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## *Murph's Memo : Volume 4 March 13, 2010*

### *Supporting Positions : U12 and Above*

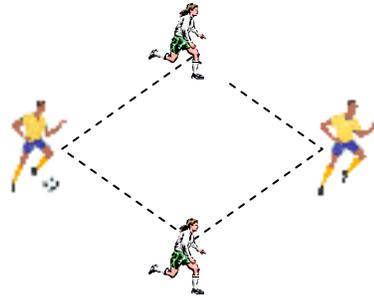
In this article, I tried to follow the previous one on **Receiving** (see Murph's Memo Feb 9, 2010) with my thoughts on how **Support** is connected to **System of Play**. Putting yourself in a position to receive a pass is the first tactic a player performs; our young players do it subconsciously. As they grow, they not only need the physical abilities but the mental ability to make good decisions. Tactics are defined as : "The player's ability to make decisions with and without the ball definition" taken from the USSF National C License Course. Most young players take up positions with very little thought regarding what is happening around them. You can tell this is occurring by their total focus on the ball and their lack of head movement to take in a picture of the situation. The ability to see the picture and diagnose the information allows the player to make a decision. How well he/she does, results in keeping the ball, passing it, loosing it or kicking it away.

I believe that no matter what system/team formation you use they all have basic player movement that helps the system work. For example, lets take a look at the **1-4-4-2 formation**. The **Center Backs** move laterally keeping space between them to a minimum, forward but not beyond the fullbacks, especially when they are in possession. Keeping their hips square to the goal whenever possible allows them to anticipate where balls maybe played and keep track of the opposition forwards. The **Fullbacks** move laterally to open space when center backs are in possession and close space in front of goal defensively. They push forward to support the midfield when possible and like the center backs keep their hips square. **Wide Midfield** players should try to play with their hips facing into the pitch as much as possible. They have lateral inside movement when defending, vertical, wide and diagonal movement to attack the defense. **Center Midfielders** move in multiple directions it's important that both don't go ahead of the ball at the same time. This would leave a huge space for the opposition to transition into creating defensive problems. They must remain connected and organized. The **Forwards** move vertically to stretch the field creating space in front of them to check into and receive the ball on the ground. By playing with their backs to goal, they present two options based on the pressure of the defense: 1) balls to feet or 2) playing ball into the space behind when checking. By playing centrally with close lateral movement, forwards occupy the opposition center backs allowing midfield players to attack the spaces between the defensive players. Of course **all** positions need to move backwards in recognition of defending the goal.

At the present time, our supporting players make runs mostly direct and towards goal resulting in a long ball. The most common outcome is the balls go out of play or back to the goalkeeper. The player with the ball needs support not just vertically but laterally and behind based on pressure of the first defender. Player's supporting roles change as the ball moves through the team. The directly involved player has 3 roles in support : 1) create space to receive a pass and look to penetrate once you get the ball 2) create space for their teammate to attack 3) do not come into the space, that reduces attacking options. The less directly involved players must maintain the shape of the team and keep the opposition stretched. The most important thing is that the players remain mentally "**Switched On**" to the game. As their teammate receives the ball can the supporting player take a visual cue, allowing them to find a good supporting position? That visual cue I am referring to is the teammate's body position and defensive pressure. If the teammate is under high pressure, closely marked, unable to turn then a **supporting position behind** or lateral is **positive**. Going beyond the player is a **negative** position and adds pressure to the player in possession. If the player can turn in possession and attack then the

supporting player can look to get beyond the ball. In doing so stretching the defense by getting into the space behind them, creating space to receive a pass or encourage the ball carrier to attack the 1<sup>st</sup> defender. The space created by our player pushing forward would allow support laterally creating a 3v2 situation. This would give the player on the ball 3 options: keep the ball, pass it forward or make a lateral pass - the decision is theirs. It is important that all players are constantly making decisions that support the player on the ball. **The best supporting positions are those that allow us to eliminate opposition with a pass !!**

As coaches we need to help our players understand and anticipate the situations better, as there is no playbook and we can't coach continuously. We should always give players ideas on how to create their game by working off the **Diamond Formation** : 1 back - 2 wide - 1 forward (see diagram). This enables coaches to set up situations, explain the movement and have players do it successfully.



Most of the time, our instructions are directed to the player on the ball. At times we need to focus away from where the ball is, for instance, if we are under offensive pressure quickly and calmly provide information to the forwards so they remain “**switched on**” ready for a ball out of defense.

If we are to have competitive teams, then our players must be continuously placed in competitive situations. Using systems that work players mentally, physically and constantly is very beneficial to developing players. We truly believe the game is the best teacher for players and coaches alike. If we use the 4-4-2 example, four defenders allow players to relax mentally especially if the fullbacks don't push forward. The most forwards they will play against are three giving them a **numbers up** situation so mistakes can be covered. Secondly, if our defenders don't push forward then we are **numbers down** offensively resulting in a lack of clear opportunities. Developmentally, I feel that the worst system to use is one that deploys a sweeper and the best is the 3-4-3. The basic shape we are looking to create with all this player and ball movement is **a triangle**. The simplest formation to introduce with this in mind is 4 v 4 played 1-2-1. It always gives the player 3 options : vertical, lateral and behind. It allows a player to see passing lanes and gain confidence. The more small sided games we play in training and encourage the players to take up supporting positions, the more comfortable they will become. Please remember that technique is the most important aspect in **all** tactics and I am not suggesting we introduce tactics to our very young players. **But playing in that diamond shape helps both technique and tactics**. The **quality** of how teams win and the way teams play is more important than the quantity of wins in terms of development. Winning is a by-product of how well we work to develop the players not the expectation.

***Lace Up Your Boots and Get Ready for Spring !!***

***Coach Murph***