

## The 3-5-2 formation

This is a great formation to play if you have the right type of players. It can be a fantastic system to pass the ball in, as it lends to forming triangles all over the pitch.

A number of professional teams have adopted this way of playing over the years, with Glenn Hoddle being a great advocate of this formation in his time as Swindon and Chelsea manager.

The use of a sweeper and wing backs allows the team to really spread out and make the pitch big when in possession of the ball. This makes it very difficult to play against if you have players who are comfortable on the ball and can pass it well.

The only real weakness of this set-up is that you can get exposed in advanced wide areas, behind your wing backs, especially when your wing backs start to tire as they have a huge workload in this system.

### **3-5-2 attacking**

- This is essentially a passing formation.
- The keeper will always look to roll the ball out to either the sweeper or one of the centre backs to start the attack.
- Once the sweeper has possession of the ball the two centre backs will spread to give him/her two options.
- Your sitting midfielder will come short for the ball, giving your sweeper another option.
- Your sitting midfielder is the 'prober'. He/she must be a good passer and possess a good first touch, as the play will be going through him/her the majority of the time.
- When the sitting midfielder is allowed to turn he/she will have a number of passes available.
- The two more attacking central midfielders will be giving depth to the shape by advancing behind the opposition's midfield.
- If playing against the standard 4-4-2 formation, this will give you a number of advantages. First of all, you will outnumber them in the middle of the park and therefore, someone will have to engage the sitting midfielder at some stage. This will lead to one of your attacking midfielders being free and it is this situation that you wish to create.
- When you can move the ball to your spare midfielder, he/she will be able to run at the back four and either look to shoot or slide a ball through to one of your forwards.
- Your wing backs are crucial in this formation and they need a lot of discipline and intelligence when playing in this position.
- If your sitting midfielder is on the ball and the opposition have decided to play 'tight' in midfield and to bring their wide men in to combat your three central midfielders, then the wing backs are the favoured ball.
- If the ball is played out to the right wing back then you do not expect the left wing back to be bombing down the left side as this will leave you exposed. The left wing back will take up a supporting position by staying wide and watching as play develops.

- You will have two attacking midfielders and two forwards who are capable of making the box for any crosses, so it is important for the wing backs to conserve their energy by simply taking up a position so that, if a cross is over hit, they are in the vicinity to pressure the ball or even retain possession.
- If the right wing back does not make any headway down his/her side then you can switch play effectively if the left wing back is in a position to receive the ball wide.
- You expect your forwards to play as a pair. This means one of them dropping short to help with the build-up play while the other may offer a run in behind. Always alternating these runs will make life hard for the opposition and will give your midfielders plenty of options.
- Encourage two- and three-touch play in this system. This will get the players into a rhythm that will create the habit of moving and creating space for themselves and their teammates.

When your players know that the centre midfielder is looking to pass in two touches they will make sure they are available. The same goes for the sweeper. If everyone knows that he/she is going to have two/three touches they will provide the angles and movement necessary to make this happen.

### **3-5-2 defending**

- When defending in this formation it is essential to get the balance right with the wing backs.
- When attacking down one side of the pitch, the wing back on the opposite side should not be fully committed to getting in the box but should be hanging wide and anticipating where the ball may go.
- It is as if he/she is playing as an advanced full back, which means that you are essentially playing with a back four. To get this balance right is fundamental to the defensive side of this set-up.
- To use all the advantages of having extra players in central midfield areas, and to have the advantages of wide players, you must be solid at the back otherwise you will be exposed.
- The uncertainty of playing with three at the back is often what puts coaches off playing this way.
- If you can get the wing backs playing in a disciplined fashion then you will be always attacking and defending in numbers.
- If play breaks down and one of your wing backs cannot make up the ground in time to defend, one of the centre backs will fill-in for them as a defensive full back. The other wing back will also play as a full back, while the sweeper becomes one of two centre backs.
- When playing against the standard 4-4-2 formation your sitting midfielder will push up onto one of the opposition's centre midfielders.
- One of your other central midfielders will sit back and pick up the opposition's other central midfielder.

- This will leave you with a spare midfielder who will look to shut the opposition's full back down.
- With the wing backs dropping off, it is one of the midfielders' job to shut an advancing full back down. The two attacking midfielders will alternate this job depending on which full back has the ball. Always show the full back down the line as he/she will have no options to pass to. The opposing wide player will be marked by your wing back and your defenders will be picking up the forwards.
- Up front, you expect your forwards to shut the central defenders down and put them under pressure. Their job is made easier by the assistance of the spare midfielder shutting down the full backs.
- Overall, this can be a very effective style of play if you possess the right players and they are coached the right way to defend and attack in this system.