



HYS – SYSTEMS OF PLAY

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CONTENTS



- Style vs System of Play Overview
 - U6/8 Systems of Play (4v4 & 5v5)
 - U10 Systems of Play (7v7)
 - U12 Systems of Play (9v9)
 - U14 + Systems of Play (11v11)
- Stages of Game and Style of Play
- Player Roles and Responsibilities

HYS – STYLE & SYSTEM OF PLAY



- **System of play**, sometimes referred to as a **'formation'**, is a tool we can use to identify areas of the field players should occupy and their roles and responsibilities in each of these positions according to your principles of play.
- **Style of play** refers to your **approach** to the game as it pertains to your soccer **philosophy**, and primarily what the actions of the players within the game will be when on and off the ball.
- There are **many systems and styles of play**, each with their own benefits and drawbacks. You may choose a specific method based on many factors like the age group, the skill level, the specific players on a team, the opponent or even the field type of weather.
- This **document is a guide** to various systems and styles and is not meant to be prescriptive.



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND



U6 & U8

4V4 & 5V5 SYSTEMS OF PLAY



U6/U8 – 4V4 & 5V5 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-2-1 or 1-2-1 with a GK

For these small sided games, a diamond formation (1-2-1) is generally recommended. This formation provides balance between defense and attack, while also maintaining an outright striker and a player to stay at the back so good for all round learning to take players to the next stage.

U8 system is the same but with the inclusion of a goalkeeper.

Pros

- Clear roles and responsibilities.
- Offers balance in depth and width.
- Helps naturally coach principles of offense and defense.
- Can adapt quickly to 3 in defense or 3 in offense.

Cons

- Offers up the center of the field to the opposition.
- Wide players need to be very mobile.
- Players at this level tend to prefer attack – requires discipline of midfield players to work on offense and defense.



4V4 OR 5V5 1-2-1



U10

7V7 SYSTEMS OF PLAY



U10 – 7v7 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-2-3-1

2-3-1 is the most classic 7v7 formation. It offers fantastic balance in any team and is incredibly easy for young players to grasp. Two defenders being helped by three hard-working midfielders offers plenty of support at the back without overloading defensive areas. A lone striker is often supported by a central midfielder.

This system can adapt quickly to a 4-1-1 when the wide midfield players drop back to support the defense, or a 2-1-3 when they go forward.

Pros

- Attack-minded and possession oriented.
- Achieves fantastic balance in both wide and central areas; defense and attack.
- Every player has a clearly defined role.
- Creates lots of opportunities for goals.

Cons

- If defenders play too far apart, a massive gap is left in the center of defense.
- Midfielders are required to be non-stop runners and help in both attack and defense.
- Forwards can become isolated if opposition midfield shuts down central areas.



7v7 2-3-1

U10 – 7v7 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-3-2-1

The 3-2-1 is an increasingly popular choice for teams that wish to adopt a less attacking based style of play. It allows teams to play a solid defensive back-line of three players without negating too much control in midfield areas.

This system can adapt quickly to a 1-4-1 when the wide defenders push forward to support the midfield or a 2-3-1 when the center defender pushes forward.

Pros

- With three strong defenders, teams can be indestructible in defense.
- More midfield support than the 3-1-2 and better suited to a possession-based style.
- Easy for strong, less skillful teams to bully more skillful teams that will often be playing with more fluid attacking formations.

Cons

- Midfielders may become confused as to how and when to come central as opposed to staying wide.
- Width can also be lacking if midfielders stay too central.
- Although it looks very balanced, it's easy for the formation to upset the rhythm of a team as roles are less well-defined.
- Central defender required to step up into midfield when the time is right.



7v7 3-2-1



U12

9V9 SYSTEMS OF PLAY



U12 – 9V9 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-3-3-2

This is a very common 9v9 formation and it's primarily down to the good practice it provides for playing the world's most standardized 11v11 formation: 4-4-2.

3-3-2 is a simple, effective approach to winning games in 9v9 for coaches who don't want to over-complicate things.

Pros

- Simplistic and naturally effective for a possession styled game.
- In theory, it does not overload any given area on the field.
- Allows an attacking duo to develop together and learn how to play effectively with 2 up top.
- Players don't need to be particularly fast or talented on the ball as necessary coverage should always be near to win the ball back.

Cons

- Lack of clearly defined roles for midfielders. Are they supposed to be more attack-minded or defensive-minded?
- Easily outnumbered in central areas by most other formations.
- Restricts players to very specific roles - if they abandon their roles even momentarily, the entire balance of the team is lost and not easily recoverable.



9v9 3-3-2

U12 – 9V9 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-3-2-3

The 3-2-3 is one of the most popular 9v9 formations. 3-2-3 is excellent for creating triangles in possession of the ball and provides any team with great balance and symmetry.

This formation adapts easily to a 4-3-3 in an 11v11 game

Pros

- Attack-minded and possession oriented.
- Provides natural width but still a good base in midfield, creating excellent balance in the team.
- Easily adaptable into a 3-4-1 in defense if wingers track back.
- Provides a solid defensive 3 as a base with central midfielders easily able to learn the art of dropping in and covering for defenders when they go on runs.

Cons

- Wingers can get drawn too wide, leaving the center forward all alone.
- Requires wingers to track back and defend or central midfielders to cover in wide areas, otherwise there's a massive gap in between them and the fullbacks.
- Defenders can often be reluctant to join the attack.



9v9 3-2-3

U12 – 9V9 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-2-4-2

The 2-4-2 is fantastic for keeping possession of the ball, while also prepares players for a variety of different 11-a-side formations including 4-4-2, 3-4-3 and 3-5-2.

It's also easily adjustable into a 2-3-1-2 and fantastic for teaching young central defenders, central midfielders and strikers alike how to work effectively in pairs.

Pros

- Overloads the midfield, allowing teams to control possession and manipulate the ball effectively.
- Central midfielders can move interchangeably and have a level of freedom.
- Develops players ability to effectively work in pairs.
- Although better suited for a possession-styled game, it still works for a counter attacking game if wingers are fast and can get up and down the line.

Cons

- Defenders must be fast as any slip-ups from right/left midfielder will leave the team easily exposed.
- The two defenders need to be vocal and strong leaders, otherwise marking may be a massive issue. Most teams will play with a front three, requiring defenders and midfielders constantly to be in communication over who has the opposition's wide players.
- If a defender gets drawn too far wide due to lack of necessary cover, a massive gap in the middle might be exploited by the other team.



9v9 2-4-2

U12 – 9V9 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-4-3-1

The 4-3-1 is one of the best formations to get team used to playing 11v11 football because of the standard back 4. 9v9 might be the best time to introduce the arc of the back-four and get teams thinking about the notion that defense is the best form of attack.

Although it is somewhat defensive on paper and requires your team to have the necessary defensive personnel, a fantastic balance can still be achieved.

Pros

- Effective for wing play, right/left defenders can push high and take the ball up the field without apprehension about who might cover them.
- Teaches players how to play in a 4-defense system very early in their development.
- Effective for keeping clean sheets.

Cons

- Midfielders need to quickly learn that they have an integral role in supporting the striker in attack. If there's no support, the striker will become extremely isolated.
- Can become overly defensive if outside defenders or central midfielder show no attacking prowess or become static.
- With an extra player in defense, you always have at least one less player joining attacks.



9v9 4-3-1

U12 – 9V9 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-3-1-3-1

The 3-1-3-1 incorporates one goalkeeper, three defenders, one defensive midfielder, a trio of attacking midfielders, and a striker. The obvious spaces in the formation are therefore in the half-spaces between the defensive and central attacking midfielder, requiring both to put a shift in to cover those spaces out of possession.

More positively, the formation is well set up to cover both wide and central channels if players hold positional discipline and incorporates a natural pressing diamond up front. It therefore becomes easier to teach young players all about their specific role in a team within the 3-1-3-1, through clearly defined roles and positions.

Pros

- Excellent control through the central locations both in defense and midfield.
- Offers a flexible attack through midfield rotation.
- Naturally leads to a high press with attacking players.
- Good for player development with clear roles and responsibilities and transition to the 4-3-3 at 11v11.

Cons

- Exposed wide areas/flanks with only three defenders can be vulnerable to quick wingers.
- Requires a very disciplined defensive midfielder player who needs to cover a lot of ground.
- Congested central areas are possible if players don't have positional discipline.
- Requires a higher tactical awareness both offensively and defensively.



9v9 3-1-3-1



U14

11V11 SYSTEMS OF PLAY



U14 + – 11V11 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-4-4-2

The 4-4-2, four defensive players, four mid-field players, and two forward players are among the most widely used formations when playing 11v11. The strength of the numbers in the defense and midfield numbers along with its simple structure. With only two strikers, the offensive side of this formation adds weakness to this formation if the midfield players cannot get forward.

The 4-4-2 diamond can easily adapt to a flat 4-4-2 when the attacking and defensive midfield players play more naturally side by side, this pushes the left and right midfield players much wider.

Pros

- Offers balance in both offense and defense.
- Flexibility in midfield allows left and right backs to join the attack when the midfield four are compact
- System offers lots of flexibility to attacking players.

Cons

- Wide midfield players can drift wide and leave the center of the field vulnerable.
- Forwards can easily be drawn out wide and become disconnected.
- Back four can become static in offense if they don't push forward.



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND

U14 + – 11V11 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-4-3-3

The 4-3-3, four defensive players, three midfield players, and three forwards, is another variation that emphasizes attacking soccer. The key to the 4-3-3 formation is the attacking players' width and their ability to exploit space outside the defense. While on the attack, the 4-3-3 allows attacking with at least seven players. On the flip side, when attacking, the defensive side of the field is left vulnerable..

Pros

- Provides natural triangles for keeping possession.
- Allows players to understand the use of space and playing wide and naturally provides moments for creativity and adaptability.
- Teaches fullbacks to get forward while most utilize the formation for its attacking potential.

Cons

- Leaves a lot of open space between the fullbacks and the left and right forwards.
- Front three often do not do a lot of defending which places more pressure on the midfield three.
- Only with very defensive-minded fullbacks and a top-quality defensive midfielder who can cover a lot of ground could a team be very successful in a 4-3-3 without being possession-based.



11v11 4-3-3

U14 + – 11V11 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-4-2-3-1

4-2-3-1 is one of the most popular formations today, particularly within the last decade. 4-2-3-1 provides a strong midfield base, allowing teams to flourish in both attack and defense. In attack, the front four can cause havoc, and in defense, the wingers often come back and do a job in defense.

Pros

- Very effective for fast counter-attacking styles of play, allows for lightning-quick transitions in attack
- This formation is very flexible and can be adapted into a more attacking 4-3-3 or more defensive 4-5-1 with ease.
- Provides players learning the game with clearly defined roles like few other formations can achieve.

Cons

- Central midfielder must be very disciplined in the role.
- Relies heavily on the wide players to play both offense and defense, tracking back is a critical part of the system.
- Relies heavily on wide defensive players to join the attack.



11v11 4-2-3-1

U14 + – 11V11 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-3-4-3

The benefit to the 3-4-3 is that it creates attacking overloads in wide areas and provides free-flowing attacking play, while simultaneously transforming seamlessly into a 5-4-1 in defense.

The 3-4-3 system can be played as a flat midfield four, or a diamond four depending on your players.

Pros

- Covers the center of the field with four players able to intercept and get the ball back out wide as well
- Marking players is very difficult for the opposition and exploiting wide areas is almost impossible when out of possession.
- The formation is very well suited for attacking play and if the wing-backs are up for the job, defending can be made easy too.

Cons

- This system is physically demanding.
- The formation requires that wing-backs in particular are very defensively disciplined, but not so defensive that they neglect their attacking responsibilities.
- If the wing-backs aren't fit enough to get forward and back, the formation becomes less effective.



11v11 3-4-3

U14 + – 11V11 SYSTEM OF PLAY



1-3-5-2

Five in midfield can do a lot in helping dominate over the opposition, but with two strikers and a back-three it also doesn't become overly defensive as say a traditional 4-5-1 for example.

The two strikers help improve your attack game and spread the field out while having the five midfielders allow you to have the advantage throughout the middle of the field.

This formation transitions seamlessly to a 5-3-2

Pros

- Dominates the midfield and ensures possession of the ball for long periods.
- Back three naturally forces opposition to wide areas.
- Naturally wide players create lots of crossing opportunities.

Cons

- As with other back-three systems, when the wing-backs push high up the field, space out wide can easily be exploited.
- If the opposition don't play with wide players three at the back can be overkill.

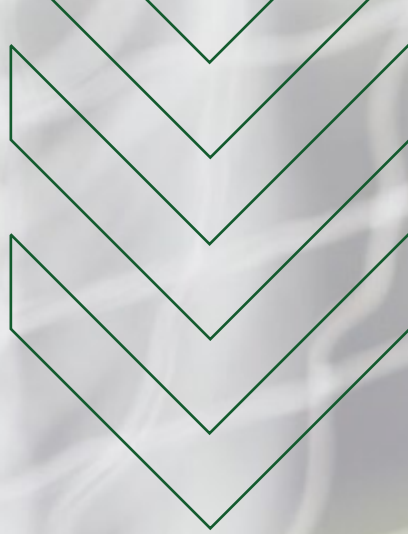


11v11 3-5-2



HYS – SYSTEMS OF PLAY

STAGES OF GAME AND STYLE OF PLAY



HYS – STYLE OF PLAY



Four moments of the game



HYS – STYLE OF PLAY



Attacking Principles

- Spread out, get wide and remain as wide as possible.
- Penetrate with highest available pass when available.
- When you cannot penetrate, circulate the ball to unbalance opponent. (Relax, Retain, Recycle)
- Vary runs, triangulate to create passing lanes that break opposition lines of defense, playing in the half space and create numerical superiority with player rotations throughout the thirds.
- Isolate defenders 1v1/2v1 in the attacking third.
- Support the attack and push up.
- Communicate.

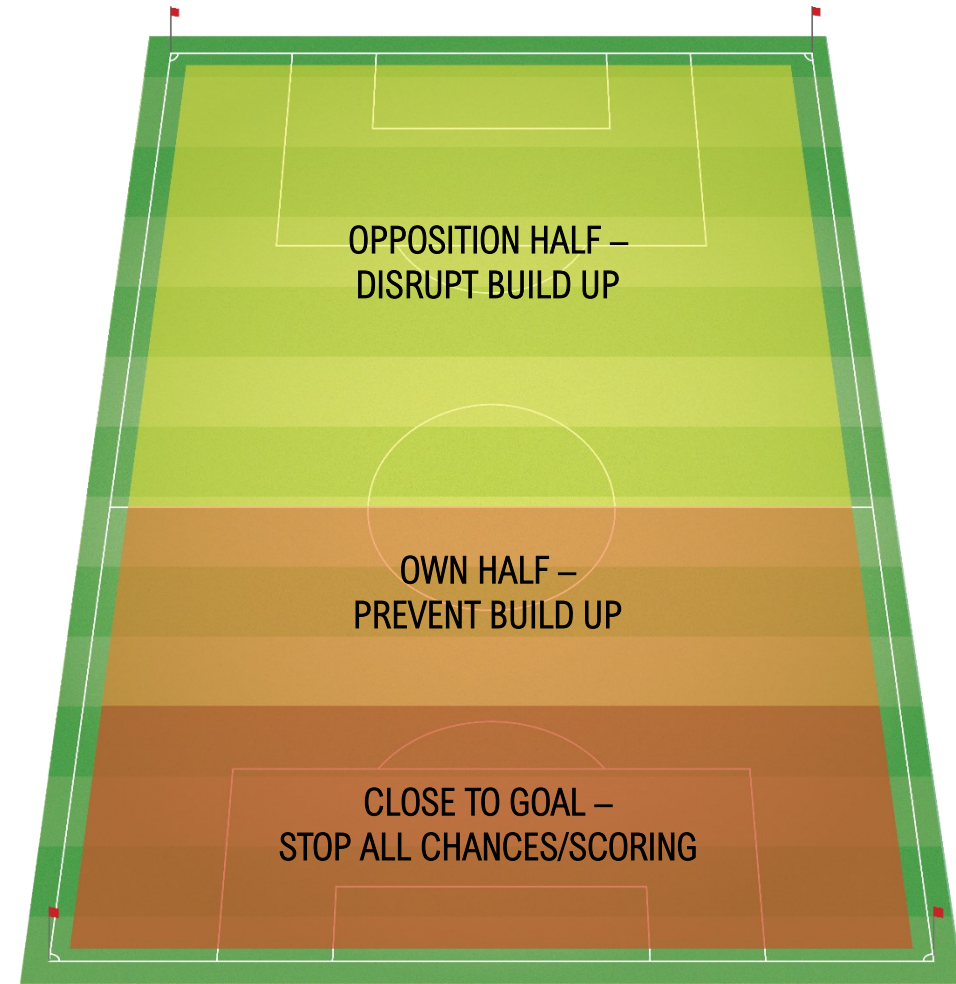


HYS – STYLE OF PLAY



Defending Principles

- Get Compact, Stay Compact
- Line of confrontation (halfway line).
- Deny Penetration into own penalty area.
- Pressing as a group of players, recognizing visual cues to step to win the ball (bad touch, weight of pass)
- Delay forward movement and force outside/protect central channel.
- Double up when pressing individual when possible, in wide areas.
- Shift, Slide and Squeeze as a unit.
- Communicate.



HYS – STYLE OF PLAY



Attack to Defense Principles

- Pressure the ball immediately after losing it (1st defender) to delay.
- Forward movement, look to funnel to the outside.
- Make field compact as quickly as possible – players drop in, get compact and stay compact).
- Get organized and balanced as quickly as possible.
- Communicate.

Defense to Attack Principles

- Spread out – Get wide, stay wide.
- Create passing lanes, movement and rotations to break lines of defense.
- Pass or dribble forward to penetrate.
- Relax, Retain and Recycle the ball if and when we cannot find highest available pass.
- Prepare/Anticipate (Squeeze up to reduce space between attacking lines, limit space for opposition players to exploit)
- Communication.

HYS – PLAYER ROLES



Key Positional Roles & Responsibilities

#1 – Goalkeeper

In Possession

- Distribute effectively - try to play short to defenders or kick early with pace.
- Be an option when defenders are in possession.
- Communicate with outfield players. Early decisions and clear, purposeful instructions.

Out of Possession

- Starting position relative to the position of the ball and in line with the ball.
- Sweeper/keeper when the defense pushes up.
- Shot stopping - ready position, decision whether to catch/parry or punch. React to 2nd chances.



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND

HYS – PLAYER ROLES



Key Positional Roles & Responsibilities

#4 & #5 – Central Backs/Defenders

In Possession

- Be prepared to receive the ball from the goalkeeper.
- Try to play angled passes behind the opposition. Play sharp, quick passes to full backs & midfield.
- Attack aerial balls with power, purpose & timing.

Out of Possession

- Recognize when to follow opponents short and when to hold your position.
- Be comfortable playing 1v1 and 2v2, practice marking goal-side and ball side.
- When full backs show wide, move deep and centrally to defend crosses.



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND

HYS – PLAYER ROLES



Key Positional Roles & Responsibilities

#2 & #3 – Full Backs

In Possession

- Try to get on the ball from the Goalkeeper.
- Recognize when to get forward to support the attacking play and when to stay back.
- Look for forward passes which break lines.
- Recognize when to come inside with or to receive the ball.

Out of Possession

- Try to be close enough to the opposition wide player to pressure their first touch.
- Try to show opponents inside until level with the penalty box, then show down the line.
- Look to take quick throw-ins on your side of the pitch.



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND

HYS – PLAYER ROLES



Key Positional Roles & Responsibilities

#6 – Holding /Defensive Midfielder

In Possession

- Try to release wide midfield players with passes which break lines.
- Try to get on the ball from the GK and defenders. Play forwards quickly when possible.
- Encourage attacking midfielders to support when playing into forwards.

Out of Possession

- Drop in as a supplementary CB if they are pulled wide.
- Provide a defensive screen, block balls into striker's feet or steal from the front.
- Be close enough to defenders to pick up second balls.



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND

HYS – PLAYER ROLES



Key Positional Roles & Responsibilities

#7 & #11 – Wide Midfielders/Attackers

In Possession

- Play high against the opposition full backs and threaten the space behind.
- Provide accurate crosses when high up the pitch.
- Work across the forward line to support the CF & disrupt the defensive line.
- Recognize when to dribble or play quick combinations.

Out of Possession

- Provide defensive cover in wide areas, pin the FB back.
- Stop opposition crosses.
- Track wide players.



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND

HYS – PLAYER ROLES



Key Positional Roles & Responsibilities

#8 & #10 – Central Midfielders

In Possession

- Try to play quick combinations in midfield.
- Link play from back to front and support forwards quickly. Recognize when to support beyond the strikers/forwards.
- Try to slide passes between the defenders to create chances.
- Score goals.

Out of Possession

- Play a high-pressure game in midfield, try to intercept passes.
- Break up the opposition play.
- Try to force the opposition to play wide or backwards.



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND

HYS – PLAYER ROLES



Key Positional Roles & Responsibilities

#9 – Center Forward/Striker

In Possession

- Recognize when to shoot with power & precision.
- Show for passes into feet and receive on the half turn.
- When play is developing in wide areas, find space between defenders to attack crosses.
- Score Goals.

Out of Possession

- Try to make play predictable.
- Force the CB to play risky passes.
- Try to prevent the ball going into midfield & win the ball from the "wrong side".



11V11 4-4-2 DIAMOND

CITED SOURCES



- <https://themastermindsite.com/>
- <https://www.wyomingsoccer.com/>
- <https://www.soccercoachweekly.net/>
- <https://www.soccerxpert.com/formations>



THANK YOU

