

# “Putting Players Into Position”



*By Jonathan Tudor, CC United Director of Coaching*

# Introduction

One of the most frequent questions asked by new coaches at the U9-U11 level is at what age should players decide where they want to play, and when they decide should they be restricted to one position on the field. I think this is a very important issue, as being played, or choosing to play in the wrong position, can either reduce the enjoyment of the sport that the player receives, or worse, can affect the confidence of the individual.

It appears that when coaches enter the realms of traveling soccer they are eager to create the “real game” for their players and this must mean the allocation of fixed positions and the recreation of the “game” in practice. It is vital for player development that players at the younger ages (U9/10) experience as many positions on the field as possible and that the coach utilizes small-sided games (3v3, 4v4) to aid technical improvement and tactical awareness in practice.

Many coaches due to inexperience tend to fall back on their familiarity with other American team sports, and look to create positional play and structure, in practice and games, at a much too young age. The truth is that U9/10 players are just grasping the concept that they have teammates having just come out of the “me”, “mine” and “self” age. Trying to teach them positions and roles would be a waste, as so much more time needs to be spent on the fundamentals to improve their execution of basic technique on the field. The application of basic techniques in different areas of the field is the foundation of how positional play develops.

# Introduction

As we go into U11 more teammates are added and some players begin to look effective in certain positions. Having come through a first growth spurt, some players develop physical attributes that allow them to be successful in some areas of the field. One example is the child who gains height, suddenly becoming the number one choice for goalkeeper. As he/she is able to stop the high shots, which at U11 is how a large amount of goals are scored

At U12, players should have a good idea of the requirements of certain positions and of which ones they are physically and technically suited to. The coach should also have a good knowledge of their players overall abilities, and be aware of which positions to put them in that will allow them to achieve the most success. The coach should be able to recognize when a player is playing well through either the enjoyment of the game that the player shows, or the effectiveness on the field that the player demonstrates. It is vital for the players development at this key age that they receive plenty of playing time in the position that they are most successful in.

One of the most frustrating things that I see in youth soccer, is when players come off the field having played well in a position, and they return to the field, in a completely different area. It is the coaches responsibility to monitor when players achieve success in certain positions on the field, and reward them with the opportunity to play there again .

# Coaches Objective

*This is a guideline of the path for coaches follow to find playing positions*

- U9/10 players play all positions including goalkeeper.
- U11/12 players look to narrow their position down to a side of the field (right/left/central) or a zone (forward/midfield/defense) based on their game effectiveness and physical development.
- U13 players get to experience playing their side or zone on a larger scale in 11v11. Effectiveness on larger fields will be associated with athleticism or the development of teammates.
- U14+ players are set in a position that they/their coach deems their most favored/effective. They have the potential of being utilized in other areas of the field in playing roles.

# Qualities Needed For Each Position

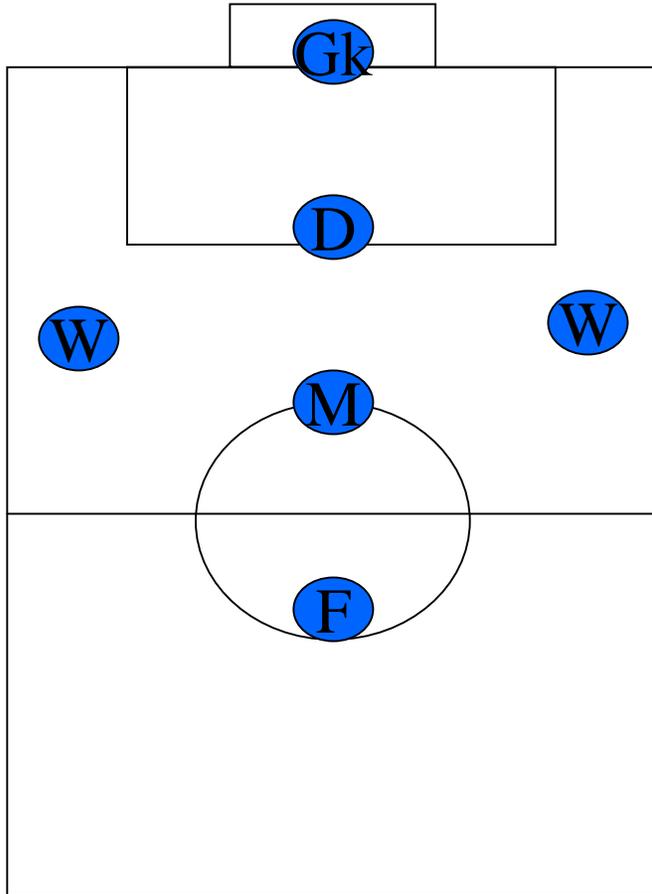
*When selecting the team, the coach should be aware that there are four specific roles on the field where we need to accommodate players*

*Each role requires certain qualities:*

- **Goalkeeper:** *height, agility, good hand's, good coordination, good communication, good distribution.*
- **Defenders:** *speed and pace, ability to tackle, good in the air, discipline to mark and track, ability to distribute, relevant size and strength (wide/central).*
- **Midfielders Central:** *relevant size and strength, speed and stamina, ability to tackle, good distribution skills, high level of awareness, ability to shoot from distance.*
- **Wide Midfielders:** *ability to beat players 1v1, ability to deliver crosses, speed and pace, positional discipline*
- **Forwards:** *relevant size and strength, speed and pace, ability to beat players, agile, ability to score goals, selfish mindset*
- **Note:** *Although these are the ideal qualities needed for playing specific positions the majority of players will be limited to one or two. Some forwards don't possess the ability to beat defenders 1v1, but they drift into areas that allow them to score goals. Some defenders are not good in the air, but are extremely quick and aggressive allowing them to dominate 1v1.*

# U9/10 Playing Roles

Once you have selected a player for a certain position they will need to understand their Defensive and Offensive responsibilities



Formation

1-1-1+ 2 Wide

Defend: Dominate your box, stop balls from crosses and shots, provide cover to last defender, communication-organize defense to prevent shots.



Attack: Awareness of outlet, good distribution-throw-kick.

Defend: Mark attackers zonally-don't get pulled out of position. Provide pressure and support, balance and cover when needed.



Attack: Be available to receive a pass off next line of players. Quality distribution away from trouble. Middle link in diamond-be ready to switch play.

Defend: Mark and track players in the central areas of the field. Provide cover in front of central player. Keep shape stay compact. Provide good information.

Attack: Be available to receive a pass. Provide support to defenders, forwards and wide players. Supporting runs beyond forward. Be aware of space to exploit.

Look to pick up pieces from defender or forwards tackles. Short and long passes be ready to switch play.



Defend: Mark and track runs of attackers in your area of field. Provide pressure and cover to players in central positions. Provide balance when ball is on opposite side of field.

Attack: Provide an outlet, utilize full width of field. Good communication when ball is passed inside. Provide good support to central players. Look to make forward runs without the ball-overlaps.



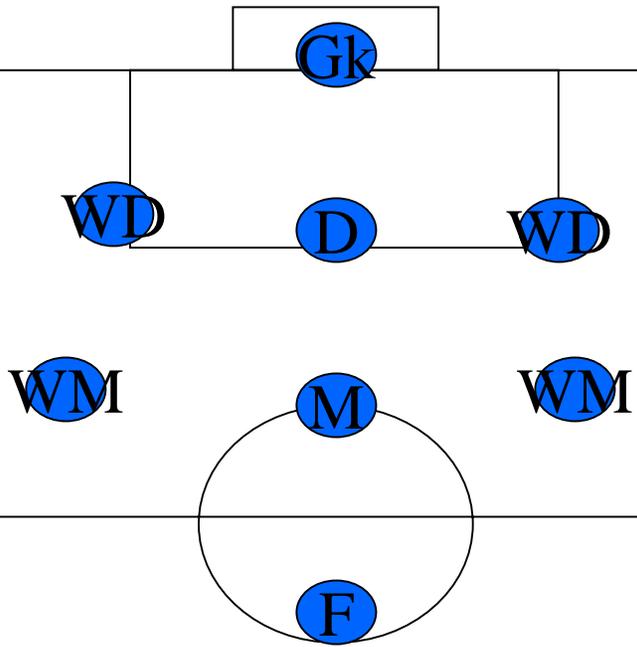
Defend: Pressure on the ball-force defender's to play towards their own goal. Take advantage of defenders mistakes. Channel play onto next defender.

Attack: Shoot on sight. Movement off ball to support team mates. Diagonal runs in front of defenders to move them behind them to get open.



# U11/12 Playing Roles

Once you have selected a player for a certain position they will need to understand their Defensive and Offensive responsibilities



Formation

3-3-1

Defend: Dominate your box, stop balls from crosses and shots, provide cover to last defender, communication-organize defense to prevent shots.

Attack: Awareness of outlet, good distribution-throw-kick.



Defend: Mark attackers zonally-don't get pulled out of position. Provide pressure and support, balance and cover when needed. Good communication.

Attack: Be available for pass from next line of players. Quality distribution away from trouble. Type of pass for effective transition-direct, switch, short.



Defend: Mark and track players in the central areas of the field. Provide cover to wide and forward players. Keep shape stay compact. Provide good information

Attack: Be available to receive a pass. Provide support to defenders, forwards and wide players. Supporting runs beyond forward. Be aware of space to exploit. Look to pick up pieces from defender or forwards tackles. Awareness of opposition during transition.



Defend: Mark and track runs of attackers in your area of field. Provide cover to team mates one link away. Provide balance when ball is on opposite side of field.

Fill in space to maintain compactness and shape. Good communication, WD mark first, WM can pass players on WD to mark.

Attack: Provide an outlet, utilize full width of field. Provide good support to central players. Look to make forward runs without the ball-overlaps



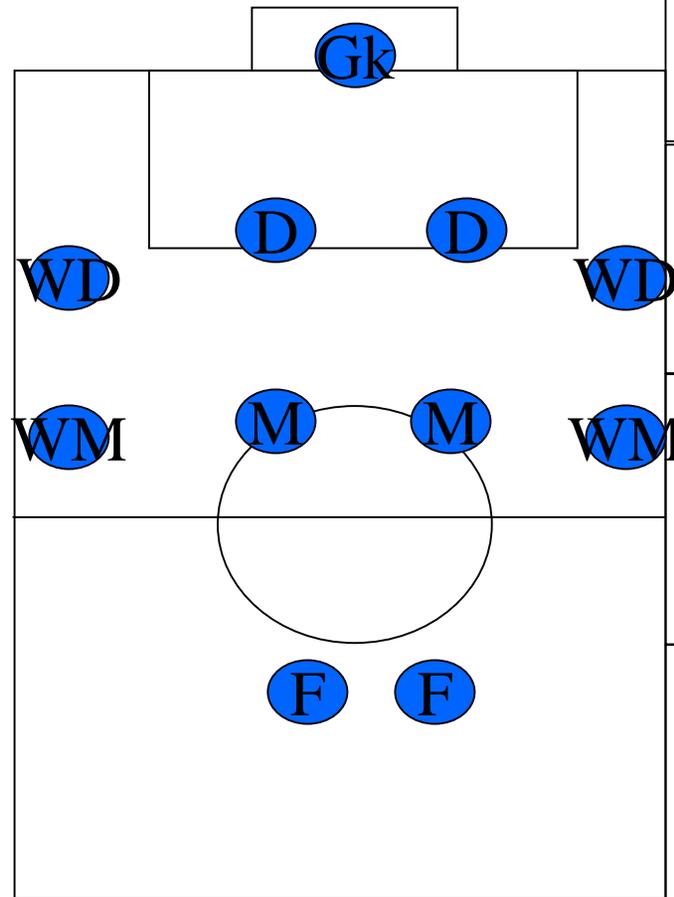
Defend: Pressure on the ball-force defender's to play towards their own goal. Take advantage of defender's mistakes. Channel play onto next defender.

Attack: Shoot on sight. Varying movement off the ball to support teammates. Diagonal runs in front of defenders to move them to create space. Runs behind defenders to get open to receive a pass. Look to hold up the ball to maintain possession as far up the field as possible.



# U13+ Playing Roles

Once you have selected a player for a certain position they will need to understand their Defensive and Offensive responsibilities



Formation

4-4-2

Defend: Dominate your box, stop balls from crosses and shots, provide cover to last defender, communication-organize defense to prevent shots.



Attack: Awareness of outlet, good distribution-throw-kick.

Defend: Mark attackers zonally-don't get pulled out of position. Provide pressure and support, balance and cover when needed. Good communication.

Attack: Be available for pass from next line of players. Quality distribution away from trouble. Type of pass for effective transition-direct, switch, short. Push forward when possible to create numerical advantage.



Defend: Mark and track players in the central areas of the field. Provide cover to wide and forward players. Keep shape stay compact. Provide good information

Attack: Be available to receive a pass. Provide support to defenders, forwards and wide players. Supporting runs beyond forwards. Be aware of space to exploit. Look to pick up pieces from defender or forward tackles. Awareness of opposition during transition.



Defend: Mark and track runs of attackers in your area of field. Provide cover to teammates one link away. Provide balance when ball is on opposite side of field.

Fill in space to maintain compactness and shape. Good communication, WD mark first, WM can pass players on WD to mark.

Attack: Provide an outlet, utilize full width of field. Provide good support to central players. Look to make forward runs without the ball-overlaps.



Defend: Pressure on the ball-force defenders to play towards their own goal. Take advantage of defender's mistakes. Channel play onto next defender.

Attack: Shoot on sight. Varying movement off the ball to support teammates. Diagonal runs in front of defenders to move them to create space. Runs behind defenders to get open to receive a pass. Look to hold up the ball to maintain possession as far up the field as possible look for quick combination play.



# CC United Formations

The formations have been specifically chosen to maximize player and team development. When played and understood, they are equally effective in both defending and attacking. The goal is for each player, when they reach 11v11, not only to understand their own playing role on the field, but also to understand how the playing roles of their teammates affect them.

## ***U9/10 1-1-1+2***

This will give the first year competitive players the appreciation of the wide player as a valuable outlet, which in turn will play a vital part in getting the players to spread out. It also provides excellent 2<sup>nd</sup> defender opportunities for the central players. Having only one forward requires the team to develop accuracy in their passing and it will also require the forward to have the discipline to stay forward and isolate themselves on central defenders. Playing this formation also creates the *diamond* shape in the defensive and attacking third which is vital in passing and support.

## **•U11/12 3-3-1**

This will give the team their first look at having two rows of equal players readying them for the 4-4-2. This formation will better prepare wide defenders and wide midfielders for 11 v11, by giving them the potential of working together at combination play (overlaps, give and go's, take over's). Playing one forward will still require accuracy of passing, but with 3 midfielders, the pass has more potential starting places. This formation will be harder to break down, as on average, we will have the numerical advantage of 7-4.

## **•U13+ 4-4-2**

The 4-4-2 is the most balanced formation in soccer. It provides cover at the back and it also provides us with plenty of attacking options coming forward. Players have the opportunity of attacking and defending in two's (wide players, central players). The 4-4-2 has the ability to change rapidly on transition to create numerical advantage without leaving large gaps to exploit. Each player has the security of cover either to their right, left or behind, and also, has the ability to push forward with the confidence that their position will be filled and compactness retained.