

## Senior Diploma Course

The Senior Diploma Course focuses on the 11v11 game model, normally this would be the U13/U14 age group and up. The Senior Diploma Course is the second course in a progression courses, the Youth Diploma Course being the first course, which is designed to be the foundation of teaching the game, as the Senior Diploma Course builds upon that youth foundation, expanding it to the 11v11 game. The reality is, top players who are entering the U14 level, should have already spent thousands of hours playing unstructured street soccer, mastering technique (player & ball, player ball & wall), and participating in structured club soccer. This would be the profile of a player who is serious about reaching their potential in the game. However, there is nothing wrong with the players who do not want to dedicate that sort of time to training, and their player pathway will be different. As coaches, we must be able to give players of all levels a meaningful soccer experience, in order to do this, we must have a methodology that is flexible and adaptable.

The methodology presented in the Senior Diploma Course is comprehensive, and intended to be adaptable to your own unique soccer environment.

We must recognize that all soccer environments are different, so there is no one methodology that is guaranteed to produce the next Messi, Pele, Ronaldo or Maradona, but there are clearly methods of development that produce very good players. Personally, I have worked in recreation programs, high school, middle school, club and college soccer, from 4 year old's just learning the game, to national team players; the reality is that these environments are all different, each requiring adaptability and flexibility. I like to say, "coaches need a tool box", if something isn't working, do you have the ability to recognize it, and change it, so the experience becomes meaningful for the player. Of course, it will take time to build your coaching "tool box", it starts with educating yourself about the game, studying it, implementing what you have learned, and constantly reflecting on your work.

Before we get into the methodology of the course, I would like you to think of a single training session, as an "environment". Training the players is not about the coach, or how the coach feels about the session, the effectiveness of the session is purely about what

the players got out of the experience. Explaining the principles of play, and relating them to the game model, might make the coach feel good, but if the players don't make meaningful connections, if they don't transfer anything to their actual playing experience, what's the point? The coach can walk away feeling great, but what was actually learned? Let me give you an example, if the principle of play is penetration through passing, in a possession type game model, the coach might want to implement a constraint/rule, mandating that every pass be played below knee height. For a team that values keeping possession, that one rule, will change the players experience, they will be forced to look for gaps, time runs, keep the ball, shift the defense and play smart to find the penetrating balls that create goals. The coach will never have to mention the principle of play, the environment teaches it, the players will learn deeper, because of the experience, the principle of play itself is just a bunch of words. If you tell a person don't touch the hot pan, its ok, but if the person touches the hot pan, and experiences the burn, the experience is so much more meaningful, get the point? Constructing great learning environments takes skill, but the foundation of player and team development, is all about environments, not just one environment but a

multitude of ever changing environments, that challenges the players to come up with new solutions to be successful. Constructing these types of unstable training environments, develops game intelligence in players, and over-time creates unique skill sets, that would of not been developed in stagnant or less dynamic training environments.

Keeping with the idea of constructing unstable and dynamic training environments, we must also have longer term vision of player development, that pulls everything together. The longer term vision does not have to be set in stone, it can be a flexible guideline for the age groups, as they progress in the game over time. Later in the course, I will cover the basics of tactical periodization, which is simply a way of organizing your trainings over a week, month and season. Because every person and team is unique, the coach must be allowed freedom in the player development process, this goes back to my theory that there is no one linear path for player development, that will be guaranteed to create the next Messi, but there are methods which have been very effective in developing players. The objective of this course is to provide you the coach, with tools for developing players, the coach can then go and apply

those tools, like an artist, interpreting and experimenting, to see what works best.

## 11 v 11 Formations & Tactics

There is no better place to start the senior diploma course, then covering a variety of formations, used in the 11v11 game. After covering the fundamentals of formations, I will touch on the most important aspects of tactical periodization, followed up by specific training methods for 11 v 11 game model. I hope the course will bring value to your coaching, and as always, feel free to contact me with any questions or comments at

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### **Formation Fundamentals in the 11 v 11 Game**

When breaking down and analyzing any formation, it is important to note that the difference between formations is only about 10 yards in player in positioning. You can make an argument that most formations are all similar, and difficult to identify once the game has started. The transition from defending to attacking, and attacking to defending, creates totally new shapes from the original formation. What complicates things even more, is

that the game of soccer is a free-flowing game, and inside that flow, there must be a structure which drives individual and team decisions. The key to any formation, is the way the coach lays out the tactical guidelines for the execution of the formation. It is extremely important to note that the same formation can be carried out in many different ways, depending on the coach. The tactical decisions that influence the way a formation is played can include establishing a line of confrontation, identifying pressing zones, outlining counter-attacking areas, instructing when to press or drop-off, determining the overall style of soccer to be played (the game model) within the formation, player personnel, physical readiness, location of the game, weather conditions, field conditions and much more, all these factors will directly influence the way a formation is carried out and played. For example, Manchester City would play a 4-3-3 much differently than Crystal Palace, because City have superior players, this would allow more tactical options and a different game model, while Crystal Palace would be very limited in their options, most likely being forced to sit and defend, while looking to counter.

When trying to teach a formation, it is very important to understand what that formation should

look like in all phases of the game, and in each area of the field. What would a 4-2-3-1 morph into in the attacking organization phase of play, in the attacking third of the field? What would a 4-2-3-1 look like during the defensive organization phase, while set-up with wide pressing zones, using half-field as the line of confrontation? What might attacking transition look like, building from the back in a 4-2-3-1? What is important to understand is, that formations need to be understood in their entirety, the coach must understand how the formation will change in every phase of play, and in every area of the field, in accordance with the game model (style of play implemented by coach). When figuring out how to play a formation in all the different phases of play, I suggest you work out transitions on paper that are simple and logical, for all players to follow. But soccer is soccer, and not everything can be planned out, so in game adjustments and problem solving by players and coaches must be done.

### **Tactical Considerations for any Formation**

#### **Game Model or Style of Play**

The game model is simply the way the coach wants the team to play, the game model can also be called the style of play. Teams like Barcelona and Ajax,

have had the same ball possession game model for decades, coaches at those clubs can come and go, but the game model or style of play, stays the same. You will not see these teams sitting in a defensive low-block, hitting endless long balls, or refusing to playing out from the back, that is the opposite of their game model. Even the academies at Ajax and Barcelona are designed to produce players that fit their game model, this is done on purpose to ensure a consistent product. However, other clubs take a different approach, allowing the Head Coach to implement whatever game model they choose when hired. The problem with this approach is, the club are risking the quality of their team product, possibly disconnecting with their own academy, relying on current players to carry out a new game model, and if the coach leaves, the players purchased may not fit with the next game model, leading to a roster of mixed players. This leads me to a very important point, when choosing a formation, the coach must understand the club, players, league and soccer culture. Below are some tactical considerations to consider when implementing a formation, to keep things simple, a standard 4-2-3-1 formation is used in all examples.

### **Full Press, Half Press, Low Defensive Block (Line of Confrontation & Line of Restraint)**

When choosing a formation, it is important to choose the tactics to be implemented with the formation, even if the tactics change from game to game, which they probably will change to keep the opponents guessing, the basic formation itself doesn't need to change. One tactical consideration will be choosing a full press, half press or low defensive block, and teaching how to implement these tactics in the formation. However, please remember that the coach can change tactics within the game itself, or from game to game, but the formation can still stay the same. To illustrate these defensive tactical points, let's look at different ways to set a team up in a defensive low block, while playing a 4-2-3-1.

In the example below, the red line marks the line of confrontation, and the yellow line marks the line of restraint. These lines are obviously not marked on the game field, but it is very important the players understand what they represent, they provide spatial reference for the team's defensive shape. The players can break the line of confrontation, normally

this is done with 1-3 players breaking the line in a coordinated effort, to pressure and win the ball back at the right moment, or 1 to 2 attacking players could simply be left high, above the line of confrontation. In this example the 4-2-3-1 formation takes the shape of a 4-1-4-1 formation, in a low defensive block, this is an important point, even though the team is playing a 4-2-3-1, it is entirely up to the coach what shape the team will take in a low defensive block, or in any other phase of play. The 4-1-4-1 shape in the low block, is a simple adjustment in the 4-2-3-1, just drop the defensive center midfielder in between the backline and midfield line, have the passing center mid and attacking center mid play next to each other in the midfield line, creating a line of four, and leave the striker higher. The adjustment is very small, but the shape is an excellent low block defensive shape. This is not the only way to create the 4-1-4-1 shape, but that is exactly the point, there is a great deal of flexibility inside every formation, in terms of how to organize and create the shapes, just make sure the transitions make sense, and the players know their role in the transitions.



In this next example, we can see the team has moved the line of confrontation up the field, into a defensive half press. The team is still using a 4-1-4-1 defensive shape, even though their general formation is a 4-2-3-1.



Here is another example of a half press using a strict 4-2-3-1 formation. Notice the defensive center mid and passing center mid (#6 & #8), are both taking up positions in between the lines. The midfield line becomes a line of three, and the striker remains high. In this formation the coach could give flexibility

to the sitting center midfielders, allowing one of them to push forward to help the midfield line if needed, when the ball is on their side of the field. If the ball is out wide and the left back needs to push up field to pressure, one center mid could drop into the back line, to add extra protection, making it a line of four again. These are all tactical examples that the coach must teach, this further makes the point that a formation can be implemented in many different ways. Keep in mind, we only talking about defensive team responsibilities at the moment, the tactical variations in all four phases of play, allow a lot of flexibility in the way a formation can be played.



Here is another variation of the half press, using a 4-4-1-1 shape. To achieve this shape from the 4-2-3-1, push the defensive and passing center midfielders into the midfield line of four, and push the attacking center mid underneath the striker. This shape can

easily be shifted into a 4-4-2, by pushing the attacking center mid, right up next to the striker. The reality is that each shape has their own strengths and weaknesses, it can be a 4-2-4, 6-3-1 or 4-1-4-1 defensive shape, it is up to the coach to figure out how to tactically guide the team to their best possible outcome, in all phases of the game.



This example shows how a half press can be used with pressing zones, with the intention of winning possession and starting the counter attack. The formation is a 4-1-4-1, as 2-3 players will break the line of confrontation when the ball is played wide to the wingback, the idea is to press the wingback when the ball is in flight, cutting off all options, creating a turn-over that leads to an immediate counter attack. This is one simple strategy that can be used in a half press with pressing zones, the pressing zones represent the first part of a counter attack.



Here is a full press in a 4-2-3-1. This would be employed from the opponents goal kick, a complete and full commitment to press is implemented. Many teams will drop the line of confrontation just far enough, to challenge the opponent to play out of the back, once the ball is played, the team can fully press. The full press can be applied using many different shapes and strategies.



The full press using a 4-2-4 formation.



### Variations in Attacking Tactics in the same Formation

Here is an example of the 4-2-3-1, in the attacking organization phase of play, but the shape can now be viewed as a 3-2-5, 3-4-3 or 2-1-2-5. Notice the wingbacks have both committed forward, providing attacking width, the wingers have tucked inside, the defensive center mid has dropped, making a backline of three. This example is an aggressive attacking shape.



### Attacking Transition and Organization in 4-2-3-1.

Here is an example of tactical flexibility inside a formation. The 4-2-3-1 uses three center midfields, but the way the coach deploys those center midfielders, can vary greatly. Would the defensive center midfielder (#6) be the only center mid dropping to receive the ball when building out of the back? That would result in the same player filling the same spaces, covering a lot of ground, running side to side. Perhaps the coach would allow the defensive center mid and passing center mid (#8) to split the field, sharing the role of building the attack? Maybe go even further and have the attacking center mid (#10) interchange with the #6 or #8, creating dynamic movement in the center midfield. These are all tactical decisions within the same formation, that the coach would need to decide.





### Formation Summary

The idea I want you to come away with from the above examples are, that formations are simply starting points, it is up to the coach to create the game model and tactics, filling in all the blanks. Formations serve as the general structure, like an Artists blank canvas, as the bulk of the work is yet to come. The old saying, “the devil is in the details”, couldn’t be more true, especially when speaking about formations, but don’t get me wrong in the sense that a formation must be accompanied by a million complicated instructions. A formation can be simple, or it can be more complex, it all depends on the situation, the specific game, game model and coach.

The other important take away is, formations must be understood and taught in all phases of the game. It does no good to teach defending shape in a low

block, if you ignore and don’t train defending in the middle, and attacking thirds of the field. If you teach attacking in the attacking third, but neglect to teach the build-up phase, and attacking transition, what are you really teaching? If you are a ball possession oriented team, the coach should understand that it takes between 15-25 passes to transition from building up the attack, to complete attacking organization shape, in the attacking 1/3. This means the team must be instructed how the team shape will change during the 15-25 pass build up, and how the team shape will transition and change if the ball is lost. The coach must learn and teach all the phases of play in the formation, teach them separately, and also link them altogether in a free game. Each player should understand the formation, the game model and their exact responsibility in all phases of play.

Now that I covered the pieces that make up a formation, the rest of the book will focus on 9 specific soccer formations, and the ways they can be implemented. The last part of the book provides practice sessions, that can be adapted to train any formation. Lastly, the book is meant to stimulate ideas for the coach, in terms of formations and tactics, hopefully providing inspiration to try new things, and make up your own transitions, bringing

to life new ideas. It is only by going outside your comfort zone, that you will start to grow and discover new things.

## Introduction to Tactical Periodization

**Game Model:** How we play. Inside the game model, we build in a degree of tactical flexibility, but never straying from the core ideas or foundation of our soccer beliefs. Teaching the four moments of the game, specific to our game model (attacking transition, attacking organization, defensive transition, defensive organization)



**Tactical Periodization:** The way the game model is taught over a week, month and season. Teaching can be done using the entire team, inter-unit, unit,

groups of players from different units and individuals.

**Typical 1-Week Cycle:** Game Day, Recovery/Off Day, Recover Day Training, Strength Day (shorter distances and less volume in training), Endurance Day (hardest day of training typically 10v10 larger field), Lower Intensity Training, Activation (easy day to review tactics & couple maximum exertions), Game Day.

**Physical Periodization:** Planning the workload of the team. The physical workload needs to be measured and coordinated with the tactical periodization training & supplemental physical work. Ideally we would have strength/movement specialist coach that would work with the staff to integrate the physical aspects.

**Pre-season:** In the college season (where I currently coach) this is very short for us, we rely on players reporting to pre-season in top physical condition. The aim of pre-season is to come together as a team as quickly as possible, while the coaching staff gets to know the abilities of players. The game model must be taught very quickly, analyzed in pre-season matches & adapted/tweaked where needed.

The idea is to hit a very high-level of performance and stabilize at that level, from a tactical, cognitive and physical aspect. The typical college season does not work this way because of the high demands of games (2-3 per/week). We try and schedule only 1 game per/week to ensure high performance levels are maintained throughout the entire season.

**In-season:** Constant analysis of game model for improvements, while getting specifically ready for the next opponent, making small-tactical and personnel adaptations for the next opponent if needed.

1 Week Cycle (Micro-cycle) Grey, Blue,

Yellow, Green= 4 weeks – Match Day's in Pink

1 Month Cycle (Meso-cycle)

Full Season (Macro-cycle) – Four Parts Pre-season,  
In-season, Post-season & Off-season

Countdown to next Game in days = G-3 (game is 3 days away) G-2 (game is 2 days away) G-1 (game is 1 day away)

### **Sub Principles for the Moments of the Game**

#### **Attacking Organization**

#1 Building out of the Back – (pass short to attract, switching play, using the keeper, playing direct, player positioning) – How you train your team to

play out from the back, and tactical flexibility that accounts for the attributes and tactics of the opponent.

#2 Building Phase – building possession in the middle 1/3 of the field (using the width, player positioning, movement of players to more attacking positions)

#3 Scoring Phase – in the attacking 1/3, crossing intelligence, movement into dangerous areas, coordinated attacking team movements, penetrating movements

#### **Defensive Transition**

#1 Mental commitment to defend immediately

#2 Immediate pressing and team recovery

#3 Quality of 1v1 defending

#### **Defensive Organization**

#1 Step-up/Push-up to stop opponents build-up play – normally in opponents defensive 1/3 from re-start.

#2 Lines of depth, correct spacing between lines and shifting of lines – this requires coordination between the entire team

#3 Defensive 1/3 lines of depth – always trying to have multiple lines of depth, but if a tight line is held, must be a unit.

#### **Attacking Transition**

#1 Read the situation. Can we score right away with a shot? Is there a direct ball that can be hit, to create an immediate scoring opportunity or put the defense under pressure? If neither option is available, we should build the play, fill all channels (width) and allow for attacking positions to be taken up as the ball is possessed.

### **Attacking Principles**

- #1 Penetration – to create scoring chances
- #2 Width – stretch the defense to open up gaps
- #3 Support – allows for ball retention and switching of field
- #4 Mobility – movement and the interchanging of positions to unbalance the defense
- #5 Balance – if possession is lost the counter attack can be dealt with effectively

### **Defending Principles**

- #1 Press – if we can win the ball right away, do so
- #2 Support – behind the pressing players are the supporting players, who cut out passing lanes
- #3 Delay – give the team time to recover behind the ball
- #4 Compactness – defending with numbers in a small area

#5 Balance – making sure all vulnerable spaces can be covered

### **Training Principles**

- #1 Complex Progressions – trainings should be simple to complex
- #2 Propensities – train important moments over and over, but keep changing the experience to make the training a little unpredictable
- #3 Specificity – all training sessions relate to the game model (debatable in player development model)
- #4) Principle of Horizontal Alternation Specificity – workload must be monitored to keep training safe and productive
- #5 Coaches Instinct – coach makes whatever changes are needed to trainings

**Micro Cycle**– the goal is to achieve the highest performance level for the match. Complete recovery comes only on the 4<sup>th</sup> day after a match. The micro-cycle helps plan the week so emotional, physical and mental capacities are at their best.

### **General Guidelines of Micro Cycle**

Saturday – Match Day

Sunday – Off completely

Monday – Players who did not play match will play 75 minute training match. Players who played 45+ minutes in match will do recovery and easier session.

Tuesday – Medium workload

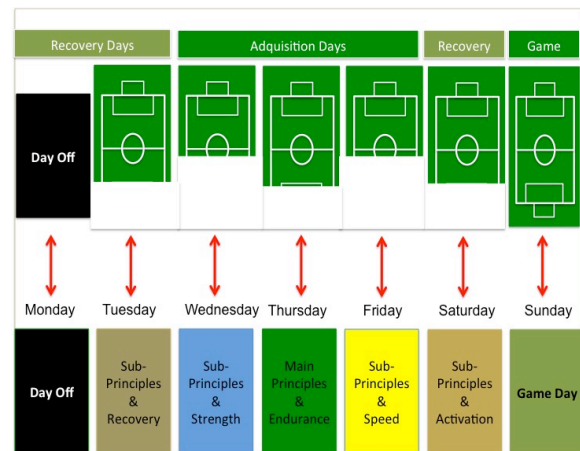
Wednesday – Largest work day of the week (10 v 10 for 60 minutes)

Thursday – Medium workload

Friday – Low workload

Below is an example of color-coded Micro Weekly Cycles, that make up a Meso Cycle, as all the Meso Cycles create the season, called a Macro Cycle.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	Training 8	Training 9	Training/Rest 10
Training/Rest 11	Training Game Model 12	Training Game Model 13	Training Game Model 14	Training Game Model 15	Pre-match walk through & physical activation 16	Match Day 17
Day off 18 Video Analysis of Match Sent to Players to Review	Match Day 19	Recovery 20 Video Analysis of Match Sent to Players to Review	Training Game Model 21	Training Game Model 22	Pre-match walk through & physical activation 23	Match Day 24
Match Day 25	Recovery 26 Video Analysis of Match Sent to Players to Review	Recovery 27	Training Game Model 28	Training Game Model 29	Training Game Model 30	Pre-match walk through & physical activation 31



The above chart shows the field space usage and focus for each training in a Micro Cycle (1 Week).

Tactical Periodization is a training methodology, invented by Portuguese Professor, Vitor Frade. I personally find it very useful, in terms of planning and organizing trainings, staying focused on the game model, and being conscious of player physical workload. However, Tactical Periodization is just one part of my coaching tool box, I am not strictly tied to Tactical Periodization as a methodology. It is very important, I am not tied to a single “Soccer Coaching Dogma”, that limits my freedom when it comes to coaching the game. The overview I provided of Tactical Periodization is simple, direct and to the point, I did that on purpose, because that is the way I view it, and that is the way I implement it myself. If you want to study Tactical Periodization in more detail, there are plenty of resources available, just

understand that this incredible popular training methodology is simply one person's view point on training. I found it more useful to pick the pieces from Tactical Periodization that made the most sense to me, combining them with the ideas I have about coaching from many other places.

### **Team Concepts**

The next part of the course will focus on team concepts for the following three areas.

1. Attacking (organization + transition) &  
General Possession/Finishing
2. Defending (organization + transition)
3. Set -Pieces

Please note that many of the exercises, can be adjusted to fit the game model being used.