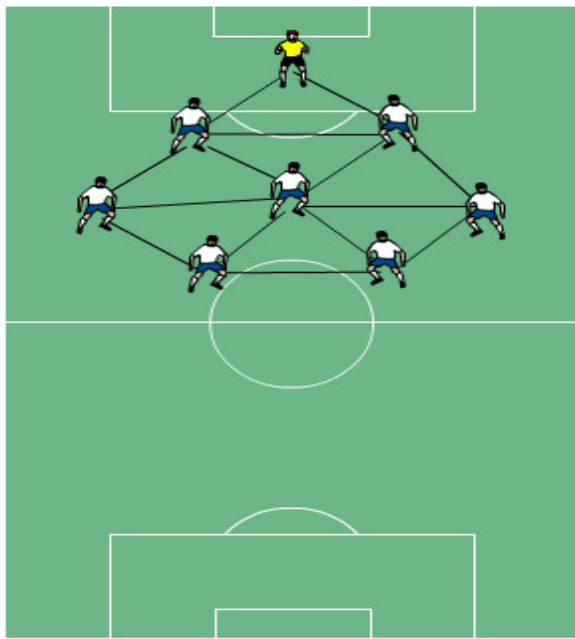


8 vs. 8 Team Shape considerations:

No matter what formation you choose to play, Team Shape is a vital component to how successful your team will play on the weekend. In this article we will look at various options for the 8 vs. 8 system of play. The transition from 6 vs. 6 to 8 vs. 8 will introduce a “third line” to the game. Now instead of observing a game that has attackers and defenders, we’ll now see the beginning of midfield play which will connect the attacking and defending lines. The 8 vs. 8 game will mirror the 11 vs.11 in both team shape and rules of the game. Players will begin to understand the concept of “team shape” and have the technical ability to apply certain tactical concepts (overlaps, up back and through, etc.) a coach may want to implement.

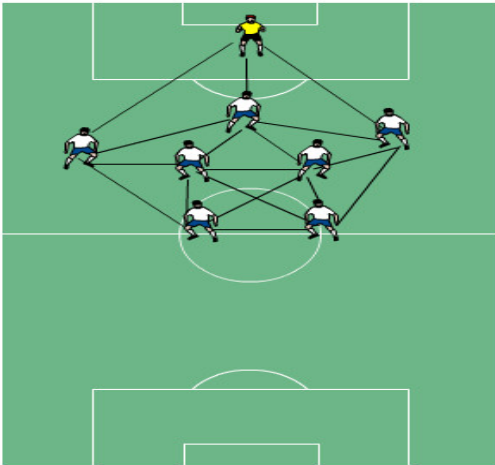
Remember there is no correct system of play! All systems have their strengths and weaknesses, but a good coach will choose a system that will maximize his/her teams’ strength and minimize its’ weaknesses.

K-2-3-2



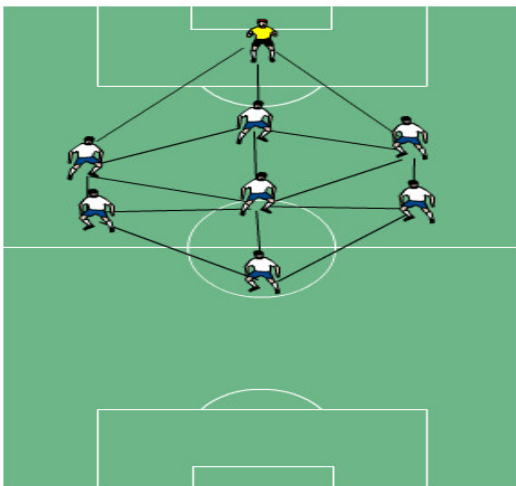
If you choose to play in the K-2-3-2 system you’ll be asking the wide midfielder players to provide the width for the team. This is a very good system in terms of having defensive “compactness” through the middle of the field. Keeping two players up top will also provide your players good options to play forward when they regain possession of the ball. However, one area of concern is when an opponent plays the ball in behind your wide midfielder. If the “ball side” central defender gets drawn out of the middle, how do we react? Do we ask the central midfielder to “drop in” to cover the vacated space or do we ask the “far side” defender to slide over to provide cover and have the wide midfielder “track back” into the initial position of the “far side” defender.

K-3-2-2



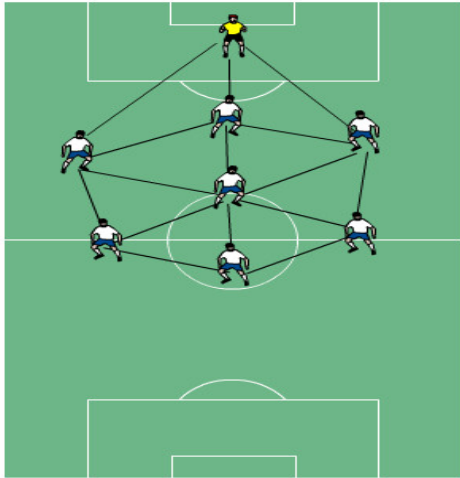
The K-3-2-2 system is an excellent choice if you have athletic flank players that can cover a lot of ground. The outside backs would be responsible for covering the entire width of the field. By adding an extra player into the central midfield the core of the team should be strong at winning both “1st and 2nd Balls”. One drawback to this formation in terms of player development is the lack of flank play. Young players tend to pound the ball down the middle of the field and fail to recognize the need to establish the width of the field. This system won’t take players out of their comfort zone and teach them to attack the spaces out wide which will become more and more important as they transition to the 11v11 game.

K-3-3-1



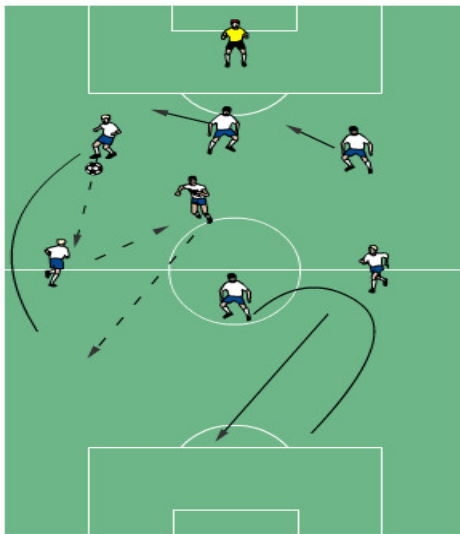
Choosing the K-3-3-1 formation may be appropriate at certain times in a game, but it should not be selected as your preferred system. If you are playing against a stronger opponent or your team is fatigued it may make sense to have more players get “behind the ball”, but the general attacking pattern of this formation is the “Counter-attack”. By nature, choosing to play counter-attacking soccer is a result oriented decision and not based on player development. It is important that we teach our young players the value and enjoyment of attacking soccer and although the K-3-3-1 system can be effective for a result, it is negative system in general and one not suited for player development.

K-3-1-3

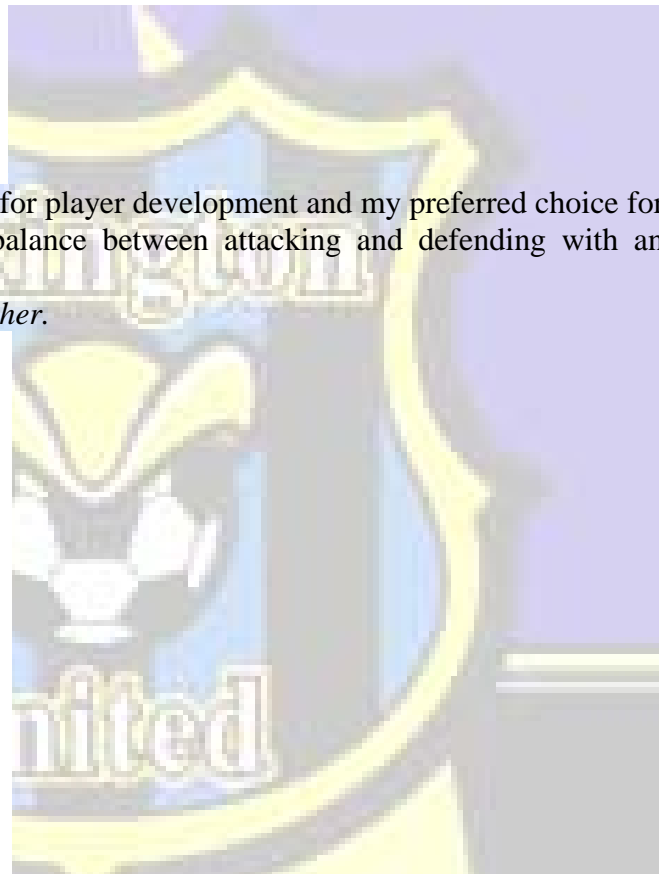


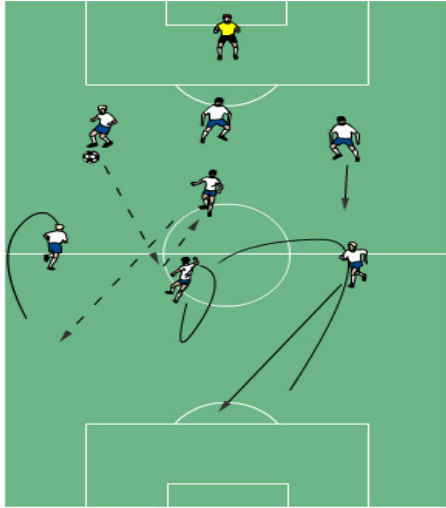
The K-3-1-3 system is a great system for player development and my preferred choice for the 8v8 game. There is a strong balance between attacking and defending with an emphasis on transition and flank play.

Lets' examine this formation a bit further.

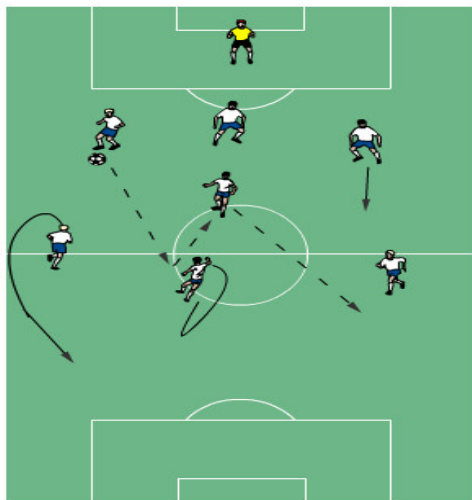


The Near Side Overlap: (above) When the outside back has the ball his first option should be to play forward (this is an important habit for players to learn). In this system, K-3-1-3, he'll have 2 to 3 forward options at all times. In the picture above, the outside back plays into the wing player and continues his run forward. The wing forward should “play the way he’s facing” into the central midfielder (the connecting player). The central midfielder can now play the outside back into the space the wing player had vacated or created for the back to run into. Notice how the central forward should drift away from the ball while the opposite wing makes a diagonal run into the box. This will make it much more difficult for opposing teams to “pick up the runners”. **Note:** the initial wing player would now assume the position of the defender and vice versa. This will allow your players to play in different areas of the field without having to always rotate just through substitutions.





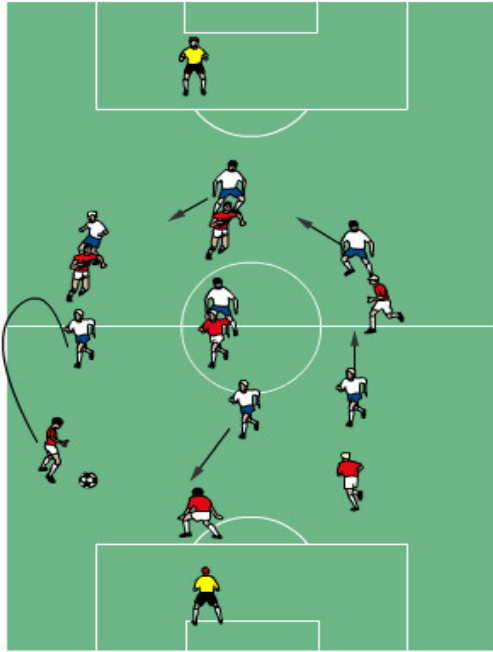
Up Back and through: (above) Now the outside back begins the attack with an entry into the center forward. A couple of reasons (or visual cues) for choosing to do this would be that the wing player has a defender “tight” to him when he “checks to the ball”. If we can enter the ball centrally into our forward the opposition generally becomes more “compact” which will open up the space along the wing. In this instance the wing player who checked to the ball should curl his run and attack the space that the defender vacated. The central forward has a couple of options. He could play the ball wide himself (not pictured) or he could drop the ball to the supporting midfielder (play the way your facing) who can “see the field”. The central midfielder now plays the ball into the space for the wing player to run onto. **Note:** The diagonal run from the opposite wing and how the central forward should “spin away” and make a far post run.



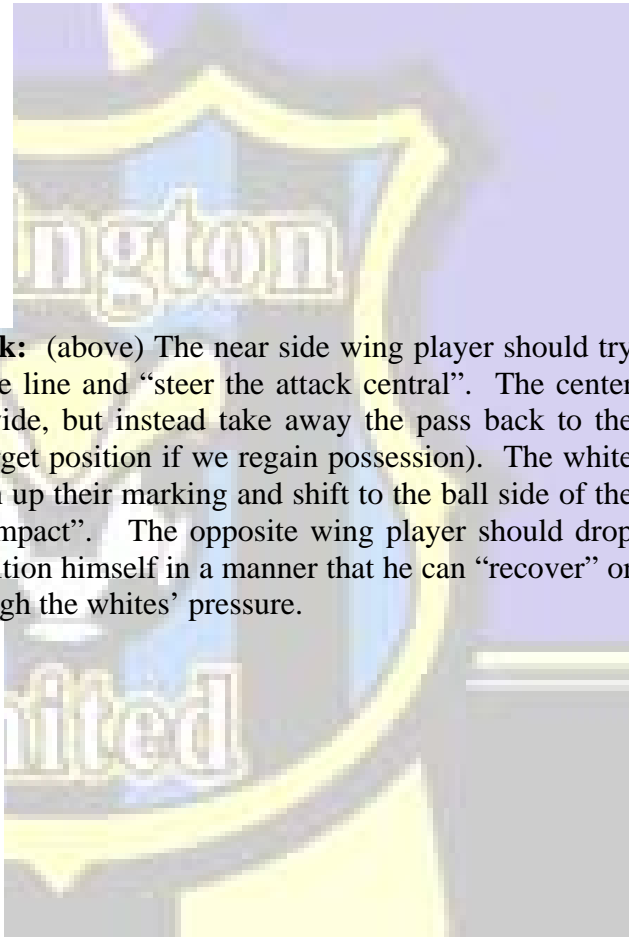
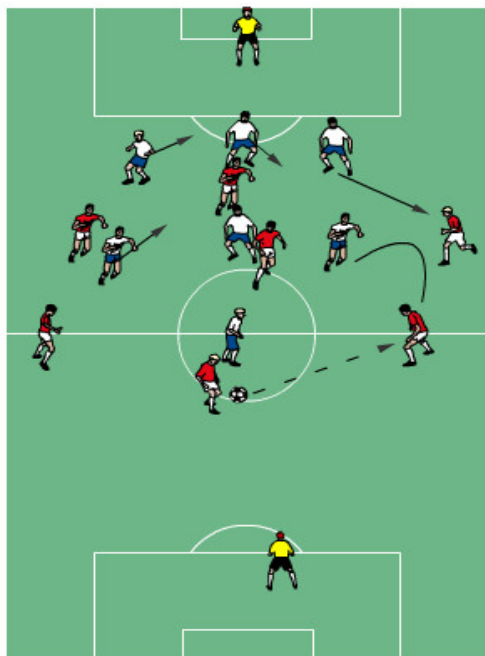
Up Back and through “Switch Fields”: (above)

The movement would be the same as above, but now when the ball is dropped into the central midfielder. He “switches the field” or “changes the point of attack” by playing a diagonal ball forward into the path of the opposite wing. **Note:** As players become more experienced they’ll be able to “read the game” better. In this case, if the opposition “drops off” or picks up the diagonal runner, the central midfielder can now switch the field by playing laterally into the path of the outside back who is stepping into the space.

Defensive Shape and Movement



Ball with the Oppositions outside back: (above) The near side wing player should try to take away the forward pass down the line and “steer the attack central”. The center forward shouldn’t chase the ball out wide, but instead take away the pass back to the central defender (he’ll be in a great “target position if we regain possession”). The white players closest to the ball should tighten up their marking and shift to the ball side of the field. This will ensure we remain “compact”. The opposite wing player should drop back to keep the team balanced and position himself in a manner that he can “recover” or track back if the opposition breaks through the whites’ pressure.



Ball Centrally, Defending in own half of the field: (above)

Notice how the K-3-1-3 system can almost become the K-3-3-1 system as we get closer to our goal. The key is to remain compact as a group and discourage the opposition to play down the middle of the field. Once the ball is played wide, we should resume the movement that we applied when the ball was on the wing. The further up the field the opposition has the ball, the more space will open up behind them for white to attack. All of the attacking movements we've previously viewed will be applicable to take advantage of that space when we regain possession.

Final Thoughts: *Remember there is no correct system of play! No system can make up for a lack of technical ability. If we don't continue to reinforce proper technique throughout our training, players will be limited no matter what system a coach chooses.*

Before deciding on "What system to play" consider that offensively, it is easier for young players to find space on the flanks. It is important that coaches encourage this in training by choosing exercises that promote lateral play such as the Four Goal game. However the game is about scoring goals and it is important that we teach players to play forward when "it's on". One of the reasons I prefer to have a few numbers "a head of the ball" is that we will have more opportunities to play direct and attacking soccer without conceding possession. The exercises a coach chooses should allow the players to "discover" the answers for themselves without constant instruction from the coach.

Please recognize that defensive success is first and foremost based on quality 1 vs. 1 defending. Getting pressure on the player with the ball is vital if the rest of the team is to carry out their defensive responsibilities. Only when this pressure takes place can the remainder of the players get "compact" and take away space from the attacking team.

Comments and feedback are always welcome at bdonahue@lexingtonsoccer.org

