

LEARN TO PLAY DEFENSE AGAINST A 1:3:4:3-FORMATION

As a follow-up to one of the previous articles we will look at what a coach can do if his own team plays in a 1:4:3:3 formation and the opposing team switches from a 1:4:3:3 formation during the game to a 1:3:4:3. In the previous article we took a closer look at the offense, this time we will look at the defense.

When talking about the various team formations/organizations, the past World Cup was a great opportunity to see some great examples of these variations. France vs. Switzerland is one example, in which France only played with one forward (Henry). What to do as the opposing team? How many defenders will you use and how do you take on the “attacking” midfielders of the French? Or take for example The Netherlands vs. Serbia & Montenegro at the same WC. Serbia played with two forwards and the Netherlands played 1v1 in the back. That meant that three Dutch midfielders had to play against two Serbian midfielders. You can look at this from both sides. How does Serbia deal with this possible threat and how does the Netherlands take advantage of these opportunities? Team organizations/formations opposite of each other can lead to opportunities and threats. As the coach you want to deal with those circumstances as well as possible; take advantage of the opportunities and neutralize all possible threats.

IMPROVE THE DEFENSIVE PLAY

The main aim in playing defense is to disrupt the build-up and to prevent goals. A coach wants to make players aware of the opportunities and the threats that can occur. A threat could be that three of your midfielders are facing four of the opposing midfielders. A possible solution would be that one of the defenders moves forward. But that would mean that the three remaining defenders would have to play 1v1. It also offers the opposing team a better chance to disrupt your own build-up, since you are playing three defenders

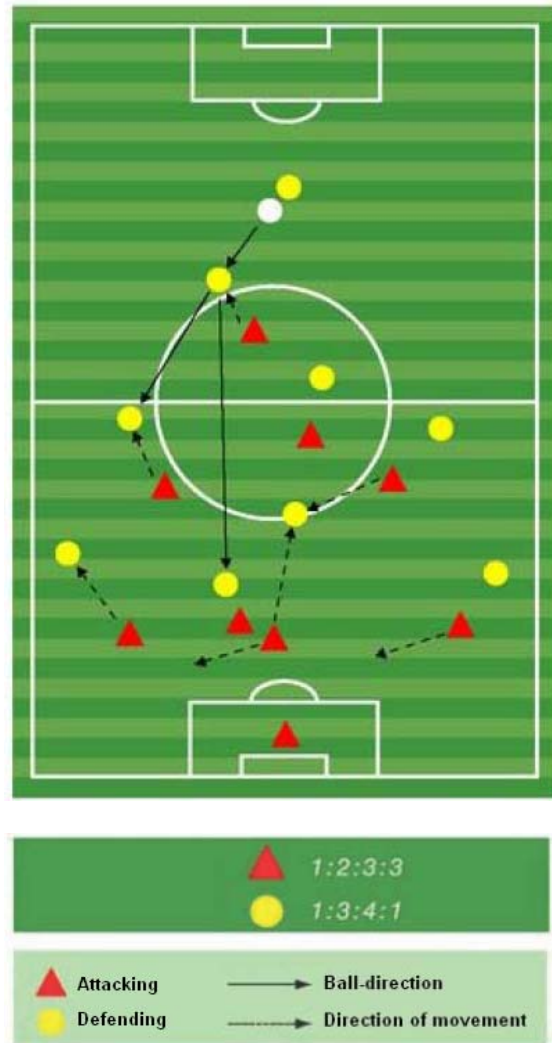
against three forwards. This offers the other team the opportunity to immediately put pressure on our defenders, after which our team has to play the long ball. The opponent then can't take advantage of the extra man situation in midfield anymore. If the team has defenders that are strong in the air then this surely is an option. This example shows you that a certain choice of playing style goes hand in hand with the quality of your players.



WORKING TOGETHER

The coach organizes the practice in such a way that the players are confronted with the above mentioned threats and opportunities. They experience what it is like to play against a 1:3:4:3 formation and they can practice possible solutions. As an example we will offer a practice exercise that is focused on improving the co-operation between the defenders and midfielders after a long pass from the goalkeeper of the opposing team (see drawing). In this exercise the coach focuses on:

- The forward. This player is responsible that the defender of the opposing team can't receive the ball. Or he offers so much pressure on the defender that this player is forced to play the long ball. If the defender still decides to pass the ball to a midfielder then the pressure, applied by the attacker, guarantees an inaccurate pass.
- The free player. The moment the long pass is given, this player shall give support behind his defenders. If one of the midfielders of the other team gets the ball then this one defender must restore the balance. He must move forward to the midfield or one of his defenders moves up to midfield, after which the "free man" takes over the coverage of the one opponent whose direct opponent moved to the midfield.
- The midfielder. If the outside midfielders "squeeze" well towards the side where the ball is then there is very little or no "space" for the central midfielders of the opposing team. This means that the "free man" doesn't have to cover any midfielder and can assist his teammates where necessary.
- The opponent. The goalkeeper or a defender plays the long ball to one of the forwards. If the pressure applied by one of the forwards is insufficient then one can try to pass the ball to one of the midfielders.



METHODICAL STEPS

The coach can improve the difficulty by coaching the opposition to outplay the 2v1 situation in the back: goalkeeper and defender of the opposition against one forward. The coach can also indicate that a high ball-circulation (including the switch pass from one wing to the other wing) complicates the marking and support for the other team. Of course a coach can come up with other solutions to take advantage of opportunities or to neutralize certain threats. You will have to trust that your creativity and expertise as a coach will help you come up with some ideas to solve these issues.