.

Example #3



This final example will show possession by the attacking wing player and how the other players, especially players in the triangle midfield, adjust to support the ball and runs of the players. In this frame you see the right wing attacker (#7) with possession attacking towards the end line. The central attacker (#9) is beginning to make a run to attack the near post while the central attacker (#10) makes a run to the space between the penalty spot and far post. The weak side wing attacker (#11) is making a run to the back post for a ball that is driven through the area. The holding central midfielder ball side (#6) supports the ball by moving slightly higher towards the ball, but remains central to protect the middle. The weak side holding central midfielder (#8) shifts slightly towards the other side, but remains very much in the middle to protect the middle in case possession is lost. They also make sure that they are behind the other holding central midfielder to support them, if they get possession of the ball.



In this frame you will see the same positioning of players as they match up against a 1-4-4-2 formation. You will see the the runs of both the central attacker (#9) and the attacking central midfielder (#10) would be isolated 1v1 and give them a good chance at attacking the goal. You also have the withdrawn wing attacker (#11) coming into position to attack the back door who will also be 1v1. All are in great positions to score, if their runs eliminate their opposition and

the goalkeeper. It is important that the run of the central attacker beats the goalkeeper to the near post and does not allow a clear path for the goalkeeper to the ball.



In this final frame you will see the same set-up, except against a 1-4-3-3 formation with a triangle midfield. There is a bit more coverage in the defensive third with the opposing team's holding midfielders coming back to mark, but the same advantages will still exist with 1v1's coming against the central attacker (#9), attacking central midfielder (#10), and the weak side wing attacker (#11). The ball should be a driven serve so that the defense cannot recover and defend. A driven ball will force the goalkeeper to hold

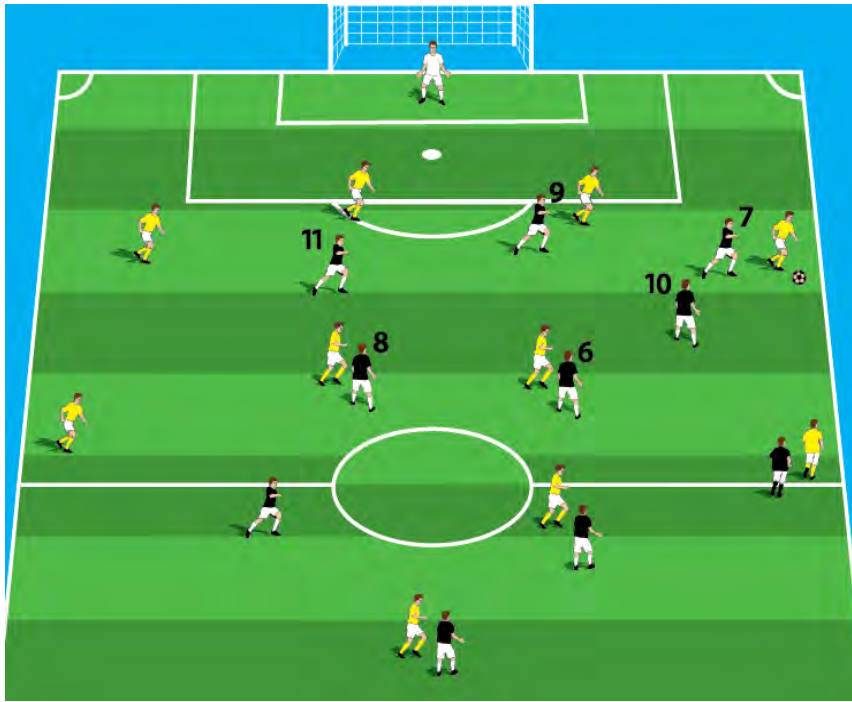
their line and the opposing defenders to defend as they come back towards the goal, which is a dangerous situation when a driven serve is played into the area. Often goals are created from deflections and miscues rather than on perfect serves and runs into the area.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (OUT OF POSSESSION)

The purpose of the triangle midfield is always about keeping the opposing team's central midfielders out of the game. You do this by denying your opponent the ability to come inside. The responsibility of this falls first to the attacking central midfielder (#10). If they are in position defensively, then they will make sure to block the passing lane into the opposition's central midfielders. Their objective is to force them wide into a possible double-team, or to force them back where the forwards would start pressuring them into making a mistake. You have the choice as the coach to determine how you want your holding midfielders to play. In most cases, it will be a combination of both of the following methods:

- 1) **Man-to-Man-** Many coaches like to play an aggressive form of this system in defending. They will condition their players to immediately mark and pressure the ball to eliminate options and force them into 1v1 situations in their own half of the field. Either that or it forces them to start looking to play the ball long out of the back. Most teams rely on their central midfielders to be their playmakers. Taking these options away will force your opponent into uncomfortable positions in possession and will create more turnovers, especially in their own half of the field. It will also force their central midfielders to start moving out of position to receive the ball thus destroying the integrity of their own system and making it harder for them to possess the ball moving forward.

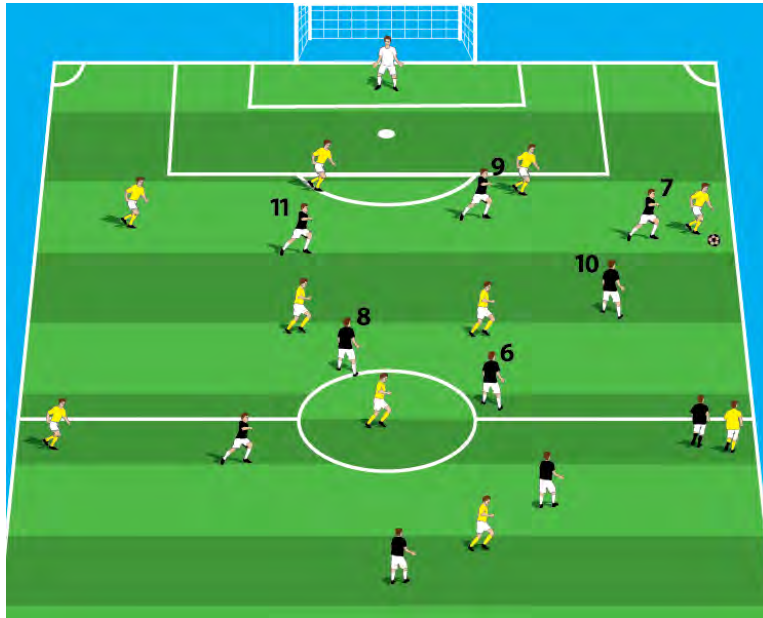
- 2) **Zonal Man-to-Man**- This is a little different as the attacking central midfielder (#10) looks to close the central passing lane while the two holding central midfielders (#6 and #8) look to keep shape and protect the middle. The holding central midfielders would also mark the opposing central midfielders man-to-man, should they come into their space. The difference, however, is the holding central midfielders would release the player if they run out of their space. Some teams will use their holding central midfielders like this so that they remain in shape to protect the middle of the field. Coaches who have had a chance to prepare for your team and formation may use this as a tactic to pull your holding central midfielders out of the middle to open up options for their attack.



As I previously mentioned, coaches may vary how they play their triangle midfield in this formation. An example would be you have a game you need to be aggressive in and want to take command early. This method calls for a tactic of high and immediate pressure in your game and you would instruct your midfield to mark up man-to-man early forcing your opponent into early mistakes in hopes of capitalizing with an early goal. You may also play

this late in the game if your team is in need of a goal. You have to force the play so you apply high and immediate pressure in hopes of forcing your opponent into mistakes. It is all predicated on other players in your team in their positions reacting the same way. It is no good for the triangle midfield to mark and apply pressure if the forwards are not doing their job by quickly tracking back to mark options behind the ball. You must also have a defense that is shifted up and in their 'check mark' shape ready to recover if your opponent attempts to play a long ball behind your defense. As this diagram shows the opposing left defender has possession and is being chased down by the wing attacker on that side (#7). The other two forwards (#9 and #11) shift inside to eliminate options flat or back. If possible, the wing attacker (#7) would close the outside lane and force the player with the ball inside. The attacking central midfielder is positioned to block the passing lane to the opponent's central midfielders, but they are ready to quickly join the wing attacker to double-team the player with possession, should the opportunity present itself. The two holding central midfielders have picked up both central midfielders and are marking them tightly. The defense is in their 'check mark' shape to first mark the outside midfielder or wing attacker, then to match up against the

opposing forwards. The weak side stays inside to protect against a ball that is switched and to guard against a ball that is played behind the defense to the weak side player. The formation that is shown for the opposition is the 1-4-4-2.



The second example shows a more zonal approach, although the positioning would not change very much. For further emphasis the example is showing the opposing team in a 1-4-3-3 formation with a triangle midfield. In this same example you see the forwards tracking over to do their job of pressuring the back four of the opponent and to eliminate options flat or back. The wing attacker (#7) would still have the same objective of trying to force the player with the ball inside and into pressure or a double team. The

attacking central midfielder (#10) is in position to block the passing lane to central options. The holding central midfielders you will see are not as tightly marked, but are in position to pressure should the ball be played centrally. They are more concerned with protecting the middle and protecting the space behind them. The defense is in their 'check mark' shape as usual.



Defending in the final 3rd is always different than in the middle or attacking 3rd since your marking becomes closer and the space gets smaller between players.

Defending is not about winning the ball it becomes about getting the ball out of pressure situations (clearing it out). In the attacking 3rd and even parts of the middle 3rd the ball is forced centrally as there are numbers in those areas and you can win the ball back more quickly. Defending in the final 3rd is all about safety. You want to force the ball wide and

defend the serve. In addition, it is important that opposing players attacking the goal are marked tightly. It is also important that the wide player with possession is defended and that

defending player has support so that they cannot be taken on 1v1 forcing a defender in the middle to break off of a player to take the ball leaving available space inside and a player free closer to the goal. In the frame you see the right wing attacker of the opposing team with possession of the ball and attacking down the line. The left wing defender (#5) is pressuring the player with possession making sure they stay wide. The central defender on that side (#4) is supporting the wing defender in case the player with possession is able to get around them. The outside left midfielder (#11) on that side is tracking back to protect against the player trying to come inside or turn and come back up field. They may also look to double team the ball, if they get close enough to do this. The other two defenders (#2 and #3) are looking to pick up the runs of the attackers to the near and far post. The opposite side outside midfielder (#7) comes back to pick up and weak side attacking runs. The two holding central midfielders (#6 and #8) look to mark players approaching the 18 yard box. The attacking central midfielder will track back to as far as 30-35 yards from goal, but looks to stay within 15-20 yards of the central attacker (#9) as they are their only support on a quick counter attack.

TRAINING POSSESSION AND PENETRATION

The following represents examples of how to train for possession and/or penetration in a 1-4-2-3-1 Formation. The exercises used will be the same as previously used, but more emphasis will be placed on quick patterns within the exercises and a focus on the triangle midfield within this system. There are a total of four (4) different exercises to accomplish what you need to in order to train or prepare your midfield to play this formation.

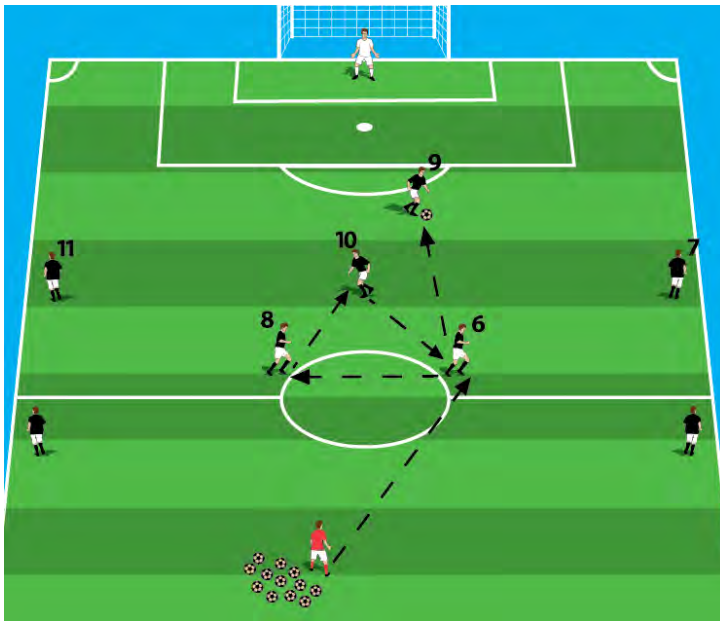
Exercise #1 (Possession and Penetration- MF Combinations)



Just as with the 1-4-3-3 there are many different patterns you can follow as working with combinations will generate many different options in attacking play. I suggest that since this formation requires quick 1-2 touch play with your holding central midfielders that you get them involved in quick touches as quickly as possible. Incorporating patterns is a great way to accomplish this. I always believe that you should begin MF Combinations with no opposition so you can work on the coordination of patterns and runs. The set-up in this diagram shows

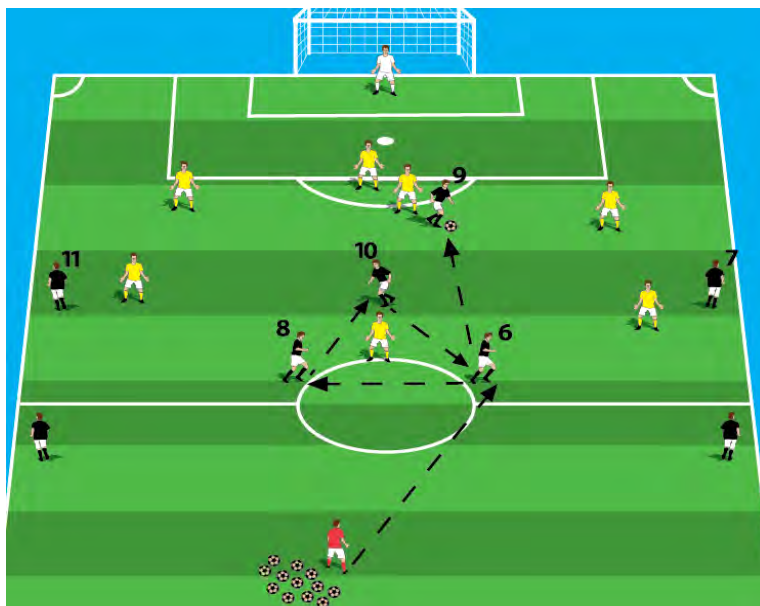
the coach with the ball ready to pass into one of the holding central midfielders. There are two

supporting wing defenders, one left and one right, while also having the three midfielders and central attacker in the system.



In this example, the ball is played into the right holding midfielder (#6). The right holding midfielder (#6) immediately passes the ball (1-touch, if possible) to the left holding midfielder (#8). The left holding midfielder (#8) immediately passes the ball (1-touch, if possible) to the attacking central midfielder (#10). The attacking central midfielder (#10) immediately passes the ball (1-touch, if possible) back to the right holding midfielder (#6). The right holding midfielder immediately passes the ball (1-touch, if possible) to the central attacker (#9). From

this position you have several options that can be trained. The first is for the central attacker to quickly receive and turn to attack the goal. Another is for the central attacker to immediately pass the ball back to the attacking central midfielder (#10) and then spin off to make a penetrating run to goal. The attacking central midfielder (#10) could then penetrate and attack the goal, pass the ball back to the central attacker (#9), pass it wide to the wing attacker on either side, and so on. Encourage the players to come up with different options and see what they do. It is important to encourage them to change speeds as they approach the final phase of the attack, though.



Once players are comfortable with the patterns without pressure, be sure to add defenders in slowly so that you continue to experience a high rate of success. You never want to add in four defenders and 4 defending midfielders straight away as it is important that the players learn to deal with the pressure gradually. Otherwise, players will get frustrated and you will not have success in the final attacking phase. If you encounter a situation where the defenders you add are more successful, then break it back down and make sure

your attacking players are focusing on quick and accurate play. They must also be able to read the pressure in the game and move the ball quickly away from the pressure. They should not continue a pattern just because that is what you trained them to do if it will not be successful. Players must learn to think and solve on their own during exercises so they learn to do the same in the game. Otherwise you end up with pre-programmed players that any good coach can break down and solve. The diagram shown would not be the first progression rather it would be the third or final progression prior to playing 11v11.

Exercise #2 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play to Targets)



The focus of this exercise is to play from none side target to the other side target as quickly and as cleanly as possible. It is suggested that you incorporate patterns to accomplish this. When you first begin the exercise, start with no defensive opposition and build it in quickly to simulate situations in the game. If you encounter a moment in the transition of the exercise where the possessing team is having difficulty, work with them on simple and effective possession before breaking it back down and building up. Give them a chance to work through and

deal with the pressure. It would also be suggested to coach your team to play composed and to work on regulating their breathing within the exercise. This will teach them to be calm and to learn how to handle the pressure better.



Once the players understand the patterns and have success at moving the ball from target to target with clean and accurate passes, then build in pressure. I would start with adding 5 players to defend in a 2-1-2 formation. This will give each layer of your formation moderate pressure, but will still allow them to have a numerical advantage. If the defenders win possession, then give them the ability to turn and attack either goal. You may want to add goalkeepers in this phase in both goals. The objective when they lose possession is to immediately win it back. They should not allow the defending team to win possession and get a shot on goal.

Condition your team to be very aggressive when they lose possession and to pressure the ball right away. When they have possession they should move the ball quickly (1-2 touch and 1-2 second possession) from target to target.



The next progression would be to build it to 8 defenders playing in a 3-2-3 formation. This will increase the pressure, but will still give the possessing team the advantage with numbers in every part of the field. The only area would be with the attackers where they will have individual man-to-man situations, something they need to be conditioned for in the game anyway. The midfield will have 3 against 2 and the defenders will have 4 against 3. Work with your team to remain calm and to breathe as they go through this phase. They need to be trained to remain calm and to not panic. Otherwise, you will end

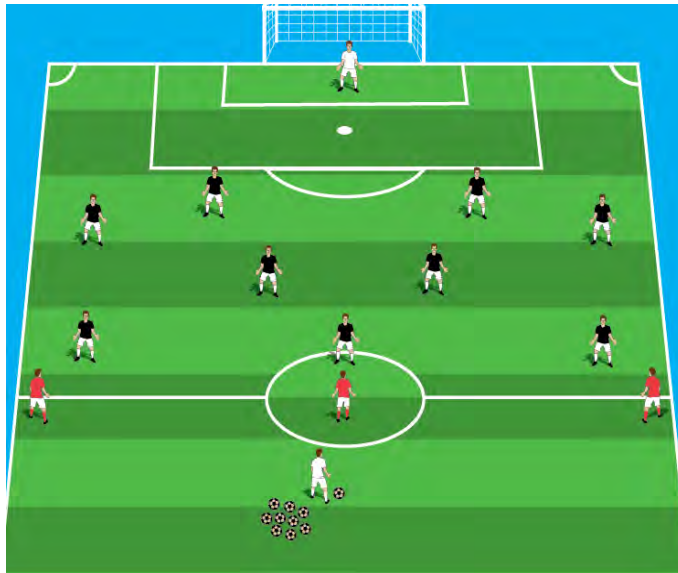
up with a team that will give possession away with little to no pressure. It is important to condition them to deal with pressure as the game will always produce varied levels of it.



The final progression would be to increase to 11v11 play. The principles of the exercise would remain the same, however, the team you are working with in possession would have to play target to target before going to the goal they are attacking. The team defending could go to goal immediately after winning possession. As you build through this final phase of the exercise you may want to build in the condition that once they possess the ball and have played from one target to the other that they have a set time to get a chance at goal. In other words, once you receive the ball back

from the second target you would have 15 seconds to get a chance at goal. If you do not, then the other team gets possession and re-starts with a free kick. In this frame the opposing team is set up in a 1-4-3-3 while your team is set up in the 1-4-2-3-1 formation. As you have progressed through the phases of this exercise be sure you remind them to remain calm and to breathe so that they have learned to handle pressure better, especially at the game level when it counts.

Exercise #3 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play Building out of the Back)



In this exercise you begin with 10 players set up in position in their own half of the field. The only missing player would be the central attacker (#9) who would be simulated by the neutral players. Position three neutral players along the midfield line (one on the right, one on the left, and one central) for the team to play into when they win possession of the ball. The coach stands in a central position with soccer balls and begins by playing a ball into the defensive half of the field. The team must quickly gain possession and possess it quickly to one of the target players. Once the ball is

played into one of the target players another ball is played in immediately even before the team has a chance to re-set. This way they must learn to adjust quickly and can deal with quick transitional moments in the game. Encourage quick 1-2 touch play and accurate passing so that when you add pressure your focus can switch to helping players to stay calm.

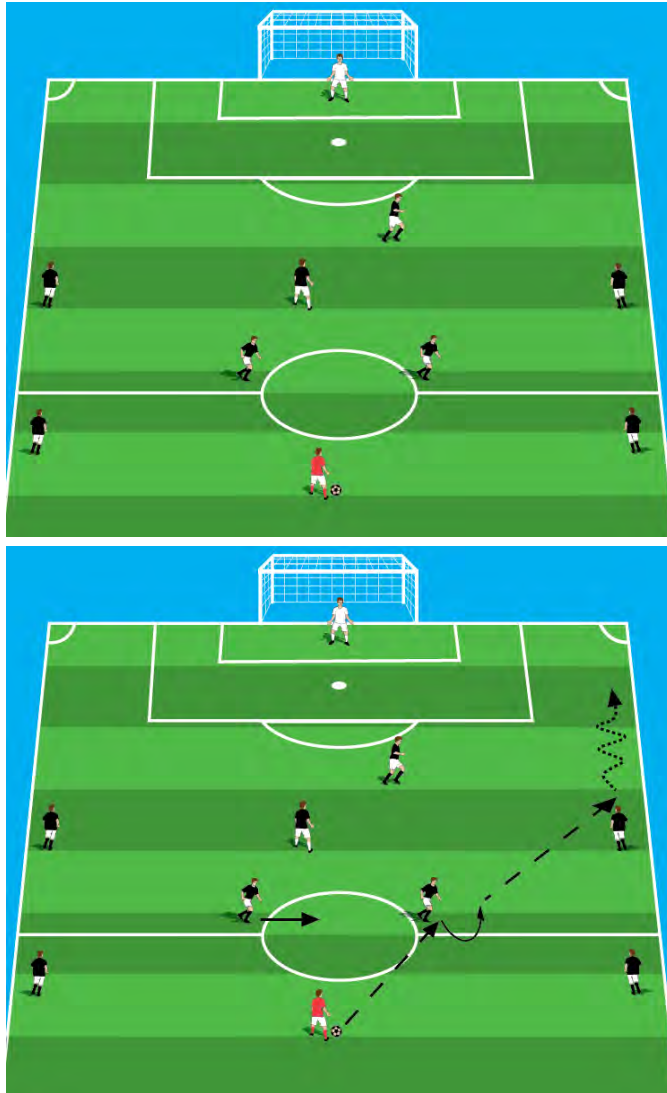


The first time you add pressure in this formation it is suggested that you have a group of player at midfield with the coach. When the ball is sent in have the coach shout or call out a number and that will be the number of players sent in to defend. This will force the players to start looking around quickly for options and pressure. This is when you start working with them on staying calm and breathing normally. You can switch this by also have a line of players on the outside and designating a number for each group. The number you call signals that this is the group that will defend. In

this diagram you see four separate groups positioned around the defensive half of the field. The coach would call out a number (you can add a second number to add more pressure) and that number would step on the field and attempt to win possession. If they do then they look to attack the goal as quickly as they can while the other team tries to stop them and re-gain possession of the ball. If they re-gain possession, then they look to quickly play it to an open neutral player as quickly as possible. This exercise is very effective for teaching your team how

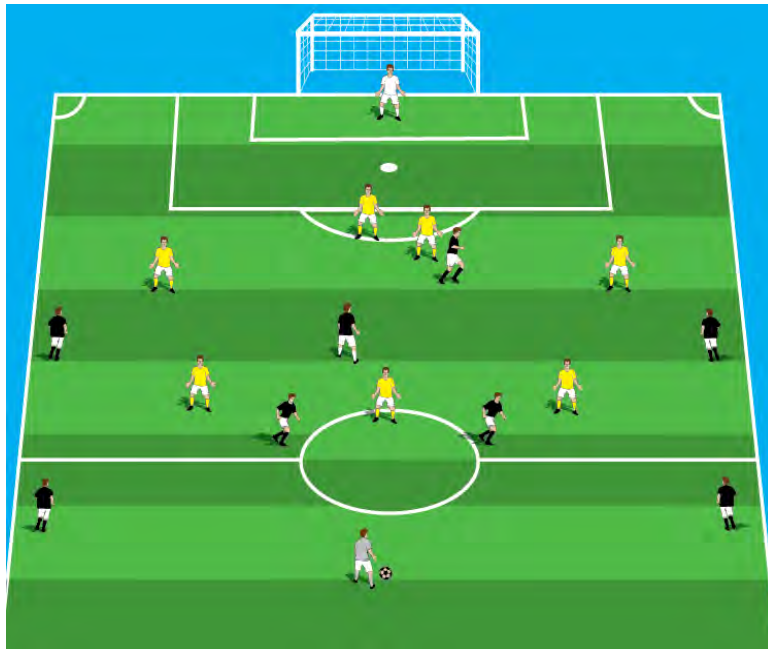
to build out of the back while dealing with pressure. Always look to show players what options they have and to condition them to not panic under pressure.

Exercise #4 (Possession and Penetration- Runs to Goal and Framing the Box)



This series of exercises focuses on quick play out wide, framing the box, and serves on goal. Everything mentioned in the previous three exercises applies here as well. Possession must be quick, clean, and accurate. The team must adjust to support possession. It is important that the triangle midfield focuses on the timings of their runs and their shape. The exercise begins with the coach passing the ball into one of the holding central midfielders (#6 or #8). The holding central midfielder receives possession, turns and passes the ball wide to the wing attacking midfielder on their side. The wing attacking midfielder gains possession and serves the ball into the box. Begin the exercise as shadow play and work on the runs and the timing of the runs. In the frame below you see the holding central midfielder receive the ball from the coach and turn to face up the field. Once they make the turn up the field the holding central midfielder passes the ball wide to the outside wing midfielder on their side. The outside wing midfielder gains possession and dribbles down towards the end line. As this is happening the central attacker is now in

position ball side to support the ball. They are in this position initially in case the receiving player on the wing looks to combine with them to attack the space behind a defender. Once the wing midfielder begins to make their run down the line the central attacker would quickly break away and start to make a run into the 18-yard box towards the near post. While the central attacker is making this run the attacking central midfielder supports their run by making a run into the box towards the far post, but is withdrawn from the end line by 10-12 yards so they have space to read the serve and attack the ball with the goal in front of them. On the opposite side, the weak side outside midfielder looks to make a run into the box covering the far post. This should give you a triangle-like shape when your players are attacking the goal and framing the box in their attack.



Once you have had success and you are comfortable that the players are doing what they are supposed to do with their runs attacking and framing the box then start to add defenders into the exercise. The final progression should have four defenders and three midfielders (4-3). This final phase will add pressure in every area of the field, but should still yield positive results. It is important that you make sure that the players perform the proper runs every time. This is typically the challenge with players, getting them to do the simple things

every single time. You also need to work with the players on dealing with the pressure, as stated before, by helping them to breathe and relax under pressure. It will then be easier to work with the players on finding options away from pressure and being able to protect the ball and not lose it because of the pressure.

These four exercises offer complete sessions and suggested progressions of other exercises where you could easily develop another 5 or 6 additional sessions from it. As you can see, all of the exercises focus on coaching from the game. The first exercise focuses on combining possession and penetration with different midfield combinations. There are more than 30 different combinations that can be used with this one exercise. The second exercise focuses mainly on possession and protecting the ball using indirect play. The third exercise works on building out of the back and using different combinations to play into targets. The fourth exercise works on penetration and framing the box using quick technical speed of play. The coaching points remain consistent throughout the four exercises and should be consistent in your direction to the triangle midfield as they learn and develop within this system.

TRAINING THE DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Defending is about accomplishing two things:

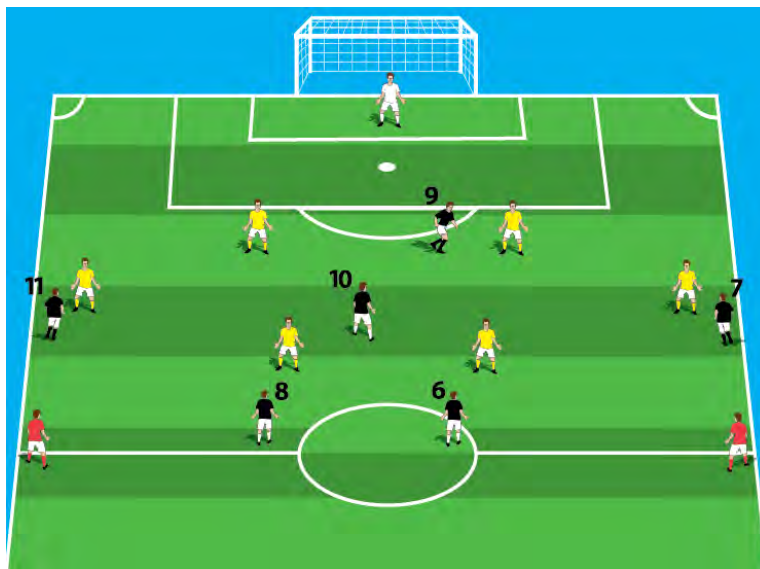
- 1) Keeping your opponent out of the middle or in switching the play through the midfield and
- 2) Keeping the central midfielders of the opposing team (their playmakers) the ability to possess the ball in the central part of the midfield.

These are the two main responsibilities of the triangle midfield. You would accomplish these through either playing your triangle midfield in a zonal way or by using two of the midfielders to mark man-to-man. The forward midfielder would act as a screen to block the passing lane into the opposing central midfielders.

The following four drills will allow you to focus your triangle midfield defending using either structure. It is up to you to bring out and emphasize the important aspects of the triangle midfield defending. The four exercises are done within the game and will focus on a different aspect of the game, be it the attacking third, middle third, defending third, or overall team shape. The coaching points will remain consistent throughout all four exercises.

Exercise #1 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Play In and Out of the Triangle)

Since the main purpose of the triangle midfield is to deny the central midfielders possession in the central midfield, and to deny the opposing team the ability to transition through the middle of the field, this exercise focuses on working specifically on that concept.

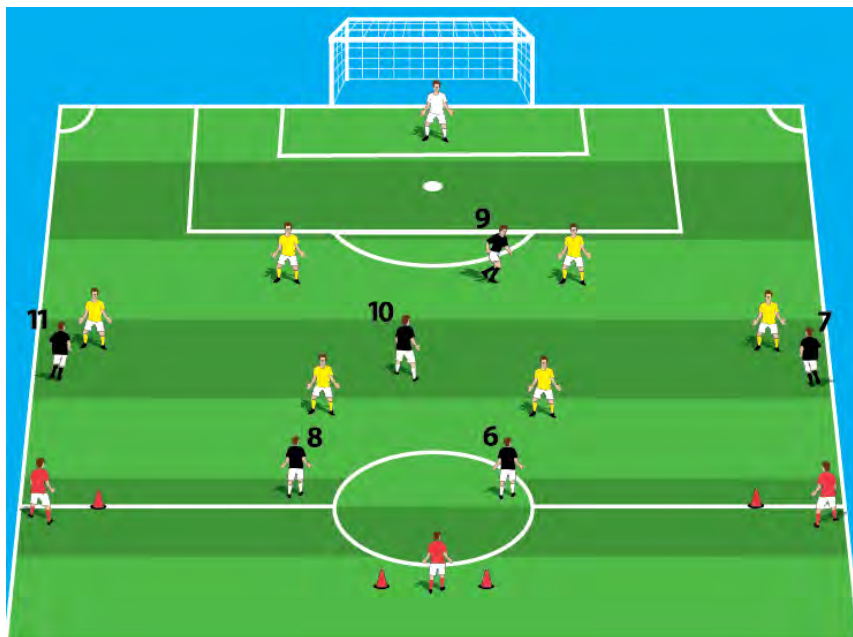


Since the main purpose of the triangle midfield is to deny the central midfielders possession in the central midfield, and to deny the opposing team the ability to transition through the middle of the field, this exercise focuses on working specifically on that concept. Set up your attacking team with the triangle in the attacking half of the field using just the 2-3-1 of your formation. Set the team defending the goal in a 1-4-2 formation. Have two neutral players, one on the right side by

midfield and the other on the left side by midfield. The neutral players are on the team with possession. The objective when you have possession is to attack the goal. Focus on the points you covered in attacking play (i.e. framing the box and runs to goal). When the team is defending make sure that the triangle is doing their job of preventing central penetration through the triangle shape. How you accomplish this will depend upon whether you want them to keep shape or to mark man-to-man. Implementing and training the players for the concept you want will be the key. The triangle midfield will get a lot of work in this drill and will not always be successful. It is important to remind them that their job is to prevent the other team from coming inside. To do this they must always keep a **TIP** on the ball to eliminate an open passing lane into the player inside. They must also be ready to switch roles to become the **TIP** should the ball be played to an area where the attacking central midfielder cannot get there in time. The most important thing is to close this passing lane as soon as possible. Be sure to stop

and make coaching points often so that players understand that their shape in the triangle midfield is absolutely important. It is also important to give coaching points often as this exercise is very demanding with fitness and will wear players down quickly seriously diminishing the quality of the exercise. Encourage constant communication between the triangle midfielders and make sure the roving central midfielder is keeping the shape of the triangle. Players need to talk but, more importantly, they need to listen to one another and react quickly or they will get frustrated easily. This is a great exercise to begin with as you introduce the triangle midfield defending. Players quickly get the idea of the demands and work rate required, along with how organized and unified the triangle midfield must be in order for the team to be successful. The players need to have a level of aggressiveness and determination that is unmatched. They have to have an immediate desire to win the ball back immediately, and not to just deny the opponent the ability to penetrate through the middle or the ability to move forward. They must have the attitude that they don't want the opponent to have possession of the ball at all. This is a unique mentality that can be trained, but must be demanded at every moment of training and play.

Exercise #2 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Attacking 3rd)



The exercise is set up with six players attacking the goal and six players defending the goal. There are also three players at midfield (one right, one central, and one left) that are supporting players that play between the gates only. The team attacking the goal works on attacking play, when with possession working on executing runs and accurate and effective passes. When defending, the team must get immediate pressure and

force the other team inside away from outside options. They should look to double-team the ball when the opportunity arises. If they win the ball back from pressure they should look to attack the goal as quickly as possible before the other team can recover and defend shape. This will work with them on transitioning quickly to attacking play. Be sure to focus on the triangle keeping their shape and limiting central options. In addition, since the two holding midfielders are conditioned to remain more central and to protect the middle, make sure they stay central in this drill as well. They can work on man-to-man in certain situations and focusing on your philosophy of defending just make sure their positioning remains central. Their actions should

be aggressive and hungry with a desire to limit the opponent's options and to win the ball back as quickly as possible.

Exercise #3 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Final 3rd)

This exercise is almost the reverse of the previous one in that it sets up the same, just in the defensive third of the field. In working with the triangle make sure the attacking central midfielder does not get drawn back into the 18 yard box abandoning the central attacker. Their main responsibility still remains to support the central attacker, even when they are not in possession. This will make you more dangerous in the counter-attack as the central attacker will always have someone supporting them even if they have two or three defenders around them. It will be easier in this situation to exploit the space behind the defense and create chances. The worst case scenario is you stretch your opponent out and force them to collect possession back in their half allowing your team to re-gain composure and shape and to look to defend farther away from your own goal.



This exercise starts with four defenders, the two holding central midfielders and the three midfielders (1-4-2-3). There are three neutral players (one right, one central, and one left) who support the team with possession. The ball begins with the central neutral player who looks to pass it into one of the players attacking the goal. Concentrate on team shape and coordination with the triangle midfield and the four defenders. Make sure they are focused at keeping a **TIP**

on the ball to close central passing lanes, but also that the two holding central midfielders are focused on protecting the middle. If the ball is served into the box, the holding midfielders must drop in to mark man-to-man while the attacking central midfielder looks to stay about halfway between the 18 yard box and the central neutral player as they must look to still support the central attacker. If the ball is cleared, then they would look to either dribble and attack space, or support the central attacker in the game. In this drill, they would look to pass the ball quickly to the central neutral player. After you have had success in this format for 10-12 minutes and have worked with the triangle midfield to keep their shape and deny central

options, add in another forward up top for the attacking team to put more pressure on. Continue to work on the defense and their overall team shape with the defenders adjusting behind the triangle midfield. It is all about shape, coordination and communication for your team to be successful at denying options for the attacking team.

Exercise #4 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Italian Shadow Play)



This is a version of shadow play that I picked up when I was in Italy taking a course at Fiorentina, and I use it in variations now very effectively. In the first three drills there was a focus on first getting the triangle midfield used to the demands of defending and what their roles and responsibilities were. As it progressed to the next two exercises you began working on coordinating with either the forward or defenders in defensive shape. This last exercise is where you put it all together and work on not only the defensive shape of the

triangle, but also of the team as a whole. This diagram shows two teams of 11 set up a full field. If your numbers are restricted, then cut back on the numbers possessing the ball and work primarily on your team and triangle defending and shape. One team is set up with four defenders, the two holding central midfielders, three midfielders, and one central attacker. It is less important how the other team is set up. The second team will possess the ball while the first team will defend and keep shape. The way it works is that the one team can defend and can intercept passes, but cannot steal the ball from a player. The attacking team must look to beat the defense and score goals. They cannot attack 1v1, but must move the ball away from pressure. If they lose possession, then they stop playing and the other team quickly goes to goal and shoots. Give them a time limit when they intercept the ball and look to go to goal (i.e. 10 seconds to go to goal). Once the play is dead, then the ball starts with the GK on the second team and they look to again possess the ball away from pressure while the defending team keeps their shape behind the ball. Work with the triangle midfield on keeping a **TIP** on the ball and with the holding central midfielders on keeping the shape and protecting the middle. When they win possession, emphasize a quick speed change and encourage them to all get up the field fast as a team to attack the other goal. Once the ball starts again with the GK, have them work on everything you have gone over in the other exercises.

1-4-3-2-1 FORMATION



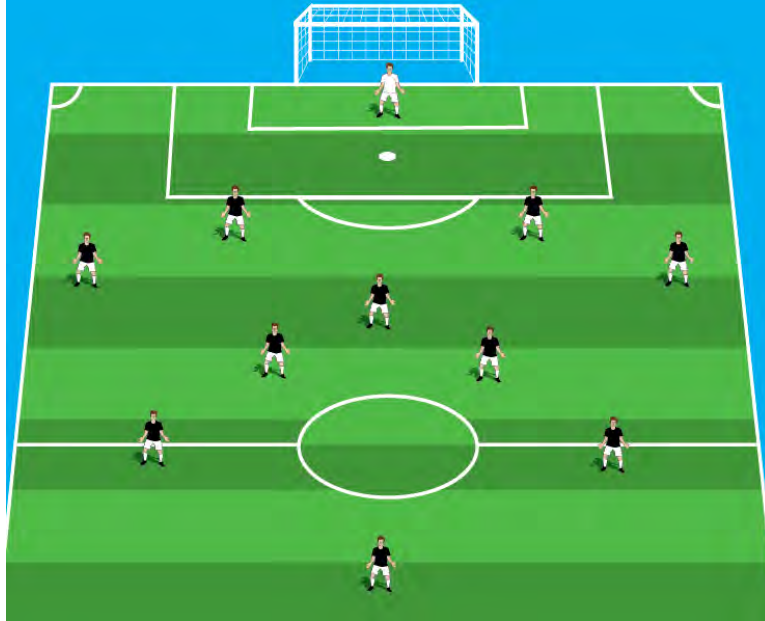
- The Triangle Midfield consists of 2 Holding Central Midfielders and 1 Defensive Central Midfielder
 - *How to Triangulate the Midfield*
 - *Training Possession and Penetration*
 - *Training Defensive Responsibilities*

Not a lot has been seen of this formation as it tends to pull away from its ancestors in this formation of being attack-minded and creative. This formation is meant to be the opposite and, in some cases, to frustrate teams that are creative and attack-minded. The formation above shows itself to have attacking options, but the general purpose of this formation is to keep numbers behind the ball and to force your opponent to always play wide and away from middle options. Known as the 'Christmas Tree' formation' when defending, it takes that exact shape when not in possession. It has the same overall purposes when in possession as you would find in the 1-4-3-3 (to find the central forward options as quickly as possible), but the general purpose of the formation is to counter-attack. Teams that play this formation are satisfied with not having possession and are content with staying behind the ball and staying compact. When possession is won they look to find the attacking central midfielder or the central attacker and look to combine between those two players waiting for the wing defenders to come up and give their formation width. When possession is lost they look to quickly drop and organize behind the ball in their pyramid shape (Christmas Tree).

The history of this formation as of late has seen coaches like Carlo Ancelotti use it during his time at Milan and initially at his time in Chelsea. It is also a very popular formation in Greece and was used off and on by the Greek National Team during their run to the European Title in 2004 when they scored 7 goals in 6 games and yielded only 3 goals, all 3 in group play. This was the only major tournament the Greeks have won as they were considered outsiders in the football world. This tournament, in the short term, established them as competitors on the world stage with big wins over France, Portugal twice, Czech Republic, and an important group tie against Spain. It was meant to vault them into contention for the World Cup in 2006 and beyond, but it was not meant to be as they failed to qualify for the 2006 and had a disappointing performance in the 2010 World Cup losing to South Korea and Argentina while only managing a late winner against a scandal-ridden Nigeria Team to squeeze out a 2-1 win. Greece have been the team most known for using the 1-4-3-2-1 system with a counter-attacking philosophy meant to slow the pace of the game while keeping scores relatively low so that they always have a chance in the game. It is an effective formation to use when facing a dangerous and creative team with significant speed that you cannot match or control. Using this formation will always keep numbers behind the ball while negating that part of the game for your opponent. This is an effective approach as it results in a slow-paced game where your opponent will possess the ball as much as 70% of the time. The team defending has to be content with not having possession most of the time. They must remain patient and wait for the opponent to make a mistake and try to force the play. Once this happens then their opportunity is created in looking to get forward very quickly by passing to either central player (either the attacking central midfielder or the central attacker). You need to have pace in these two players or the system will not work. These two players must be able to put immediate pressure on the opponent by threatening to get in behind them. They must also do this quickly enough before the opposing midfield can recover and get back to help defend. It must be a ball that is played quickly forward when possession is initially won. Then the team looks to come up and support and the triangle, at this point, is the focus of this system to help get the ball forward and to support the runs and possession of the forward players.

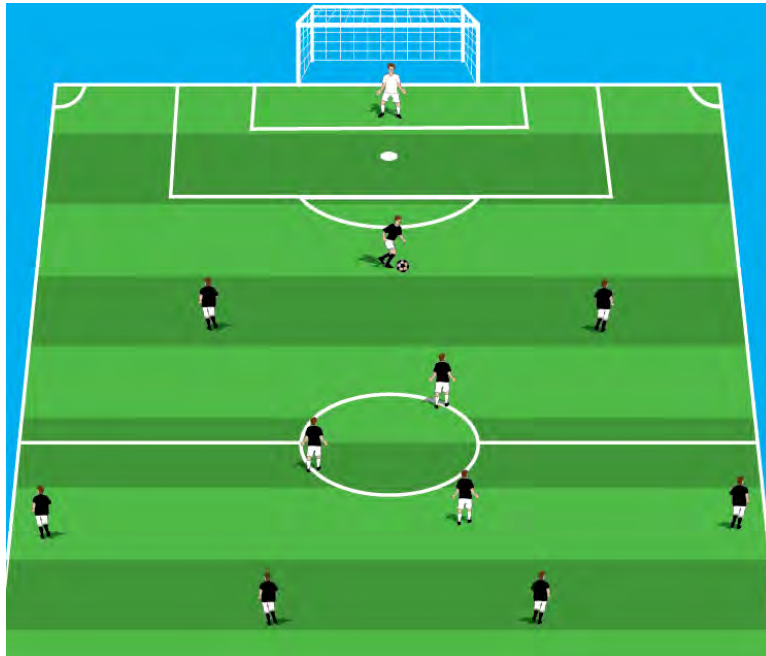
HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (IN POSSESSION)

The same principles of organizing and creating the triangle apply as is the same with similar formations using the triangle. The difference here is that the central midfielders are more defensive in their movements and actions. Even though it shows as if there are two attacking



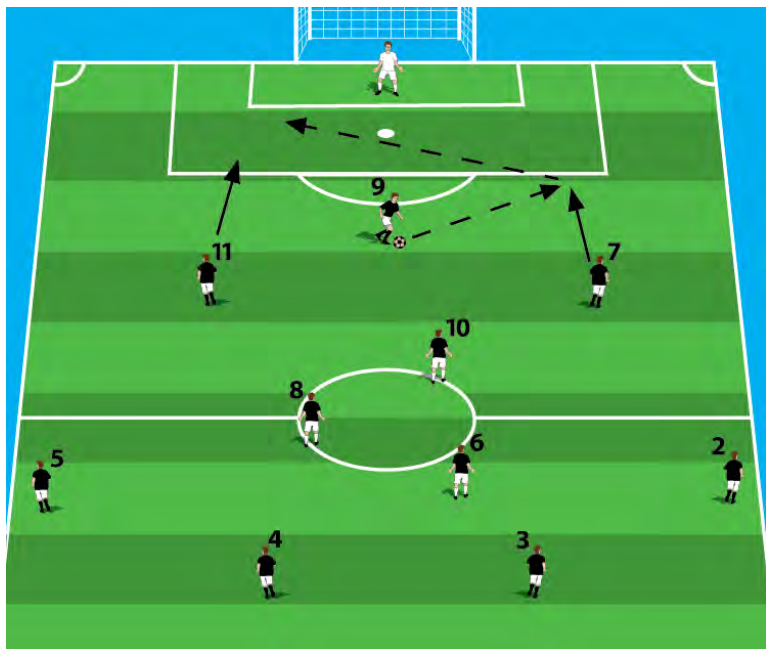
central midfielders and one holding central midfielder, it actually has three holding or defensive central midfielders. The shape in possession would be different than out of possession. The two central attackers would push out wide to give more depth and support in the attack. One of the central midfielders would step forward to support directly behind the central forward. The wide defenders would start coming forward to give more width and support in the system. It is important that you have speed

out of your central attacker and the other two central attackers who push out wide. Speed will make this effective in the counter-attack, a necessity with this formation. The attacking central midfielder coming forward has the main responsibility of supporting the central attacker directly beneath the ball. They rarely look to go forward and make penetrating runs as this is reserved for the three attackers. They may look to shoot from outside when the forwards have penetrated the box, but are always concerned about staying behind the ball to protect the middle and keep the opponent from playing the ball into supporting central midfield players. In this situation you look for the runs behind the opposing defense to come from the wide forwards and, when the ball is played wide, from the central forward. They are the ones looking to create opportunities behind the defense and in the box. You won't have the same numbers going forward as with other formations, which is why it is necessary to be quick in the counter attack and to have players with speed up top. The triangle keeps its shape more as a matter of discipline as they are focused on staying central to protect the middle. It tends to be more rigid in its structure than with other formations that use the triangle midfield. While they are focused on their shape and playing the ball to the forwards, the forwards are the ones who are making the runs and have few restrictions on their play. The wing backs would come up to support as outside midfielders, but they won't risk coming too far and will read moments when to support higher up into the attack.

Example #1

In this frame you see the two withdrawn players getting wide to support the central attacker with possession. One of the central midfielders steps forward to support the central attacker while the defensive central midfielder shifts over creating your triangle shape shown in the image to the left. The wing defenders are starting to come up the field to support the attack, but as you can see they are not coming forward quickly as they are always concerned about the space behind them. The central defenders would then keep their shape, but

would ultimately shift towards ball side. The weak side wing defender would then tuck in to create the customary check mark shape found in defenses. In this system the attack is



performed by the three players forward and not by the midfield players or the wide defenders. It is up to the runs and movements of the three attackers while the other players simply provide support from behind. In the example shown left you see the ball in possession with the central attacker (#9). The right wing attacker (#7) starts to make a run forward and receives a pass from the central attacker (#9). The left wing attacker (#11) also begins to make a penetrating run into the box as the ball is passed to the right wing attacker (#7). The right

wing attacker (#7) receives the ball and immediately drives the ball diagonally across the mouth of the goal towards the run of the left wing attacker (#11). The combination of these three attacking players will also take on the shape of the triangle at different times in their attacking play. In this situation the triangle between these three players starts with one attacking and two withdrawn, but will switch with the attacking runs of the two wing players to become two attacking and one withdrawn. While this is going on the attacking central midfielder (#10)

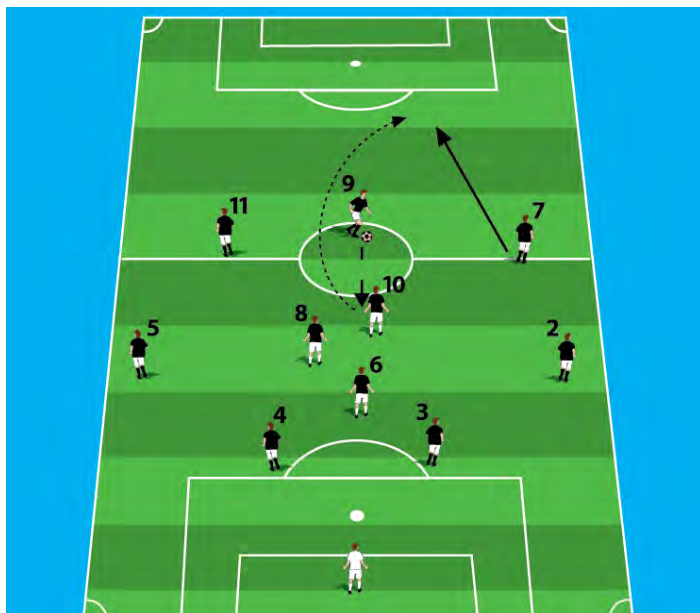
supports behind the ball, but plays no real part in the attack. They are there, as are the other two midfield players, to provide support and shape in possession. You can see from the shape in this example that even though the attack is in the final third the majority of the players are still located in the defensive half of the field. In this example there are still seven players that are behind the ball and ready to defend if possession is lost. This is the focus of this system. It will make for boring play, at times, but it is effective when executed correctly.

Example #2



In this example possession has been won and the ball quickly played forward to the central attacker (#9). This example is used to illustrate where the players were in defending and where their runs are to once possession is won and the ball played forward. The two withdrawn attackers (#7 and #11) who were inside to defend now are making runs wide and forward to support the central attacker (#9). The attacking central midfielder (#10) slides inside and slightly forward so that they are underneath the central attacker (#9) and there to support the ball after it is initially played forward. The

opposite side central midfielder (#8) slides in slightly and behind the attacking central midfielder (#10) to provide support and shape. The two wing defenders (#2 and #5) start to move out wide and forward to start providing width and support in possession. In the



continuation of this example you see the ball passed back to the attacking central midfielder (#10) who looks to immediately pass the ball to the space behind the defense for the run made by the right wing attacker (#7). This is a common ball that is played by the attacking central midfielder (#10), a ball that is played quickly behind the defense to put them under immediate pressure and to allow your team to push up and get its shape further up field. In this situation it is necessary to have speed to exploit the opposing defense and to create chances on the counter attack. Without speed this

concept would not be effective. The thought in playing this type of ball is that even if



possession is lost you still have nine players behind the ball to defend. You won't have possession long, but you won't give anything away either. This is the most common situation you would encounter in this situation and where you would end up playing the majority of the game, real estate wise. This third image now shows the inclusion of the opposition in a 1-4-3-3 formation with one attacking central midfielder and two holding central midfielders. This will hopefully better show the example of up-back-through with the ball being passed up to the central attacker

(#9), back to the attacking central midfielder (#10), then into space behind the defense forward to the run of the right wing attacker (#7). The attacking central midfielder could certainly play the ball wide to the supporting wing defender (#2), but the first option would always be to play to the space forward for the runs of the three attackers (#7, #9, or #11).

Example #3



In this example the ball is being possessed by the right wing defender (#2). It could be a situation where the central attacker (#9) was not open or that possession originated in this space. Either way, this is the starting point for this next example. You can still see the compactness of this system, especially in the middle of the field. The objective here would still be to play the ball forward as soon as possible and not get caught in your own half of the field. In this example the ball is passed quickly to the central attacker (#9) while the right wing

attacker (#7) continues to make their run wide and forward. The central attacker receives possession and passes immediately to the space behind the defense and in front of the right wing attacker (#7). The triangle midfield in this system keeps its shape and supports behind the ball. The central attacker (#10) provides immediate support underneath the ball and would look to play the ball forward as quickly as possible while staying behind the ball as a triangle to protect the middle and eliminate central options.



This formation is always about winning the ball off of pressure and mistakes of your opponent. The central attacker (#9) is always moving and shifting ball side looking for the moment when possession is won and they can receive the ball immediately to feet. If your first option is not on, then the second option would be to play the ball forward to either the right wing attacker (#7) or the left wing attacker (#11). The third option would be to play the ball wide to either the right wing defender (#2) or the left wing defender (#5). In comparing this philosophy with the other formations

covered you will notice that none of the central midfielders is an option in possession, they always serve as support and to give shape to block the middle of the field. Their primary

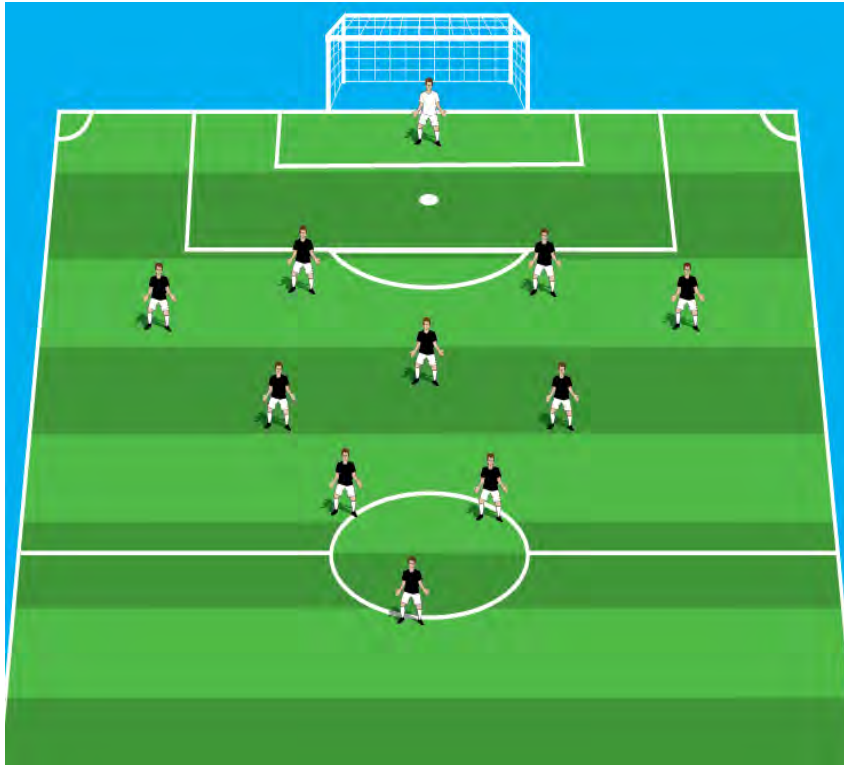


responsibility is to always protect the middle of the field while their secondary responsibility is to support the ball. This is definitely a more defensive philosophy.

In this frame showing the opposing team in a 1-4-3-3 formation with one attacking central midfielder and two holding central midfielders you can see how the natural pattern of playing wide and then into the first option (#9) it is designed to beat the opposition and the back four defenders. It is specifically designed to accomplish this by looking to play the forward as

quickly as possible. The idea of keeping the shape of the midfield triangle in possession is all about discipline and resisting the temptation to go forward as it will cause the system to fail and break down giving your opponent clear chances to attack your goal.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (OUT OF POSSESSION)



The purpose of the triangle midfield is always about keeping the opposing team's central midfielders out of the game. This doesn't change in this system even though the triangle midfield tends to be more rigid. The objective is to force them wide into a possible double-team, or to force them back where the forwards would start pressuring them into making a mistake. In other triangle midfield systems you might choose to mark man-to-man or to play zonal or a combination of the two. In this formation you strictly

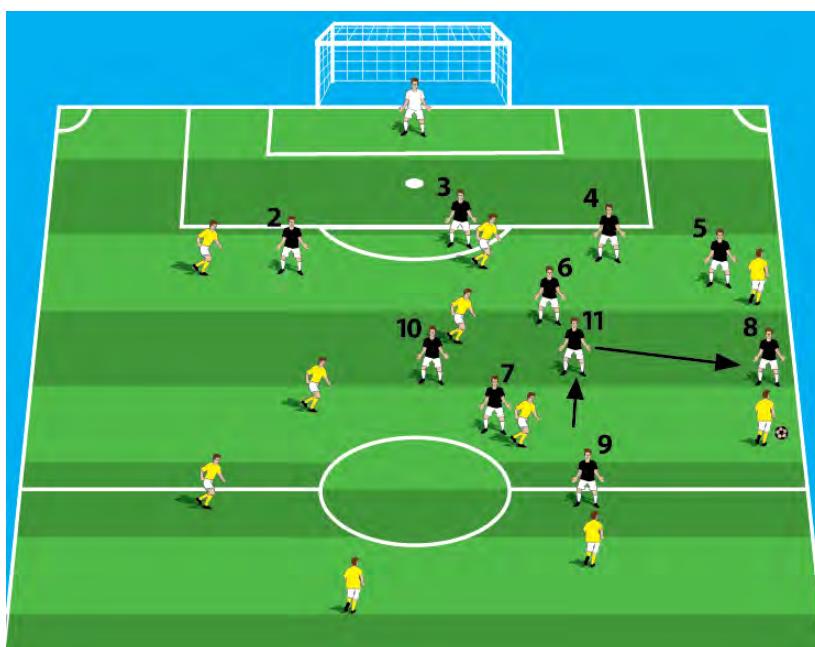
play zonal until the ball gets into your own third of the field. At that point you will use the defensive central midfielder (#6) to mark man-to-man while the two holding central midfielders (#8 and #10) to pick up the central midfielders of the opposition. The whole focus of this system is to stay compact and make it impossible for the opposing team to come inside for any option. This will force them into situations where they are always going wide or back and makes their attacking game predictable. This is what the formation is trying to accomplish, forcing them into predictable play.

Example #1

The image above clearly shows the compactness and that 'Christmas Tree' shape. This shape shows how the central part of the field is completely shut off with as many as five players centrally located. The only open spaces look to be wide in the midfield areas however, once the ball is played there the central players look to shift to force them to play the ball back. The triangle midfield is the most important part of the formation in team defending, whereas the attacking side they were not much of a factor. The triangle midfield is responsible for keeping itself very compact while shifting as quickly as possible ball side to squeeze the space of the opposition. If they try to play the ball centrally, then the triangle midfield needs to be quick at pressuring and physical in how it plays to deter the opposing team from trying to come inside again. The philosophy has to be that the opposition is punished for trying to come inside. Once they lose possession the ball needs to be played quickly to a forward option to start building fear into the opposition that if they make a mistake and lose possession, then they will be



play, the entire focus of this style of play. You can see in this image the shape of the 'Christmas Tree' as it has shifted to the side to start restricting the space of the opposition. If the wing defender continued to advance with possession the triangle midfielder (#8) would slide out to defend while the attacker



punished for that mistake. It is a very effective psychological weapon that is another important element of playing this style. It is important that you focus on how you play and let your opponent worry about you. Keep numbers behind the ball and limit them to only space wide. Once they go wide start squeezing them to either force them into a bad decision, or force them into playing the ball back and around to avoid the pressure. In this way you are controlling them and dictating how they play, the entire focus of this style of play. You can see in this image the shape of the 'Christmas Tree' as it has shifted to the side to start restricting the space of the opposition. If the wing defender continued to advance with possession the triangle midfielder (#8) would slide out to defend while the attacker (#11) ball side would drop in behind to protect the middle. The opposite side attacker (#7) would slide into the middle to help close the space and contain the opposition. You can see the space that is open is on the opposite side of the field and that there is no possibility to play the ball into central options. This is by design. You should be okay with this and the team should be prepared to shift from side to side closing the gaps centrally and in behind them.

Let the opposition play around you and behind you, but not into central options. This is a matter of focus for the triangle midfield to be able to shift and defend central options and be okay with not having the ball very much at all. It takes a lot of patience and discipline to play this way. You are playing for results and not for the beauty of the game.

Example #2



This is the same concept. I just thought it important to show the formation defending in the central part of the field rather than in the defensive half of the field. In this image you can see the formation in the middle of the field in its 'Christmas Tree' formation as if defending a ball being played from the oppositions back third. You can see how the formation takes up only as much as 40 yards from the last defender to the central attacker up top. The

goalkeeper in this situation would be playing up closer to the top of the 18 yard box to defend against a long driven ball in an attempt to get behind the formation. In the second image you



can see the opposition placed in a 1-4-3-3 formation with two holding central midfielders and one attacking central midfielder. The natural shape of this formation forces the opposition to look at stay wide as there is no possibility to play into central options. The triangle midfield with the one defensive central midfielder and two holding central midfielders naturally take shape around the attacking central midfielder of the opposing team. The

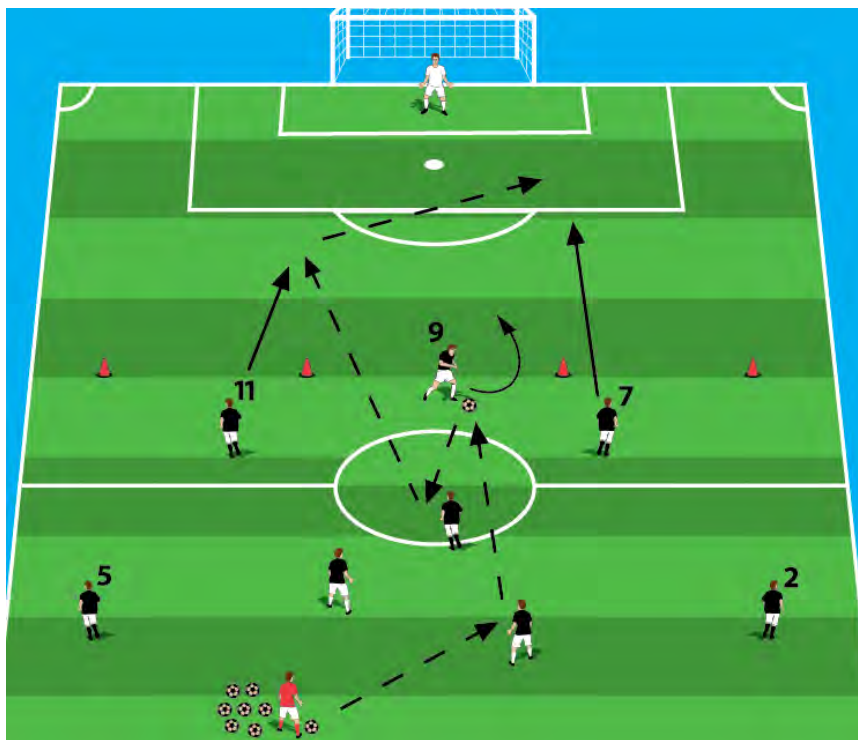
triangle midfield is less concerned about the player at this point and more concerned about keeping their shape and keeping it very compact (10-12 yards apart at most). The goalkeeper in this situation is encouraged to play the ball to wide defenders, but nothing exists centrally for

them to play into. In many systems the central forward will look to go to the player that receives the ball in order to start putting pressure on them. This system operates differently. Once the ball is played out they will look to keep their shape and slowly drop back with the team as the opposition advances. They may shepherd slightly ball side, but not to pressure the ball, only to limit the real estate they can play into.

TRAINING POSSESSION AND PENETRATION

Since this formation bases its' attacking game on the ability to counter attack quickly, the exercises within this section will focus on that principle. The focus of attacking play will not change in that you are still trying to play the ball into your 1st option as quickly as possible (the central attacker). The differences are that if this player is not open we do not slow the process down, but instead move the ball more quickly into areas where the ball can either be played into the 1st option or the ball can be played behind the opposing defense. This formation relies on the speed and runs of the three forwards. The elements of their runs and combinations must also be brought out in these exercises as well.

Exercise #1 (Quick Combinations Through the Attacking Central Midfield)



In this first exercise, the three attackers, triangle midfield, and two supporting wing defenders are involved against just the goalkeeper. No opposition is added at this time to give the attacking team time to become comfortable with the patterns being implemented. The first pattern shown in this diagram begins with the coach passing the ball to the defensive central midfielder. The central attacker (#9) starts to check to the side to open

up as an option. The two holding central midfielders adjust so that the attacking central midfielder is supporting the central attacker directly beneath the ball while the other one expands out to the side opposite ball side. The two wing attackers who were tucked in to start begin to flare out to the side and forward. The central attacker receives the ball and passes it back to the supporting attacking central midfielder, then turns and looks to start making a run up the field staying central. The left wing attacker (#11) and right wing attacker (#7) continue

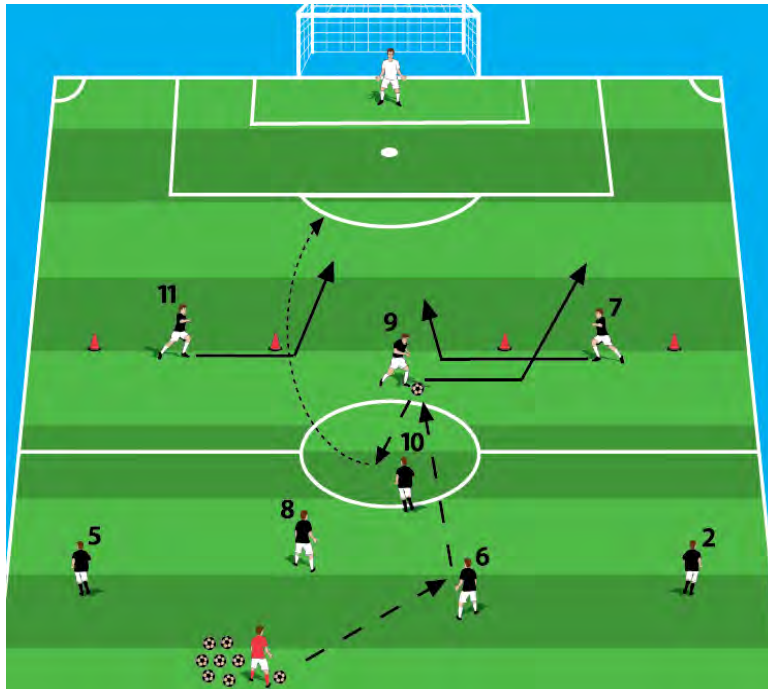
to make their runs making sure not to cross the line of cones before the ball is played through by the attacking central midfielder. Once the ball is played through all three attackers are making runs towards the goal. In this diagram the left wing attacker receives the ball and immediately plays it across to the opposite side to the right wing attacker (#7) who would shoot at goal.



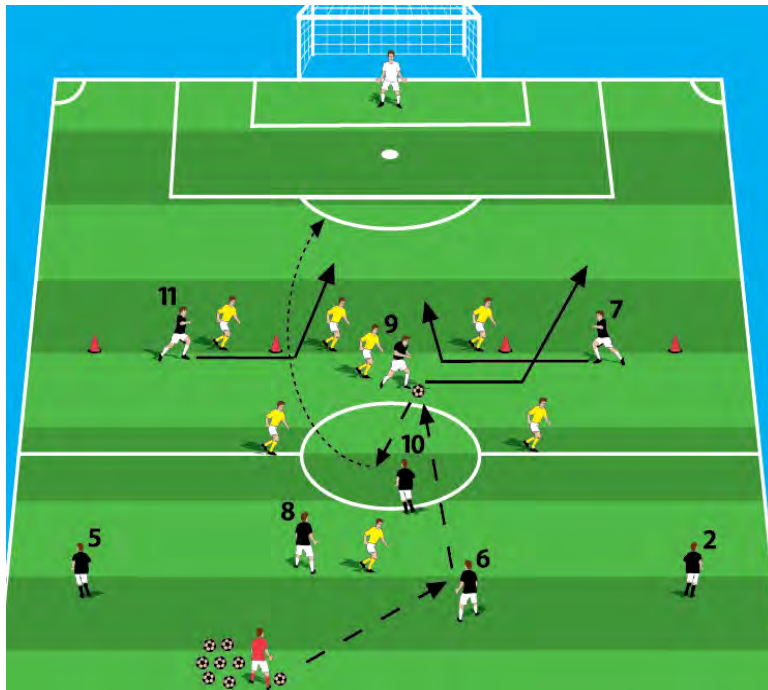
There are many different combinations you can create from this setup. For example, the central attacker does not pass the ball back, but instead re-directs the ball behind the defense for the wing attacker on that side. Once you have a few patterns built into their memory, then it would be time to implement defenders into the exercise so that they can experience pressure similar to the game. In this example you see the opponent playing a version of the 1-4-3-3 formation with two holding and one

attacking central midfielders. It would be suggested to change up the system they train against or have them train against the type of formation they may see in the game or games they would play. Make sure that your team has an understanding of at least 4-5 different patterns before you add opposition. Once you add the opposition, have them go through the different patterns again. They may not have the same level of success so it is important to encourage them to be problem solvers. If the pattern is blocked off or they are unsuccessful and realize that a particular pattern does not work, then they need to be creative and change. They should be able to solve problems and come up with other options without having you point them out. Give them 4-5 examples in the initial patterns, but make sure they know that situations may arise in the game that will dictate they adapt or adjust. They have to be able to think and encouraging them to do so at the early stages of implementation will make your job easier as coach. Remember, it is easy to create players that do not think on the field (ROBOTS), but you want them to be able to problem solve and think creatively in the run of play by taking the basics of what you have given them and being able to build on that. This way the game becomes for the players and the training becomes yours.

Exercise #2 (Beating the Off-Sides Trap with Combinations)



wide. Have them stutter-step and start making runs in towards the middle as the ball is played back to the attacking central midfielder (#10). As the ball arrives to the attacking central midfielder the wing attackers should begin their break behind the cones. The ball should be



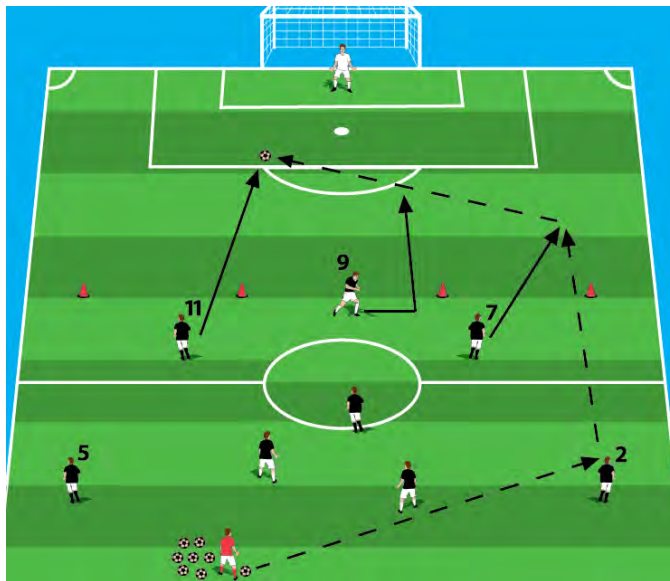
delivered in the air behind the defense and to the space being attacked by the forwards. The central attacker after passing the ball back looks to make their run wide and then behind the line of cones so that their attack has the shape of the three attackers going to goal. You can see in this second diagram where defenders are added that the runs of the wing attackers are in the seams of the defense. The left wing attacker (#11) makes a run inside drawing the wing defender with them and cuts in behind the central defender on that side. This is what we call a blind-sided

You will encounter teams that will try to frustrate and slow your counter attacking game down by pulling an off-sides trap. The previous exercise is about the timing of runs in combinations, but it is sometimes necessary to recycle runs when the opposition steps and puts players in off-sides positions before the ball can be played. The following exercise builds on the previous exercise, but incorporates recycling your runs and making flat and diagonal runs into space to beat the trap. In this diagram the process starts the same, but the forwards will begin already on the line of cones

run as the central defender will not be able to read when the forward breaks leaving the wing defender as the only defender in the play (1v1 to goal). The right wing attacker makes a run inside as well drawing the wing defender on that side in with them while the central attacker

overlaps and makes a run towards the space they just vacated. The right wing attacker (#7) cuts in front of the central defender to try and draw them back with them. This will expose the space the right wing attacker just vacated and allow the central attacker to make a run into space that should be very open. As part of your combinations try to find this player with the delivery from the attacking central midfielder. As before, encourage the players to try different patterns within this combination so that they can start to solve problems when opposition is added into the exercise.

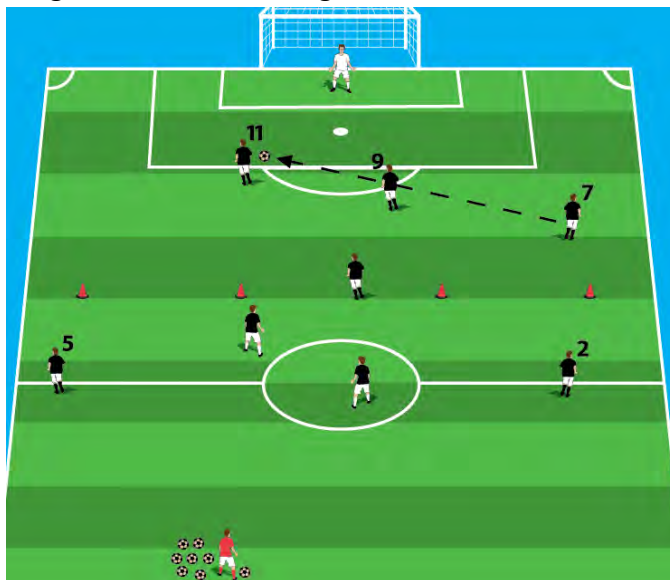
Exercise #3 (Combinations Through the Wing Defenders)



In this exercise the ball starts by being played wide to the wing defender (#2). The wing defender receives the ball and immediately looks to play the ball into space down the line for the right wing attacker (#7). The right wing attacker would bend their run into the space being sure not to break the cone line until the ball was played through. The weak side left wing attacker (#11) would also be sure to time their run before breaking in towards goal. The central attacker (#9) would initially have checked or tried to find an open window to receive the ball. As soon as the ball is played wide they

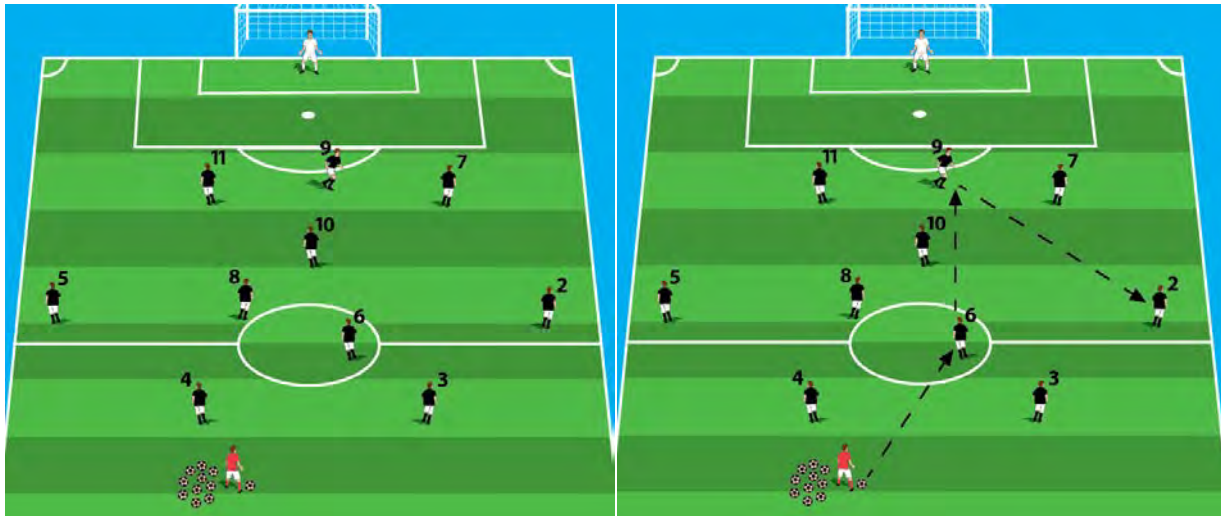
would turn to support the ball, but would break towards goal as it was played through to the wing attacker. The triangle midfield should shift over to the ball side, but make sure they are

not risking any space in the middle. Once the ball is played forward, then the attacking central midfielder would shift up centrally to support the play, the opposite side holding midfielder would shift out to give shape, and the defensive central midfielder would slip in behind centrally to protect the middle of the field. The second diagram shows the shape of the team after they have made their runs. You can see the flight of the ball crosses in front of the central attacker (#9) as the first option and then would continue to the weak side left wing attacker (#11). Both players are in

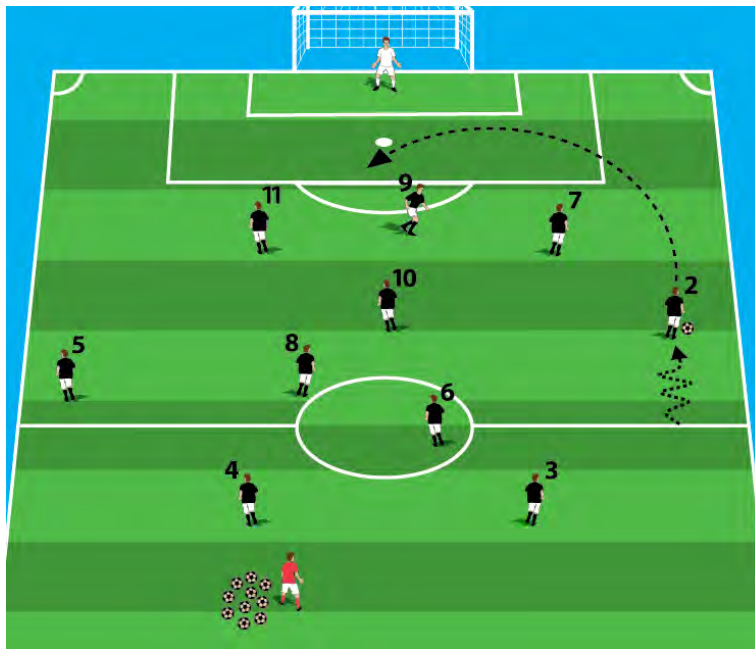


position to receive the ball and attack the goal. The triangle midfield is in its shape to support the runs of the three attackers with the attacking central midfielder in a central supporting position as the most advanced midfielder in the triangle.

Exercise #4 (Central Attacker to the Wing Defenders)



In the first frame you see the team set out in their positions. Their placement is higher than in the previous three exercises in that they are closer to goal. The exercise begins with the coach



passing the ball into the defensive central midfielder (#6) who turns and passes the ball to the central attacker (#9). The central attacker (#9) receives the ball and passes out wide to the right wing defender (#2). The right wing defender receives the ball and dribbles 5-6 yards forward before serving the ball into the 18 yard box in front of the central attacker (#9) and the run of the weak side left wing attacker (#11). It is important that the wing defender serving the ball into the box quickly take the 5-6 yard space and serve the ball in quickly. They

must make sure that they read the pressure and are not put into a position where they are isolated or can be defended. Their actions must be quick and deliberate so that the opportunity to attack is still present and there is no chance of the service or player being defended or blocked. Make sure the serves are driven into the area and have the height to get over the resistance line offered up by the opposition. The ball must always be played in behind

the defense as quickly as possible in this exercise. Emphasize the speed of which the ball is delivered and the determination of the three attackers to always make the runs and be in a position to attack the ball and goal when it arrives.

These four exercises offer complete sessions and suggested progressions of other exercises where you could easily develop another 5 or 6 additional sessions from it. As you can see, all of the exercises focus on coaching from the game. This is an important component that you need to emphasize so that your players are always in game-like situations when they train. The coaching points remain consistent throughout the four exercises and should be consistent in your direction to the triangle midfield as they learn and develop within this system.

TRAINING THE DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Defending is about accomplishing two things:

- 1) Keeping your opponent out of the middle or in switching the play through the midfield
and
- 2) Keeping the central midfielders of the opposing team (their playmakers) the ability to possess the ball in the central part of the midfield.

These are the two main responsibilities of the triangle midfield. You would accomplish these through having your triangle midfield play very disciplined and organized so that they never expose the middle of the field or give the opposition the opportunity to play into their central options.

The following three drills will allow you to focus your triangle midfield defending using either structure. It is up to you to bring out and emphasize the important aspects of the triangle midfield defending. The three exercises are done within the game and will focus on a different aspect of the game, be it the attacking third, middle third, defending third, or overall team shape. The coaching points will remain consistent throughout all four exercises.

Exercise #1 (Italian Shadow Play From Attacking 3rd to Defending Half)

Italian Shadow Play is where you move to positions of where you are supposed to be in relation to where the ball is positioned. Another team is involved that possesses the ball, but must move away from opposing pressure and cannot challenge through the pressure. The defending team cannot steal the ball directly from the opposing team, but they can intercept passes. Once they do they can go to goal quickly working on the exercises from the possession and penetration section. When the defending team does gain possession the other team cannot defend them. They look to drop back into position to begin the exercise again once the play is dead. It is effective on both sides as you can work with the defending team on their shape in relation to the ball. It will also be beneficial to have them work on transitional speed as they

should immediately look for the first option once they win possession, and the speed by which they quickly look to get up the field to attack the goal.



This first diagram represents the starting positions for the players as they prepare to drop and defend. This diagram would represent the exact moment of when possession is lost and what the team shape would be like at that time. The ball would start with the goalkeeper and they would begin the exercise by playing the ball out to any one of their defenders. Once the ball is played out the drill begins and the defending team would look to immediately drop and get into their customary 'Christmas Tree' shape to defend their half of the field. They would react quickly to

drop and defend and the only player who would look to apply pressure to slow the transition of the opponent's attack would be the central attacker. This would give the rest of the team the few seconds they needed to quickly drop and get into shape to defend and to protect the space behind them.



This second diagram shows the team as they have dropped into their own half of the field and assumed their 'Christmas Tree' shape. The ball is currently positioned with the opposing team's left central defender and the central attacker is in position to apply pressure, but not to take risks with that pressure. They want the opposing team to just play in front of them which would allow them even more time to settle into their shape and to begin reading the opposing team and their runs. You can see from this diagram that there really

aren't any available options centrally. The only space available to them is on each wing. This is the objective of this formation in defending, to force the opposition when in possession to play into the wide spaces.



This final diagram shows the opposing team has played the ball to the wing attacker on their left side. The defending team has shifted over to close the space allowing only the space back as the only open space available. The triangle midfielder on that side is positioned slightly about the player with the ball to close the passing lane down and to be in a position to double-team the player with possession, if the opportunity should arise. The rest of the team has slid over to close and

congest the spaces in the middle. The weak side wing defender would guard against a ball switched to the weak side attacker while the withdrawn forward on the weak side is in a position to help defend should the weak side wing defender make a run towards the back side. The opposite side holding central midfielder is in the middle of the field looking to match up against their attacking central midfielder and can read the movements of their triangle midfield as well. The defensive central midfielder is in position to pick up the runs of any of the attacking midfielders in case they make an advanced run towards goal or a diagonal run to beat the defense.

Exercise #2 (Defending a Central Target)

This exercise is set up using the full team to defend playing against 9 field players and a goalkeeper. The team in possession has one player positioned inside the middle of the 1-4-3-2-1 formation at all times. The defending team looks to keep their shape and intercept or steal the ball whenever and wherever possible. If they do, they look to quickly play the ball to their central attacker who then looks to pass the ball into the goalkeeper on the goal they would be attacking. The possessing team looks to score by passing the ball into the target player inside the formation and then back out to any other player on their team. It is important that this player stay in the middle and not wander out to the fringes of the middle. They need to stay centrally located so that they are forcing the defending team to work hard.



You can see in this diagram the defending team is in their standard 'Christmas Tree' shape while the possessing team have three layers of three players each (three defenders, three midfielders, and three attackers). The central midfielder for the possessing team is positioned in the middle of the 1-4-3-2-1 formation and will move and shift looking to find an open window to receive the ball

and play it out again. This is demanding work for the defending team as they must always be shifting and moving and, above all, communicating constantly with one another. This is an effective exercise for working with the defense on their ability to communicate and direct one another. It is also very effective for the triangle midfield as they will have to coordinate and adjust constantly while also communicating and helping to direct their movements.

Exercise #3 (Defending in the Final 3rd)



This exercise is set in the defensive half of the field. Set your defending team in their traditional 'Christmas Tree' shape in their defensive half while playing against 8 opposing players look to attack their goal. The exercise begins with the coach passing the ball into the attacking team. Once the ball is played in the attacking team works to try and beat the defending team and create a chance at goal. The defending team looks to keep themselves organized and to force the attacking team into making a bad

decision and cause them to lose possession of the ball. Once this happens they look to play the ball quickly to their central attacker who would then look to pass the ball back to the coach.

The opposing team's central attacker will also be placed in the middle of the defending team's triangle to also see if they can play through the middle of the defending team. If a goal is scored another ball is played in from the coach so that the exercise is continuous. Remember to instruct the defensive team on their shape and organization. It is also important to work with the triangle on their shape and ability to move and shift as the ball transitions into a different space.

Although this system does incorporate a triangle midfield it is done very differently than most of the other formations. Of all the formations that use a triangle midfield this one is the least creating and most restrictive of all of the formations. It is not an attractive formation nor a popular one to play, but it is effective at controlling the tempo of the game and in restricting options, especially if you are playing a dynamic attacking team with dangerous speed.

1-3-5-2 FORMATION



- The Triangle Midfield consists of 2 Attacking Central Midfielders and 1 Holding Central Midfielder
 - *How to Triangulate the Midfield*
 - *Training Possession and Penetration*
 - *Training Defensive Responsibilities*

All formations are created to combat other formations that have been successful. The 1-3-5-2 formation was created to combat the midfield strengths of West Germany and Italy who played traditional 1-4-4-2 formations. The game in the late 1970's and well into the 1980's became more stagnant and very defensive in its structure and performance. Some refer to this time period as the most boring soccer the world has ever seen. Teams had moved away from the attacking styles found by the Dutch and adapted by the Brazilians in the early 1970's and took on a more conservative style of play. The 1-4-4-2 was re-invented into different structures in the mid to late 1970's and the game became a boring low scoring affair, especially in competitions at the highest levels (World Cup and European Championships). Club teams like Bayern Munich were dominating the league and championship levels with a more defensive style that centered around the strength of the central midfield.

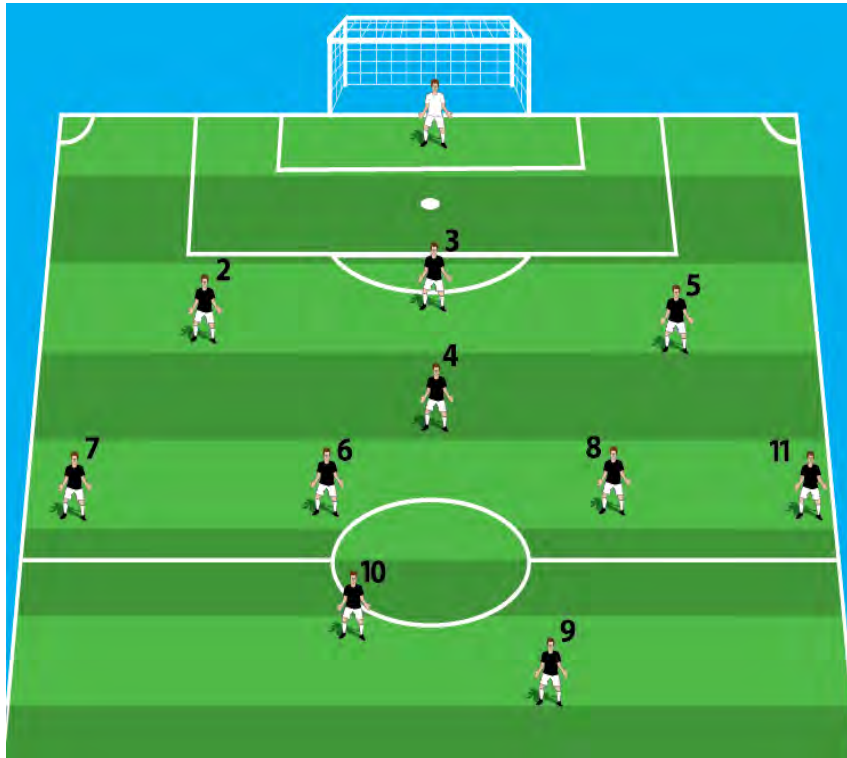


The creation of the 1-3-5-2 formation began with a young coach from Argentina, Carlos Bilardo. He analyzed the way the game had become and what he liked from other systems, then looked at what he had available and began to draw conclusions. What he arrived at was that they had a young star that was about to splash onto the world scene, a player who needed the freedom to move about the field without restrictions. Bilardo liked the attacking capabilities of the Dutch system, but knew the restrictions of the attackers in this system would limit this young star's capabilities. This young player, Diego Maradona, was looked at as being a very dangerous and creative player who needed the freedom and flexibility to move about the field without restrictions. Bilardo liked the structure of the midfield in the Dutch system and felt it was necessary to have this structure in order to combat the strengths of teams like West Germany and Italy. He also felt that they needed to dominate the

strengths of the midfields of these teams and, to do this needed to outnumber them in the midfield. He quickly drew to the conclusion that he would need five midfielders; three centrally located and then a wide midfielder on each side. That left him faced with either going with one attacker or just three defenders. His decision was based upon the fact that just about every team in the world had gone to the 1-4-4-2 formation and he believed that three defenders and the support from the outside midfielders would be enough to stop any opposing attacks. This became the birth of the 1-3-5-2 formation and started Argentina on a run of two consecutive World Cup Championship appearances and one World Cup Title in 1986. They would have secured a second consecutive title in 1990, but a late penalty kick call against them and a stingy defensive performance by West Germany who spent nearly the entire game defending, resulted in a 1-0 defeat and a Runner-up finish.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (IN POSSESSION)

The triangulation of the midfield in the 1-3-5-2 is very similar to that of the 1-4-3-3 and just depends if you have two attacking central midfielders or one attacking central midfielder. This section will only cover having two attacking central midfielders and one holding midfielder,



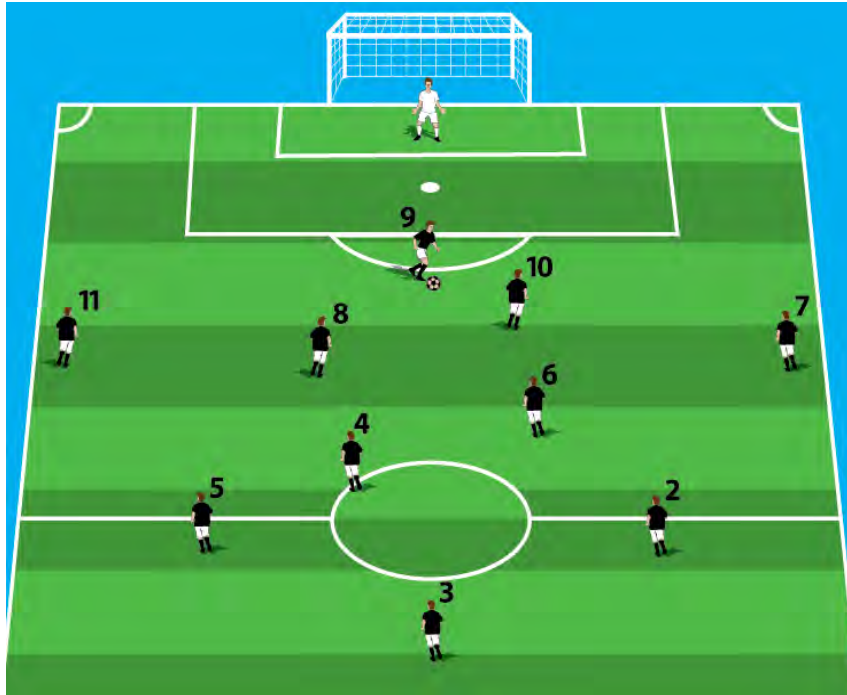
similar to what Argentina employed in their formation when the system first was created. The subtle difference with the triangle midfield in this formation is that you have outside midfielders and it naturally conditions the triangle midfielders to stay central and not be drawn out wide. It is also involves being more flexible in adjusting and moving as there are only two forwards in this system; players that are free-flowing and free moving players. In this formation, the holding central midfielder is

responsible for making the key adjustments so that the formation remains in shape and position to support the attackers and the ball. It is necessary that the central midfielders in the triangle stay within 12-15 yards from one another and that the holding midfielder gives them depth. The triangle midfield will almost always stay within the width of the 18 yard box and play in an area of about 20 yards each side of midfield. This is the area they look to dominate and control to win the game. There may be occasions where they venture wider, but only in cases where other players have over-committed and they must adjust based upon what the opposing team is doing.

Since there are no real restrictions placed on the two forwards, other than they look to support one another and combine to get behind the defense, it places more responsibility on the two attacking central midfielders to adjust to the movements and runs of those forwards. One attacking central midfielder (the weak side one) will always need to be in a position to attack the goal while the other attacking central midfielder must always be in a position to support behind the ball. This triangle because of these demands places more of an emphasis on reading and adjusting to the game more quickly and on fitness demands of the players in the triangle midfield. Players in these positions are always moving adjusting and constantly reading the movements of their forwards. Their ball movement must also be quick as one mistake and they allow their opponent to attack just three defenders instead of the customary four defenders.

Keeping shape, reading and adjusting to the movements of their own forwards, and the demands of fitness on these three players means they must also be smart players with strong technical ability. Their skill and work rate must be ready to outpace and outwork any opposing two or three midfield systems they may encounter.

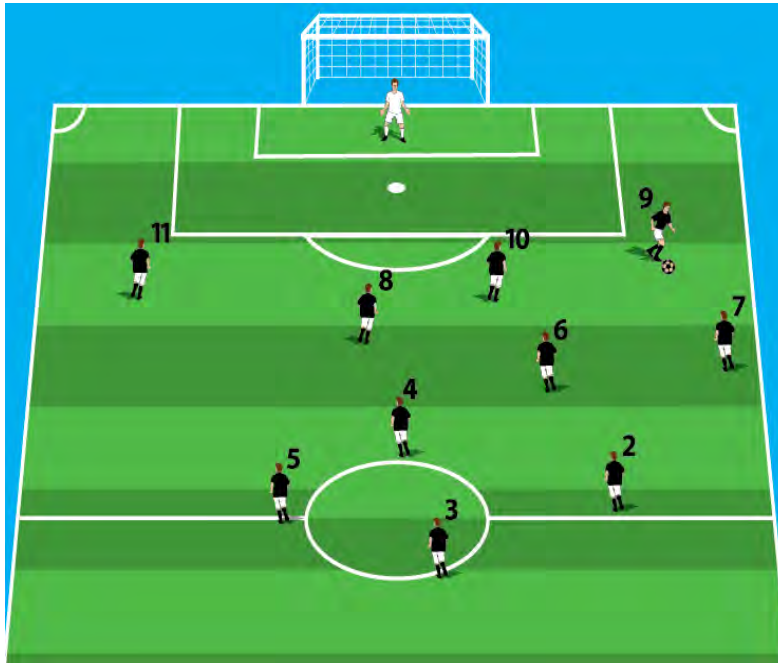
Example #1



In this example the central attacker (#9) has possession of the ball while the withdrawn central attacker (#10) is making a forward run. The triangle midfield consists of two attacking central midfielders (#6 and #8) and one holding central midfielder (#4). The principles of triangulation will always remain the same as the attacking central midfielder on the right side (#6) supports the withdrawn forward (#10) on that side who is making the forward run. The opposite

side attacking central midfielder (#8) supports the central attacker with possession (#9) while also looking to keep the shape of the triangle as it moves forward. They would be in a position to make an attacking run forward as an attacking option. The holding central midfielder (#4) stays behind the two attacking central midfielders and is responsible for communicating with the two in order to keep the triangle shape in the midfield. The three defenders keep their shape in support of the runs, but look to stay behind the ball in order to protect the middle.

As you can see it appears as if there is more of a diamond rather than a triangle with the incorporation of the withdrawn attacker. This will be a normal and common occurrence when with possession, especially in central areas of the field. The two attacking central midfielders (#6 and #8) will always shift and adjust to support the withdrawn attacker first as the withdrawn attacker has the responsibility to combine with and to support the deep attacker. Both attackers have the freedom to move about anywhere in the attacking area to create opportunities and to confuse the defense. The triangle midfield is responsible for organizing and making supporting runs and positioning based upon their movements. It will always work that attacking central midfielder opposite the withdrawn attacker will be positioned higher and in position to make an attacking run from a withdrawn position while the attacking central midfielder who is behind the withdrawn attacker will always support beneath them.

Example #2

being sure to stay behind the line of the run of the withdrawn attacker. The holding central midfielder (#4) shifts centrally to keep the shape of the triangle and to protect the middle. The weak side then is wide open for the attacking run of the left outside midfielder (#11).



they can either combine with the deep attacker or make a penetrating run forward. The triangle will keep its shape, but one attacking central midfielder will be in a withdrawn position

In this example you see the deep attacker (#9) has come wide to receive the ball. The withdrawn attacker (#10) is starting to make a run towards the goal. The outside right midfielder (#7) is positioned underneath the ball as support and would also be available to make an overlapping run should the deep forward start bringing the ball inside. The attacking central midfielder ball side (#6) is supporting at an angle underneath the ball inside while the weak side attacking central midfielder (#8) is making a forward run towards goal, but

You can see the shape of the triangle with the two attacking and one holding central midfielders. As in the previous example, the shape will actually look like a diamond with the inclusion of the withdrawn attacker. This is by design as the triangle's main responsibility is to support the run of the withdrawn attacker. Everything keys off of the movements of the attackers. The deep attacker will always look to position themselves on the same side as the ball while the withdrawn will always support behind the deep attacker at an angle ready to read when the ball is played in so

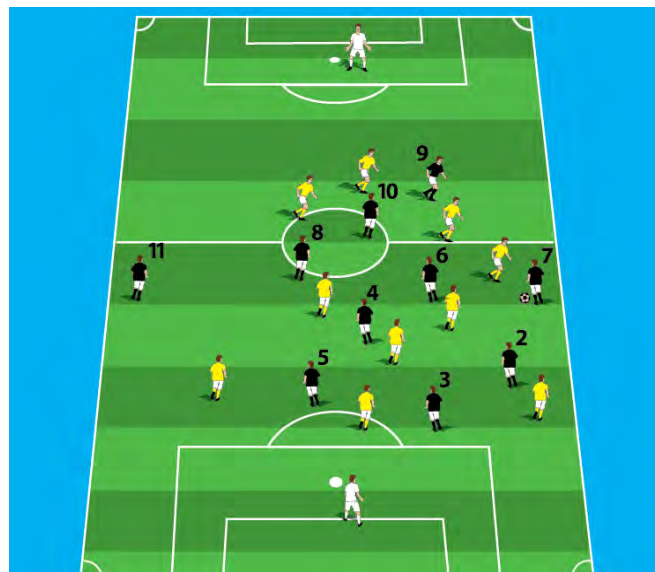
also ready to make a penetrating run as a second option for the deep attacker. The opposite side attacking central midfielder will always have the responsibility of support directly beneath the ball or to support at an angle behind the ball. The second diagram shows the positioning of a team playing in a 1-4-3-3 formation. Although this formation matches up fairly well in the midfield, you can see the outside midfielder (#7) wide open to support the ball. You also see the weak side outside midfielder (#11) wide open on the back side.

Example #3



In this example the outside right midfielder (#7) has possession and is looking to advance up the field. The deep central attacker (#9) has shifted over to the ball side while the withdrawn attacker is supporting more centrally at an angle behind the ball. The central attacker on the side of the ball (#6) is supporting just inside of the outside midfielder with possession. The opposite side attacking central midfielder (#8) has shifted up to support the withdrawn attacker (#10) as an option in the attack when the ball is played. The holding central midfielder (#4) is centrally located to protect the middle, but is also in

a position to support both attacking midfielders. The triangle midfielder offering proper support of the withdrawn attacker again takes on the shape of a diamond. The defensive shape



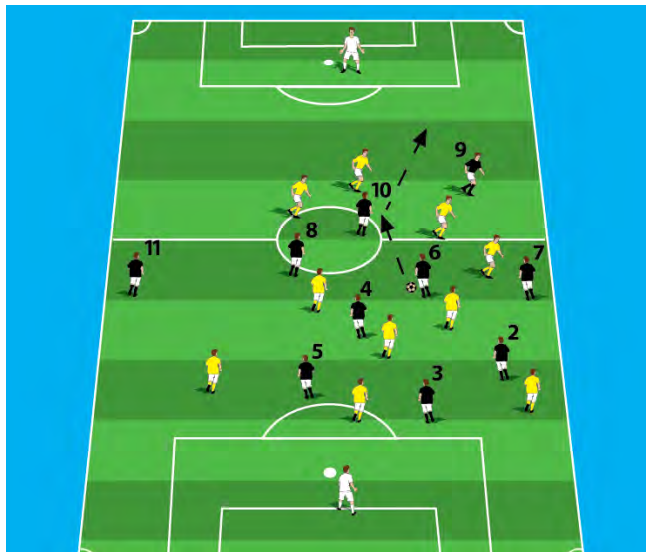
is shifted over towards the ball with the right defender (#2) supporting the ball, the central defender (#3) dropping behind as the sweeper, and the opposite side left defender (#5) in the customary check-mark formation. The dangerous player in this situation right now would be the weak side outside midfielder on the left (#11). This player has a lot of space they can attack and, if executed correctly, would be in a great position to attack the goal on a diagonal run behind the defense. You can see the lines that are created when the team is in its proper shape, but the strength of this system is in its depth.

You can see in this second frame the addition of the opposition in a 1-4-3-3 formation. This diagram would be that moment of transition where your opponent has lost possession and



you've won it and began to attack forward. You can see the natural pattern that is open to where the outside right midfielder (#7) can transition possession to the opposite side outside midfielder (#11) by playing through the triangle midfield. The positioning of both attacking central midfielders allows the outside midfielder with possession to be able to pass into the supporting attacking central midfielder (#6). The attacking central midfielder now has possession of the ball and is in a position to break down the defense of the opposition. The attacking central midfielder is in a very advantageous position where they can

attack the defense and are behind the triangle midfield of the opposing 1-4-3-3 formation. This is one of the main reasons the 1-3-5-2 formation was created, to control the midfield of the 1-4-3-3 formation and to be able to attack the weaknesses within that system. The attacking central midfielder would then have many options with which to break down the opposing team.



In this position they are able to attack forward by dribbling into the space. Chances are the defense will not immediately step to challenge the ball because of the numbers they are facing. A smart defense will be dropping and organizing behind the ball. You can see in this diagram how you could easily be attacking their four defenders with as many as five or even six players. If one were to break off and pressure the player with the ball this would create immediate opportunities for you to quickly get behind them. One such opportunity would be to pass the ball into the withdrawn attacker

(#10) who could then play a penetrating ball in front of the deep attacker (#9) who would be in on goal with very little effort. It would just be a matter of timing and discipline on the part of the deep attacker to remain onside and patient until the ball was played. Once they turned to make their penetrating run they would be in position to beat the central defenders trying to recover and would have the inside run to goal with the ball. The continuation of this play would also find the withdrawn attacker supporting behind the run of the deep attacker in a central position. If both central defenders make recovery runs to stop the deep attacker, then the withdrawn attacker would be wide open at the top of the 18 yard box in a central position. The triangle midfield would of course shift up to support with the weak side attacking central midfielder covering the far post on a switched ball.



Another option that would be immediately available would be for the attacking central midfielder (#6) to play a penetrating ball to the opposite side for the weak side outside midfielder (#11) who would be looking to make a diagonal penetrating run to goal. This would be a very effective ball and, with the proper pace, the weak side outside midfielder (#11) would be able to attack the goal without the opposing defenders being able to recover in time to offer resistance. In this example you would see the deep central attacker peel off and start making a run towards the far post. The withdrawn attacker would support the outside midfielder with the ball by making a run towards

the near post, but being sure to stay behind the attacking run of the outside midfielder. This way if they play the ball across they would remain onside and in a position to receive and score.



The attacking central midfielder who made the penetrating pass (#6) would step up to support behind the deep attacker in a position that is about 25-30 yards from goal. The other attacking central midfielder would be positioned to support directly beneath the outside left midfielder (#11) making the run on goal. The holding central midfielder (#4) looks to remain centrally located to protect the middle of the field while also supporting the attacking runs of both attacking central midfielders. The weak side outside right midfielder (#7) continues to make their run wide opposite side just in case the ball needs to be switched. The defense

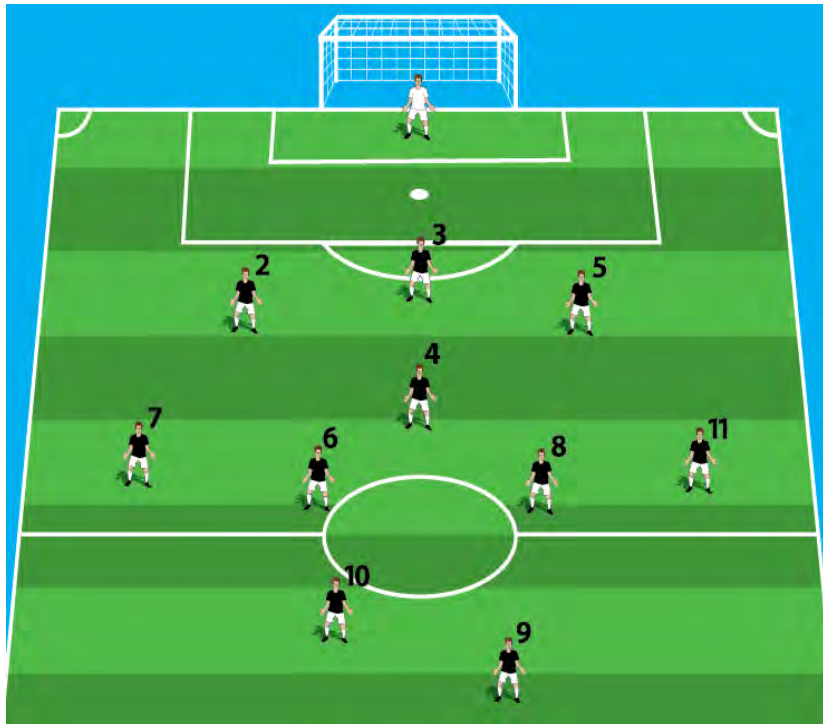
remains in a compacted position around midfield, but would be ready to support forward should they be needed. Their main concern would always be to read the positioning of the attackers in relation to the ball so that they are always in position to protect the space behind them.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (OUT OF POSSESSION)

Defending in the triangle midfield in a 1-3-5-2 formation is all about denying their playmakers possession of the ball and to make other players on their team work to beat you. Since the system was created to break down teams with strong midfields it was designed to always have a numerical advantage in this area and to create numbers problems for the opposition in other areas (i.e. outside midfield positions when playing against a 1-4-3-3 formation). In the triangle midfield defending, the central midfielders are more protected as they have the support of the outside midfielders in the system. There won't be as many instances where they would have to come out wide to defend. This makes their job one where they must deny the opposing team's central midfielders possession or involvement in the game. There would be two ways to accomplish this as a defending team:

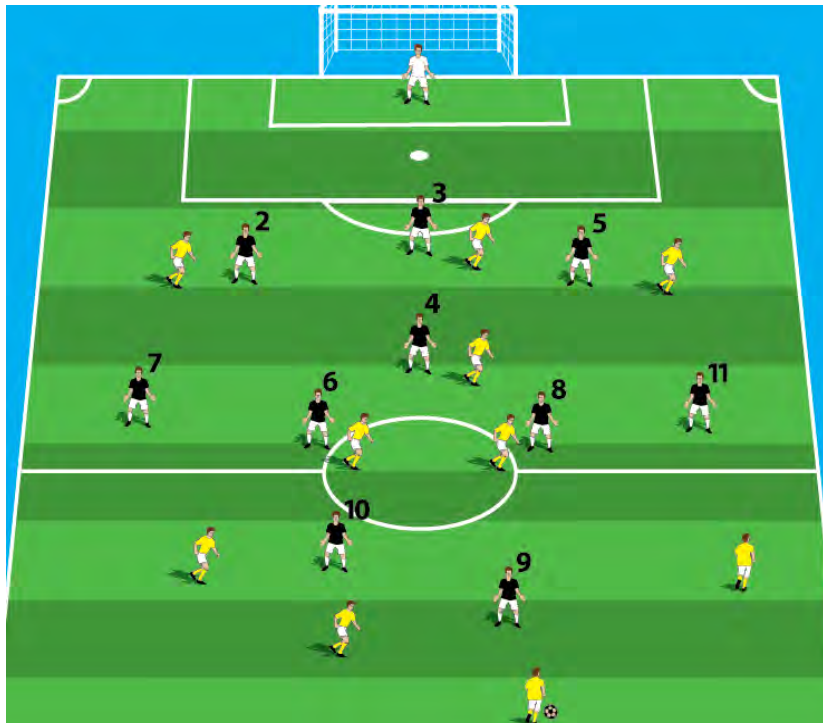
- 1) The first method is to defend the central midfield space in a zonal way. This means that you keep the shape of the triangle, but shorten the distances between all three players to prevent your opponent from being able to play through the middle. It is important in this style of defending that you always keep a **TIP** on the ball at all times. That means wherever the ball is there is always a central midfield player from the triangle blocking the passing lane into central options while the other two midfield players keep their shape, but shorten the distance to 8-10 yards. This will force the opposing central midfielders to start moving outside to get the ball, thus disrupting their shape and their game. It is still important that the holding central midfielder is aware of the two central midfielders for the opponent in case they need to adjust slightly to further eliminate them as options, but for the most part, they play zonal and focus on the distance from one another and the space they are defending. Remember, the holding central midfielder is the conductor of the triangle. This means that they must always be reading and communicating to the two attacking central midfielders the adjustments they need to make to help limit or eliminate the options of the opposing midfield. Also, the player acting as the **TIP** must stay within the width of the 18 yard box and allow other players to do their jobs in defending. Since there are outside midfielders in this system it is not necessary for the central midfielders to venture out from their area. This would only expose the midfield and give the opposition the chance to come inside. The central midfielders should only come inside if there is no other option.
- 2) The second method is almost opposite in that it combines man-to-man marking with zonal defending. It begins with the same principle of having the triangle midfield player closest to the ball acting as the **TIP**. The other two midfield players support behind as before, but they look to mark man-to-man while still trying to keep shape behind. The two midfielders behind remain aware of the two central midfielders and mark them when they come into their area. It is important that they mark them, but stay behind them also. Do not allow them to get in behind your midfielder or they can gain an advantage in attacking your goal. If they gain possession, then the objective is to force them to play it back and re-set.

In both cases, it is important that the holding midfielder drops back to help the defenders when the opponent has possession in your defending third of the field. They would act as a stopper or central defender if this happens.



The final comment on defending and triangulation has to do with the rigidity of the triangle midfield. It is important to keep stating that the triangle midfield is a living a breathing thing in possession, but also when adjusting to defend. Since your formation's strength is based upon the midfield in possession, then it stands to reason that your strength in defending would also be in midfield. It is not common in this formation for a team to stay up and play a high pressure game. The reason is because you only have three

defenders and you still need to be concerned about protecting the space behind you. In most cases, your team would drop back and defend at midfield where your strength is. Your three



defenders would stay compact behind the midfield to prevent anything in the middle. The only option for your opponent would be to try and bypass the midfield by going directly to the forwards. If you are playing a team that uses a formation with three attackers then this could be dangerous. It is important to have three defenders that have pace, skill, and strength in challenges as they will often find themselves in 1v1 challenges. It is also important that your GK be quick at reading the

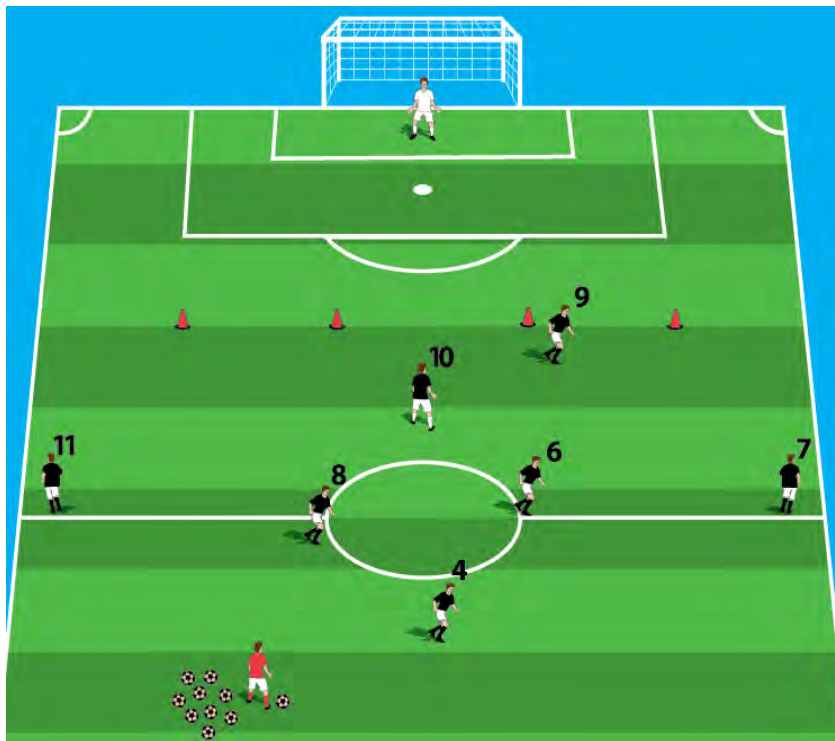
opposition and attempts at playing balls behind the defense. It is also important that they are comfortable at coming off of their line and to act as a sweeper in cases like these.

In this second frame you see the 1-3-5-2 formation matched up against a 1-4-3-3 formation and one of the central defenders with possession coming forward. You can see how the triangle midfield matches up comfortably and how the only option for the player with possession is to play the ball wide to the outside wing defender shifting up or to try and drive a ball long into the wing attacker on that side. Your goal as a defending team is to make the opposition and their attack predictable. Taking away the midfield of the opposition forces them into predictable play and will make it easier for you to shut them down.

TRAINING POSSESSION AND PENETRATION

The following represents examples of how to train for possession and/or penetration in a 1-3-5-2 Formation. The exercises used will be the same as previously used, but more emphasis will be placed on quick patterns within the exercises and a focus on the triangle midfield within this system. There are a total of four (4) different exercises to accomplish what you need to in order to train or prepare your midfield to play this formation.

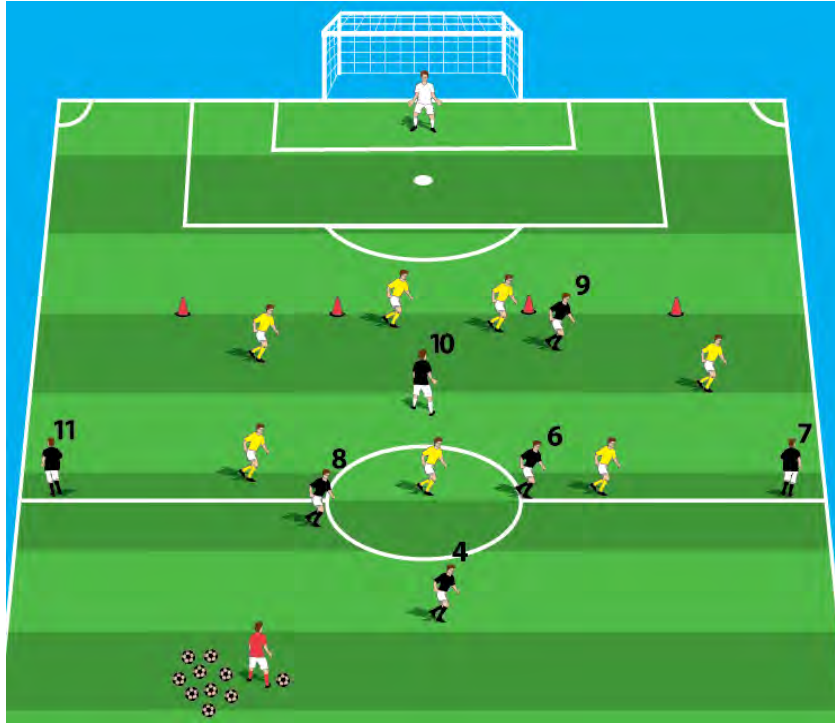
Exercise #1 (Possession and Penetration- MF Combinations)



In the midfield combination exercises shown in this diagram it is recommended to begin with a line of cones and no opposition. You need to give the players a sense of success while also working on the combinations you want them to use. There are several different combinations you can use (more than 30). It is recommended that you implement 5-6 different ones and then encourage the players to problem-solve and come up with different combinations on their own.

The exercise begins with the coach playing the ball into one of the central midfield players. The coach should vary who they play the ball into and encourage the rest of the players to adjust to the ball and possession. Once the players are comfortable with adjusting to where the ball is

played and are comfortable with the combinations you have introduced, start encouraging them to try other combinations. Emphasize to them to play at game speed so that their speed is realistic and you can work on minimizing the mistakes that they make.



After they have had success and are performing the combinations with few to no mistakes start adding in defenders into the play. Do this slowly and not all at once. It would be recommended to start with three defenders and one midfielder who plays in the middle of the triangle. Have the team work on using combinations that make sense and move away from the pressure. As they become comfortable at moving away from pressure and in creating chances on goal start adding in

additional opposing players until you have four defenders in the back and three midfielders for a total of seven defenders against seven possessing the ball. You may want to have the player passing the ball in to start the exercise be a central defender who supports the possession and to help move the ball away from pressure. Make sure to emphasize that their priority is to protect the ball and to not force the play. Keep possession and take advantage of opportunities to go forward when the opposition is not in position to defend you.

As mentioned before, there are more than 30 different combinations that you can work with from this exercise. You will want to introduce 5-6 to the team and have them work with those before coming up with others on their own. Here are a few you can work with:

- 1) The ball is initially played into the attacking central midfielder (#6) who passes back to the holding central midfielder (#4). The holding central midfielder (#4) receives the ball and passes to the central attacker (#9) who plays it back to the withdrawn attacker (#10) and then turns out to start making a penetrating run towards goal. The withdrawn attacker (#10) makes a one-touch pass splitting the two defenders and back to the space in front of the central attacker (#9) who collects the ball and goes to goal.
- 2) The ball is initially played into the holding central midfielder (#4) who receives and passes the ball wide to the outside right midfielder (#7). The outside right midfielder (#7) receives the ball and passes the ball to the central attacker (#9) and starts making a run down the line. The central attacker (#9) receives the ball and plays it through into

the space wide in front of the outside right midfielder (#7), then turns inside and starts to make a run towards the middle of the goal. The outside right midfielder collects the ball and starts to attack the near post of the goal. Other players would continue to goal making sure to frame the box. The outside right midfielder would then either shoot at goal or drive a low serve across the box for other players to attack.

- 3) The ball is initially played into the attacking left central midfielder (#8) who receives and plays it wide to the outside left midfielder (#11). The outside left midfielder (#11) receives the ball and plays it into the withdrawn attacker (#10), then starts to make a run down the line. The central attacker (#9) checks towards the ball and then turns and makes a penetrating run towards goal. The withdrawn attacker (#10) plays the ball wide to the opposite side outside midfielder (#7) who is also making a forward run. The outside right midfielder (#7) collects the ball and starts to attack the near post while all of the other players frame the box.

Exercise #2 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play to Outside Targets)



Begin by setting your team out in the 1-3-5-2 formation with the two outside midfielders positioned at midfield right at the midfield line just off of the field. Begin the exercise with no opposition and work on patterns to complete to the opposite outside midfield player. For example, start with the ball having to be played through one of the attacking central midfielders and the deep central attacker before it can be played to the opposite outside midfield player. By mixing up the patterns and

putting the condition in play that players must play at game speed, you should see quicker play as you progress through the exercise. Once you feel comfortable with the success of the patterns move on to adding opposing players to the exercise and build it to where you have a 2-3-2 formation for a total of seven opposing players.

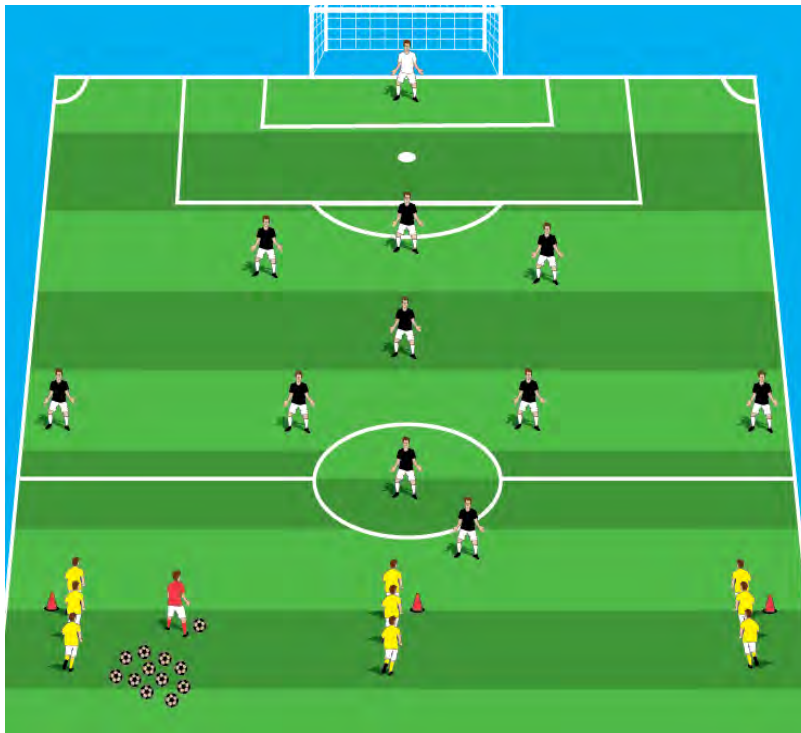
Once you have added opposing players to the exercise you will want to give direction and build in transitional speed and play. Condition the team to play from one outside midfield player to the other. Once they do give them 15 seconds to attack the goal they are attacking. Make sure they understand through the process that they must first protect the ball and not give it away



or force the play. You need to also give the opposing team the opportunity when they win possession by allowing them to attack either goal when they win the ball. This will force your formation to adjust and defend immediately while under extreme conditions. Once they win the ball back they must quickly re-gain their shape and composure and look to play from target to target. This will also start to condition them to protect the ball and to not lose possession. They will begin to understand that if they make the mistake and

lose possession they will be punished for this. Once your team is doing a better job of protecting the ball and playing from target to target and learning to change gears to attack, then move the target players onto the field and add opposing players so that you are playing 11v11.

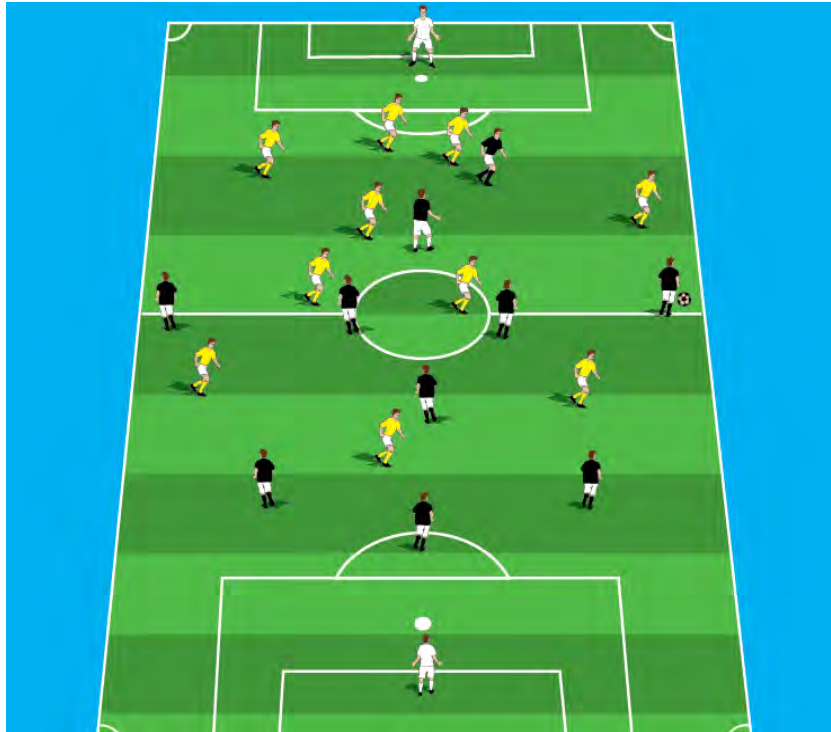
Exercise #3 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play Building out of the Back)



In this exercise you are working with your team to build the ball out of their defensive third under pressure from opposing players. The exercise begins with the coach playing a ball into the defensive half of the field for your team to gain possession. The coach will send in anywhere from 1-6 players to apply pressure as the team builds the ball back to the deep central attacker in the system. The coach will vary where the ball is delivered and will vary how many opposing players will be sent in to pressure the team with the ball. If the pressuring players

win possession they look to attack the goal as quickly as possible. The team losing possession must stop the attack and quickly look to re-gain possession and play to their central attacker. As the team experiences success start to add layers to the opposing players applying pressure. You will start with two and three players pressuring first and will then add in a second layer of players to pressure to represent the opposing team's midfield. Finish the process by building to 11v11 play.

Exercise #4 (Italian Shadow Play to 11v11 Play)



This is an exercise where you can focus on the attacking or defending side. In this particular example you are focusing on the attacking side. In this exercise the attacking team works on protecting the ball while the defending team works on blocking passing lanes. The defending team cannot steal the ball from the attackers, but can intercept bad passes and then goal to goal. This puts more of an emphasis on the attacking team on protecting the ball and making good and quick decisions in possession.

Focus on quick possession, but make sure that they relax in possession and concentrate on their breathing. This way they won't panic in possession or try to force the play.

There are different ways to deal with when the team loses possession, and it all depends upon where in the actually session you are and what you want to focus on. They would include the following possibilities:

- 1) When the attacking team loses possession they would jog back into position while the opposing team play one-touch play to goal. The attacking team that lost possession do not attempt to win the ball back, but rather are just jogging back to get into position to start again.
- 2) When the attacking team has lost possession they play high pressure and marking and must win the ball back within 10 seconds or face some type of punishment exercise.
- 3) When the attacking team has lost possession they must do some quick punishment exercise while the opposing team can look to quickly start attacking. Once they have

completed the punishment exercise they must look to recover and quickly re-gain possession as quickly as possible.

These are just a few examples you could use and would depend upon what your focus is and where in the training session you are as far as its progress. You may decide that you do not want to work on team defending and exclusively work on the possession and attacking side. You may want to focus on the Barcelona style of when you lose it go and get it immediately. You may also decide you want to delay their recovery to put more pressure on how quickly your team can transition between attacking to defending play. You may also decide you don't want to jump into having the attacking team looking to win possession back or be involved in that part of the game because it is too early in your session to get into a scrimmage environment. Either way, this is a great exercise to work on your team's ability to possess and protect the ball while dealing with mild to moderate pressure.

TRAINING THE DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Defending is about accomplishing two things:

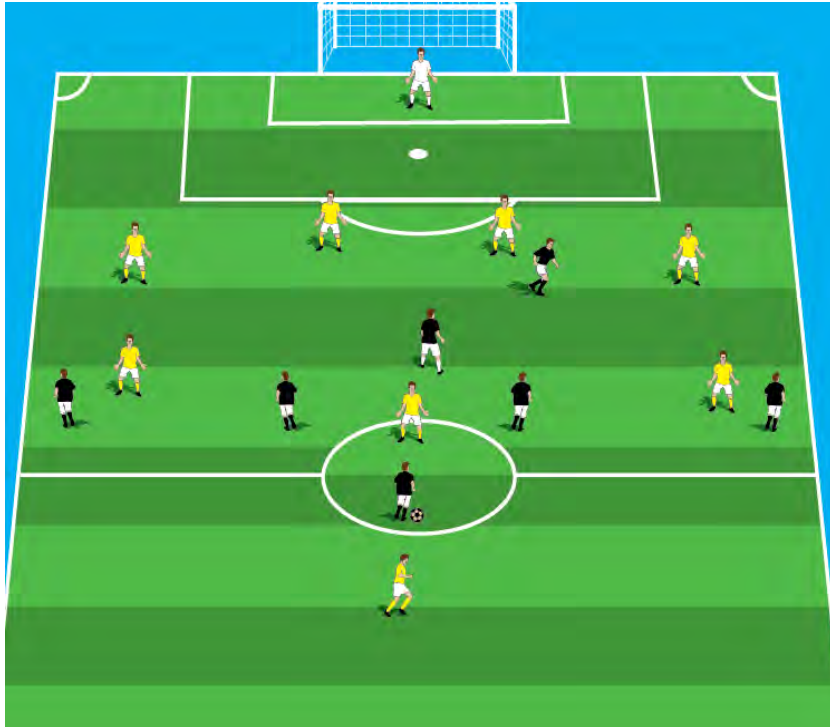
- 1) Keeping your opponent out of the middle or in switching the play through the midfield and
- 2) Keeping the central midfielders of the opposing team (their playmakers) the ability to possess the ball in the central part of the midfield.

These are the two main responsibilities of the triangle midfield. How you accomplish this can be done through either playing your triangle midfield in a zonal way, or by using two of the midfielders to mark man-to-man. The attacking central midfielder would act as a screen to block the passing lane into the opposing central midfielders.

The following four drills will allow you to focus your triangle midfield defending using either structure. It is up to you to bring out and emphasize the important aspects of the triangle midfield defending. The four exercises are done within the game and will focus on a different aspect of the game, be it the attacking third, middle third, defending third, or overall team shape. The coaching points will remain consistent throughout all four exercises.

Exercise #1 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Play In and Out of the Triangle)

Since the strength of this formation is to control the midfield and deny a team with a strong midfield the ability to possess the ball, this would be the obvious choice to introduce and train your triangle midfield in the 1-3-5-2 formation. This exercise has both attacking and defending components that you can work on since you will be working to goal. Position your attacking two and triangle midfield players in the attacking half of the field playing against a 1-4-3-3 formation, but with one of the three midfielders positioned inside the middle of the triangle. The other two will play on the outside right and outside left. Also have four defenders playing to defend the goal with a goalkeeper in the goal. The final player would be a central forward

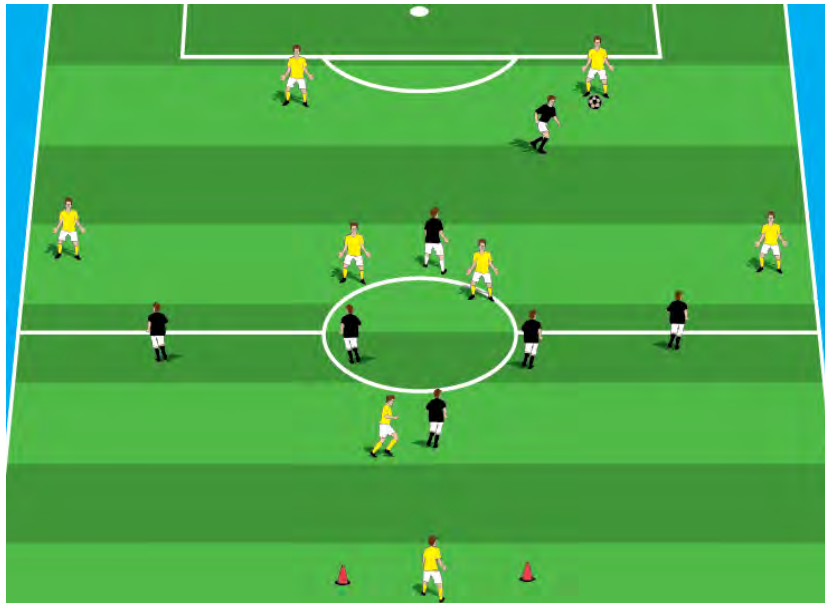


playing behind the midfield who is there as a target, but also there to provide more pressure on the attacking team. This will be the team defending the goal, but not the team you will actually be working with. The team you are working with in their defensive capacity will be the two attackers and, primarily, the triangle midfielders. This team will also have their outside midfielders with them. Their total formation will be a 5-2 playing against a 4-3-1. They will be at a disadvantage numbers wise, but will have

the ability to attack the goal directly when they have possession. When they do not have possession, work with them on their shape and in protecting the central part of the midfield. The exercise begins with the team attacking the goal in possession. Emphasize your philosophy and options in the attack as if this were an attacking session. You want them to follow the normal game plan in the attacking half of the field. Make sure they work on protecting the ball and in looking for their options in possession to create chances on goal. Once possession is lost focus on their defensive shape, especially in the triangle midfield. They should look to deny passing lanes into the central midfielders. The objective of the opposing team once they gain possession is to try and pass into the player in the middle of the triangle and out again to another option. This is how they score and they get one point for doing this. Your team gets points for scoring on the goal. It will obviously be easier for the opposing team to score and your team will tire quickly and this is a good time to explain why they need to do a better job of protecting the ball. You may want to put an exercise in should the other team play in and out of the triangle. It will help drive this point home. It is easier to defend if the other team never gets possession of the ball. Sounds like Yogi Berra philosophy, but it is true! They cannot score if they don't have the ball. Your team needs to work harder to defend and keep shape then they will when they attack the goal. Make sure your team knows that and to emphasize the increased work rate when they do lose possession. There has to be some urgency when they lose possession to get the ball back as quickly as possible. They cannot, however, sacrifice their shape or the integrity of the team's defensive positioning in an attempt to win the ball back. They must be very disciplined and controlled when they defend. Otherwise the opposing team will find ways to get inside the triangle and give them clear and dangerous chances in real games to attack your three defenders with numbers. If this happens, then you won't survive, and the chance of you giving up goals in large numbers is very high. Defense is about organization and discipline and not reckless individual play. It is also helpful if your team and

defensive volume is loud. Encourage them to raise the volume on their communication when possession is lost. This tends to disrupt the opposing team and helps your team play more confidently.

Exercise #2- Triangle Midfield Defending (Playing to Targets Behind the Triangle)



The first exercise focused on protecting the space inside the triangle in the middle. This exercise is similar, but it focuses on protecting the space in the middle and behind the triangle as the opposing team will look to play to a central target behind the midfield. This is the most dangerous space and the area the triangle midfield in the 1-3-5-2 should be trying to protect. Deny them the ability to get behind the triangle midfield where

they can attack your three defenders and you will shut down the opposing team and control the game. The target player for the opposing team is positioned between two cones and can shift and move in that space between the cones. The opposing team attempts to control and possess the ball trying to play it into that target player between the two cones. The defending team works on staying organized, denying passing lanes centrally and applying pressure to prevent the possibility of the ball being played to the target player. Staying organized and being disciplined are the keys to defending here. Make sure they focus and are aware of the opposing team's movements. Encourage them to communicate and, when possible, to raise the volume. If the defending team wins possession they look to shoot into the open goal behind the opposing team. This exercise will simulate where the 1-3-5-2 will do most of their defending in the game. It is important that they are successful in this exercise.

Exercise #3 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Final 3rd)

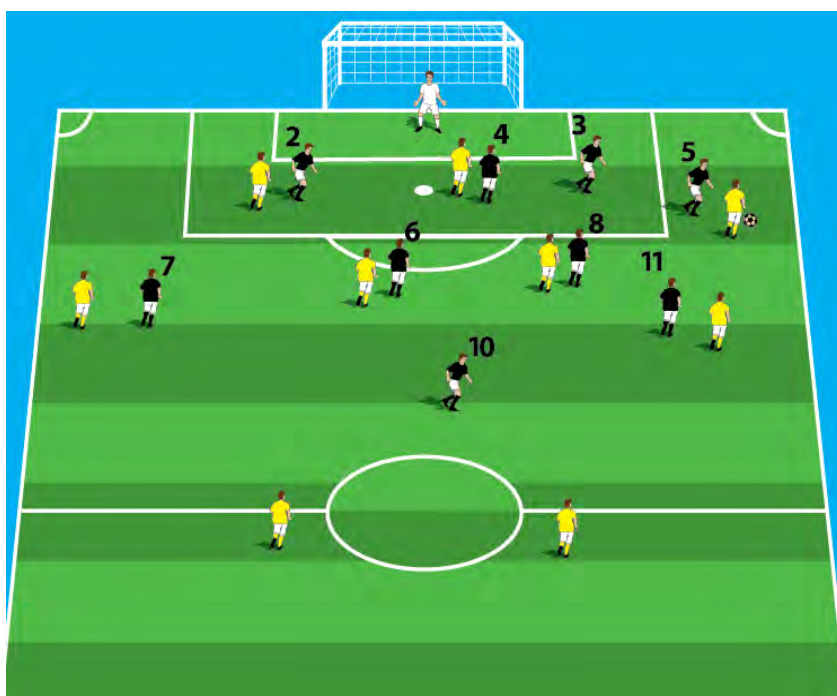
The first exercise focused on defending in the middle to attacking 3rd of the field. The second exercise focused on defending in the middle 3rd of the field. This third exercise focuses on defending in the defensive half of the field. The key in this exercise is to force the opposing team's attack wide and/or back. Do not give them positions inside or in central positions. Deny their attacking central midfielders possession in this area where they can do damage and hurt you. It is important when the ball is played wide and it is obvious that the opposing team will be serving the ball in and making runs to goal, make sure that the holding central midfielder comes back to mark the run of one of the attacking central midfielders. It will also be



important for the attacking central midfielders to defend against players looking to position themselves on top of the 18 yard box for a ball that is cut back. In this first image you see the defensive team set out in a compacted shape playing with every player except the deep forward. The opposing team is lined up in a 2-4-3, also one player shy of a full compliment. The opposing team looks to possess the ball and attack the goal. The defensive team you are

working with looks to keep themselves organized and keep shape behind the ball. Try to organize them so that they are forcing the opposition outside or back, then condition them to

react and deal with situations as they change in the exercise.



In this example, you see the opposing team forced to attack wide. The left wing defender (#5) has come out to pressure the player with the ball and to keep them wide. The central defender (#3) has shifted over to support the left defender. The holding central midfielder (#4) has dropped in to mark the run of one of their forwards. The right wing defender (#2) drops in

to cover the weak side run. The two attacking central midfielders (#6 and #8) mark the runs of the central midfielders of the opposing team. If they start to penetrate deep then they continue to mark them. The outside midfielders (#7 and #11) look to mark any players supporting directly beneath the ball. The withdrawn attacker (#10) positions themselves centrally to pick up any ball played out or back and to be in a position to support the deep attacker in the system so that they can start the counter attack when possession is won. The withdrawn attacker may drop in a little more in order to close off the passing lane across to the

other side. By doing this they would force the ball to be played back before going across giving the team time to shift over to the other side.

Exercise #4 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Italian Shadow Play)

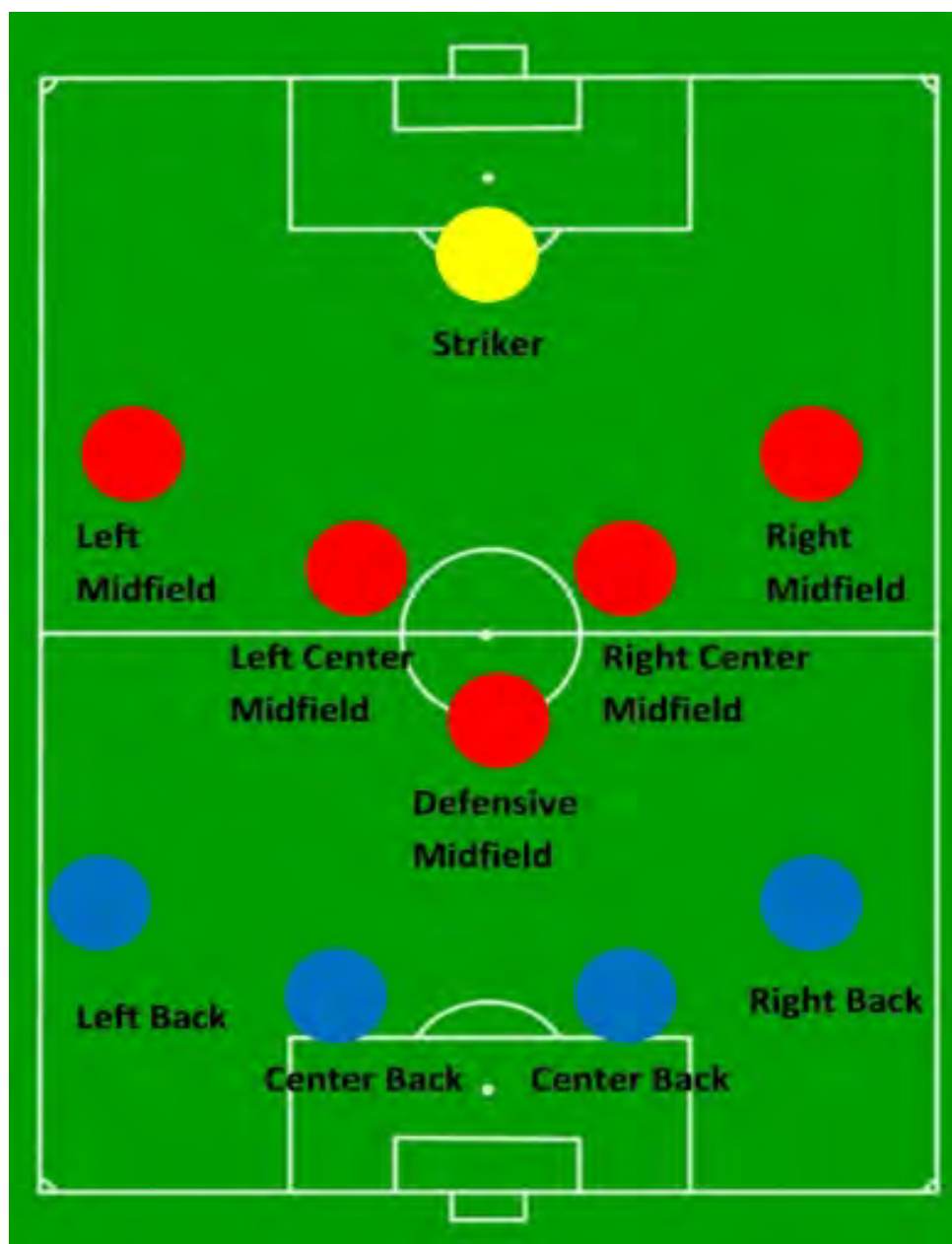


One of the attacking drills used Italian Shadow play as an exercise to help prepare your team to play the 1-3-5-2 formation. It is also very effective to use when working on defending. In this exercise, work with the defending team to quickly keep shape and to deny the passing lanes into the central midfielders. The opposing team looks to quickly possess the ball in an attempt to attack the goal. The defending team looks to keep shape and block the passing lanes. They are not allowed to steal possession, but they

can intercept passes that are forced or within their ability to win. Once they win possession have them play one-touch to the opposite goal while the opposing team drops back and re-gains their shape to begin the drill again. Make sure your triangle midfield stays within 8-10 yards from one another to make it impossible for the opposing team to play through the middle. You may decide to mark man-to-man with your midfield, just make sure they also have as their priority to still be focused on protecting the middle of the field.

The four defensive exercises focus on defending in the different thirds of the field. Following these exercises will help your team and triangle develop their defensive game. Work with the triangle midfield on keeping a **TIP** on the ball and with the holding central midfielder on keeping the shape and protecting the middle. When they win possession, emphasize a quick speed change and encourage them to all get up the field fast as a team to attack the other goal. Having a team that can transition quickly to the attacking game is very important as it will also translate to defending as well. Once the ball starts again with the GK, have them work on everything you have gone over in the other exercises.

1-4-5-1 FORMATION



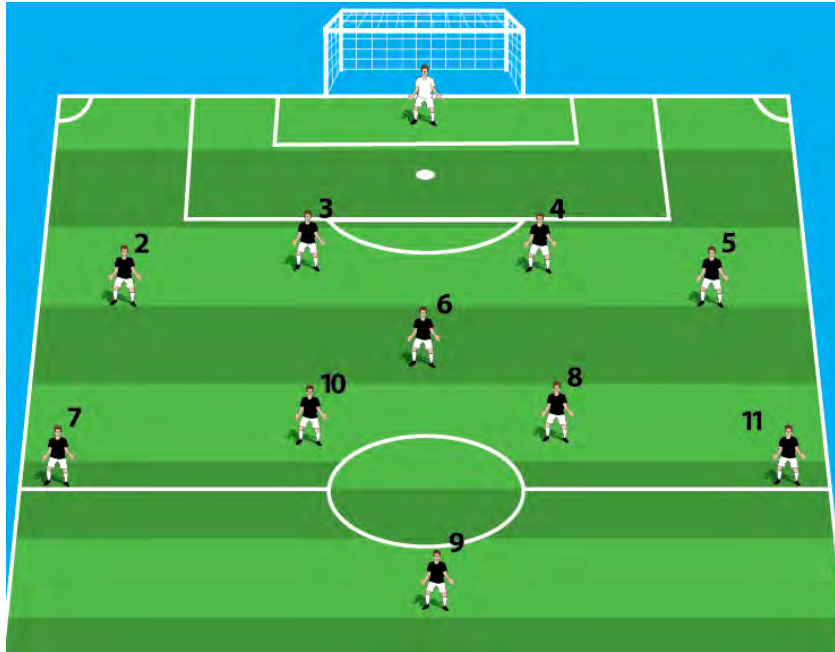
- The Triangle Midfield consists of 2 Attacking Central Midfielders and 1 Holding Central Midfielder
 - *How to Triangulate the Midfield*
 - *Training Possession and Penetration*
 - *Training Defensive Responsibilities*

The history of this formation is not as glamorous as other formations that were created to change the complexion of the game. This formation found its way into European football in the 1980's in response to the successes of the English 1-4-4-2 and the Dutch 1-4-3-3. You first saw this formation in England with teams that found themselves in difficult away matches and in need of a result. The idea of playing a more defensive formation to keep numbers packed in the midfield appealed to coaches looking to find a point or to not concede a lot of goals. It became a successful application, but resulted in what people felt was a boring brand of football as there was very little in attacking play. Teams were comfortable with keeping ten players behind the ball and just denying any space behind them and showed little interest in going forward and attacking the opposing goal themselves. English teams began using this in European competitions and it frustrated typical German and Dutch powers, but it found success at this level as well. This caused a rapid spread of this formation throughout Europe as teams would apply this tactic in away matches, especially in games where teams were over-matched or under-staffed. The success of teams that weren't European powers encouraged the appearance of this formation at the World Cup levels in 1982 and 1986. As a result, you saw a significant drop in goal production per game at these events. Teams would use these formations to frustrate teams that were traditional powers in the hopes of getting one or two chances a game and sneaking away with a win or draw. This actually resulted in FIFA stepping in to address and make a few changes in the game, especially with the goalkeeper and passing back. It later included steps and then a change to time. All of this came out of poor goal production, defensive posturing and play by teams, and an overall boring type of soccer being played.

The formation has remained a defensive and boring style of soccer since its inception in the early 1980's. It wasn't until the early 200's that a coach came along and looked at this formation a little differently. In June of 2004, a young Jose Mourinho who had been successful at clubs in Spain accepted to become one of the highest paid managers in football by agreeing to a contract with English club Chelsea FC. After spending significant time learning from famed Dutch coach Luis Van Gaal, Mourinho took his knowledge and implemented his version of the 1-4-3-3 formation successfully at Chelsea FC. He found, however, that teams would solve the problem of beating his triangle midfield and were successful at shutting down their speedy attacking wing players like Dutch player Arjen Robben. To adjust his approach he began switching back and forth during games between playing a 1-4-3-3 formation and a 1-4-5-1 formation. His version was not considered a boring or defensive approach, but rather a quick possession approach with a dangerous counter attacking style. The secret he felt was in looking at the system as a possession oriented system with the strength in the central midfield. He also looked at needing a powerful and dangerous central attacker who could attack at speed against 2 central defenders and who could also hold the ball up under pressure for a few seconds while the speed of the outside midfielders came up to exploit the space wide. He used a young attacker from the Ivory Coast who fit well in this style and the player thrived in this position. Didier Drogba became one of the most dangerous central attackers in this formation and was strong and physical enough to handle pressure and to attack two defenders at speed. He was also dominant in the air and would become a dangerous attacking options on any ball served into the area. Mourinho was successful in implementing and switching back and forth between

this formation and the 1-4-3-3. It helped to earn Chelsea FC two league titles during his short three year tenure with the club and establish them as a dominant presence in Europe.

HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (IN POSSESSION)

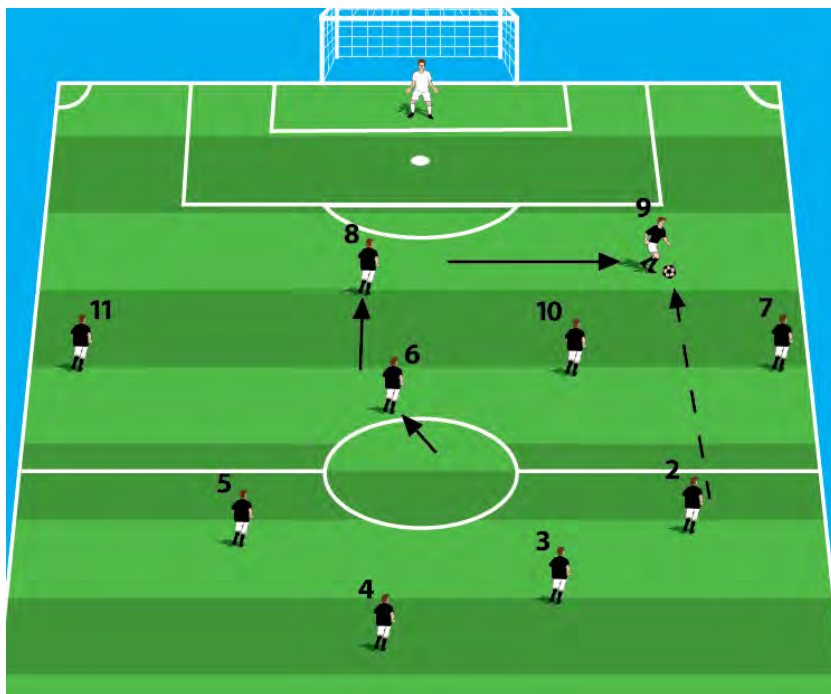


The triangulation of the midfield in the 1-4-5-1 is very similar to that of the 1-4-3-3 and the 1-3-5-2. There are differences with the triangle midfield in this formation is that you have outside midfielders and it naturally conditions the triangle midfielders to stay central and not be drawn out wide. The triangle midfield must also be quick to adjust as there is only one forward in this system. If they make a run wide, then one of the attacking central

midfielders must be prepared to make a run forward so there is always a central attacking option in case the ball is played. It is necessary that the central midfielders in the triangle stay within 12-15 yards from one another and that the holding midfielder gives them depth. The triangle midfield will almost always stay within the width of the 18 yard box and play in an area of about 20 yards each side of midfield. This is the area they look to dominate and control to win the game. There may be occasions where they venture wider, but only in cases where other players have over-committed and they must adjust based upon what the opposing team is doing.

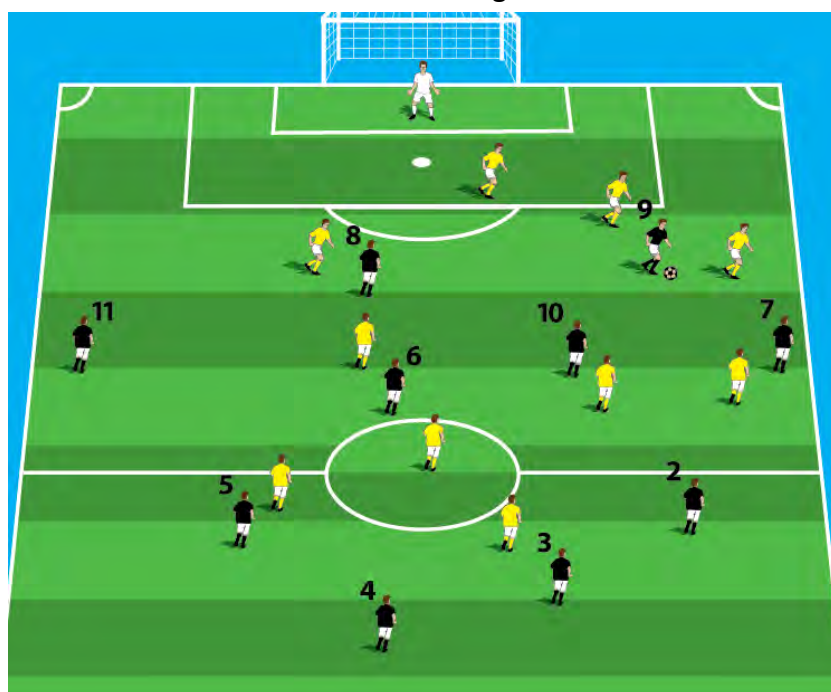
Example #1

The formation of the triangle will adjust depending upon the runs and movement of the central attacker. Since there is only one attacker in this formation it is important that the weak side attacking central midfielder read when the central attacker goes wide to determine if they should make a run forward. The advantage of this system in its attacking game is the ability of the attacking central midfielders to make attacking runs from withdrawn positions. In this example the attacker (#9) has made a run wide to receive the ball and the weak side attacking central midfielder (#8) begins making a run forward from a withdrawn position. The pass originates from the right wing defender (#2) who follows up slightly to support the ball. The right outside midfielder (#7) is in position to directly support the play or even make an overlapping run. In the triangle midfield the holding central midfielder (#6) has shifted over



and up slightly to keep the shape of the triangle. It is their responsibility in this system to direct the other two midfield players and to always work at keeping the shape of the triangle. The attacking central midfielder (#10) ball side looks to support directly beneath the central attacker (#9). In this situation you see the triangle has shifted to where there is now a true attacking central midfielder (#8), one holding central midfielder (#6) and one supporting central midfielder (#10). As has been explained in other

formations, the triangle is a living and breathing entity and will constantly shift, rotate, expand and contract as conditions within the game dictate. In this version of the 1-4-5-1 the triangle

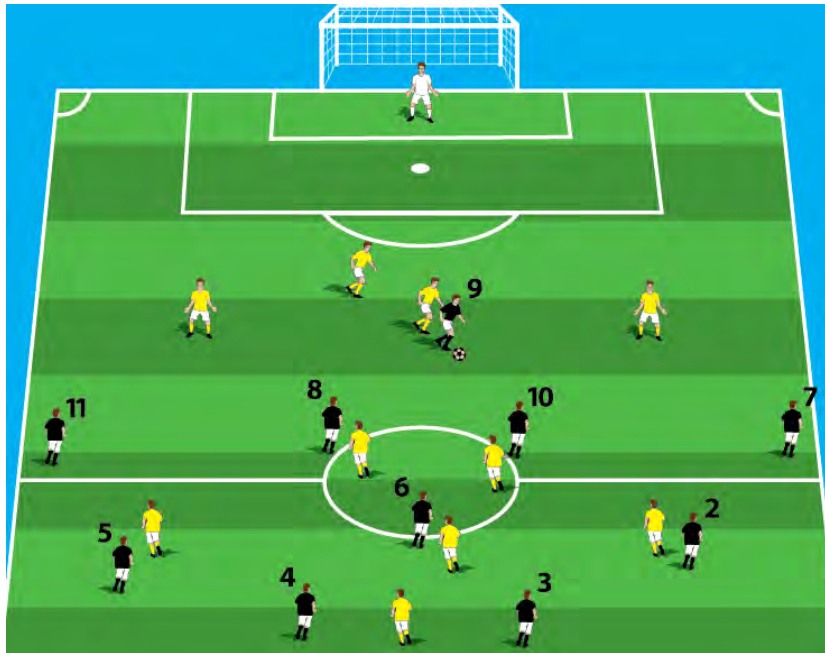


midfield is less restrictive and must always be adjusting and moving as there is only one attacker in the system. By having attacking options coming from withdrawn positions it creates defensive matchup problems for the opposing team. In this second diagram you can see how the run of the central attacker (#9) has pulled the defense towards the ball while the weak side defender is left to deal with the withdrawn run of the weak side attacking central midfielder (#8). This example

also shows the space between the opposing defense and opposing midfield and the passing lanes that are open to the attacking central midfielder (#10) and the space on the opposite side of the field. A team that can transition with possession from one side to the other quickly will find a 2v1 advantage on the weak side. The opposing team in this example is in a 1-4-3-3 formation with one attacking central midfielder and two holding central midfielders. It is

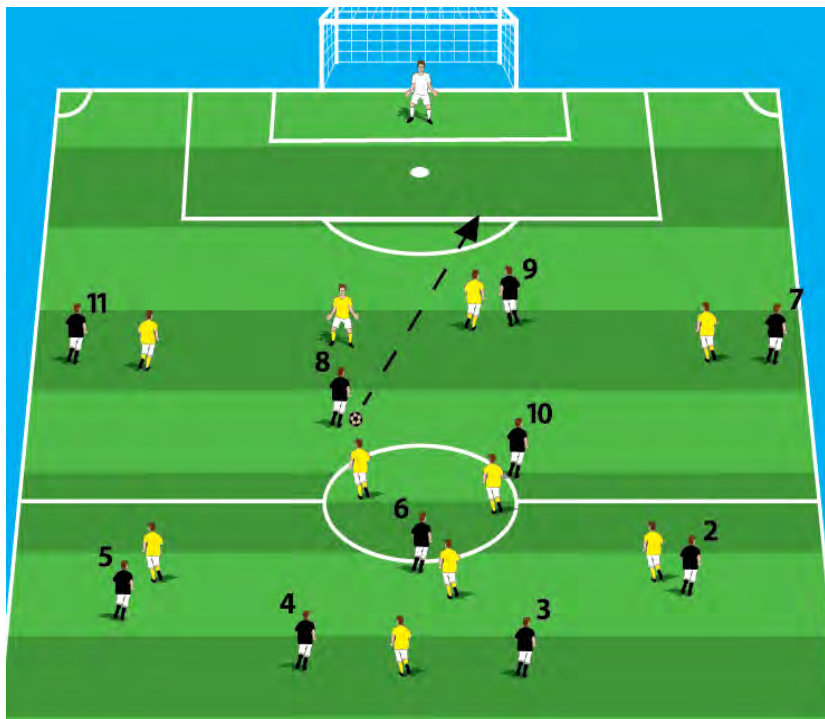
important in attacking play that if you want to take advantage of this situation you look for that first option (central attacker #9) as soon as possession is won.

Example #2



penetrating run from a withdrawn position. The holding central midfielder looks to keep the shape of the triangle while protecting the middle of the field.

This second example focuses on when the ball is played to the central attacker (#9) when they are in a central position on the field. Since combinations are important through the central attacker this is an important example. The central attacker has received possession of the ball. The triangle midfield is organized behind the central attacker (#9) with one attacking central midfielder (#10) supporting directly underneath the ball while the other is in position to make a



In this second diagram, the central attacker has received possession and immediately passes back to the attacking left central midfielder (#8) and turns to make a penetrating run. The outside midfielders on both sides (#7 and #11) are making forward runs to support the ball. In this example the attacking central midfielder (#8) receives possession and passes through the space between the two central defenders of the opposing team. The advantage of this play is that one defender HAS to take the central attacker.

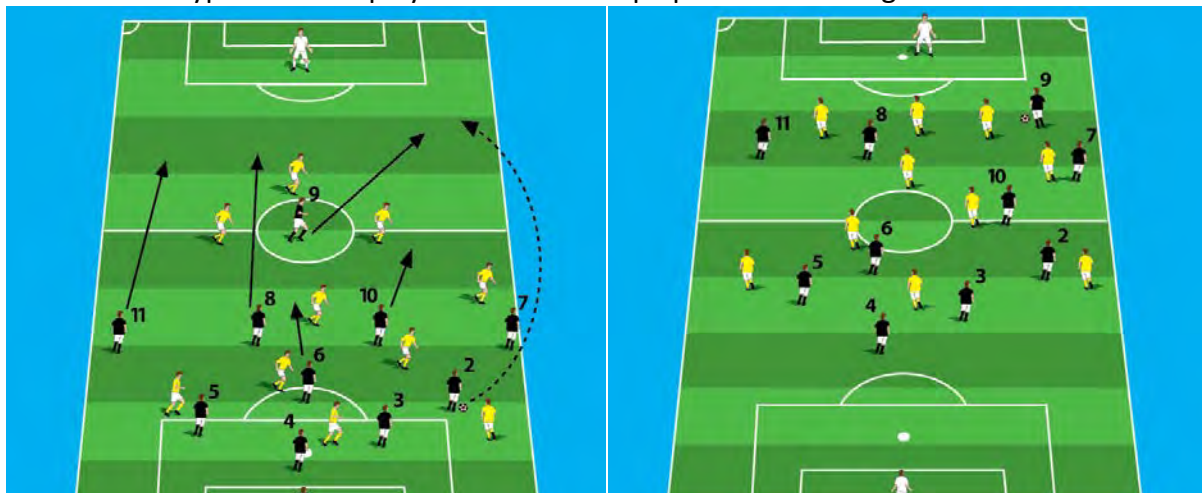
This leaves the other central defender to decide to retreat and concede space to the player with possession, or step and apply pressure. In either example the defense is vulnerable. If the defender retreats then the attacking central midfielder (#8) can advance and attack the goal themselves. If the defender steps to pressure then the passing lane opens up and the defense is exposed anyway. If the defender pressures while also closing the passing lane the attacking central midfielder (#8) can make a penetrating pass out wide to the run of the outside left midfielder (#11).

Example #3



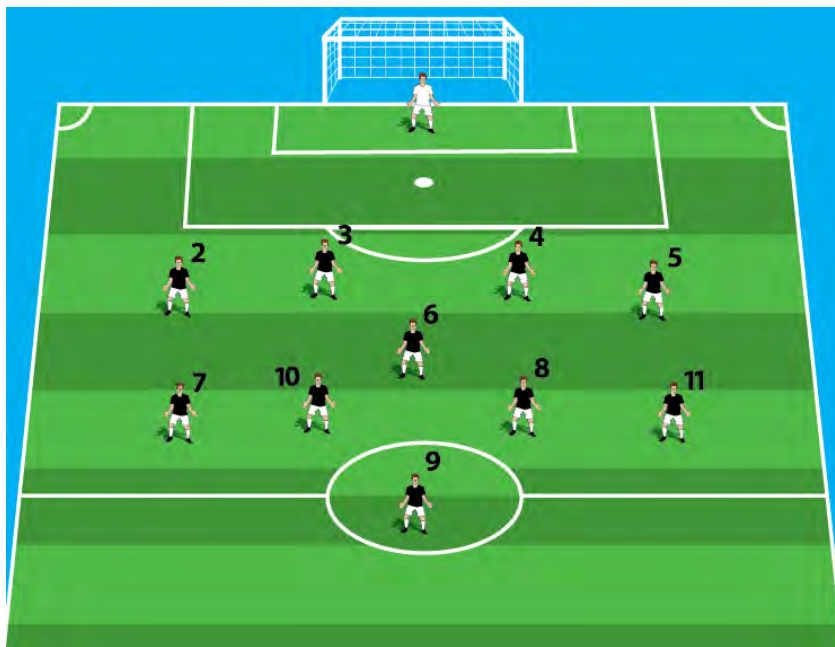
In this example possession is won in your own defensive third and you are working on escaping pressure. The advantage of this system is it is built on attacking the space behind the opposing defense as it always keeps one attacker pressed up against the central defenders. This gives the central attacker (#9) the advantage of being able to read the defense and to determine when and where to make attacking and penetrating runs. You can see the triangle midfield in its shape recovering to

support the central attacker in this diagram. The right wing defender with possession has to decide which type of ball to play in order to escape pressure and begin the attack.



In the two frames on the previous page the right wing defender (#2) plays a long and penetrating ball deep into the opposing half of the field behind the opposing team's defense. The central attacker (#9) reads the pass and makes a run into the space to gain possession of the ball. Since this player by design will have speed and power, they should not have difficulty gaining possession and beginning to make a run towards goal. The weak side outside midfielder (#11) and the weak side attacking central midfielder (#8) would begin to make runs forward to attack the middle and far post of the goal as options for the central attacker (#9) once they gain possession. This will also spread out the opposing defense and force them into a possible 1v1 with the central attacker (#9). The ball side attacking central midfielder (#10) would shift over slightly staying beneath the play to support the central attacker (#9). The holding central midfielder would shift slightly away and up, but would make sure to stay behind the play to protect the middle of the field. The outside right midfielder (#7) would make a forward run down the line towards the central attacker (#9) to support the play by either overlapping the player, cutting inside, or just supporting behind. Either way it will also put pressure on the opposing defense to deal with additional options in their half of the field.

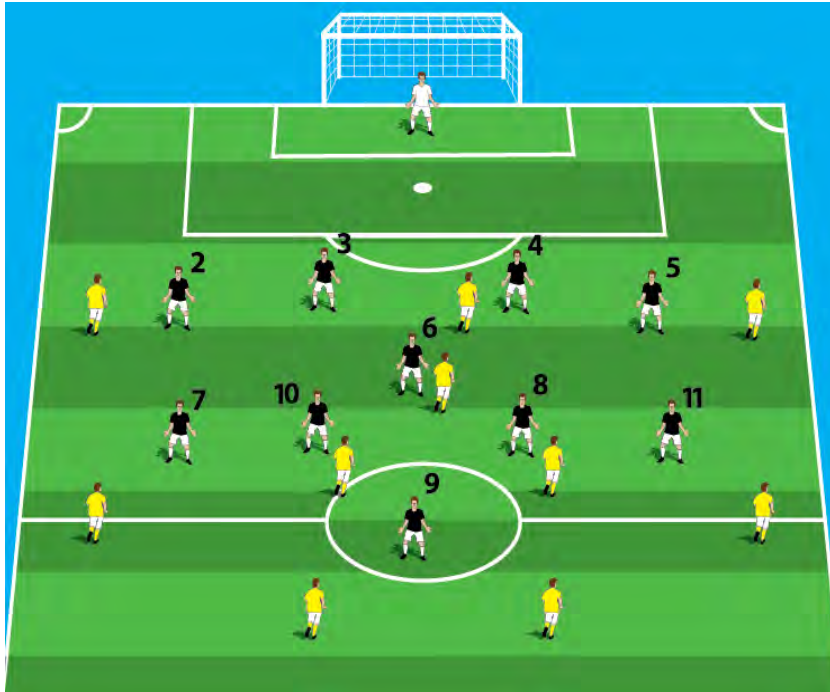
HOW TO TRIANGULATE THE TRIANGLE MIDFIELD (OUT OF POSSESSION)



Defending in the triangle midfield in a 1-4-5-1 formation is all about denying their playmakers possession of the ball and to make other players on their team work to beat you. Since the system was created to break down teams with strong midfields it was designed to always have a numerical advantage in this area and to create numbers problems for the opposition in other areas (i.e. outside midfield positions when playing

against a 1-4-3-3 formation). It is a system designed to frustrate your opponent as you are putting nine and sometimes ten players behind the ball, the bulk of which is meant to clog the midfield. In the triangle midfield defending, the central midfielders are more protected as they have the support of the outside midfielders in the system. There won't be as many instances where they would have to come out wide to defend. This makes their job one where they must deny the opposing team's central midfielders possession or involvement in the game. There would be two ways to accomplish this as a defending team:

- 1) The first method is to defend the central midfield space in a zonal way. This means that you keep the shape of the triangle, but shorten the distances between all three players to prevent your opponent from being able to play through the middle. It is important in this style of defending that you always keep a **TIP** on the ball at all times. That means wherever the ball is there is always a central midfielder from the triangle blocking the passing lane into central options while the other two midfield players keep their



shape, but shorten the distance to 8-10 yards. This will force the opposing central midfielders to start moving outside to get the ball, thus disrupting their shape and their game. It is still important that the holding central midfielder is aware of the two central midfielders for the opponent in case they need to adjust slightly to further eliminate them as options, but

for the most part, they play zonal and focus on the distance from one another and the space they are defending. Remember, the holding central midfielder is the conductor of the triangle. This means that they must always be reading and communicating to the two attacking central midfielders the adjustments they need to make to help limit or eliminate the options of the opposing midfield. Also, the player acting as the **TIP** must stay within the width of the 18 yard box and allow other players to do their jobs in defending. Since there are outside midfielders in this system it is not necessary for the central midfielders to venture out from their area. This would only expose the midfield and give the opposition the chance to come inside. The central midfielders should only come inside if there is no other option.

- 2) The second method is almost opposite in that it combines man-to-man marking with zonal defending. It begins with the same principle of having the triangle midfielder closest to the ball acting as the **TIP**. The other two midfielder players support behind as before, but they look to mark man-to-man while still trying to keep shape behind. The two midfielders behind remain aware of the two central midfielders and mark them when they come into their area. It is important that they mark them, but stay behind them also. Do not allow them to get in behind your midfielder or they can gain an advantage in attacking your goal. If they gain possession, then the objective is to force them to play it back and re-set. Even in situations where the opposing team gets behind

the triangle there is still some protection as there are four defenders protecting the goal.

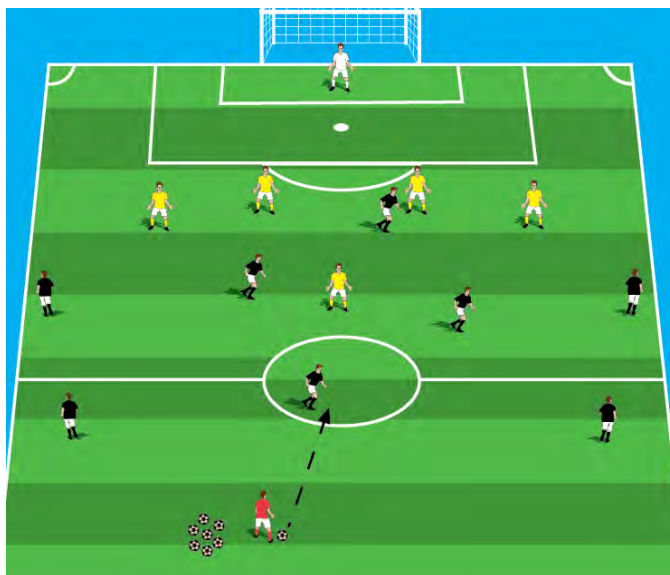
In both cases, it is important that the holding midfielder drops back to help the defenders when the opponent has possession in your defending third of the field. They would act as a stopper or central defender if this happens. Although there are two central defenders in the system it is important that the holding central midfielder drops in to help mark and defend. Their mark would typically be the opposing attacking central midfielder making a run from a withdrawn position. In this situation the holding central midfielder is in the best position to read the run of this player and to pick up and mark them.

In the frame on the previous page you see the 1-4-5-1 formation matched up against a 1-4-3-3 formation. You can see how the triangle midfield matches up comfortably and how the only option for the opposing team would be to play the ball wide to the outside wing defender shifting up or to try and drive a ball long into the wing attacker on that side. Your goal as a defending team is to make the opposition and their attack predictable. Taking away the midfield of the opposition forces them into predictable play and will make it easier for you to shut them down.

TRAINING POSSESSION AND PENETRATION

The following represents examples of how to train for possession and/or penetration in a 1-4-5-1 Formation. The exercises used will be the same as previously used, but more emphasis will be placed on quick patterns within the exercises and a focus on the triangle midfield within this system. There are a total of four (4) different exercises to accomplish what you need to in order to train or prepare your midfield to play this formation.

Exercise #1 (Possession and Penetration- MF Combinations)



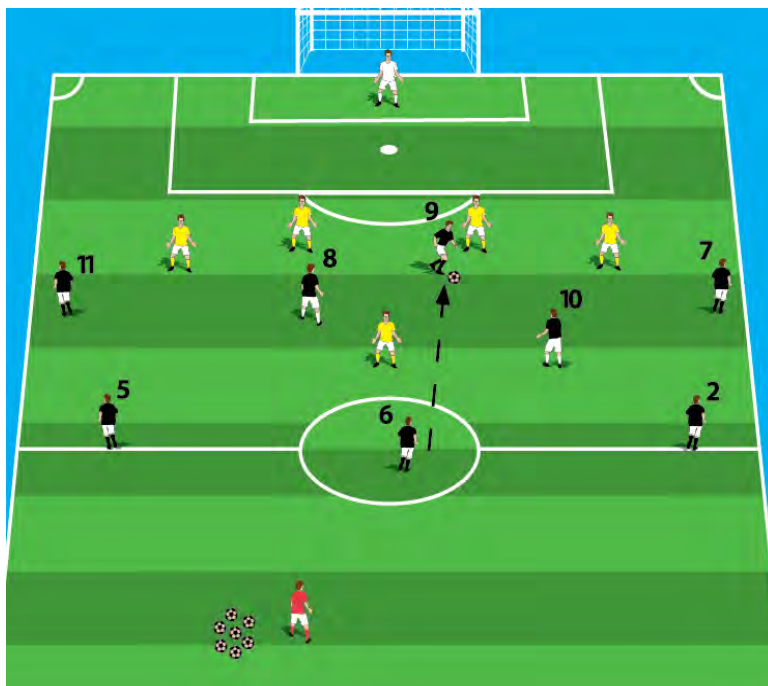
This is always one of my favorite exercises, regardless of the formation being taught, as it makes players responsible for positional requirements and simulates the game. It is a controlled version that focuses on developing the success of combinations through the midfield. In this exercise the coach plays the ball into the holding central midfielder. You can see in the diagram that the triangle midfield is now slightly turned. As the ball is played into the holding central midfielder you can see the ball side attacking central midfielder is shifting outside slightly and back towards

the ball. This is done for two reasons:

- 1) To provide immediate support to the holding midfielder as an option to receive the ball.
- 2) To open up the checking run and passing lane to the central attacker (#9) and be in a position to support that player directly beneath the ball.

The weak side attacking central midfielder has shifted up slightly also for two reasons:

- 1) To provide immediate support to the central attacker and be ready for a quick combination to help get the central attacker behind the opposing team's defense.
- 2) To be in a position to make a penetrating run behind the opposing team's defense.



The two attacking central midfielders always have as their priority in support to adjust and move based upon the movements and runs of the central attacker. The holding central midfielder is always responsible for keeping the shape of the triangle and to protect the middle in case possession is lost. In this second frame you can see the support being provided by the two attacking central midfielders. The weak side attacking central midfielder (#8) is in position to receive the ball and to play a combination either behind the defense for the penetrating run of

the central attacker (#9), or by splitting the two defenders out wide on the left for the penetrating run of the outside left midfielder. As a third option for the weak side attacking central midfielder (#8) they could play the ball back across to the opposite side attacking central midfielder who could then step forward and take a shot at goal or play a ball through for the outside right midfielder. The important thing to remember is that this is a possession oriented formation with the ability to strike quickly on the counter attack. It is meant to attack with players from withdrawn positions. This is what makes the outside players in this formation so dangerous. Don't look at this formation as a sit back and defend and then send the ball through counter attacking style; it is not really designed to be that way. This is what Jose Mourinho looked at when he re-defined this formation as a true possession formation. You have superior numbers in the midfield and you should use this to dominate your opponent. If they try to press you in your half, then punish them with the counter attacking capabilities that this system is designed for.

Exercise #2 (Possession and Penetration- MF Combinations 2)

This second version of combination play shifts the start of possession back to the goalkeeper in the defensive third of the field. Since one of the strengths of this system is to be able to counter attack quickly through the runs of the central attacker, then this also has to be taught and prepared for. In this exercise the ball is played in by the goalkeeper to one of the central defenders. The central defender receives the ball and would then turn up field. You can see the formation of the 1-4-5-1 as it

expands and begins to move out of the defensive third of the field. The opposing team is playing a 1-4-3-1 formation and is only short two forwards. This is done to give the central



defenders starting the play the opportunity to build confidence and to be successful. As you progress through the drill add in the other two players and shift their formation so that you are facing different formations when you play. In this second frame you see the central defender turn with possession to face forward. The central attacker (#9) starts to make their run to penetrate behind the defense. The outside midfielders have also begun to make runs forward to support the attack. The

triangle midfield has shifted slightly to support the run of the central attacker. The weak side attacking central midfielder (#8) has shifted up slightly while the ball side attacking central

midfielder (#10) is behind the central attacker (#9) to provide immediate support beneath the ball. In this example the central defender (#3) plays a long driven ball behind the defense and into the space in front of the run of the central attacker (#9). Work on combinations like these in order to have this as a dangerous weapon in your arsenal. Otherwise, you will invite direct pressure from the opposing defense and you won't have a way to release the pressure. The most important aspect is the qualities of that central attacker (#9). You need to have a player that fits this position. You need someone who is strong and physical and can hold the ball up under pressure. You need someone with size who can challenge and win the ball in the air, and you need someone with speed who can put the opposing team under immediate pressure with runs that can get in behind them.

Exercise #3 (Possession and Penetration- Possession Play to Outside Targets)



This is another favorite exercise of mine as it works on the ability of the team to protect the ball and move it away from pressure. Make sure the players understand not to force passes into pressure and not to panic if they are under pressure. In this exercise place your team out on the field in their 1-4-5-1 formation. Have them play against a 1-2-3-2 formation. The objective is for your team to possess the ball from one target to the other target. It would also be helpful to have them play through the central attacker

before they could play it out to the other target. Make sure possession is clean and accurate and that players are not forcing the ball into pressure. They should be focused on first protecting the ball and not giving it away or putting it into situations where possession could easily be lost. The exercise begins with one target passing it into one of the players in the 1-4-5-1. Have them control and protect the ball and play through the central attacker until they are able to play a clean and accurate pass into the opposite target. Once the ball re-enters give them 15 seconds to attack the goal. This will condition them to raise their level of speed and intensity once they transition to going to goal. If the opposing team wins possession it is important that you win possession back immediately in this drill. The opposing team because they are dealing with being numbers down can attack either goal immediately. This will force your team to do a better job of protecting the ball and will force them to go and get it when they do. I would also suggest adding in a punishment exercise if they do lose possession (i.e. 3

knees to chest). This will further re-enforce the need to protect possession rather than force the play. Build the exercise so that you are playing 11v11, but still work with your team on playing from one target outside at midfield to the other before they can go to goal. The opposing team can attack the goal right away.

Exercise #4 (Italian Shadow Play to 11v11 Play)



This is an exercise where you can focus on the attacking or defending side. In this particular example you are focusing on the attacking side. In this exercise the attacking team works on protecting the ball while the defending team works on blocking passing lanes. The defending team cannot steal the ball from the attackers, but can intercept bad passes and then goal to goal. This puts more of an emphasis on the attacking team on protecting the ball and making good and quick decisions in possession.

Focus on quick possession, but make sure that they relax in possession and concentrate on their breathing. This way they won't panic in possession or try to force the play.

There are different ways to deal with when the team loses possession, and it all depends upon where in the actually session you are and what you want to focus on. They would include the following possibilities:

- 1) When the attacking team loses possession they would jog back into position while the opposing team play one-touch play to goal. The attacking team that lost possession do not attempt to win the ball back, but rather are just jogging back to get into position to start again.
- 2) When the attacking team has lost possession they play high pressure and marking and must win the ball back within 10 seconds or face some type of punishment exercise.
- 3) When the attacking team has lost possession they must do some quick punishment exercise while the opposing team can look to quickly start attacking. Once they have completed the punishment exercise they must look to recover and quickly re-gain possession as quickly as possible.

These are just a few examples you could use and would depend upon what your focus is and where in the training session you are as far as its progress. You may decide that you do not want to work on team defending and exclusively work on the possession and attacking side. You may want to focus on the Barcelona style of when you lose it go and get it immediately. You may also decide you want to delay their recovery to put more pressure on how quickly your team can transition between attacking to defending play. You may also decide you don't want to jump into having the attacking team looking to win possession back or be involved in that part of the game because it is too early in your session to get into a scrimmage environment. Either way, this is a great exercise to work on your team's ability to possess and protect the ball while dealing with mild to moderate pressure. The 1-4-5-1 formation is all about getting and keeping numbers behind the ball to deny any space behind the defense. In addition, it is meant to frustrate the opposing team as they will not be able to play the ball into their playmakers in the central midfield with very much success. Since the system is designed to congest the middle area it becomes very difficult for the opposing team to play into these spaces. You force the opposing team to possess the ball with their defenders, but once they start trying to force into the midfield or up to their attackers they will find very little space to work and will often become frustrated at the lack of options. It is important that the defending team in the 1-4-5-1 stay compact and deny any space into the central midfield. Once the opposing team has lost possession this would then be your opportunity to either counter attack quickly, or to possess the ball through your superior midfield numbers until options to go forward and attack through withdrawn runs becomes available.

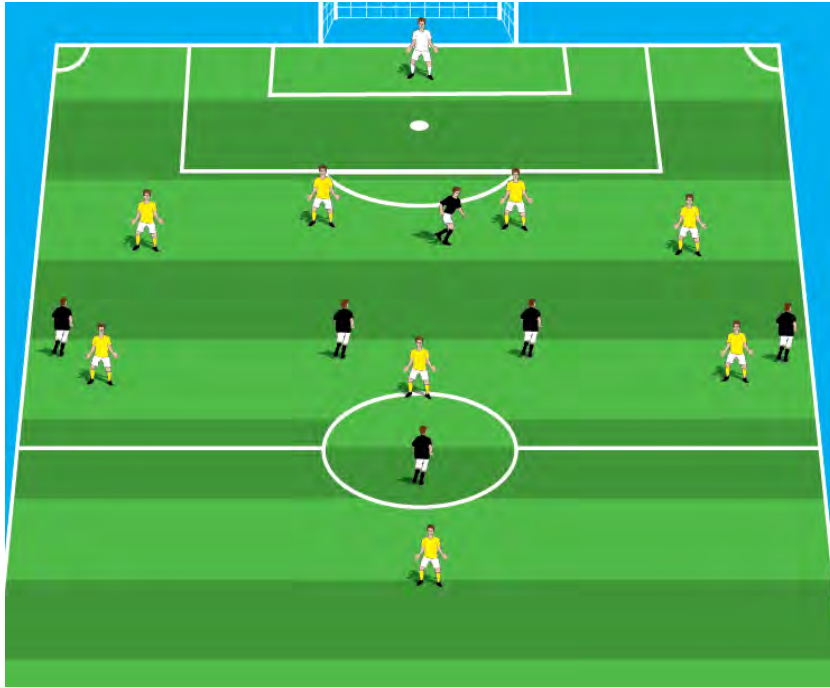
TRAINING THE DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Defending is about accomplishing two things:

- 1) Keeping your opponent out of the middle or in switching the play through the midfield
and
- 2) Keeping the central midfielders of the opposing team (their playmakers) the ability to possess the ball in the central part of the midfield.

These are the two main responsibilities of the triangle midfield. How you choose to accomplish this can be done through either playing your triangle midfield in a zonal way, or by using two of the midfielders to mark man-to-man. The attacking central midfielder would act as a screen to block the passing lane into the opposing central midfielders.

These three drills will allow you to focus your triangle midfield defending using either structure. It is up to you to bring out and emphasize the important aspects of the triangle midfield defending. The four exercises are done within the game and will focus on a different aspect of the game, be it the attacking third, middle third, defending third, or overall team shape. The coaching points will remain consistent throughout all four exercises.

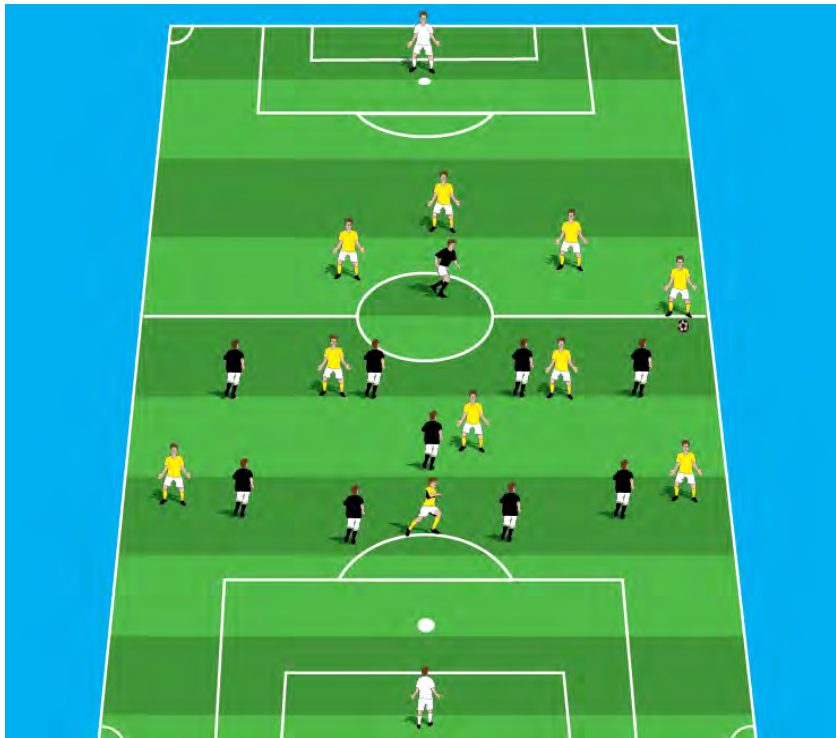
Exercise #1 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Play In and Out of the Triangle)

Since the strength of this formation is to control the midfield and deny a team with a strong midfield the ability to possess the ball, this would be the obvious choice to introduce and train your triangle midfield in the 1-4-5-1 formation. This exercise has both attacking and defending components that you can work on since you will be working to goal. Position your central attacker, two outside midfielders and triangle midfield players in the attacking half of the field

playing against a 1-4-3-1 formation to start, but with one of the three midfielders positioned inside the middle of the triangle. The other two will play on the outside right and outside left. Also have four defenders playing to defend the goal with a goalkeeper in the goal. The final player would be a central forward playing behind the midfield who is there as a target, but also there to provide more pressure on the attacking team. This will be the team defending the goal, but not the team you will actually be working with. The team you are working with in their defending capacity will be the central attacker and, primarily, the triangle midfielders. This team will also have their outside midfielders with them. Their total formation will be a 5-1 playing against a 4-3-1. They will be at a disadvantage numbers wise, but will have the ability to attack the goal directly when they have possession. When they do not have possession, work with them on their shape and in protecting the central part of the midfield. The exercise begins with the team attacking the goal in possession. Emphasize your philosophy and options in the attack as if this were an attacking session. You want them to follow the normal game plan in the attacking half of the field. Make sure they work on protecting the ball and in looking for their options in possession to create chances on goal. Once possession is lost focus on their defensive shape, especially in the triangle midfield. They should look to deny passing lanes into the central midfielders. The objective of the opposing team once they gain possession is to try and pass into the player in the middle of the triangle and out again to another option. This is how they score and they get one point for doing this. Your team gets points for scoring on the goal. It will obviously be easier for the opposing team to score and your team will tire quickly and this is a good time to explain why they need to do a better job of protecting the ball. You may want to put an exercise in should the other team play in and out of the triangle. It will help drive this point home. There has to be some urgency when they lose possession to get the ball back as quickly as possible. They cannot, however, sacrifice their shape or the integrity of the

team's defensive positioning in an attempt to win the ball back. They must be very disciplined and controlled when they defend. Otherwise the opposing team will find ways to get inside the triangle and give them clear and dangerous chances in real games to attack your defenders with numbers. Defense is about organization and discipline and not reckless individual play. It is also helpful if your team and defensive volume is loud. Encourage them to raise the volume on their communication when possession is lost. This tends to disrupt the opposing team and helps your team play more confidently.

Exercise #2 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Defending in the Final 3rd)



In this exercise have the attacking team work on attack the goal while your team works on defending. Have your team set out in their 1-4-5-1 and the other team in whatever formation you wish to defend against. In this example the opposing team is set in a 1-4-3-3 formation with one attacking central midfielder and two holding central midfielders. Work with the defending team on keeping their shape and staying organized behind the ball. The triangle midfield has the responsibility of staying

compact (within 8-10 yards of one another) and in denying space for the central midfielders to gain possession. You should work with your team on forcing the opposing team to play either wide or back to maintain possession of the ball. If they try to force the ball inside your team should be quick to react and apply pressure on the ball forcing them to go back or wide right away. Train your team to stay compact and to keep numbers behind the ball. Once the other team forces the ball inside or they lose possession look to quickly come out with possession by finding the central attacker as quickly as possible. Once you find the central attacker look to play the ball back to the opposing goalkeeper to re-start the exercise. Have your team maintain their position inside their own half of the field. The opposing team should drop back into their own half to re-gain possession and then come forward to attack your team in the 1-4-5-1 formation. Build this exercise into a scrimmage after you have had the success of preventing any type of attack on your goal. Start working with them in the scrimmage to attack as a unit and then to drop back into their own half of the field once possession is lost. This will condition them to always work back to keep numbers behind the ball and to deny space behind your defense.

Exercise #3 (Triangle Midfield Defending- Italian Shadow Play)

One of the attacking drills used Italian Shadow play as an exercise to help prepare your team to play the 1-4-5-1 formation. It is also very effective to use when working on defending. In this exercise, work with the defending team to quickly keep shape and to deny the passing lanes into the central midfielders. The opposing team looks to quickly possess the ball in an attempt to attack the goal. The defending team looks to keep shape and block the passing lanes. They are not allowed to steal possession,

but they can intercept passes that are forced or within their ability to win. Once they win possession have them play one-touch to the opposite goal while the opposing team drops back and re-gains their shape to begin the drill again. Make sure your triangle midfield stays within 8-10 yards from one another to make it impossible for the opposing team to play through the middle. You may decide to mark man-to-man with your midfield, just make sure they also have as their priority to still be focused on protecting the middle of the field.

The three defensive exercises focus on defending in the different thirds of the field. Following these exercises will help your team and triangle develop their defensive game. Work with the triangle midfield on keeping a **TIP** on the ball and with the holding central midfielder on keeping the shape and protecting the middle. When they win possession, emphasize a quick speed change and encourage them to all get up the field fast as a team to attack the other goal. Having a team that can transition quickly to the attacking game is very important as it will also translate to defending as well. Once the ball starts again with the GK, have them work on everything you have gone over in the other exercises.

CONCLUSION

The triangle midfield was a structure that was created in a formation back in the late 1960's to break down and beat the English success in the 1-4-4-2. It was very effective as it created natural supporting angles and a numerical superiority in the central midfield. This structure since it was first introduced by the Dutch has been replicated in other formations as covered in this book. It has also been adjusted in other formations like the 1-4-4-2 to where the midfield now takes on the shape of a diamond and is more compact in its shape.

This book focused on five different formations that use the triangle midfield. There are other formations that may use the triangle midfield or even variations within the formations discussed, but the ones covered should give you a good base of understanding of how the triangle midfield operates in shape, possession and penetration, defending, and triangulation. It is the most dominant shape in the game today as seen at the World Cup level with Spain playing a variation of the 1-4-3-3 and 1-4-2-3-1 and Barcelona and Real Madrid playing similar 1-4-3-3 and 1-4-2-3-1 variations. All of these teams are considered the best in the world and all three of these teams use a triangle midfield. It is too great a space in the midfield to let it be controlled by just two midfielders.

I have been privileged in this career to learn from some of the best coaches in the world; some of which have served as fine professional examples in this sometimes gypsy-like career of coaching. It is important as a coach that you always keep an open mind and take in the work of others and in the feedback from your players. I have seen many great coaches that will never receive the recognition of some that are excellent examples of what a coach should be. I have also seen poor examples of coaches so caught up in their own successes that their arrogance is the only thing you see and hear. Remember, this is a beautiful game that offers opportunities to learn and grow with everything you do. I remember a club I was directing in Florida where a licensed coach was having trouble communicating to 6-7 year old players how to strike the ball with the laces and to keep their ankle locked. His assistant coach had an idea and left and went to his car returning with a tennis racket and a tennis ball (he was an avid tennis player). The kids looked at him and laughed and the head coach just rolled his eyes. I sat back and was intrigued because I wanted to see what he was thinking. Sometimes you have to think outside the box in order to get through to kids and get your point across. The kids were always striking the ball with their toe, so he thought he could help here. He took the tennis racket and tossed the ball up trying to hit it with the metal edge of the racket. The kids laughed when he barely hit the ball. Then he tossed it up and hit it with the strings like you're supposed to do. "Which one makes sense", he asked. Of course the kids said the strings. Then he went on to explain how the strings are your laces and the metal edge represented their toes. You could almost see the light bulb appear above the kids' heads. The coach looked at him in disbelief and shook his head; he still didn't see it. He then had the kids work on shooting and sure enough they got it! The coach couldn't believe it! I had to walk away and laugh knowing I had just learned

something from a dad who had never coached soccer a day in his life, but saw the problem in a different way. It was awesome! I use this example all the time now.

I hope everyone reading this book is able to get something from it. My passion is this game and I want to improve and grow and writing is one way I do this. It forces me to think about the game in different ways and it helps me to discover aspects of the game that I didn't know or wasn't sure of. It is my desire that this book helps you to learn more about the game and helps you to think and grow beyond where you are now. I always use affirmation statements with my teams to help them with mental toughness and with their confidence. Remember anything you want to do or grow into as a coach is entirely possible. If you want to coach at a certain level, then develop a plan to help get you there and start building towards it today. If you like where you are then continue to build or grow to be the best you can be at the level you are now. Don't stand still because the game naturally evolves and moves forward. The mere act of standing still means you are moving backwards. Keep moving forward and growing. Take coaching courses to learn and grow. Take trips to study teams and coaches at other levels. Watch games to see what other coaches do, even younger teams or less qualified teams. The more you watch and the more you study the more prepared and experienced you become. Your goal as a coach should be to learn something new every day. Good luck in your quest to become the coach you want to be!

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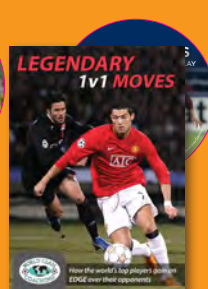
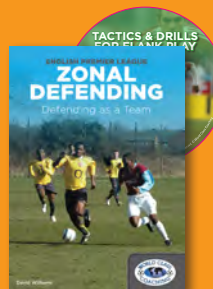
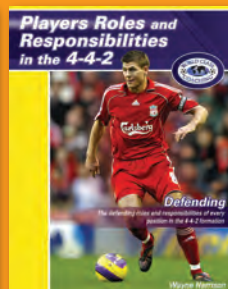
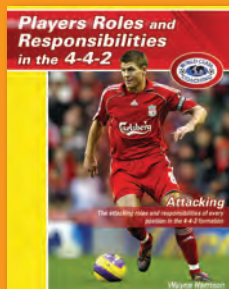
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