

GlenEd Soccer - Coaching Concepts

Topic 3: Formation and Positioning

FORMATION - for clarification (4-4-2 = 4 defenders, 4 midfielders, 2 forwards... goalies are not specified in the formation as written, but assumed). As a coach the following questions will help to determine what formation to use.

1. How do I create team shape and balance with the skill level of my team?
2. How can I maximize our strengths?
3. How can I minimize our weaknesses and build player confidence?
4. How can I ensure players get 60 - 75% playing time (minimally 50%) with this formation?

Formation is defined as vertical and horizontal coverage across the 3rds of the field (defending, middle, and attacking). The concept of formation is to organize players on the field prior to the start of play or restarts during the game. What works for one group of players on a team may not work when substituting players. As the skill level changes on the field we need to remember to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of players in the game. The game dictates fluid movement. By that I mean don't change the formation; merely explain the needs/demands of the players before that player enters the game. For example, in an 8v8 game - a 2-3-2 formation could look like a 3-2-2 when defending and a 2-2-3 when attacking. Don't over-coach formation, explain the expectations of the player entering the game and let *the game be the teacher*. If we are overly active during the game the players are listening to direction and not playing the game... learning the game (off topic - sorry... right, right, right - formation).

If defense is your "focus" then your expectation/need is to get numbers behind the ball (more players of our team in-between the opponent with the ball and the goal we are defending). In an 11v11 game for example, instruct the players that when we lose possession of the ball the shape you hope to see will look more like a 5-4-1 or a 4-5-1 ... but the players know the formation you are playing is a 4-4-2 or a 4-3-3. Explaining attacking and defending expectations to a couple of players will allow your team to maintain good shape, and help be more successful and give you the numbers you need in attack and on defense. Keep in mind... there really are only 2 players that are positioned on the field to fit the style of play you need for that particular game. Is it another defender and a midfielder, or 2 midfielders?

Basic Formation Guidelines

6v6 the basic formation is 1-1-1 (add 2 players, remember GK is assumed)

8v8 the basic formation is a 2-2-1 (add 2 players)

11v11 the basic formation is 3-3-2 (add 2 players)

Now your decision as coach for the remaining 2 positions depends on skill level of the players and the opponent you are facing that day. Instilling in the core players the fundamental tactical needs when your team has the ball and when you lose possession will help your team stay well connected. Moving 2

athletic players, 2 players that have master basic skills will challenge them to learn and help with shape. Obviously you could choose to play with 1 forward or to stretch your formation into something other than what I've outlined above but the basic premise is still the same... let players know your expectations, give them guidelines based on game conditions, and don't over coach. By observing the style of play you can make adjustments during outages to change the flow of the game, regain momentum, etc.

POSITIONING

Skill level of players will dictate how they contribute on the field and the position they play. A concept to consider is creating playing partners. There are obvious benefits of pairing players to supplement skill sets (similar to the "yin yang" of Chinese culture - it's about balance). *Example: fast players paired with more deliberate... aggressive paired with passive players... shooters paired with passers... and bigger with smaller.* Partnering players minimize weakness by coupling strengths of both on the field. More deliberate players can become targets that help keep possession, while passive players can become holding midfielders or 2nd defenders that provide cover and balance on defense.

When choosing positions for players remember to let them experience as many positions as possible at an early age. Consider primary and secondary positions based on skills of the player and possible pairings... for example -

If you have a slower player that has good foot skills, consider how that player could be successful as a striker (goal scoring forward) or central midfielder. As a less mobile forward (target player), receiving and shooting might be a huge advantage for your team. While lacking speed and quickness, their ability to combine technically using wall passes might draw the attention of defenders and allow others to get open for passes, and/or with good foot skills the player might have many opportunities to shoot more often increasing chances of scoring. As a central midfielder, this player will have success as a quarterback (receiving and distributing the ball - letting the ball do the work with less need for speed and agility). In this example this player would need to be paired with a faster player that is good at defending and unbalancing the opposing team with movement and energy.

Our goal as a coach is to teach the game and to develop player's skills. We have to challenge our players to see the game through the eyes of a defender, a midfielder, and a forward. The more we provide that comprehensive level of understanding and vision, the better prepared the players will be when entering high school or college. Coaches at all levels assess talent and look for athleticism and versatility. Players that continue playing for their high school team or college team may be required to play a position to "make the team" or "become a starter". Preparing players to be complete soccer players - educating them about the game and styles of play will allow them the best opportunity to be successful. While we set our goals on a season or annual basis when opportunities present themselves to move players around - we take advantage of it for the long term benefit that the players will realize.