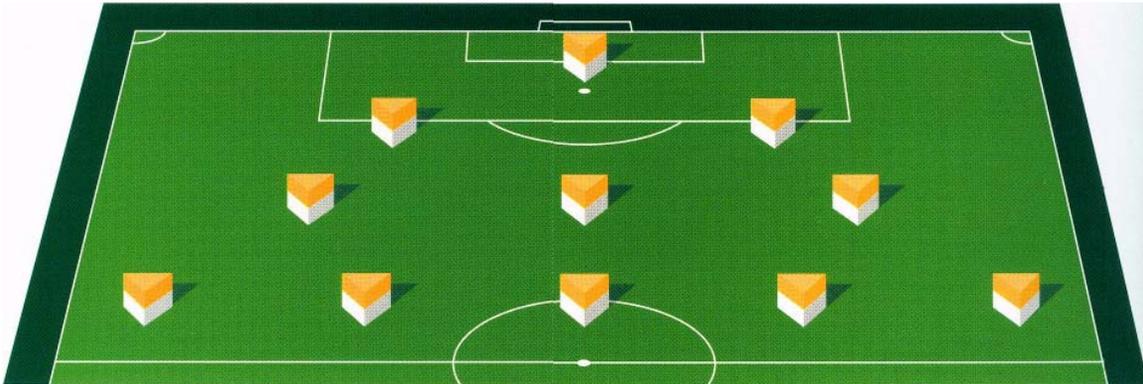


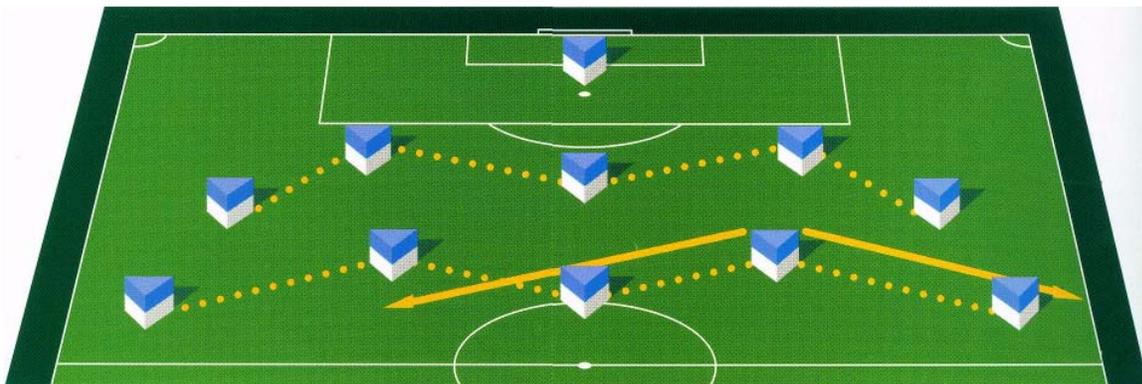
A History of the Game's Tactics¹

By Coach Rick Cosse



To best understand the "Systems of Play" used today, it is always helpful to understand just how we arrived at today's popular 4-4-2 and how soccer professional's views of the game have shaped our current thinking. When soccer was first organized in the mid-1800s, it was assumed that the offense was the most important part of every team. So it followed that the pioneer players instinctively threw themselves together into attacks on the opponent's goal. Little by little it was understood that this approach was, in reality, a rudimentary tactic that left them too exposed to opposing counter offensives. And so the first tactical line up was formed, based on three lines of players in front of the goalkeeper, who was called on, as always, to guard the goal. This type of lineup, in which players kept to their linear positions, consisted of two fullbacks, three halfbacks, and five forwards. The center half (the central midfielder) marked the opposing center forward and was both the key playmaker and the pivot between the defense and the offense. Seen from above, this lineup appears to be a pyramid, with the goalkeeper at the top and the five forwards at the bottom. Because of the English roots of the game, the names of the positions—goalkeeper, fullback, halfback, wing (or winger), and forward—took root in many parts of the world in English. Changes in soccer strategy evolved slowly from the origins of soccer in the late nineteenth century until the threshold of the First World War (1914-1918).

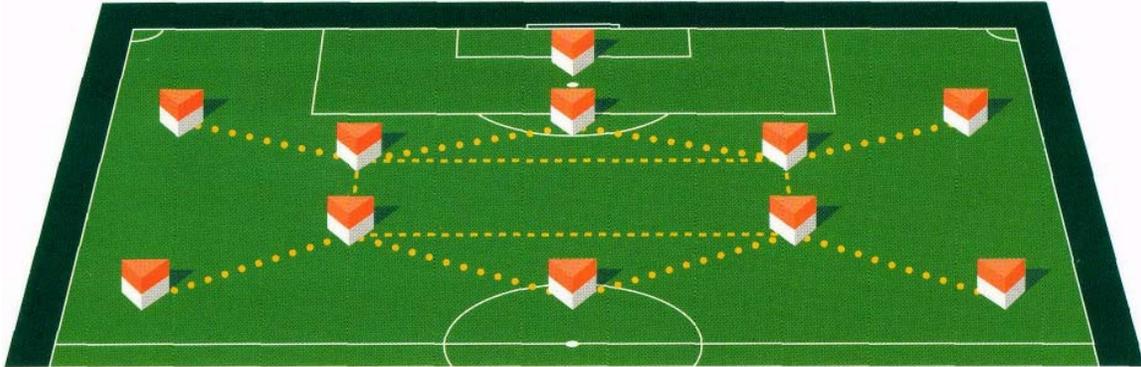
The Method, or MM



It was not until after World War I that soccer strategy started to undergo a distinct metamorphosis: in Europe the "Method," or MM, came into fashion. (The British, playing the game in isolation, practiced a different game plan with closer marking of opponents.) Two backs and two wing halfbacks lined up with a center half to delineate the first, more withdrawn "M" in front of the goalkeeper. The two wing halves on either side of the three forwards formed the second,

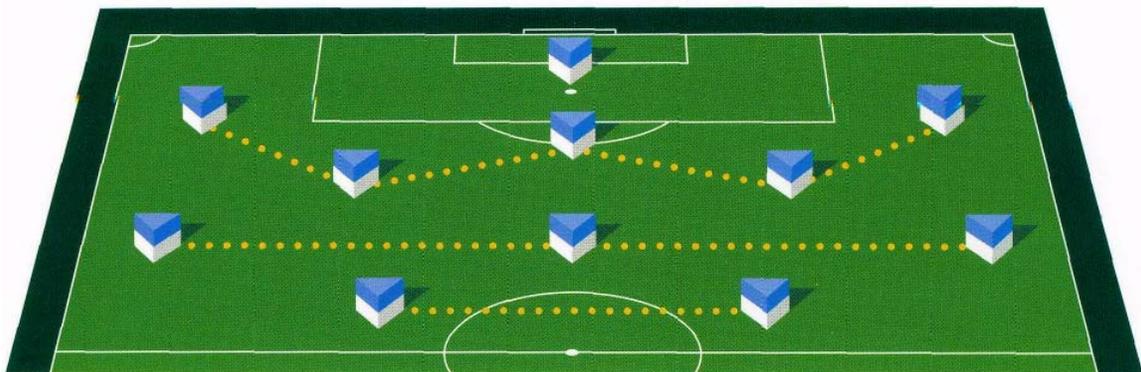
more advanced "M." With the Method, Uruguay (1930 and 1950) and Italy (1934 and 1938) won the World Cup, thanks not only to the talents of individual players but especially to teamwork. The Method was practiced by the famous Austrian "Wunderteam," which was considered by the experts to be the best European soccer team outside of Britain in the 1930s. The Austrian teams moved in a linear fashion, using short passes played across the lines of the "M"s to keep possession of the ball.

The System, or WM



After World War II the "System," also known as WM, was developed to counter the strengths of the Method. Anticipated by the British in the 1930s, the System was really a variation of the Method. In front of the goalkeeper there were now three defenders—the center half of the Method becoming a defender—spread across the field on the same line. In the midfield, two halfbacks and two wing halves formed a "quadrilateral," and three forwards were aligned up front. Although the System gained much popularity and was used everywhere, Uruguay won the 1950 World Cup using the Method, now characterized by a player roaming diagonally across the field and capable of anything, especially of starting attacks from turnovers. For Uruguay that player was Schiaffino, the first great wing half playmaker.

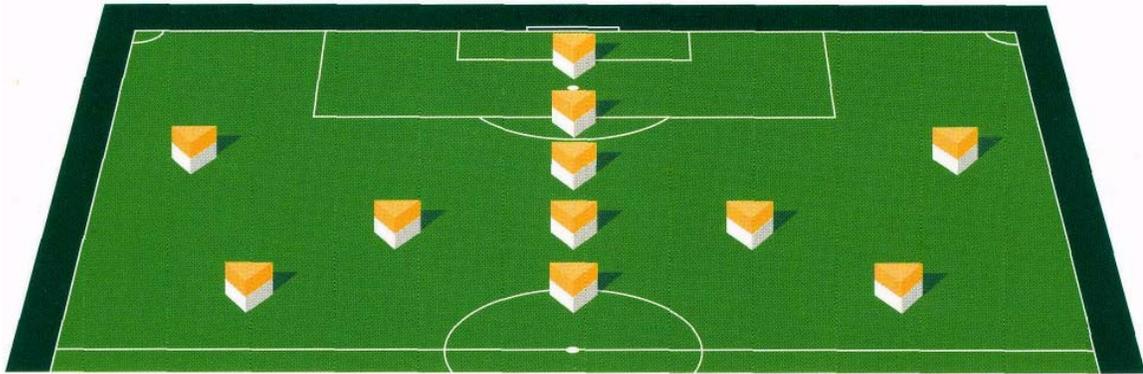
The Honved Model



The Hungarian Club Honved F.C., from Budapest, made an indelible mark in the beginning of the 1950s. The great Hungarian national teams took most of their players from this club team. Similar to the MM and WM designations, the Honved Model, attributed to Gustav Sebes, vice minister of sport and coach of the national team, could be called WW. The defending line and the midfield line remain the same as in the System, but the forward line is reversed. The wings and the center forward are behind the inside forwards (the System's wing halves), who now play in a more forward role than in the System. Wings and center forward provide the front line of forwards, rather than the reverse. For the

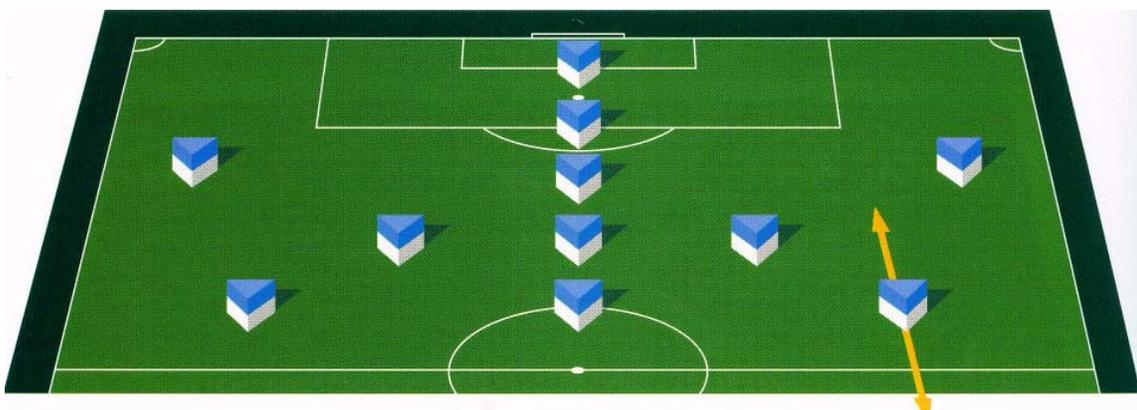
Honved team, Kocsis and Puskas played up front, whereas the wings, Budai and Czibor, withdrew to the same line as the now withdrawn center forward, Hidegkuti, the first celebrated player who was able to use this deep-lying position to take defenders by surprise.

From the Sweeping Game to the Libero



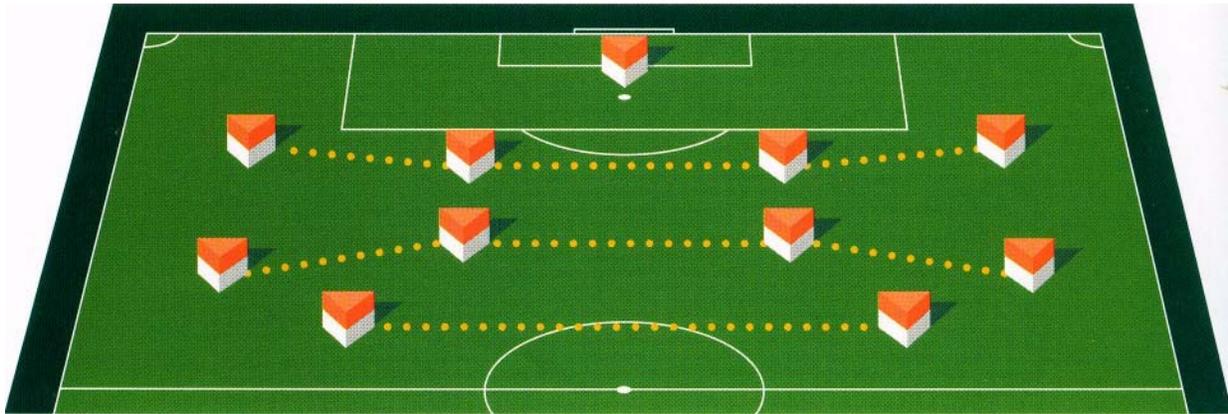
The 1950s saw the introduction of excessive defense—best described as “First, don’t let in a goal, then take the enemy by surprise via the center forward” Although such play not spectacular, it was often profitable for the Swiss national team and the Swiss Club Servette Geneva, both coached by the Austrian Karl Rappan, who gave the name of this scheme to history: verrou in Swiss-German (beton in French, cotenocc/o in Italian, literally “bolt” in English). It was first practiced in Italy by Padova in 1941, and became popular in the 1950s. The marking of the opponents was tight—man to man—sometimes with help from an overlapping winger who could defend or move forward. But in the long run, this scheme did not pay off, and after the 1950s it was modified because of the need for better defense. There was always the risk that the center half, in line with the two backs, might be isolated in front of the opposing forwards: once past him, in fact, the center forward came face to face with the goalkeeper and therefore was in the best situation to score a goal. To prevent this, a libero—the free man or “sweeper”—was necessary in front of the goalkeeper and behind the backs and center half, who in this scheme still marked the center forward and became the “stopper,” in soccer terminology. The idea was to offer additional security to the defense. The sweeper formation has been popular among professional teams in most countries for decades, and World Cups from 1982 - 1990 were won by teams playing in this formation: Italy in 1982 with Gaetano Scirea as sweeper; Argentina in 1986 with Jose-Luis Brown; and Germany in 1990 with Klaus Augenthaler. Franz Beckenbauer, who won the World Cup as a player in 1974, revolutionized the role in the 1970s by turning it into a position from which, when free of defensive responsibilities, attacks could first be mounted.

By Man—By Zone



Recently, soccer tactics have undergone changes, often very short lived, but the contrast between zone play and man-to-man play remains. The first change is a derivation of the Method, in which players are marked according to their position on the field and schemes are determined by the behavior of the opponent. Specific man-to man markings are

not used. There are two peculiar characteristics of zone play: the full press and the offside trap. Zone play takes a scientific approach to the offside trap; when the opponent attacks, the defense moves up, causing the opponents to withdraw or risk being offside, as well as cutting off the opposing forwards. This means that the defensive phase begins practically at the same moment in which control of the ball is lost. Pressing—an aggressive attempt to move forward and control the opponent in possession of the ball—immediately takes place. Most teams now play the zone system, and from experience most coaches maintain that the 4-4-2 arrangement is the most functional and profitable: four defenders in line (or almost), four midfielders in line (or almost), and two forwards. The most common variations are 4-3-3, with one midfielder becoming a forward or a winger who tries to spread the defense, or 4-2-4. But other schemes exist, the most effective of which was used a great deal in the 1990 World Cup in Italy, although the first to use it were the Belgian clubs Anderlecht and Malines. This scheme foresaw the sweeper behind or on line with the four defenders in the so-called “five-man defense,” which was also used at Italia '90 by England, Germany, and Brazil. But three defenders can also play by zone with the sweeper behind, as shown by the 1990 Soviet team of Valeri Lobanovski.



General Considerations

With our understanding of “The History of the Game’s Tactics” we can now move on to some general considerations in teaching systems of play to our youth soccer players.

- 1) While we want to achieve a balance and cover as much of the field as possible on both attack and defense we will generally want:
 - a) numbers up in defense;
 - b) numbers up in the midfield;
 - c) leaving us with numbers down in attack. The intent must be to create numbers up in attack.
- 2) As a coach, you should consider the following when building your system of play.
 - a) Play out of a basic 3-3-3 to evenly distribute the work load and economically cover the field both in defense and attack. If playing 8 a side, start with 2-2-2. Remember, system numbers start from the back and the Goal Keeper is not included.
 - b) The deployment of the remaining player will be based upon:
 - i) The needs of the team and where they may be lacking;
 - ii) The physical and technical attributes of your players;
 - iii) The system of play that the opposition employs;
 - iv) The score;
 - v) The particular match and its circumstances.
- 3) Regardless of the system of formation the “Principles of Attack and Defense” must be applied.
- 4) **NO SYSTEM IN AND OF ITSELF CAN GUARANTEE VICTORY. THE SYTEM IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE PLAYERS.**

¹ World Cup USA 1994 Book of Soccer