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FORMATIONS

In association football, the formation describes how the players in a team are positioned on the pitch. Different formations can be used depending on whether a team wishes to play more attacking or defensive football.

Formations are described as the number of players in each area from the defensive line (not including the goalkeeper). For example 4-4-2 describes the formation as having: 4 defenders, 4 midfielders and 2 forwards. Conventionally, the formation can be described with 3 numbers, although 4-numbered (e.g. 4-4-1-1) and 5-numbered formations (e.g. 4-1-2-1-2) can be used. The numbering system was not present until the 4-2-4 system was developed in the 1950s.

The choice of formation is often related to other tactical choices, such as the choice of playing style. Formations can be deceptive in analysing a particular team's style of play, e.g. one team could play 4-4-2 and work defensively, whereas their opposition using the same formation could play much more attacking football.

Formations can be altered during a game, but this requires adaptations of the players to fit in to the new system. This can be due to a team wishing to change their offensive or defensive strategy, or even due to the loss of a player. Some formations also lend themselves to dynamically changing as players move up and down the field, e.g., the Brazilian 4-2-4 could effectively become a 2-4-4 during a match.

Formations are used in both professional and amateur football matches. However, in amateur matches these tactics are sometimes adhered to less strictly due to the lesser severity of the occasion. Skill and discipline on behalf of the players is also needed to effectively carry out a given formation in professional football. Formations need to be chosen with the players available in mind, and some of the formations below were created to address deficits or strengths in different types of players.

EARLY DAYS

In the football matches of the 19th century defensive football was not played, and the line-ups reflected the all-attacking nature of these games.

In the first international game, Scotland v. England on 30 November 1872, England played with seven or eight forwards in (1-1-8 or 1-2-7) and Scotland with six (2-2-6). For England, one player would remain in defence picking up loose balls and one or two players would hang around midfield and kick the ball upfield for the other players to chase. The English style of play at the time was all about individual excellence and English players were renowned for their dribbling skills. Players would attempt to take the ball forward as far as possible and when they could proceed no further they would kick it ahead for someone else to chase. Scotland surprised England by actually passing the ball among its players. The Scottish outfield players were organised into pairs and each player would always attempt to pass the ball to his assigned partner. Paradoxically, with so much attention given to attacking play, the game ended with a 0-0 draw.

CLASSIC FORMATIONS

2-3-5 (THE PYRAMID)

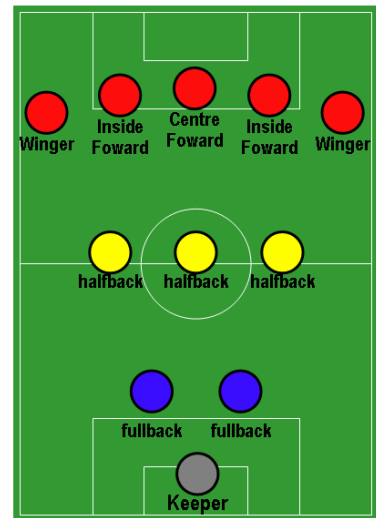
The Pyramid FormationThe first long-term successful formation was first recorded in 1880. However in "Association Football" published by Caxton in 1960, the following appears in Vol II, page 432:

"Wrexham ... the first winner of the Welsh Cup in 1877 ... for the first time certainly in Wales and probably in Britain, a team played three half backs and five forwards ..."

The 2-3-5 was originally known as the Pyramid with the numerical formation being referenced retrospectively. By the 1890s it was the standard formation in Britain and had spread all over the world. With some variations it was used by most top level teams up to the 1940s.

For the first time a balance between attacking and defending was reached. When defending, the two defenders (fullbacks) would watch out for the opponent's wingers (the outside players in the attacking line); while the midfielders (halfbacks) would watch for the other three forwards.

The centre halfback had a key role in both helping to organize the team's attack and marking the opponent's centre forward, supposedly one of their most dangerous players.



It was this formation which gave rise to the convention of shirt numbers [1] but can appear confused when applied to the classic 4-4-2 line up, i.e.:

- 01 – Goalkeeper
- 02 – Right back
- 03 – Left back
- 04 – Centre back
- 05 – Centre back ('Libero')
- 06 – Defensive midfielder
- 07 – Right winger
- 08 – Centre midfielder
- 09 – Centre forward
- 10 – Offensive midfielder, Playmaker
- 11 – Left winger

Teams that used this formation

- Uruguay, 1930 World Cup winner
- Argentina, 1930 World Cup runner up

THE DANUBIAN SCHOOL

The Danubian School of football is a modification of the 2-3-5 formation as played by the Austrians, Czechs and Hungarians in the 1920s, and taken to its peak by the Austrians in the 1930s. It relied on short-passing and individual skills.

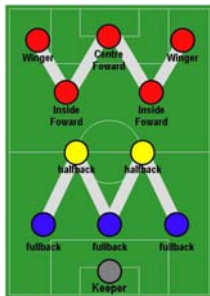
Teams that used this formation

- Austria, 4th at the 1934 World Cup

METODO

The Metodo was devised by Vittorio Pozzo, coach of the Italian national team in the 1930s. It was a derivation of the Danubian School. The system was based on the 2-3-5 formation, Pozzo realized that his halfbacks would need some more support in order to be superior to the opponents' midfield, so he pulled 2 of the forwards to just in-front of midfield, creating a 2-3-2-3 formation. This created a stronger defence than previous systems, as well as allowing effective counterattacks. The Italian national team won back-to-back World Cups in 1934 and 1938 using this system.

THE WM



The WM system was created in the mid-1920s by Herbert Chapman of Arsenal to counter a change in the offside law in 1925. The change had reduced the number of opposition players that attackers needed between themselves and the goal-line from three to two. This led to the introduction of a centre-back to stop the opposing centre-forward, and tried to balance defensive and offensive playing. The formation became so successful that by the late-1930s most English clubs had adopted the WM. Retrospectively the WM has either been described as a 3-2-5 or as a 3-4-3.

THE WW

The WW was a development of the WM created by the Hungarian coach Márton Bukovi who turned the 3-2-5 WM "upside down". The lack of an effective centre-forward in his team necessitated moving this player back to midfield to create a playmaker, with a midfielder instructed to focus on defence. This created a 3-5-2 (also described as a 3-3-4), and was described by some as an early version of the 4-2-4. This formation was successfully used by fellow countryman Gusztáv Sebes in the Hungarian national team of the early 1950s.

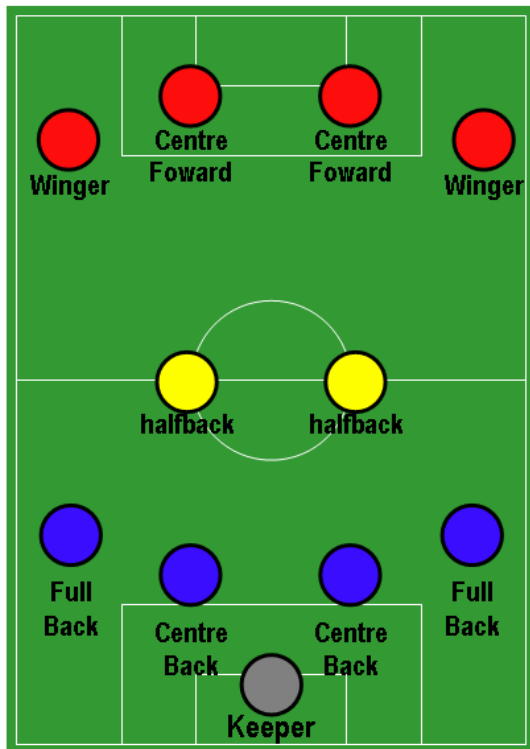
3-3-4

The 3-3-4 formation was similar to the WW with the notable exception of having an inside-forward (as opposed to centre-forward) deployed as a midfield schemer alongside the two wing-halves. This formation would be commonplace during the 1950s and early 1960s. One of the best exponents of the system was the Tottenham Hotspur double-winning side of 1961, which deployed a midfield of Danny Blanchflower, John White and David Mackay. FC Porto won the 2005-06 Portuguese national championship using this unusual formation (coach: Co Adriaanse).

4-2-4

The 4-2-4 formation attempts to combine a strong attack with a strong defence, and was conceived as a reaction to WM's stiffness. It could also be considered a further development of the WW. The 4-2-4 was the first formation to be described using numbers.

While the initial developments leading to the 4-2-4 were devised by Márton Bukovi, the credit for creating the 4-2-4 lies with two different people: Flávio Costa, the Brazilian national coach in the early 1950s, as well as another Hungarian Béla Guttmann. These tactics seemed to be developed independently, with the Brazilians discussing these ideas while the



Hungarians seemed to be putting them into motion. However the fully developed 4-2-4 was only 'perfected' in Brazil in the late 1950s.

Costa published his ideas, the "diagonal system", in the Brazilian newspaper O Cruzeiro, using schematics as the ones used here and, for the first time ever, the formation description by numbers as used in this article. The "diagonal system" was another precursor of the 4-2-4 and was created to spur improvisation in players.

Guttman himself moved to Brazil later in the 1950s to help develop these tactical ideas using the experience of Hungarian coaches.

The 4-2-4 formation made use of the increasing players skills and fitness, aiming to effectively use 6 defenders and 6 forwards, with the midfielders performing both tasks. The 4th defender increased the number of defensive

players but mostly allowed them to be closer together, thus enabling effective cooperation among them, the point being that a stronger defense would allow an even stronger attack.

The relatively empty midfield relied on defenders that should now be able not only to steal the ball, but also hold it, pass it or even run with it and start an attack. So this formation required that all players, including defenders, are somehow skillful and with initiative, making it a perfect fit for the Brazilian player's mind. The 4-2-4 needed a high level of tactical awareness as having only 2 midfielders could lead to defensive problems. The system was also fluid enough to allow the formation to change throughout play.

4-2-4 was first used with success at club level in Brazil by Palmeiras and Santos, and was used by Brazil in their wins at 1958 World Cup and 1970 World Cup, both featuring Pelé, and Zagallo who played in the first and coached the second. The formation was quickly adopted throughout the world after the Brazilian success.

Teams that used this formation

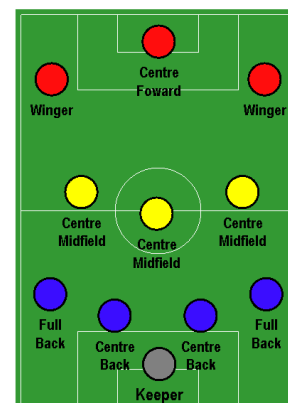
- Brazil, 1958 FIFA World Cup Winners
- Celtic FC, European Cup 1966-67 Winners "The Lisbon Lions"
- Brazil, 1970 FIFA World Cup winner

COMMON MODERN FORMATIONS

The following formations are used in modern football. The formations are flexible allowing tailoring to the needs of a team, as well as to the players available. Variations of any given formation include changes in positioning of players, as well as replacement of a traditional defender by a sweeper.

4-3-3

The 4-3-3 was a development of the 4-2-4, and was played by the Brazilian national team in the 1962 World Cup. The extra player in midfield allowed a stronger defence, and the midfield could be staggered for different effects. The three midfielders normally play closely together to protect the defence, and move laterally across the field as a coordinated unit. The three forwards split across the field to spread the attack, and are expected to "tackle back". When used from the start of a game, this formation is widely regarded as encouraging defensive play, and should not be confused with the practice of modifying a 4-4-2 by bringing on an extra forward to replace a midfielder player when behind in the latter stages of a game.



A staggered 4-3-3 involving a defensive midfielder (usually numbered 4 or 6) and two attacking midfielders (numbered 8 and 10) was commonplace in Italy, Argentina and Uruguay during the 1960s and 1970s. The Italian variety of 4-3-3 was simply a modification of WM, by converting one of the two wing-halves to a libero (sweeper), whereas the Argentine and Uruguayan formations were derived from 2-3-5 and retained the notional attacking centre-half. The national team which made this famous was the Dutch team of the 1974 and 1978 World Cups, even though the team won neither.

In club football, the team that brought this formation to the forefront was the famous Ajax Amsterdam team of the early 1970s, which won three European Cups with Johan Cruyff. Chelsea used this formation to great effect under José Mourinho in the time he was at the club. While getting his team to constantly press the opposition when defending, he also likes the two wingers to come back to create a 4-5-1 formation.

At the 2006 FIFA World Cup Spain and The Netherlands played both a variation of 4-3-3 without wingers. The three strikers would interchange positions and run the channels like a regular striker would.

Teams that used this formation

- Greece national football team, winners Euro 2004
- Brazil national team, winners 1962 FIFA World Cup
- Feyenoord in winning the 1970 European Cup
- Juventus F.C., Serie A winners and UEFA Champions League Winners 1995/96
- Rosenborg B.K., in their 13-in-a-row league wins & 10 seasons in the UEFA CL
- All the teams coached by Zdeněk Zeman
- Chelsea F.C., Premiership Winners 2004/05 2005/06
- Olympique Lyonnais, Ligue 1 Winners 2001/02 - 2006/07
- FC Barcelona, La Liga Winners 2004/05 2005/06, UEFA Champions League 2005/06
- Chelsea F.C., UEFA Champions League 2007/2008 runner-up
- FC Zenit Saint Petersburg, UEFA Cup Winners 2007/08

4-4-2



This adaptable formation is the most common in football today, so well known that it has even inspired a magazine title, FourFourTwo. The midfielders are required to work hard to support both the defence and the attack: one of the central midfielders is expected to go upfield as often as possible to support the forward pair, while the other will play a "holding role", shielding the defence; the two wide midfield players must move up the flanks to the goal line in attacks and yet also protect the fullback wide defenders. It is a very popular formation in Britain especially.

Teams that used this formation

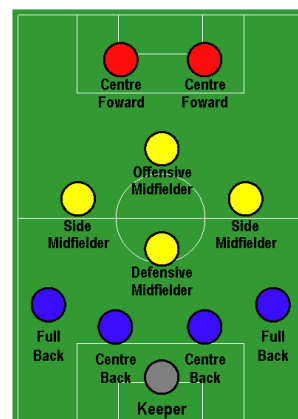
- Brazilian National Team during 1994, winners of the 1994 World Cup
- Manchester United F.C., Treble Winners 1998-99
- Arsenal F.C., Unbeaten Season 2003/04

4-4-2 DIAMOND OR 4-1-2-1-2

The 4-4-2 diamond (also described as 4-1-2-1-2) staggers the midfield. The width in the team has to come from the full-backs pushing forwards.

Teams that used this formation

- *Argentina* - Probably the team that uses it more often, although in the 2006 FIFA World Cup coach José Pekerman alternated between 4-1-2-1-2 and 4-2-2-2. Carlos Bilardo's team is a clear example with Diego Maradona being the offensive midfielder. This position is known as *enganche* and is a key position for Argentine football. This player often has more freedom than the rest and is considered the creative player, the playmaker, which can 'break' the formation and move freely along the offensive field. Other examples are Ronaldinho, Juan Román Riquelme, Rivaldo, Gheorghe Hagi, Zidane, Kaká, and Totti. The defensive midfielder is key for getting the ball back and covering the spaces left by the fullbacks or other players, being some sort of "midfield sweeper". This position is key for the 4-3-1-2 formation because of the recuperation of possession and several times this player distributes the ball to the teammates. Some examples include Dunga, Torsten Frings, Fernando Redondo, and Makelele.
- *Germany* - With the speciality of two Full Backs who are also capable of playing like good wingbacks, which is more offensive (Philipp Lahm, Marcell Jansen) - if there is a counter attack, the defensive midfielder will come to help the two centre backs.
- *England National Team* - the so-called "Wingless Wonders", winners of World Cup 1966
- *AC Milan* winner of the Champions League 2003, 2007 and the 2004 Scudetto (coached by Carlo Ancelotti)
- *FC Porto* winner of the Champions League 2004 (managed by José Mourinho)
- *Real Madrid* 2001-2002 champions league winners in final
- *The Czech Republic* used this formation for the Euro 2004
- *Boca Juniors* winner of the Copa Libertadores 2000 and 2001 (managed by Carlos Bianchi), and 2007 (managed by Miguel Angel Russo).

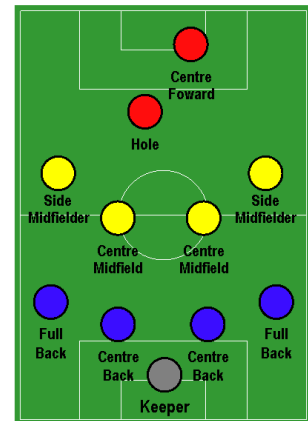


4-4-1-1

A variation of 4-4-2 with one of the strikers playing 'in the hole', or as a 'second striker', slightly behind their partner. The second striker is generally a more creative player, the playmaker.

Teams that used this formation

- Italy, 2006 FIFA World Cup Winners:
- Greece, European champion 2004
- Finnish national team
- Juventus during 2001/2002 and 2002/2003
- Manchester United F.C. during 2006-07 season
- Fenerbahçe S.K. 2006/2007 season Turkish League champions.



4-3-2-1 (THE 'CHRISTMAS TREE' FORMATION)

This is another variation of the 4-4-2, commonly described as the 'Christmas Tree' formation. Another forward is brought on for a midfielder to play 'in the hole', so leaving two forwards slightly behind the most forward striker. Terry Venables, first brought in this system throughout England's Euro 96 campaign. Glenn Hoddle then used this formation during his time in charge of the England national football team since then the formation has lost its popularity in England.

Teams that used this formation

- AC Milan, 2007 Champion's League Winners:
- FC Barcelona during the 2004–05 and 2005–06 seasons when not playing 4-3-3 with Ronaldinho and Ludovic Giuly (or sometimes Lionel Messi during 2005–06) playing behind Samuel Eto'o.
- Fenerbahçe S.K., Turkish Super League and UEFA Champions League in 2007/2008
- Egypt national football team during 1998 African Cup of Nations
- France national football team champions of 1998 FIFA World Cup

5-3-2

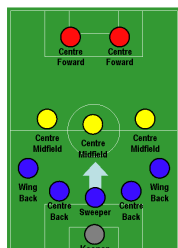


This formation has three central defenders (possibly with one acting as a sweeper.) This system is heavily reliant on the wing-backs providing width for the team. The two wide full-backs act as wing-backs. It is their job to work their flank along the full length of the pitch, supporting both the defence and the attack.

Teams that used this formation

- Germany adopted this formation between 1990 and 1994, winning the 1990 World Cup
- Celtic FC, during their 2001 treble winning season and run to the UEFA Cup Final in 2003

5-3-2 WITH SWEEPER OR 1-4-3-2



A variant of the above, this involves a more withdrawn sweeper, who may join the midfield, and more advanced full-backs.

Teams that used this formation

- Real Madrid, as 2000 Champions League winner with Iván Helguera playing as sweeper

3-4-3

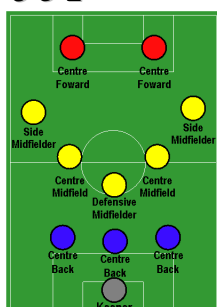
Using a 3-4-3 the midfielders expected to split their time between attacking and defending. Having only three dedicated defenders means that if the opposing team breaks through the midfield, they will have a greater chance to score than with a more conventional defensive configuration, such as 4-5-1 or 4-4-2. However, the three forwards allow for a greater concentration on offense. This formation is used by more offensive-minded teams. To use this effectively a team must have 3 defenders which can hold their own and a keeper who is not afraid to leave the box.



Teams that used this formation

- FC Barcelona (four La Liga titles in 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994, and a Champions League in 1992)
- AC Milan during the end of the 1990s, with Alberto Zaccheroni as coach (one scudetto in 1999)
- AFC Ajax (with a diamond midfield) won the Champions League in 1995 when Louis van Gaal was manager. Ajax also won the Eredivisie three times - 1994, 1995 and 1996.

3-5-2



This formation is similar to 5-3-2 except that the two wingmen are oriented more towards the attack. Because of this, the central midfielder tends to remain further back in order to help prevent counter-attacks. It differs from the classical 3-5-2 of the WW by having a non-staggered midfield. It was used for the first time at international level by the Argentinian coach Carlos Salvador Bilardo in the FIFA World Cup Mexico 1986. Many teams also use a central attacking midfielder and two defensive midfielders, so the midfielders form a W formation.

Teams that used this formation

- Argentina, 1986 World Cup winner
- Brazil, 2002 World Cup winner
- Glasgow Celtic, competed in the 2003 UEFA Cup Final
- Croatia, 1998 World Cup 3rd place under Miroslav Blazevic
- CSKA Moscow winner of the UEFA Cup 2005 (managed by Valery Gazzaev)
- Russia
- São Paulo Futebol Clube, 2005 FIFA Club World Championship winner
- D.C. United, 2004 MLS Cup winner, from 2004 - 2006
- Iran, 3 times Asian Cup Champions

3-6-1

This uncommon but modern formation obviously focuses in the ball possession in the midfield. In fact, it is very rare to see it as an initial formation, as it is better used to keep results. Its more common variants are 3-4-2-1 or 3-4-3 Diamond, which use two wingbacks. The lone forward must be tactically gifted, because he is not only focused in scoring, but to play back to the goal to assist with back passes to his teammates. Once the team is leading the game, the tactics focuses even more in ball control, short passes and time wasting. On the other hand, when the team is losing, at least one of the playmakers will play more often in the edge of the area to add depth to the attack. Guus Hiddink is one of the few coaches who has used this formation when coaching Australia, in the 2006 World Cup

Teams that used this formation

- South Korea, 2002 FIFA World Cup fourth place
- Australia, 2006 FIFA World Cup second round
- United States, 1998 FIFA World Cup, 32nd place

4-5-1



4-5-1 is a defensive formation, however if the two midfield wingers play a more attacking role it can be likened to 4-3-3. The formation can be used to grind out 0-0 draws or preserve a lead, as the packing of the centre midfield makes it difficult for the opposition to build-up play. Because of the 'closeness' of the midfield, the opposing team's forwards will often be starved of possession. However, due to the lone striker, the centre of the midfield does have the responsibility of pushing forward as well. The defensive midfielder will often control the pace of the game.

A modification of this formation was also used by José Mourinho's Chelsea F.C. side. This modified version is the 4-1-4-1 where only one striker is used and the wingers are given the responsibility of moving the ball forward and attacking. A holding midfielder is also positioned in front of the back four. This provides freedom for the rest of the team to move forward and attack as the defense will be "protected" by the holding midfielder. The England national football team under manager Fabio Capello opted for a 4-1-4-1 formation in an international friendly against Switzerland for his first game in charge.

Teams that used this formation

- Norwegian national team with great success in the early/mid-90s
- Liverpool FC, 2005 UEFA Champions League winner
- Arsenal FC, frequently during the 2005-2006 season
- Olympique Lyonnais, Ligue 1 Winners 2001/02 2002/03 2003/04 2004/05 2005/06
- Rangers often used this formation while getting to the 2008 Uefa Cup Final
- Hamilton Academical, Scottish First Division Winners 2007/2008

4-2-3-1

This formation is widely used by Spanish and French sides: it is a defensive formation which is quite flexible, as both the side midfielders and the fullbacks may join the attack, usually on the counter. In defense, this formation is similar to the 4-5-1. It is used to maintain possession of the ball and stopping opponent attacks by controlling the midfield area of the field. The lone striker may be very tall and strong to hold the ball up as his midfielders and fullbacks join him in attack. The striker could also be very fast. In these cases, the opponent's defense



will be forced to fall back early, thereby leaving space for the offensive central midfielder. This formation is used especially when a playmaker is to be highlighted.

This formation is also currently used by Brazil as an alternative to the 4-2-4 formation of late 50's to 1970. Implemented similarly to how original 4-2-4 was used back then, use of this formation in this manner is very offensive, creating a 6-man attack and a 6-man defense tactical layout. The front 4 attackers are composed as wide forwards and playmaker forward in support of a target striker in front.

Teams that used this formation

- France used this formation in the Euro 2000 final win against Italy
- Real Madrid C.F. 2001/2002 Uefa Champions League Winners
- Brøndby I.F., SAS Liga runners up 2002/03 & 2005/06 and winners 2004/05
- AS Roma, Serie A 2005-06, 2006-07
- Grêmio FBPA, Campeonato Brasileiro 2006 3rd
- France, 2006 FIFA World Cup Runners-Up:
- Portugal, 2006 FIFA World Cup 4th
- Real Madrid C.F. 2006/2007 La Liga Winners
- Liverpool F.C., began using this formation in the 2007/08 season.
- River Plate used this as a main formation under Simeone for the 2008 Clausura
- The Netherlands used this formation for the Euro 2008
- Germany used this formation in the Euro 2008 quarter-final, semi-final and final.

Teams that used this formation as a variation of attacking 4-2-4

- Brazil in recent 2010 World Cup qualification games
- Fenerbahçe S.K. 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 Turkish league champions

4-6-0

A highly unconventional formation, the 4-6-0 is an evolution of the 4-2-3-1 in which the centre forward is exchanged for a player who normally plays as a trequartista (that is, in the 'hole'). Suggested as a possible formation for the future of football[6], the formation sacrifices an out-and-out striker for the tactical advantage of a mobile front four attacking from a position that the opposition defenders cannot mark without being pulled out of position[7]. However, owing to the intelligence and pace required by the front four attackers to create and attack any space left by the opposition defenders, the formation requires a very skilful and well-drilled front four. Due to these high requirements from the attackers, and the novelty of playing without a proper goalscorer, the formation has been adopted by very few teams, and rarely consistently. The formation was first professionally adopted by Luciano Spalletti's Roma side during the 2005-06 Serie A season (mostly out of necessity) as his "strikerless formation", and then notably by Alex Ferguson's Manchester United side in the 2007-08 Premier League season (who won the Premier League and Champions League that season).

5-4-1

This is a particularly defensive formation, with an isolated forward and a packed defense. Again however, a couple of attacking fullbacks can make this formation resemble something like a 3-4-3.

INCOMPLETE FORMATIONS

When a player is sent-off (after being shown a red card), the teams generally fall back to defensive formations such as 4-4-1 or 5-3-1. Only when a draw is not an option (e.g. in a playoff or knockout match) will a team with ten players play in a risky attacking formation such as 4-3-2 or even 4-2-3. When more than one player is missing from the team the common formations are generally disbanded in favour of either maximum concentration on defense, or maximum concentration on attack.

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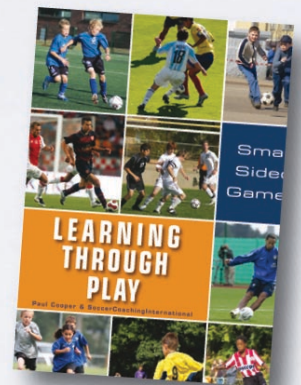
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