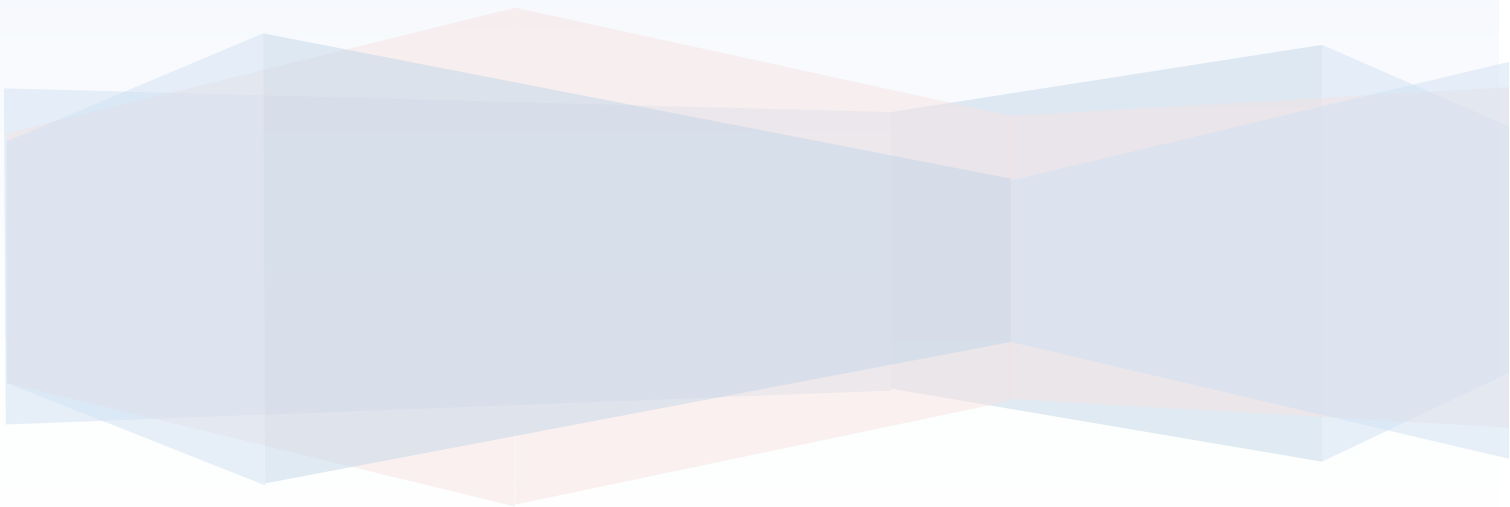


Tactical Theorems and Frameworks '09

A Comprehensive Tactical Design and Match Strategy Guide for Virtual Football Managers

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Foreword by Paul Collyer

One of the great pleasures of developing Football Manager, and CM before it, over the years has been the role of the community in helping us develop and shape the game. This guide is one of the best examples of how a community can enhance a game and add to the experience of those playing it.

The tactical interface and system in Football Manager 2009 has prompted much discussion and debate over the years, and I have been following the theorems contained herein since they first appeared back in 2005. Now while I know the match engine code pretty well, and understand in coding terms how things translate from tactics to match, I have to admit that some of the things I have read here have opened my eyes to the way the match works in the eyes of the user, as well as inspiring me to make things work even better.

So I have pleasure in personally recommending this guide for both new and experienced FM players, and hope you get as much from it in terms of game play, not to mention on field success, as those who spent time creating it.

Over to Richard and Gareth.....

Introduction

History

Tactical Theorems and Frameworks '09 (TT&F '09) is the sixth in a series of tactical guides aimed at helping the virtual manager get the best out of the Football Manager tactical module. Its first iteration originated from a series of experiments during the early days of FM06 that were undertaken in the belief that there were serious flaws in the Match Engine. These experiments disproved the hypothesis, showing the original writer that he didn't know as much about football as he had previously thought and the first TT&F, posted in November 2005, which both praised and explained the FM06 engine. The thread was stickied in the GQ section of the SI Games forums and quickly became a significant player in the development of virtual tactical theory.

With later versions of Football Manager, TT&F became more sophisticated, expanding its ambitions and tactical strategies and recruiting a large and knowledgeable following that significantly contributed to its development. Unfortunately, it began to drift towards jargon, heavyweight managerial references and excessive numerical detail, thus becoming largely inaccessible for the casual user. By FM08, while still being congratulated by contributors, it had lost direction and was being overwhelmed by threads promising super-tactical solutions to the Match Engine. These 'super-tactics' were not just in fundamental opposition to TT&F, but often generated frustration and anger for users, as they tended to produce unrealistic matches in which possession and chances were dominated by the losing team. Despite this seeming domination, the numerous chances created were often very poor and easily defended by the AI team. Many users failed to recognise the half-chance nature of the attacks and some resorted to accusations of a random Match Engine, super-keepers and a cheating AI.

TT&F '09 has taken all of this on board and aims to confront it head on. First and foremost, we aim to overcome the user frustrations and accusations of AI cheating that have plagued recent versions of Football Manager. None of the regular contributors to TT&F have ever found Football Manager to be exasperating, overly unfair, full of super-keepers or horribly unrealistic. Furthermore, in relation to the complaints of randomness, TT&F's methodology ensures the Match Engine produces excellent looking football and match situations in which managerial decisions, good or bad, make obvious differences. Finally, TT&F's philosophy has always been that virtual and real world football management requires a multiplicity of tactical strategies, rather than one super-tactic, in order to combat numerous different match situations and footballing styles. In discussing these elements in jargon-free detail, TT&F '09 hopes to bring the enjoyment levels and in-depth tactical knowledge of its regular contributors to a much wider audience. With luck, more and more virtual managers will embrace some or all of the TT&F concepts and find Football Manager '09 to be a fully satisfying gaming experience. We certainly hope so.

Philosophy

There are five important definitions and beliefs that underlie TT&F.

Definition of Formation: A formation is the basic framework deciding the position of each player, i.e. a 4-4-2 has four defenders, four midfielders and two attackers. Likewise, a 4-3-3/4-5-1 formation has four defenders, one defensive midfielder, two central midfielders, two wingers and a centre forward.

Definition of Tactics: Tactics operate within the formation framework. A 4-4-2 at home will differ heavily from a 4-4-2 away. In a home formation, the wingers may hug the touchline, support the attackers and be given a fair degree of creative freedom. In an away formation, they may be asked to tuck in, support the full backs, and be ready for quick breaks when the potential reward outweighs the risk.

Football Manager Tactics: When designing tactics, one slider tweak alters the tactical instruction but not the overall formation. When discussing tactical instructions, we will talk about them in the context of a single unspecified formation.

Changing Tactics: No team ever goes through a match without some switches in tactical strategy. The extent to which these tactical changes work defines the course of the match. They may not be recognisable to the casual viewer but they happen nonetheless. The same applies to in-match management in Football Manager. Playing the same tactic all game in the belief that because your players are superior you will inevitably win and/or failure to recognise and change your tactics when things are obviously going against you will not bring you titles. In-game decision-making is absolutely vital to TT&F tactical theory and to be successful you will need to learn when and how to apply each tactical change.

The Successful Manager: Teams and managers are generally successful due to a combination of four things: good tactical management, good man-management, good transfer policy and availability of funds. Failure to manage any of the above is likely to lead to a season of poor performances and disillusionment. We will assume you are capable of managing transfers and can recognise good players in relation to level, so we will not elaborate further on these aspects here. Suffice to say, with roughly the right calibre of player for your division our tactical theory should help you on the path to success. However, if you don't have the right calibre of player, you will almost certainly struggle. If you regularly make perfect decisions you can survive with poor players, but it will be difficult. We promise no miracles, just good tactical design.

To learn more about the player, transfer and man-management side of Football Manager visit the good player and tactical forums at [FM-Britain](#) and [SI Games](#).

Scope

TT&F '09 has been totally rewritten to take into account the significant match engine improvements over the FML and FM'09 Beta tests. While its main priorities are to maintain its focus on producing realistic looking football and to facilitate the switch to the arrowless engine, it has expanded in scope to include the following:

Manager Style: distinct managerial styles require distinct tactical strategies. Ranging from the detailed and precise tactical plans of Jose Mourinho to the motivational simplicity of Kevin Keegan, TT&F '09 outlines eight mentality systems and their real world tactical and managerial equivalents

Translating the Sliders: by focusing on real world tactical language and minimising the focus on slider notch numbers, TT&F '09 enables managers to quickly and easily design fully effective tactics for any match situation and formation

Player Roles: by detailing player roles and illustrating how they combine with each other and the mentality systems, TT&F '09 explains how tactics work from the ground up

Match Strategies: TT&F '09 outlines five easy to design match strategies that slot into whichever of the eight managerial philosophies you choose to implement

Choosing your Pitch Size: TT&F '09 explains how tactics fit with pitch sizes, enabling you to choose the ideal pitch for your home matches and make effective changes for different pitch dimensions

Individual Player Theories: TT&F '09 outlines how to get the best performance out of each standard player position within each managerial strategy

Specialist Position Theories: TT&F '09 explains how to get the best performance out of the following player types:

- Sweeper Keeper
- Sweeper/Libero
- Deep-Lying Playmaker
- Box-to-Box Midfielder
- Advanced Playmaker
- Target Man
- Poacher
- Complete Forward

Opposition Instructions: TT&F '09 explains how to employ OIs to counter different formation types and limit the influence of your opponent's key players

Limitations

There are certain elements of the Football Manager experience that TT&F does not cover. This section briefly underlines their relation to tactical success.

Manager Reputation: All squads will need time to adjust to and respect your managerial and tactical decisions. You won't get the best out of your players until you have installed a sense of discipline throughout your squad.

Squad Gelling: If your squad has not gelled, then the team will not play well, no matter how good your tactical plans. Starting the game with a shaky squad will limit success as will buying in huge numbers of players. Playing conservative football in these situations gives the squad a chance to grab points. Given enough gelling time the squad will be able to play a more expansive game.

Man and Media Management: If your man/media management skills are poor, you will upset your players, fans and board, which will cost you matches. Learn how your players respond to certain media and player interactions and team talks so you are able ensure they are motivated for every match.

Transfer and Financial Strategies: A club that overspends and builds an overly large squad will generate unhappiness. Likewise, a club that has no ambition in the transfer market will fail to capture the quality of player required for success. Focusing on and acquiring logical targets that fit your squad and wage structure will ensure a relaxed dressing room and consistently good performances.

Training Programmes: To get the best performance possible out of your team, you will need to shape players to your tactical vision. Tailored training regimes ensure that the manager has a wealth of potentially ideal players at his disposal, allowing him to turn his tactical vision into reality.

Set Pieces: Extremely important but not covered. Did you think we were going to spoon-feed you everything?

Related Links

For questions and advice relating to this document please visit the tactical forums at [FM-Britain](#) and [SI Games](#). For in-depth discussions of specific theories, please visit the [FM-Britain Tactical Bible Forum](#). For an audio discussion of these theories, please download the [Get Sacked podcast](#), an entertaining look at virtual football management.

We hope you enjoy reading this as much as we enjoyed writing it and that it helps you to fully understand and appreciate the tactical elements of FM09.

Good luck and play well

wwfan

Utilising the Document

Although TT&F '09 is intended to be a comprehensive tactical design and match strategy walkthrough for beginner and advanced players alike, it can also be used as a quick reference resource for the following problems:

Poor and Disjointed Play: If the football your team is producing looks extremely unrealistic and players constantly make simple errors, then read **Frameworks** (pages 10-22)

Random Performances: If your team sometimes performs like world-beaters whereas other times plays like a pub-side, then read **Framework Adaptation** (pages 23-26)

Problems with Specific Teams/Formations: If you consistently struggle against a certain team or type of formation, read **Framework Adaptation** (pages 23-26)

Home and Away Performances: If your team plays well at home and terribly away, or vice-versa, read **Match Strategy Theories** (pages 27-33)

Unable to Hold a Lead: If you are constantly leaking late goals and dropping points that were seemingly in the bag, read **Match Strategy Theories** (pages 27-33)

Poor Player Performance: If you can't get a specific player to perform well or a specific position to work as expected, read **Individual Player Theories** (pages 34-40)

World-Class Player Underperforming: If you are unable to get consistently good performances out of a world-class footballer, read **Specialist Position Theories** (pages 41-45)

Unable to Stop Specific Opposing Players from Performing: If you constantly struggle to limit the influence of certain players, read **Opposition Instructions Theories** (pages 46-48)

In addition, we will also release a set of 72 TT&F inspired tactics for Football Manager '09. The tactics include 20 modern formations in Defensive, Standard and Attacking Match Strategies, plus nine classic formations and three futuristic, experimental formations. These tactics are largely intended for better than average sides playing on smaller than average pitches. They are **Band of Two** tactics (*see page 15*) with generic player role settings (*see pages 34-35*). We hope you enjoy them.

We will also release a 2-page Crib Sheet detailing the basic instructions and an Excel-based Tactical Wizard that takes you through each tactic step-by-step.

Frameworks

Every tactic is based around a framework that decides the basic 'shape' of the formation by employing variations of mentality, defensive line, closing down, runs and passing settings. In order for any tactic to work effectively, these key ingredients must be set correctly. The roles of individual players are then adapted around these instructions.

Player Roles & Mentality Systems

For the most part, the frameworks are based around player roles referred to by their typical Football Manager abbreviation (left sided midfielder becomes ML, goal keeper GK etc.). However, there are four roles atypical of Football Manager position defaults that are fundamental to the design of tactics.

The MCd and the MCa

In every tactic, one central midfielder needs to be given the role of MCd (midfielder with defensive duties) and another needs to be given the role of MCa (midfielder with attacking duties).

The MCd is a holding player. He can be played in the DMC position, but does not have to be. He should be defensively minded and will generally not make forward runs. His primary role is to protect the back line when the midfield and forwards attack, and to act as the first line of defence when the opposition have attacking possession. He should be cautious, hold his position and help maintain the team's defensive shape.

The MCa is the flip side of the coin. He is an attacking player whose role is to support the forwards when the team has possession. He can be played in the AMC position, but does not have to be. He will be more attacking, will tend to make forward runs and commonly assumes a playmaking role in the centre of the field.

Having both types of central midfielder in a side means the midfield doesn't get vacated when a team are on the attack while ensuring there are enough people attacking to offer support. It provides defensive stability and attacking muscle.

The FCd and the FCa

This is a slightly harder distinction to recognise at first glance. It is best to explain the system with regard to formations employing two strikers, such as the classic 4-4-2.

The FCd is the link player. He drops in the hole behind the main striker to act as a bridge between the midfield and the attack. Without him, it is possible to leave the two strikers completely isolated from the rest of the team. With him, there is a staggered stage of attack. The main striker and, formation allowing, a couple of midfielders run beyond him while he holds up the ball and looks for passing options, giving the attack time to take shape. This is crucial in all systems, but especially so for those employing a counter attacking strategy. Having him hang slightly further back offers passing options to the other forwards and midfielders, and therefore keeps the play imaginative, flowing and effective.

The FCa is his strike partner. Told to stay forward at all times, he is the primary end-target of the attacking play (but not necessarily the target man). He plays off the shoulder of the last defender, tries to latch on to long balls and through balls and moves around as much as possible to create space for himself. Being furthest forward, he always offers an attacking pass option, especially for the FCd. He can, if needed, lay the ball off to deeper positioned teammates, but his primary function is attempting to finish off attacking moves.

However, this definition blurs slightly in formations having fewer or more than two forwards:

Lone Striker Formations: In a lone striker formation, one of the MCs or AMCs plays the role of FCa. The idea here is that the lone striker's role is more similar to an FCd than to a true FCa. He will aim to hold the ball up and lay it off to other people. He will look to keep the ball long enough for his support to arrive in the form of midfielders and wingers. In order to not leave him isolated, he requires a lower mentality. In order to ensure support arrives quickly the attacking midfielder thus requires a much higher mentality. In nearly all formations with a lone striker, you will be able to play a player with FCa mentality instructions in midfield and still employ a more standard MCa alongside him.

Three Striker Formations: In formations with three strikers, it is beneficial to make the central striker the FCa and have both his support strikers FCds. This means that he has two people supporting him and looking to feed him through balls. This should enable all three players to stay in contact with the rest of the team, providing attacking presence and multiple passing options.

Four Striker Formations: This is not an issue with a four-man strike force, which simply employs pushed up ML/Rs as FL/Rs.

With those terms clarified, we can continue with the frameworks.

Managerial Type & Mentality Systems

The two primary tactical instructions (mentality and creative freedom) are the most difficult to translate into real world footballing language. It is difficult to imagine a manager specifying exactly how attacking each player should be or how much he is allowed to deviate from managerial instructions to the degree the sliders allow. Such levels of precision have traditionally caused much angst and argument among FM managers and have often been heavily criticised as being too complex. In attempting to unravel these complexities, we'd like to offer a new conceptualisation of these sliders as determining manager type as much as the tactics of the team.

The two polarities of managerial type are the Authoritarian and the Libertarian manager. The Authoritarian determines every aspect of the team's play and expects each player to follow his instructions to the letter. Mentality structure will be individually tailored to the players and creative freedom will be close to non-existent. The team will play very precise, controlled football with little flair or creativity and heavily rely on set pieces and set moves to score. On the other hand, the Libertarian manager has a rough idea of how attacking or defensive his team should be for each match and gives players their heads. The mentality structure will be very generic and creative freedom will be high. The team will play free-flowing football and goals will come from all types of open-play moves.

As in real life, these two managerial stereotypes, although potentially successful short-term, are likely to fail in the long run as they are too one-dimensional in approach. The overly structured manager can take his highly controlled style of football to the top level but is often too regimented to remain there, with his teams failing to offer enough flair and creativity to break down high-class defences. However, he should be able to keep a poor squad up simply by playing percentage football. The flair and creativity focused manager will do very well with a squad full of players who can operate at the higher end of the divisional level but will fail to bring enough tactical acumen to the table to win really big matches and titles. With a poor squad, he is likely to be an unmitigated disaster, as he will ask his players to do things of which they are not capable.

As with real life managers, the successful FM09 manager will need to learn how to balance a systematic approach to formation structure with a trust in which players can be allowed the creative freedom to express themselves without disrupting his overall tactical vision. Knowing which type of manager you are will then enable you to choose or design a mentality system that best suits your style. Some systems better suit a manager at the Authoritarian end of the scale, as they can do well with restricted creative freedom, whereas others are friendlier to the Libertarian axis, requiring a lot of creativity and flair to flourish.

No matter which one you choose it is likely that they will need to be tweaked further to suit your own playing preference, managerial style and the ability of the individual players at your disposal. You might be an aggressive manager that tries to impose his particular style of play on the opposition and thus veer towards an attacking framework with low creative freedom. You might examine

your opponent's strategy in fine detail and assign the majority of players to counter it whilst relying on an elite few to do the creative stuff. There is no 'best way' to play or manage. However, somewhere there will be a style of play that best suits your temperament and vision. The following section outlines a number of mentality approaches that have worked over the last few versions, alongside their relative suitability to managerial type.

The mentality systems will be presented in order, ranging from the most Authoritarian approaches at the top to the most Libertarian at the bottom. Authoritarian mentality systems assign specified mentalities and instructions to every player, whereas Libertarian ones are more simple and team-based. The mentality structures illustrated indicate how a standard match strategy would look. However, the actual player mentality values shown are just to illustrate the settings and don't have to be followed precisely. If you are a cautious manager, your starting mentality (DCs) can drop to five. If you are more aggressive, you could have a lowest starting mentality of eleven. To design a complementary attacking strategy, simply raise each value by four to eight notches, depending on your standard settings. For a defensive strategy, lower by four to eight.

NB: We recommend a maximum of eight notches between the most attacking and defensive outfield players for all mentality systems. Greater mentality gaps risk isolating the defence from the midfield and the midfield from the attack.

The Nike Defence

Manager Type: José Mourinho

Although this mentality structure is basically an adaption of the Rule of One (*see page 14*), it is ideally suited to those that wish to play the Mourinho way. It is exceedingly control-orientated and specifies more individual mentality settings than any other system. It closely mirrors Mourinho's tactics in two ways. Firstly, it employs an athletic covering DC to support a powerful destroyer in the manner of the Carvalho/Terry Chelsea partnership. Secondly, the MCd sits slightly deeper than he would in the Rule of One, which equates to how Mourinho employed Makélélé. Like all Rule of One tactics, it suits the Mourinho-type manager as it can do well without excessive creative freedom.

GK: 7
 DCd: 6
 DC: 8
 FB: 10
 MCd: 9
 ML/R: 11
 MCa: 12
 FCs: 13

Credit: Justified

The Libero Defence

Manager Type: Fabio Capello

As with the Nike Defence, the Libero Defence is a reworking of the Rule of One. Like Mourinho, Capello is very specific about how he wishes each of his players to perform and always employs a deep holding midfielder. However, unlike Mourinho he encourages one of his DCs to advance forward with the ball in the manner of a classic Libero, as seen by Rio Ferdinand's performances under Capello for England. Allowing a deeper defensive line than the Nike Defence, the Libero Defence better suits the type of controlled, possession football Capello prefers in contrast to Mourinho's direct, muscular approach.

GK: 8
 DC: 8
 DCa: 13
 FB: 9
 MCd: 8
 MR/L: 11
 MCa: 13
 FCs: 14

Credit: Jaswarbrick

Rule of One (RoO)

Manager Type: Martin O'Neill

The Rule of One plays roughly in the same manner as a Martin O'Neill tactic. Like Mourinho and Capello, O'Neill is very fastidious about tactics and expects each of his players to fulfil a specific function. However, he has had much less chance to work with genuinely world-class players, which has led to him employing a more generic system into which players of lesser quality are able to operate. In applying detailed specific mentality and player instructions, O'Neill can overachieve without the need for highly creative or flair players in his attacking line. Relying on detailed tactical structure enables him to employ lowish levels of creative freedom without a drop in performance.

GK: 7
 DC: 8
 FB: 9
 MCd: 10
 ML/R: 11
 MCa: 12
 FCs: 13

Credit: wwfan

Bands of Two

Manager Type: Alex Ferguson

Sir Alex is the first manager that deviates from a very tight control methodology. Manchester Utd's system, most especially in the Queiroz years, operates through four bands of play. While the central defenders are predominantly instructed to defend (unlike when playing for Capello, Ferdinand stays back) the full backs and defensive midfielder offer deep support for the front line alongside their defensive duties. The attacking midfielder and wingers have become virtually interchangeable, switching roles in the high support band, and are usually allowed their creative heads. The final band is the spearhead forward, ideally a complete player who is comfortable playing with the ball at his feet or in the air.

GK: 8

DC: 8

FB: 10

MCd: 10

ML/R: 12

MCa: 12

FCs: 14

Credit: wwfan & Millie

Role Theory

Manager Type: Arsene Wenger

Moving towards the more expressive mentality systems, in which control structure meets individual responsibility, we find Arsene Wenger. Unlike the other systems, here the mentality matches the player role within the team's overall match strategy and thus changes depending on how many players are assigned to specific roles (*see pages 18-19*). When playing an attacking strategy (*see page 32*), the five attacking roles are on the same mentality, whereas when playing a defensive system (*see page 33*), five roles are assigned defensive mentalities. The player's role rather than his individual skills or team system becomes the most important aspect of play. When everything fits into place and all the roles interact perfectly, the football is magical.

Defensive Roles: 8

Supporting Roles: 11

Attacking Roles: 14

Credit: wwfan & Millie

2-6-2 Mentality

Manager Type: Marcelo Lippi

Lippi's teams have traditionally been some of the more expressive in Italian football, partly to do with his charismatic manner generating team spirit, but mainly due to his flexible approach to tactics. The 2-6-2 system allows considerable flexibility in the middle of the park, with six players interlinking as support group for the attack and defence. As with most Italian approaches, this system can frustrate opponents by dominating possession deep on the pitch as the back two interact with the midfield in an eight player passing system prior to instantaneously turning defence into attack as one of the front players is suddenly picked out in space.

GK: 8
 DCs: 8
 FBs: 11
 MCd: 11
 ML/R: 11
 MCa: 11
 FCs: 14

Credit: zagallo

5x5 Theory

Manager Type: Rafa Benitez

Although Benitez doesn't come immediately to mind as a Libertarian, his structural approach to tactics is a simple one, relying on five players to defend and five to attack. Although he has transformed Liverpool into a team that is very difficult to break down, criticisms remain with regard to his attacking intentions and lack of width. In typical Spanish manner, Benitez wants his front five to play with creativity and flair, unlocking opposing defences via quick-fire passing interchanges. Without players who have the vision and touch to unlock defences in tight areas this translates into many efficient but dour matches. However, with the right players and creative freedom allowances up front, scintillating attacking play will complement resolute defence.

GK: 8
 DC: 8
 FB: 8
 MCd: 8
 ML/R: 12
 MCa: 12
 FCs: 12

Credit: Asmodeus

Global Mentality

Manager Type: Kevin Keegan

Global mentality suits a manager who is willing to give players their heads and relies heavily on motivation techniques to get the best out of them. When the team is playing well, the global system is capable of outstanding football. However, its relative lack of defensive cover and a tendency to be compressed means that, when things are going less well, it can be outflanked on the counter and squeezed out when attacking. To combat that it requires heavy levels of creative freedom and players who can make the best use of it alongside excellent team discipline and determination. For a manager confident of his team-talks and media interaction it can be a great system.

All Players: 11

Effective Strike Partnerships

Although we have specified two types of forward, the mentality frameworks only specify one FC setting, despite the requirement for the FCa to play higher up the pitch than the FCd. The reason for the omission is the difference in instructions for Attacking, Standard and Defensive mentality systems.

In all systems, it is important that there is a reasonably large mentality split between the two forwards. This stops the opposing defence from being able to hold a single line that denies both forwards space. One FC drops deeper to find space in front of the line, whereas the other plays higher to try and move into space beyond it. In a defensive system, the mentality framework directly links to the lower FCd settings, with the FCa being assigned a higher mentality to ensure he is playing on the shoulder of the last defender. In an attacking system, the mentality framework directly links to the higher FCa settings, with the FCd being assigned a lower mentality to ensure he drops deep into space.

Using the suggested mentality setting of the DC as a base (x) we recommend the following settings as a rough guide for an effective strike partnership.

Defensive: FCd ($x + 5$); FCa ($x + 8$)

Standard: FCd ($x + 3$); FCa ($x + 7$)

Attacking: FCd ($x + 1$); FCa ($x + 6$)

However, for a Global Mentality System the formula is slightly different:

Defensive: FCd (x); FCa ($x + 4$)

Standard: FCd ($x - 2$); FCa ($x + 2$)

Attacking: FCd ($x - 4$); FCa (x)

These settings can be altered depending on the ability and speed of the forwards, the starting mentality of each system and the specific managerial vision.

Player Roles & Forward Runs (FWRs)

When assigning forward runs to your players, it is important that you are very clear as to their role in the team. Player roles are defined in the following way:

Defend: The player will focus heavily on defensive duties

Support: The player will perform both defensive and attacking duties

Attack: The player will focus heavily on attacking duties

Asking your players to make forward runs defines how often and by how far they will deviate from the assigned formation position. If a player is told to make Forward Runs Rarely, this translates into the match engine as an instruction to hold his formation position and be ready to cover any counter-attacks. Assigning Forward Runs Mixed translates as instructing him to help out with attacks but not to stray too far from his formation position so he can quickly get back and help out the defence as and when needed. Forward Runs Often tells the player to move into attacking positions as soon as the team has the ball. With the above in mind, forward runs should be applied in the following manner:

- *Defend:* FWRs Rarely
- *Support:* FWRs Mixed
- *Attack:* FWRs Often

To keep things simple, we will restrict early discussion of player roles to the three most basic match strategies, Defensive, Standard and Attacking (*see pages 32-33*). Every tactic requires enough people defending and enough people attacking to be stable, but attacking flavours require more attackers and, conversely, defensive tactics need more bodies in defence. Hence, roles are assigned in the following manner:

- *Defensive:* 5 defend, 2 support, 3 attack
- *Standard:* 3 defend, 4 support, 3 attack
- *Attacking:* 3 defend, 2 support, 5 attack

Such a system assigns player roles into a basic configuration of 3 Defend, 2 Support and 3 Attack, which repeats through all the match strategies. The manager then decides on which two players he wishes to 'float' between the three. These 'floaters' will be classed as Defends in Defensive match strategies, Supports in Standard match strategies and Attackers in Attacking match strategies. For most formations (including 5-3-2, 4-4-2, 4-3-3, 4-5-1 etc.) the likelihood is that these players will be the full backs or wing backs. For systems without full backs, the manager needs to be more creative. Once you've identified which players you are going to 'float' it becomes simple to scale the instructions and create all three strategic flavours of any tactic.

When assigning these roles, it is important to recognise the forward positions as being attacking by nature. As such, they do not require having FWRs Often/Mixed to be classified as an Attacker/Support. Indeed, assigning FWRs Often to both FCs in a two-forward formation will often lead to their being isolated from the midfield and uninvolved with play. As specified earlier, one FC (FCd) will need to operate in a deeper, support role to link the attack with the midfield, whereas the other (FCa) should be looking to play on the shoulder of the last defender. Correctly assigning their forward runs is fundamental to having your attack operate as a unit:

- The FCd can be classed as attack/support with no/mixed FWRs
- The FCa can be classed as attack with mixed/often FWRs

To evaluate whether you have the correct FWRs instruction assigned to your FCs, use the Match Stats to check on the offside count and FC involvement in play. If the offside count is high, then it is likely that your FCa is making runs too early and his FWRs should be Mixed. If the FCd isn't seeing much ball, it is for one of two reasons. He may not be dropping into space to pick up easy passes from midfield, or the pitch might be so small that this space is being squeezed and he can't get into the game. For the former, you will need to reduce FWRs from Mixed to Rarely. For the latter, you will need to have him operating higher up the pitch, so increase FWRs from Rarely to Mixed.

The Arrowless Match Engine

With the removal of arrows, the Forward Runs slider has become significantly more important. In combination with mentality, it is now the major method of instructing a player to advance from his formation position and move into attacking areas of the pitch. It is important to clarify the benefits of this change.

There is a common misperception as to the functionality of arrows. Arrows were not player runs. Nor did they specify exactly where a player should be running, either with or without the ball. What they did was specify two possession-related static positions. As soon as a team won possession, a player would robotically follow his arrow to move into his assigned attacking position. Once there, he would make a play related move. When the team lost the ball the same would happen in reverse. During this movement, the player was following a pre-set instruction that kicked in no matter what was happening on the pitch, taking the player out of the game and impairing his ability to react to the action.

Replacing arrows with forward runs ensures that player movement is far more dynamic and directly related to on-pitch events. Despite a seeming loss of lateral control, which, as with most arrow-related moves, was largely illusory, the new system ensures dynamic player movement, fluid football and realistic transitions from defence to attack. A well thought-through forward runs pattern will lead to some truly excellent passing combinations and quality attacking play.

Closing Down

Closing down translates as how quickly and how far a player will leave his defensive position to deal with an attacking threat. Setting it too high throughout the team will lead to defensive structure disintegrating as players chase their opponents all over the pitch. It will also result in a lot of tired legs and defensive errors during the latter stages of a match. Setting it too low will see players backing off and backing off, allowing the opposition time and space to make through passes and set up for shots in dangerous positions.

Generally, closing down will work best if players perform it in relation to their position. Forwards are positioned high up the pitch, so need to close down more aggressively than their defensive counter-parts. Midfielders will be somewhere between the two. With this in mind, it is advisable to use your goalkeeper and central defensive pairing as a base and grade upwards from there. For lower level, poorly conditioned and ill-disciplined squads you should veer towards the lower end of the closing down spectrum. For quality, hard working, fit and disciplined sides, you should veer towards maximum settings.

Using the DC's mentality as a base (x), closing down should roughly conform to the following minimum to maximum settings:

- GK/DC: x
- FB/WB: $x + 1$ to $x + 4$
- DMC/MCd: $x + 2$ to $x + 6$
- MCa/AMC/Wingers: $x + 3$ to $x + 8$
- FCs: $x + 4$ to $x + 10$

As highlighted above, when choosing the correct settings for your team, it is important to recognise whether the closing down structure is too aggressive for the type of football your players, in terms of fitness, tactical discipline and technique, are capable of playing. A key indicator that closing down is too high is seeing your players running around like headless chickens and finishing games in a state of semi-exhaustion. This is likely to be quite common for high pressing tactics in lower level football. If you notice your players, either individually or as a unit, closing down to the extent that your defensive formation shape suffers, reduce individual closing down settings until you are happy with performance. Alternatively, you might decide to play a more cautious game or conserve player energy in easy matches, which will also require the reduction of closing down. The indicator that you have gone too low is seeing the opposition having time and space in front of the back line to pick their through balls and compose themselves to make consistently effective long range shots. In more defensive systems, you might have to apply more closing down than the guidelines suggest, especially for central midfielders with a low work rate.

It is also important to recognise the distinct closing down patterns in different footballing cultures, with sides from hotter countries more focused on

conserving energy than pressing the opposition at pace. In contrast, colder countries generally employ far higher levels of closing down.

Pitch size will also play a factor. On a huge pitch, players will have to run much further to close down the opposition, so are less likely to get there in time for the instruction to be effective. They will also tire rapidly. On such a pitch, the closing down gradient needs to be gradual, with the whole team having very similar settings and targeting a certain area of the pitch to try and win back possession. On a small pitch, high closing down settings can majorly restrict the opposition's chances of playing possession-orientated football. The closing down gradient will be steep, with the forwards having far greater settings than the central defenders, with attempts to regain possession happening all over the pitch. Think about what level of closing down best suits your players when deciding upon pitch size. However, wherever you play and at whatever level, it is important to maintain some degree of grading.

Passing Patterns

There are two major areas to be thinking about when setting passing patterns. The first is to make sure each player has plenty of passing options when he is in possession. The second is to think about what type of football you would like your team to play.

Passing Options

Passing length determines the options that a player will look for. Too short, and players won't have enough free options within range, leading to the player getting confused and hoofing the ball clear. Too long and the player will tend to play too many speculative, Hollywood balls, making it difficult to hold onto possession. At the bare minimum, a player should always be able to look up and see two easy passing options. Ideally, there will be three but this might be difficult to achieve on small pitches, against entrenched defences or under heavy pressure. A common error is to allow a player no obvious forward passing options at all. If you ask a full back to play very short passes to an aggressive midfield, all of whom are looking to get forward at every opportunity, the chances are he will look up and fail to see an obvious pass. He will be able to pass it inside, but that will not initiate an attack and often leads to the back four being dispossessed by a pressing front line or punting a directionless long ball up field to avoid being caught in a dangerous position. Common signs that this is happening are players dawdling on the ball when under little pressure or players with short passing instructions banging it long.

Make sure that each defensive player can look up and hit a lateral ball, forward ball and a diagonal ball without too much difficulty. For a player high up the pitch, the forward ball might be very difficult to pick against a packed defence, so he needs to have lateral, diagonal and backwards options, which enable the team to retain possession and look for a new opening. Check on the positioning

settings of the players around the passer (mentality and forward runs) and adjust his passing instructions so he can hit passes to any of the required lengths. That might mean giving him longer passing instructions than you would have first expected. Individual player attributes are influential when assigning passing instructions. A player of great passing ability should find some kind of passing option no matter his instructions, as long as his temperament is up to his being able to play his way out of danger. However, someone who struggles to control his passing might be better suited to longer 'clear the ball' instructions so that he doesn't make poor, hurried passes from dangerous positions.

Passing Systems

Although all passing systems can and should be tweaked to best suit the players at your disposal, there are two basic passing strategies from which you can build. One is focused on keeping possession, controlling the ball and breaking down the opposition in the final third. The other is more counter-attacking orientated and looks to clear the lines before catching a retreating defence out of position and vulnerable to the quick break.

Possession/Breaking Down the Opposition: Such a system requires a solid base from which to launch attacks. It is the job of the defenders to ensure possession is retained until a chance opens. Hence, defenders and more defensively minded midfielders should be looking to play possession-friendly short passes. The more creative players will be looking to move the opposition about and open up space in the final third. Hence, they will be playing a far more direct game. If they lose the ball and it is cleared, the defence reorganize, reset the base and the move can start again.

Counter-Attacking: This system requires the opposite approach. The defence is expected to be under pressure and its main aim is to clear the lines and, hopefully, initiate a counter while doing so. Hence, defenders' passing settings will be direct, looking to bypass the midfield and feed the forwards, as a short pass to a deep-lying midfielder can be extremely dangerous if he is immediately closed down and loses possession. Direct passing instructions ensures the whole team is in passing range for an under pressure defender, offering multiple clearance options. The forwards' job is to try and counter before the opposition gets its defence back into position. Hence, they will be looking to play short passes to their strike partner and supporting midfielders in the hope of quickly working a good through ball opportunity.

The above systems will need to be adapted to pitch size and match strategy. For example, on a smaller pitch, the direct passes of the attacking players might be over hit too often and need to be adjusted accordingly. Likewise, to see out a match with a possession mindset might lead to a manager asking a second central midfielder to play short passes to help with ball retention duties and only having four players probing for space in the final third. With a poor side, both systems may need to be based on longer passing instructions to ensure players aren't making foolish and easily intercepted passes in dangerous positions.

Framework Adaptation

Although this section links very closely to the frameworks section, it also refers to Match Strategy Theories (*pages 32-34*). To get the most out of this section, it might be best to familiarise yourself with the basics of these strategic ideas.

Defensive Line

Getting the defensive line right is fundamental to a team being able to defend effectively. This section discusses the various elements a manager needs to consider when setting up his back line.

Relation to Mentality System

The most important setting for the defensive line relates to the mentality system. The back line must be in contact with its midfield at all times. If it isn't, opposition forwards will constantly exploit the gap between the deepest midfielder and the central defenders. This will lead to the team being vulnerable to long shots (as the forwards have plenty of time and space to set themselves) plus a series of desperate last-ditch tackles resulting in bookings and dangerous free kicks. A solid defence needs to have at least one defensively minded central midfielder harassing attacking moves before they reach the defensive line.

To ensure the above doesn't happen, the defensive line must be linked to the mentality structure. As a rough guide, the non-floating Support players' mentality instructions determine the most desirable setting for the defensive line. Linking the defensive line to the mentality system ensures the back four remains in contact with the midfield and the team plays as a unit rather than separate attacking and defensive forces.

Relation to Opposition Formation

Whilst it is always important to keep the above in mind when setting a default defensive line, a good manager will also take into account the opposing formation he is facing. A formation that is narrow and multi-strata (e.g. wingless 4-1-2-1-2, wingless 4-3-1-2) generates a lot of chances through the AMC. Increasing the d-line reduces the space in which the opposing AMC can operate and limits his effectiveness. As there are no wingers, it is difficult for such a formation to spread the play wide into space, so utilising the high d-line against this type of formation often results in passing chances drying up and loss of possession for the opposition.

If the opposing side is playing with a very defensive formation, it is often worthwhile deepening the defensive line. Defensively structured formations (4-

1-4-1, 4-5-1) typically have no midfielders supporting the forward and rely on direct/long balls down the flanks/over the top to create counter-attacking chances. A deeper defensive line limits the chances of such balls being successful and often isolates the forwards when they do get possession, as they have nobody supporting the move and quickly find themselves surrounded by opposing defenders and midfielders. This often results in the defending team winning possession back in a dangerous area and being able to launch a counter attack before the opposing defence has had time to regroup.

Relation to Player Attributes

It is important to be aware of both your own and opposing player attributes when setting your defensive line prior to each match. If your central defenders are on the slow side a deeper defensive line is going to be a safer bet. This will need to be protected with a more defensive mentality system, which collapses the central midfield into the pocket and makes it difficult for fast forwards to run at or behind the back line. In contrast, if the back line is very athletic then a higher defensive line with more aggressive closing down will put opposition strikers under pressure the instant they get the ball. Learning how high a defensive line your starting defenders can cope with will be hugely beneficial when setting defensive strategies for different opponents.

Relation to Pitch Size

If the pitch is on the short side, a very high defensive line might be problematic for your team, no matter how athletic your back four. With less ground to cover, a breaking forward might well be able to stay ahead of a chasing defender long enough to get a clear shot on goal. On a longer pitch, the defenders will have more time to cover the break and snuff out the chance. In contrast, a high defensive line on a short pitch may increase the chances of your defenders being caught in possession by a heavily pressing front line, especially if you are playing a low tempo, short passing game. On a longer pitch, the opposite applies. A low defensive line offers an increased amount of exploitable space in front of the back four, which could cause problems against quick and skilful attacks. It also requires defenders to have better passing attributes as longer passes more easily go astray, leading to intercepted balls in dangerous positions. Taking careful consideration of your defenders' attributes when deciding your pitch size is a major step towards building a defensive home fortress.

Additional Settings

The Nike Defence: relies on an athletic player sweeping balls behind a more destructive blocker and thus requires a higher d-line.

The Libero Defence: relies on a world-class ball playing defender being able to step out of the line and join attacks, leaving a defensively minded midfielder and

central defender as cover. To do this effectively you will have to play a lower d-line to open up the space for the Libero to move into.

Width

Relation to Match Strategy

In general, aggressive strategies require width. Attacking and controlling strategies need to open up space in the final third in order for their creative players to do damage. If the opposition is trying to shut-up shop, maximise width to try and break down the packed defence. If the opposition is trying to counter, then a slightly narrower formation prevents your defence from having to cover too much ground when the opposition does manage to break. A standard match strategy offers defensive solidity with some attacking flair and is best employed with medium width. A defensive strategy aims to reduce space in the defensive third and is narrower. A shut-up shop strategy aims to put as many bodies between the goal and ball as possible and is very narrow (*see pages 32-34 for further information on the above match strategies*).

Relation to Pitch Size

Although the above is very important in managing an overall match strategy, pitch size also needs to be taken into consideration. With a very wide pitch, players can easily find space and defending is generally tougher. Narrowing the formation ensures that the defence has less ground to cover when defending quick breaks without unduly compromising attacking options. When playing on a very small pitch, space is at a premium and therefore you will need your team to play wider than usual to have any hope of capitalising on attacks. A well-designed defence is still effective on a small pitch even when playing on the counter with maximum width. Think about what type of football you want to play at home prior to setting your pitch dimensions.

Tempo

Relation to Match Strategy

An attacking strategy aims to keep constant pressure on the opposition in order to stop them having time to break forward and counter. As such, it is generally pretty fast paced. On the other hand, a control strategy works on the assumption the opposition won't even try to attack so aims to keep possession and slowly prise open gaps in the defence. Thus, a slower tempo is more suitable. For standard tactics, the manager can use the tempo instruction far more intuitively, cranking it up when the team seems to be on top and slowing it down when they are struggling to keep hold of the ball. Defensive strategies are very dependent on player quality. If you have a side that can play keep ball prior to releasing

quick counters, then a slow tempo is fine. If, however, your players are prone to losing possession easily, play at a quicker pace to try and disrupt the opposition and take advantage of their mistakes. Quick tempo with a defensive strategy will result in a lot of ball for your opposition, but less likelihood of one of your players being caught in possession in a dangerous position. You'll need to have good defenders to pull this off. Slowing it down can often lead to a lot of possession, but you will need to have players you can trust to keep the ball under pressure.

Relation to Pitch Size

Pitch size is very important when it comes to determining tempo. A fast paced strategy is excellent for a small pitch whereas a slower tempo is better for large ones. Passing and closing down at pace on a small pitch reduces the chance of a player losing the ball in a tight spot whilst increases the opportunities for your midfielders and attackers winning balls in dangerous areas. As the pitch is small, players have to cover less ground and are therefore less likely to run out of steam. Fast tempo play on a huge pitch leads to a greater chance of a hurried, misplaced and intercepted pass. Furthermore, the team will tire and make mistakes during the latter stages of a match. Look to slow things down, keep the ball and force the opposition to do all the chasing. Think about what type of football you want to play at home prior to setting your pitch dimensions.

Match Strategy Theories

This section explains the assumptions behind the Defensive, Standard and Attacking match strategies and details how to translate them into the slider system. It also looks at how you can transform these three strategies into five, adding the Shut Up Shop and Control options to the manager's armoury.

Strategy Assumptions

Mentality System Assumptions

- For Attacking systems it is assumed that all the Attacking/Support players should be on an attacking mentality, with the Defend players on attacking/normal.
- For Standard systems the DCs and FCs can, but don't have to, be on defensive or attacking mentalities respectively, with the rest of the team on normal.
- For Defensive systems, it is assumed that all the Defend and Support players should be on defensive mentalities, with Attacking players on defensive/normal.

Passing Assumptions

Passing has to be balanced so that it gets an ideal mix of three properties. A good passing framework should: a) take pressure off the defence; b) retain ball possession; c) create good goal scoring opportunities.

For defensive teams, playing deeper and more cautiously than attacking teams, it is important to make sure the ball is removed from the danger zone quickly. They will usually be weaker than their opposition, or certainly not pushing as hard for a goal, and therefore will want their passing to be incisive in what could be a short amount of time. Attacking sides will want to get the ball down and play it, keep hold of possession and look for the best opportunities to play in team mates for a goal.

Because of this, TT&F '09 advocates the following frameworks for passing:

Defensive

Defend - direct
Support - mixed
Attack - short

Standard

Defend - low direct
Support - mixed
Attack - low mixed

Attacking

Defend - short
Support - mixed
Attack - direct

The logic behind this is that defensive teams will look to get the ball away from goal, but will then want to concentrate on keeping the ball when they reach the midfield. Because of the narrower width, players should be close enough together to have passing options. Therefore the support players can be on mixed and the attack can use short passing. The team should be able to hold on to the ball, but will only aim to once they have moved out of the defensive third. Since attack is not the prime aim of the game plan, it is assumed that the team can concede a little incisiveness in the final third in order to try and keep the ball. If you have possession, the opposition do not and, therefore, cannot score.

Attacking teams will, on the other hand, need to get the ball and play it well between each other. The defenders are set to short passing so they can look for a good passing option to start an attack. Since they should be under less pressure, they should have the time and the mentality to be able to do this. The attacking players are on direct passing for two reasons. Firstly, it allows much more incisive passing leading to good opportunities to play in players in advanced positions. Secondly, since the players should be more spaced out, a direct passing game gives players more options and allows passes to more easily reach

teammates. In most formations the Attack players will be wing players (full backs and wingers), so this allows them to look for options in the centre of the field without the need to always cross the ball. The Support players sit deeper and play dangerous through balls to attacking players, try to revitalise attacks in danger of petering out and aim at quickly recycling half-cleared balls.

Standard tactics' passing instructions are similar to defensive tactics, but the passing settings are much closer together since there is more neutrality in player roles. It keeps the ball moving in the manner of an attacking tactic, but tries to avoid putting the team under undue pressure with inappropriate short defensive passing.

Tempo Assumptions

Fast tempo is generally a better bet for attacking sides as the more quickly the ball is moved around, the greater the likelihood of space opening up in the final third. A slower tempo means less misplaced passes but enables the opposing team to have more time to get back into position to cover attacks. It is thus better for more defensively minded formations.

There are cultural and weather differences to take into consideration when thinking about the above. Nations in colder climates tend to play a faster tempo game than those in warmer regions. There are a few reasons for this. Firstly, the ball travels more slowly in heavy conditions so a low tempo, short passing game is often unsuitable. Although the ball can zip off a damp pitch, it slows down significantly on a soaking wet one, both of which have led to the development of a direct, fast-paced game in Northern Europe. Secondly, hot and humid conditions will sap player energy, so teams from such climates tend to play a slower tempo, possession-orientated game, leading to the highly technical football of South America, Southern Europe and the better African nations. Thinking about the cultural footballing preferences of the country he is working in will help a manager to quickly find his tactical feet.

NB: Check pitch sizes before deciding on ideal tempo

Width Assumptions

To break a defence down the attacking team needs to use as much of the pitch as possible to open space. In contrast, a defensive team will look to reduce space at every available opportunity. Although a team's defensive width will naturally be narrower than the attacking one, it will be risky for weaker teams to spread too wide as once they lose possession they will become vulnerable to quick passing movements that exploit space before the formation can regain defensive shape.

There are also cultural differences. Northern European teams tend to spread the ball to the wings with great regularity and expect the wingers and fullbacks to work together to provide plenty of crosses from standard positions. Teams from

more technically orientated nations tend to play considerably narrower, aim to control possession in the middle of the park and use rampaging fullbacks or drifting midfielders/attackers to provide width as and when necessary.

NB Check pitch sizes before deciding on ideal width

Time Wasting Assumptions

An attacking team will be looking to score goals and won't want to waste any time. A defensive team will be hoping not to concede and will therefore aim to take advantage of any stops in play to further wind down the clock. Time wasting also has a few cultural variations. Some nations/leagues have a greater tendency towards defensive play and will employ time wasting far earlier in the game than others. Other cultures believe that attack is the best form of defence and will go forward almost to the final whistle. Both strategies have potential weaknesses. Sitting on a narrow lead for 80 mins can cause a team to collapse under the weight of attacking pressure whilst pushing for the killer goal risks conceding on the counter. Ultimately, the type of time wasting strategy you choose to employ will depend on your trust in your team. Arguably, it is best employed as a dynamic instruction that changes relative to the match situation.

Tackling Assumptions

An attacking team will be looking to win quick ball high up the pitch and will thus throw themselves into tackles. As the majority of tackles will be made in the opposing half it doesn't matter if they result in a free kick, as it won't be in a dangerous position. Tackles in such areas are also less likely to get a card. Thus, tackling will be heavy. A defensive team aims to keep players behind the ball and not to make any tackling errors. They will also be pinned back in their own half so can't afford to give away as many free-kicks, as they will be dangerous and more likely result in a card. Players will only choose to make tackles when they are sure of getting the ball or have no other choice. Thus, tackling will be easy.

Marking Assumptions

Loose and zonal marking generally means a player won't be close to an opponent when possession changes. These players will immediately be available for an attacking pass. It is the preferred marking instructions for Attacking roles. In contrast, tight and man marking ensures that the player is as close as possible to his opposing man when not in possession. Such players aim to win the ball back and launch passes to the more open, Attacking players to start a counter. It is the preferred instruction for Support and Defend players.

NB: It is more than possible to play zonal and tight, which is often the preferred option for players who have no obvious opponent to mark.

Focus Passing Assumptions

An attacking team will look to exploit the space on the flanks and regularly work the ball into those areas. Thus, for attacking formations, focus passing down flanks. In contrast, a defensive team aims to hit direct balls and thus tend to hit the balls that centrally positioned forwards have a chance of reaching. Thus, for defensive formations, focus passing through the middle.

Formation shape, which is often determined by cultural preferences, impacts upon the best choice of focus passing instructions. A team without wingers might not get the best out of the down the flanks instruction and mixed is likely to be the better option. Likewise, a defensive formation employing a lone FC runs the risk of his being overpowered by the defence before he can lay it off to the midfielders. Mixed will direct more balls into channels for the wingers to chase and might be a better option.

The left/right flanks focus passing options are best employed when you have identified one of your opponent's flanks as being significantly weaker than the other and wish to take advantage of that weakness.

Creative Freedom Assumptions

Creative freedom, which encourages players to break from the tactical plan and take risks, is of great importance for an attacking strategy but dangerous for a defensive one. The more aggressive the strategy, the more players should be given high creative freedom instructions. Players assigned to Attack roles should be allowed higher creative freedom, Support roles normal and Defend roles lower. However, as detailed in the Frameworks section (*pages 12-13*) assigning levels of Creative Freedom is as much down to manager type as player roles.

Free Role Assumptions

A free role encourages a player to largely abandon defensive duties and focus on finding attacking space. As with creative freedom, this is highly advantageous for attacking systems but potentially dangerous for defensive ones. However, for every system it is important that one player is looking to create space at all times in order to provide a passing outlet for players under pressure. For each system, at least one Attacking roles need to operate within the formation structure or it will lose defensive stability and attacking organization. However, the others can be given free roles. Hence, Attacking strategies have three free roles, Standard two and Defend one. For the default tactics accompanying this guide, we have made the FCa the standard free role player. This will be fine if he is describes as an FC in the game. For STs, it is best to apply free roles elsewhere, as they do not make best use of the instruction.

NB: With top-class players, or when employing a playmaker or libero, you can increase free roles. However, doing so with a poor team will be disastrous.

Match Strategies

The Standard Match Strategy

This is arguably the most important of all match strategies as, by carefully balancing risk and reward, it enables a manager to assess the match situation and how well his team is playing prior to switching to a more specialised tactical plan. It is an ideal starting strategy for all short-odds matches. By carefully watching the match the manager can then decide to be more aggressive or cautious or to stick with the standard approach if things are going well.

Tactical Instructions

- Mentality System: Upper Defensive – Lower Attacking (min 5 players on Normal)
- Player Roles: 3 Defend, 4 Support, 3 Attack
- Closing Down: Low Normal- High Normal
- Passing Pattern: Defend (low direct), Support (mixed), Attack (low mixed)
- Tempo: Normal
- Width: Normal
- Time Wasting: Normal
- Tackling: Normal
- Focus Passing: Mixed
- Marking: Defend & Support (Tight/Man), Attack (Loose/Zonal)
- Creative Freedom: Defend (Low), Support (Normal), Attack (High)
- Free Roles: Attack (one)
- Counter Attack: Optional
- Play Offside: Optional

The Attacking Match Strategy

This strategy is best employed for matches that you are favourites to win and expect to dominate possession in your opponent's half. It aims to exploit space in the final third by employing fast tempo, direct, attacking orientated passing supported by a defensive strategy aimed at recycling possession. It focuses heavily on getting players forward and into space and allows them the creative freedom to express themselves.

Tactical Instructions

- Mentality System: High Normal – Upper Attacking (min 5 players on Attacking)
- Player Roles: 3 Defend, 2 Support, 5 Attack
- Closing Down: Mid Normal – High Often
- Passing Pattern: Defend (short), Support (mixed), Attack (direct)
- Tempo: Fast
- Width: Wide

- Time Wasting: Low
- Tackling: Hard
- Focus Passing: Down Both Flanks
- Marking: Defend & Support (Tight/Man), Attack (Loose/Zonal)
- Creative Freedom: Defend (Low), Support (Normal), Attack (High)
- Free Roles: Attack (three)
- Counter Attack: No
- Play Offside: Yes

The Defensive Match Strategy

This strategy is best employed for matches that you are favoured to lose and in which you expect your opponent to put you under extended pressure. It aims to keep men behind the ball, to restrict space in your half, to slow things down and to frustrate the opposition. It relies on direct balls to the forwards followed by sharp and quick passing interchanges to score goals on the counter.

Tactical Instructions

- Mentality System: Defensive – Mid Normal (min 5 players on Defensive)
- Player Roles: 5 Defend, 2 Support, 3 Attack
- Closing Down: Low – Mid Normal
- Passing Pattern: Defend (direct), Support (mixed), Attack (short)
- Tempo: Slow
- Width: Narrow
- Time Wasting: High
- Tackling: Easy
- Focus Passing: Through the Middle
- Marking: Defend & Support (Tight/Man), Attack (Loose/Zonal)
- Creative Freedom: Defend (Low), Support (Normal), Attack (High)
- Free Roles: Attack (one)
- Counter Attack: Yes
- Play Offside: No

Although the above three strategies should be enough to perform well over a full season, the more sophisticated manager has a couple more options up his sleeve, Control and Shut-up-Shop.

The Control Match Strategy

The Control Match Strategy sits between the Standard and Attacking mentality systems and has two options for deployment. The first is to slow down a match that should already be won, generally playing keep ball whilst still being able to gently probe in the final third when space opens up. The second is when a more patient approach is deemed to be necessary against a team that is sitting back

and trying to frustrate. Closing down is more cautious than in Attacking strategies in order to entice the opposition out of their defensive comfort zone and free up some space. For both options, the manager has to best decide how to employ Defend, Support and Attack roles. As midfield possession is the priority, six players can be given support roles in a 2-6-2 pattern. However, should the manager prefer a more aggressive Control Strategy, a 2-5-3, 2-4-4, or 3-3-4 split should be used. For a more cautious approach, employ a 3-5-2 or 3-6-1 split.

Tactical Instructions

- Mentality System: Normal – Mid Attacking
- Player Roles: 2-3 Defend, 3-6 Support, 2-4 Attack
- Closing Down: Normal – Low Often
- Passing Pattern: Defend (low-mixed), Support (mixed), Attack (low-direct)
- Tempo: Normal
- Width: Wide
- Time Wasting: Low
- Tackling: Normal
- Focus Passing: Mixed/Down the Flanks
- Marking: Defend & Support (Tight/Man), Attack (Loose/Zonal)
- Creative Freedom: Defend (Low), Support (Normal), Attack (High)
- Free Roles: Attack (one-two)
- Counter Attack: No
- Play Offside: Optional

The Shut-up-Shop Match Strategy

Although the Shut-Up-Shop Strategy is the most defensive of the systems, one must guard against dropping its mentality system too low, which will invite pressure, and should use Defensive and Standard strategies as guiding bookends. The aim of the tactic is to frustrate the opposition by reducing space, slowing things down, keeping the ball, wasting time as much as possible and to clear the ball long when out of risk-free options. Unlike the Defensive Match Strategy, it is not looking to score on the counter, just not to concede. As possession and frustration is the priority, more players than usual will be kept behind the ball. Closing down will be aggressive up front, but cautious in midfield and defence. Defenders and support players will be looking to clear the ball, whereas Attackers will aim to maintain possession and draw fouls rather than make risky attacking passes. In terms of Defend, Support and Attack roles, the manager can choose to deploy a 6-3-1, 6-2-2, 5-4-1 or 5-3-2 split. Due to its very defensive nature, this strategy might not suit all formations, especially those with multiple attacking midfielders and forwards.

Tactical Instructions

- Mentality System: Defensive – Mid Normal (min 5 players on Defensive)

- Player Roles: 5-6 Defend, 2-4 Support, 1-2 Attack
- Closing Down: Low – Low Normal
- Passing Pattern: Defend (very direct/long), Support (mixed), Attack (very short)
- Tempo: Very Slow
- Width: Narrow
- Time Wasting: Very High
- Tackling: Easy
- Focus Passing: Through the Middle
- Marking: Defend & Support (Tight/Man), Attack (Loose/Zonal)
- Creative Freedom: Defend (Low), Support (Normal), Attack (High)
- Free Roles: Attack (one)
- Counter Attack: Yes
- Play Offside: Optional

Individual Player Theories

Most managers are forced to cut their tactical teeth at clubs with somewhat less than world-class squads. Prior to taking on the cream of the football world, it is important for any manager to understand how to get the best out of basic football positions. Failure to do so will lead to incoherent and disjointed play, no matter how good the overall tactical vision. The following section explains how to shape a generic tactic and then begin moulding it to the specific players at your disposal.

Generic Instructions

At the very basic level, an ideal starting point for your tactics would be to instruct your players to follow instructions according to their assigned roles.

Defend Role

Players in this role must be looking to play risk free, simple football. In cautious tactics, this will mean looking to get the ball high up the pitch and away from danger. In aggressive tactics, it will mean playing simple possession passes to more skilful and creative players.

- Run With Ball: Rarely
- Long Shots: Rarely
- Through Balls: Rarely
- Cross Ball: Rarely
- Cross From: Deep

Support Role

Players in this role will be looking to support the attack whilst not wandering too far from their defensive positions. They should thus be aiming to play balls into attacking areas rather than operating in those areas themselves. The following instructions will aid them in that direction.

- Run With Ball: Mixed
- Long Shots: Often
- Through Balls: Often
- Cross Ball: Mixed
- Cross From: Mixed

Attack Role

Players in this role will be looking to attack the final third and do as much damage in that area as possible. They will generally be looking to get onto the end of through balls rather than playing them. Once they have the ball they will be looking to quickly shape opportunities for themselves or others.

- Run With Ball: Often
- Long Shots: Mixed
- Through Balls: Mixed
- Cross Ball: Often
- Cross From: Byline

Player Abilities

The above generic instructions might not suit the players you have at your disposal. For example, you might have a highly creative defender who can play pinpoint passes whom you envisage spraying balls to the flanks to start counter attacks, in which case you will increase his Through Balls settings. You might have a side-midfielder who has no pace and average crossing but excellent passing, in which case lower his Crossing instructions (both amount and position from) and increase his passing options. You might have a Forward with poor dribbling and pace, but great passing and long shots, in which case reduce Run With Ball and Forward Runs and increase his opportunities to take pot shots or play others in. Taking into account the attributes of your players will enable you to mould the tactical instructions to make best use of their specific abilities. It will be extremely counter-productive to ask players to regularly do things of which they are not capable.

Positional Instructions

To get the best out of his squad and formation of choice, a manager might also want to tailor the generic instructions to better fit the specific positions within

his preferred formation. This section provides a brief guide in how a manager might go about doing that.

Please note, this is a guide only and must be considered alongside the generic instructions and player abilities in order to get the best out of any squad.

Goalkeeper

Key Attributes: Aerial Ability, Command of Area, Handling, Reflexes, One on Ones

The goalkeeper is very much part of the Defensive Roles framework and his tactical instructions reflect those of the central defenders, focusing on simple and risk free use of the ball. The major difference between strategies is in his distribution instructions. For more cautious tactics, he will aim to clear the ball deep whereas for more aggressive ones he will feed the defence in order to start off passing moves.

- Player Role: Defend
- Run With Ball: Rarely
- Long Shots: Rarely
- Through Balls: Rarely
- Cross Ball: Rarely
- Cross From: Deep
- Hold Up Ball: No
- Distribution: Long Kick (Defensive), Quick Throw (Standard), Defender Collect (Attacking)
- Distribute To: FC/TM (Defensive), ML/R (Standard), DL/R (Attacking)

Central Defenders

Key Attributes: Jumping, Marking, Tackling, Positioning, Strength

The main job of a central defender in all the match strategies is to stop the opposing attackers from playing and to clear the ball from danger when required. When playing in an attacking match strategy, they must also be able to help the team maintain possession and lay off simple passes to more creative players. To ensure they remain focused on defensive duties, keep their individual instructions as simple as possible. For defenders who go forward for set pieces, it can be advantageous setting their long shots to mixed, as it will enable them to fire off pot shots if they pick up a half-clearance when retreating. This is a far better option than their looking for a pass and getting caught in possession and out of position to cover a break.

- Player Role: Defend
- Run With Ball: Rarely
- Long Shots: Rarely
- Through Balls: Rarely

- Cross Ball: Rarely
- Cross From: Deep
- Hold Up Ball: No

Full Backs

Key Attributes: Pace, Tackling, Positioning, Work Rate, Stamina

The full back is becoming a key player in modern football, having to supplement his traditional defensive duties with overlapping runs down the wing to support forward play and help attacks overload the final third. Although primarily assigned defensive duties in more cautious tactics, he has to work very hard in aggressive ones to fulfil his defensive and attacking responsibilities.

- Player Role: Defend/Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Rarely/Mixed/Mixed
- Long Shots: Rarely/Mixed/Rarely
- Through Balls: Rarely/Mixed/Rarely
- Cross Ball: Rarely/Mixed/Often
- Cross From: Deep/Deep/Mixed
- Hold Up Ball: No

Wing Backs

Key Attributes: Pace, Tackling, Crossing, Work Rate, Stamina

Although most wing backs can also be employed as full backs, they generally require slightly more attacking attributes so they can fulfil winger duties on the flanks. Thus, their tactical instructions are more aggressive. The following settings can be used for wing back formations, or for natural or accomplished wing backs operating in the full back position. Attacking wing back instructions will encourage overlaps and should be applied to any wing/full back you want performing that function.

- Player Role: Defend/Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Rarely/Mixed/Often
- Long Shots: Rarely/Mixed/Rarely
- Through Balls: Rarely/Often/Mixed
- Cross Ball: Rarely/Mixed/Often
- Cross From: Deep/Mixed/Byline
- Hold Up Ball: No

Defensive Midfielder

Key Attributes: Marking, Tackling, Positioning, Work Rate, Strength

The defensive midfielder's main duties are to protect the defensive line from breaking attackers and to support the more creative midfielders when in possession. A key job of the defensive midfielder is to keep hold of the ball while the defence and attack are reorganising themselves after a period of opposition pressure.

- Player Role: Defend
- Run With Ball: Rarely
- Long Shots: Rarely
- Through Balls: Rarely
- Cross Ball: Rarely
- Cross From: Deep
- Hold Up Ball: Yes

Midfielder with Defensive Duties (MCd)

Key Attributes: Marking, Positioning, Passing, Teamwork, Stamina

The midfielder with defensive duties performs roughly the same role as the defensive midfielder. However, while the DMC operates between the midfield and defence, the MCd is very much part of the midfield and needs to have the technical skills to fulfil that function. Operating slightly further up the pitch means he will have more opportunities to shoot from range and a greater chance of picking a through ball. Although primarily a defensive player, his tactical instructions must reflect this greater attacking responsibility.

- Player Role: Defend
- Run With Ball: Rarely
- Long Shots: Mixed
- Through Balls: Mixed
- Cross Ball: Mixed
- Cross From: Deep
- Hold Up Ball: Yes

Side-Midfielders

Key Attributes: Passing, Crossing, Positioning, Teamwork, Work Rate

A side-midfielder performs defensive and attacking duties within the overall structure of the team formation. Lacking either the explosive pace or exciting dribbling skills of an out-and-out winger, the side-midfielder relies on teamwork and work rate to get into dangerous attacking positions without compromising his defensive responsibilities. In attack, he focuses on working space on the

flanks to supply key crosses and passes into the final third. In defence, he plays a key role in defending the flanks.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Mixed/Mixed
- Long Shots: Often/Mixed
- Through Balls: Often/Mixed
- Cross Ball: Mixed/Often
- Cross From: Mixed/Byline
- Hold Up Ball: No

Wingers

Key Attributes: Pace, Acceleration, Technique, Flair, Dribbling

The winger possesses the technical and physical skills to beat his man and his tactical instructions need to make the best use of these abilities. Employed in a Support Role the winger's job is to try to get past his man and get in an early cross for the forwards. Employed in an Attack Role he will try to run at the defence in the final third, aiming to cause panic and indecision prior to shooting or attempting to make a through ball/cross to a team mate.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Often/Often
- Long Shots: Mixed/Mixed
- Through Balls: Often/Mixed
- Cross Ball: Often/Often
- Cross From: Mixed/Byline
- Hold Up Ball: No

Midfielder with Attacking Duties (MCa)

Key Attributes: Passing, Technique, Long Shots, Teamwork, Stamina

The MCa operates as an attacking variant of the MCd, focusing mainly on attack whilst still performing key middle of the park duties. Although his main responsibilities are to help the team maintain possession and to fashion out chances for players with Attacking roles, he still needs to track back defensively. In a Support role he will aim to combine attempts at through balls with the occasional pot shot at goal if space opens up. In an Attacking role he will aim to drift into space around the opposition's defensive line.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Mixed/Mixed
- Long Shots: Often/Mixed
- Through Balls: Often/Often
- Cross Ball: Mixed/Mixed

- Cross From: Deep/Mixed
- Hold Up Ball: No

Attacking Midfielder

Key Attributes: First Touch, Technique, Creativity, Flair, Decisions

The AMC operates higher up the pitch than a standard midfielder, so he cannot drive into space from deep in the manner of the MCa. Requiring excellent technical and mental skills, his duty is to fashion chances for himself and others in the final third before the opposition defenders reduce the time and space he has to make his play. He must be able to consistently make high quality decisions at speed for him to make best use of his tactical instructions.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Mixed/Often
- Long Shots: Mixed/Mixed
- Through Balls: Often/Often
- Cross Ball: Mixed/Mixed
- Cross From: Mixed/Byline
- Hold Up Ball: No

Deep Lying Forward (FCd)

Key Attributes: Technique, Creativity, Long Shots, Strength, First Touch

The FCd's main function is to link the attack to the midfield. Operating on a lower mentality than his strike partner, often with no Forward Runs, he aims to drop deep into space and hold up the ball before supplying linking passes to teammates. If he has time to turn, these linking passes are likely to be through balls to his strike partner. Other passing possibilities are possession-orientated balls to deep-lying midfielders or more aggressive passes in front of breaking wingers or advanced midfielders. In a Support Role he will be mainly looking to play others in. In an Attack role he will also look to fashion chances for himself.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Mixed/Mixed
- Long Shots: Often/Mixed
- Through Balls: Often/Mixed
- Cross Ball: Mixed/Mixed
- Cross From: Mixed/Mixed
- Hold Up Ball: Yes

Advanced Forward (FCa)

Key Attributes: Acceleration, First Touch, Off the Ball, Finishing, Composure

The Advanced Forward's main duty is to hang on the shoulder of the last defender and break through the defensive line to get on the end of through balls. Possessing a good first touch and an innate ability to find space, he uses his acceleration to outpace the defence and get as close to goal before taking a shot. His secondary role is to chase down misplaced through balls or clearances from deep and turn them into scoring opportunities for his teammates.

- Player Role: Attack
- Run With Ball: Often
- Long Shots: Mixed
- Through Balls: Mixed
- Cross Ball: Mixed
- Cross From: Byline
- Hold Up Ball: No

Specialist Position Theories

In general, it is inadvisable to give specialist instructions until you have a well-gelled and world-class squad, the respect of your players plus enough managerial experience to design a tactical system around certain types of player and the confidence to change tactics as and when necessary. However, if you are a lower level manager lucky enough to possess a player whose technical skills far exceed those common to the division, you may be able to use similar settings to make him the key component of your team. It is also inadvisable to have too many specialist roles within one tactic, as then nobody will perform the water-carrying role, possession will be difficult to come by and play will become disjointed. If you are confident that you have the right players and experience, the following tactical instructions will enable you to get the best out of your specialist players.

Sweeper Keeper

Key Attributes: Aerial Ability, Command of Area, Handling, Reflexes, One on Ones, Communication, Eccentricity, Rushing Out, Acceleration, Pace, Anticipation, Positioning, Decisions, First Touch, Outfield Rating

Famous Examples: Fabian Barthez, Jorge Campos, Rene Higuita

The Sweeper Keeper aims to perform two roles: a standard keeper and an outfield sweeper. Operating behind a pushed up d-line, he will be assigned a higher mentality than the DCs, plus mixed creative freedom. Alongside standard goalkeeping duties, he will sweep up balls in front of and wide of the penalty

area and initiate counter-attacking moves with direct through balls to breaking players. He needs to be highly athletic and extremely comfortable with the ball at his feet.

- Player Role: Support
- Run With Ball: Rarely
- Long Shots: Rarely
- Through Balls: Mixed
- Cross Ball: Mixed
- Cross From: Deep
- Hold Up Ball: No
- Distribution: Long Kick (Defensive), Quick Throw (Standard), Defender Collect (Attacking)
- Distribute To: FC/TM (Defensive), ML/R (Standard), DL/R (Attacking)

Sweeper/Libero

Key Attributes: Jumping, Marking, Tackling, Positioning, Strength, Pace, Acceleration, Decisions, Concentration, Anticipation, Passing, Creativity, Flair, Dribbling, Technique

Famous Examples: Franz Beckenbauer, Franco Baresi

There are two different methods of employing this type of player, either as a pure Sweeper (DCd) or as a defender-playmaker in the classical Libero style (DCa).

Sweeper (DCd): The Sweeper operates on a lower mentality than the other DC/s in the defensive line. His exceptional athleticism and reading of the game enable him to cover defensive errors, sweep them up from a deep position and secure possession. This will often be the preferred option for those wishing to employ a high defensive line.

- Player Role: Defend
- Run With Ball: Rarely
- Long Shots: Rarely
- Through Balls: Mixed
- Cross Ball: Rarely
- Cross From: Deep
- Hold Up Ball: No

Libero (DCa): The Libero also sweeps behind the back line in the same manner as the Sweeper. The key difference is the Libero will roam forwards in support of the midfield when the team has possession and aim to be the extra body in defence. The attacking intent of the tactic, his assigned role and his mentality settings determine to what extent he will leave his defensive position. It is also useful to assign high Creative Freedom settings, and possibly a free role. The

Libero works better with a lower defensive line as this allows him to step into the space in front of the other DC/s.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Mixed/Mixed
- Long Shots: Mixed/Often
- Through Balls: Often/Often
- Cross Ball: Rarely/Rarely
- Cross From: Deep/Deep
- Hold Up Ball: No

Deep-Lying Playmaker

Key Attributes: Marking, Tackling, Positioning, Strength, Stamina, Passing, Technique, Creativity, First Touch, Decisions

Famous Examples: Andrea Pirlo, Cesc Fabregas, Juan Roman Riquelme

The Deep-Lying Playmaker operates in the space between his defence and midfield and aims to initiate attacking moves via pinpoint passes to players positioned higher up the pitch. A key element to setting up an effective Deep-Lying Playmaker is ensuring his passing instructions enable him to hit first time passes to any point on the pitch, thus requiring mixed-high mixed as minimum settings. Although creative freedom is not a necessity, especially in the Defend role, assigning a free role will ensure he drifts into space and makes himself available for the easy pass.

- Player Role: Defend/Support
- Run With Ball: Rarely/Mixed
- Long Shots: Rarely/Mixed
- Through Balls: Often/Often
- Cross Ball: Rarely/Mixed
- Cross From: Deep/Deep
- Hold Up Ball: Yes

Box-to-Box Midfielder

Key Attributes: Marking, Tackling, Positioning, Strength, Stamina, Passing, Technique, Acceleration, Long Shots, Decisions, Teamwork, Bravery, Determination, Work Rate

Famous Examples: Brian Robson, Roy Keane, Steven Gerrard, Redondo

Nowadays, the box-to-box midfielder is a threatened species to be found mainly in the British Isles. The precise tactical plans of modern-day football have no place for the non-stop dynamism of box-to-box midfielders, as seen by the problems continental European managers have in working out how to best

deploy Gerrard. In FM terms, it is best to allow the Box-to-Box Midfielder highish mentality and creative freedom alongside a free role to get him forward while assigning him a Support role ensures he won't neglect his defensive duties.

- Player Role: Support
- Run With Ball: Mixed
- Long Shots: Often
- Through Balls: Mixed
- Cross Ball: Mixed
- Cross From: Mixed
- Hold Up Ball: Yes

Advanced Playmaker

Key Attributes: Passing, Technique, Creativity, Flair, Long Shots, Strength, First Touch, Anticipation, Off the Ball, Decisions, Dribbling, Teamwork

Famous Examples: Maradona, Zinedine Zidane, Michel Platini, Dennis Bergkamp, Zico

The Advanced Playmaker can operate in the MCa, AMC or FCd position. Requiring very high creative freedom and free role instructions, the Advanced Playmaker aims to drop into the hole between the opposition's midfield and attack, making himself available for his teammates' passes and aiming to turn defence into attack in an instant. In a Support role he mainly restricts himself to making chances for others. In an Attack role his flair, creativity and tactical freedom make him a defensive nightmare. If playing him as an AMC or an FCd, it is worth giving him lower than normal mentality settings and fewer forward runs to encourage him to drop into space and look for passes into all areas of the pitch. Similar instructions without selecting playmaker options will have the player operating as a creative forward/midfielder.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Mixed/Often
- Long Shots: Often/Mixed
- Through Balls: Often/Often
- Cross Ball: Mixed/Often
- Cross From: Mixed/Byline
- Hold Up Ball: No

Target Man

Key Attributes: Strength, Stamina, Jumping, Heading, First Touch, Long Shots, Anticipation, Bravery, Decisions, Teamwork, Work Rate

Famous Examples: Jan Koller, Nikola Zigic, Emile Heskey, Peter Crouch

Although the examples give above are all internationals, the Target Man instruction is far more suited to less good sides than leading ones, as it restricts the variation of attacking play. However, a dominant Target Man can transform an average team into a good one by using his sheer physicality to disrupt the opposition's defence and open space for his strike partner and supporting midfielders. Although the quality of opposing defences means the Target Man won't score many goals at higher levels, thus restricting his role to Support, he should bag hatfuls in lower leagues and can thus be deployed in a more Attacking role. For a shorter but technically gifted Target Man who is happy playing with his back to goal (think Mark Hughes and the older Alan Shearer) employ the 'To Feet' supply instruction. For a tall, less technical player, use 'To Head'. For a tall, technical gifted player, then the 'Mixed' instruction is ideal.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Rarely/Rarely
- Long Shots: Often/Mixed
- Through Balls: Often/Often
- Cross Ball: Mixed/Mixed
- Cross From: Mixed/Mixed
- Hold Up Ball: Yes

Poacher

Key Attributes: Pace, Acceleration, First Touch, Off the Ball, Finishing, Composure, Flair, Dribbling, Decisions, Anticipation

Famous Examples: Michael Owen, Gabriel Batistuta, Filippo Inzaghi, Ruud van Nistelrooy

The goal poacher is rapidly being phased out at the top level as modern football begins to favour forwards who offer more to the team than just being able to score. However, outside the top level a quality poacher can guarantee enough goals to ensure the team is pushing for a good league position. Setting tactical instructions that force the poacher into playing as part of the team will not get the best out of him. Instead, play to his strengths by giving him a high mentality, a free role and creative freedom to make the best use of any space he finds and simple instructions that encourage him to look for final third opportunities. The 'Target Man/Run onto Ball' instruction combination can often get the best out of a Poacher. Restricting his passing options will also encourage him to make a beeline for goal over playing in a teammate.

- Player Role: Attack
- Run With Ball: Often
- Long Shots: Rarely
- Through Balls: Rarely
- Cross Ball: Mixed
- Cross From: Byline
- Hold Up Ball: No

Complete Forward

Key Attributes: Acceleration, First Touch, Off the Ball, Finishing, Composure, Flair, Dribbling, Decisions, Technique, Creativity, Long Shots, Strength, Heading, Stamina

Famous Examples: Pele, Johan Cruyff, Thierry Henry, Romario

Should a manager be lucky enough to work with a complete forward, he needs to allow him to make use of the full range of his ability. Whether operating behind an FCa as deep support or spearheading the strike force, the complete forward simply needs to be given his head. Assigning him a free role and plenty of creative freedom will ensure the opposing defence has a torrid time trying to cope with him, unsure of whether he'll run, shoot, play a through ball, drop deep, stay high and central or drift into the channels.

- Player Role: Support/Attack
- Run With Ball: Often/Often
- Long Shots: Often/Often
- Through Balls: Often/Often
- Cross Ball: Often/Often
- Cross From: Mixed/Byline
- Hold Up Ball: Yes

Opposition Instructions Theories

A thoughtful use of Opposition Instructions can turn a good tactic into a great one by targeting opponent strengths and weaknesses prior to every match. They can also be used to counter potential formation weaknesses in your own tactic.

Relation to Width/Pitch Size

As discussed earlier, a narrow width setting is the most suitable option for a wide pitch, as it ensures protection in central areas defensively whilst encouraging attacking players to fluidly move into space in the final third. However, this strategy leaves the wings open for exploitation. In order to minimise the opportunities for opposing wide players, use the 'Close Down Always' OI to target the most advanced wide players in your opponent's formation.

Relation to Player Strata/Channels

On a smaller to medium sized pitch when playing against a formation that roughly mirrors your own (i.e. 4-4-2 versus a 4-4-2 or 4-2-4) Player Strata/Channel Opposition Instructions are irrelevant. However, if the two formations don't match, then OI becomes an important tool to combat players operating in different channels and/or strata from those in your team.

The AMC Position

Players in the AMC position are usually very technically skilled, which means that the Closing Down OI is a very risky option. Firstly, there is the likelihood that a DC will leave the defensive line to perform the Closing Down instruction, thus opening a dangerous gap. Secondly, the technical skill of the AMC means there is a high possibility of his evading the closing down player and creating an opportunity. If you are not using a DMC, consider the 'Tight Mark Always' OI when playing against an AMC. A further option is to specific mark the AMC with your DMC or MCd.

The DMC Position

Players in the DMC position often act as fulcrums for play and thus see a lot of the ball. Failing to limit their influence may lead to poor possession and a frustrated team. Use the 'Close Down Always' OI to reduce the time the DMC has on the ball and force him into making more hurried passes than he would like. The 'Show onto Weaker Foot' OI can also force him to misplace passes and aid in attempts to quickly regain possession. A further option is to specific mark the DMC with your FCd, AMC or MCa.

The Lone Striker

How to handle a lone striker depends on how aggressively the opposition are playing. If he is being used in a defensive formation, use the 'Close Down Always' and 'Hard Tackle' OIs to try and limit his involvement in the match to picking up balls deep on the pitch. However, these will be poor OIs if the opposition is using an aggressive tactic and attacking through the midfield. In this case, the 'Tight Mark Always', 'Easy Tackle Always' and 'Show onto Weaker Foot' will be better OIs, as they will focus on stopping him getting easy shots off or winning free kicks in dangerous positions. A further option is to specific mark the lone striker with your one of your DCs.

Relation to Specific Players

The 'Show onto Foot' OI

This OI is an excellent tool for combating threats from out wide. The key thing to think about is the type of attacker/s you are playing against.

- *Tall & Slow Attackers:* OI wingers to go inside
- *Short & Quick Attackers:* OI wingers to go outside
- *Tall & Quick Attackers:* OI wingers onto wrong foot

The reasons for this are threefold. If the opposition attackers are slow, then the defenders should easily mop up a through ball. In contrast, if the player is tall and good in the air, then the defence will struggle to cope with good crosses. If the attackers are both good with the ball in the air and on the ground, then the best option is to make the winger struggle to get a good ball in by forcing him onto his weaker foot. Be aware, if the winger is technically good and has a major pace advantage over the defending full back, showing him onto his weaker foot inside may lead to the winger having a clear run on goal. The 'Show onto Weaker Foot' OI can also be very useful when trying to pressurise the back line and/or goalkeeper into making defensive errors.

The 'Tight/Loose Marking' OI

The 'Tight Marking' OI is best employed to target highly skilled opposing players in order to mark them out of the game. For such players, it is a better option than the 'Close Down Always' OI, as it immediately reduces space rather than waiting until the player gets the ball before doing so. If one only employs the 'Closing Down Always' OI, by the time a defender reaches a technical player he will have already had the opportunity to do something dangerous. However, the two OIs can be used very effectively in tandem.

The 'Loose Marking' OI is best employed as a method of channelling opponent's play through a player you don't consider to be much of a danger. By maintaining your marking pattern on other players, plus possibly adding a few 'Tight Mark Always' OIs, you can force the opposition into feeding balls to a specific player by assigning the 'Loose Marking Always' OI to him. The best players to target are those that are technically poor, meaning their passes and shots will be of little danger, very slow players who you can hurry into bad decisions by closing down or players lacking in strength, bravery and determination whom you can bully off the ball via the 'Hard Tackling' OI.

The 'Closing Down' OI

As mentioned previously, this is a vital OI for teams trying to protect their flanks on a wide pitch. It is also vital in terms of putting heavy pressure on entrenched, backs to the wall defences. In terms of targeting other players, use the 'Close Down Always' OI to target slow players of limited technical skill. The 'Close Down Rarely' OI should be employed against quick players who can use their pace to outflank heavy closing down instructions but don't have the technical skills to pose much threat in the final third. Closing Down Rarely forces these players to use technical rather than physical strengths to get past their man, which will generally be beyond them.

The 'Heavy/Easy Tackling' OI

The 'Heavy Tackling' OI is best employed on players who combine low physical presence with poor technique and lack of bravery. They will be intimidated by

the heavy challenges and, lacking the technical skills to play their way out of trouble, will easily give up possession. Although the 'Heavy Tackling OI' can be employed to target key opposition players in order to kick them out of the game, it is likely to give away many free kicks and attract cards when used against technically gifted players. The 'Easy Tackling' OI is often the best bet against players with great physical presence but limited technical ability, as it draws attacking fouls, or against players of great technical ability but limited physical, as it forces them to go past their man rather than allowing him to get past his man or draw a dangerous free kick via a piece of great technical play leading to a missed or badly-timed tackle.

Conclusion

TT&F is not intended to be the last word in tactics, rather the first. What we have tried to do is open the box of the tactical jigsaw puzzle and show you the size and shape of all the pieces. What we don't know is how the picture will look when you put all the pieces together. You might decide you like some of our descriptions and stick closely to our ideas. However, you might prefer to use this document as a rough guide that can help towards you stamping your personal authority on a tactical set, making it work in exactly the manner in which you envision your team playing.

We hope that people reading this document will be inspired to extend its frameworks and theories and contribute to a more sophisticated and intuitive method of visualising future virtual tactics. It would be great to see threads developing on the Ancelotti/Milan strategy, the concepts of Samba or Total football and the direct-ball Crazy Gang tactics of the 80s. Likewise, it would be interesting to hear about competing or improved theories that can offer different playing strategies. We'd love to have contributions and feedback, both positive and negative, in order to improve the guide for future iterations of FM. We certainly intend on opening some research threads on specific tactical styles and different tactical assumptions and hope as many of you as possible can contribute.

Our main hope is that the guide has succeeded in opening up the world of virtual tactics to our readers and encouraged them to drift away from the fruitless search for a super-tactic and towards a playing strategy that we believe brings considerably more enjoyment and immersion to the FM experience. We've been playing FM in roughly this manner for three years, moving from our original crude interpretations of the game to the level of sophistication we have reached here. We believe that with this guide we have finally been able to translate our ideas into layman's and football language and hope that in doing so we can bring the enjoyment levels and success we have when playing to a far wider audience.

Good luck and play well

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