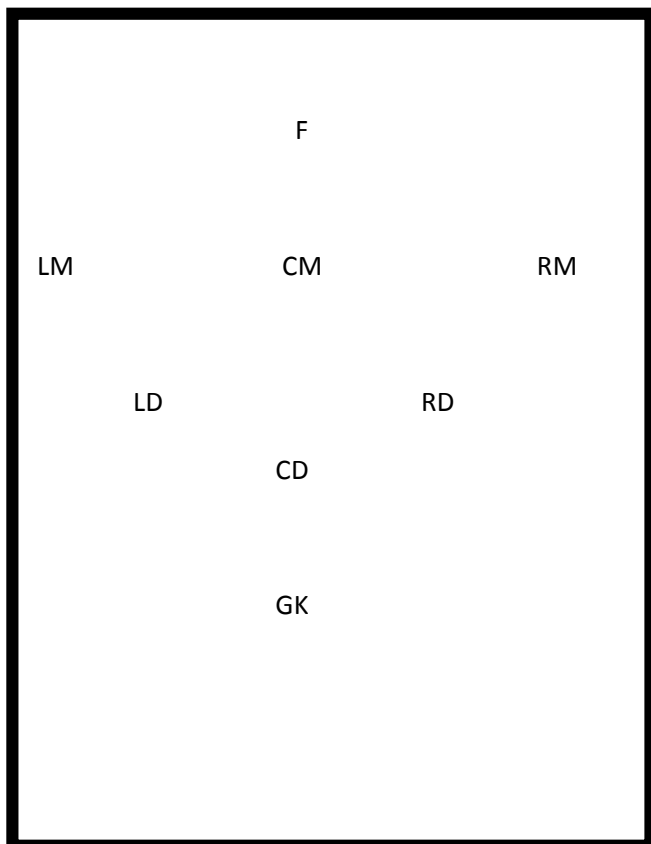


BFSC U11-U12 Systems of Play: 1-3-3-1

As teams at these age groups play with a goalkeeper and seven field players, coaches need to consider which tactical system or systems suit their players and style of play. This link provides an overview of the 1-3-3-1, one of the most common systems of play.

3-3-1



Key Considerations

This system deploys a goalkeeper, three defenders, three midfielders and a forward.

Advantages:

1. Similar to a 4-4-2 (just add a player at each level), the most common system utilized by U13+ teams in 11v11 games.
2. Allows for three backs, which simplifies work at the back and allows for coaches to be able to teach basic covering responsibilities.
3. When the team loses the ball, 6 players (all of the defender and midfielders) are available to defend.
4. The team can organize well behind the ball in transition. The central midfielder has a lot of attacking options, and the three backs will outnumber the opposing team's attackers and be available to receive support passes to build possession.
5. The flank players have a lot of room to run forward and their defensive responsibilities are limited, given the small field and the fact that there is a back behind them to deal with much of the flank pressure.
6. The central midfielder most often is not required to retreat deep into her defensive zone to help out, as the three backs can deal with most of the deep pressure.

Disadvantages:

1. The single striker is a major concern here. Depending upon how the coach decides to lay out responsibilities, the single striker can be isolated and of limited use in transition (she is often a target to receive and lay-off passes rather than a runner) and she can be hard to find if she has to roam sideline-to-sideline in search of clearing passes. In addition, if the opposition play three backs, she has a very difficult time applying pressure and the opponents can run her around without threat of losing possession. This can be very frustrating for young attackers.

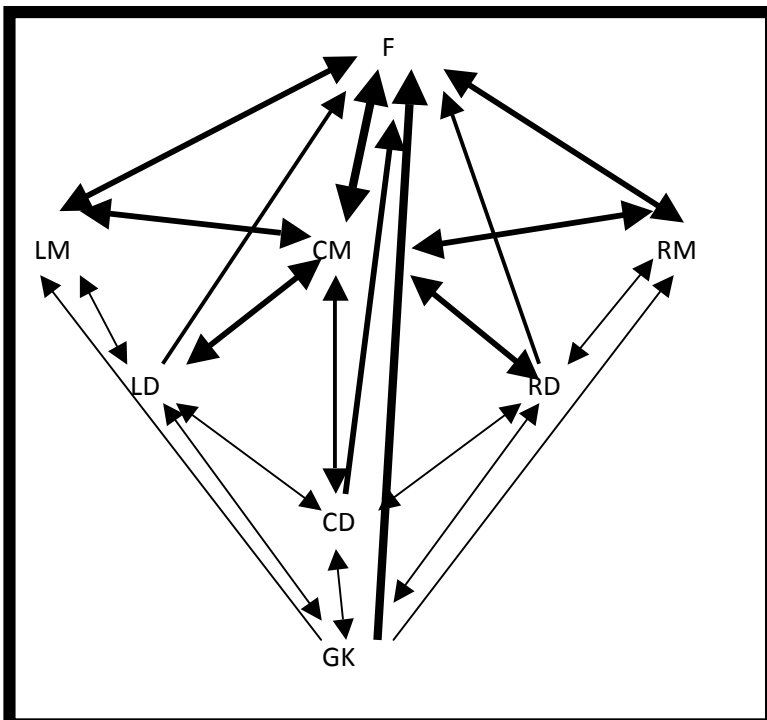
2. Transition can be difficult, as the single target player means that direct play can be difficult unless the wing midfielders play very high.
3. Three backs can be a concern on a number of levels. First, unless well coached, the wing defenders can become simple blocking players and their ability to learn an active role in the game can be limited (they need to be used in possession if they are to develop). Second, because the field is quite narrow, the back three can become crowded together and of little use in transition.

Training Considerations

In general, the coach must emphasize the importance of transition, and the need to use the flank midfielders to stretch opposing defenses. The shape of the team allows for good, compact defense, but the forward and the midfielders must be trained to get into good attacking positions as soon as the ball is won. In addition, the back line players must be trained to fan out and provide support in transition. Also, it is recommended that the forward move in line with the ball on defense to make play out of the back predictable. Finally, the forward must be given specific instructions as to her defensive responsibilities given that she is outnumbered 3-1. Typically, she is trained to prevent the opponent from changing fields in particular.

Patterns of Play

The diagram below highlights key patterns of play, with the heavier arrows indicating the most common passing relationships. Although each team and set of players will ultimately develop their own key patterns, the diagram outlines those most common in a 1-3-3-1.



Player Characteristics and Positional Skill Requirements

As the passing spine indicates, specialized technical and physical skills and tactical understanding are necessary for players to perform well within the 1-3-3-1.

Goalkeeper: The goalkeeper position often becomes specialized at U11 and U12, as qualified candidates are identified. Among the critical skills to be developed at this age are: Basic and consistent handling and footwork; safe and effective diving; distribution (both throwing and kicking/punting); knowledge of angle play; punting; dealing with set-pieces; organizing the defense; and the mentality of shot-stopping.

Defenders: The coach can organize the backs as either a central defender (sweeper) set behind two backs or a “flat” three. If there is a center back, she needs to be quick, a sure tackler and able to communicate to organize the defense. She should also be strong in the air and she must long pass well. The outside backs are normally quick, good in 1v1 duels and able to pass the ball over distance. Among the key tactical requirements for the outside backs are the ability to cover for the center back and also the ability to make good decisions regarding when to engage opposing attackers.

Wing midfielders: These players are typically quick, hard-working players who can get forward to attack flank space behind opposing defenses. Outside midfielders also need to be able to cross the ball well, combine with the central midfielder, forwards and even the outside back on their side, and they need to be able to finish crosses from the far side of the field..

Central midfielder: This player must possess the ability to see the field well (distribute intelligently) and her ability to connect with all of the other field players is critical in transition, organizing possession, changing fields and pushing the attack. Her ability to shoot from distance can provide considerable attacking potential as well. Finally, central midfielders are typically strong 1v1 players as well.

Forward: This player must have a very consistent work rate as she must cover a lot of ground both on defense and in the attack. A sharp change of speed will get her behind the defense on occasion, and she needs to be a talented finisher. Her ability to receive (both on the ground and in the air) is critical for the team’s transition. This player must also possess the willingness to take on defenders to create both space and attacking opportunities. She should know how to combine well with the midfielders.

In summary, while players will only perhaps possess some of the above characteristics, this information should be helpful in aiding coaches to both place players and also design training.