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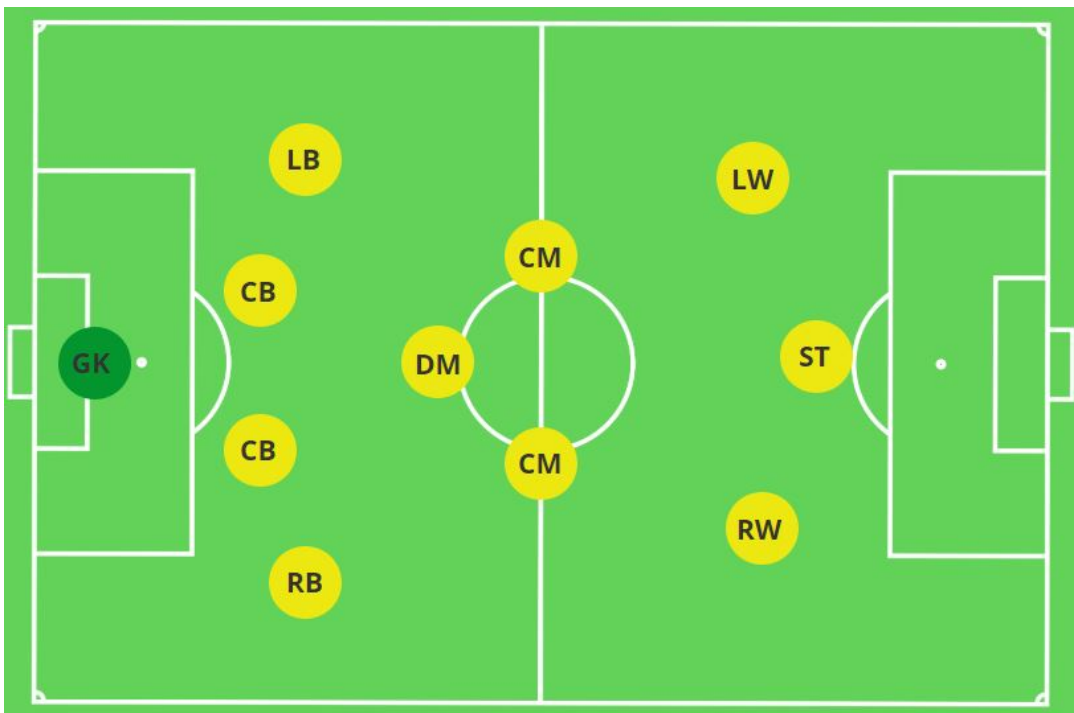
Best Formations for 11v11

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In the ever-changing world of football, dozens of formations are being used on a day to day basis around the globe. Choosing the right formation can affect the balance of the game, while the decision of which formation to play can also be instrumental in getting the best out of the players a manager has at their disposal. Here are some of the most common and best formations in the modern 11v11 game.

4-3-3



One of the most popular formations in the world today, 4-3-3 has become a favourite of some of the most celebrated attacking teams on the planet. FC Barcelona, Ajax and Real Madrid have all used the formation to tremendous success using a possession-based

style of football but 4-3-3 has more recently been used to achieve success whilst playing on the break, such as Croatia's star-studded World Cup 2018 team. The formation is fantastic for teaching youngsters how to play the game in a variety of different ways. It provides natural triangles for keeping possession, allows players to understand the use of space and playing wide and naturally provides moments for creativity and adaptability. It's also great for teaching fullbacks to get forward while most utilize the formation for its attacking potential.

The most obvious drawback to the 4-3-3 formation is the open space between the fullbacks and the wingers. Through playing in a front-three the wingers are often not typically ones who want to do a lot of defending, nor do managers often want them to do any defending at all. This is why it can be dangerous to use for teams that don't keep a lot of possession, because without the ball there is a lot of open space out wide. Only with very defensive-minded fullbacks and a top quality defensive midfielder who can cover a lot of ground (Croatia) could a team be very successful in a 4-3-3 without being possession-based. That being said, the perks and pros of the 4-3-3, such as its overwhelming attacking potential, can be invaluable to any team looking to play free-flowing football.

4-2-3-1



4-2-3-1 is one of the most popular formations around the world, particularly within the last decade and the slow decline of the 4-4-2. 4-2-3-1 provides a strong midfield base, allowing teams to flourish in both attack and defense. In attack, the front four can cause havoc, and in defense, the wingers often come back and do a job in defense. Successful teams that have played the formation in the past have deployed a counter-attacking

approach to the game, such as the current Borussia Dortmund side or Jose Mourinho's teams over the years.

This formation is very flexible and can be adapted into a more attacking 4-3-3 or more defensive 4-5-1 with ease. Not only is it perfect for counter attacking football as evidenced by Mourinho himself, but it allows for lightning-quick transitions in attack.

The one knock against the 4-2-3-1 that many managers have noted is that it is set up in a way where the attacking midfielder must be the focal point in attack. If the attacking midfielder goes missing Mesut Ozil style, the formation is no longer effective. It also produces a larger gap in between the wingers and the defenders than in a traditional 4-5-1 but if the defensive midfielders can cover a lot of ground, this becomes less of an issue. Overall, it's clear why the 4-2-3-1 is one of the most popular formations in the world. It can be used effectively as both an attacking or defensive formation depending on the manager's approach and provides players learning the game with clearly defined roles like few other formations can achieve.

4-1-4-1



In the Guardiola era, 4-1-4-1 has recently become one of the world's most popular formations. Essentially it takes a defensive looking 4-5-1 and makes it one of the most fluid attacking formations in existence. With the 4-1-4-1, managers can opt for a defensive approach with a flat 4-5-1 or can play like Guardiola's Manchester City and push the wingers so high that it becomes a 4-3-3 in attack. Because it is relatively new, it is one of the lesser studied formations and managers can benefit as a result thanks to its fluidity. The key to the formation's fluidity is in deciding which pair of players are going to be the main support system for the lone-striker and how the team will cope

with having only one defensive midfielder. If it's the two central attacking midfielders supporting the striker, the wingers need to be particularly disciplined in defense. As a result, most opt for the wingers to be the support system for the striker, like Manuel Pellegrini's West Ham. This then allows the central midfielders to drop deeper depending on the situation, eliminating the most commonly believed disadvantage of the formation, with having only 1 man in defensive midfield.

The formation is also very conducive to allowing fullbacks to play on the front-foot and has become a favourite for possession-based teams around the globe. That being said, teams who do not keep a lot of possession may struggle to cope during defensive transitions due to the second line of four having less clearly defined defensive roles. That can be a key reason for why youth teams might opt to avoid the formation in favour of a 4-2-3-1 or 4-3-3, which provide a similar attack-to-defense balance but have more clearly defined roles.

See more -> [4-3-3 vs. 4-1-4-1: Tactical Flexibility](#)

3-4-3



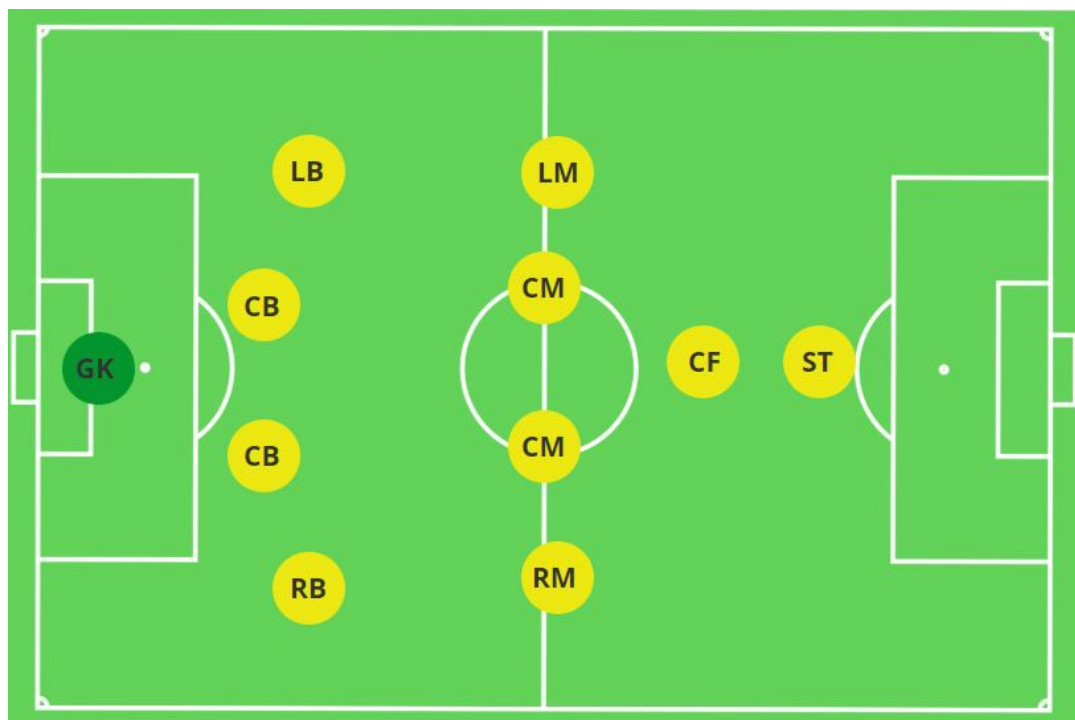
One of the best examples of a formation being used to completely transform a team came just two years ago when Antonio Conte's Chelsea broke records on their way to a Premier League title using the 3-4-3 formation. Since then, back-three's have been commonplace in England and the popularity of the 3-4-3 formation has arguably never been as fashionable as it is right now. The fantastic benefit to the 3-4-3 is that it creates attacking overloads in wide areas and provides free-flowing attacking play, while simultaneously transforming seamlessly into a 5-4-1 in defense. The overloads created

in wide areas not only make marking players nearly unmanageable, but also mean that wide areas are hard to exploit when out of possession as well. Simultaneously, central areas are well covered too with four players available to snuff out danger if the wing-backs get caught up the field.

One of the weakness of the 3-4-3 formation however is just how physically demanding it is. It's obvious why a player like Victor Moses, who has struggled throughout his Chelsea career, flourished under Antonio Conte. Moses could run up and down the line for days! Same with N'Golo Kante, another key cog in that historic Chelsea team. The formation requires that wing-backs in particular are very defensively disciplined, but not so defensive that they neglect their attacking responsibilities. The whole point of a 3-4-3 is to create attacking overloads through the wing-backs. In fact few other formations rely so heavily on one position. If the wing-backs aren't fit enough to get forward and back, the formation becomes less effective. Falling in line with that, if they get pushed too high, a back three can be vulnerable. This is especially true given that the right and left-sided centre-backs are usually players who have played their whole life in a back-four and wide area covering can sometimes be foreign to them. That being said, the formation is very well suited for attacking play and if the wing-backs are up for the job, defending can be made easy too.

See more -> [How Chelsea Won The 2016-17 Premier League Title Playing 3-4-2-1](#)

4-4-1-1 / 4-4-2



Although once regarded as the best way to both exploit and reduce space on the pitch, hardly any team in the world today plays with the once standard 4-4-2 formation. It used to be the most popular formation by quite some margin but now even teams like

Atletico Madrid and Claudio Ranieri's Leicester who have deployed the formation to successful extents in the past decade have opted for a more modern 4-4-1-1. One of the central reasons for this sudden shift was the fall of two-striker systems, as most managers began to opt for an extra man in midfield. Since then false-nine's and no-striker systems have almost become more popularized than the traditional 4-4-2. The 4-4-2 formation can still work today. For example, Javi Gracia's highly impressive Watford team play a variation of the 4-4-2 that looks a lot more like a 4-2-2-2, and have been extraordinarily successful this season. But although it can still be an effective formation, the 4-4-2 is a dying breed and is very different from what it once was.

If played correctly, there are few better formations for attacking on the break and shutting down the opposition in defense. Two banks of four ensures that the opposition's attack has to find their way past eight players (if the players are disciplined) in order to score. This is why with the right tactics and personnel, that the likes of Ranieri's Leicester and Simeone's Atletico have flourished with the formation. It's also obvious for all to see that on paper, space on the field in a traditional 4-4-2 is covered everywhere you look.

The 4-4-1-1 also suits a rugged style of play for clubs like Sean Dyche's Burnley or the aforementioned Watford, and can get the best out of players who lack a natural talent on the ball. As such it is a solid option for teams who do not keep large amounts of possession. However, with most modern teams deploying three midfielders in central areas, it is easy for teams in a 4-4-1-1/4-4-2 to get outnumbered in midfield. Another drawback of the formation is that it can easily become overly defensive depending on the manager's approach. As a result, managers have to carefully walk that tight rope in correctly balancing their formation. This was achieved to great effect by Didier Deschamps' World Cup winning France squad this past summer. His 4-4-1-1 often became a 4-3-3 in attack, with left-sided midfielder Blaise Matuidi shifting into central areas and Mbappe and Griezmann operating down the wings.

3-5-2



The 3-5-2 remains a popular option in Serie A and in women's football, despite hardly being used in most other big leagues around the world. Five in midfield can do a lot in helping dominate over the opposition, but with two strikers and a back-three it also doesn't become overly defensive as say a traditional 4-5-1 for example. Many managers today want to utilize a traditional two-striker system, but also want an extra man in midfield. This can make the 3-5-2 a managers dream; especially when you take into account its likely superiority when defending against a 4-4-2. However, in the rise of one-striker-systems and false-nine's, having three centre backs may be rendered pointless. This is especially true if the opposition's wingers are not getting forward.

As with other back-three systems, when the wing-backs push high up the field, space out wide can easily be exploited. A 4-4-2 provides a defensive base, particularly in wide areas that a back-three just cannot provide. It may also make the job of the fullbacks even more demanding than it already is. But when done right, the formation is very impressive and transitions seamlessly to a 5-4-1. Nuno Espirito Santo has used a 3-5-2 with Wolverhampton Wanderers to tremendous effect since their resurgence in the top flight, but he has some of the best ball-playing central midfielders and most durable fullbacks in the league; two essential characteristics to the success of the formation. The 3-5-2 may be complex for young teams to comprehend, but with the right personnel it has some incredible perks in both attack and defense, making it an extremely attractive option for any manager.

See more -> [3 Ways To Play 3-5-2](#)

4-4-2 DIAMOND



An increasingly popular option for Premier League managers, the 4-4-2 Diamond, also known as the 4-1-2-1-2, is re-inventing two-man striker systems. Sometimes the diamond formation can look a lot like a 4-2-3-1 or 4-3-3. This is because rarely does the number ten actually operate solely through the middle, while at least one striker is usually tasked with covering in wide areas. As a result when attacks start, the formation hardly ever seems to look like it was intended to. But in this modern era of tactical flexibility, the 4-4-2 diamond is offering managers with something different. This is mainly because roles are not clearly defined and most players do not have to be restricted to staying in their specific spot. Both central midfielders and strikers can play either narrow or wide, the number ten can roam free and the fullbacks can get forward or hold their position.

A downside to the diamond formation is that the lack of natural width and clearly defined roles may produce situations where gaps in space occur. For example, if the fullbacks decide to offer width, the central midfielders must be tactically astute in covering in behind. If the strikers offer width, the team may lack the necessary verve in central areas. Both of these problems are easily solvable but require the stamina and fitness of players to be on another level. This can lead to players over-exerting themselves and getting caught on the break. That being said, with the right players this formation could be one of the most effective and the reasons for the downfall of two-striker systems do not necessarily apply to the 4-1-2-1-2. There is plenty of cover in central areas, even if the cover is unorthodox, while a team lacking natural wingers or attack-minded wide players could really benefit from using the formation.

OTHER TIPS

1. PLAY TO YOUR PLAYERS' STRENGTHS

Any formation should always come secondary to the players that a manager has at their disposal. A 4-3-3 will never be effective without attack-minded wingers, while a 4-1-4-1 will never work if the defensive midfielder can't cover any ground. Forcing players into positions that they are uncomfortable with will only stunt their development and cause them to lose confidence in their abilities. As a result, it is imperative that a manager finds a formation that will produce the best outcome for the majority of players they have in their squad.

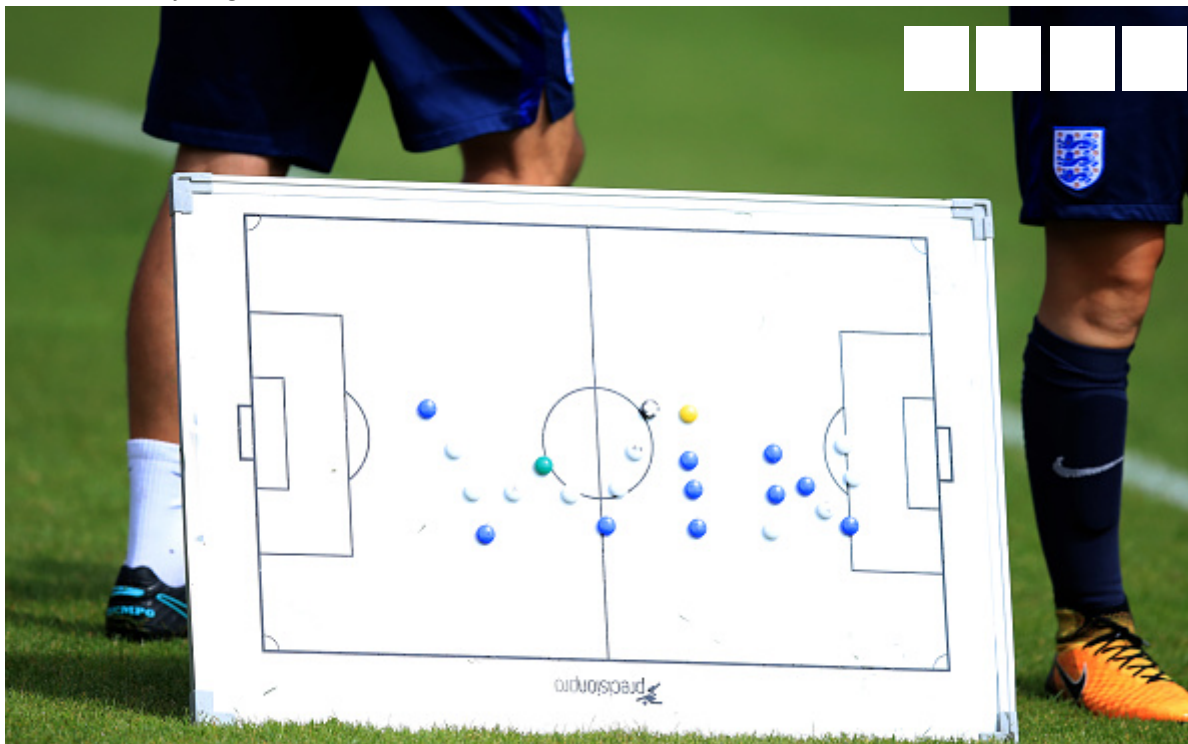
2. ROTATE YOUR PLAYERS

You might think you've found the best position for a player, but that doesn't mean they should be restricted to playing there all season long. Even defenders, a position that so few young players actually want to play, should be rotated around even if it's just across all three positions in a back three. If you have a player who you think would make for an excellent striker but can't ever score goals, why not try them in central midfield?

Understand that many of the elements that make a good defender, also help to make a good midfielder or a good striker. Very few players play the same position their entire life and equally few at the 11v11 game play the position they started with in the early days of their playing careers. Manchester City goalkeeper Ederson Moraes was a midfielder just years before going pro with Benfica, Eric Dier was a left-back for Sporting CP before finding his calling as a defensive midfielder at Spurs and Arsenal centre back Calum Chambers was a right winger just two seasons prior to making his move to the Gunners from Southampton. These are just a few examples of why players should never be restricted to just one position and should learn the effective ways to play the game in as many different positions as possible.

3. DON'T OVER-COMPLICATE THINGS

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Just like it's imperative to know your players' strengths and weaknesses, it's also imperative to simplify things for them. Formations with clearly defined roles such as the 4-2-3-1 can help make the job of players that much easier. If too much is being asked of a player, they won't succeed. This is why positions exist in the first place, to simplify things. Wing-backs can't also be strikers and defensive midfielders. If they were, the game would be too complicated. Managers have to find ways to simplify things for their players as best as they can and not over-complicating a player's role so much. Players should understand that they are either primarily an attacking player, a defensive player or a player (such as a centre-mid or wing-back) who *needs* to do both. This is the only way that players will succeed. They need to know their role and they need to feel at ease and confident in their ability to succeed in that role.

4. DON'T BE STUBBORN

Nothing is worse than a manager who sticks by a formation even when it's going to shame. One of the best things a manager can do is be tactically flexible depending on the opposition. As a result, players should be comfortable in at least two or three different formations. They should be given that time to practice different formations in practices, pre-season games and even across the season. You might think a 4-2-3-1 formation suits the players you have in your lineup, and then discover that playing a 4-4-2 Diamond produces even better results. It's important for managers to be flexible, adaptable and not resort to a single formation all season-long; especially when that formation is no longer working.

So there it is, *The Mastermind*'s introduction to formations suited to the 11v11 game. Although a team's personnel should always be taken into consideration before choosing a formation, these formations should give managers flexibility and allow teams with a lot of different options to play effective football all season long and chop and change their team depending on the situation, opposition or circumstance. Thanks for reading and be sure to check out the best formations for **9v9** and **7v7**. Thanks for reading and see you soon.

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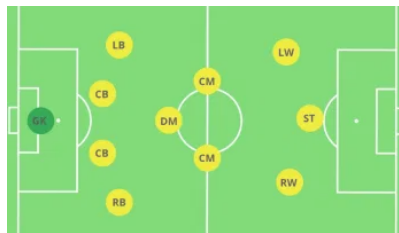
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