

## **MY FUTSAL PHILOSOPHY**

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**Introduction**

In this paper, I will describe my futsal philosophy. It is a document that will define how I want my team to play futsal. I will also explain the formations I prefer in both defense and attack, which method we should use in the various stages during a game, the roles each player has, for what purpose I have chosen my philosophy and so on.

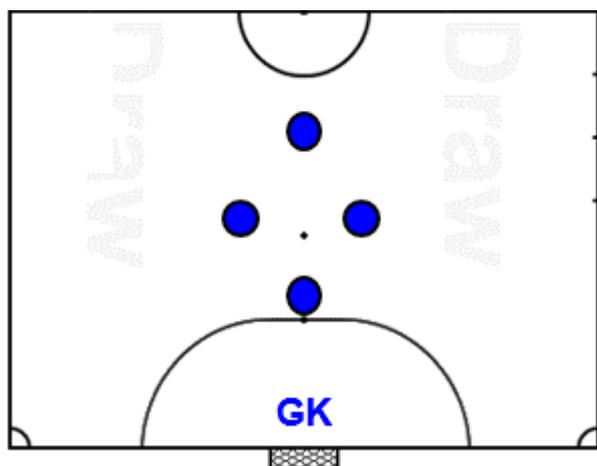
## Formations

There are different ways to think when starting positions within a formation shall be selected. One way is to describe what kind of player types I would like to have in my team, after that I can either buy these players to my club or coach my current squad to play the way I want them to do. In my everyday life, however, this is a mere utopia, I rarely have the time to really teach the players into embracing a whole new way to play and recruiting the player I want is out of the question. The clubs I have worked with hardly have those amounts of money. Instead I customize my formation after which player types I have available, which sometimes means that I compromise with what I would like to do on the court, but on the other hand, the players will feel natural in the roles I have given them. I want to get as much quality as possible of the squad I have at my disposal, which means that I get to do some compromising in order to get results.

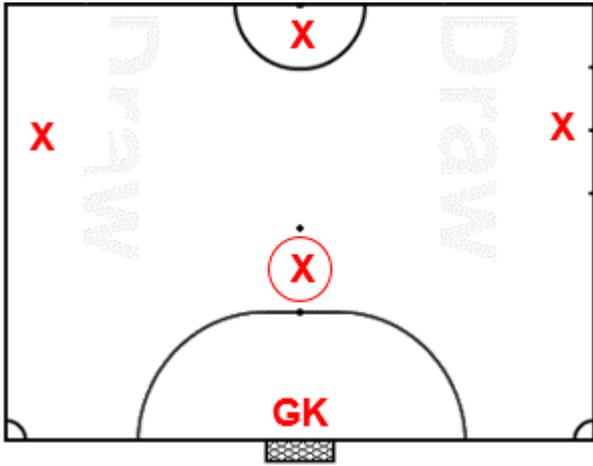
However, this document will not focus on the reality, but what I would like to do if I had free hands. I do know that a working day for a futsal coach is filled with challenges, but this paper's main focus is to describe what I want to achieve in an ideal world. Normally, I choose tactics based on what kind of players I have, but in this document there is no such limitations.

See this document as my manual on how I would like my team to play futsal if no limitations exist, but be aware that I am not naive. A good futsal coach has a well-written philosophy, but a great one understands when he need to adjust the idea to get most out of his squad.

In defense, I prefer to play with a 1-2-1 formation (as you can see below):



When we have the ball and want to attack our opponents, I also prefer to use a 1-2-1-formation:

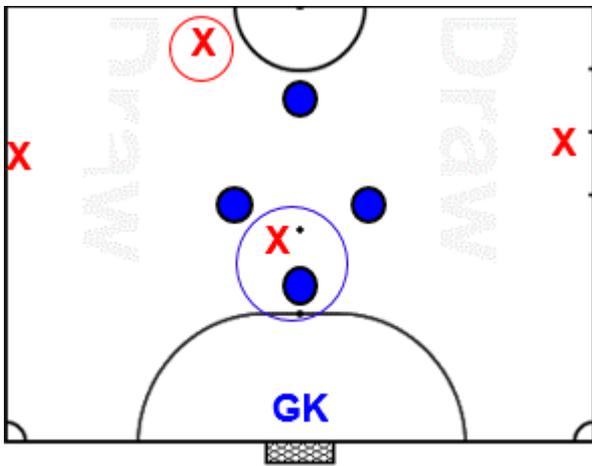


## Defense - Roles, player types and methods

When we play defense (when we do not have the ball in our possession), I prefer to use a 1-2-1 formation. However, this can sometimes be changed to a 1-1-2, but more on that topic later. 1-2-1-formation, however, is the foundation of our defense positions.

In football / soccer, we must choose between a positional or a marking defense, but in futsal, we cannot really be so strict. This is partly due to the fact that the offside rule does not exist in futsal, which makes defense far more complex and difficult to manage. Therefore, I have chosen to have a mixed defense, an approach where we use both a form of positional defense and a version of marking defense at the same time.

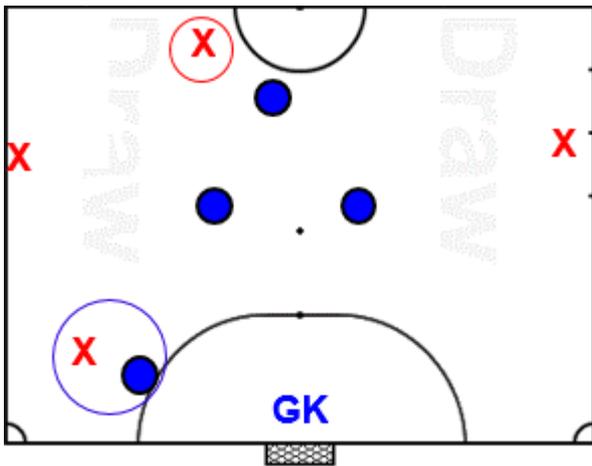
The libero has a marking responsibility when we play defense and will follow the most dangerous opposition player in the upcoming situation. It is thus not a proper man-man-marking, but more of a kind of zone marking where the libero marks the player who is behind our wing players and constitutes the greatest threat to our goal.



As you can see in the picture above, our libero has begun to mark the opponent's pivot (blue circle) because the player had entered the empty space (playing surface # 2) behind our wing players. Would the red pivot decide to leave the area and go back to the starting area or playing space #1 (between or pivot and wing players), our Libero remain in his position. It is thus a form of zone marking as our libero play, where the player marks the most dangerous player who enters the area behind our wing players. If any player goes here – Mark him. If no one goes into playing space #2 or #3 - Stay in position.

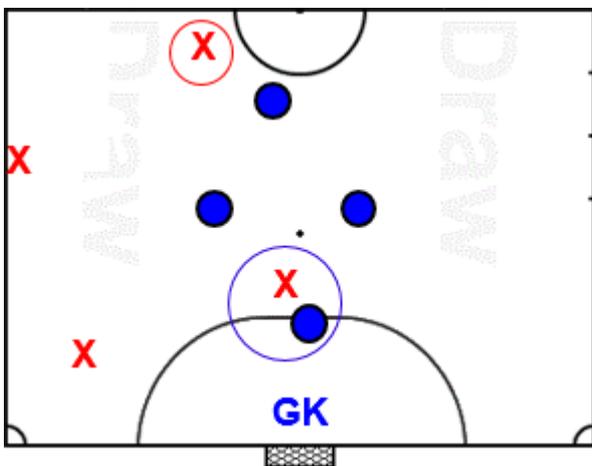
Please note that our opponents can change players in this position, that is why it is not a pure man-man-marking of our libero, but the player who is being marked may vary. It is important that our libero and goalkeeper has a good communication with each other and our libero holds his player on the defense side. If the libero does this right, the opponent must get pass the libero to get a clean shooting position. The libero's aim is to get the opponent to play with his back against our net and to take the ball from him if possible.

In the picture below, we can see how the opponent's pivot is trying to make life difficult for our libero by leaving the central space. Note that the marking has not subsided.

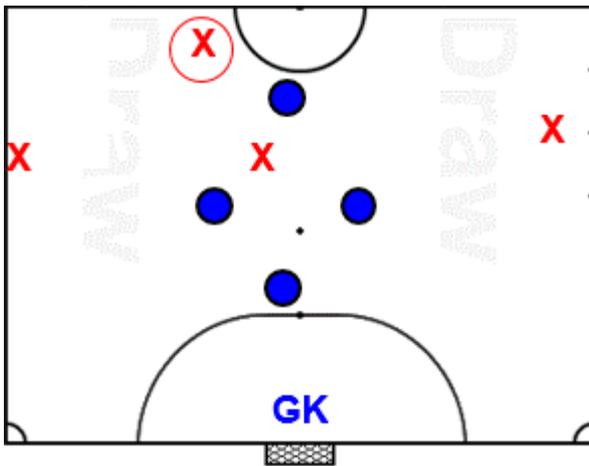


The red pivot trying to threaten our playing area # 3 by running deep. Since our libero has a zone marking responsibility and has the task to mark the most dangerous offensive player of the opponents for the moment, he fulfills his marking responsibility (blue circle). Note that the libero keeps the pivot on the outside and keeps the opponent with his back against our net, this makes it much more difficult to do anything even if the pass would reach the pivot. The goal here for our libero is to keep the pivot out of the playing area # 3, so that he is not playable behind our libero.

Would your opponents' play, for example 2-2 or 1-1-2, with two pivots, the libero continues to mark the most dangerous player. This of course requires good communication with the goalkeeper to secure the greatest risk to our goal. In the picture below, it is the central pivot that pose the greatest risk to us, it is also because of that our libero has chosen to follow this player (blue circle). The second pivot is of course also a risk, but not as big risk as the player most likely need to receive the ball with his back against our net and / or have a bad angle to make a direct shot.

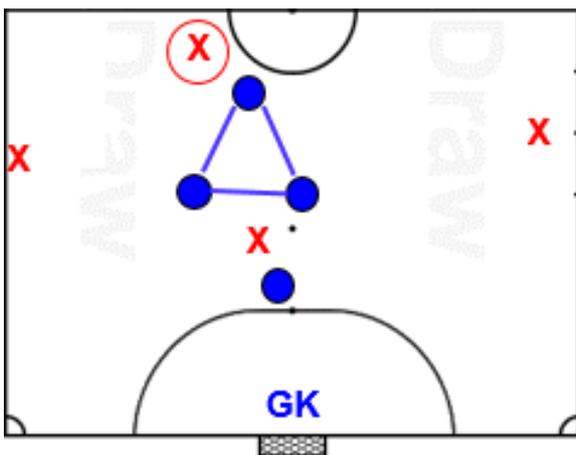


In the picture below, by contrast, the opponent has made it to our playing space # 1, which means that he does not pose any threat to us or our libero. Therefore, our libero has chosen to remain in his position, as no opponent has entered playing space # 2 or # 3. It is also this what distinguishes zone marking from man-man-marking - In the former we only mark our opponents if they go into the dangerous area we have defined, in the second option, we follow the player all over the place until we got the ball. Our libero play zone marking out of these two options.



If now our libero has a zone inspired marking defense, which priorities does our other players have?

Unlike our libero, our wing players or pivot does not use any kind of marking defense (except on set pieces, more on that later). Instead, they play positional defense. That means that they do not take into account where the opponents are, but where the ball and the team mates is.



As you can see in the picture above, our pivot and wing players plays in a positional defense system (the blue triangle). This means that they do not mark any player, the ball and the teammates are the reference points. Our goal is, with the defensive skills press and cover, to prevent the opponent's build-up play by giving them as little time and space as possible.

The player closest to the ball holder presses the opponent. The pressing player can choose from three types of press - Ball winning, steering or delaying press. The former is obviously preferable, but if we are too far from the ball holder we may be tricked into a trap. Steering press may be preferable in such cases, and we want our opponent to be at the flanks as much as possible. The central area is sacred and must be protected at all costs, no ball can go to or through our triangle. If the ball goes to a player in or behind the triangle, the ball must quickly be recaptured and taken from the central area to the flanks. Out on the flanks, it is difficult for players to get decent scoring opportunities, it is central space of the court that most goals are done in futsal.

The other two players' job is to cover the attractive area behind the player that presses. In addition to the techniques, press and cover, is also the distance between and within the lines important to keep opponents away from our goal. Distances may vary depending on how close the opponents is

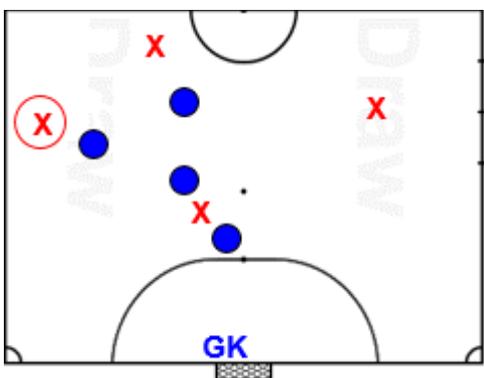
to our goal (the farther away from our goal, we may have more generous distances in an attempt to recapture the ball closer to their net, but if they are close to our goal we need to have more tight distances).

In the picture above can you see how the opponents are attacking in our half of the court. Notice the distances between and within our lines. Our libero is about six meters from our goal line, our wing players eleven meters and our pivot seventeen meters. Between the wing players, it is five meters. The Libero is not playing a positional defense, but serves as a benchmark, but for the other players, it is important that the distances are kept intact. We move players up and down and to the sides of the court as a unit so that the distances are the same, it makes it harder for opponents to find attractive spaces to play futsal on.



Here can we see an example that often occurs in the defense in our own half. The opponent's ball holder passes the ball to a wing player, at the flank where we want them to be. Our principle is that the closest player presses the ball holder, which in this case is our left wing player. It is important to perform the press is when we have cover, otherwise distances are too large and then our opponents easily may get through the central area, just what we want to avoid.

When our left wing player goes out on the flank to press, at the same time our right winger goes central in order to cover the space behind. This means that we can temporarily change our formation from 1-2-1 to a variant of 1-1-2, or the oblique Y, which it also is called (see picture below).



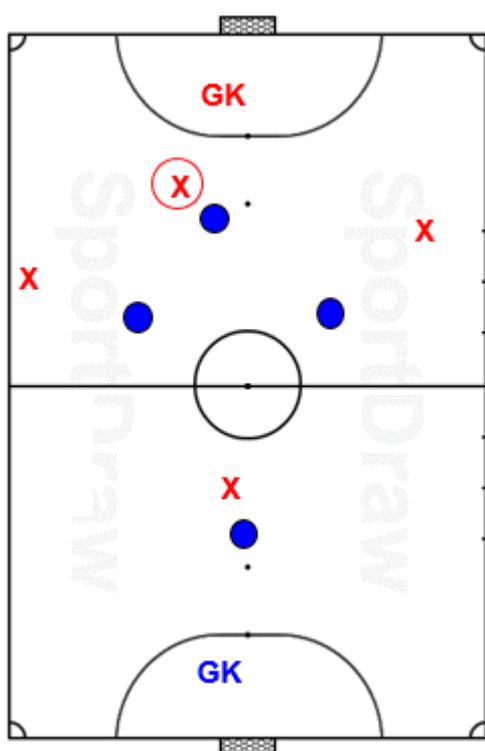
Please note that our libero is NOT included within this movement, but continues to mark the most dangerous player closest to our goal net.

Positional defense, as the wing players and our pivot uses, focuses on the defensive techniques press and cover, the distance between and within the lines and the unit movements. You can see this kind of defense like a rubber band - Is it too little except it makes no use and is it still too long the formation cracks.

There are four kinds of movements in the positional defense that we use – Side-to-side, centering, advance and retire. The former have I already shown you, centering means that we need go to the middle of the court where the ball is to protect the central area (and thus let the opponents play at the edges, where it is less dangerous).

Advance and retire are closely linked, as side-to-side movement and centering is. If your opponents start to back with the ball or play it back home, we move up with the team (therefore the term “advance”), while retaining our positional defense (the libero still marks the most dangerous player).

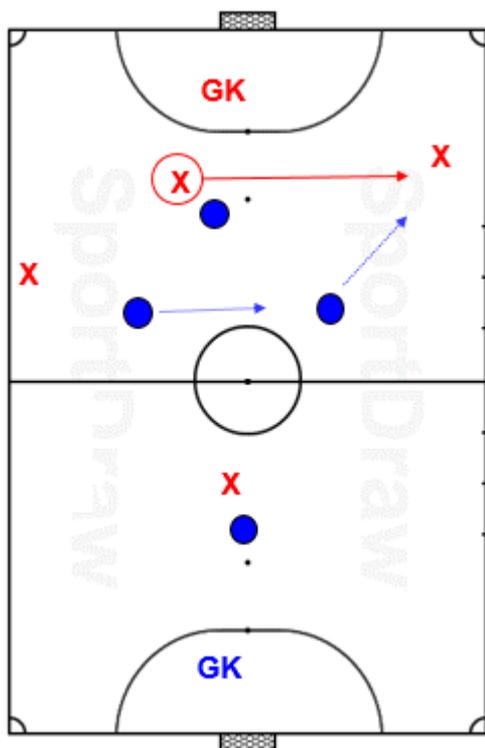
Then, it may look like this:



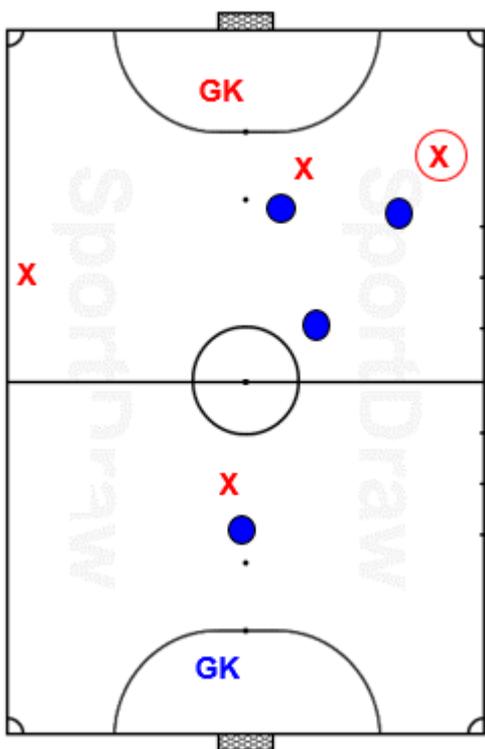
As you can see here, we have advanced when the opponents withdraw. Distances are also more generous within and between our lines - Between the wing players and pivot it is about seven meters and between the wing players about eight meters. This is because it is not as serious if we get overtaken here because it is a long way to our own net for the opponents, but if we manage to win the ball high up we can create ourselves a good chance of scoring. In other words, it is good odds in our favor here if we use greater distances, but still important that we keep the triangle intact.

In addition, the same principles apply for our defense here as in our own half of the court - Still positional defense for our wing players and pivot, marking defense for our libero, press and cover is important and that we move as a unit.

Even here, there may be possible that we occasionally have to change our formation to keep our positional defense intact (see below).



Since we use the rubber band principle, it is important that we keep the positional defense intact, it can sometimes mean that we have to change the formation. Here is an example where we go from 1-2-1 to 1-1-2, but still retains the distances and makes it difficult for opponents to play in the middle.



In the picture above, we have changed to a 1-1-2 formation, the inclined Y. If our opponents play the ball back to the central of the court, the right wing player leave the flank and return to the 1-2-1 again. In that case, we use centering.

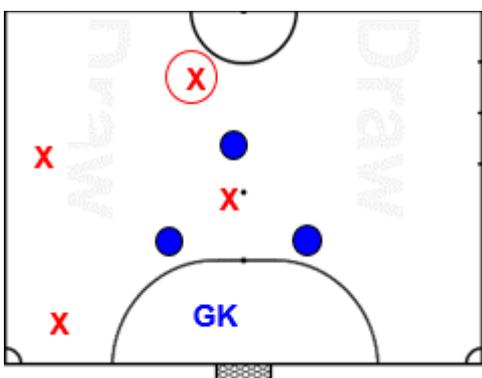
When should we retreat, then? We do this either because of tactical directives of the coach (when we are in the lead, for example) or because the opponents have reached the playing space # 1 (the space between the pivot and the wing players), but we are not close enough to recapture the ball. Then we have lost the central area and we need to return to our half of the court where we reorganize.

This means that we, when we have lost the ball, primarily works with a direct recapturing of the ball. If we fail with this (as defined above), we go back to our own half and work with indirect recapturing of the ball.

The height of the defense line can shift during a game. From a physical perspective, there are different parts of the game where we make more explosive runs and has a greater activity as a whole. This is usually the first 6-7 minutes and last 6-7 minutes of the first half and the beginning of the second half. This means that in the middle of the first and last 13 minutes of the second half, we have a lower activity level where we do not do as many actions.

This can we use to our advantage, and thus use a flexible line of defense. This means that we change the height of the line depending what he game clock shows. As an example, we use a low defense line (reference 10-meter point) at the beginning of the game, when activity is high, but when there is less action, we will use a high defense line (reference point arc on the offensive half of the court). This means that we slow down the opponents at the beginning of the game so they run off unnecessary energy when they are cannot go anywhere while we guard our positions, but we are raising the line when the chance that they make mistakes in their own half of the pitch is greatest (when they are tired, in other words). This means that we save our energy for the right time. We are strong at the end of the games. The formula we use for our defensive line is L-H-L / L-H-H, but can of course be changed depending on the circumstances.

Before we go on to talk about set pieces, I will write a bit about the numerical modes. Sometimes we will have a player sent off or situations where the opponents are one or more players more than us when they hunt an equalizer via a joker game. For his, we of course need to have a strategy.



In the example above, we play with the idea that we have a player sent off. This means that we, temporarily, must abandon our libero man-man marking. We go over to two liberos and a pivot

that works with the steering or the delaying kind of press. We simply go over to a positional defense that has a low starting point, from the penalty area. Our aim here is that opponents will get bad shot opportunities from the edges that our goalkeeper easily can manage.

At set pieces, however, we use a straight marking defense where we play a simple, but oh so difficult to carry out, kind of man-man-marking. In the picture below, we see how the opponents are trying to make a kick from the flank.



Note that all players (except the goalkeeper) have a player that they are marking. We abandon the marking system only when the opponent's attack is over or when we have forced the opponents to restart in a build-up play. Also note that the distances to the marked player will vary depending on where on the court they are - The farther away the more generous distance, the closer to our goal, the tighter.

We act in the same way on both corners or freekicks. At free kicks that are obvious scoring opportunities we preferably use only one, but a maximum of two, players in the wall. The determining factor is how reliable goalkeeper is with the distance, if it is enough with one or two in the wall.

In order to achieve our game idea in the defense in a maximal way, we need to have these types of players in the following positions:

### **Goalkeeper**

**TYPE:** As with all players in the teams I coach, the understanding of the game probably is the most important feature. With it, a goalkeeper can come a long way, even if the other skills are of lower quality. Psychology comes next and especially the courage to communicate with his / her defenders, but also to be a part of the offensive if we need to joker game to level the score. Being a goalie in futsal requires a fearlessness to go into situations that otherwise would have been nasty to enter. A functional technology is also preferred, although it is never superior to the understanding of the game and psychology.

**ROLE:** Besides the obvious, saving the shots from the flanks, the goalie needs to communicate with his / her teammates but partly also to prevent the opponents to come into scoring opportunities. The former is about giving the defenders information that they may have missed, like a dangerous player without marking or that we do not cover space behind the pressing player. Second is to take care of situations before there is a dangerous scoring chance for the opponents. Such may be to rush out and avert a potentially free player or getting to the ball before a pivot.

## **Libero**

TYPE: Understanding of the game is important since many decisions need to be taken regarding the marking game. Needs courage and determination to mark a player when there is another threat at the flank. Need to be strong in the body (in good shape) to withstand harsh pivots.

ROLE: The only player that marks an opponent in the open game scenario and should therefore pick off the opponents' most dangerous player that occurs in the middle.

## **Wing player**

TYPE: Understanding of the game as usual highest priority, but here also the physics starts to become crucial. Above all, the sustainability of the defensive actions, as the player in question is one of those who have to plow most meters per game in the press and cover. While communication between the pivot and the second wing player also is key (psychology).

ROLE: Playing in a positional defense together with the other wing player and the pivot. Working with the press and cover and alternates thus between them, there is therefore lots of running. Communicates loudly with the other wing player and the pivot.

## **Pivot**

TYPE: Again, understanding of the game is a main point. Needs a lot of endurance in the press and cover job. Even good press skill is important since this player is in the forefront for this.

ROLE: The first player who works in the press, thus may be the best on it in this team. Going into cover positions on the flanks when the wing player presses the opponent.

## Attack - Roles, player types and methods

When we have the ball in our possession and will conduct an attack, we use a 1-2-1 formation (which we also use in the defense). It provides us with many natural passing triangles that we want in our build-up play. Below you can see how it might look on our half of the court when we have the ball.



When we attack, an organized build up play is the highest priority. We want to play the ball through the opponents' lines. We want to advance with short passes and we want to have as much ball possession as possible in order to control the game. We want to play the ball forward when we can, but pass it back to the wing players or libero when we have to.

However, we need to have a varied passing game, so straighter, longer passes is obviously not prohibited even if it is not our primary method. In our build-up play, our libero in the middle is important because this player controls the whole method. This player controls the pace of the game, when we need to play it short or do a long ball, so this player needs to have a great understanding of the game. Our wing players are as wide as possible because we want to attack the opponents through the flanks and then create scoring opportunities, either by challenging the opponents, turn the buildup to other side to find empty spaces, make a wall play, hit a cross or a cut back into the penalty area or make a breakthrough in the middle.

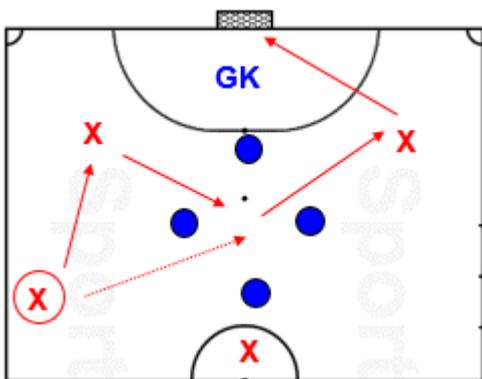
We want our players to have their faces at the correct direction, which means we want to have their faces towards the opponents' net as much as possible. For example, this means that we do not want to pass the ball to a player who have the back against the opponents' goal, but if we do it we only do it because we in a later event wants this player to face at the correct direction. The only way to score goals is to have the face in the correct direction, against the opponents' goal, so we naturally want to have our faces in the correct direction as much as possible. We also have greater chance of collecting information about the game this way. It is also important that we pass the ball in front of the teammate that will receive the pass. Just as in the defense, we move as a unit back and forth over the court to create appropriate distances in our build up.



In the picture above, you can see that we have advanced up in the court with the ball in our possession and pressed back the opponents against their own half of the court. Notice how wide our wing players are, this allows us to pull apart the opponents and gaps will therefore occur centrally when they have to move. Our pivot takes a more central position for the opportunity of a wall play, but he / she is not afraid to move to the flanks. Therefore, the pivot is not a fixed position, but requires a good physique since we want fool the opponents' libero out of position.



In the example above, our libero passes the ball to our left wing player. At the same time, our pivot goes to the left in order to test the opponent's libero. Will the libero to remain and keep the position or follow?



Let us say that the Libero does NOT follow our pivot. It gives us several options. One is that our left wing player passes the ball to the pivot who then passes to ball into the middle. There, the left wing player has entered the space and passes the ball directly out to the right flank, where our right wing player has advanced. Alone on goal, it becomes quite easy to get an undisturbed scoring chance here.

Other options are that the pivot plays the ball into the center to the right wing player who has entered the middle (if this player likes to shoot with his / her left foot, that is) or to play the ball directly to the right with a hard pass to a free wing players

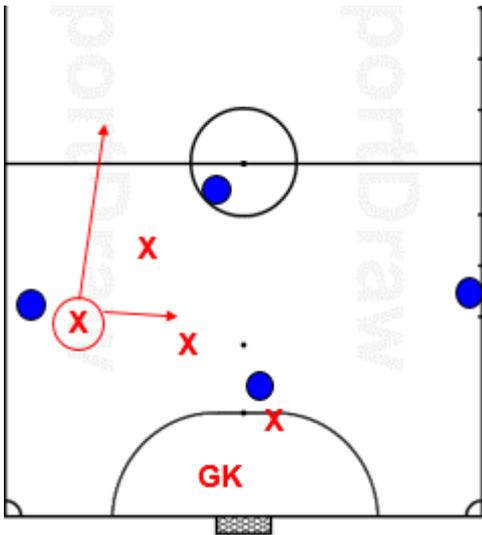


If the opposite occurs, the libero begins to mark our pivot, we have created a gap behind the opponent's triangle. If then our left wing player goes into the middle of the court, while our higher wing player advances, we create an excellent opportunity to hit a hard pass through the triangle.



Another example can be seen here as our right wing players in the above image wall plays with our libero who shoots on the target.

One thing that is important to point out is that these solutions are a kind of foundation for how we want to work with our attacks. It does not mean that other solutions are wrong, but this is a base that we proceed from if nothing else works. When it comes to attacking it is, unlike in defense, about being creative. As long as we get to scoring opportunities, it is important to open up for alternative methods. In brief summary, we can say that in defense it is never allowed to be creative, the rules we set up needs to be followed, while in attacking it should be allowed to have greater freedom. Defending is science, attacking is art.



In the image above, we can see how we have won the ball out on the flank (where we want our opponents to be). We are looking first and foremost for a good counterattack option.

We have two main methods for counter-attacks - One is to play the ball on the space behind the opponent's libero so that our pivot can get to 1-on-1-situation with their goalkeeper. The important thing here is to not pass the ball too hard, otherwise the opponent's goalkeeper will take the ball with ease and we will have to defend again. The second method is to pass the ball to the other wing player who will run with the ball to create a 2-on-1-situation against the opponents.

If the opponents are organized, we choose to use a structured build-up play. The spaces will decide if we want to counter-attack or if we want to use a build-up play. If there is space behind the opponents, we use the counter-attack with a longer, straighter ball. If the space is in front of them, we use build-up play. The spaces control the way we play and in that way we can also change our way of playing the game, which makes us more difficult to read. We always do the opposite.

Regarding set pieces, I think it's more important to do two alternatives in a perfect way rather than to have six that we can do decently. This gives plenty of room to be creative and to create new solutions for the players, but these are the two we mainly use.



In the above image, we see how our right wing player passes the ball into central space. At the same time, our pivot runs deep to draw one of the opponents out of position. Our left wing player takes a diversionary run towards the goal, changes direction and then finally moves towards the middle, where the ball goes. From there, this player makes a direct shot. The pivot is prepared if the goalkeeper leaves a return ball.



moves towards the center, where the player shoots.

If we would be in a game where we need to score in last minutes, we use a joker. Most likely we will then have a numerical superiority against our opponents, so it'll be a build-up play that we have to work with. This differs little from our usual build-up play, except that we most likely will need to work with a faster passing game where we pass the ball from side-to-side to pull apart the opponents and create scoring opportunities. It is important, however, that our joker plays on the flank if we need to switch to our true goalkeeper (if our goalkeeper does not play in the joker role, that is).

These are the players types we need in order to attack according to our game philosophy:

### **Goalkeeper**

TYPE: Understanding of the game important, primarily to determine if there is a good counter attack chance or time for a calm build-up play. Amazing if this player also has good passing skills and can be used as a joker.

ROLE: Starts the game after a save. Plays the joker role if we need to score at the end.

### **Libero**

TYPE: As always, the understanding of the game. Also need to have a very good passing skill and a lot of courage (psychology) since this player often is alone with the ball in the middle.

ROLE: Our playmaker and conductor. Incredibly important in our build-up play.

### **Wing player**

TYPE: Understanding of the game. Physics is important since it is a lot of runs and duels with tough opponents.

ROLE: Often the ones who will finish our attacks. Players who likes to shoot and make points.

### **Pivot**

TYPE: Understanding of the game, again. Need to be good physically to keep away his / her defender, and thus also needs to have a courage in daring to take a beating. Not bad if the pivot has a great technique on small spaces.

ROLE: Often wall plays. Attracting surveillance.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Key points in our defense:**

- We play 1-2-1-formation in our own half
- Our libero marks the most dangerous player in the middle of the court
- Our wing players and pivot plays a positional defense
- Sometimes, we play a 1-1-2-formation on the flanks when we move from side-to-side
- Our team is 11 meters long and 5 meters wide at our own half of the court
- We change the height of the defense line according to the formula L-H-L / L-H-H

### **Transition from defense to attack:**

- Use a counter attack if possible
- If that does not work, use a systematic build-up play

### **Key points in our attacks:**

- We play 1-2-1-formation when we have the ball in our possession
- We prefer to use a systematic build-up play, but can also use a counter-attack with long balls
- Our wing players play wide, but are not afraid of moving in to the central space if needed
- Our pivot has his / her position in the central space, but can also play at the flanks

### **Transition from attack to defense:**

- Our libero marks the most dangerous player in the central space
- All the other players play in a positional defense
- We use a 1-2-1-formation, but if it is necessary we can sometimes use 1-1-2
- We retreat to our own half if the opponents reaches the playing space #1 or worse

### **At set pieces:**

- At defensive set pieces, we use a straight man-man-marking system
- At free kicks close to our goal, preferably only one but a maximum of two players in the wall
- The goalkeeper decides if it will be one or two players in the wall at dangerous free kicks
- At offensive set pieces, we have two good alternatives to choose from depending on the situation

**// Johan Solinger, 5 April 2017, Hisingen**