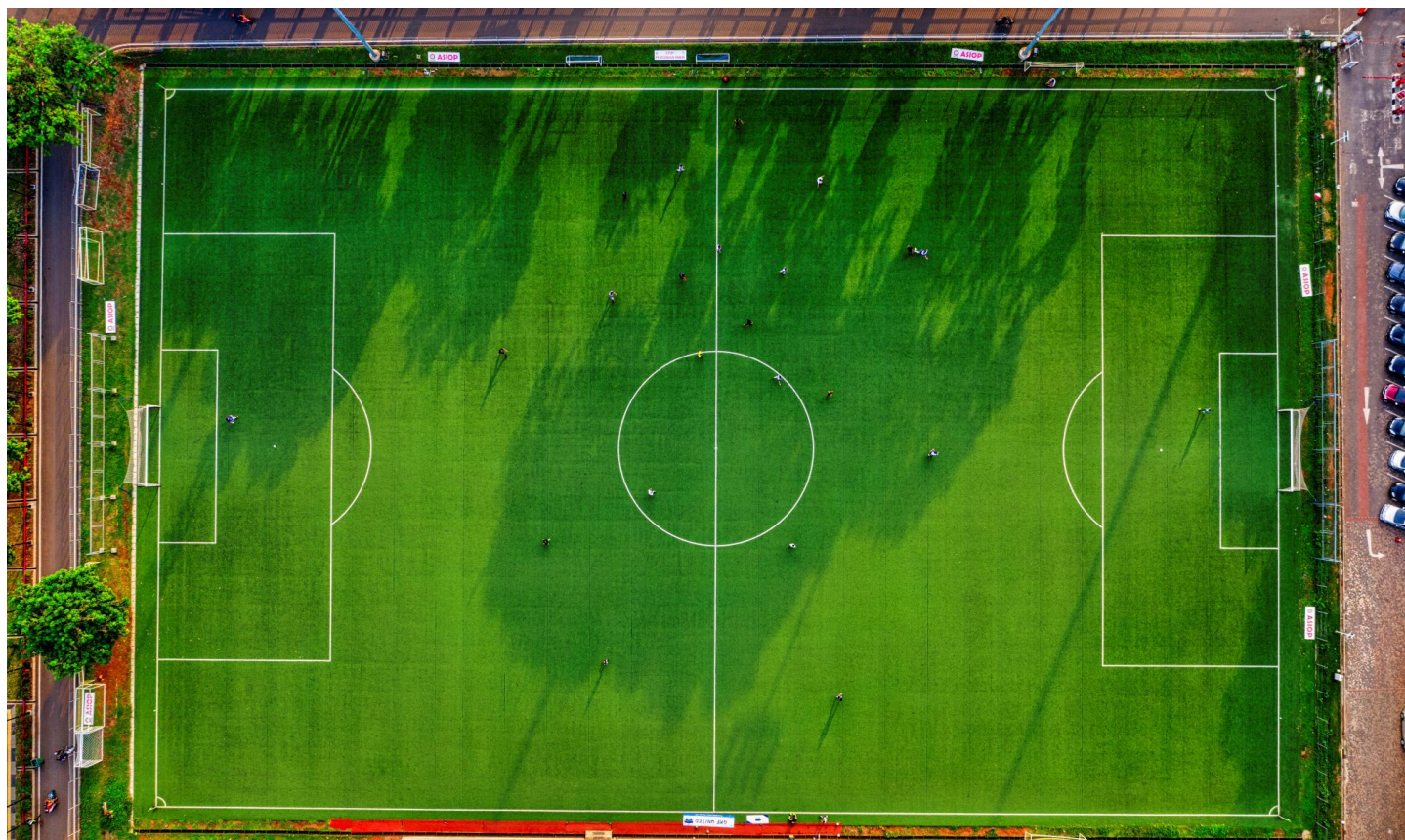




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## Best Formations for 9v9 (Part 2)

september 9, 2019 by rhys desmond, posted in coaching, formations, most recent, world football



Along with the growing popularity of the 9v9 game in youth soccer, is a growing popularity of the examination of different 9v9 formations. We pretty much covered it in [Best Formations for 9v9 \(part 1\)](#), but there are so many formations out there, so might as well explore some of the other best options in this part 2 of Best Formations for 9v9. Enjoy!

## 3-4-1



In an era of one striker systems, coaches and managers may look to expand upon the popular 2-3-1 formation in 7v7 and shift into a 3-4-1 by the time 9v9 rolls around. This is one of the most popular 9v9 formations out there and like the 11v11 formation 4-4-2, it provides for a well-balanced team with cover in all the right areas. Although it might not be the most expansive system of play, 3-4-1 can be a great option for teams looking to have a solid midfield base and teach concepts applicable to future formations like the 4-4-2 and 4-5-1.

#### ADAPTABLE FORMATIONS FOR 11v11

- 4-4-2
- 4-5-1
- 3-4-3

#### PLAYERS REQUIRED

- Wingers who like to stay wide and don't get drawn to the middle or collapse on the defenders. Ideally skillful and fast wingers will work best as striker can easily become isolated if not.
- A centre forward who can hold the line all on their own.
- Midfielders who are good in possession and can make frequent vertical runs.

#### PROS

- Defensive-minded and set up to shut down space in many areas of the field.

- Well balanced and provides two central midfielders, giving more opportunities to control the game in a key area of the field.
- Rigid, well structured and easily organized
- Easily adaptable into a 3-2-3 or 3-1-3-1 in attack with the right players
- Provides a solid defensive 3 as a base with central midfielders closing down potential space in the middle.
- Provides a natural formula for counter-attacking as the midfield four can sit in and attack at the right moments.

### CONS

- The gap between the midfield four and centre forward can cause the forward to become isolated at times.
- Can become overly-defensive, particularly if wingers offer very little in attack.
- Offers limited flexibility in attack if team shape does not change.

## 2-1-4-1



Everyone in world football these days wants to play like Pep Guardiola. His favourite formation? The **4-1-4-1**. For teams looking to play a high pressing, high possession game, utilizing central midfielders as key play-makers, the 2-1-4-1 is a fantastic formation to use. This is a very attacking formation, so utilizing the 2-1-4-1 generally requires that a team keep a lot of possession, rather than say the tactic of 'parking the bus' which might be better suited for just about any other formation in existence. If



possession, playing out from the back and pressing are some of your team's key principles though, this formation offers loads of fluidity and should be one of the first that you consider.

#### ADAPTABLE FORMATIONS FOR 11v11

- 4-1-4-1
- 3-1-4-2
- 4-3-3

#### PLAYERS REQUIRED

- Wingers who can also act like wing-backs/full-backs and cover a lot of ground, particularly in racing back to cover wide areas in defense.
- A centre forward who can play with their back to goal and link up well with other players.
- A midfield triangle that can control the tempo of the game and keep possession, shifting play from left to right with ease.
- Two solid defenders who are capable of covering ground, keeping possession and playing out from the back so that their defensive responsibilities are kept to a minimum.

#### PROS

- Attack-minded and fluid in possession of the ball.
- Tactically flexible in many different ways (ex: DM dropping in to create 3-2-3 or wingers dropping one at a time to create 3-1-3-1)
- Midfield triangle can essentially dominate over any other 9v9 formation as very few other teams will have a midfield three.
- Loads of triangles and diamonds so this provides a natural formula for playing out from the back, pressing and progressive possession.
- Centre-forward should never become isolated.
- Can become a 3-1-3-1 if near-side winger tracks back, or 4-1-2-1 in defense if needing to close out a lead.

#### CONS

- Unbalanced, particularly in defending wide areas as a massive gap can be created. The onus on the wingers to track back may be too much.
- Requires more technical and tactical preparation than many other formations, however this can also be a pro because then players are learning complex footballing topics at a young age.
- Against formations like 3-2-3 and 2-3-3, there will be a lot of open space out wide that the defenders will not be able to cover well enough.
- May be vulnerable to quick counter attacks, particularly out wide.

## 3-3-1-1

For teams looking to employ a defensive approach, shut down space and defend in a rigid, organized fashion, this formation might be an option. The 3-3-1-1 takes the common 3-3-2 system and shifts it into a one-striker formation by dropping one of the forwards into an attacking midfield role, while potentially pushing the wingers deeper in front of the fullbacks. This formation can get very defensive, so it is important to either purposefully play this system with defensive aptitude being the end goal, or to employ attack-minded wingers so that it can shift into a 3-1-3-1 in attack.

### ADAPTABLE FORMATIONS FOR 11v11

- 4-4-1-1
- 4-3-1-2
- 3-5-1-1
- 3-4-2-1

### PLAYERS REQUIRED

- Wide midfielders who have attacking flair, talent and do not collapse on the fullbacks.
- Attacking midfielder (number 10) who can control the game, but also balance the positioning of the defensive midfield.
- Defensive minded players in general, especially with regards to the two blocks of three.

### PROS

- Defensive-minded, but potentially dangerous on the counter-attack
- Two banks of three can provide balance, cover, rigidness and organization when defending.
- Allows for compactness in defending and shuts down space both in the middle and out wide.

### CONS

- Offers very little in attack unless attacking shape changes.
- Overly reliant on the number 10 to stay central and get on the ball as much as possible. If they come wide, a massive hole is left in the middle.
- Becomes very easy for the wide midfielders to crowd on top of the fullbacks, essentially leading to two players playing the same position.

## **2-4-2 DIAMOND**

If your team lacks natural wide players, the 2-4-2 Diamond may be the route to go down. Although it offers very little width, everything can go through central areas and hypothetically, the space on the 9v9 field should already be low enough that this might not be too big of an issue. A similar lack of width can occur in many 9v9 formations and like the 3-2-3, the right and left central midfielders may be crucial in covering that potential gap. What it lacks in width, it certainly makes up for in attacking prowess. Two

strikers, an attacking midfielder and two other central midfielders should be enough to fuel a flamboyant attack. This also is a relatively unused formation, so you may be able to surprise some teams with a rigid and organized structure and get in behind in fairly unique ways.

#### ADAPTABLE FORMATIONS FOR 11v11

- 4-4-2 Diamond
- 3-1-4-2 / 3-5-2

#### PLAYERS REQUIRED

- Positionally sound central midfielders or ones who are at least mobile and capable of covering a lot of ground, shifting both horizontally and vertically.
- Attacking midfielder (number 10) who can control the game, but also balance the positioning of the defensive midfield.
- Lack of wide players, otherwise why not play a more traditional 2-4-2?

#### PROS

- Attacking midfielder can stop the other team's pivot from playing out from the back.
- Loads of cover in central areas, even if centre-mid's get caught wide.
- Diamonds in central areas for keeping possession and creating chances.
- Could be suited to either a possession-based or direct (long-ball) approach, as higher up the field lies three potential attacking options at all times.
- Many teams will be unprepared to know how to defend against this formation.

#### CONS

- Lack of natural cover in wide areas.
- Central midfielders required to cover a lot of ground, particularly in shifting horizontally to cover the wide areas.
- May be too tactically complex for youth players to understand.

## **4-2-2**



Back four systems are used in the 9v9 game more often than someone new to the 9v9 scene might expect. The **4-3-1** is undoubtedly one of the most popular formations at the 9v9 level, but teams looking for a different approach to four at the back might look to the less common 4-2-2. With two centre backs, two central midfielders and two strikers, the middle of the field should be pretty much covered. Meanwhile each of these positional pairs can work together to cover the wide areas if needed. The fullbacks could also push high to create a 2-4-2 or 3-3-2 in attack. The 4-2-2 certainly offers a lot of positional fluidity and could in time become an increasingly popular option for teams looking to play with four at the back.

#### ADAPTABLE FORMATIONS FOR 11v11

- 4-4-2
- 4-3-3
- 5-3-2

#### PLAYERS REQUIRED

- Positionally sound central midfielders or ones who are at least mobile and capable of covering a lot of ground, shifting both horizontally and vertically.
- Lack of wide players, otherwise why not push the fullbacks forward and play 2-4-2?
- Defensive minded players, from back to front. Forwards will be required to do a lot of pressing to try and keep possession in the opposition's end.
- Fullbacks who understand how to time their runs forward and when to join the attack.

## PROS

- Plenty of cover in central areas.
- Solid defensive base and cover.
- More suited to a long-ball approach, but possession-based play could be introduced with the fluidity of the team shape in attack if fullbacks create a 2-4-2 or 3-3-2.

## CONS

- Lack of natural cover in wide areas.
- Central midfielders required to cover a lot of ground, particularly in shifting horizontally to cover the wide areas.
- If central midfielders get caught too wide, a massive hole will be left in the middle of the field.

# CONCLUSION

9v9 soccer is one of the most interesting from a coaching perspective and usually comes at the height of learning processes for youth and children, as they begin to understand more complex, tactical subjects. This guide should provide coaches, managers and players with a brief understanding of some of the best 9v9 formations, that hadn't already been discussed in [Best Formations for 9v9](#). Although a team's personnel should always be taken into consideration before choosing a formation, these five formations should allow teams with a multitude 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 follow *The Mastermind Coaching* on Twitter [@coachingtms](#) for more updates and articles like this. See you next time!

For part 1 of [Best Formations for 9v9 go here](#).

[For the best 11v11 formations go here.](#)

[For the best 7v7 formations go here.](#)

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