FORMATIONS-MINI SOCCER

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Mini soccer formations

The question of what formation to use is one that every youth coach asks themselves at some point and I get at least one email a day asking me to recommend the "best" formation to use for various age groups.

Jargon Buster – formation

A formation is the way players are distributed on the pitch. For example, three defenders, two midfielders and one attacker is a common seven-a-side formation.

To those of you searching for the best formation, I have to say that you are engaged on a fruitless task: there is no such thing.

Coaches of older youth teams really need to consider the relative strengths of their players, the strength of the opposition and their own objectives for the match before they can decide on a formation.

But 95% of teams end up using one of the handful of standard formations and we'll look at two of these in more detail later.

Coaches of younger children, (from four years old up to about six or seven), need to ask themselves a different question: do they really need to use a formation at all? It might be best to allow their players the freedom of the pitch instead.

"But," I hear you say. "If I don't tell them where to play, they will all crowd around the ball. And we won't have any defenders... every player wants to score a goal!"

But in practice, your whole team will be defenders and attackers. As soon as an opposition player gets the ball he or she will be surrounded by your players and as soon as one of your players gets the ball the "swarm" will try to force the ball upfield.

So at the younger age groups, allowing your players to swarm around the ball can be a very effective "formation". Not one, perhaps, that will make other coaches admire your tactical expertise and your parents might raise their eyebrows but it works. Try it and see!

When children get a bit older you can begin to think about more traditional formations – one of the most common is 3-2-1.

Jargon Buster – 3-2-1

3-2-1 was a 1970s game show! But it is also a seven-a-side mini soccer formation where the players line up as three defenders, two midfield players and one attacker.

This is a good, safe formation. Three defenders form a solid base to the team and also provide width in attack if the two outside defenders are given the freedom to make runs up the wings.

One or both of the outside defenders can also move into midfield and take the place of any midfielders who have joined an attack.

The major disadvantage to this formation is the sole attacker. If midfielders do not move up quickly, the attacker can become isolated and ineffective.

For this reason it may not be suitable for very young teams, and 2-2-2 usually works better until players understand the need to move forward quickly to support the attacker.

A more imaginative formation is 2-1-2-1. You have one just in front of two defenders. In front of this player are two midfielders who provide close support to the single attacker.

This formation naturally creates a good team shape. There will always be several diamonds/triangles even if one or two players move completely out of position – a common occurrence with young players.

Unfortunately, the relatively small size of a mini soccer pitch tends to compress 2-1-2-1 to 3-3 unless the players are constantly checking their positions relative to one another.

As you can see, there are advantages and disadvantages to these (and every other) formation. The only way to find out which is the best one for your team is to try them all and see which one works best.

But don't be in a rush to mould your players into a traditional formation. As I have already mentioned, allowing your players to swarm around the ball is very effective in the younger age groups and it won't be long before some of your players naturally gravitate to defensive or attacking positions. In fact, you may find that your team develops it's own formation without any input from you at all!

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