Quick Reference Guide

IN POSSESSION

#1 GOALKEEPER – A goalkeeper’s main responsibility is to protect the goal, but the modern
day goalkeeper is expected to do a lot more. We want him to be 2-footed, be able to trap a ball,
pass the ball and be able to clear the ball when being passed back to and under pressure. Also,
his quick distribution can start a quick counter attack. Our style will focus on a good build up from
the back, but if there is a one v one situation up front then play it long.

#2 & #5. RIGHT AND LEFT FULL BACKS – Fullbacks look great when coming forward
overlapping and putting in great crosses (i.e. Roberto Carlos and Cafu). When one of the backs
has made that run the other back should tuck inside and slightly behind the two central defenders
to provide proper support in case of loss of possession and to prevent a successful counter attack
from the opponent. The defenders should also look to push on down the line when the
goalkeeper has the ball. The goalkeeper can either play the ball directly to either of them (if they
are free and available). Wingbacks can also receive possession from the central defenders who
receive the ball and look to play it wide for the build-up. The first option in this style of play is to
always look and play forward as quickly as possible. In every situation, a player who has time
and space in this position should always look to run forward with the ball. The second option is
to play it sideways into a midfielder when they are free and showing for the ball. The third and final
option is to play the ball backwards and start the build up again through the other flank. The
wingback and attacking wing on that same side should be very familiar with one another and
understand how and where they want the ball delivered. For example, if the wing player is tightly
marked the ball should be played into space behind. If the wing has time and space, then the ball
should always be delivered into feet. This is an incredibly important factor as a wing that can
consistently get behind the defender can create goal-scoring chances. These scoring chances
cannot be realized without effective communication and strong support from the wingbacks.

#3 & #4. CENTRAL DEFENDERS – Number 3 is generally looked upon as being the “Stopper”.
The main purpose of this player is to defend. Number 4 is the technical player. This player, when
called upon to, is asked to start the build up from the back and may also be looked to push on
into midfield. It would be ideal if the right central defender was right-footed and the other left-
footed. This would give the defensive third perfect balance in the build-up. In a perfect situation
both would be able to defend and both would be technically strong players. When the goalkeeper
has the ball the positioning of the central defenders to start the build-up is important. They should
begin at the corners of the penalty box so they can spread the opponents’ strikers who want to
close down and pressure. The central defenders should be prepared to accept the ball sideways
on so that they can quickly look forward for the next pass with the ball at their feet. They should
look to make quick and effective choices of where to play the ball and to minimize the risks of
deciding where to continue possession or whether to run with the ball. Remember, making an
incorrect decision in the middle defensive third will almost always cost you a goal. Central
defenders are the heart and soul of your defense. It is important that when one goes forward you
make sure that either a midfielder covers for them, or both of the wingbacks tuck in to create
some security in the middle of the defense.

#6 & #8. RIGHT AND LEFT MIDFIELDERS – These two players are always referred to as linking
players and are there to link the possession between the full backs and the attackers. They are
the middle point of the triangle, the essence of the system, and always provide support for the
central players (10 + 9). Also, they look to capitalize on the open or available spaces created by
the attackers’ runs to either gain an attempt at goal or to possibly get a scoring chance for
themselves. When one midfielder makes an advancing run the other one must hold and tuck into
a central position to keep the teams’ shape and balance in case possession is lost. They should
always look to make themselves available to the ball, especially when the goalkeeper is in possession, so that they may receive and quickly look to play the ball forward to the attacking players. Their first option will always be to look forward to the central players. If they are not available, then they look for their second option (attacking players wide, or the space behind them and the wide defenders). Their third option would be to play the ball wide to an advancing wingback. The final option, as is with all positions, would be to play the ball back to a supporting player.

**#10 CENTRAL MIDFIELDER** – This player should be your most technically gifted player (i.e. Zidane, Bergkamp). The main responsibility of this player is to always support and play off of the central striker (#9). This player must read the game well and be able to anticipate the attacking play based upon the runs made by the attackers. They must always look to keep the central balance of the attack by always being available to receive the ball from either of the three attackers. They are responsible for attacking the goal on all serves, but must also be ready to read the central defenders in order to determine which type of run needs to be made. For example, if the central attacker makes a checking run to receive the ball and draws both of the central defenders, then this player must recognize this and immediately attack the space vacated by the two central defenders. If only one of the central defenders follows and the other remains, then this player must check in behind the central attacker for immediate support. This central midfielder player, also known as the shadow striker, is the playmaker of the system and is looked upon as the player who makes things happen in and around the box with their skill and vision. This player will always be looked upon to create scoring chances for others and for themselves.

**#7 & #11. RIGHT AND LEFT WINGERS** – The most important skill these players must have is speed. It would be ideal that they are the fastest players on the field, but they must be at least above average in speed for this system to work. This whole system is predicated upon the fact that these players have speed and can put immediate pressure because of this on the opposing defense. They always look to stay wide and are often called upon to serve the ball into the box for the central players to attack the goal. They must understand that when the fullback marks them tightly that the ball needs to be played to space behind them. Conversely, when they have space between them and the fullback that the ball must be played into their feet. They always look for opportunities to isolate the fullback and take them on 1 v 1 every time. If they have ten chances to take the defender on, then they should take all ten chances. They also look for combinations with supporting central players in an attempt to exploit and beat their defender. They always look to stay as wide and as deep as possible, whether in possession or without possession. They are very much one-dimensional type of players who are always thinking of attack in every situation. Finally, they must be patient players as they will often go extended periods of time without ever realizing possession of the ball. It is not uncommon for these players to go as long as twenty minutes without ever gaining possession, but they must always stay focused and involved, as their role is often to stretch the defense (whether they have possession or not). By holding the line as deep as possible the wingers are automatically creating space for others and themselves.

**#9 CENTRAL STRIKER** – This player is expected to score the goals and win your team the game. A good striker can be played into feet so he can bring other players into play (midfielders). They must be able to hold the ball under pressure from an opponent and still be able to see supporting players. They will often be called upon to attack the goal via flighted balls and must be able to win the ball in the air. They are smart, quick players who are very attack-minded and look to get behind the defense as often as possible. They must be able to read the central defenders to see if they are being double team and, if not double-teamed, be able to turn and quickly attack the one central defender. They must have the insight to see supporting players immediately, but also understand where supporting players are without seeing exactly where they are. There is a certain trust factor with this player and all players in this system as they are
expected to operate under pressure at all times and must be able to make runs and attack a defense for ninety minutes whether immediately successful or not.

WITHOUT POSSESSION

#7 & #11. WINGERS – These two players are responsible for the 2 full backs of their opponents. For high pressure allow a distance in which you invite the goalkeeper to pass to one of the fullbacks. Once the goalkeeper has decided to distribute to one of the wingbacks, then the wings look to close and immediately apply pressure inside with the central attacker dropping back centrally anticipating a pass back to the goalkeeper. The weak side or opposite side wing also pinches in to eliminate space and to force a difficult or errant pass. In normal situations the wings would drop back and pinch in forcing the opposition to play the ball wide. Once the goalkeeper distributes ball, then the wing would apply moderate pressure ensuring that possession stays wide and no central possession opportunities exist.

#9 CENTRAL STRIKER – Starts in between the 2 central defenders of the opponents and waits for the right moment to cut off the goalkeeper and force possession to the sides. The plan should be to force possession to the weakest (technically) central defender as there is a better chance of either winning the ball or forcing this player to make a mistake. The central attacker should always try to anticipate a pass by the defender back to the goalkeeper. This is the best time to apply pressure in the hopes of forcing your opponent to make a mistake.

#10 CENTRAL MIDFIELDER – This player’s main responsibility is to prevent a central player from receiving and playing a ball through the middle. They must always be aware of where the central options for the opponent are and do their best to eliminate or reduce the possibility of a central pass forward. Often this may be one of the central defenders attempting to possess and move the ball forward. The central midfielder must make sure that they apply immediate pressure to shepherd them to one side. Once they have been guided there. The near side wingback then picks up the assignment and allows the central midfielder to stay central (within the width of the 18 yard box) in an effort to continue eliminating the opponent’s central options.

#6 & #8. RIGHT AND LEFT MIDFIELDERS – These players are responsible for maintaining the shape of the triangle at all times, defensively as well. They do this to support the central midfield player and to prevent and eliminate the risk of the opponent switching the field of play, something that would break down the system quickly. These players must make sure that they are within 12-15 yards of each other and are keenly aware of the opponent’s central options. They must be sure to shift and mark them closely, but to not damage the integrity of the triangle in this action. They just need to be close enough to disrupt, intercept or force the opponent back to the same side. There must always be a point of the triangle blocking a central option for the opponent. In addition, if the opponent should penetrate deep into the defensive third, then they must become marking players inside the 18 yard box to eliminate the threat of an attack via a served or driven ball.

#2 & #5 RIGHT AND LEFT FULL BACKS – If your opponents play 4-3-3 then the backs will man mark their direct opponent on the wing. If the attack takes place down the flank of your other full back then tuck in and cover and help your central defenders. If it is a 4-4-2 system against you then when the ball is played on your side push onto the wide midfielder to mark him and the other back tucks to cover and support. The biggest difference between these two is that the backs must react more quickly when pushing forward to pressure a wide midfielder whereas in a 4-3-3 the forward winger who is always close to you.
#3 & #4. CENTRAL DEFENDERS – The first and most important responsibility of these two players is to make sure that they are supporting the #2 and #5 players when they are defending an opponent with possession. This means that they must be at an angle behind that player and within 10-12 yards of them to prevent the opponent from coming inside. These players are responsible for making sure the defense is properly shifting and has its shape. They are the link between each of the wingbacks but, more importantly, they are the ones who read the opposition and communicate to the defense what adjustments are needed. It should be as if the entire defensive unit is on a rope that is being guided and pulled by the two central players.

#1 GOALKEEPER – This player must be an excellent communicator and should always be giving instruction and information to their defensive unit. They need to be able to read what the opposition is doing and to communicate this effectively and concisely to the defenders. It can be a game of inches, and goalkeepers must be very specific in where they want their defenders and, at times, how they want them to defend. They should be in control of their area and should be able to command at all times. A good goalkeeper knows how to effectively communicate for ninety minutes and is always in command of the 18-yard box. It is also necessary for today’s goalkeeper to be able to come out and act as a sweeper to negate through balls and quick counter attacks. This system forces teams to attempt through balls in an attempt to alleviate the pressure of having the ball and opponents in their half of the field for the majority of the time. The goalkeeper should understand this and always be aware of what the opponent is doing and how they might be able to stop it or break it down.

OFFSIDES – Playing the offside trap can be very risky, especially when you play with a flat back 4 System. The most important fact is that the defense needs to be functioning and working together. If they are shifting and sliding as they are supposed to be, then the off-sides trap will become easier to employ. In a situation where the opponent has possession on the outside, which should be the case most of the time since this system is predicated on forcing and keeping your opponent wide, then the responsibility of implementing the offside trap becomes falls on the weak side outside defender (i.e. the ball is on #2’s side, then it is up to #5 to determine if an offside trap should be attempted). This should never be implemented as your main defensive weapon as it is too risky and can often fail because of too many variables. However, it is sometimes necessary to implement this when trying to negate your opponent’s tactical advantage or game plan.

HIGH PRESSURE PLAY – This is usually implemented in situations where you might be down a goal or are playing a considerably weaker or inferior opponent. Using high pressure is different than applying pressure. This involves the systematic marking and pressuring of an entire team to eliminate options and win the ball back immediately. Pressure involves the reduction of time and space with possession to force your opponent to either make a mistake or to lose possession.

LOW PRESSURE – A team cannot play high pressure all of the time. It requires too much energy and too much risk. Therefore, it is very common for a team to vary their style throughout the course of the game to off-balance your opponent. Low pressure involves getting everyone behind the ball once possession is lost. You allow a certain amount of space in front of you for your opponent as your shape becomes very compact centrally. Once your opponent approaches you, then you begin to shepherd them to the side and to eliminate any and all central options. Often when possession is won the first look is for the central attacker who may be matched up 1 v 1.
This is the 1:4:3:3 System with the Central Midfielder playing just behind the Central Striker.
- This system has a numerical system that relates to a certain position:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalkeeper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Full-Back</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Defender (stopper)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Defender</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Full-Back</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Midfield</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Midfield</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Midfield</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Winger</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Striker</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Left Winger</td>
<td>11</td>
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