

Team Formations : 4-2-3-1

Liam Bramley looks at the key features of playing 4-2-3-1

When any coach or manager is faced with selecting a team to play any game of football they must first identify the players available to them and then organise them in the most effective way to suit the skills, attributes and personalities of the individuals.

Here I am attempting to show you how I have worked using a 4-2-3-1 system.

Firstly the 4-2-3-1 organises the players as shown in Fig 1. The benefits of this system come from the following considerations:

- Having two holding midfield players (4 and 8) allows the two full backs (2 and 3) to be adventurous without fear of being caught outnumbered defensively on counter attacks.
- Most teams play with three central midfield players in the modern game therefore this system prevents the team being overloaded in the most crucial area of the pitch. If the opposition choose to play with two central midfield players then the team has a chance to dominate in this key area.
- Any of the three attacking midfield players (7, 10 and 11) can drop between the lines to receive and when this happens and the player can turn they have three forward passing options – one in each key channel (left, right and centrally)

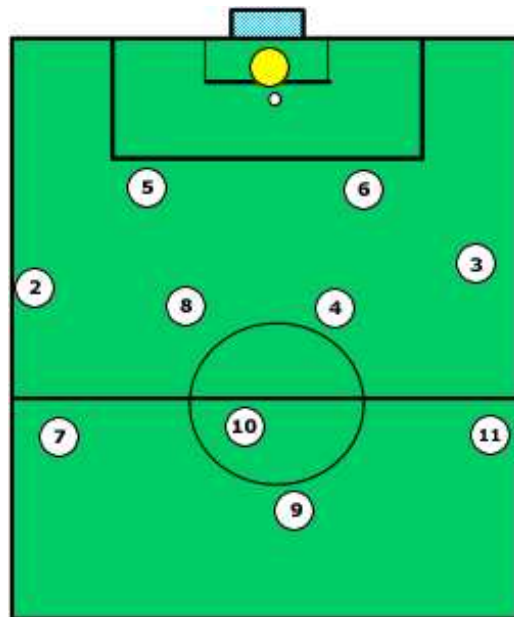


Fig 1.



Liam Bramley – UEFA A-Licence

Newcastle United FC Under 15 / 16's Academy Coach



The key principle is to get into a position to receive behind the opposition's units of players. Initially the team should look to penetrate behind the defence as the quickest route to goal. If this is not possible they should look to get an attacking player behind the opposition's midfield, from where they can slide through-balls, run with the ball, dribble, shoot or use a combination of those clever innovative attacking skills to create goal-scoring opportunities.

Roles of the defenders – Players 2, 3, 5 and 6

In order for the team to play out from the back and develop play through the thirds the first step is to encourage the back four to want the ball from the goalkeeper whenever the goalkeeper is in possession. In order to do this they must create space as shown in Fig 2. where the two centre backs split and open up and the two full backs push on in advance of their centre backs. This creates the passing angles shown in Fig 2. to switch the play across the defensive unit.

It is very important at this stage that the players build confidence in playing this way and in each other and also understand that at any time if they come under pressure they should be able to relieve the pressure by turning out to shield the ball and use passing options behind the ball including the goalkeeper if necessary.

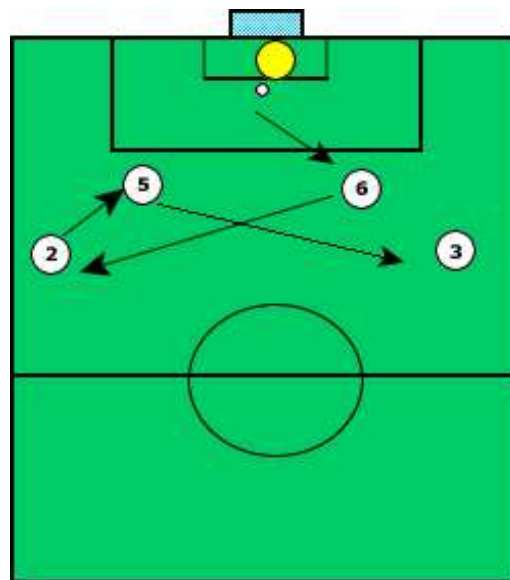


Fig 2.

Roles of the midfielders – Players 4 and 8

Once the back players are comfortable receiving the ball from the goalkeeper and understand their passing options amongst each other the next stage is to incorporate the two holding midfield players (4 and 8). These players should look to support the back players and create and find enough space to comfortably turn and face forwards. If this is not possible because they attract an opponent they can still be used to bounce the ball off to relieve pressure or change the point of



Liam Bramley – UEFA A-Licence

Newcastle United FC Under 15 / 16's Academy Coach



the attack as shown in Fig 3. It is important that these two players understand the necessity to keep possession and not take any risks with possession in the defensive third of the pitch so their receiving, shielding and tuning skills are essential to be effective here.

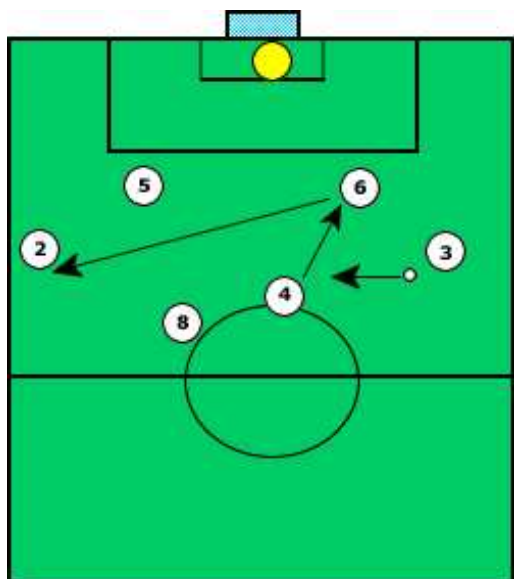


Fig 3.



“To me attacking football happens when Makelele gets the ball and passes it to the central defender, who passes it to the right back, who comes forward and judges the situation. If he can do something he passes forward or runs with the ball, if not, he gives it back to Makelele who builds the attack again.....That is attacking football. In England, attacking football is getting the ball to Makalele and having him hit it forward, no matter what, even if everybody is marked.”

Jose Mourinho, 2006, The Italian Job (Vialli and Marcotti)

Roles of the attacking midfielders – Players 7, 10 and 11

The two holding midfield players need to work in tandem with each other where one comes short to support and the other maintains and creates space by staying on the shoulder of their marker. If their movement attracts an opponent out of the central area, the team should look to exploit the space left behind – by passing to one of the attacking midfield players (7, 10 or 11) who has exploited the space created. Only one midfield player should look to exploit this space at any given time. As with the two holding players the attacking midfielder looks to exploit this space by receiving and turning to face forwards. If this is not possible the players behind the ball should support and look to play forward or change the point of the attack again (see Fig 4.)



Liam Bramley – UEFA A-Licence

Newcastle United FC Under 15 / 16’s Academy Coach



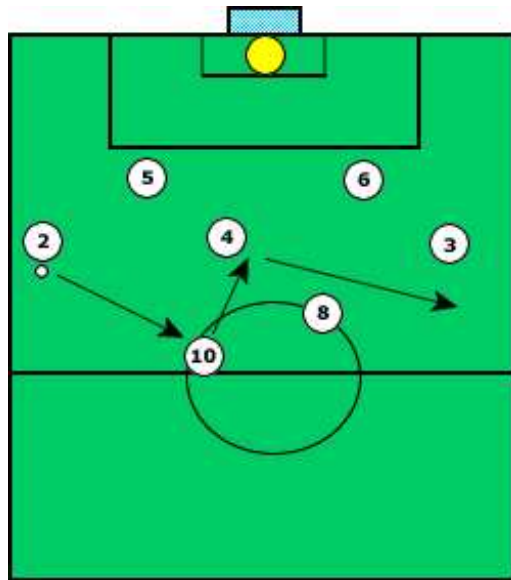


Fig 4.

If the attacking midfielder gets turned to face forward he needs forward passing options to be created by the other three players (see Fig 5.) The full backs can also support the attack by moving up into more advanced positions. The two holding midfield players support behind the ball in case the ball needs to come back out or in case of a counter attack. The two central defenders begin to think about making contact with the opposition in case of a counter attack but can always drop off again if they are needed to retain possession later in the attack.

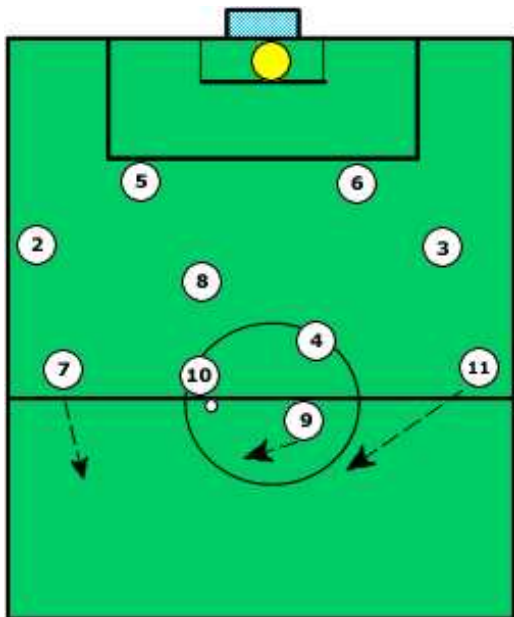


Fig 5.



“What I try to do is to find the spaces and get there to try and get on the ball. I am always looking for a space to move into.”

Wayne Rooney



Liam Bramley – UEFA A-Licence
Newcastle United FC Under 15 / 16's Academy Coach



Attacking using the width – Players 2, 7, 9, 10, 3 and 11

Should this central area become too congested with defenders the team may need to exploit space in wide areas and this can be achieved in a number of ways. In Fig 6. The full back has played into the attacking wide player who has driven inside with the ball to create space for an overlap. In Fig. 7 the attacking wide player has found a passing angle by coming inside which the full back in possession can either use as a passing option, or they can use this movement as a decoy for another attacking player to exploit the space down the side depending on the decision the opposition's full back makes.

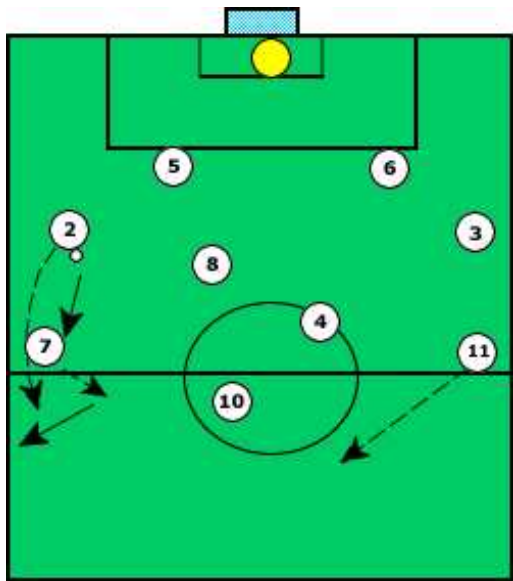


Fig 6.

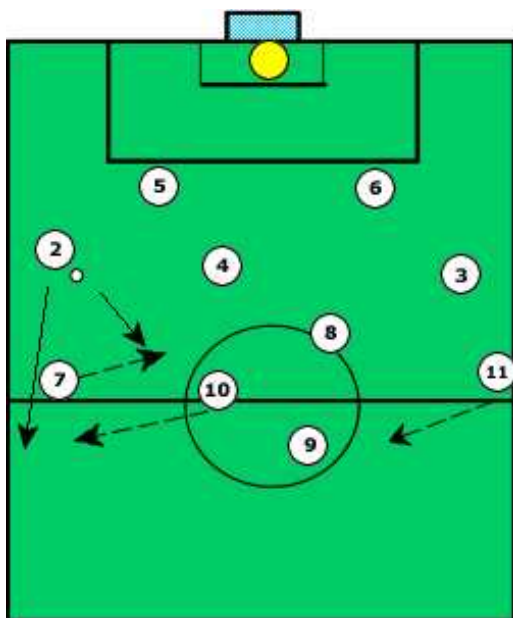


Fig 7.

“Players should not be obsessed with the ball, they need to have vision and be aware of where their partners go.....”

Arsene Wenger. Insight Live LMA Interview 2006



Liam Bramley – UEFA A-Licence

Newcastle United FC Under 15 / 16's Academy Coach



Attacking centrally – Players 7, 9, 10 and 11

The central striker (9) can receive the ball off any other player but the quality of the delivery is crucial. The ball can be played into space or into feet but must allow the central striker every opportunity to receive and use the ball effectively. Immediate support and clever movement from the three attacking midfield players is essential to maintain the momentum of the attack, whilst the full backs and holding midfield players may also offer passing options.

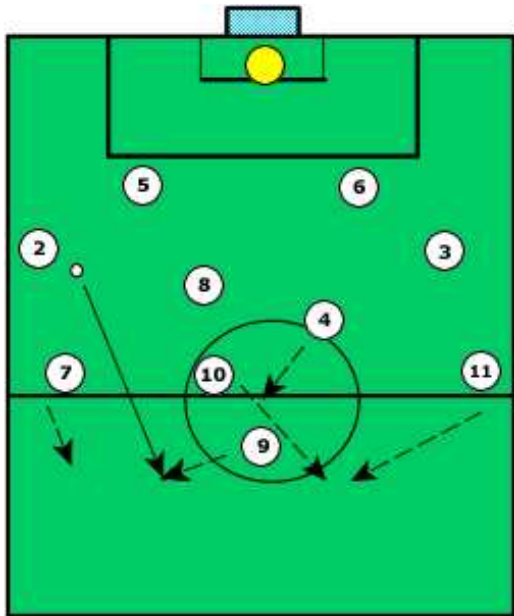


Fig 8.



“It is all about shifting people out of spaces and getting players into those spaces that have been left by other players.”

“I wanted goalscorers and wide players from movement not from players who were already in position.”

Terry Venables, 1996, *The Making of the Team – Venables England.*

The ideas outlined here should allow progress to be made into the attacking third of the pitch and for the team to create goal-scoring opportunities. The key is to play with quality and patience, with players rotating positions to find space and lose their markers. It is important that players continually move in and out of the key spaces making it difficult for the defenders to stay organised and compact.



Liam Bramley – UEFA A-Licence

Newcastle United FC Under 15 / 16’s Academy Coach

