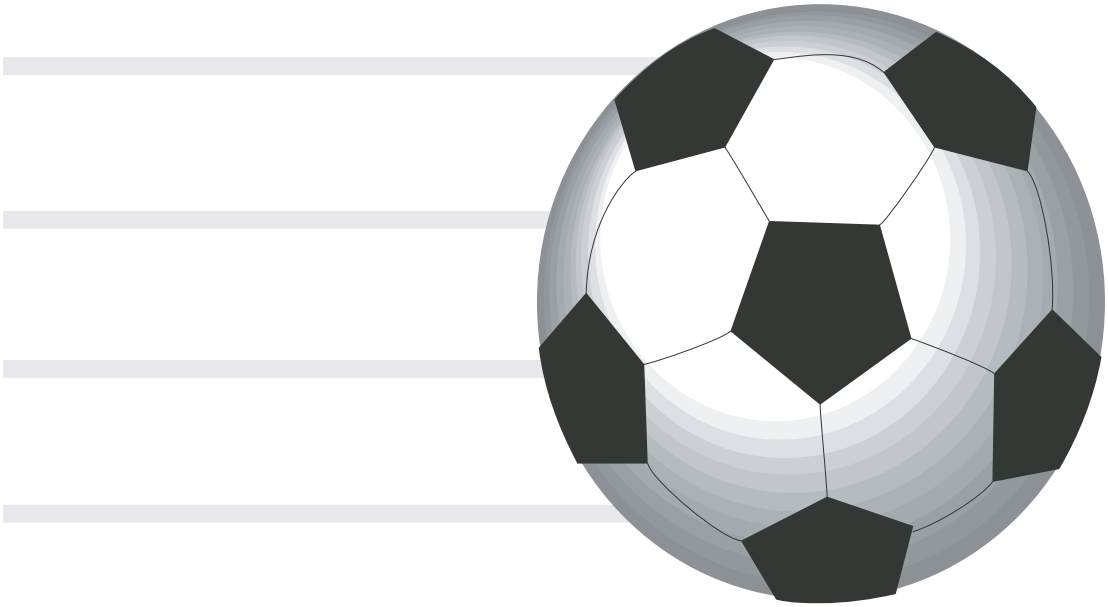
PRINT & GO

SYSTEMS OF PLAY



INTRODUCTION

Systems of Play & Strategy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement 3
Introduction 4
Our Philosophy 4
Book Design 5

Systems of Play 4-4-2 6
- Flat back four, flat midfield, zonal system 7
- Sweeper, flat midfield 9
- Flat back four, diamond midfield, zonal 11
- Sweeper, diamond midfield 13

Systems of Play 3-5-2 15
- Flat back three, modified diamond midfield, attacking midfielder 16
- Sweeper, modified diamond midfield, attacking midfielder 18
- Flat back three, flat midfield, defending midfielder 20
- Sweeper, flat midfield, defending midfielder 22

Systems of Play 4-3-3 & 3-4-3 24
- 4-3-3 flat back four, flat midfield, zonal 25
- 4-3-3 sweeper, flat midfield 27
- 3-4-3 flat back three, flat midfield, zonal 29
- 3-4-3 sweeper, flat midfield, zonal 31

Systems of Play: Special and New 33
- 4-5-1 flat back four, flat midfield, zonal 34
- 4-5-1 sweeper, flat midfield 36
- 4-2-3-1 flat back four, zonal 38
- 3-2-3-2 flat back three, zonal 40

Systems of Play: small sided games 42
- 2-1-2 indoor 43
- 2-2-1 indoor 45
- 2-3-2 youth games, zonal training 47
- 3-2-2 youth games, zonal or sweeper training 49

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is dedicated to all coaches, players, parents and officials without whose passion for soccer the greatest game in the world could not exist.

I thank all the teams, players and coaches who have participated in developing the systems of play and strategies and used them on the field to make sure they work.

I would like to thank my fellow coach, Barry Mason, who reviewed and edited each page of this book and corrected my errors.

A final thanks to my wife, Kelly, who patiently waits for me to come home from the field, to stop watching all levels of soccer live or on TV, or to finish another creative book session.

Tom Sauder

November 2004

Introduction

The idea for this book quite frankly came from feedback we received from our website, www.soccerpracticebooks.com. Coaches sent us e-mails asking questions as basic as:

" I have never coached full field; how do I line up my team?" or "I am playing a 3-5-2 and am concerned about my defense; any advice?"

So we did some research in the libraries and on the web to see why coaches were coming to us with these questions. What we found was astonishing. There were either very in-depth resources such as entire books or videos on one system, such as a 4-4-2, or videos and books on zonal play. At the other end, we found very superficial information on systems of play.

What was missing was a single source of information that covered current systems of play and gave some basic information about them. Nor was there much information for coaches on what the team requirements are, what the coaching requirements are and how to adapt strategies based on game situations and the opponents.

So we set out to define the most common systems of play for full field soccer (11v11), and small-sided soccer (indoor 6v6 and outdoor 8v8). Each system and its variations are explained on a single page and a second page shows the basic line-up, typical defensive, transitional and attacking situations, including positions and development of plays.

This book is not meant to treat each system in great depth. Rather it is designed to give the coach a tool firstly to decide which system to pick for the team and then provide enough information to get started and adapt.

The practices and drills in our Print & Go Practice Books available at www.soccerpracticebooks.com are adaptable to practice for any system.

Our Philosophy

Choosing a system of play and game strategy is the most important and often the first decision a coach must make for the team. There are two main philosophies:

1. The coach insists on a particular system and recruits players who fit that system, or trains available players to conform.

2. The coach evaluates the players and their talent, the opposition, and then picks a system that is best suited for the team available.

Both philosophies are valid. What is important is to recognize the particular situation and choose the appropriate philosophy. For example, in situations with a short pre-season and little or no recruiting, philosophy # 2 is more appropriate. On the other hand, with a long pre-season and the ability to recruit prior to training camp, philosophy # 1 is appropriate.

Book Design

Each system has an introduction page that provides an overview of the system, which could be historical, philosophical, psychological or strategic in its nature.

It then describes the team requirements to play the particular system, discussing players' skill, physical fitness and mental preparation demands.

We provide coaching requirements to give an understanding of what to expect and how to go about developing the team.

Finally, we briefly discuss game strategy, strengths and vulnerabilities and how to respond to opponents in some key situations.

The second page of each system has four diagrams with accompanying instructions.

The first diagram shows a picture of the basic line up and describes responsibilities of each player.

The second, third and fourth diagrams show positional plays for defending, transitioning and attacking. Player movement and tactics are indicated.

Systems of Play

4-4-2

4-4-2: flat back four; flat midfield; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is very popular and used by such great teams as the Dutch National and Manchester United. It is a very effective and versatile attacking system based on coming down the sides as well as spreading the defense and then penetrating through the center. With overlapping outside defenders and midfielders the 4-4-2 quickly converts to a 4-2-4 or 2-4-4 putting immense pressure on the opposing defensive units. The vulnerability of the 4-4-2 lies in its flat back defense which can be torn apart by diagonal runs through its center.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 4-4-2 system must have outside defenders and midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to chase back in the team's transition to defense. The zonal system requires a high degree of verbal and visual communication, particularly when defending, to ensure that opposing attackers are challenged and covered.

This system relies on the off-side trap and that is where defenders need to be alert to ensure they step up just before the ball is played in behind them. This requires almost automatic mechanisms because there is little time to provide each other with instructions.

When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and central midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.

Inside midfielders are the strategists who read the play, decide when to come back to support the defenders, where to distribute the ball and when to make penetrating runs down the middle. They require excellent vision and ability to read the opposition.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

First and foremost, coaches need lots of time before the season starts to train the key elements of this system. Emphasis needs to be on keeping players in their zones and on getting them to make the right decisions regarding challenging penetrating opponents. Much work will be required to coordinate the off-side trap, which again requires verbal and visual communication.

Players with ability to beat opponents 1v1 on the wings with the ability to play effective crosses into the target area need to be developed.

Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

STRATEGY

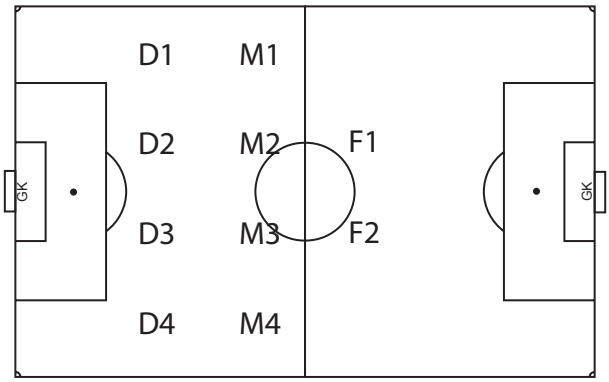
This system works very well when attacking just about any other system an opponent might play. It is particularly effective against other zonal 4-4-2 systems or a 4-3-3 system because it outnumbers it in the critical midfield area.

The weakness of this 4-4-2 lies in defense, particularly against a 3-5-2 system which can outnumber it in central midfield, thus pulling out a central defender causing difficulty with the integrity of the flat back zone. A 3-4-3 system can also cause difficulties, particularly if its three forwards get additional support from overlapping midfielders.

Ultimately, the strength of your own team will determine if the opponent is forced to make an adjustment to their system during the game or if you need to adjust because the opponent's system is dominating. This 4-4-2 is a very attractive attacking system with risks on defense.

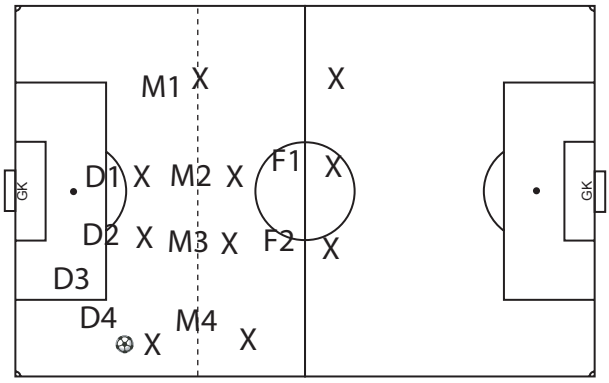
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-4-2: flat back four; flat midfield; zonal system



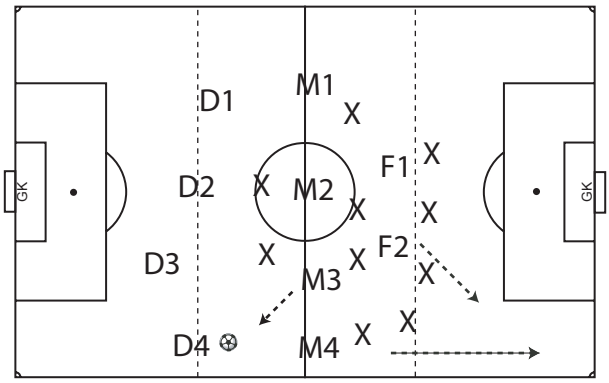
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1 & D4 challenge attackers on their side, cover for D2 & D3, overlap when attacking.
3. D2 & D3 mark central attackers if play is in middle.
4. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking, defend against overlapping defenders or outside midfielders.
5. M2 & M3 control play, attack and defend centrally.
6. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



Defending:

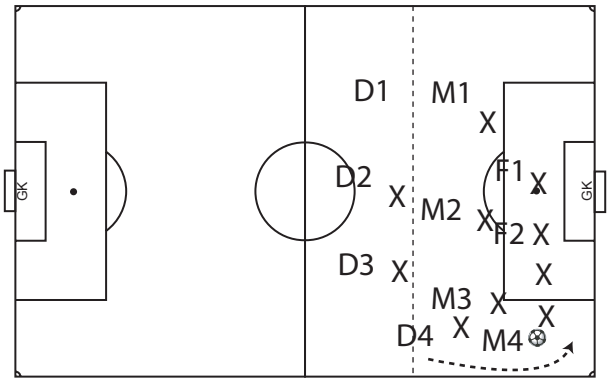
1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D3 provides support to D4.
3. D2 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M4 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M3 comes to ball for a pass.
4. D3 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to D3, M3 or deep to right.

Depending on where on the field the play is, the player. in possession should have at least three passing options. to players either coming towards the ball or making runs into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing with M4 in possession.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping defender D4 who will then cross.

If ball were in center of field with M2 in possession, then M2 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or F2 making runs into space. M2 could also pass wide to overlapping M1/D1 or M4/D4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-4-2: sweeper; flat midfield

OVERVIEW

This system is very popular and used by school, college and youth teams with a short pre-season.
It is a very effective and versatile attacking system based on coming down the sides as well as spreading the defense and then penetrating through the center. With overlapping outside defenders and midfielders the 4-4-2 quickly converts to a 4-2-4 or 3-4-3 putting immense pressure on the opposing defensive units.
The sweeper provides permanent security and cover for the marking defenders. It does not rely on the off-side trap and therefore is not vulnerable when the trap fails. It does shift play more often into own half.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 4-4-2 system must have outside defenders and midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to chase back in the team's transition to defense. The sweeper must be an expert in 1v1 and tackling with exceptional speed, good read of the play and communication skills to organize the defenders in front.
The defenders need to be able to man mark or to mark within a zone depending on the number of opposing forwards.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and central midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
Inside midfielders are the strategists who read the play, decide when to come back to support the defenders, where to distribute the ball and when to make penetrating runs down the middle. They require excellent vision and ability to read the opposition.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

First and foremost, coaches need relatively little time before the season starts to train the key elements of this system due to the security provided by the sweeper based defense. Emphasis needs to be on keeping midfield players in their zones and on getting them to make the right decisions regarding when to make overlapping runs. The same is true for defenders if playing against two forwards.
Players with ability to beat opponents 1v1 on the wings with the ability to play effective crosses into the target area need to be developed. Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players and the sweeper.

STRATEGY

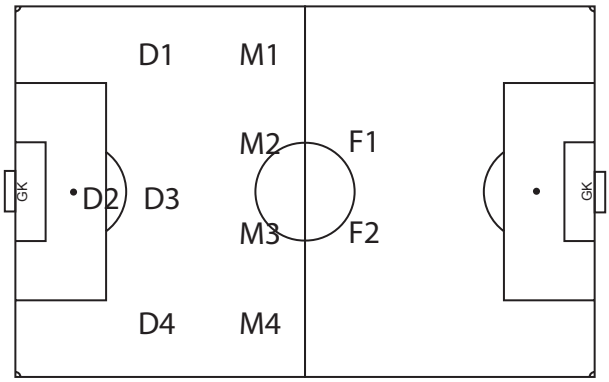
This system works very well when attacking just about any other system an opponent might play. It is particularly effective against other zonal 4-4-2 systems. It provides defending security against a 4-3-3 and 3-4-3 system and outnumbers the 4-3-3 in the critical midfield area.
The weakness of this 4-4-2 lies in offense, due to fairly limited options. Defenders tend not to overlap, however, the central defender can provide an option through the middle.

The weakness of the opponent's attack will decide whether or not to convert this system into a 3-5-2 or 3-4-3 sweeper formation to generate more offense.

This 4-4-2 is a very attractive system providing balance between offense and defense.

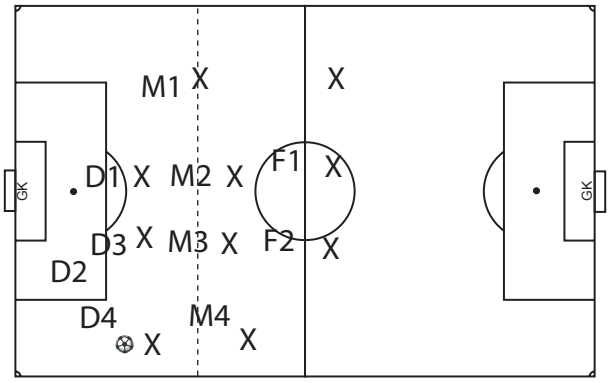
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-4-2: sweeper; flat midfield



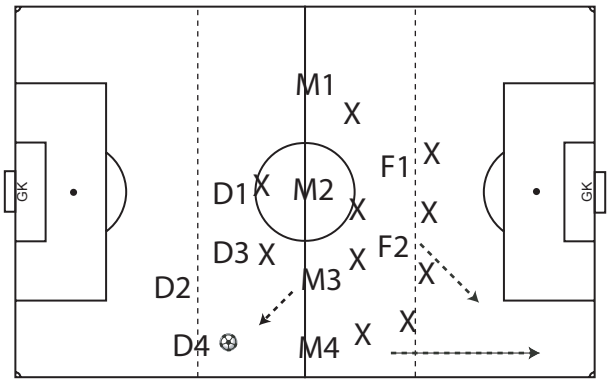
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side.
2. Against 3 forwards, D1, D3 & D4 mark forwards.
3. Against 2 forwards, D1 & D3 mark if play comes down left and D3 & D4 mark if play comes down right side.
4. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking, defend against overlapping defenders or outside midfielders.
5. M2 & M3 control play, attack and defend centrally.
6. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



Defending:

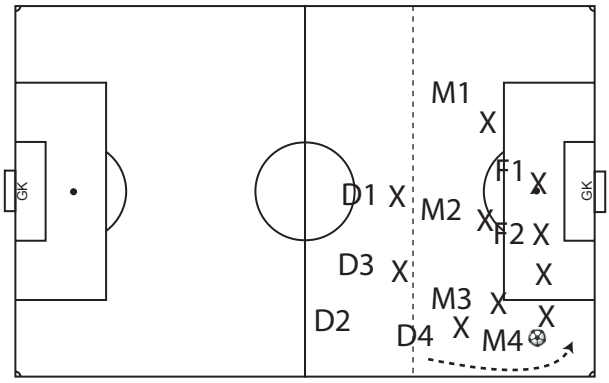
1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D2 provides support to D4.
3. D3 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M4 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M3 comes to ball for a pass.
4. D2 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to D2, M3 or deep to right

Depending on where on the field the play is, the player in possession should have at least three passing options to players either coming towards the ball or making runs into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing with M4 in possession.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping defender D4 who will then cross.

If ball were in center of field with M2 in possession, then M2 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or F2 making runs into space. M2 could also pass wide to overlapping M1 or M4/D4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-4-2: flat back four; diamond midfield; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system has become popular with professional teams in the late 90s. It relies on two midfield specialists: a defensive midfielder sweeping behind the midfield, and an offensive playmaking midfielder. The diamond midfield provides attacking flexibility down the sides and through the middle. The defense is strengthened by the defensive midfielder. At the same time, it is a more predictable system to defend against due to the more static positional play of the central midfielders. The vulnerability of the 4-4-2 lies in its flat back defense which can be torn apart by diagonal runs through its center.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

The diamond midfield requires two specialists. The defensive midfielder needs to have vision and be a two-way player due to responsibility to defend and start transition from defense to attack. The offensive midfielder needs to anticipate play to get into position to receive the ball from the back and then have the 1v1 and passing skill to put forwards and overlapping players into positive action. They need to support forwards and wingers in possession and have goal scoring ability.
Outside defenders and midfielders must be in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to chase back in the team's transition to defense.
The zone defense requires a high degree of verbal and visual communication to ensure that opposing attackers are challenged and covered. This system relies on the off-side trap and defenders need to ensure they step up just before the ball is played in behind them. This requires almost automatic mechanisms because there is little time to provide each other with instructions. When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

The key to this system is to have central midfielders of adequate skill. The coaching challenge is to develop a strategy of how to defend in central midfield when outnumbered. The options are to require the attacking midfielder to come back or a central defender to step up. That could leave the defense exposed if the opponent successfully overlapped your own outside midfielder and the outside defender needed to step up as well. Lots of time before the season starts is required to get this system tuned.
Emphasis needs to be on training zone defense and off-side trap mechanisms.
Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

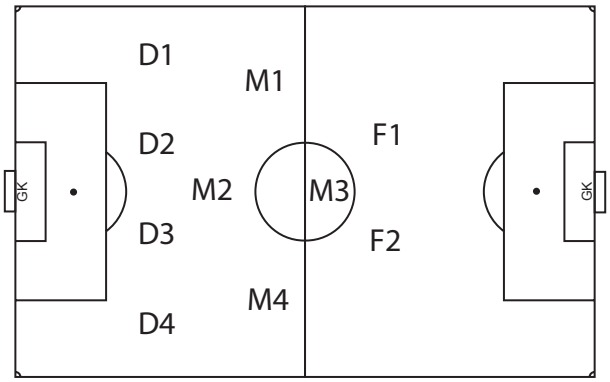
STRATEGY

This system works very well against similar diamond midfields and particularly against a 4-3-3.
Against a strong zonal 4-4-2 the central midfielders might need to collapse to a flat zone as well.

The weakness of this 4-4-2 lies in defense, particularly against a 3-5-2 system which can outnumber it in central midfield 3v1, thus pulling out a central defender, still being outnumbered and causing difficulty with the integrity of the flat back zone.
A 3-4-3 system can also cause difficulties, particularly if a central defender needs to step into midfield causing a 3v3 situation at the back.
Ultimately, the strength of your own team will determine if the opponent is forced to make an adjustment to their system during the game or if you need to adjust because the opponent's system is dominating.
This 4-4-2 is a very attractive, attacking system with risks in central midfield during transition to defense.

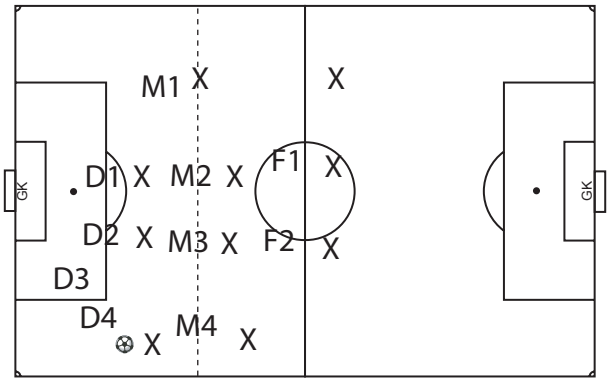
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-4-2: flat back four; diamond midfield; zonal system



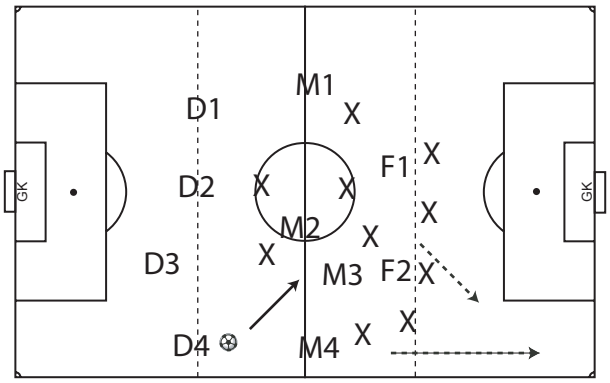
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1 & D4 challenge attackers on their side, cover for D2 & D3, overlap when attacking.
3. D2 & D3 mark central attackers if play is in middle.
4. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking, defend against overlapping defenders or outside midfielders.
5. M2 plays defensive, M3 is playmaker setting up attacks.
6. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



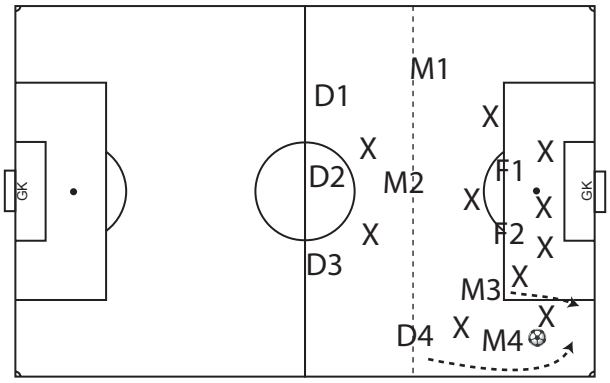
Defending:

1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D3 provides support to D4.
3. D2 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M4 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M3 is primary target for a pass from defenders.
4. D3 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to D3, M3 or deep to right. Depending on where on the field the play is, the player in possession should have at least three passing options to players either coming towards the ball or making runs into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing to M4.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping defender D4 who will cross or
4. pass it to M3 in position or into run.

M3 at this point becomes a forward in behind F1 & F2. If M2 were in possession, then M2 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1, F2 or M3 making runs into space. M2 could play wide to overlapping M1/D1 or M4/D4.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-4-2: sweeper; diamond midfield

OVERVIEW

This system is a rarely used version of the popular sweeper/flat midfield 4-4-2 used by school, college and youth teams. It offers a very versatile attacking system based on an attacking playmaking midfielder and attacking down the sides thus spreading the defense and penetrating through the center.
It has defensive risks being vulnerable when attacked through the central midfield.
The sweeper provides a permanent security and cover for the marking defenders. It does not rely on the off-side trap and therefore is not vulnerable when the trap fails. It does shift play more often into own half.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 4-4-2 system must have outside defenders and midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to chase back in the team's transition to defense. The sweeper must be an expert in 1v1 and tackling with exceptional speed, good read of the play and communication skills to organize the defenders in front.
The defenders need to be able to man mark or to mark within a zone depending on the number of opposing forwards. They need to know when to step up to pick up penetrating opposing midfielders.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and central midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
Inside midfielders are specialists. The attacking midfielder needs to read the play and be available at all times to receive the ball and make good decisions on when to distribute the ball or when to hold and go 1v1. The defensive midfielder needs to read the transition and with the central defender close down opposing attacks through the center of the field.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

First and foremost, coaches need time before the season starts to assess whether or not there are defenders and inside midfielders with the experience and the intelligence to execute this system.
With the players in place, emphasis needs to be on timing and communication between defenders and midfielders to ensure an organized defensive shape for all situations. The key player on attack is the offensive midfielder and teammates need to seek him/her as the "go to" player.
Players with ability to beat opponents 1v1 on the wings with the ability to play effective crosses into the target area need to be developed. Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement.

STRATEGY

This system will be very difficult to defend against by opponents due to its elements of surprise.
It will cause confusion thus putting the other coach to the test. It will be particularly effective against a 4-3-3 in the critical midfield area.

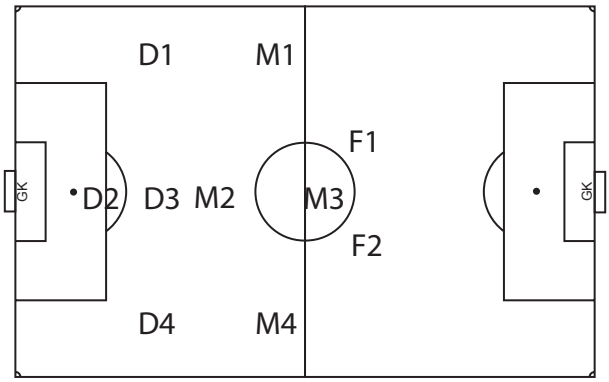
The weakness of this 4-4-2 lies in defending against a 4-4-2 with flat midfield, requiring the defense to be acutely aware of when to step into midfield while ensuring coverage of opposing forwards.

The strength of the opponent's attack will decide whether or not to convert this system into a 4-4-2 with a flat midfield or 3-4-3 with a flat midfield to win the central midfield battle.

This 4-4-2 is a very attractive attacking system.

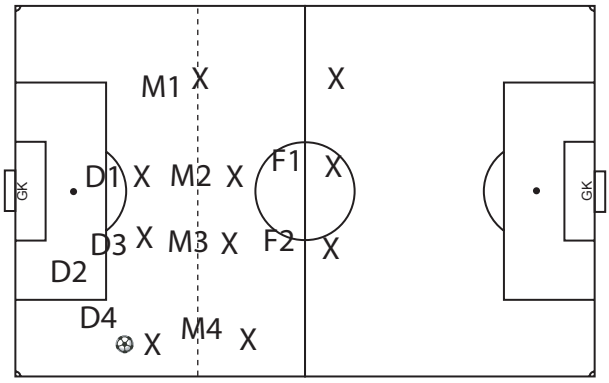
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-4-2: sweeper; diamond midfield



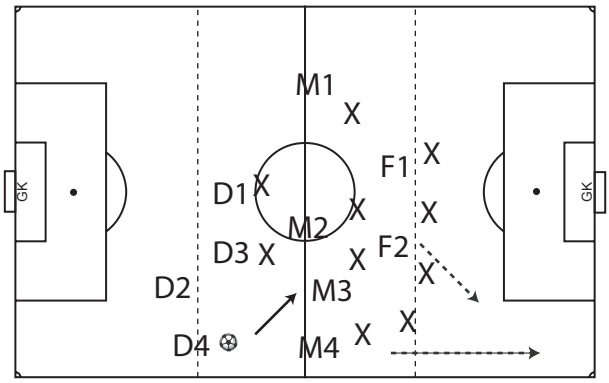
Lining Up:

1. D1/D4 and M1/M4 generally stay on their side.
2. Against 3 forwards, D1, D3 & D4 mark forwards.
3. Against 2 forwards, D1 & D3 mark if play comes down left and D3 & D4 mark if play comes down right side.
4. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking, defend against overlapping defenders or outside midfielders.
5. M2 defends play through middle, M3 is playmaker.
6. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



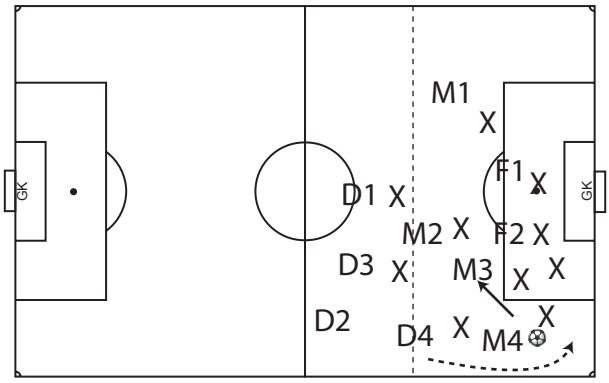
Defending:

1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D2 provides support to D4.
3. D3 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M4 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M3 is ready to receive pass as primary target.
4. D2 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to D2, M3 or deep to right. Depending on where on the field the play is, the player in possession should have at least three passing options to players either coming towards the ball or making runs into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing with M4 in possession.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or pass to M3 or
3. pass it to overlapping defender D4 who will then cross. If ball were in center of field with M3 in possession, then M3 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or F2 making runs into space. M3 could also pass wide to overlapping M1 or M4/D4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

Systems of Play

3-5-2

3-5-2: flat back 3; modified diamond midfield; attacking midfielder

OVERVIEW

This system is an attacking minded system for teams with time and player skills to develop the zonal systems. Defenders mark opposing forwards in their zone and play the off-side trap.
The central midfielders close down the middle. When in possession, the 3-5-2 offers five attackers.
Two outside midfielders become wingers; the attacking central midfielder is a playmaker with complete freedom of movement, which makes defending them very difficult.
This system can create odd-man advantages when attacking down the sides or through the center.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 3-5-2 system must have midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to come back in transition to defense. They must have defending skills as well as abilities to pass and cross effectively. The central midfielders must have defending skills and vision for the game and passing skills. The attacking midfielder must be able to read the play, receive the ball anywhere on the field and have exceptional decision making and passing skills.
Forwards need to know when to make wide diagonal runs or when to break through the center.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and attacking midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
Defenders must have excellent 1v1 defending skills and an ability to communicate decisions to challenge opposing midfielders. They must have vision to establish the off-side line and movement must be automatic and extremely well synchronized.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

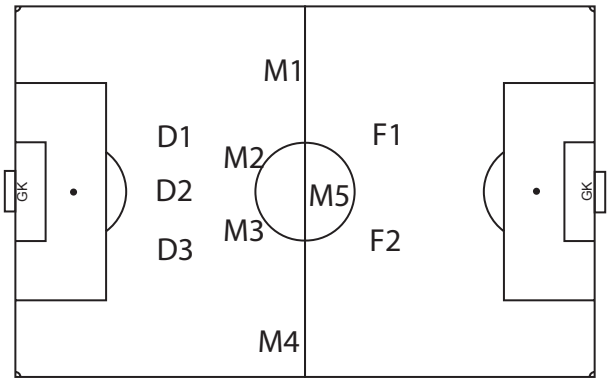
This is a difficult system to train due to the timing and automation requirements of the off-side trap.
If there isn't enough time to train this, you may revert back to the sweeper 3-5-2 system.
Team speed and endurance are important and players with these qualities are first selected for the outside midfield and three defender positions . Players with good 1v1 skills can take on the forward and offensive midfield roles. Players with less endurance and speed but with good tactical and positional sense can be placed in the central midfield positions. Communication amongst defenders and from defenders to midfielders is key.

STRATEGY

This system is very effective in attacking most other systems due to the versatility provided by the central attacking midfielder, who can create odd-man advantages on the wings and through the center. Other teams may be forced to have a defender step up, exposing the defense , or pulling a midfielder back, weakening their transition to attack.
There is a defensive risk in this system created by a potentially large gap between central midfield and central defense (if outside defenders are pulled wide). The flat back three also leaves lots of room for opponents to play diagonal through balls, avoid the off-side trap and outnumber the defenders.
Also, teams with three forwards can create undue pressure on the defense. Countering that is the ease with which you can convert to a 3-5-2 with a sweeper or a 4-4-2 .
This system is for highly experienced and well synchronized teams.
This 3-5-2 is most effective against any 4-4-2 system and most vulnerable against a 3-4-3 system.

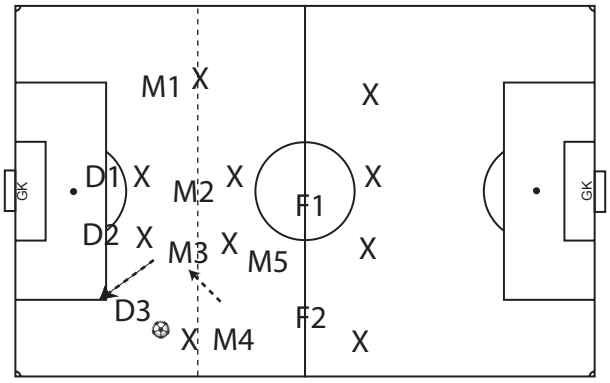
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

3-5-2: flat back 3; modified diamond midfield; attacking midfielder



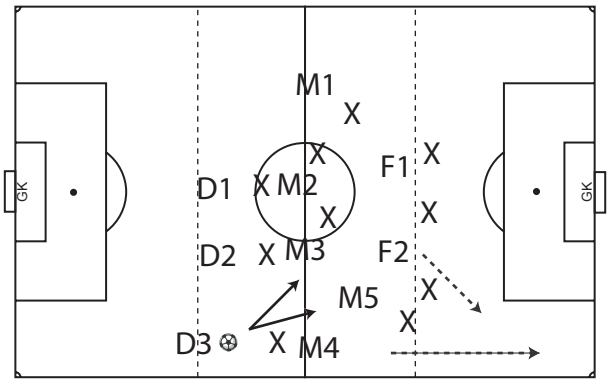
Lining Up:

1. D1, D2 & D3 mark forwards in their zone.
2. M2/M3 have defensive roles, closing down the middle.
3. M5, F1 & F2 put pressure on opposing defenders.
4. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking, and defend against outside midfielders.
5. M5 is playmaker setting up attacks.
6. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



Defending:

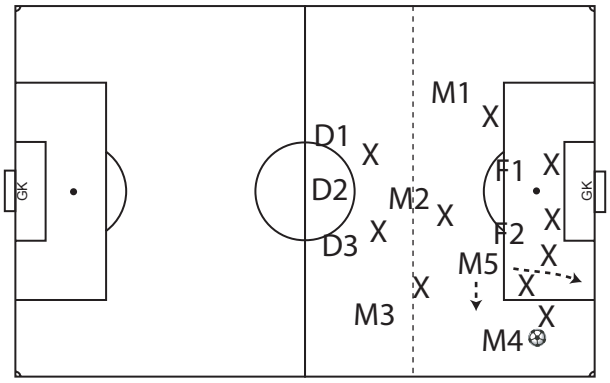
1. D3 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D2 picks up D3's mark.
3. M3 provides support for D3 taking sweeper's role.
4. M4 who was overlapped shifts to take M3 spot.
5. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
6. M1 marks outside midfielder.
7. F1, F2, M5 shift ball side to cover three of four defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M5 is primary, M3 secondary target for a pass from defenders. M4 or F2 are the long ball alternative.
4. No initial back pass support for D3.
5. M3, M5 pass diagonal into run of M4 or F2 or switch play to opposite side.

The player in possession should have at least three passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing to M4.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to M5 in position or into run.

M5 at this point becomes a forward in behind F1 & F2
If M5 were in possession, then M5 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1, F2 or M4 making runs into space.
The key is for M5 to play behind forwards to put opposing defenders off-balance.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

3-5-2: sweeper; modified diamond midfield; attacking midfielder

OVERVIEW

This system is an attacking minded system for teams without time or player skills to develop any of the zonal systems. The sweeper covers behind defenders who mark opposing forwards on their side (mixed zone) or man to man. The central midfielders close down the middle. When in possession, the 3-5-2 offers five attackers. Two outside midfielders become wingers; the attacking central midfielder is a playmaker with complete freedom of movement, which makes defending them very difficult.
This system can create odd-man advantages when attacking down the sides or through the center.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 3-5-2 system must have midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to come back in transition to defense. They must have defending skills and abilities to pass and cross effectively. The central midfielders must have defending skills as well as vision for the game and passing skills. The attacking midfielder must be able to read the play, receive the ball anywhere on the field and have exceptional decision making and passing skills.
Forwards need to know when to make wide diagonal runs or when to break through the center.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and attacking midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
Defenders must have excellent 1v1 defending skills and an ability to communicate decisions to challenge opposing midfielders. The sweeper is the organizer of the defensive unit and takes over marking assignments when one of the outside defenders has left their mark.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

This is a fairly easy system to train a team in and hence well suited for teams with short pre-seasons. Positional roles are easily defined and explained and can be practiced early with increasing success. Team speed and endurance are important and players with these qualities are first selected for the outside midfield and three defender positions (particularly the sweeper). Players with good 1v1 skills can take on the forward and offensive midfield roles. Players with less endurance and speed but with good tactical and positional sense can be placed in the central midfield positions. Communication amongst defenders and from defenders to midfielders is key.

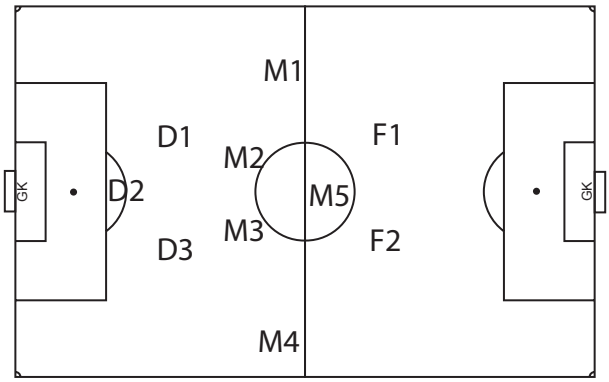
STRATEGY

This system is very effective in attacking most other systems due to the versatility provided by the central attacking midfielder, who can create odd-man advantages on the wings and through the center. Other teams may be forced to have a defender step up, exposing the defense, or pulling a midfielder back, weakening their transition to attack.
There is a defensive risk in this system created by a potentially large gap between central midfield and central defense (if outside defenders are pulled wide). Also, teams with three forwards can create undue pressure on the defense. Countering that is the ease with which you can convert to a 4-4-2 with a sweeper or a 3-5-2 with a defensive midfielder. You simply pull back the central attacking midfielder or substitute him/her with a more appropriately skilled player.

This 3-5-2 is most effective against any 4-4-2 system and most vulnerable against a 3-4-3 system.

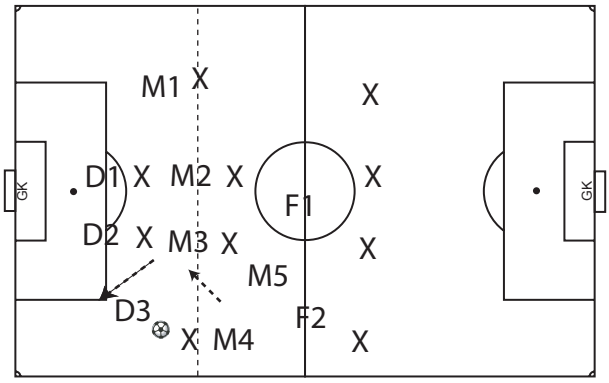
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

3-5-2: sweeper; modified diamond midfield; attacking midfielder



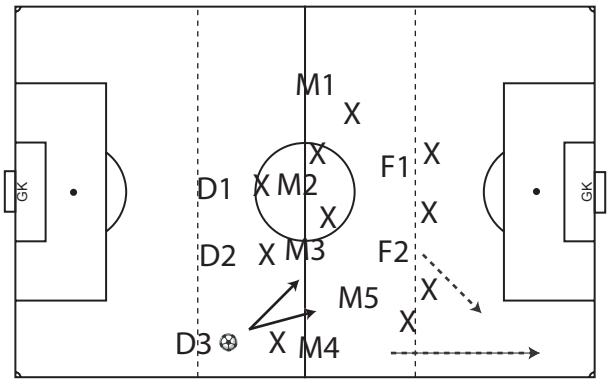
Lining Up:

1. D1 & D3 mark forwards on their side (mixed zone), sweeper (D2) covers in behind.
2. M2/M3 have defensive roles, closing down the middle.
3. M5, F1 & F2 put pressure on opposing defenders.
4. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking, and defend against outside midfielders.
5. M5 is playmaker setting up attacks.
6. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



Defending:

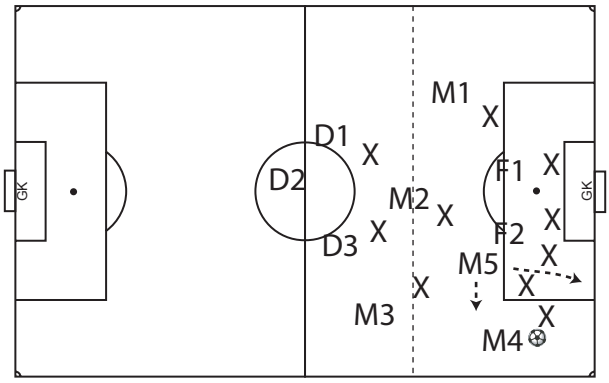
1. D3 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D2 picks up D3's mark.
3. M3 provides support for D3 taking sweeper's role.
4. M4 who was overlapped shifts to take M3 spot.
5. M2 & M4 pick up central midfielders.
6. M1 marks outside midfielder.
7. F1, F2, M5 shift ball side to cover three of four defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M5 is primary, M3 secondary target for a pass from defenders. M4 or F2 are the long ball alternative.
4. No initial back pass support for D3.
5. M3, M5 pass diagonal into run of M4 or F2 or switch play to opposite side.

The player in possession should have at least three passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing to M4.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to M5 in position or into run.

M5 at this point becomes a forward in behind F1 & F2. If M5 were in possession, then M5 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1, F2 or M4 making runs into space.

The key is for M5 to play behind forwards to put opposing defenders off-balance.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

3-5-2: flat back 3; flat midfield; defending midfielder

OVERVIEW

This system is an attacking minded system with the safety provided by a defensive midfielder, allowing inexperienced teams to develop a zonal midfield system. Defenders mark opposing forwards in their zone and play the off-side trap. When in possession, the 3-5-2 offers five attackers.
Two outside midfielders become wingers; one of the central midfielders moves up thus providing variation which makes defending them very difficult.
This system has lots of flexibility because any midfielder can join the attack.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 3-5-2 system must have a defensive midfielder who is in exceptional aerobic shape as he/she will be shifting laterally throughout the game to provide cover for the other midfielders. He/she must be able to read and anticipate the play to be in the right spot at the right time.
This key player allows the other four midfielders to be less concerned about coming back after loss of possession and keeping one of them up for a quick transition.The central midfielders must both have attacking skills as either of them can make deep penetrating runs or set up the forwards.
Forwards need to know when to make wide diagonal runs or when to break through the center.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and attacking midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
Defenders must have excellent 1v1 defending skills and an ability to communicate decisions to challenge opposing midfielders. They must have vision to establish the off-side line and movement must be automatic and extremely well synchronized.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

This is a difficult system to train due to the timing and automation requirements of the off-side trap.
If there isn't enough time to train this, you may revert back to the sweeper 3-5-2 system.
Team speed and endurance are important and players with these qualities are first selected for the outside midfield and three defender positions. Players with good 1v1 skills can take on the forward and offensive midfield roles. In essence, the defensive midfielder acts like a sweeper behind the midfield and a coach may look to someone with sweeper experience to fill this role.

STRATEGY

This system is very effective in attacking most other systems due to the versatility provided by the flexibility of the midfield. Other teams will find it difficult to win the midfield battle and may add a fifth midfielder of their own, which will not cause a problem. If the opponent adds a third forward then the defensive midfielder becomes an outright defender.

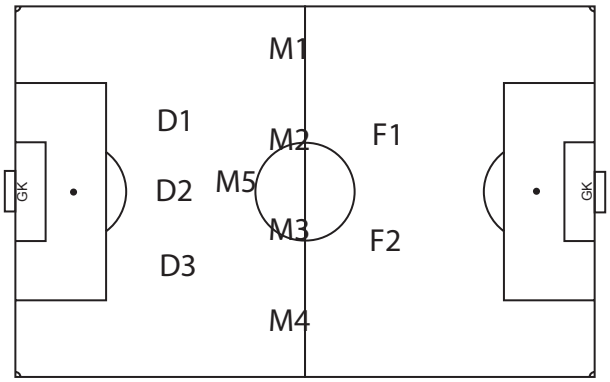
If more attacking is required, this system easily converts to a 3-4-3.

The vulnerability lies in the flat back three leaving room for opponents to play diagonal through balls, avoid the off-side trap and outnumber the defenders.

This system is for teams wanting to develop a more complex style of play to challenge opponents.

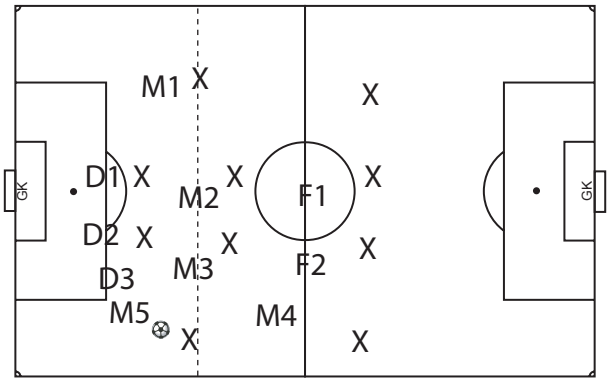
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

3-5-2: flat back 3; flat midfield; defending midfielder



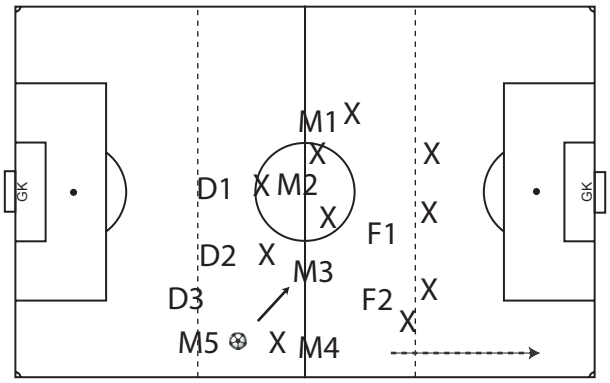
Lining Up:

1. D1, D2 & D3 mark forwards in their zone.
2. M5 has a defensive role, covering befind M1-M4.
3. M2 and M3 control center of field, either can attack.
4. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking, and defend against outside midfielders.
5. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



Defending:

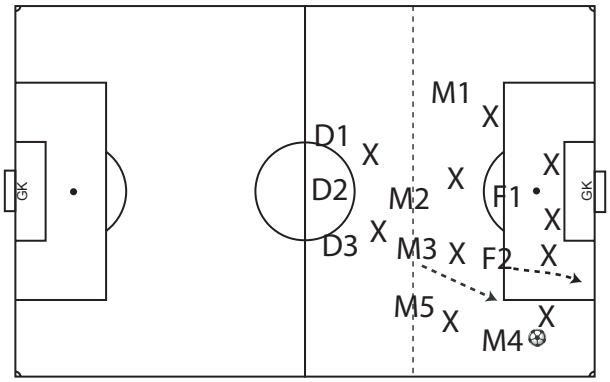
1. M5 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D3 provides cover for M5.
3. D1 and D2 mark forwards.
4. M4 who was overlapped covers defenders and gets ready for transition.
5. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
6. M1 marks outside midfielder.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M4 is primary, M3 secondary target for a pass.
4. Back pass support from D3.
5. Alternative is long ball over top of defense into run of F1 or switching to M1.

The player in possession should have at least three passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing to M4.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to F2 in position or into run, or
4. pass it to M3 making supporting run.

M3 or M2 can join the attack knowing that M5 will provide cover and support.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

3-5-2: sweeper; flat midfield; defending midfielder

OVERVIEW

This system is a very safe system defensively and suited for teams with short pre-seasons. Defenders mark opposing forwards in their zone supported by the sweeper. When in possession, the 3-5-2 offers attacking flexibility employing as many as five attackers.
Two outside midfielders become wingers, one of the central midfielders moves up thus providing variation which makes defending them very difficult.
This system has lots of flexibility because any midfielder can join the attack.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 3-5-2 system must have a defensive midfielder who is in exceptional aerobic shape as he/she will be shifting laterally throughout the game to provide cover for the other midfielders. He/she must be able to read and anticipate the play to be in the right spot at the right time.
This key player allows the other four midfielders to be less concerned about coming back after loss of possession and keeping one of them up for a quick transition. The central midfielders must both have attacking skills as either of them can make deep penetrating runs or set up the forwards.
Forwards need to know when to make wide diagonal runs or when to break through the center.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and attacking midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
Defenders must have excellent 1v1 defending skills and an ability to communicate decisions to challenge opposing midfielders. The sweeper provides security and is a very safe alternative for teams who don't have time to develop the off-side trap.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

Team speed and endurance are important and players with these qualities are first selected for the outside midfield and three defender positions . Players with good 1v1 skills can take on the forward and offensive midfield roles. In essence, the defensive midfielder acts like a sweeper behind the midfield and a coach may look to someone with sweeper experience to fill this role.

STRATEGY

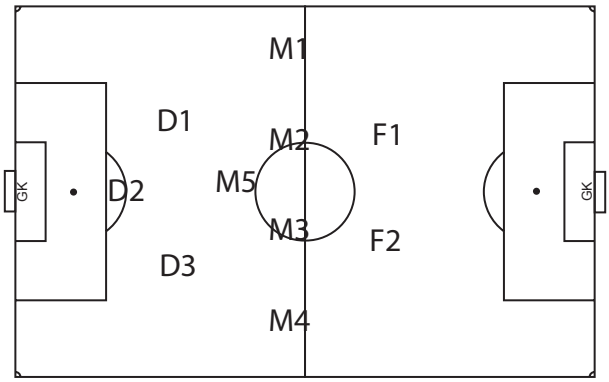
This system is very effective in attacking most other systems due to the versatility provided by the flexibility of the midfield. Other teams will find it difficult to win the midfield battle and may add a fifth midfielder of their own, which will not cause a problem. If the opponent adds a third forward then the defensive midfielder becomes an outright defender.

If more attacking is required, this system easily converts to a 3-4-3.

This system is for teams wanting to develop a more complex style of play to challenge opponents.

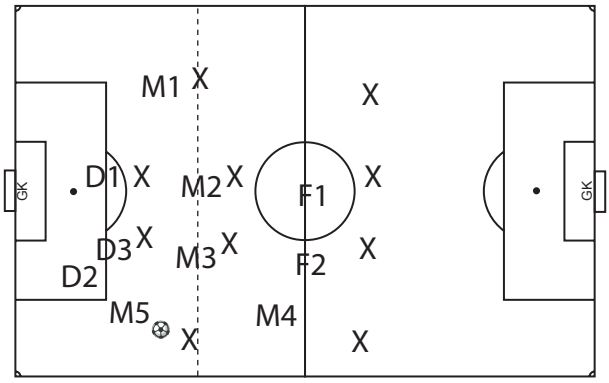
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

3-5-2: sweeper; flat midfield; defending midfielder



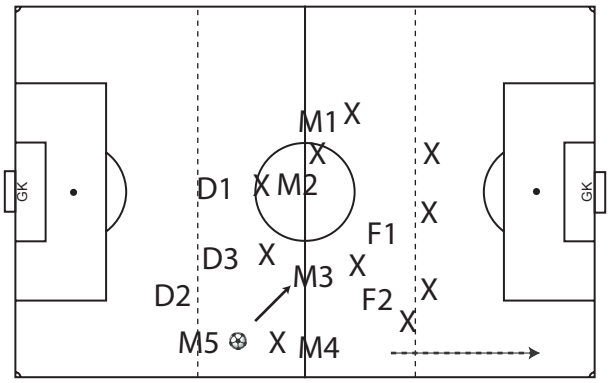
Lining Up:

1. D1& D3 mark forwards in their zone.
2. D2 provides cover for D1 & D3.
3. M5 has a defensive role, covering befind M1-M4.
4. M2 and M3 control center of field, either can attack.
5. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking, and defend against outside midfielders.
6. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



Defending:

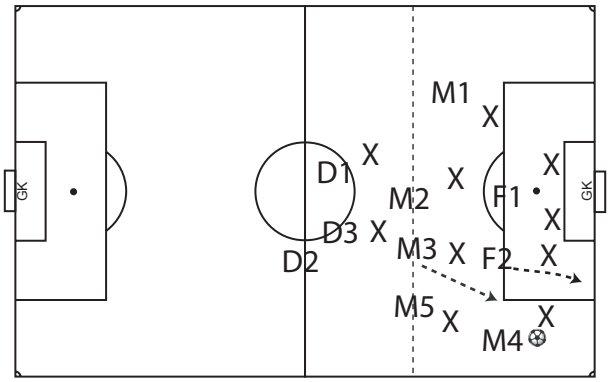
1. M5 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D2 provides cover for M5.
3. D1 and D3 mark forwards.
4. M4 who was overlapped covers defenders and gets ready for transition.
5. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
6. M1 marks outside midfielder



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M4 is primary, M3 secondary target for a pass.
4. Back pass support from D2.
5. Alternative is long ball over top of defense into run of F1 or switching to M1.

The player in possession should have at least three passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing to M4.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to F2 in position or into run, or
4. pass it to M3 making supporting run.

M3 or M2 can join the attack knowing that M5 will provide cover and support.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

Systems of Play

4-3-3 & 3-4-3

4-3-3: flat back four; flat midfield; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is the re-emergence of the "original" 4-3-3 sweeper system of the 1960s to 1980s. In this zonal version it is complex to implement and is recommended for mature, competitive teams. The benfit is that the width of the field is covered in all areas. The risk is that attacking becomes too static if the forwards stay in their position making them easy to mark. The forwards need to change positions and shift towards the middle to set up 3v2s while opening the side for overlapping defenders/midfielders. When defending, this system almost always converts into a 3-4-3 because a defender needs to step up.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 4-3-3 system must have outside defenders and midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to get back in the team's transition to defense. The zonal system requires a high degree of verbal and visual communication, particularly when defending, to ensure that opposing attackers are challenged and covered.

This system relies on the off-side trap and that is where defenders need to be alert to ensure they step up just before the ball is played in behind them. This requires almost automatic mechanisms because there is little time to provide each other with instructions.

When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and central midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.

The central midfielder is the strategist who reads the play and distributes the ball requiring excellent vision and ability to read the opposition.

Outside defenders need to be capable to be outside midfielders as well.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

First and foremost, coaches need lots of time before the season starts to train the key elements of this system. Emphasis needs to be on keeping players in their zones, on getting them to make the right decisions regarding challenging penetrating opponents and on timing the off-side trap.

Players with ability to beat opponents 1v1 on the wings with the ability to play effective crosses into the target area need to be developed amongst outside defenders/midfielders/forwards.

A key challenge is to avoid static positioning by training positional switching, creating spaces, midfield shifts and overlaps. It requires a lot of thinking and communication.

Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

STRATEGY

This system is particularly effective against systems with 4 defenders by providing 3 or 4 attackers and at the same time making it difficult for opposing defenders to join the attack.

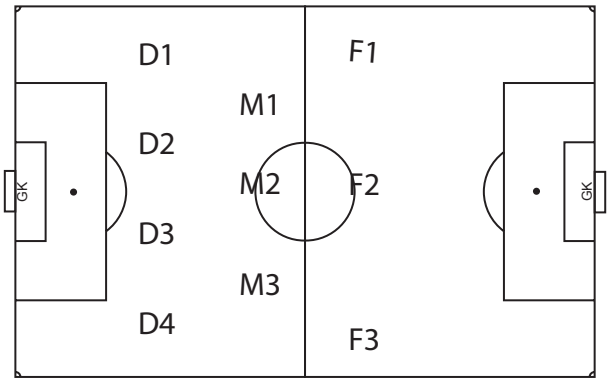
It will work well against any 4-4-2, a 3-4-3 or a 4-3-3.

The weakness is against a 3-5-2 system which will outnumber it in midfield by two players forcing a conversion to 4-4-2 by pulling a forward back, or to a 3-5-2 pulling a forward back and the central defender pushing into center midfield.

The ability of your players to stay mentally alert to avoid static positioning when attacking and provide defensive coverage will determine whether this system is the right one for your team.

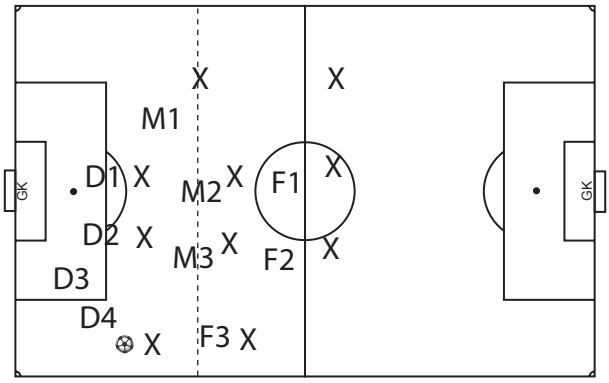
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-3-3: flat back four; flat midfield; zonal system



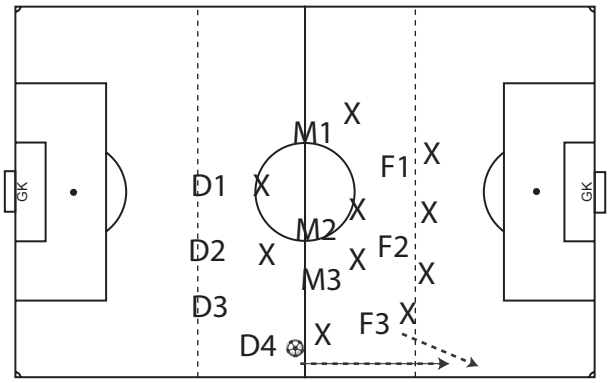
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1 & D4 cover for D2, D3, overlap when attacking and step up to mark opposing outside midfielders.
3. D2 & D3 mark central attackers if play is in middle.
4. M1,M2,M3 control central midfield, with M2 providing an additional attacking option behind forwards.
5. M1, M2, M3 can shift to side of play, M1 & M3 overlap.
6. F1 & F3 attack down their flanks, F2 stays central.



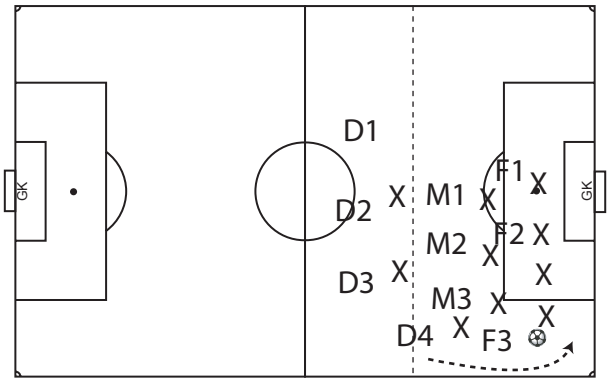
Defending:

1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D3 provides support to D4.
3. D2 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. F3 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. D4 gets ready to give and go with M3 or pass to F3.
2. F3 gets ready to make wide run.
3. M3 gets ball & passes, supports player receiving ball.
4. D3 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to M3, D3 or deep to right. Alternatively, the midfield can shift to the side of play with outside midfielders overlapping and the opposite side defender covering the opponents outside midfielder.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right to F3.
2. F3 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping D4 or M3 who will then cross.

If ball were in center of field with M2 in possession, then M2 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or F3 making runs into space, pass through middle to F2 or to overlapping D1, D4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

4-3-3: sweeper; flat midfield

OVERVIEW

This system is the classic system of the 1960s to 1980s. It still is one of the easiest systems to implement and very well suited for youth teams just starting to play full field soccer. The benefit is that the width of the field is covered in all areas and players learn the basic elements of positional and the basic skills required in all parts of the field. The risk is that attacking becomes too static if the forwards stay in their position making them easy marks by the opponent. When defending, this system almost always converts into a 3-4-3 because a defender needs to step up.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Mature teams employing this 4-3-3 system must have outside defenders and midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to get back in the team's transition to defense.

For younger teams you may not wish to have outside defenders/midfielders overlap initially.

The sweeper needs to be a player with speed and strong tackling and have the ability to communicate and direct the defenders in front as to whom to mark and when to release to support the midfield.

When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and central midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.

The central midfielder is the strategist who reads the play and distributes the ball requiring excellent vision and ability to read the opposition.

Outside defenders need to be capable to be outside midfielders as well.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

Coaches do not need a lot of time to get the team organized to play this basic system, making it suitable for teams with short pre-seasons and young teams. As the season progresses complexity can be gradually added. Players with ability to beat opponents 1v1 on the wings and with the ability to play effective crosses into the target area need to be developed amongst outside defenders/midfielders/forwards.

A key challenge is to avoid static positioning by training positional switching, creating spaces, midfield shifts and overlaps. It requires a lot of thinking and communication.

Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

STRATEGY

This system is particularly effective against systems with 4 defenders by providing 3 or 4 attackers and at the same time making it difficult for opposing defenders to join the attack.

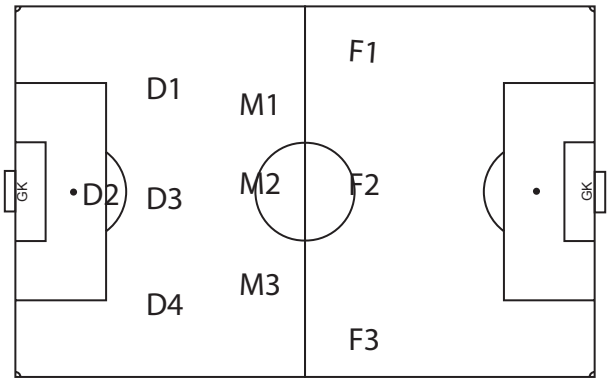
It will work well against any 4-4-2, a 3-4-3 or a 4-3-3.

The weakness is against a 3-5-2 system which will outnumber it in midfield by two players forcing a conversion to 4-4-2 by pulling a forward back, or to a 3-5-2 pulling a forward back and the central defender pushing into center midfield. This is most likely to be the case in mature and competitive environments.

The ability of your players to stay mentally alert to avoid static positioning when attacking and provide defensive coverage will determine whether this system is the right one for your team.

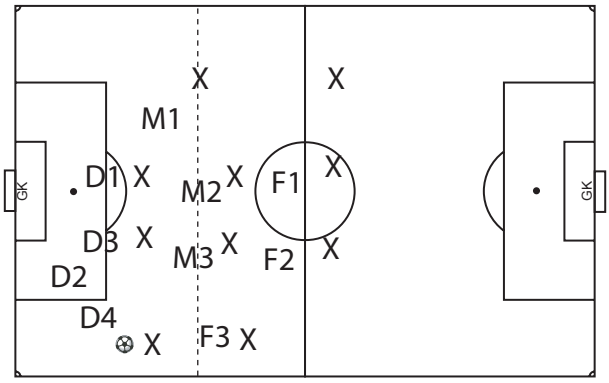
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-3-3: sweeper; flat midfield



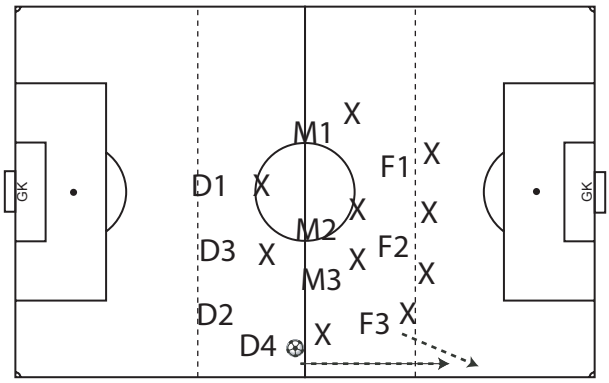
Lining Up:

1. Midfielders stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1/D3 or D3/D4 mark forwards against a 2FW system, D1/D3/D4 mark against a 3FW system.
3. D2 sweeps providing coverage for defenders.
4. M1,M2,M3 control central midfield, with M2 providing an additional attacking option behind forwards.
5. M1, M2, M3 can shift to side of play, M1&M3 overlap.
6. F1 & F3 attack down their flanks, F2 stays central.



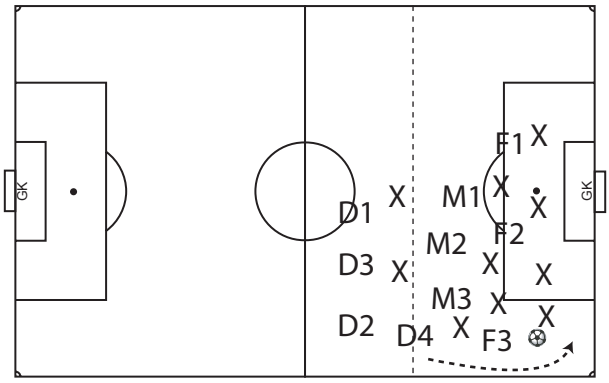
Defending:

1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D2 provides support to D4.
3. D3 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. F3 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. D4 gets ready to give and go with M3 or pass to F3.
2. F3 gets ready to make wide run.
3. M3 gets ball & passes, supports player receiving ball.
4. D2 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to M3, D2 or deep to right. Alternatively, the midfield can shift to the side of play with outside midfielders overlapping and the opposite side defender covering the opponents outside midfielder.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right to F3.
2. F3 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping D4 or M3 who will then cross.

If ball were in center of field with M2 in possession, then M2 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or F3 making runs into space, pass through middle to F2 or to overlapping D1, D4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

3-4-3: flat back three; flat midfield; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is a very risky attacking formation for mature teams with zonal system experience.
The benefit is that the width of the field is covered in all areas. The risk is that attacking becomes too static if the forwards stay in their position making them easy marks by the opponent. The forwards need to change positions, shift towards the middle to set up 3v2s while opening the side for overlapping midfielders. It is vulnerable to being caught on opposing counterattacks and can be outnumbered on defense if the midfielders and forwards do not transition back fast enough.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 3-4-3 system must have outside midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to get back in the team's transition to defense. The zonal system requires a high degree of verbal and visual communication, particularly when defending, to ensure that opposing attackers are challenged and covered.
This system relies on the off-side trap and that is where defenders need to be alert to ensure they step up just before the ball is played in behind them. This requires almost automatic mechanisms because there is little time to provide each other with instructions.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. All forwards and outside midfielders must have crossing technique and capability for heading the ball.
Forwards must have the discipline to come back with opposing overlapping defenders as there is little security behind them.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

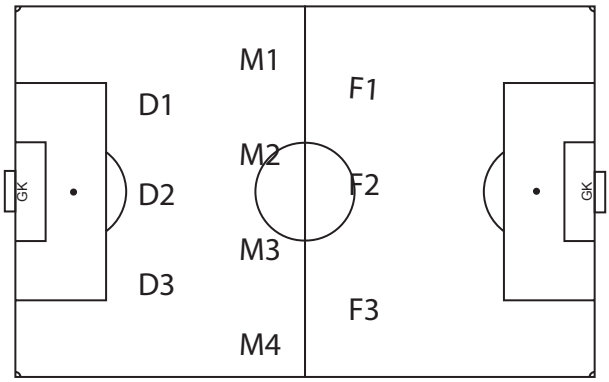
First and foremost, coaches need lots of time before the season starts to train the key elements of this system. Emphasis needs to be on keeping players in their zones, on getting them to make the right decisions regarding challenging penetrating opponents and on timing the off-side trap.
Players with ability to beat opponents 1v1 on the wings with the ability to play effective crosses into the target area need to be developed amongst outside midfielders/forwards.
A key challenge is to avoid static positioning by training positional switching, creating spaces, midfield shifts and overlaps. It requires a lot of thinking and communication.
Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

STRATEGY

This system is particularly effective against systems with 4 defenders by providing 3 or 4 attackers and at the same time making it difficult for opposing defenders to join the attack.
It will work extremely well against any 4-4-2.
The weakness is against any system with 3 forwards and a decision must be made whether or not to convert to a 4-4-2. If the three defenders can manage three forwards, then the offensive power should pressure the opponents in their half and generate lots of scoring opportunities.
The ability of your players to stay mentally alert to avoid static positioning when attacking and provide defensive coverage will determine whether this system is the right one for your team.

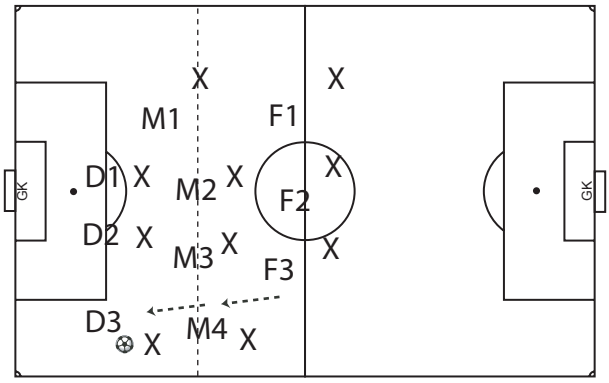
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

3-4-3: flat back three; flat midfield; zonal system



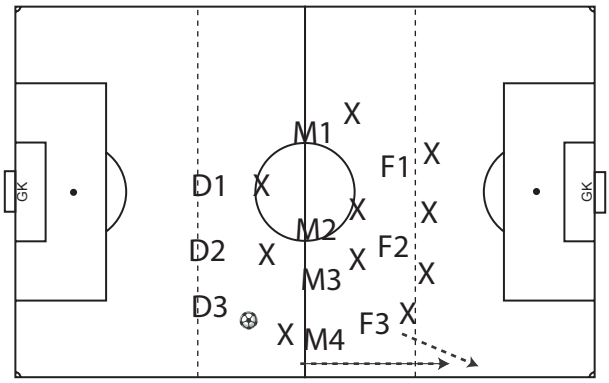
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1,D2,D3 mark forwards and step up to mark overlapping outside midfielders.
3. M2,M3 control central midfield.
4. M1 & M4 can overlap.
5. F1 & F3 attack down their flanks, F2 stays central.



Defending:

1. D3 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. M4 and F3 need to come back to support defenders.
3. D2 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. F3 comes back to mark overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

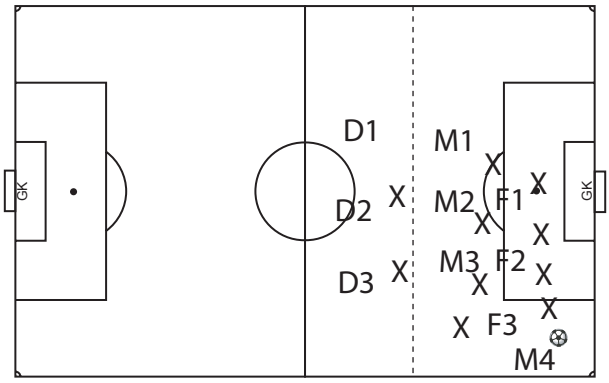
1. D3 passes to M4 or F3 down line or M3.
2. M4 & F3 get ready to make wide run.
3. If M3 gets ball, play is down line or over top defenders

The key is to transition quickly up the field to

a. relieve pressure ;

b. outnumber the opponents defense.

Overlapping midfielders must be covered by one of the forwards (see below).



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right to M4.
2. F3 has dropped to support M4.
3. M4 can go 1v1 for cross or play give and go with F3 or play ball back to F3 who now has passing options.

If ball were in center of field with M2/M3 in possession, they could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or F3 making runs into space, pass through middle to F2 or to overlapping M1/M4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

3-4-3: sweeper; flat midfield; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is a risky attacking formation for mature teams with some security provided by a sweeper. The benefit is that the width of the field is covered in all areas. The risk is that attacking becomes too static if the forwards stay in their position making them easy marks by the opponent. The forwards need to change positions, shift towards the middle to set up 3v2s while opening the side for overlapping midfielders. It is vulnerable to being caught on opposing counterattacks and can be outnumbered on defense if the midfielders and forwards do not transition back fast enough.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this 3-4-3 system must have outside midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to get back in the team's transition to defense. The sweeper requires a high degree of verbal and visual communication, particularly when defending, to ensure that opposing attackers are challenged and covered. He/she must also be in good aerobic shape and be fast to be able to cover width and depth of field.

When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. All forwards and outside midfielders must have crossing technique and capability for heading the ball.

Forwards must have the discipline to come back with opposing overlapping defenders as there is little security behind them.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

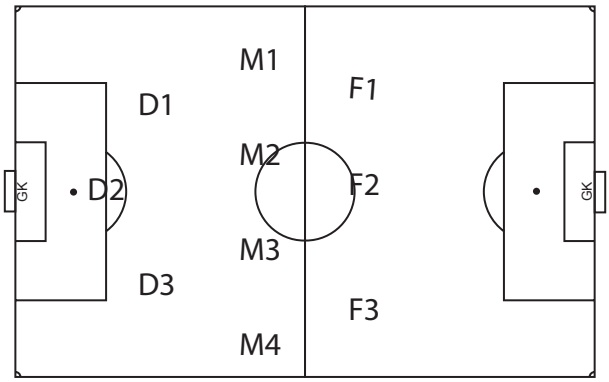
First and foremost, coaches need to have available an experienced sweeper or spend significant time choosing and training one, as well as a back-up. The sweeper allows the offense of the team to play to it's potential by organizing behind overlapping midfielders.
Players with ability to beat opponents 1v1 on the wings with the ability to play effective crosses into the target area need to be developed amongst outside midfielders/forwards.
A key challenge is to avoid static positioning by training positional switching, creating spaces, midfield shifts and overlaps. It requires a lot of thinking and communication.
Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

STRATEGY

This system is particularly effective against systems with 4 defenders by providing 3 or 4 attackers and at the same time making it difficult for opposing defenders to join the attack.
It will work extremely well against any 4-4-2.
The weakness is against any system with 3 forwards and a decision must be made whether or not to convert to a 4-4-2. If the three defenders can manage three forwards, then the sweeper position is dissolved and turns into a marking defender. The team's offensive power must now keep and pressure the opponents in their half and generate lots of scoring opportunities.
The ability of your players to stay mentally alert to avoid static positioning when attacking and provide defensive coverage will determine whether this system is the right one for your team.

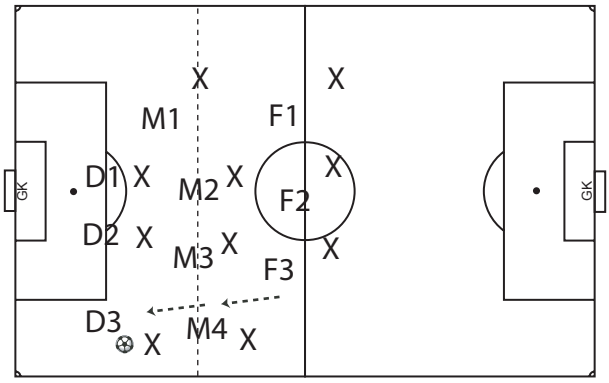
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

3-4-3: sweeper; flat midfield; zonal system



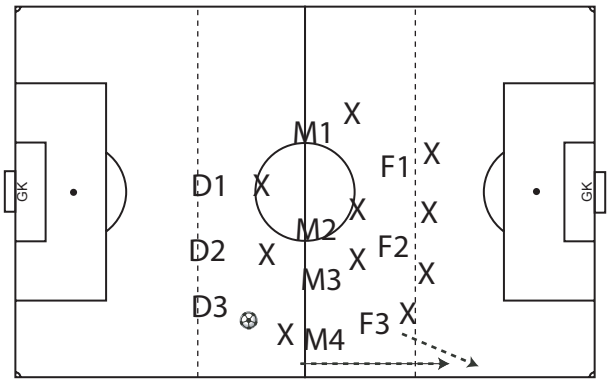
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1& D3 mark forwards and step up to mark overlapping outside midfielders.
3. Sweeper D2 provides cover for D1/D3.
4. M2,M3 control central midfield.
5. M1 & M4 can overlap.
6. F1 & F3 attack down their flanks, F2 stays central.



Defending:

1. D3 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. M4 and F3 need to come back to support defenders.
3. D2 steps up and marks central attacker.
5. F3 comes back to mark overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & F2 cover remaining three defenders.

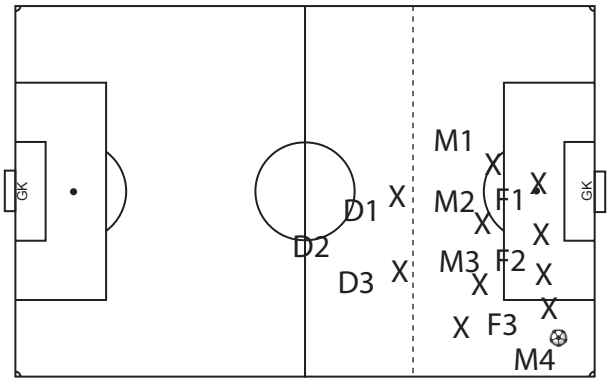


Transitioning:

1. D3 passes to M4 or F3 down line or M3.
2. M4 & F3 get ready to make wide run.
3. If M3 gets ball, play is down line or over top defenders.

The key is to transition quickly up the field to
a. relieve pressure;
b. outnumber the opponents defense.

Overlapping midfielders must be covered by one of the forwards (see below).
After attack started, defenders get back into position.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right to M4.
2. F3 has dropped to support M4.
3. M4 can go 1v1 for cross or play give and go with F3 or play ball back to F3 who now has passing options.

If ball were in center of field with M2/M3 in possession, they could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or F3 making runs into space, pass through middle to F2 or to overlapping M1/M4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

Systems of Play

Special & New

4-5-1: flat back four; flat midfield; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is a very defensive system designed to stop a superior opponent from scoring, while relying almost exclusively on the counterattack to score the winning goal in an otherwise 0-0 game.
It is recommended to only use this system with experienced teams who understand the concept of closing down spaces, absorbing pressure and counterattacking quickly.
The 4-5-1 can shut down any other system and good teams will respond by converting to a 3-5-2 or even a 2-5-3 depending on how much stronger they are and how much they need/want a win.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Mature teams employing this 4-5-1 system must have outside defenders and midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to get back in the team's transition to defense.
This system relies on the off-side trap and significant time is required to develop timing for the defensive unit to step up as well as the necessary visual and verbal communication.

When attacking, the outside players as well as the forward all need to be able to play 1v1. Central midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
The lone forward needs to be in superb aerobic shape as he/she will put pressure on whichever opposing defender has the ball.
The central midfielder is the strategist who reads the play and distributes the ball requiring excellent vision and ability to read the opposition.
Outside defenders need to be capable of being outside midfielders as well.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

This system is not recommended as the primary system for a team, but rather as a system for a special circumstance or game. As such, the coach has the challenge of training the team on the primary system and then preparing the team for this event. This will require additional focussed practices for one game. The challenge is to train players to be able to mentally switch gears for one game and then get back to normal for the game after. Do not attempt the zonal system if typically you play with a sweeper. Identifying the lone forward and the additional midfielder and getting them to understand their new roles is key. Getting team communication and organization needs to be rehearsed in practice.

STRATEGY

This system's purpose is to stop a superior team from scoring. At best it converts into a 4-4-2 when attacking.

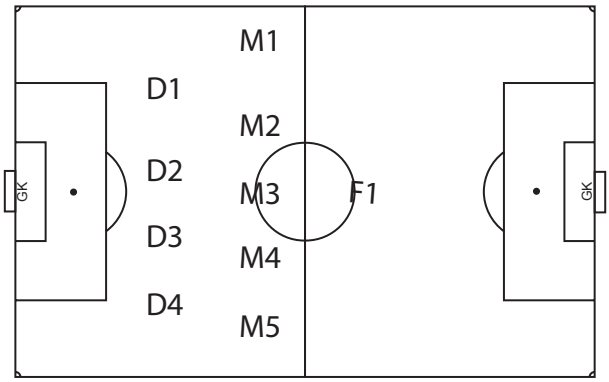
Opponents may push defenders forward to overcome the tight midfield marking which actually plays into your strategy of quick counterattacks.

Most likely, this will turn into a chess match between coaches and the coach's ability to read game situations and make quick tactical adjustments will be tested.

If the opponent isn't as superior as anticipated a switch to a 4-4-2 at the half should be in the game plan.

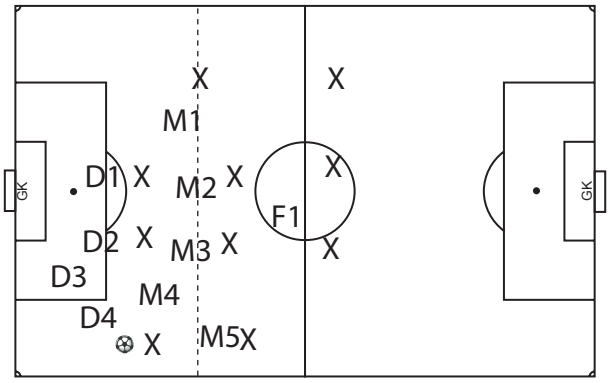
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-5-1: flat back four; flat midfield; zonal system



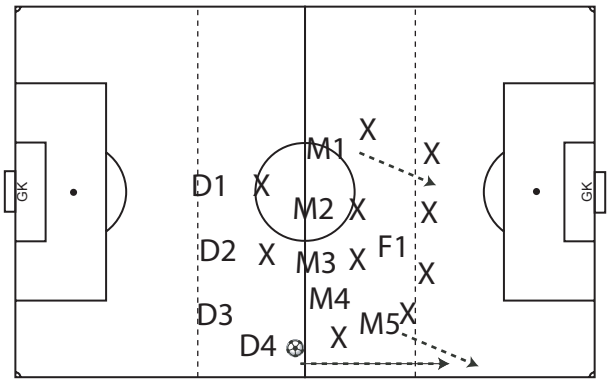
Lining Up:

1. Defenders/midfielders stay on their side (zone).
2. D1 & D4 challenge attackers on their side, cover for D2 & D3, overlap when attacking.
3. D2 & D3 mark central attackers if play is in middle.
4. M2,M3,M4 control central midfield.
5. M1,M5 become wingers when play is on their sid.e
6. F1 stays central.



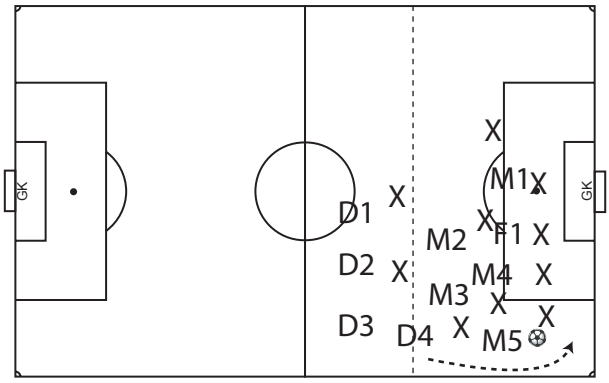
Defending:

1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D3 provides support to D4.
3. D2 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M5 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
7. M4 covers on the right and is available for transition.
8. M1 marks outside midfielder.
9. F1 covers central defenders.



Transitioning:

1. D4 gets ready to give and go with M4 or pass to M5.
2. F1 gets ready for cross.
3. M4 gets ball & passes, supports player receiving ball.
4. D3 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to M4, D3 or deep to right.
6. M1 gets ready to make a run for the far post.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right to M5.
2. M5 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping D4 who will then cross.

If ball were in center of field with M3/M4 in possession, then they could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or M1 making runs into space past their markers. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

4-5-1: sweeper; flat midfield

OVERVIEW

This system is a very defensive system designed to stop a superior opponent from scoring, while relying almost exclusively on the counterattack to score the winning goal in an otherwise 0-0 game.
It is recommended to only use this system with experienced teams who understand the concept of closing down spaces, absorbing pressure and counterattacking quickly.
The 4-5-1 can shut down any other system and good teams will respond by converting to a 3-5-2 or even a 2-5-3 depending on how much stronger they are and how much they need/want a win.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Mature teams employing this 4-5-1 system must have outside defenders and midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to get back in the team's transition to defense.
The sweeper needs to be a player with speed and strong tackling and have the ability to communicate and direct the defenders in front as to whom to mark and when to release to support the midfield.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forward all need to be able to play 1v1. Central midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
The lone forward needs to be in superb aerobic shape as he/she will put pressure on whichever opposing defender has the ball.
The central midfielder is the strategist who reads the play and distributes the ball requiring excellent vision and ability to read the opposition.
Outside defenders need to be capable of being outside midfielders as well.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

This system is not recommended as the primary system for a team, but rather as a system for a special circumstance or game. As such, the coach has the challenge of training the team on the primary system and then preparing the team for this event. This will require additional focussed practices for one game.
The challenge is to train players to be able to mentally switch gears for one game and then get back to normal for the game after.
Identifying the lone forward and the additional midfielder and getting them to understand their new roles is key. Getting team communication and organization needs to be rehearsed in practice.

STRATEGY

This system's purpose is to stop a superior team from scoring. At best it converts into a 4-4-2 when attacking.

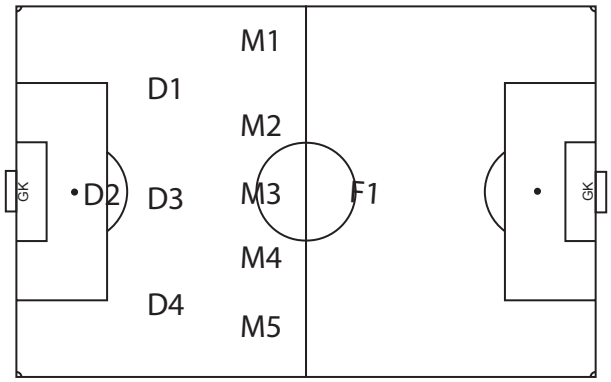
Opponents may push defenders forward to overcome the tight midfield marking which actually plays into your strategy of quick counterattacks.

Most likely, this will turn into a chess match between coaches and the coach's ability to read game situations and make quick tactical adjustments will be tested.

If the opponent isn't as superior as anticipated a switch to a 4-4-2 at the half should be in the game plan.

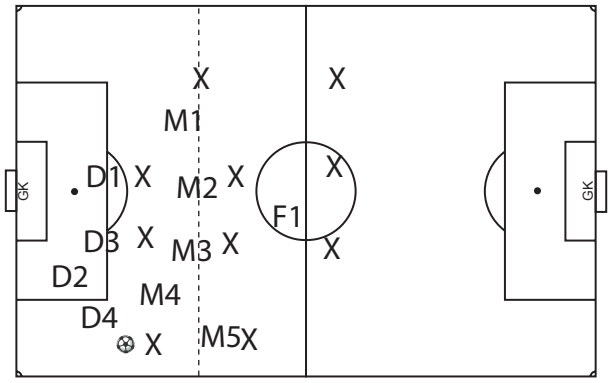
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-5-1: sweeper; flat midfield



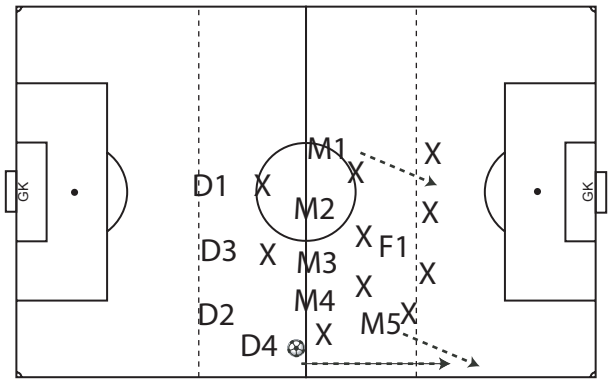
Lining Up:

1. Midfielders stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1/D3 or D3/D4 mark forwards against a 2FW system, D1/D3/D4 mark against a 3FW system.
3. D2 sweeps providing coverage for defenders.
4. M2,M3,M4 control central midfield.
5. M1,M5 become wingers when play is on their side.
6. F1 stays central.



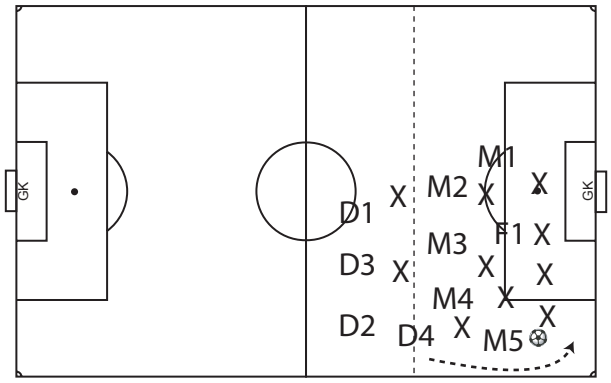
Defending:

1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D2 provides support to D4.
3. D3 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M5 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders
7. M4 covers on the right and is available for transition
8. M1 marks outside midfielder.
9. F1 covers central defenders.



Transitioning:

1. D4 gets ready to give and go with M4 or pass to M5.
2. F1 gets ready for cross.
3. M4 gets ball & passes, supports player receiving ball.
4. D2 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to M4, D2 or deep to right.
6. M1 gets ready to make a run for the far post.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right to M5.
2. M5 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping D4 who will then cross.

If ball were in center of field with M3/M4 in possession, then they could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or M1 making runs into space.
Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

4-2-3-1: flat back four; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is one of the many emerging variations of the basic systems used by today's pro teams.
It is a very effective and versatile attacking system based on four attackers. With overlapping outside defenders and midfielders it converts to a 4-2-4, 4-3-3, 3-4-3, 3-3-4 or 2-4-4 putting immense pressure on the opposing defensive units who must be extremely alert and in constant communication.
The vulnerability of the 4-2-3-1 lies in it's flat back defense which can be torn apart by diagonal runs through its center. Transition to defending is easily forgotten with the mindset on attacking.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this system must have midfielders who have attacking skills equal to forwards.
Outside defenders must be in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to chase back in the team's transition to defense. The zonal system requires a high degree of verbal and visual communication to ensure that opposing attackers are challenged and covered.
The inside midfielders are defensive and strategy specialists and need to be disciplined in positional play.
This system relies on the off-side trap and that is where defenders need to be alert to ensure they step up just before the ball is played in behind them. This requires almost automatic mechanisms because there is little time to provide each other with instructions.
When attacking, the offensive midfielders and the forward need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and midfielders must have goal scoring skills.
After loss of possession in the opponent's half, the attacking midfielders need to make decisions as to whom to challenge. Should they pressure defenders or drop back to cover midfielders?
A key team requirement is to have players that can think, sove problems, improvise and make decisions.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

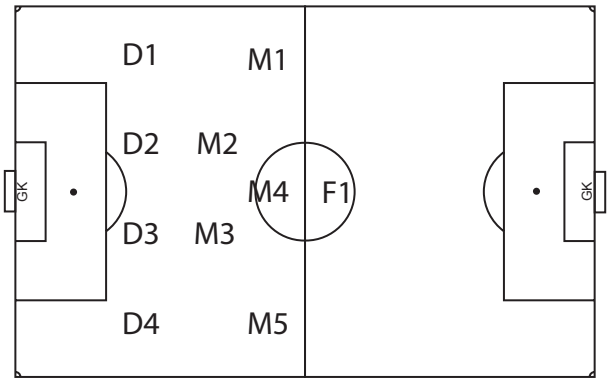
First and foremost, coaches need lots of time before the season starts to train the key elements of this system. Emphasis needs to be on keeping players in their zones and on getting them to make the right decisions regarding challenging penetrating opponents. Much work will be required to coordinate the off-side trap, which again requires verbal and visual communication.
Midfielders with the ability to attack and defend need to be recruited or developed. Tactical training to ensure the offensive midfielders transition optimally will be the focus of every practice session.
Aerobic conditioning and speed training are a requirement, particularly for the outside players.

STRATEGY

This system is highly effective in attacking and challenging opponents' defenses. Opponents will find it difficult to respond to four attackers being unpredictable in their runs and positions.
The weakness of the 4-2-3-1 lies in transitioning to defense because while providing attacking variability, midfielders might find it difficult to get into defensive position. On the other hand, the two central mid-fielders and four defenders should provide some security.
A 3-5-2 system can outnumber it in central midfield, thus pulling out a central defender causing difficulty with the integrity of the flat back zone. A 3-4-3 system can also cause difficulties, particularly if its three forwards get additional support from overlapping midfielders.
If struggling defensively in midfield, conversion to a 4-4-2 is likely the best tactical response.
Ultimately, the strength of your own team will determine if the opponent is forced to make an adjustment to their system during the game or if you need to adjust because the opponent's system is dominating.

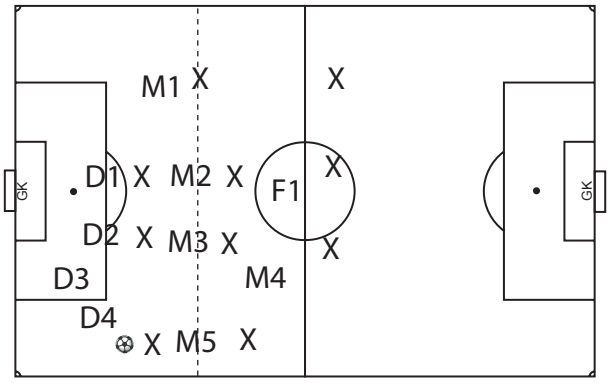
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

4-2-3-1: flat back four; zonal system



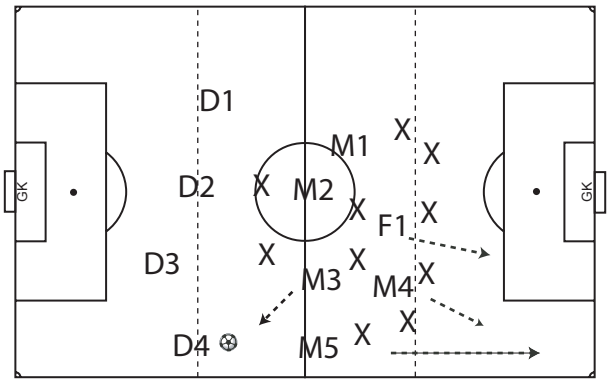
Lining Up:

1. Defenders and midfielders generally stay on their side of the field (zone).
2. D1 & D4 challenge attackers, cover for D2 & D3.
3. D2 & D3 mark central attackers if play is in middle.
4. M1 & M5 are outside forwards when in possession, defend against overlapping defenders or midfielders.
5. M4 is playmaker as well as second centre forward.
6. M2 & M3 control play, mostly defend centrally.
7. F1 is target player supported on wings by M1, M5.



Defending:

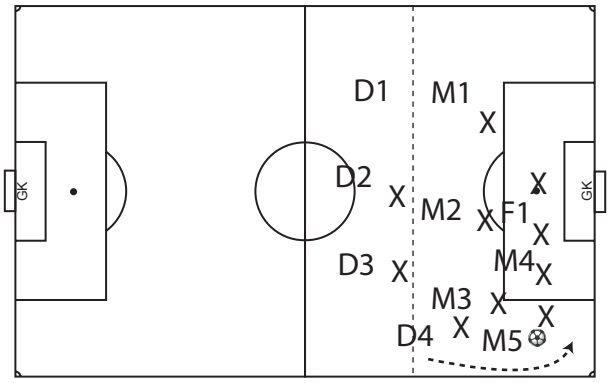
1. D4 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D3 provides support to D4.
3. D2 marks central attacker.
4. D1 shifts to mark second central attacker.
5. M5 marks overlapping defender.
6. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders
7. M1 marks outside midfielder.
8. F1 & M4 cover remaining three defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M5 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. M4 & F1 get ready to make diagonal through runs.
3. M3 comes to ball for a pass.
4. D3 supports D4 for a back pass.
5. D4 has option of passing to D3, M3 or deep to right

Depending on where on the field the play is, the player in possession should have at least three passing options to players either coming towards the ball or making runs into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing with M5 in possession.
2. M5 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to overlapping defender D4 who will then cross.

If ball were in center of field with M2 in possession, then M2 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1 or M4 making runs into space. M2 could also pass wide to overlapping M1/D1 or M5/D4. Again, it is important to provide passing options for player with ball.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

3-2-3-2: flat back 3; zonal system

OVERVIEW

This system is a slight variation of the 3-5-2 system employed by advanced teams.
Defenders mark opposing forwards in their zone and play the off-side trap.
The central midfielders close down the middle. When in possession, this system offers five attackers.
Two outside midfielders become wingers, the attacking central midfielder is a third forward.

This system can create odd-man advantages when attacking down the sides or through the center.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

Teams employing this system must have midfielders who are in exceptional aerobic shape as they will both make deep runs to attack and then need to come back in transition to defense. They must have defending skills as well as abilities to pass and cross effectively. The defensive midfielders must have vision for the game and passing skills. The attacking midfielders must be able to become forwards and have exceptional decision making skills to know when and where to attack and transition to defense.
Forwards need to know when to make wide diagonal runs or when to break through the center.
When attacking, the outside players as well as the forwards all need to be able to play 1v1 and place accurate crosses into the penalty area. Both forwards and attacking midfielders must have goal scoring technique and capability for heading the ball.
Defenders must have excellent 1v1 defending skills and an ability to communicate decisions to challenge opposing midfielders. They must have vision to establish the off-side line and movement must be automatic and extremely well synchronized.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

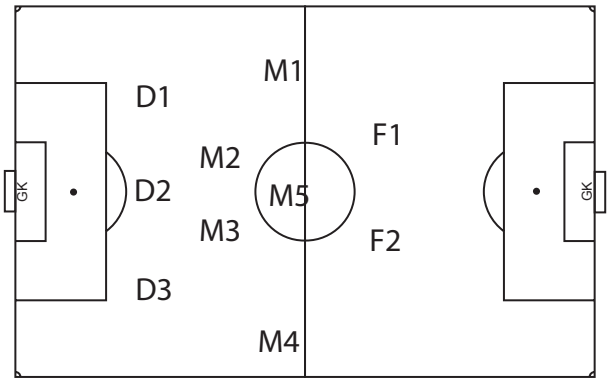
This is a difficult system to train due to the timing and automation requirements of the off-side trap.
If there isn't enough time to train this, you may revert back to the sweeper 3-5-2 system.
Team speed and endurance are important and players with these qualities are first selected for the outside midfield and three defender positions . Players with good 1v1 skills can take on the forward and offensive midfield roles. Players with less endurance and speed but with good tactical and positional sense can be placed in the central midfield positions. Communication amongst defenders and from defenders to midfielders is key.

STRATEGY

This system is very effective in attacking most other systems due to the versatility provided by the attacking midfielders who can create odd-man advantages on the wings and through the center. Other teams may be forced to have a defender step up, exposing the defense , or pulling a midfielder back, weakening their transition to attack.
There is a defensive risk in this system when losing the ball in the opponent's end and the attacking mid-fielders reacting too slow or positionally wrong. The flat back three also leaves lots of room for opponents to play diagonal through balls, avoid the off-side trap and outnumber the defenders.
Also, teams with three forwards can create undue pressure on the defense. Countering that is the ease with which you can convert to a 3-5-2 with a sweeper or a 4-4-2 .
This system is for highly experienced and well synchronized teams.
The 3-2-3-2 is most effective against any 4-4-2 system and most vulnerable against a 3-4-3 system.

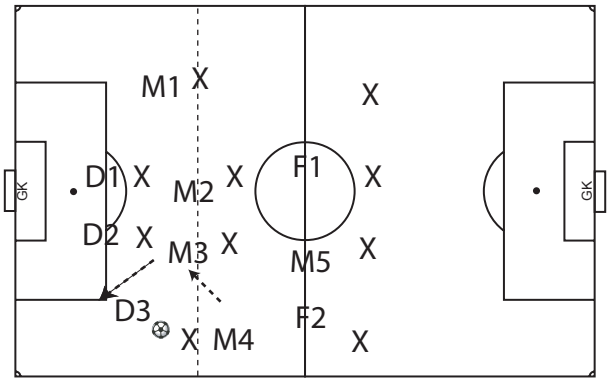
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

3-2-3-2: flat back 3; zonal system



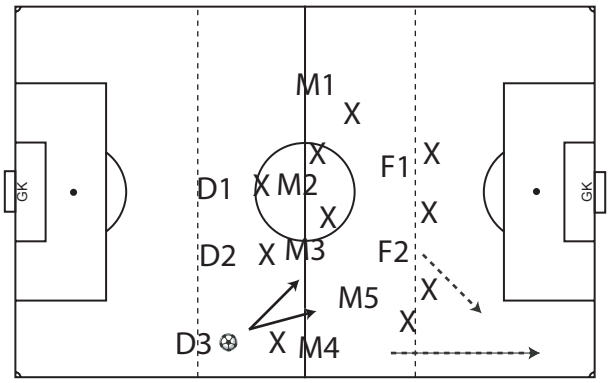
Lining Up:

1. D1, D2 & D3 mark forwards in their zone.
2. M2 & M3 have a defensive role, closing down middle.
3. M5 becomes third attacker in any position.
4. M1& M4 are wingers when attacking and defend against outside midfielders.
5. F1 & F2 make runs to near/far post or to wings.



Defending:

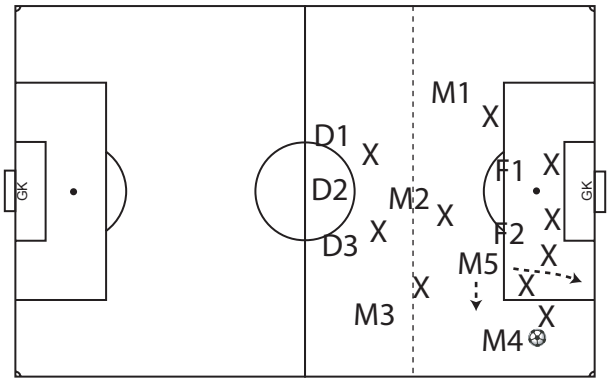
1. D3 challenges overlapping midfielder.
2. D2 picks up D3's mark.
3. M3 provides support for D3 taking sweeper's role.
4. M4 who was overlapped shifts to take M3 spot.
5. M2 & M3 pick up central midfielders.
6. M1 marks outside midfielder.
7. F1, F2, M5 shift ball side to cover three of four defenders.



Transitioning:

1. M4 gets ready to make overlapping run.
2. F2 gets ready to make diagonal run.
3. M5 is primary, M3 secondary target for a pass from defenders. M4 or F2 are the long ball alternative.
4. No initial back pass support for D3.
5. M3, M5 pass diagonal into run of M4 or F2 or switch play to opposite side.

The player in possession should have at least three passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. Ball has been played down the right wing to M4.
2. M4 can go 1v1 and cross the ball in or
3. pass it to M5 in position or into run.

M5 at this point becomes a forward in behind F1 & F2. If M5 were in possession, then M5 could pass through defenders diagonally to F1, F2 or M4 making runs into space.

The key is for M5 to play behind forwards to put opposing defenders off-balance.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

Systems of Play

Small Sided Games

2-1-2: indoor or other small sided games

OVERVIEW

Indoor and small sided games typically play 6 v 6 with 5 field players and a goalkeeper.
For teams who play 11 v 11 outdoors it is recommended to keep the basic structure of defense, midfield and forwards intact in order to train the concepts and players and to provide a connection between defense and attackers.
With very young children who always play small sided and don't understand the concepts of midfield yet, it is highly recommended to play a 3-2 system, 3 defenders and 2 forwards.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

For teams who typically play 11 v 11 and are playing indoors this is a great opportunity to develop speed, endurance, fast play and ball skills. Small sided games require five players on the field who need to know how to act as defenders, midfielders and forwards, thus training a complete set of physical, technical and mental soccer skills. However, it should be noted that not all good small sided players make good full field players.

For young teams who are just starting soccer, there is no requirement because the point is to develop kids into soccer players.

In general, you want the most skilled and fit players in the midfield position, the best 1v1 attackers (ideally with speed) as forwards and fast tackling players on defense.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

This is a fairly easy system to train a team in and hence well suited for teams with short pre-seasons.
Positional roles are easily defined and explained and can be practiced early with increasing success.
Team speed and endurance are important and physical training must be a component of practices either on their own or built into the drills.
Players with good 1v1 skills can take on the forward and midfield roles.
Communication amongst all players is critical and must also be stressed during practices.
The biggest challenge will be to train the forwards on marking opposing defenders.

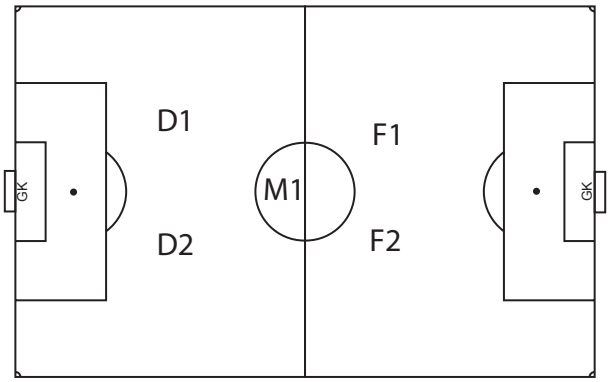
STRATEGY

This is the most basic and common small sided system and quite often ends up in a 1v1 game with the other team playing the same system. Attacking variability and success is created by defenders picking the right moments to overlap or penetrate through the center joining the attack.

When playing against the other popular system, a 2-2-1, the decision of keeping the 2-1-2 or matching the 2-2-1 needs to be made first. If keeping the 2-1-2 and defenders are strong, then the non-marking defender needs to step up and keep an eye on the other team's second midfielder.

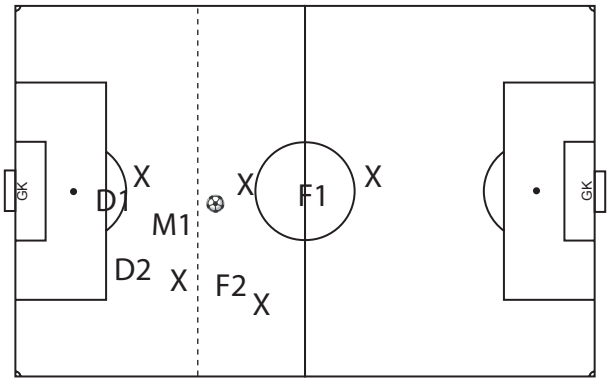
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

2-1-2: indoor or other small sided games



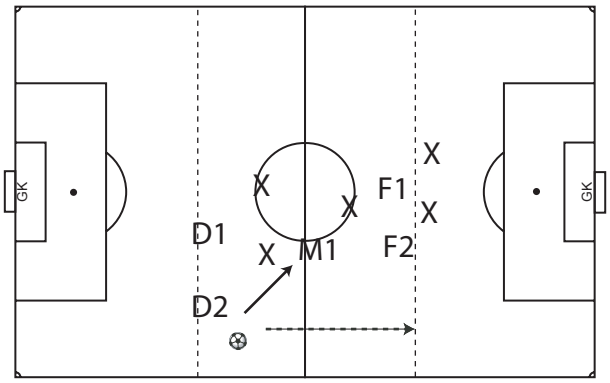
Lining Up:

1. D1& D2 mark forwards in their zone and overlap.
2. M1 has attacking and defending role.
3. F1 & F2 make diagonal runs and cover overlapping defenders.



Defending:

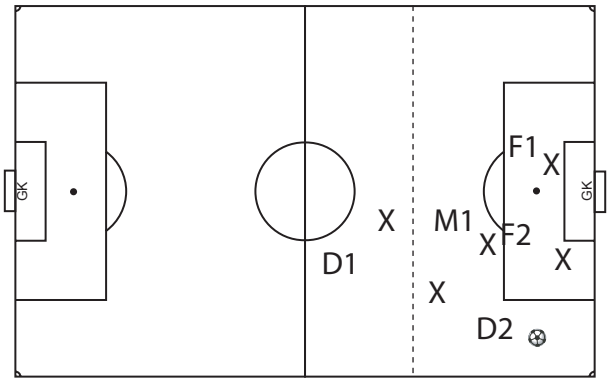
1. M1challenges midfielder.
2. D1 and D2 mark forwards.
3. F2 needs to come back with overlapping and penetrating defender.
4. F1 stays high for fast break pass.



Transitioning:

1. D2 has bal.l
2. M1 comes across for a give and go with D2.
3. F2 is ready for pass down the side.
4. F1 is ready for a long switching ball over top.

The player in possession should have at least two passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. Give and go has put D2 down the side.
2. D2 crosses ball.
3. F1 and F2 time runs behind defenders to near/far posts.
4. M1 gets ready for rebounds and to cover for D2 and pick up opposing forward on a quick transition by the other team.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

2-2-1: indoor or other small sided games

OVERVIEW

Indoor and small sided games typically play 6 v 6 with 5 field players and a goalkeeper.
For teams who play 11 v 11 outdoors it is recommended to keep the basic structure of defense, midfield and forwards intact in order to train the concepts and players and to provide a connection between defense and attackers.
With very young children who always play small sided and don't understand the concepts of midfield yet, it is highly recommended to play a 3-2 system, 3 defenders and 2 forwards.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

For teams who typically play 11 v 11 and are playing indoors this is a great opportunity to develop speed, endurance, fast play and ball skills. Small sided games require five players on the field who need to know how to act as defenders, midfielders and forwards, thus training a complete set of physical, technical and mental soccer skills. However, it should be noted that not all good small sided players make good full field players.

The lone forward is more of a target player who needs superior ball receiving skills, has the ability to hold the ball until support arrives and play an accurate pass.

For young teams who are just starting soccer, there is no requirement because the point is to develop kids into soccer players.
In general, you want the most skilled and fit players in the midfield position, the best 1v1 attackers (ideally with speed) as forward and fast tackling players on defense.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

This is a more complex system to train due to requiring at least one of the midfielders to join the attack. Defenders are required to overlap frequently at the same time. Transitioning to defense might be a challenge. The attack is very versatile and when trained properly should challenge the opponent.

Players with good 1v1 skills can take on the forward and midfield roles.
Communication amongst all players is critical and must also be stressed during practices.
The biggest challenge will be to train the forwards on marking opposing defenders.

STRATEGY

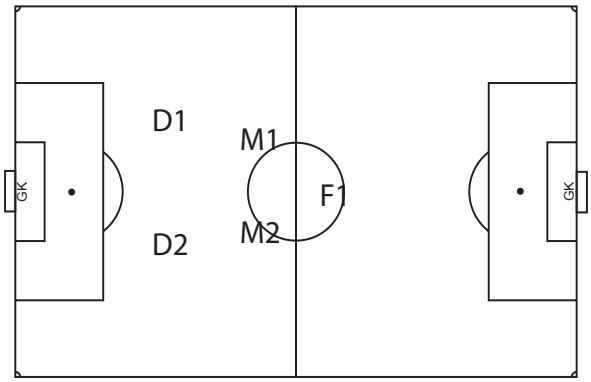
This is the less common small sided system and used by experienced or professional indoor teams.

When playing against the other popular system, a 2-1-2, this system offers an advantage in midfield and versatility in the attack. If the other team converts and matches the 2-2-1, there will be 1v1 situations everywhere. If the other team stays 2-1-2, then this could confuse them and keep them off-balance.

The only caution is to make sure that the midfielders communiucate such that one of them challenges the opposing midfielder when defending and the other one picks up an overlapping defender.

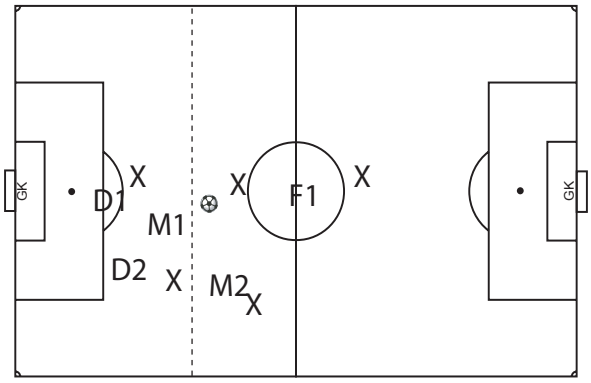
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

2-2-1: indoor or other small sided games



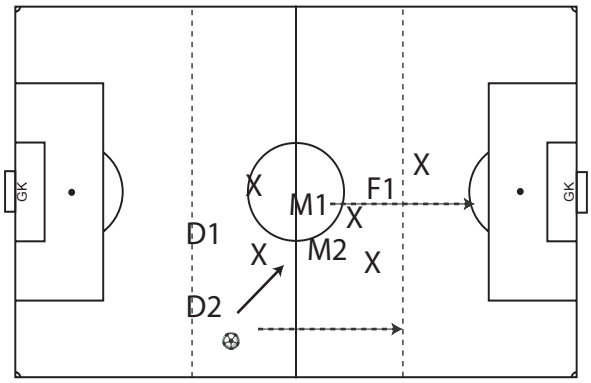
Lining Up:

1. D1& D2 mark forwards in their zone and overlap.
2. M1, M2 have attacking and defending role.
3. F1 is a target player staying in front (ball side) of opposing defenders.



Defending:

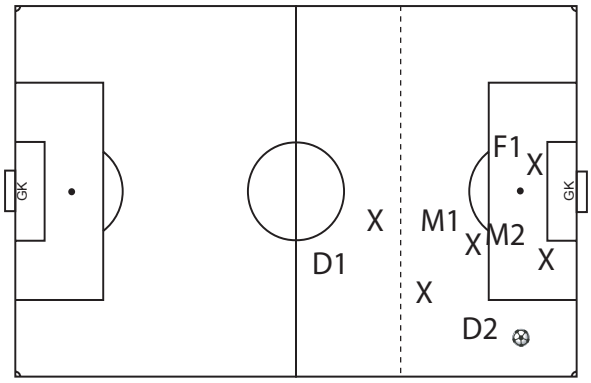
1. M1 or M2 challenges midfielder depending on side of opponent's attack. The other midfielder picks up overlapping defender on their side.
2. D1 and D2 mark forwards.
3. F1 stays high for fast break pass.



Transitioning:

1. D2 has ball
2. M2 is ready for a give and go with D2.
3. F1 is ready for pass over top of defense.
4. M1 is ready for a through ball into cente.r

The player in possession should have at least two passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. Give and go has put D2 down the side.
2. D2 crosses ball.
3. F1 andM2 time runs behind defenders to near/far posts.
4. M1 gets ready for rebounds and to cover for D2 and pick up opposing forward on a quick transition by the other team.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

2-3-2: youth games, zonal training

OVERVIEW

Many youth leagues play 8 v 8 with 7 field players and a goalkeeper.
This provides an opportunity to practice the key elements of a zonal system at a time when competition ought not to be the priority of the game or the league. At the same time it is a bit of an awkward situation and can present difficulties depending on age group and size of field, i.e. 7 year olds playing this system on a 3/4 field. 10 year olds across 1/2 field will find this a good situation with many touches on the ball and frequent transitions.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

This is the first opportunity to specialize in positions. Fast and unafraid defenders with tackling instincts will emerge.

Midfielders with ball skills are needed with the ability to recognize opportunities to overlap.
They must have the stamina to make those runs and then come back when transitioning to defense.
They also need the ability to cross, pass and shoot.

Forwards ideally have speed, good 1v1 skills, the ability to receive the ball, create space and set up for a shot. They need to be hungry with a drive for goal.

This is an ideal way to train the zonal system for the future.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

Patience is required to teach the fundamentals of the zonal systems with all its shifts, covering, overlaps and timing. Time is also required to find and improve or to develop players with natural abilities for certain positions. A coach cannot expect the mental and decision making abilities from players he/she sees from professionals. Practices need to be geared to develop the basic elements of skill and tactics.

A coach must be familiar with the zonal concept before attempting to coach.
Team speed and endurance are important and physical training must be a component of practices.

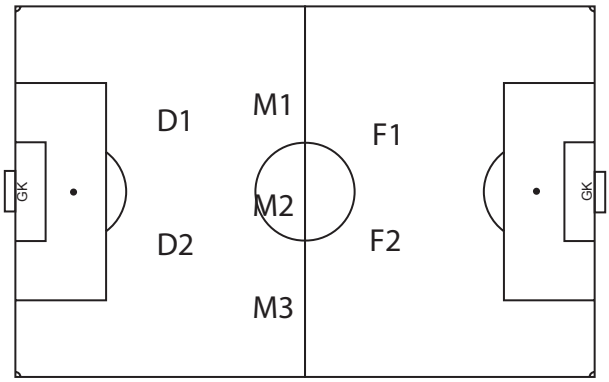
STRATEGY

Against a team playing a 2-3-2 this system becomes very much a battle of many 1v1 situations. To gain the upper hand, give and go passing is essential to isolate the opponent. The vulnerability lies in defense because there is no coverage.

When playing against the 3-2-2, the advantage should lie in midfield and either force an opposing defender to step up or a forward to come back. In the latter case a defender may choose to push up to continue outnumbering the opponent in midfield.

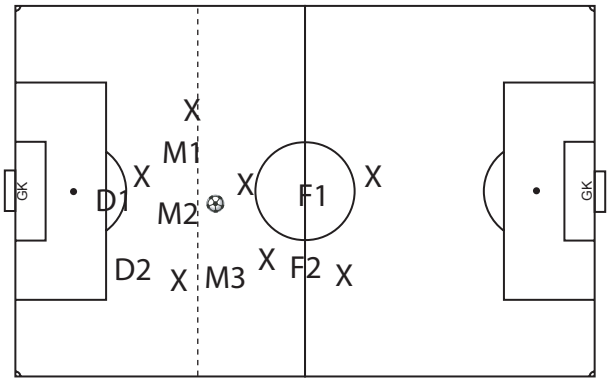
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

2-3-2: youth games, zonal training



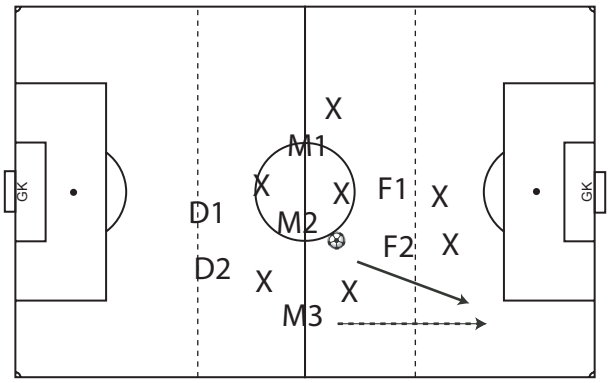
Lining Up:

1. D1& D2 mark forwards in their zone.
2. M1, M2 & M3 control midfield in their zone.
3. M1 and M3 can overlap when attacking.
4. F1 & F2 make diagonal runs and cover overlapping defenders.



Defending:

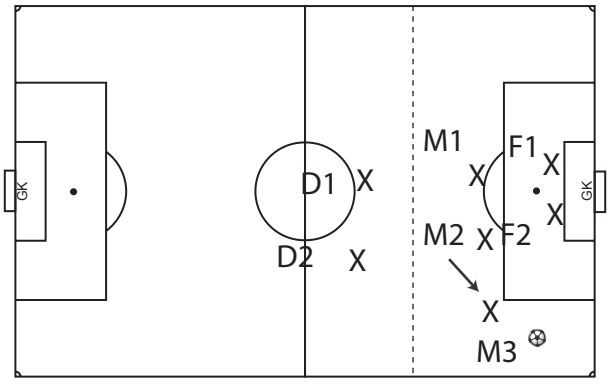
1. M1, M2, M3 challenge midfielder in possession
2. D1 and D2 mark forwards
3. F1 & F2 try to stay up to keep opposing defenders from attacking. If they do, F1 & F2 come back to mark them.



Transitioning:

1. M2 has ball and looks to pass wide right.
2. M3 goes for overlapping run down the right.
3. F2 is also ready for pass down the side.
4. F1 is ready for a long switching ball over top .

The player in possession should have at least two passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. M3 went for overlap.
2. M3 crosses ball or looks for support from M2.
3. F1 and F2 time runs behind defenders to near/far posts.
4. M1 gets ready for rebounds.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.

3-2-2: youth games, zonal or sweeper training

OVERVIEW

Many youth leagues play 8 v 8 with 7 field players and a goalkeeper.
This provides an opportunity to practice the key elements of a zonal or sweeper system at a time when competition ought not to be the priority of the game or the league. At the same time it is a bit of an awkward situation and can present difficulties depending on age group and size of field, i.e. 7 year olds playing this system on a 3/4 field. 10 year olds across 1/2 field will find this a good situation with many touches on the ball and frequent transitions.

TEAM REQUIREMENTS

This is the first opportunity to specialize in positions. Fast and unafraid defenders with tackling instincts will emerge. Also, a natural sweeper may emerge. Defenders with endurance, speed and passing ability are required to make overlapping runs.

Midfielders with ball skills, passing ability and vision are required.

Forwards ideally have speed, good 1v1 skills, the ability to receive the ball, create space and set up for a shot. They need to be hungry with a drive for goal.

This is an ideal way to train the zonal system for the future.

COACHING REQUIREMENTS

The first decision the coach needs to make is whether or not the sweeper system should be used. That will depend on the general defensive strength of available players. If they are weak, consider a sweeper. In that case the midfielders need to have endurance and be trained to read positional play as they will need to shift. Forwards also need to be skilled as they will get little support once the team attacks.

Patience is required to teach the fundamentals of the zonal systems with all its shifts, covering, overlaps and timing. Time is also required to find and improve or to develop players with natural abilities for certain positions. A coach cannot expect the mental and decision making abilities from players he/she sees from professionals. Practices need to be geared to develop the basic elements of skill and tactics. A coach must be familiar with the zonal concept before attempting to coach.

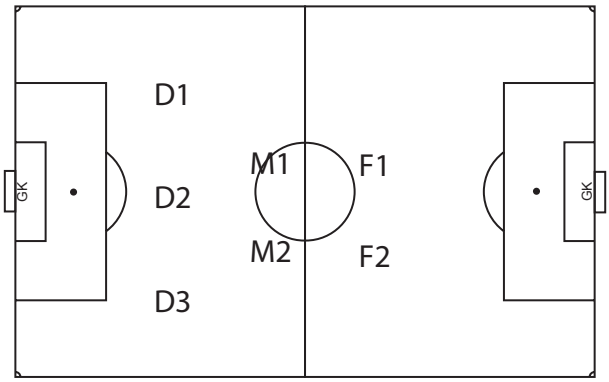
STRATEGY

Against a team playing a 3-2-2 this system becomes very much a battle of many 1v1 situations. To gain the upper hand, give and go passing is essential to isolate the opponent. The strength lies in defense due to the extra defender.

When playing against the 2-3-2, the midfield is vulnerable and needs to be extremely skilled and agile to cover three opponents. If that is a challenge when the opponent is attacking there are two options: Against a strong opponent, pull back a forward and essentially play 3-3-1 when defending. Against an equivalent or weaker opponent push up a defender and play 2-3-2 when defending.

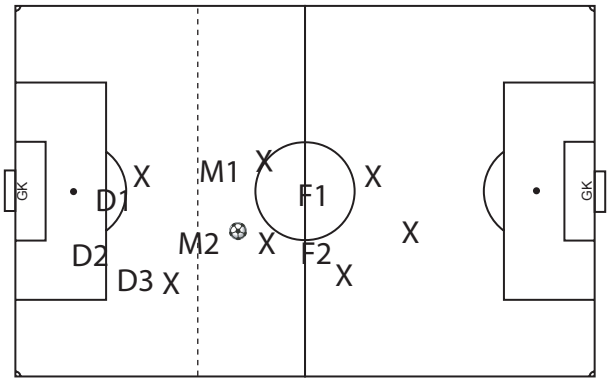
Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc. www.soccerpracticebooks.com

3-2-2: youth games, zonal or sweeper training



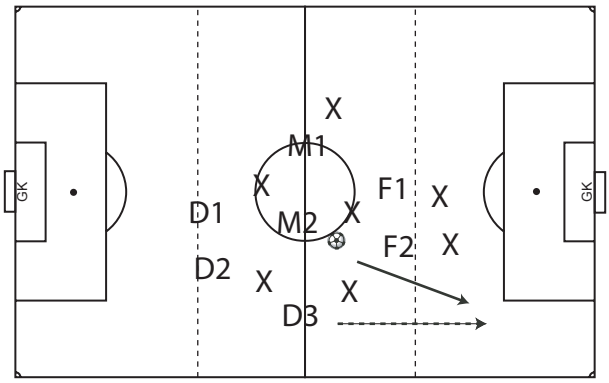
Lining Up:

1. D1, D2 & D3 mark forwards in their zone or D1/D3 mark and D2 sweeps.
2. D1/D3 can also overlap.
3. M1, M2 control center midfield.
4. F1 & F2 make diagonal runs and cover overlapping defenders.



Defending:

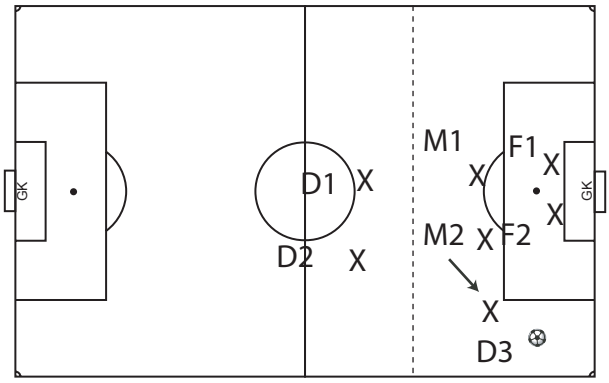
1. M1or M2 challenge midfielder in possession.
2. D1 and D3 mark forwards.
3. D2 covers behind.
4. If opponent plays with 3 midfielders, then one of the defenders needs to step up and the remaining defenders mark forwards.
5. F1 & F2 try to stay up to keep opposing defenders from attacking. If they do, F1 & F2 come back to mark them.



Transitioning:

1. M2 has ball and looks to pass wide right.
2. D3 goes for overlapping run down the right.
3. F2 is also ready for pass down the side.
4. F1 is ready for a long switching ball over top.

The player in possession should have at least two passing options to players or into space.



Attacking:

1. D3 went for overlap.
2. D3 crosses ball or looks for support from M2.
3. F1 and F2 time runs behind defenders to near/far posts.
4. M1 gets ready for rebounds.

Copyright 2004 by Sauder Consulting Inc.