

The 4-2-4 formation

This formation is very rarely used in the professional game unless it is adopted in the final few minutes of a game when searching for a goal. However, at grassroots level this can be a very effective formation to use as the defenders you will be playing against will find it hard to cope with the four up front.

The very nature of this set-up suggests a direct approach. With four front players, the focus is to get the ball up to them as quickly as possible to put pressure on the opposition's back four. The idea of this very attacking formation is to force mistakes from the defenders and to pressurise the goal as much as possible.

In the professional game it is rarely used as it leads to being overrun in midfield and good defenders can cope in one-v-one situations. At grassroots level it can prove to be a very effective way of playing as the defenders are not as adept at dealing with one-v-one situations and they tend not to take advantage of the weakened midfield.

4-2-4 attacking

- When attacking with this system, it is essential that the two centre forwards give depth.
- One forward will come short to feet, while the other looks for the long ball over the top into space.
- Both wide men will be advanced and can try to find a position between the opposing wide midfielder and full back. The idea is to make it difficult for the full back to mark you as he/she doesn't want to be dragged too far away from their centre back. At the same time the opposing wide midfielder doesn't want to be forced all the way back to his/her defensive line as it will result in both midfielder and full back doing the same job and marking the same player.
- Both central midfielders will match up in midfield against the opposition's two central midfielders. Their job will be to pick up any second balls from the attackers and to support the forwards if they manage to bring the ball down.
- Your defenders will be looking to pass up to the four front players as quickly as possible.
- It will be very difficult to play through the midfield due to the lack of numbers in that section of the pitch. However, it is always worth passing into the centre of midfield if it drags the opposition's midfielder out of position and consequently makes more space for the front men to get hold of the ball. Your central midfielder player will simply pass it back to the defender for him/her to then play up to the front man.
- If your central midfielders are fit enough it can be worth one of them gambling, occasionally, to see if they can get the wrong side of their marker. They will not be picked up by the opposition's back four because they are all occupied with the front players.
- This is a good tactic to use, especially if you have a tall striker who wins flick-ons on a regular basis. This will give the central midfielder the confidence to make that run without fear of being caught out if the header is not won.
- Tricky and skilful wide men are handy in this system as they will be one-on-one with their markers all the time and, if they have the measure of their marker, they can be devastating in this position. Regular crosses into the box are difficult to deal with at any level and will result in goals.

4-2-4 defending

- You will have to be very disciplined and astute at the back when adopting this tactic as you will be put under pressure, especially on the wings.
- Fit full-backs are ideal for this system as they can get out to the wide men and make up for the lack of orthodox wide midfielders that this formation lacks.
- When one of your central midfielders has gambled and the play has broken down it still leaves you with five players to get past before they can get at your goal.
- When you have been caught on the break in this fashion then it will require your back four to drop off and remain compact and tight.
- The opposition's wide midfielders are not so important in this instance and it is important that your full backs do not venture too far away from the centre backs as you do not want to create any holes for the opposition to exploit.
- Your remaining central midfielder will try to stall the advance of the attack by staying central and trying to force the play wide.
- All four front players will be pushed onto the back four when the opposition's keeper has the ball in his/her hands. This will force the keeper to go long.
- If the opposition's keeper is confident enough to try and throw the ball out to the wide men then you will expect your wide forward to back track and put some pressure on the player.
- It is essential your centre backs are comfortable in the air as they will be having a lot of long balls to deal with.
- As the ball goes long, your two central midfielders will be dropping back towards the back four so that any second balls from the centre backs are within distance for them to make a challenge.
- Overall, this tactic is used when chasing a game and looking for a goal. However, this way of playing can be used from the start of the game and can be very effective at grassroots level as it puts a lot of pressure on the opposition's back four which, more often than not, will result in chances and goals.