



Guideline (GUI)




# 11 vs 11 Formation Option Guide

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## Errors or Omissions

Big Country Soccer Association has provided this manual to the membership as a guide for the options available with an 11 vs 11 field formation. Any errors or omissions contained herein shall not supersede the by-laws, policies, procedures, or guidelines of the Association. Any changes to the manual shall be included in the next edition. The by-laws of the association supersede any guideline or policy should a conflict occur.

## Document Revision History

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# 1 Vision

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The Big Country Soccer Association aspires to be an outstanding educational-athletic organization that provides a high-quality experience for every athlete. A high-quality experience is one in which every athlete:

1. Is coached using the principles of Positive Coaching;
2. Has fun playing the game;
3. Feels like an important part of the team regardless of performance;
4. Learns “life lessons” that have value beyond the playing field; and
5. Learns the skills, tactics and strategies of the game and improves as a player.

# 2 Mission

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The Big Country Soccer Association is committed to providing well-organized soccer recreation appropriately structured to accommodate any level of play commensurate with our players’ individual abilities, potential, and interest and to promoting a positive youth sports culture that teaches life lessons and “honors the game” for all players in the Big Country, Alberta area. Our sporting philosophy is based on the following objectives:

1. To provide and support programs for the involvement and enjoyment of members of the Big Country Soccer Association in support of a long-term development of the sport of soccer.
2. To encourage and welcome parental support in youth soccer development.
3. To encourage good sportsmanship through development and competition in the sport.
4. To ensure all participants in all programs have fun and equal opportunity to actively participate in the sport.
5. To develop each athlete's basic skills that they can apply to the sport.
6. To develop good coaching and officiating capabilities in the sport.
7. To create and maintain a spirit of friendly competition without fear of bullying.

# 3 Scope

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This document is intended to provide general guidelines to Big Country Soccer Association community on the general information on the 11 vs 11 formation and its various options. For a coach to play a particular formation, it is still suggested that coaches also research their selected formations further including player movement when attacking and defending to see how the relationship of players and their positioning is essential to master the selected formation. It is important to select a formation that is specific to team skills.



## 4 References

The following referenced documents are to be considered the latest edition and indispensable for the application of this document.

Table 1 – References

| Document Number | Title                      |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
|                 | Alberta Soccer Association |
|                 | Canada Soccer Association  |

## 5 Acronyms and Defined Terms

For this document, the following acronyms and terms apply.

### 5.1 Acronyms

Table 2 – Acronyms

| Acronym | Definition                     |
|---------|--------------------------------|
| ASA     | Alberta Soccer Association     |
| BCSA    | Big Country Soccer Association |
| CSA     | Canada Soccer Association      |

### 5.2 Definitions

Table 3 – Definitions

| Term                                  | Definition  |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Big Country Soccer Association</b> | This is the name used to identify the association of community rural teams in Big Country central Alberta.  |
| <b>Registered Member</b>              | This is the community that is registered with BCSA to register their players to compete in the Association with other registered teams. These communities will have their players registered with Alberta Soccer Association. |

## 6 Responsibilities

6.1 The following list of responsibilities are not all encompassing. Additional responsibilities may be assigned out, as required, when there are tasks and/ or actions required to represent Big Country



Soccer Association, its players, parents, coaches, and the governing soccer associations that Big Country Soccer Association is required to adhere to.

**6.2** President of Big Country Soccer Association is responsible for the following in reference to this document:

- a) Provide final comment on all Big Country Soccer Association governance and other administrative documents before releasing them as a published document to the Big Country community.

**6.3** Vice- President of Big Country Soccer Association is responsible for the following in reference to this document:

- a) Lead on the development of Big Country Soccer Association governance, policies, and any other administrative documents necessary for Big Country Soccer Association to operate in the soccer community.
- b) Provide support for the development and support of Big Country Soccer Association coaches.

**6.4** Registered Members of Big Country Soccer Association is responsible for the following in reference to this document:

- a) Ensure Big Country Soccer Association coaching information is made available to coaches that this document applies to.

**6.5** Coaches of Big Country Soccer Association is responsible for the following in reference to this document:

- a) Ensure players are aware of the system of play selected for the team including player responsibilities related to that system.
- b) Provide an environment where players are able to explore and experience the positions related to the 11 vs 11 formation.



## 7 4 x 3 x 3 Formation



Figure 1 – 4-3-3 Formation

### 7.1 Formation Overview

One of the most popular formations in the world today, 4-3-3 has become a favourite of some of the most celebrated attacking teams on the planet. FC Barcelona, Ajax and Real Madrid have all used the formation to tremendous success using a possession-based style of football but 4-3-3 has more recently been used to achieve success whilst playing on the break. The formation is fantastic for teaching youngsters how to play the game in a variety of different ways. It provides natural triangles for keeping possession, allows players to understand the use of space and playing wide and naturally provides moments for creativity and adaptability. It's also great for teaching fullbacks to get forward while most utilize the formation for its attacking potential.

The most obvious drawback to the 4-3-3 formation is the open space between the fullbacks and the wingers. Through playing in a front-three the wingers are often not typically ones who want to do a lot of defending, nor do managers often want them to do any defending at all. This is why it can be dangerous to use for teams that don't keep a lot of possession, because without the ball there is a lot of open space out wide. Only with very defensive-minded fullbacks and a top quality defensive midfielder who can cover a lot of ground could a team be very successful in a 4-3-3 without being possession-based.



That being said, the perks and pros of the 4-3-3, such as its overwhelming attacking potential, can be invaluable to any team looking to play free-flowing football.

## 7.2 Some Pros to 4-3-3

- Central area control. With three central midfielders, the team can maintain control of the central areas of the field, which is crucial for buildup and dictating the style of play.
- Strong attacking presence. The three forwards, including a striker, give the team a potent attacking threat, allowing them to create and score goals.
- Balanced midfield. The 4-3-3 formation requires three versatile midfielders who can play multiple roles: passing, tackling, shooting, heading, initiating attacks, reading the game, and breaking up opponents' possession. This balanced midfield allows for sharp passing combinations through midfield and in the final third, creating natural width and overlaps.
- Passing options. The midfield three provides ample passing options for the team, making it easier to play through the midfield and create goal-scoring opportunities.
- Versatility. The formation allows different attacking players to be used in each position, making it adaptable to different teams' strengths and weaknesses.

## 7.3 Some Cons to 4-3-3

- Vulnerable to counterattacks. The 4-3-3 formation can sometimes leave teams exposed in defensive areas, particularly if their wide players push up high. This is especially true in the event of counterattacks by the opposing team, as it can be difficult for the defense to recover if they're caught out of position with a high defensive line.
- Dependence on wingers. The formation relies heavily on the wingers to provide width and create chances, putting pressure on them to perform.
- Fitness requirements. The 4-3-3 formation requires high energy and stamina levels from the fullbacks and central midfielders. Their roles involve a lot of movement up and down the pitch. This can be a challenge for teams with players who aren't fit enough to press properly, making the formation susceptible to quick counterattacks. If a team has weak fullback players, the 4-3-3 may not be the best.

## 7.4 Key to a Successful 4-3-3 Formation

- When not in possession the 4-3-3 formation almost becomes a 4-5-1 system as the 2 wingers should 'sag' back into the middle third to compact the opposition's midfielders.
- If the opposition is playing a 4-4-2 system there is also opportunity to press for the ball higher up the pitch in the attacking third. This can force the opposition to play more directly through to their forwards and allow more chances to regain possession.





- The key to a successful 4–3–3 formation occurs in the moment of transition in play between the opponent’s possession and regaining the ball.
- Immediately possession is gained the team must be prepared to create width, depth and support at pace and can sometimes be seen as a counter attacking tactic against strong teams.



## 8 4-2-3-1 Formation



Figure 2 – 4-2-3-1 Formation

### 8.1 Formation Overview

4-2-3-1 is one of the most popular formations around the world, particularly within the last decade and the slow decline of the 4-4-2. 4-2-3-1 provides a strong midfield base, allowing teams to flourish in both attack and defense. In attack, the front four can cause havoc, and in defense, the wingers often come back and do a job in defense. Successful teams that have played the formation in the past have deployed a counter-attacking approach to the game.

This formation is very flexible and can be adapted into a more attacking 4-3-3 or more defensive 4-5-1 with ease. Not only is it perfect for counter attacking football but it allows for lightning-quick transitions in attack.

The one knock against the 4-2-3-1 that many teams have noted is that it is set up in a way where the attacking midfielder must be the focal point in attack. If the attacking midfielder goes missing the formation is no longer effective. It also produces a larger gap in between the wingers and the defenders than in a traditional 4-5-1 but if the defensive midfielders can cover a lot of ground, this becomes less of an issue.



Overall, it's clear why the 4-2-3-1 is one of the most popular formations in the world. It can be used effectively as both an attacking or defensive formation depending on the manager's approach and provides players learning the game with clearly defined roles like few other formations can achieve.

## 8.2 Formation Requirements

- A central defensive midfielder: The defensive midfielder in the 4-2-3-1 is the most important component of the setup. This player plays the role of two midfielders in a normal 4-4-3 — the defensive midfielder and the controller. As such, the player must have adequate technical skills, ability to pass under pressure, an impressive passing range, and great positional sense.
- An all-action midfielder: Known as the Box-to-Box midfielder, this is the player who lines up alongside the defensive midfielder on the team sheet. This player's role is a lot more different, though. The player is expected to carry the ball from 'box to box', aiding in attack when appropriate and having significant defensive duties. This player is usually associated with making late runs into the box to hit the perfect long shot.

## 8.3 Some Pros to 4-2-3-1

- Attack: The 4-2-3-1 makes use of four attacking players with the box-to-box having the potential to be the fifth. This means that in a counterattacking situation, the team playing the 4-2-3-1 will almost always have the numerical advantage.
- Fluidity: The 4-2-3-1 boasts of a rather impressive ease of transition. While as many as five players can be dedicated to the attack, that number can just as easily change to six in defence. This fluidity in transition is what makes it so popular, as it is less susceptible to the threat of a counterattack.
- Balance: The 4-2-3-1 is well balanced, having the potential for great attacking football or a masterpiece defensive performance depending on the manager's game plan.
- Flexibility: Provides flexibility for teams to move from a defensive shape to an attacking shape quickly. This allows teams to protect their back line while still maintaining an attacking presence.
- Possession: Encourages teams to keep possession of the ball. This allows teams to maintain control of the game and dictate the tempo of play.
- Versatility: Allows teams to switch between different tactics and styles of play depending on the situation (such as switching to 4-4-1-1 or 4-5-1). This makes it an ideal formation for teams that want to be unpredictable and hard to read.



## 8.4 Some Cons to 4-2-3-1

- Finding the right personnel: The midfield of the 4-2-3-1 requires incredible specific personnel. The central defensive midfielder position, for example, requires a great passing range, decent athleticism, and a good footballing brain.
- The box-to-box midfield position requires stamina, good passing, and shot technique. If these requirements are not met, the 4-2-3-1 loses the balance which makes it so impressive.
- Vulnerable to width: Can be vulnerable to teams that use width to stretch the defense. With two central midfielders, there is less cover on the wings and so teams can use this to their advantage.
- Overworked: The attackers will need to work hard defensively due to initially pressing high
- Prone to counter-attacks: As the formation relies on two central midfielders to protect the defense, if they are caught out of position then there is a risk of an attack down the wings. This can leave the defense exposed and can be difficult to recover from.
- Isolation: The forward (or striker) can be isolated and outnumbered in the attack, making it difficult to create chances.

## 8.5 Key to a Successful 4-2-3-1 Formation

- The 4-2-3-1 formation is a popular soccer formation that consists of four defenders, two defensive midfielders, three attacking midfielders, and a lone striker.
- This formation is known for its balanced nature, as it provides a good mix of defensive solidity and attacking prowess.
- The two defensive midfielders help to protect the back four, while the three attacking midfielders support the striker and provide a creative outlet for the team.
- The lone striker is the team's main goalscoring threat and is typically a player with good finishing ability and movement off the ball. Overall, the formation is a well-rounded option that can be effective in a variety of situations.



## 9 3 x 4 x 3 Formation



Figure 3 – 3-4-3 Formation

### 9.1 Formation Overview

Back-three's have been commonplace in the game and the popularity of the 3-4-3 formation has arguably never been as fashionable as it is right now. The fantastic benefit to the 3-4-3 is that it creates attacking overloads in wide areas and provides free-flowing attacking play, while simultaneously transforming seamlessly into a 5-4-1 in defense.

The overloads created in wide areas not only make marking players nearly unmanageable, but also mean that wide areas are hard to exploit when out of possession as well. Simultaneously, central areas are well covered too with four players available to snuff out danger if the wing-backs get caught up the field.

One of the weakness of the 3-4-3 formation however is just how physically demanding it is. The formation requires that wing-backs in particular are very defensively disciplined, but not so defensive that they neglect their attacking responsibilities. The whole point of a 3-4-3 is to create attacking overloads through the wing-backs. In fact few other formations rely so heavily on one position. If the wing-backs aren't fit enough to get forward and back, the formation becomes less effective. Falling in line with that, if they get pushed too high, a back three can be vulnerable. This



is especially true given that the right and left-sided centre-backs are usually players who have played their whole life in a back-four and wide area covering can sometimes be foreign to them. That being said, the formation is very well suited for attacking play and if the wing-backs are up for the job, defending can be made easy too.

## 9.2 Some Pros to 3-4-3

- Attacking potency: With three forwards, the formation is designed to provide plenty of attacking options, making it difficult for the opposition to defend against. The formation can create multiple passing options in the final third, which can lead to more scoring opportunities.
- Possession-based play: The formation can be used to dominate possession, as the two central midfielders provide a solid base for retaining the ball, while the wider midfielders or wing-backs provide width and support in attack.
- Defensive stability: With three center-backs, the formation offers a solid defensive base, making it difficult for the opposition to penetrate through the middle. The wing-backs can also track back to provide extra defensive cover.
- Flexibility: The formation can be adapted to suit different styles of play, as the midfield and attacking players can be adjusted to provide more defensive cover or attacking flair as needed.
- Counter-attacking: The formation can be very effective on the counter-attack, with the three forwards capable of quickly transitioning from defense to attack, and the wing-backs providing support on the flanks.

## 9.3 Some Cons to 3-4-3

- Vulnerable to counter-attacks: The formation can leave the team vulnerable to counter-attacks, especially if the wing-backs are caught up the field and unable to track back in time to defend.
- Defensive imbalances: While the formation provides a solid defensive base with three center-backs, it can also create defensive imbalances if the midfielders fail to provide enough cover in front of the defense.
- Lack of midfield control: The formation can struggle to control the midfield, especially against teams that play with more players in the center of the park. This can lead to a lack of possession and a struggle to create scoring opportunities.
- Over-reliance on the forwards: With three forwards, the formation can sometimes be over-reliant on the attacking players to create goals, leaving the team exposed if they fail to score.
- Limited width: While the wing-backs provide width, the formation can sometimes lack natural wingers, which can limit the team's options for crossing and attacking down the flanks.



#### **9.4 Key to a Successful 3-4-3 Formation**

- The 3-4-3 formation offers a well-balanced setup with a 3-2 shape at the back and a front five created by the wingbacks, attacking midfielders, and striker.
- The wingbacks can be deployed in varying roles, either pushing forward for a high-block or dropping back for a low-block defense.
- Overloading wide areas of the pitch is a key component of breaking down the opposition in a 3-4-3 formation.
- The strength of the box-shape created by the double pivot and attacking midfielders is crucial for ball progression, chance creation, and counter-pressing in the 3-4-3 formation.
- Cohesion among players is crucial for success in the 3-4-3 formation.



## 10 3 x 5 x 2 Formation



Figure 4 – 3-5-2 Formation

### 10.1 Formation Overview

The 3-5-2 remains a popular option despite hardly being used in most other big leagues around the world. Five in midfield can do a lot in helping dominate over the opposition, but with two strikers and a back-three it also doesn't become overly defensive as say a traditional 4-5-1 for example.

Many teams today want to utilize a traditional two-striker system, but also want an extra man in midfield. This can make the 3-5-2 a coach's dream; especially when you take into account its likely superiority when defending against a 4-4-2.

However, in the rise of one-striker-systems and false-nine's, having three centre backs may be rendered pointless. This is especially true if the opposition's wingers are not getting forward.

As with other back-three systems, when the wing-backs push high up the field, space out wide can easily be exploited. A 4-4-2 provides a defensive base, particularly in wide areas that a back-three just cannot provide. It may also make the job of the fullbacks even more demanding than it already is. But when done right, the formation is very impressive and transitions seamlessly to a 5-4-1.





The 3-5-2 may be complex for young teams to comprehend, but with the right personnel it has some incredible perks in both attack and defense, making it an extremely attractive option for any manager.

## 10.2 Some Pros of 3-5-2

- Flexibility: Provides a great deal of flexibility in how it is used. It allows for a team to play both defensively and offensively, depending on the situation.
- Balance: Provides a great balance between defense and attack. It allows for a team to defend strongly while still having the ability to attack quickly.
- Strength in the Middle: Strong in the middle of the field as it allows for two defensive midfielders to protect the back line while still having three attacking players to push forward.
- Versatility: Highly versatile as it can be tailored to suit the team's needs. It is easily adaptable and can be used in a number of different ways.
- Robustness: Very robust and provides a strong defensive core that can protect against any opposition. It is also highly effective against counter-attacking teams.

## 10.3 Some Cons of 3-5-2

- Vulnerable Flanks: With only three central defenders and no dedicated fullbacks, the formation can leave the flanks exposed. Quick and skilled wingers from the opposition can take advantage of this vulnerability, especially during counterattacks or when the wingbacks are caught upfield.
- Over-reliance on Wing-backs: Relies heavily on wingbacks to provide both defensive support and attacking width. This dual responsibility can be physically demanding, and the team's success may be significantly impacted if the wingbacks are not up to the task or suffer from fatigue.
- Lack of Attacking Width: Since the formation primarily uses central midfielders and forwards, the team may lack attacking width if the wingbacks do not make consistent forward runs. This can lead to a narrow and predictable attacking approach, making it easier for the opposition to defend.
- Difficulty Against Wide Formations: Teams using the formation may struggle against opponents employing a 4-3-3 or 4-2-3-1 formation, as these formations often use fast wingers who can exploit the vulnerable flanks in the setup.
- Central Midfield Congestion: While having a strong presence in central midfield can be an advantage, it can also lead to overcrowding and a lack of space for creative play. It may require highly skilled and intelligent midfielders to effectively navigate this congestion and make the most of the formation.



- Susceptibility to Counter-attacks: If the wingbacks and midfielders are caught out of position during an attack, the formation can be vulnerable to quick counter-attacks, particularly from teams with speedy forwards and wingers.

#### **10.4 Keys to Successful 3-5-2**

- The 3-5-2 soccer formation can be a very effective way to defend against teams that rely heavily on their forwards to score goals. For example, it is a good strategy against 4-4-2.
- It is important that all of the players on the team understand their roles and responsibilities within this formation. When executed properly, it can provide a solid defense, while still allowing for attacking options.
- One of the strengths of the 3-5-2 formation is the use of wingbacks. The ideal wingback would be very fit, speedy, and a good dribbler with a decent delivery. This position is crucial to the success of the formation, as the strengths of the formation (possession, attacking options, and defensive stability) all derive from the wingback position.
- Featuring a sturdy trio of central defenders, adaptable wing-backs, and a collaborative midfield, this setup strikes a balance between attacking and defensive play. By emphasizing ball control and applying pressure in the opponent's territory, the formation is a powerful choice for teams striving to strengthen their defense while still offering goal-scoring opportunities for their strikers.



## 11 4 x 4 x 2 or 4-4-1-1 Formation



Figure 4 – 4-4-2 Formation

### 11.1 Formation Overview

Although once regarded as the best way to both exploit and reduce space on the pitch, hardly any team in the world today plays with the once standard 4-4-2 formation. One of the central reasons for this sudden shift was the fall of two-striker systems, as most coaches began to opt for an extra man in midfield.

Since then false-nine's and no-striker systems have almost become more popularized than the traditional 4-4-2. The 4-4-2 formation can still work today. But although it can still be an effective formation, the 4-4-2 is a dying breed and is very different from what it once was.

If played correctly, there are few better formations for attacking on the break and shutting down the opposition in defense. Two banks of four ensures that the opposition's attack must find their way past eight players (if the players are disciplined) in order to score. This is why with the right tactics and personnel, teams have flourished with the formation. It's also obvious for all to see that on paper, space on the field in a traditional 4-4-2 is covered everywhere you look.



## 11.2 Some Pros of 4-4-2

- Balanced: Provides a balanced approach to both attacking and defending, offering a good balance of players in key areas of the pitch.
- Solid foundation: The four defenders give a solid foundation and allow for good protection of the goal.
- Midfield control: The two central midfielders offer control of the center of the pitch and can provide support to the forwards and defenders.
- Attacking options: The two wingers provide width and options for crosses into the box whilst the two forwards offer a dangerous threat in the final third.
- Flexibility: Allows for flexibility and adaptation to different playing styles and tactics.
- Transition: The formation allows for quick transition from defense to attack.
- Pressing: Can be effective against teams with a high-pressing style.

## 11.4 Some Cons of 4-4-2

- Lack of width: With only two wingers, the formation can be narrow and predictable, making it easy for opponents to defend against.
- Lack of a creative midfield: With two central midfielders and two wingers, the formation can lack a creative playmaker who can unlock the opposition's defense and create scoring opportunities.
- Vulnerability to counter-attacks: Can be susceptible to counter-attacks, as there are only two central defenders and two full-backs to defend against the opposition's quick transition play.
- Dependence on the striker: Relies heavily on the performance of the two central strikers, and if they are not in form or not getting the necessary support from midfield, the team can struggle to score goals.
- Inability to control possession: Can struggle to maintain possession and build attacks from the back, as there are only two central midfielders who are tasked with both attacking and defending.

## 11.5 Key to a Successful 4-4-2 Formation

- The 4-4-2 places two central-forward threats high; up against a back four, this means both opposing centre-backs are constantly occupied.
- The double threat is also useful for securing central balls in advanced areas and subsequent combinations in and around them.
- It also creates a forward base upon which teams can build effective counter-attacks.



- In this particular formation, it is rare to see the full-backs defending underloaded.
- Deeper wide midfielders are better positioned to recover and work back – compared with wide attackers in a 4-3-3, for example.
- The 4-4-2 offers a strong defensive presence across the entire pitch, with compactness, balance and cover easy to establish in a high press, mid-block or low block.
- It also provides the perfect balance for counter-attacking football. Teams set up in a 4-4-2 have the numbers to defend in a compact, deep block to lure the opposition forward – but enough of a central presence to initiate counters and link into a variety of forward runners.