



COACHING SEMINAR

Coaching the Attacking 4-4-2



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'There is no system of play which will overcome inaccurate passing or shooting; none which will improve ball control; none which allows for players who will not support each other; and none which allows for players who cannot or will not run.'

Charles Hughes

'Soccer – Tactics and Skills'

Former FA Director Of Coaching

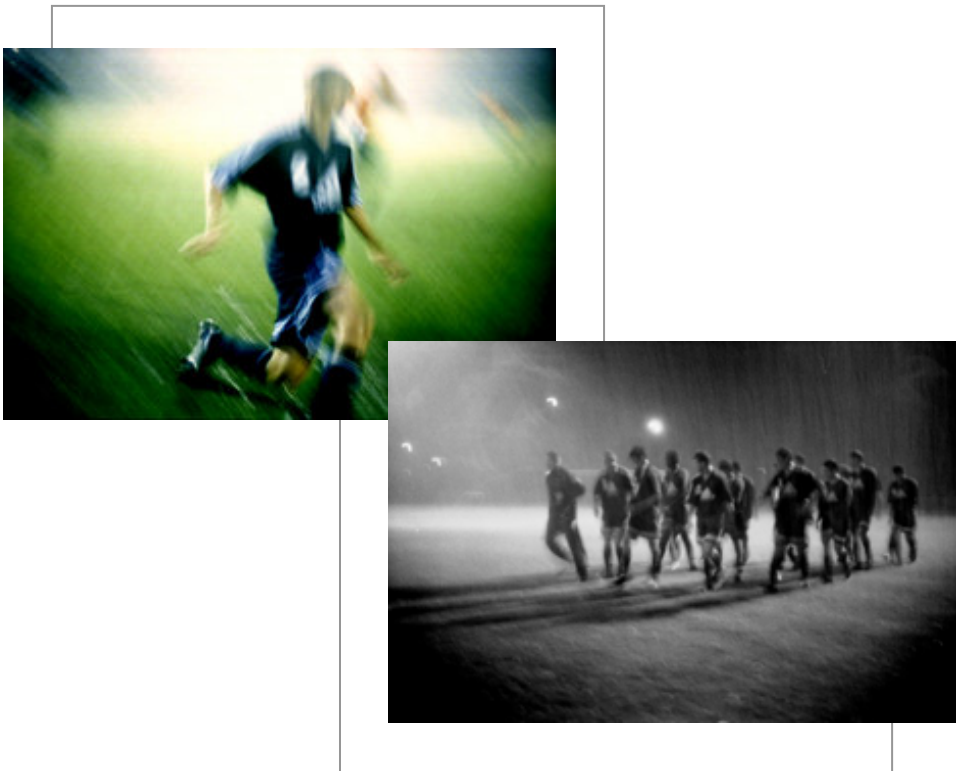


Photos by Robbie Fisher

'One of the considerations necessary to developing young players is the formation used to teach the type of attacking patterns sought, and the English have now adopted a version of the Dutch 4-3-3 across all of their youth development squads from U-14 to U-21, abandoning the inflexible and predictable 4-4-2 with balls played down channels and pressing tactics.'

Craig Foster

SBS Soccer Analyst



Photos by Robbie Fisher

Attacking Philosophy



Four in the box, Manchester United (v Fenerbahce)

To play the attacking 4-4-2 demands a certain mindset:

- Be prepared to take CALCULATED risks.
- Attack is the best form of defence.
- You want to score more goals, get more crosses in, have more bodies in the box, etc.
- Give your full-backs a major attacking role

Is it really 4-4-2?

Writing names down on a piece of paper is one thing; playing a fluid, multi-directional team game like soccer is a different matter.

Your defending shape might look like 4-4-2, but your attacking shape might be 2-6-2, or 2-4-4 or 2-4-1-3 or any other variation.

The prevailing basis of the play we will see today is:

- attack with 8 players, leaving two at the back
- defend with 8 players, leaving two up front

This leads to an 8-man defence and an 8-man attack.

The questions for coaches:

- How will I deploy the 8 defenders?
- How will I deploy the 8 attackers?

Other variations occur in the nature of the instructions given to the two players remaining at the back when attacking, and to the two players remaining up front when defending.

Today's presentation aims to highlight some of the different manifestations of the so-called 4-4-2. We may even ask ourselves whether 4-4-2 is the right term for the football we see on screen today.

It is often convenient for both coaches and players to look at the 4-4-2 system as a system of pairs.

- 2 centre-backs
- 2 full-backs
- 2 central midfielders
- 2 wide attackers
- 2 strikers

From an operational point of view, there are close relationships between certain players.

- 2 centre-backs work closely together
- 2 central midfielders work closely together
- 2 strikers work closely together
- 2 left-sided players (left-back and wide-left player) work closely together
- 2 right-sided players (right-back and wide-right player) work closely together

Of course, further relationships have to be established linking pairs, or one member of it, with the player or pair closest to them.

Teams at the higher levels have much greater freedom and flexibility of roles within the framework. This assumes an elite level of understanding between the players, who have to change roles often and cover each other; this needs to happen instantly (e.g. Shevchenko of AC Milan chasing all the way back when Cafu is caught high upfield)

Here is an overview of how the roles of the pairs mentioned (on page #) may be defined.

Full-backs

- When your team is in possession, get forward. There is no need to keep 4 players at the back. Trust your centre-backs.



Heinze (top) and Neville, Manchester United's full-backs.

- Be prepared to leave two at the back, even if 2v2.

- Full-backs do not seem to be told: 'If the other full-back goes, you must stay.' Many teams have both full-backs push up at the same time and often wide too. Some teams have the opposite full-back tuck in towards the central midfielders, or 'around the corner'. Obviously, the following factors influence things: What's the score? How long to go? Game plan for today's opponents.
- Full-backs are key members of the attacking unit. They can do the following, and more:
 1. Arrive late, unmarked.
 2. Deliver crosses.
 3. Join the attack facing forward, often in space or in a 1v1
 4. Try to exploit modern 'narrow' 'ball-centred' defences.
 5. Score goals (Roberto Carlos, Ashley Cole, Cafu, etc)

Centre-backs

- Stay back.
- You have a very limited role in the attack, other than by your distribution of the ball.
- You will get your chance to score on set plays.
- Keep the team shape compact when team is attacking by bringing the line up.
- Be prepared to deal with long passes against us.
- Be comfortable in 2v2 situations. Realise that if other players do their job, it will never be 2v2 for very long.



Photos by Robbie Fisher

Wide attackers

- Don't need to stay out wide waiting for a chance to take a man on and get a cross in, as full-backs do a lot of that for us.
- Can play more closely with the two central strikers, and get in the box a lot more (Man United)
- Can help keep it narrow in centre of field (Brazil)



- Can leave the wide space for full-backs to come into (Brazil)
- Can push up high and wide to stretch opposition (Real Madrid)

Central midfielders

- Try to stay central as much as possible.
- Remember there will probably be 6 other attacking players getting forward; may need to protect the centre-backs.
- One may sit more closely in front of the centre-backs (base of diamond; front sweeper), e.g. Pirlo



Back four plus midfield diamond, Pirlo at base (AC Milan)

- Make forward runs at the right time.

Strikers

- Try to stay up and central.
- Always be in the box when the ball gets there.
- Sometimes come deep to get the ball, or go into a wide channel.



Photos by Robbie Fisher

Goalkeepers

- Be prepared to function as a sweeper. Can often turn the 2v2 at the back into 2v3 in your team's favour.
- Be able to act as a supporting player, available for passes back, and to do so as comfortably as a field player.



Photos by Robbie Fisher

Defensive Aspects



Back four plus midfield four zoning up (AC Milan)

- The eight defending players usually mark zonally.
- The back four is usually flat.
- While team is attacking, the last defenders push the line up very high.
- The midfielders keep it compact and often very narrow.
- Sometimes one or both of the strikers defend just in front of the midfielders, and sometimes they have no real defensive role at all once the ball is in their own team's half.

Notes



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