

THE FOOTBALL FORMATIONS

**CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAYERS
ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES**



STERGIOPOULOS VAIOS

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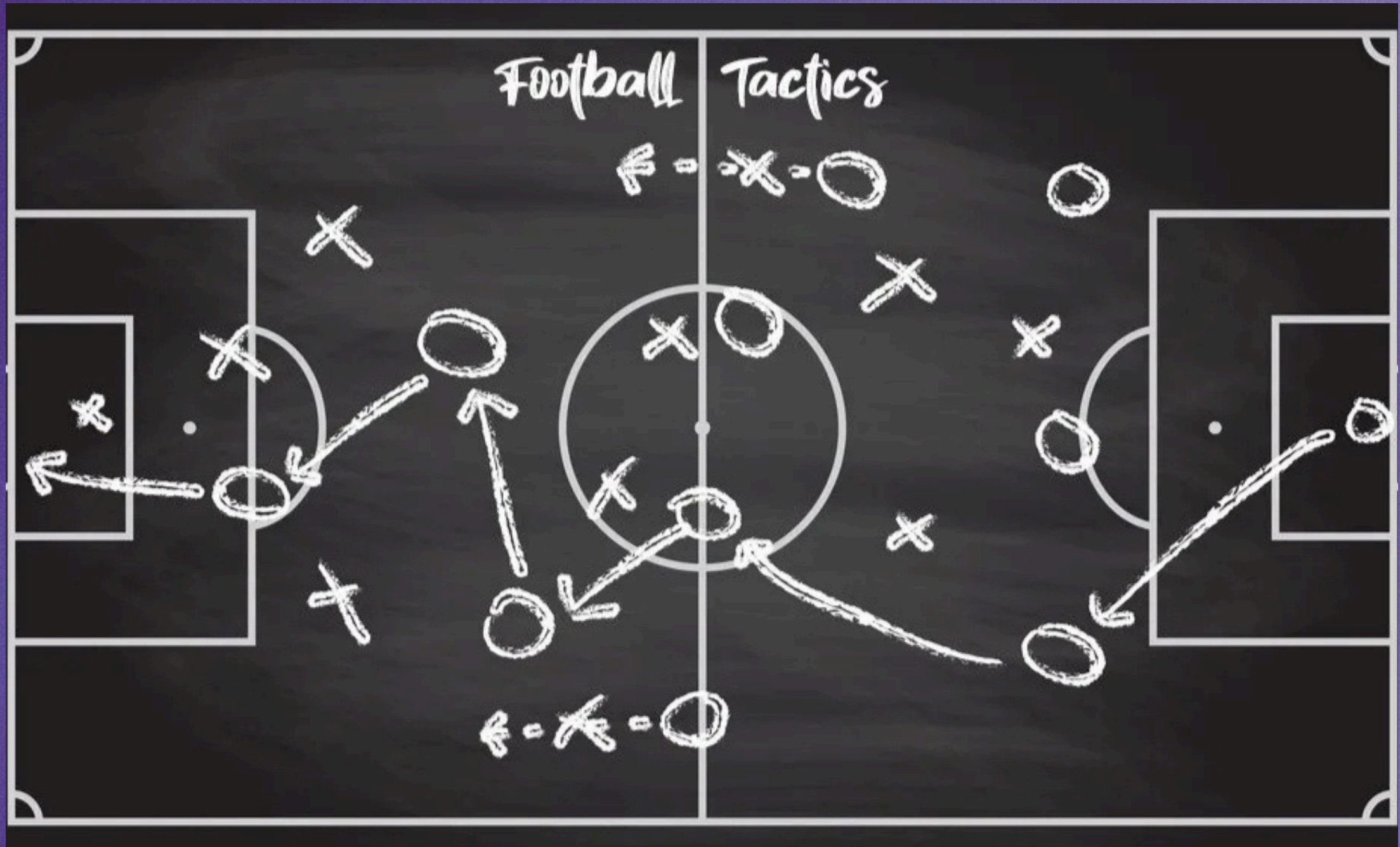
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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, we've seen that the best football teams (clubs and national teams) have used many different formations. These formations have been used around the world also with youth football teams.



Formations can help a team counteract its own weaknesses, and add numbers to specific parts of the field to get a numerical advantage over the opponent, or hit the opponent's weaknesses.

Just because a team has better, stronger, and faster players, it doesn't mean that the weaker team is going to automatically lose. That's exactly when formations can play a big role in the success of a team.



FORMATION: 1-4-4-2

Origin Of The Formation:

In the modern game, this formation is one of the older ones, and it is out of this formation that other teams started adapting their formations by dropping one of their strikers and building more possession-like formations and balancing the space on the field as well as the defensive and offensive responsibilities.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 3 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 4 Midfielders, 2 Strikers

Defenders:

2 Full Backs. With or without attacking attributes, depending on the physical – technical – tactical level of these players.

2 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, and aggressiveness.

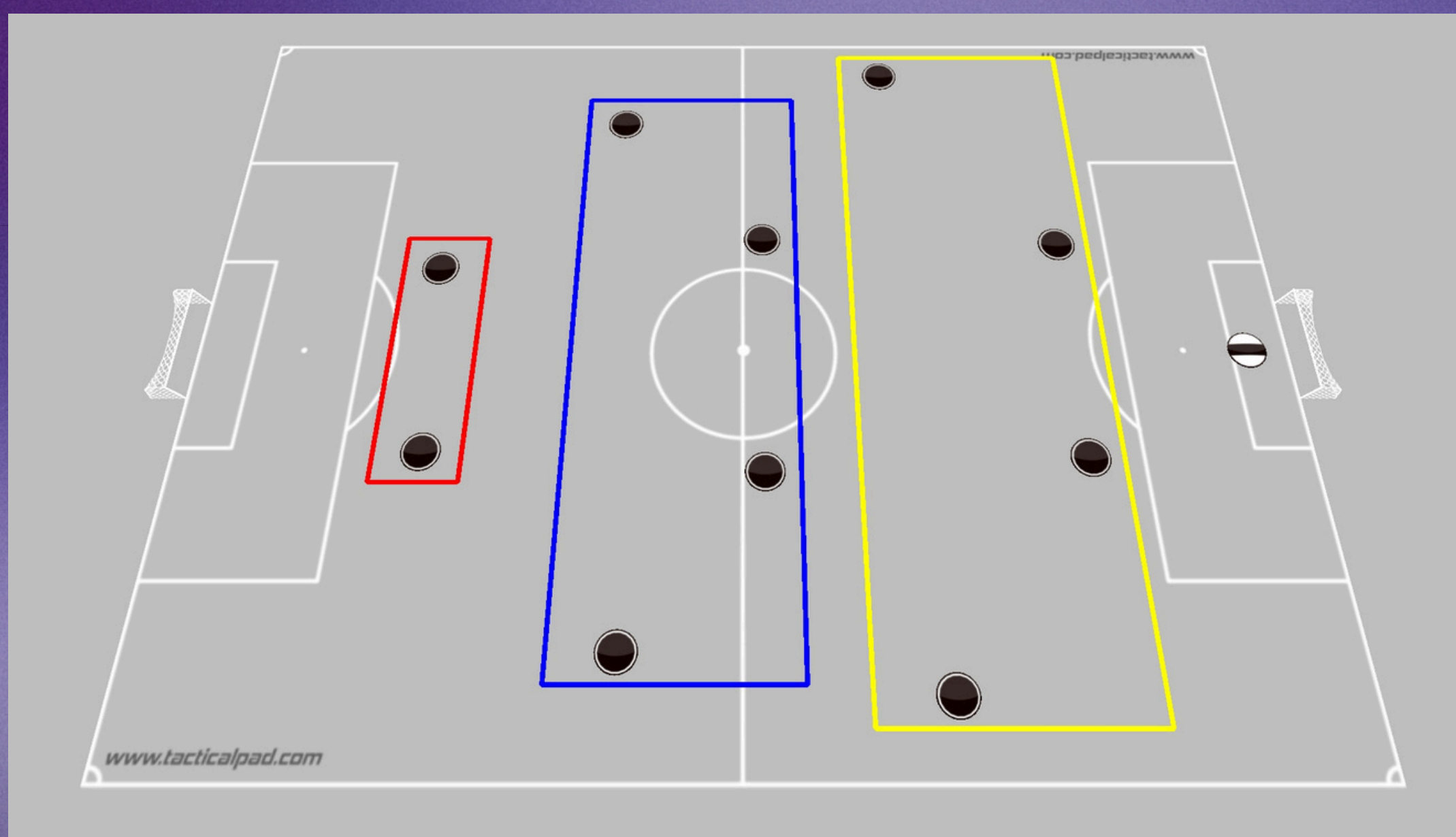
Midfielders:

2 Central Midfielders. Where one has more defensive duties, and the second one has mixed roles (attacking and defending) and has good ball distribution and attacking qualities.

2 Wingers. They usually provide the width of the field and must be good passers, crossers, and fast players, and good for 1v1. Depending on what the coach wants they can play more defensive or more offensive. Regardless of this, they must be good at defensive transitions.

Strikers:

2 Strikers. They must work together when defending and know how to stagger while attacking. Must work well together at creating runs and space for each other. Their qualities must complement each other, one could be tall and good in the air and holding the ball, while the other could be a great finisher inside the box and a great dynamic runner.



1-4-4-2 Advantages and Disadvantages:

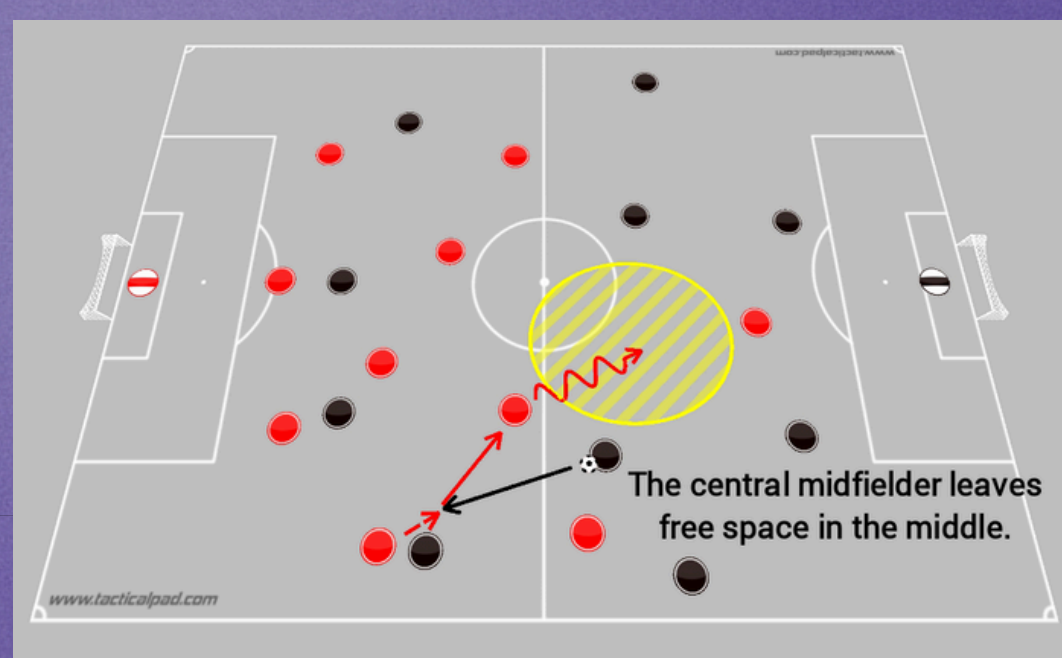
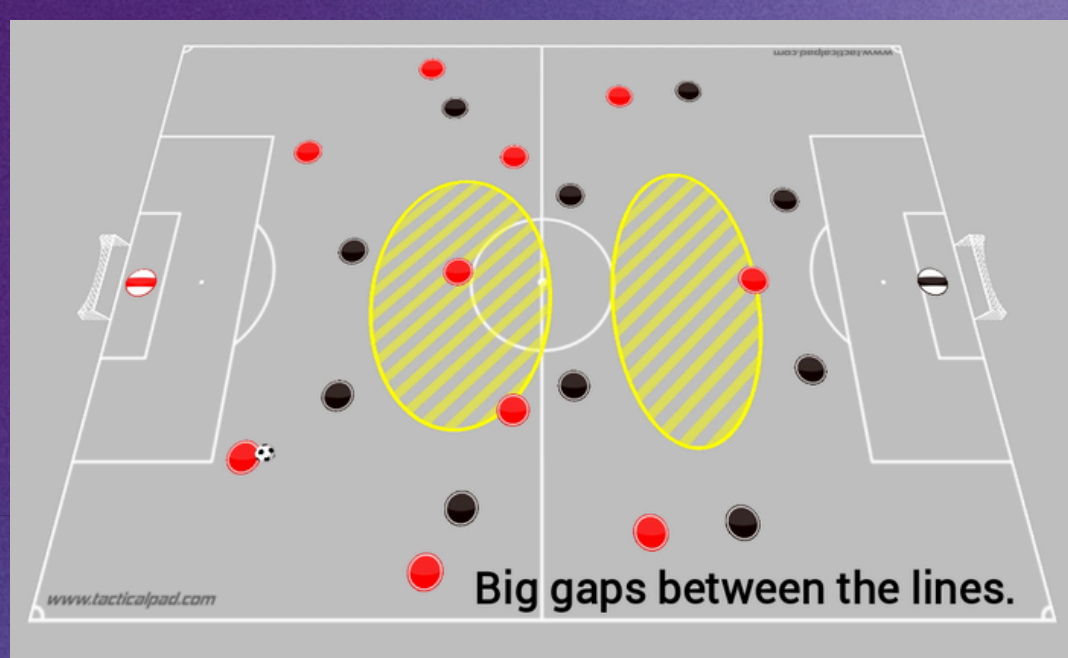
Advantages

- Simple to understand.
- Increases the efficiency of the defensive game as it allows the lines to stay more compact.
- Good distribution of player roles.
- It establishes linkups of players in 2's, and tactically players can understand their roles more efficiently; two center-backs, two central midfielders, two strikers, wing-backs, and wingers.



Disadvantages

- The strikers can be left alone if center midfielders stay back too much.
- Distance between lines can be very far from each other, leaving big spaces for the opposition to attack.
- It creates a very rigid system of play, which can weaken the collective efficiency of the attack and defense of the team.
- Center midfielders have to cover a lot of ground in the middle of the field, and if not done so, the opposition can take advantage of open spaces and attack through the middle.



FORMATION: 1-4-3-3

Origin Of The Formation:

Its origins come from the 1-4-2-4 formation, as this formation requires tremendous capacity from the 2 midfielders, 1 of the 4 attackers was dropped into the midfield to help out with the demands in the middle of the field. It created a better balance while attacking and defending.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 3 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 3 Midfielders, 3 Forwards

Defenders:

2 Full Backs. With or without attacking attributes, depending on the physical – technical – tactical level of these players.

2 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, and aggressiveness.

Midfielders:

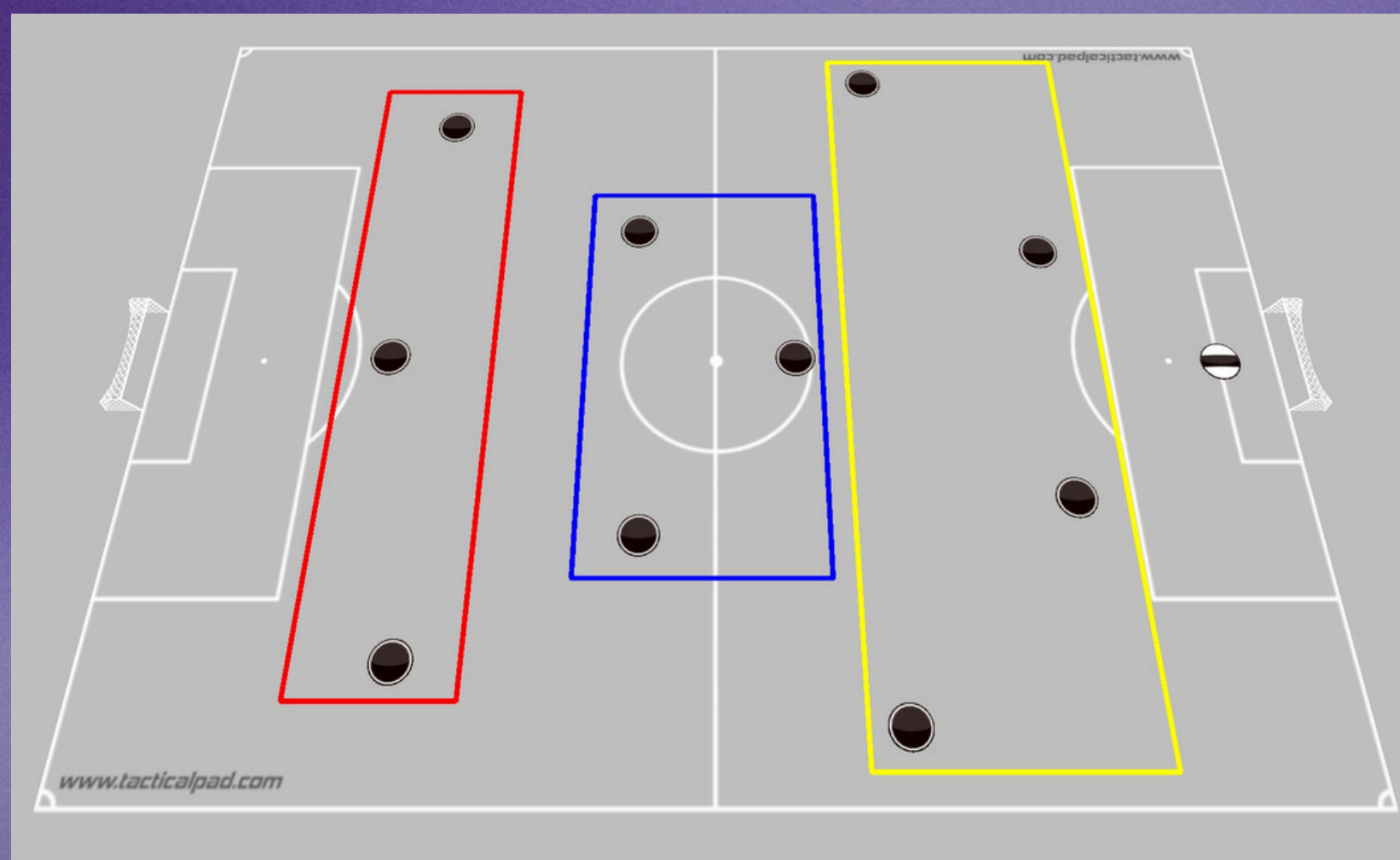
It's characterized by having 3 center midfielders who play in front of the 4 defenders. One of the three central midfielders plays a little behind the other two, fulfilling a more defensive role, and covering the other two when they take more attacking roles.

The other two central midfielders have more of a creative role, as they are in charge of linking up the build-up with the attack, as well as joining the attack on the finishing third.

The role of these two central midfielders requires a lot of work, as they have to have a balance helping on the attack as well as on defensive transitions.

Strikers:

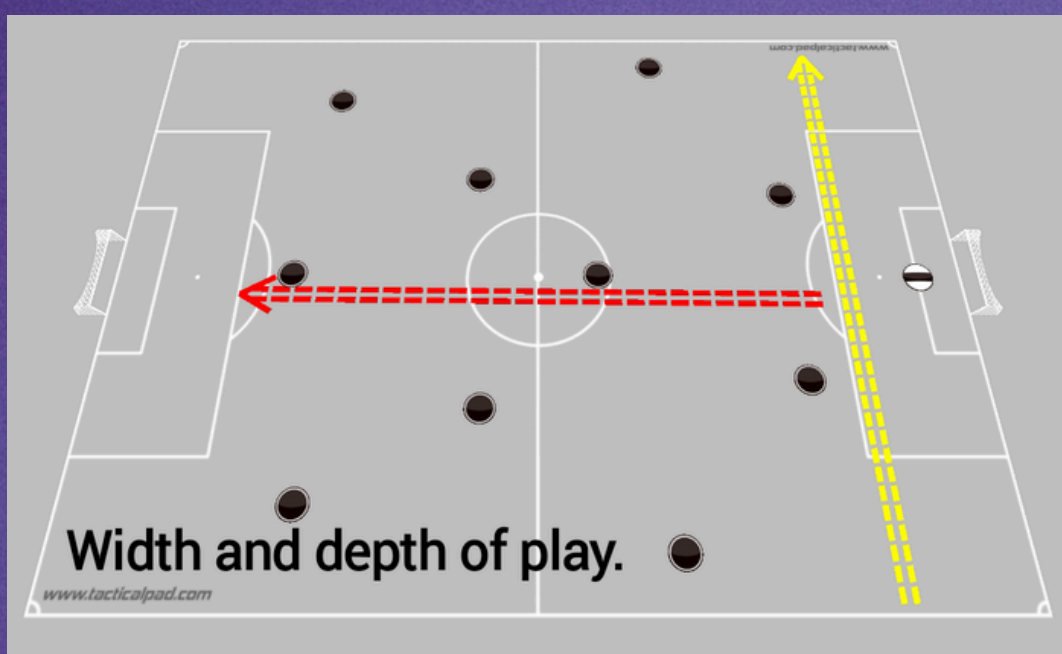
3 Forwards. Two of the forwards are wide players on the attack, as they will provide the width and stretch the opposition's defensive line. These two forwards must be great dribblers and good in 1v1 situations. Also, they must be fast, creative players who can finish inside the box as well as good crossers. The central forward is a strong, tall player, who's a good finisher inside the area, good with headers, and has more freedom on defensive transitions.



1-4-3-3 Advantages and Disadvantages:

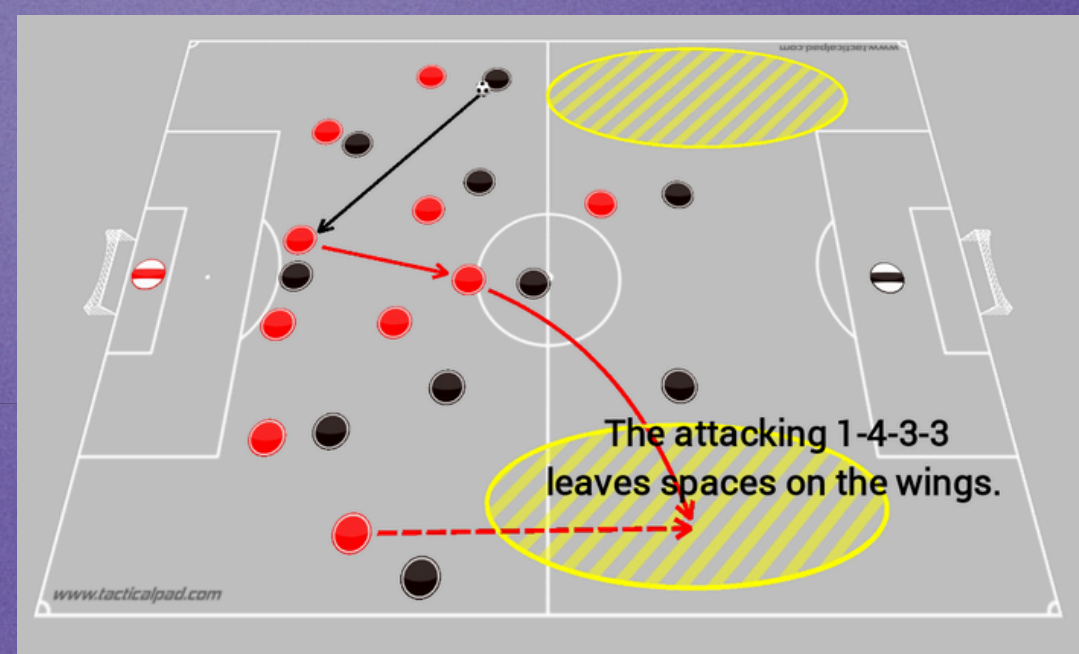
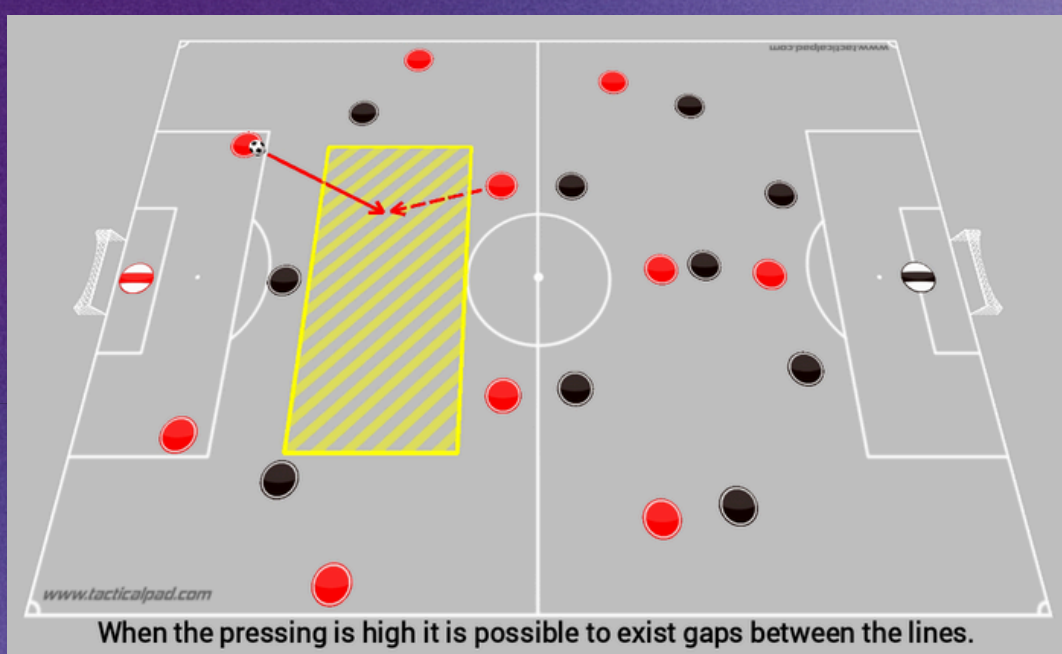
Advantages

- It becomes efficient when trying to defend the middle of the field, as this formation allows for good compactness between lines.
- The ball distribution in the middle of the field will allow for creating more possession and control when attacking.
- It creates a more offensive game, as it provides control in the middle, as well as the width and length of the field, helping to create more spaces.
- It helps technical, fast, and attacking players maximize their efforts and creativity in the finishing third.



Disadvantages

- It can create a lot of distance between lines, especially the 3 forwards in relation to the midfield line, opening spaces for the opposition's team to counter-attack through central or wide areas.
- Since this is a very attacking formation, the defensive line tends to be very high, leaving it vulnerable to long direct attacks.
- The team must be very good at pressing high as soon as the ball is lost, otherwise, it can leave big gaps.
- This formation depends a lot on 1v1's, so their forwards must have great success at it.



FORMATION: 1-3-5-2

Origin Of The Formation:

The origins of this formation come from the 1-4-4-2, where one of the defenders moves up to the midfielders' line.

The idea is to dominate the game in the central axis of the field.

The teams that have mastered this formation come mainly from Italy.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 3 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 3 Defenders, 5 Midfielders, 2 Forwards

Defenders:

3 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, aggressiveness as well as technical abilities.

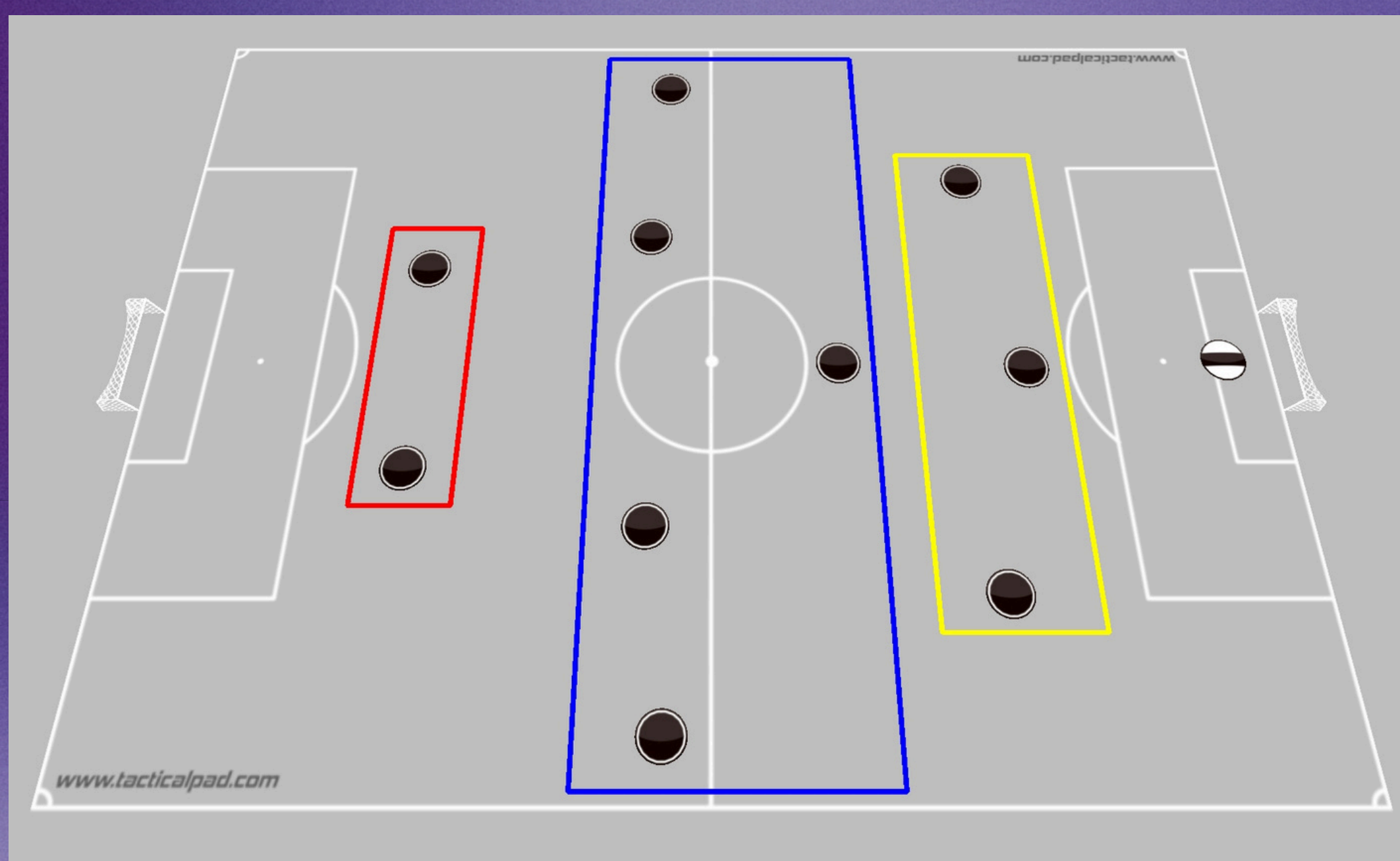
Midfielders:

3 Center Midfielders. Where one midfielder has a more defensive role and helps out the three center backs, while the other two support the forwards.

2 Wingbacks. Have mixed responsibilities, as they need to help build the attack and create width, and on defense must help out the defensive line.

Strikers:

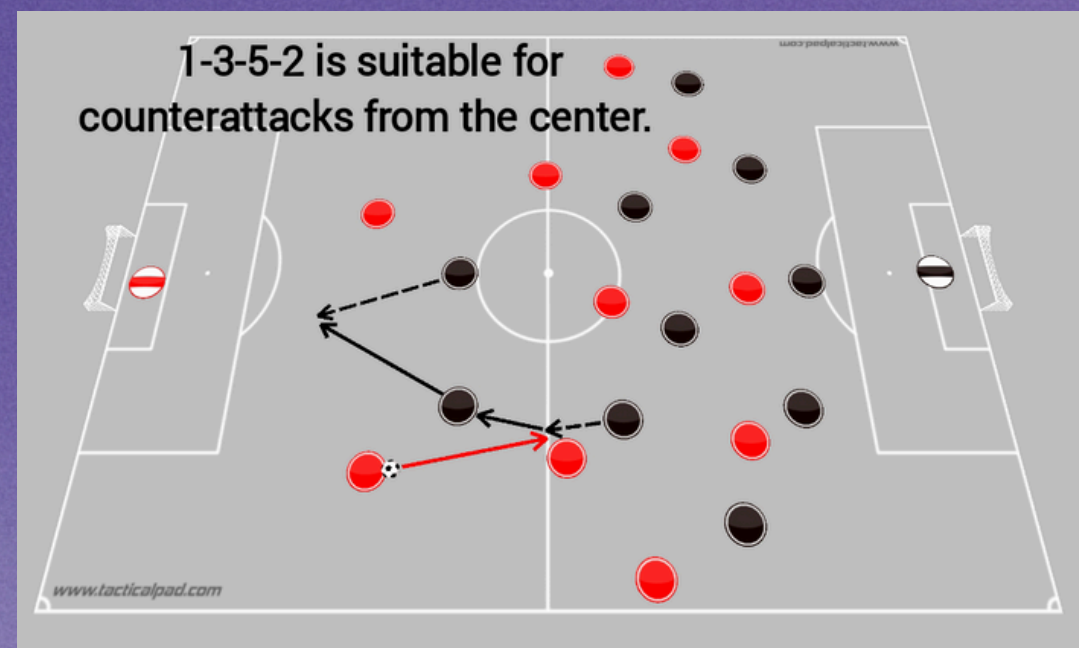
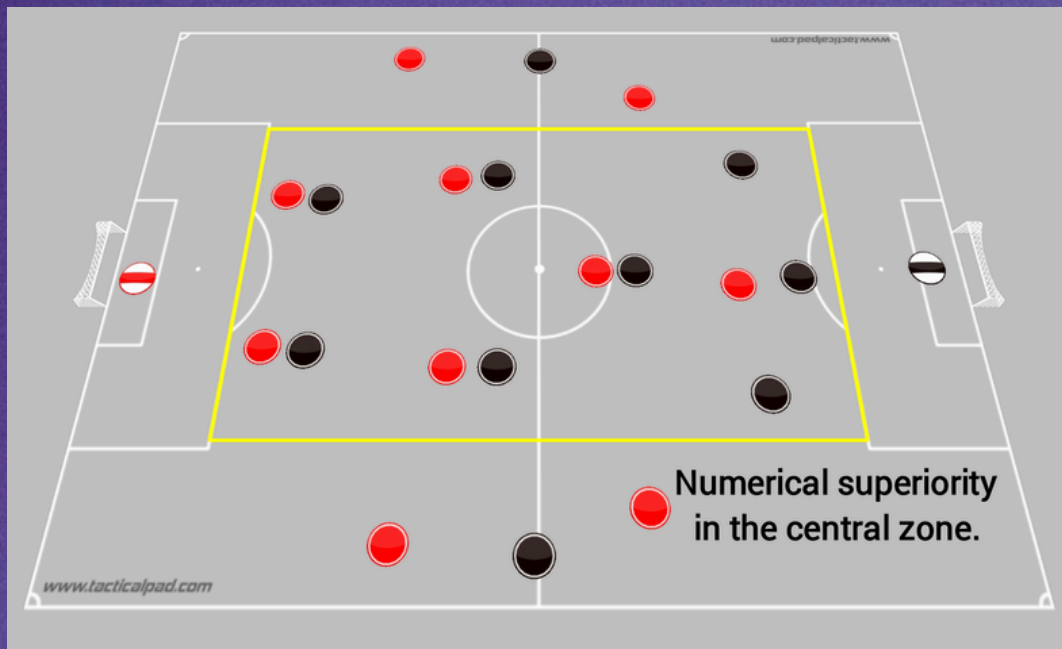
2 Forwards. One forward must be fast and good at the low play and the other one good at head and strong in battles. Also must have good passing, crossing, and finishing skills, and on defense, they must be good at applying fast pressure to avoid the other team from building up the play from the center backs.



1-3-5-2 Advantages and Disadvantages:

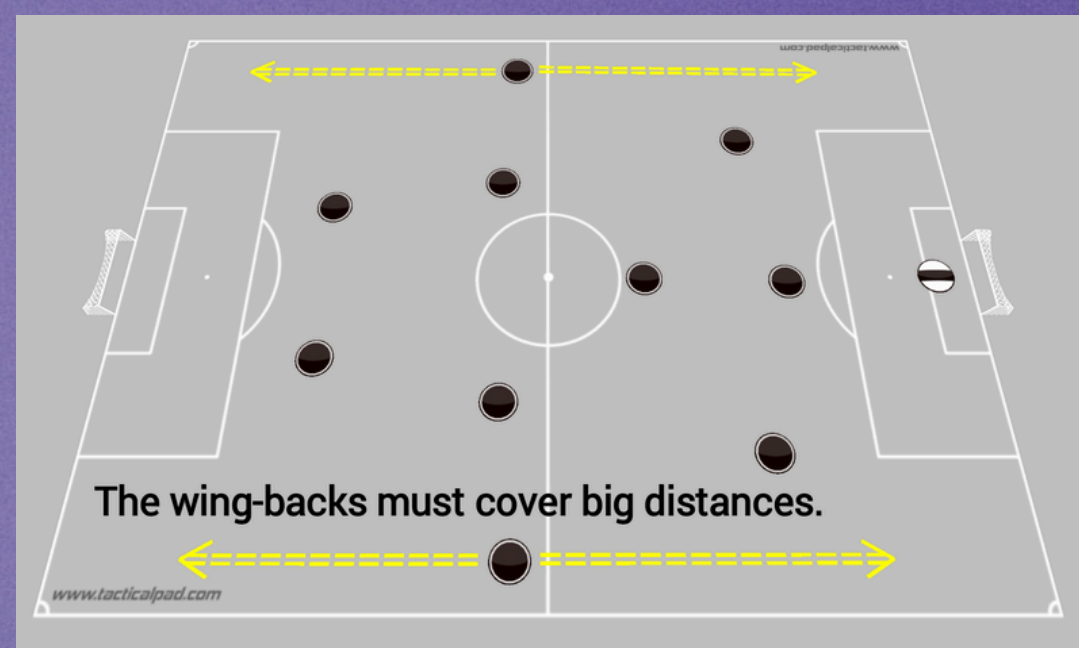
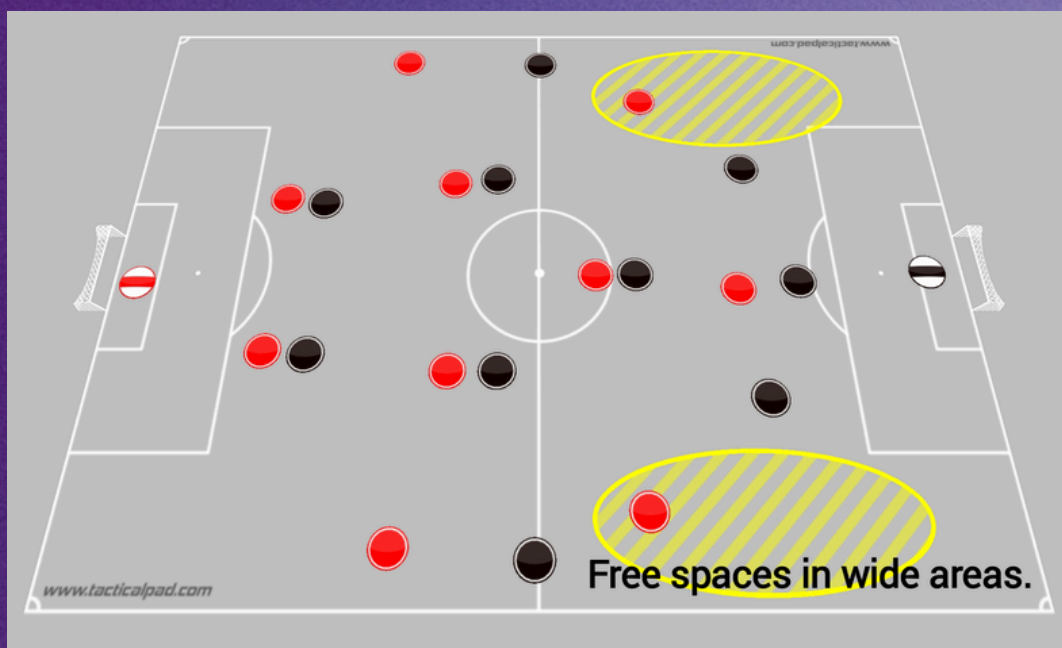
Advantages

- It creates numerical superiority in the middle of the field.
- The main intention is to gain the ball and attack quickly from the center with the two forwards.
- It can create pressure on the opponent's center backs creating more scoring opportunities.
- Improves the game in between lines, if one of the forwards drops deeper.



Disadvantages

- It leaves a lot of empty spaces on the wide areas of the field, where the 3 central defenders are.
- The wingbacks have to run big distances on the field.
- The 3 center backs must be of very high defensive quality as well as technical, as they must constantly build the play from the back with good decision-making.



FORMATION: 1-4-4-1-1

Origin Of The Formation:

It originates from the 1-4-3-1-2 formation, by moving one of the 3 midfielders forward to the next line.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 4 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 4 Midfielders, 2 Strikers

Defenders:

2 Full Backs. With or without attacking attributes, depending on the physical – technical – tactical level of these players.

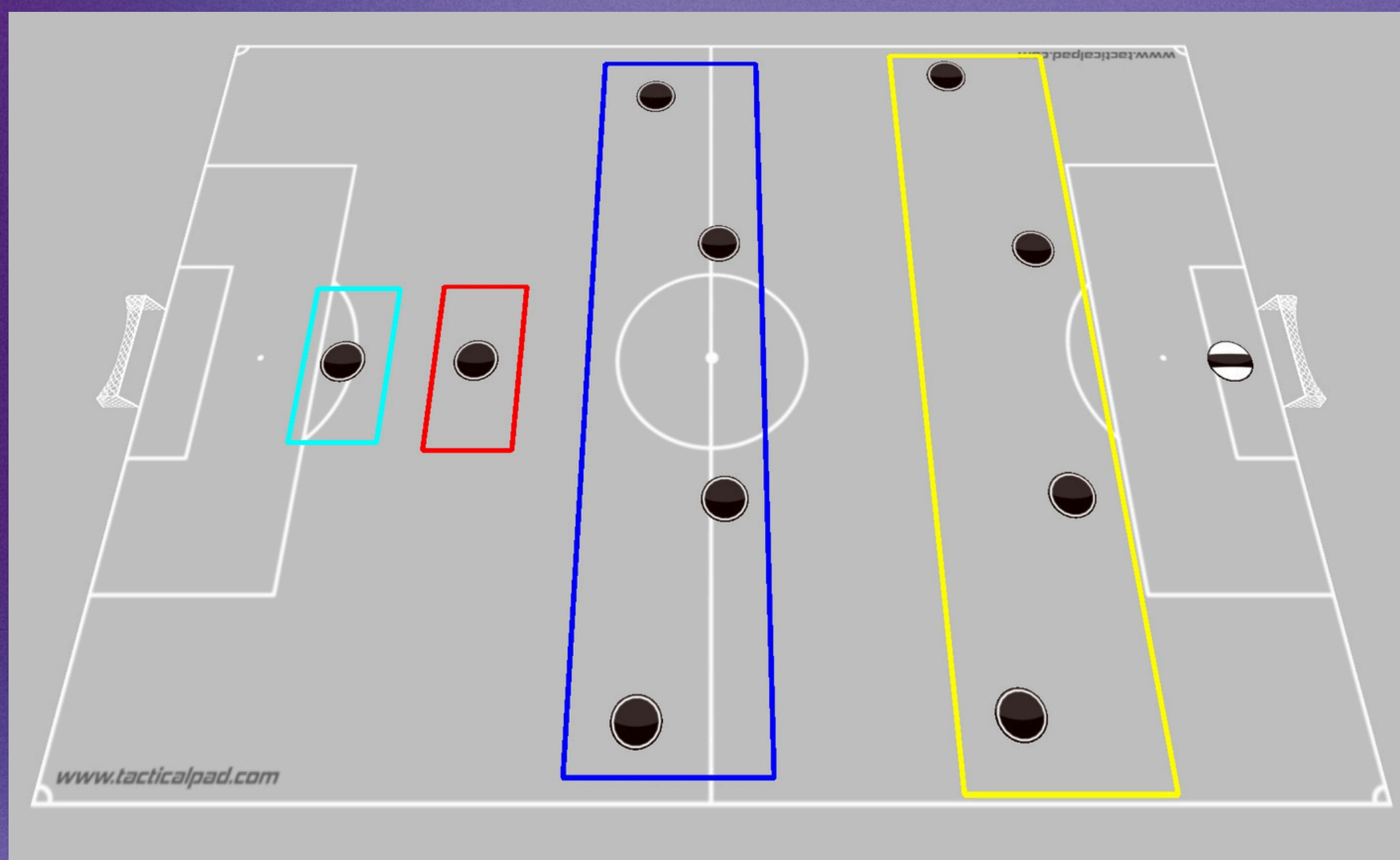
2 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, and aggressiveness.

Midfielders:

The First Line of 2 defensive midfielders, who are helping the 4 defenders behind them. The second midfield line has 2 creative midfielders, who are in charge of distributing the ball and finding the open spaces, also being able to incorporate into the attack with the strikers.

Strikers:

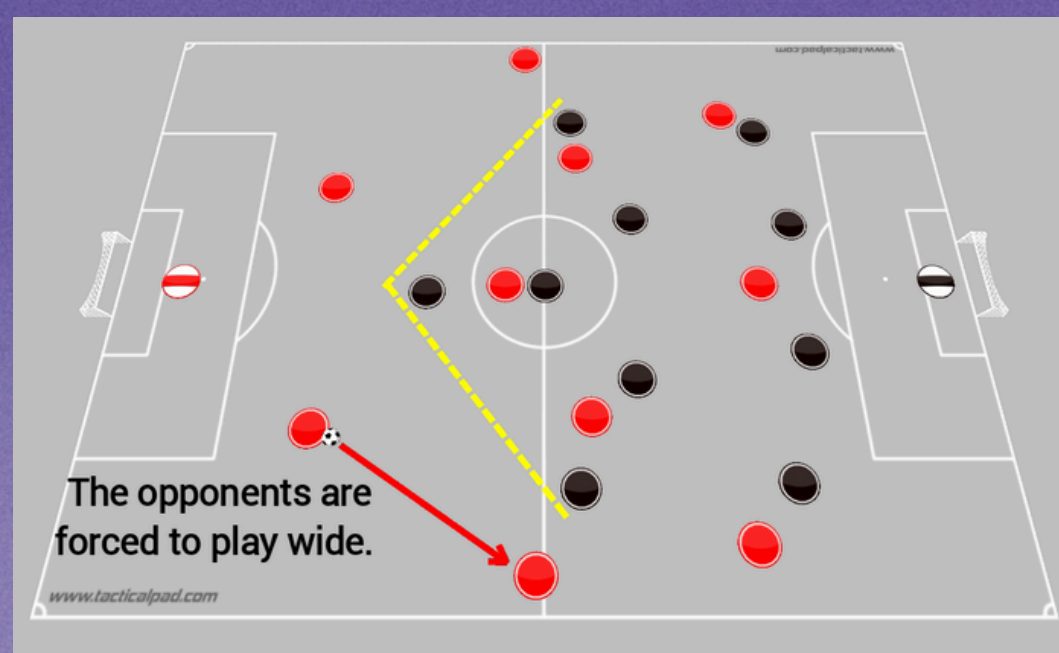
2 Strikers. Characterized by great mobility, a lot of speed, and great finishers. They are also players that help in the defensive transitions by pressing the build-up play from the opposition's defense.



1-4-4-1 Advantages and Disadvantages:

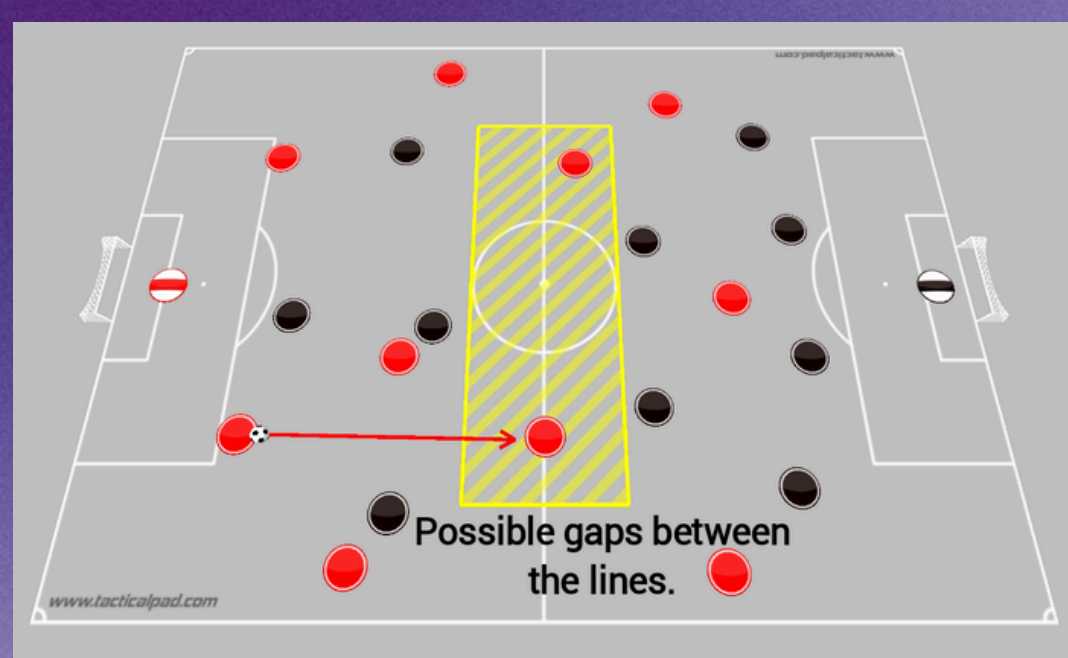
Advantages

- It improves and strengthens the defense and recovery of the ball in the 2/3 (middle) of the field, as lines can be compact creating a numerical advantage.
- It forces the opposition to attack wide, where the ball can be easily recovered.
- It creates a good staggering between lines, making it easier to pressure the opposite team and recover the ball on the finishing third.
- Players with great technical quality and good vision can exploit their potential on the attack, creating better scoring opportunities on the finishing third.



Disadvantages

- The biggest weakness happens on defense, as the team can be split into 2 groups, the defensive block of 6, and the attacking block of 4. If the opposition's team counter-attacks, the block of 4 attackers plays a small role in the defensive transition.
- If the strikers and attacking midfielders don't help much on defense, most of the defending will happen on the wings.
- Most of the attacks will occur through the middle of the field, making attacks very predictable, and good teams will be able to adjust their tactics.
- The attack will be carried out by only 4 players, creating a lot of numerical disadvantages in the finishing third.
- To overcome the lack of play through the wings, the team must have good full-backs that can provide width to the team and be able to attack and defend.



FORMATION: 1-4-1-4-1

Origin Of The Formation:

This formation has its origins in the 1-4-4-2, and similar to the 1-4-5-1, one of the five midfielders' role is to stay in front of the defensive line, helping out and covering any of the four when attacking.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 4 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 1 Defensive Midfielder situated in front of the defensive line, 4 Midfielders in front of the defensive midfielder, 1 Striker

Defense:

2 Full Backs. With or without attacking attributes, depending on the physical – technical – tactical level of these players.

2 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, and aggressiveness.

Midfielders:

1 Central Midfielder. Also called a defensive midfielder, who stays in front of the defenders, to help out the defenders and balance the recovery and distribution of the ball in the defensive third of the field.

This player plays an important role in building up the play from the back and breaking any advances in the middle of the field by the opposition team. Good strength and height are important to have, as well as good technical abilities and good vision when distributing the ball.

The Next Line of 4 Midfielders:

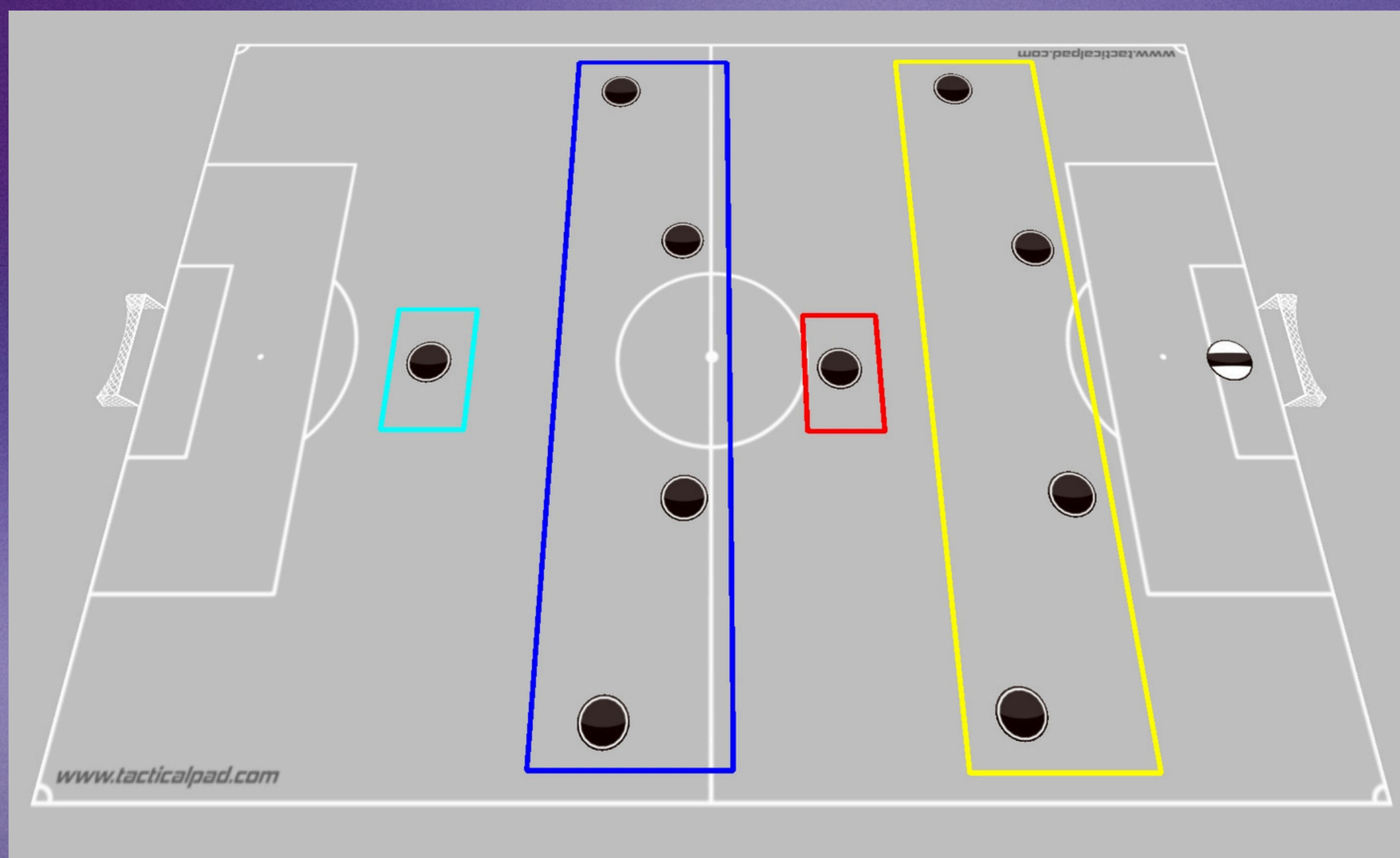
2 Central Midfielders. With a great understanding of the game, need to have good positioning, great technical ability, and good passers of the ball as well as finishers, as they also can join the attack.

2 Wingers. These players need to be fast, good passers, good crossers, and finishers, which also help out recover the ball on the defensive transitions.

Strikers:

1 Striker. Physically strong, with the high technical capacity to hold the ball, waiting for the rest of their teammates to then start distributing the ball.

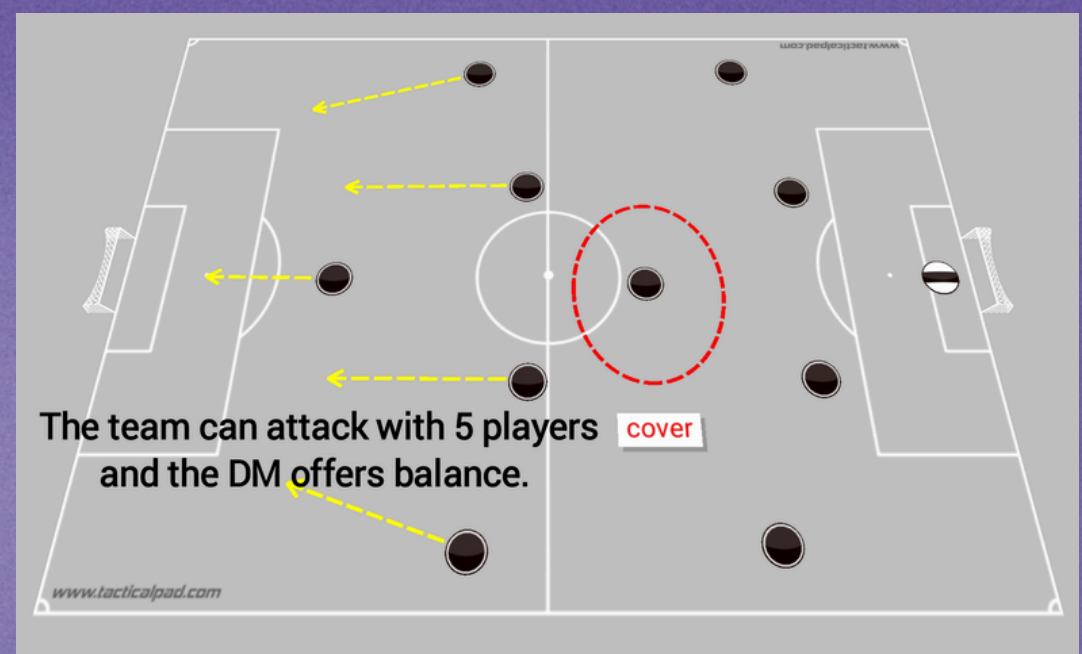
Great finisher, as well as a good runner to either, create space for others or move easily inside the area looking for gaps and through balls.



1-4-1-4-1 Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- Better distribution of the ball around the field, allowing better staggering of players when defending.
- Distances are shorter when transitioning to defense, allowing players to defend the player with the ball faster, and allowing the closing of spaces and passing lanes quicker.
- It creates more options when attacking and defending, by getting more players around the ball.
- Increases the chances of properly used spaces when counterattacking.
- Better possibilities of recovering the ball in the finishing third, allowing up to 5 players (1 striker plus 4 midfielders) to swarm the player with the ball.



Disadvantages

- Excessive use of short passes without penetrating or advancing.
- If the ball is recovered on the defensive third, there is a lot of space to attack forward because most of the players are closer to where the ball was recovered.
- It requires a common collective understanding of each position, as well as a very technical and tactical team that is in sync at all times.



FORMATION: 1-4-5-1

Origin Of The Formation:

This formation has its origins in the 1-4-4-2, by dropping one of the strikers to the central midfield line. The intention is to strengthen the midfield zone. Especially when playing against stronger teams. The distribution of the ball is more stable and balanced, and it takes less defending effort and increases the chances of a counter-attack.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 3 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 5 Midfielders, 1 Striker

Defense:

2 Full Backs. With or without attacking attributes, depending on the physical – technical – tactical level of these players.

2 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, speed, and aggressiveness.

Midfielders:

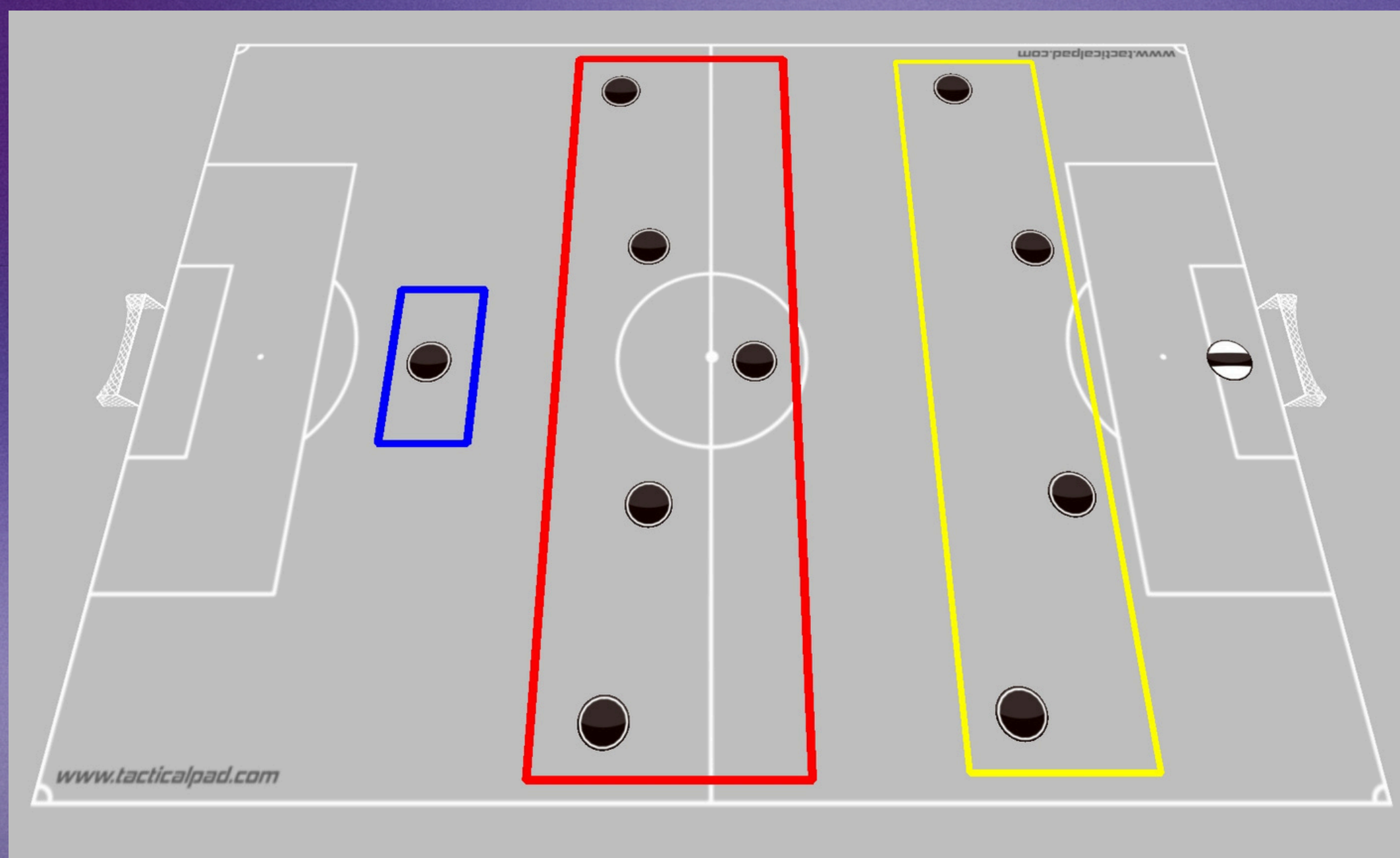
3 Central Midfielders. They can alternate different roles. But more often, one is a more defensive central midfielder who covers the other two. And the other two central midfielders are in charge of distributing the ball and moving the team forward, generating the attack. These two midfielders can also join the attack and step into the 18-yard box.

2 Wingers. Usually, they are used wide and high up the field, these wingers are characterized by their speed, crosses, and penetrating passes into the box as well as good finishers.

Strikers:

1 Striker. Physically strong, with the high technical capacity to hold the ball, waiting for the rest of their teammates to then start distributing the ball.

Great finisher, as well as a good runner to either, create space for others or move easily inside the area looking for gaps and through balls.



1-4-5-1 Advantages and Disadvantages:

They are the same as in the 1-4-1-4-1 formation.

FORMATION: 1-4-1-3-2

Origin Of The Formation:

This originates from the 1-4-3-3 formation by dropping back one of the 3 forwards to the center of the field. This distribution is the first one used from the 1-4-4-2 formation, the only difference from this formation is the diamond shape in the middle of the field.

So this 1-4-1-3-2 formation is also known as a 1-4-4-2 (diamond shape).

Distribution and Application:

Uses 5 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 4 Midfielders in a diamond shape, 2 Forwards

Defenders:

2 Full Backs. With or without attacking attributes, depending on the physical – technical – tactical level of these players.

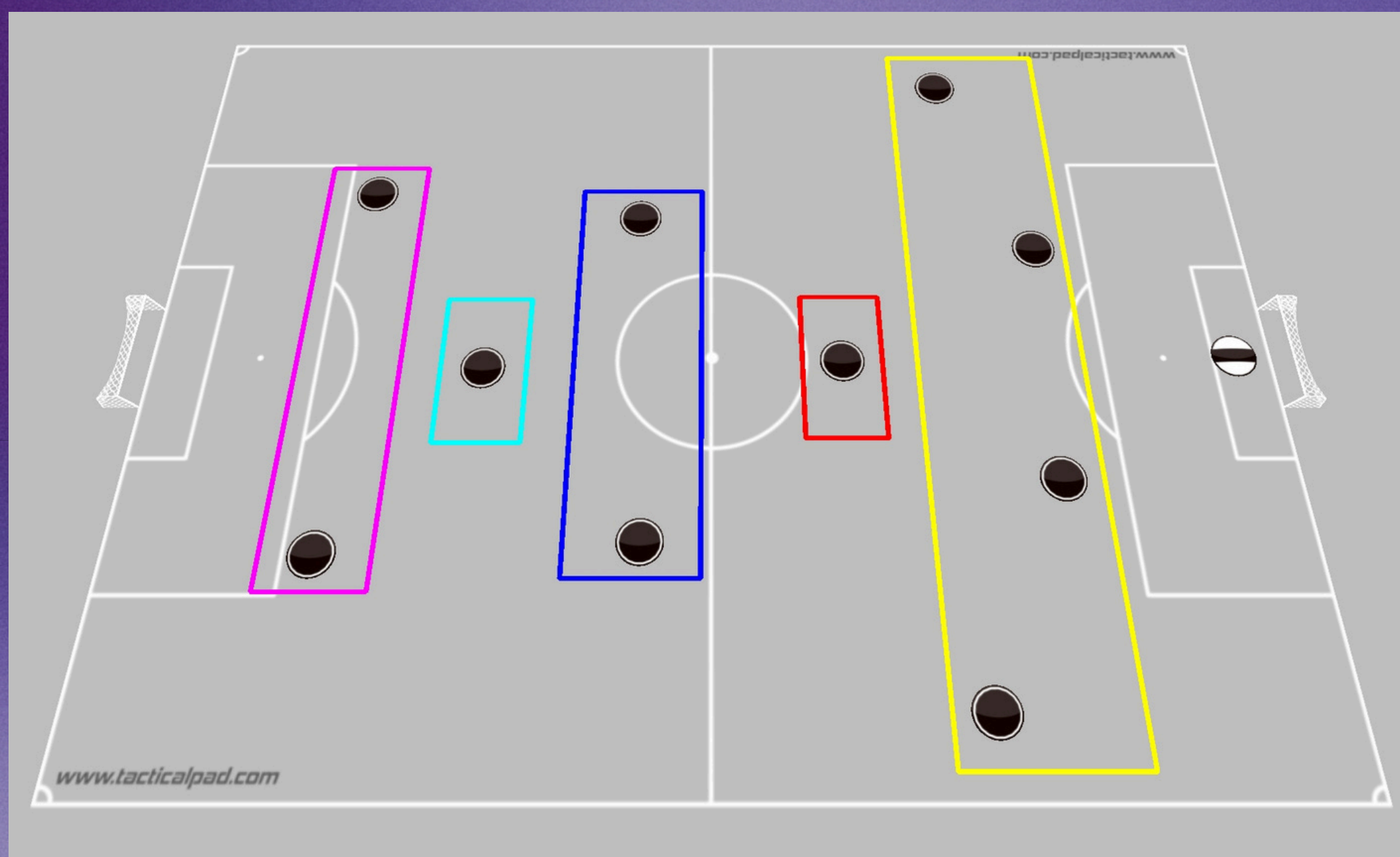
2 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, and aggressiveness.

Midfielders:

The middle of the field forms a diamond shape, with a defensive midfielder positioned in front of the 4 defenders. In front of the defensive midfielder, there are 2 midfielders with mixed responsibilities, who provide balance when attacking and defending. And an attacking midfielder, whose main responsibility is to feed balls to the two strikers on top, as well as to take advantage of the space between lines.

Strikers:

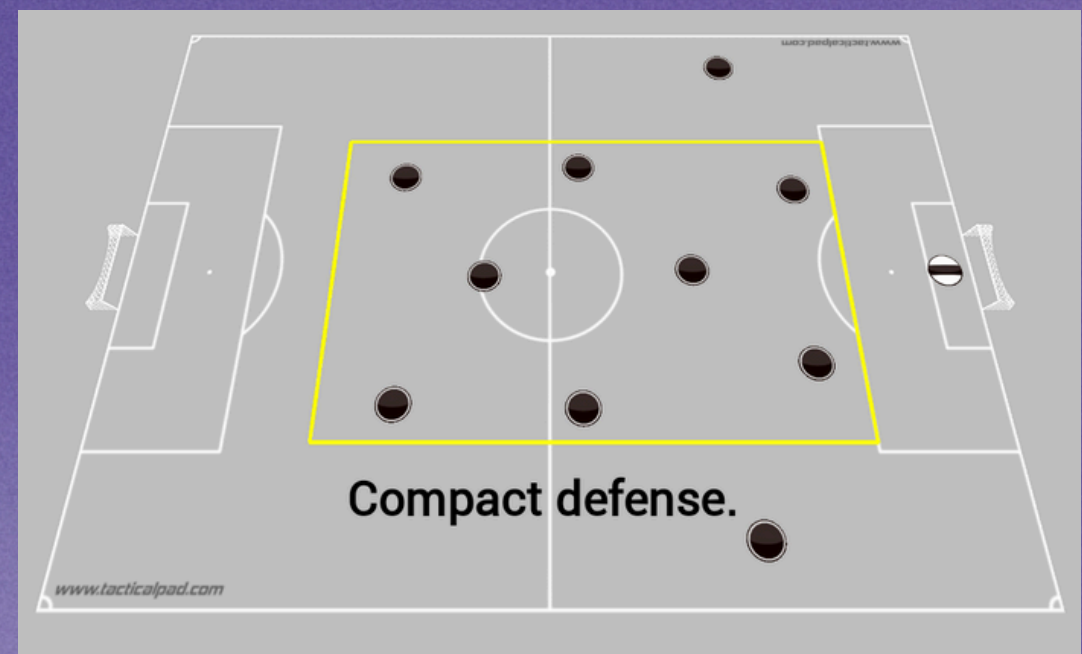
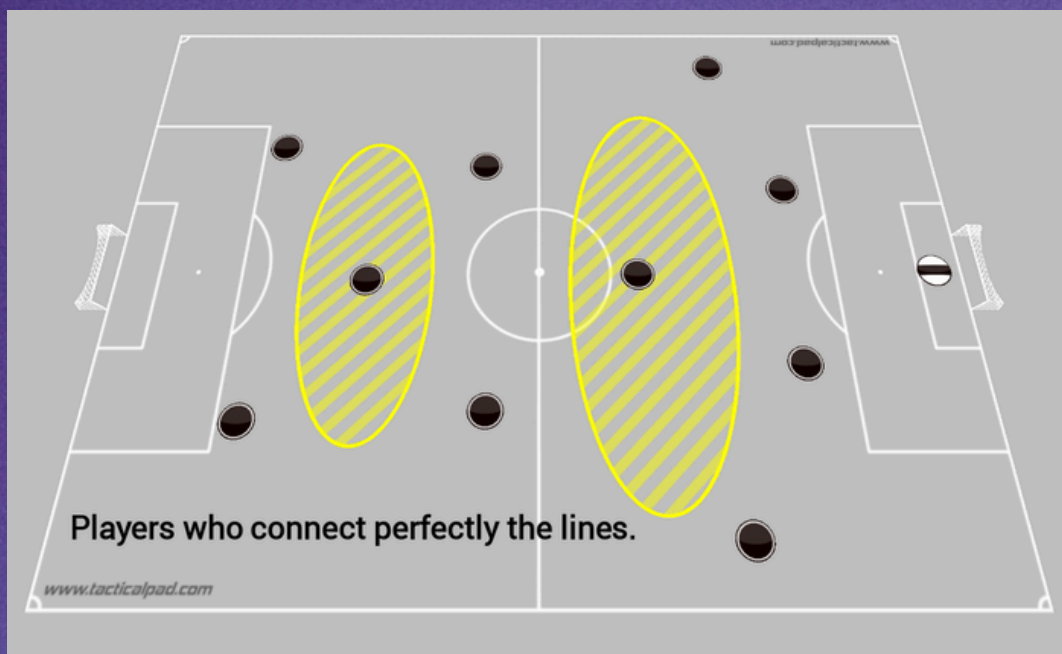
2 Strikers. Must possess great mobility, speed, and finishing. On defense, they work together to quickly press the defenders who are trying to create a build-up play from the back.



1-4-1-3-2 Advantages and Disadvantages

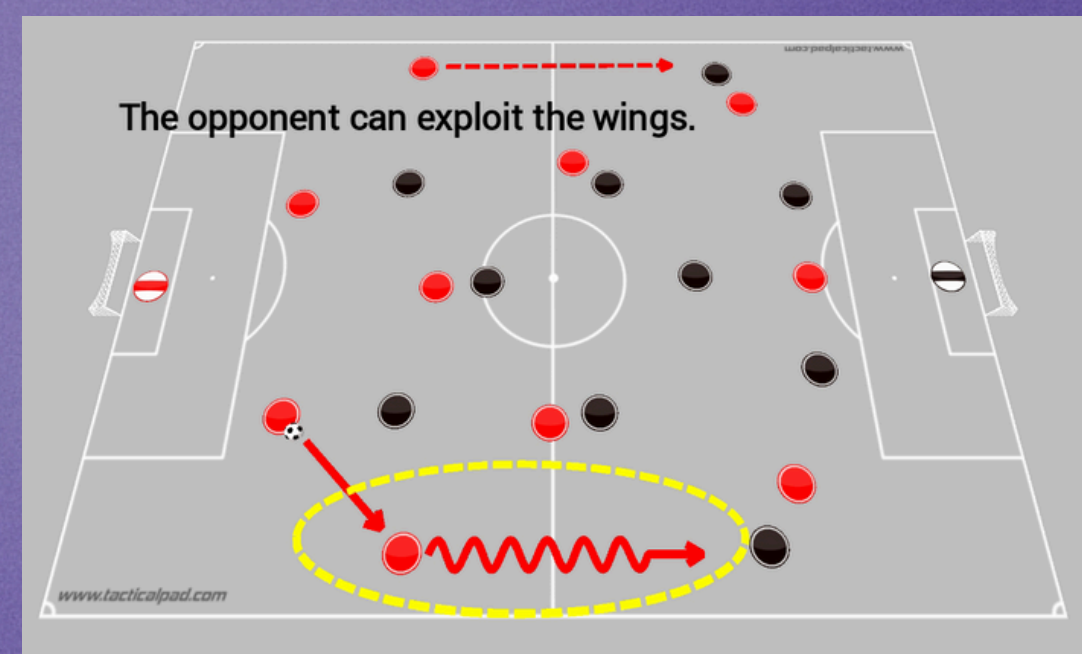
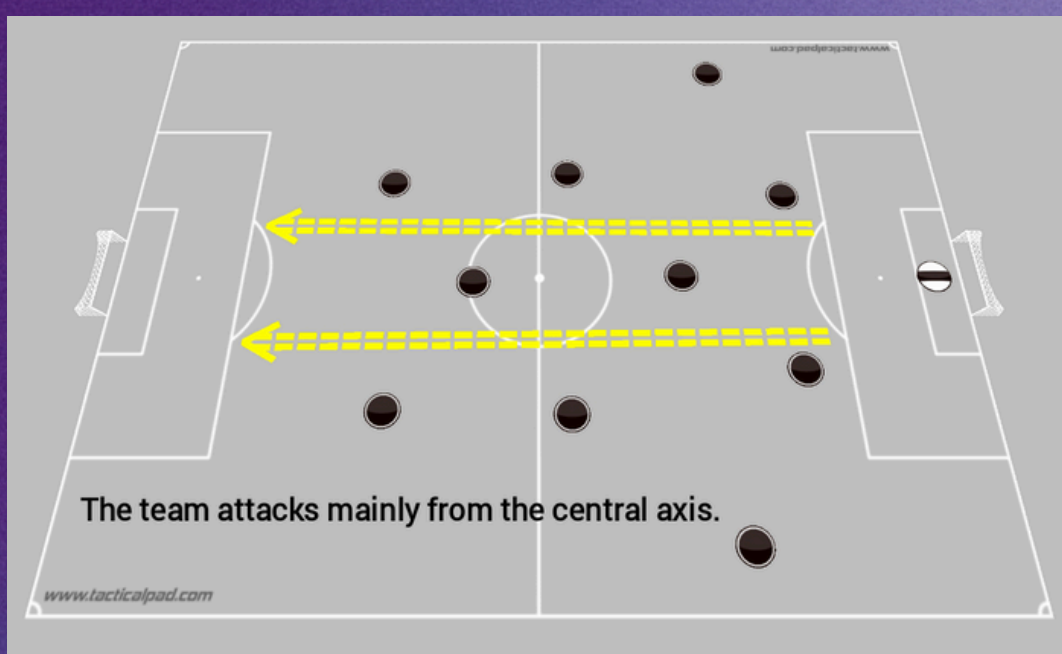
Advantages

- It allows for good positioning of players in the center of the field, being able to work between lines.
- As players are more compact, it also allows players to distribute their offensive and defensive responsibilities without the need of wasting a lot of energy.
- It improves the defensive game as the team is more compact.



Disadvantages

- If the two strikers and the attacking midfield don't contribute to the defensive transitions, the rest of the team will have to work extra hard to recover the ball.
- The opposing team will use the width of the field very often, creating a lot of crossing chances.
- The attack is mainly concentrated through the middle of the field, making it very predictable.
- This formation requires very good full-backs who can contribute to the attack to provide width.



FORMATION: 1-4-2-3-1

Origin Of The Formation:

This formation comes from the 1-4-1-4-1. The difference is that on the second line we have 2 players in front of the defensive line instead of 1. These two players also stay behind the next line of three midfielders. The intention is to improve the mechanics and efficiency of the defensive role and distribution.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 4 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 2 Defensive midfielder situated in front of the defensive line, 3 Attacking Midfielders, 1 Striker

Defense:

2 Full Backs. With or without attacking attributes, depending on the physical – technical – tactical level of these players.

2 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, and aggressiveness.

Midfielders:

First Midfield-line

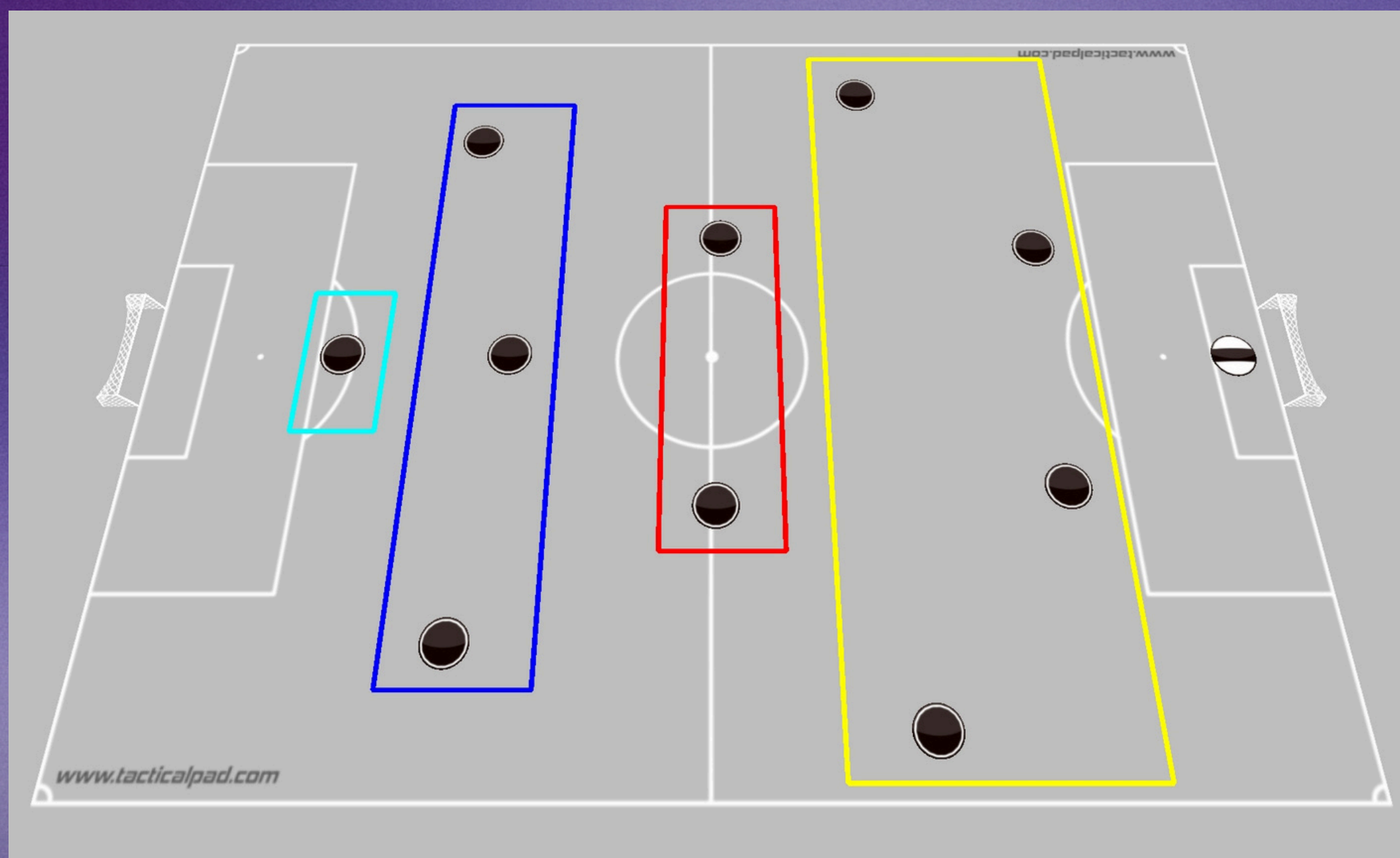
2 Defensive Midfielders. Play in front of the 4 defenders. They are in charge of the defensive-offensive collective balance. They must have the ability to defend and generate attacking plays into the opposite side of the field (finishing third).

Second Midfield-line

3 Attacking Midfielders. Two of these midfielders attack the wings, they must be bats, good passers, and finishers, as well as good on defensive transitions. The central midfielder, has the role of an attacking midfielder, usually behind the striker. This player has a great attacking vision, great technique, and mobility as well as a good finisher inside the box.

Strikers:

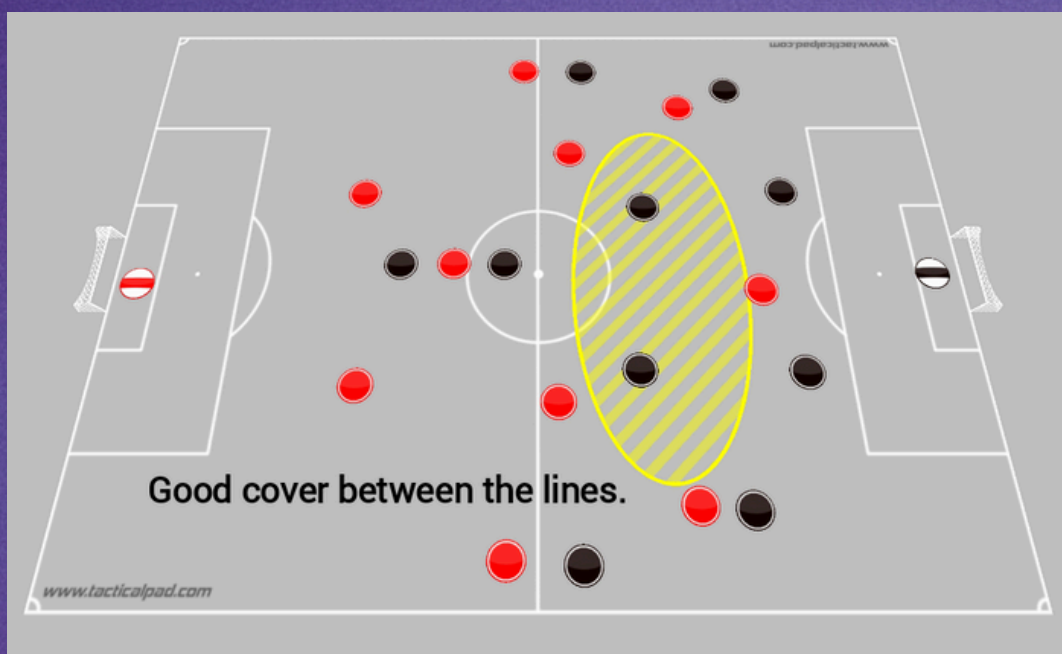
1 Striker. Physically strong, with the high technical capacity to hold the ball, waiting for the rest of their teammates to then start distributing the ball. Great finisher, as well as a good runner to either, creates space for others or move easily inside the area looking for gaps and through balls.



1-4-2-3-1 Advantages and Disadvantages

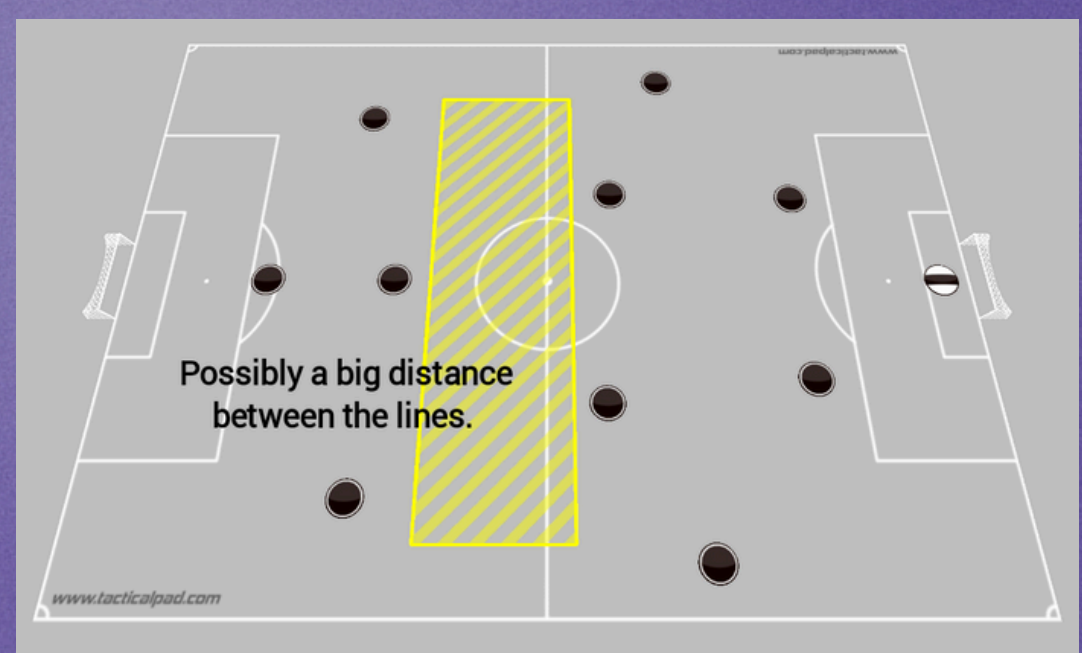
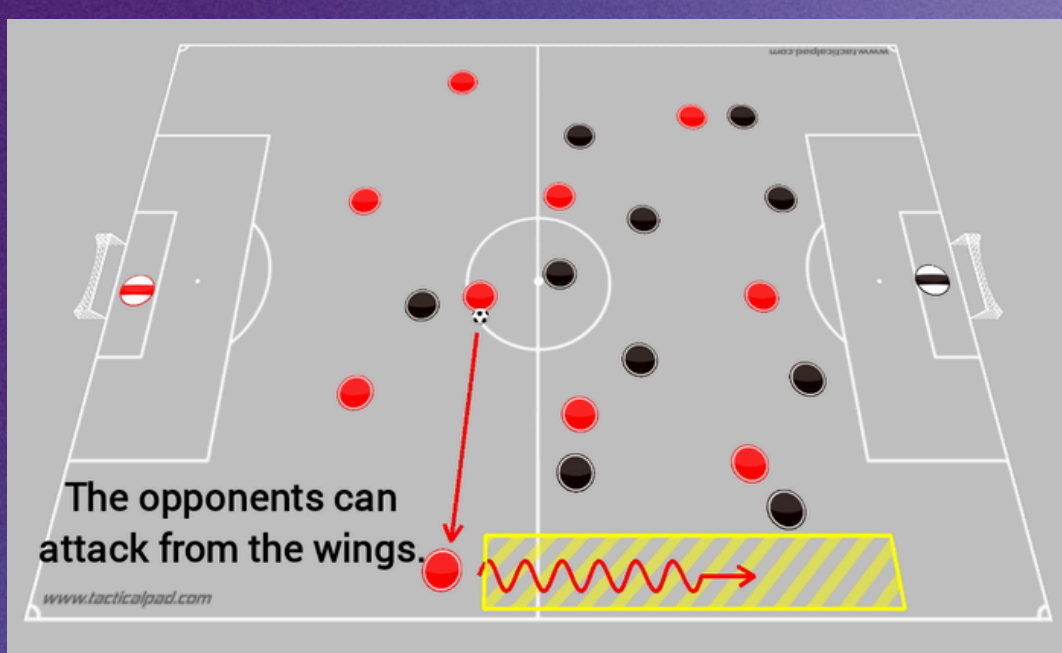
Advantages

- Good balanced and rational distribution of the ball, allowing a better staggering on defense, reinforcing the central part of the field.
- It makes the opposition's game hard to play between the lines.
- It creates great possibilities to recover the ball on the finishing third, as it allows the team to press with up to 4 players on the opposition's half.
- It allows for good options of distribution on the attack, as it creates different lines of attack on the middle and wings on the field.
- Great opportunities to fulfill the spaces when counterattacking.



Disadvantages

- Much ground needs to be covered by the two defensive midfielders if the attacking midfielders don't come back quickly to help out.
- While the center of the field is strongly reinforced, it leaves the wings vulnerable to attacks.
- In attack, the team runs the risk of being split into two blocks, the defending block of six, sending only 4 attackers forward, responsible for finishing the play.



FORMATION: 1-4-3-2-1

Origin Of The Formation:

Its origin comes from the 1-4-2-3-1 when a center midfielder from the attacking line is dropped to the defensive midfield line. The purpose is to get better control and distribution on the defensive half. This formation is not as used as the previous formations.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 4 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 3 Defensive Midfielders, 2 Attacking Midfielders, 1 Striker

Defenders:

2 Full Backs. With or without attacking attributes, depending on the physical – technical – tactical level of these players.

2 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, and aggressiveness.

Midfielders:

First Midfield-line

3 Defensive Midfielders. Play in front of the line of 4 defenders. Their characteristics and duties are very similar to the three central midfielders in the 1-4-1-4-1 formation. Where one of the three midfielders plays behind the other two, with a more defending role, and covers the other two. As the other two have to generate distribution and push the team forward toward the finishing third of the field. These players have to be very fit as they have important roles in attacking and defending.

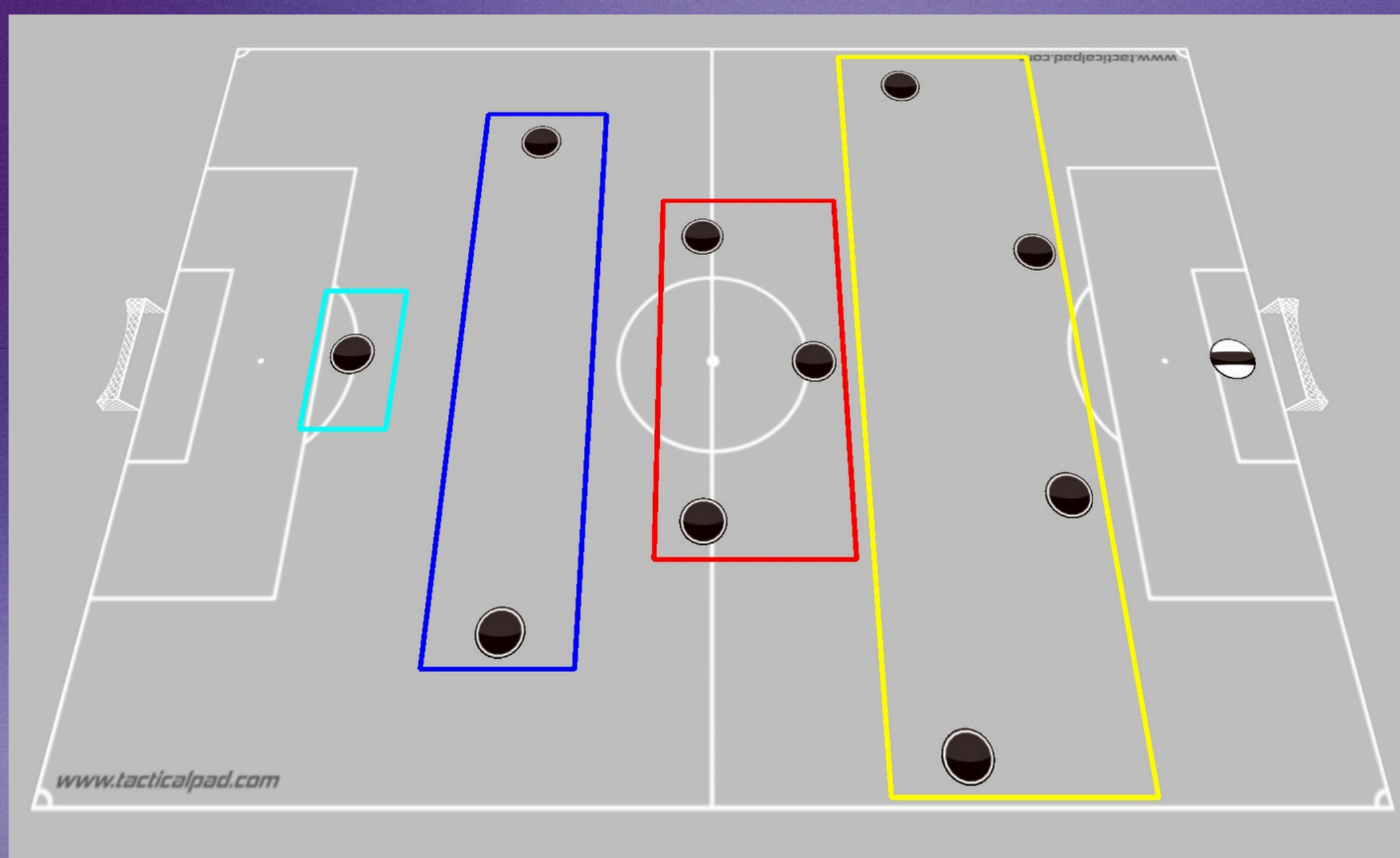
Second Midfield Line

2 Attacking Midfielders. They play higher up the field, with great technical skills, and are dynamic and creative runners. And they create a lot of penetrating runs inside the box. Must be great finishers. Should be able to make runs and be inside of the finishing third.

Strikers:

1 Striker. Physically strong, with the high technical capacity to hold the ball, waiting for the rest of their teammates to then start distributing the ball.

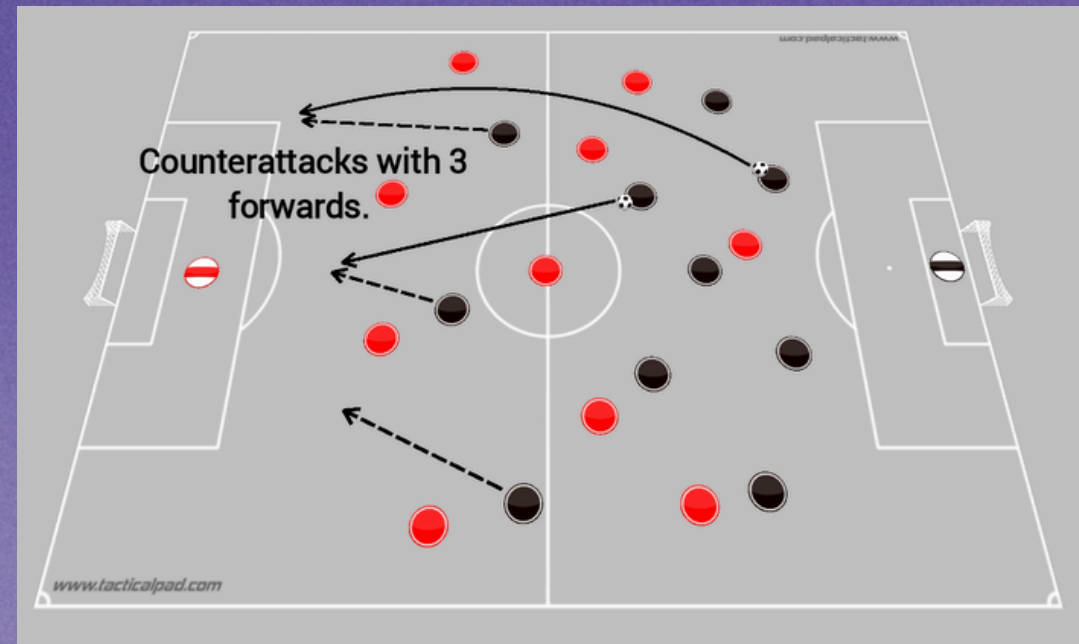
Great finisher, as well as a good runner to either, create space for others or move easily inside the area looking for gaps and through balls.



1-4-3-2-1 Advantages and Disadvantages

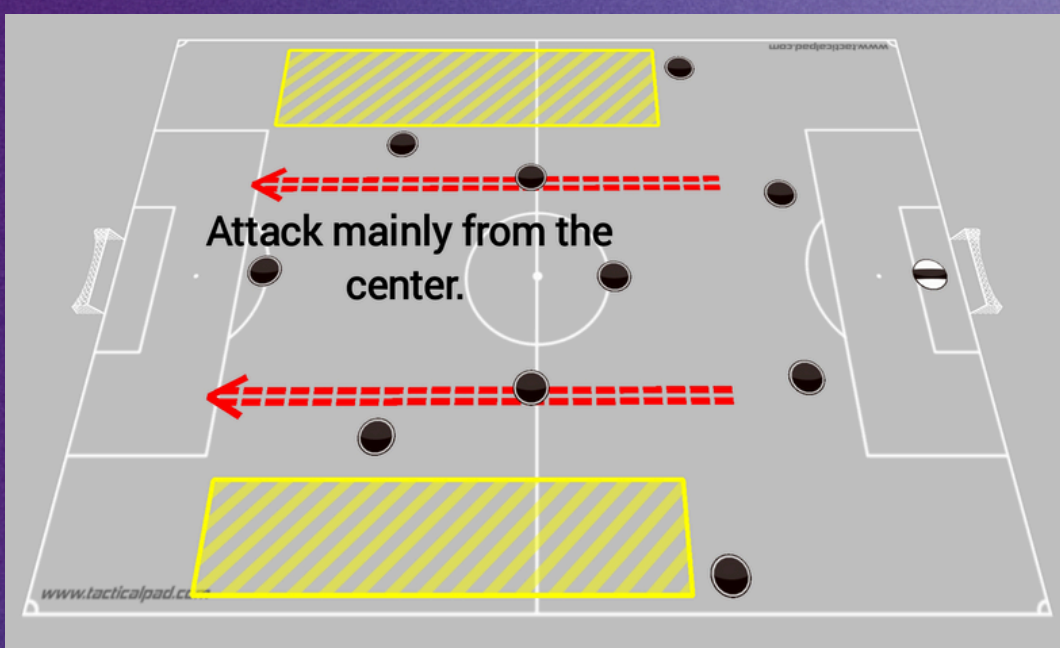
Advantages

- It doesn't allow the opponent to attack through the middle of the field and is constantly forced to shoot from distance.
- It allows for a good defensive game between lines, as they are well staggered.
- When counter-attacking, spaces are well distributed, as the three players on the attack are staggered.
- It forces the other team to keep their 4 defenders without being able to join the attack, as they can be counter-attacked and be at a constant numerical disadvantage.



Disadvantages

- If the team is very compact, when recovering the ball, there will be a lot of forwarding space to cover.
- The team can be divided into two groups, therefore the distances between lines have to be worked very well, especially during transitions.
- On Offence, most of the attacks have to go through the middle, as there will be big gaps on the wings.



FORMATION 1-3-4-3

Origin Of The Formation:

The origins of this formation come from the 1-4-3-3, where one of the defenders moves up to the midfielders' line. The idea is to dominate the possession game in the center of the field.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 3 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 3 Defenders, 4 Midfielders, 3 Forwards

Defenders:

3 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, aggressiveness as well as technical abilities.

Midfielders:

2 Center Midfielders. Where one midfielder has a more defensive role and helps out the three center backs, maintaining the balance of the tactical positioning during the build-up play. The second center midfielder has more attacking responsibilities, where he creates opportunities to move the team forward and feed the attackers with good passes and through balls, as well as joins the attack.

2 Wingbacks. Have mixed responsibilities, as they need to help build the attack and create width, and on defense must help out the defensive line.

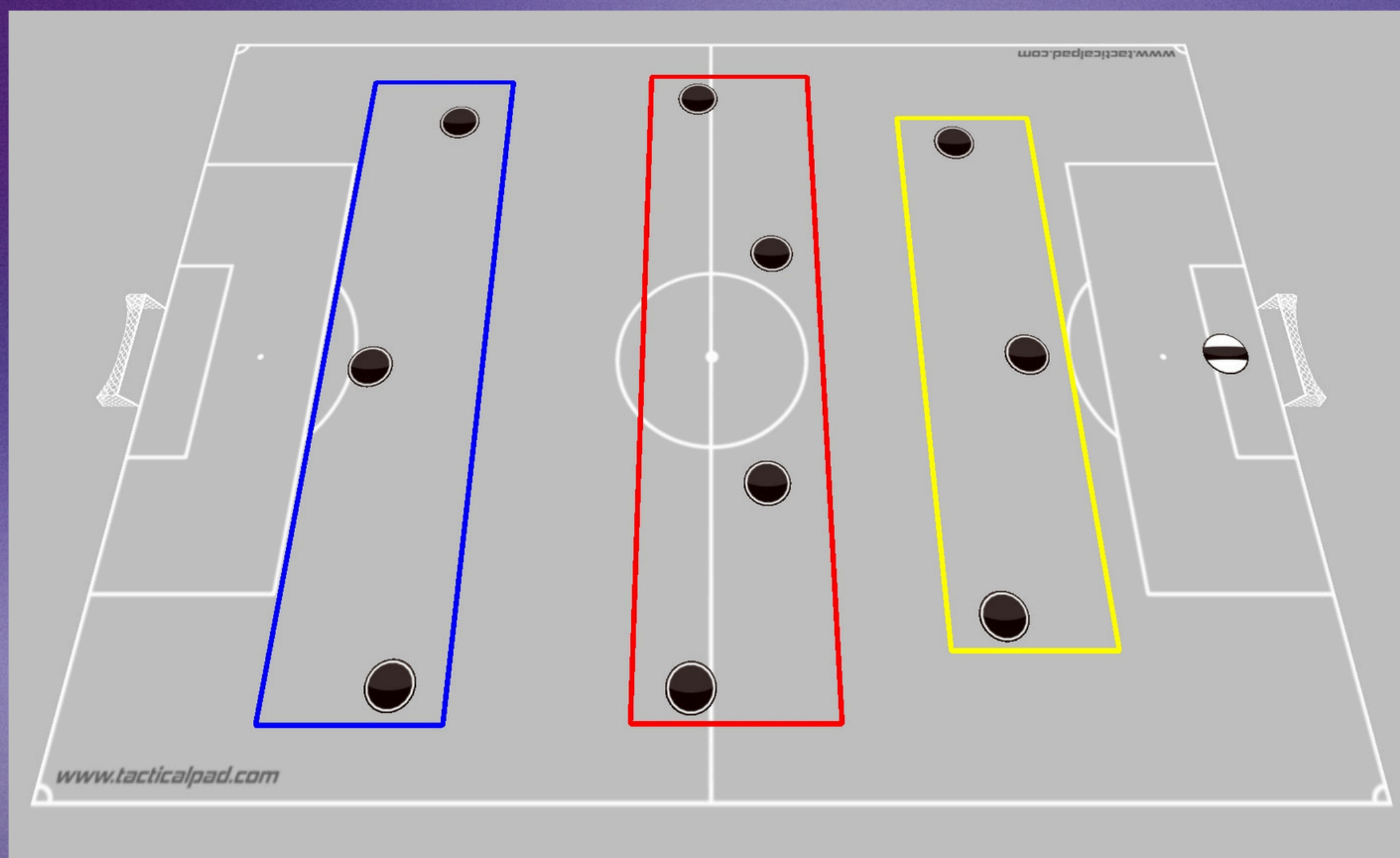
Strikers:

3 Forwards. The right and left forwards play wide, to maintain the width of the field, and must have good speed, as well as good dribbling. Good at beating players 1v1.

Also must have good passing, crossing, and finishing skills, and on defense, they must be good at applying fast pressure to avoid the other team from building up the play from the back.

The central forward is a tall player, strong with good technical skill, as well as a good finisher inside the area, on the ground, and in the air.

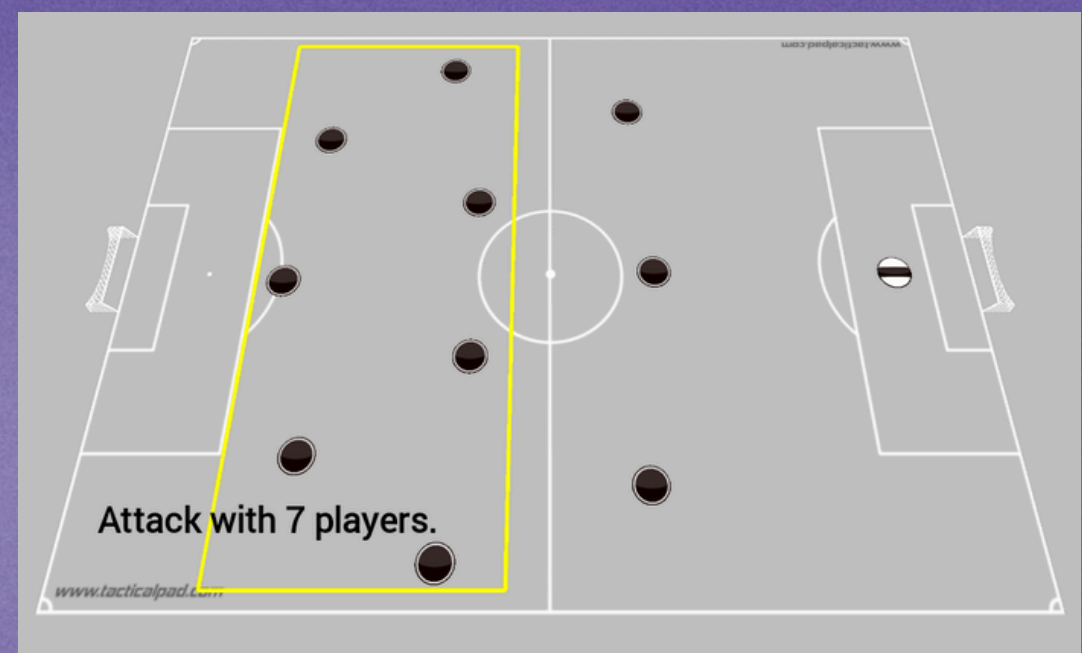
With good mobility, he helps on defense applying high pressure together with the other two forwards.



1-3-4-3 Advantages and Disadvantages

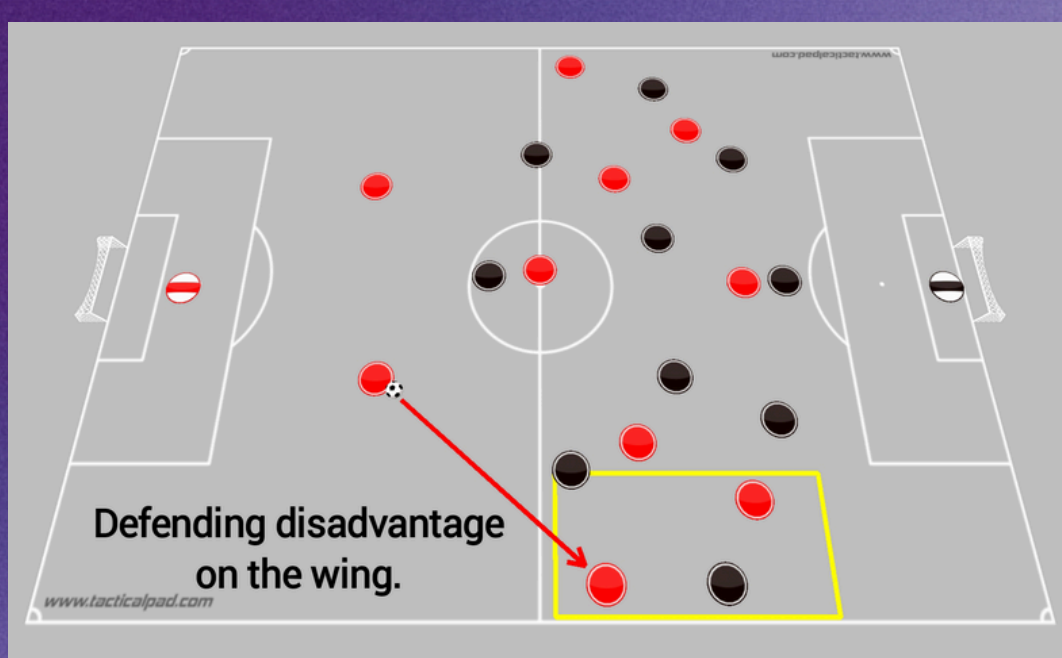
Advantages

- It creates numerical superiority in the middle of the field.
- The main intention is to maintain as much possession of the ball as possible and try to keep the opposing team in their defensive part of the field as much as possible.
- It can bring up to 7 players into the attack, creating more scoring opportunities.
- Improves the offensive game as it staggers players across the field, and it can create good width.
- Improves the game in between lines, exploding spaces and often getting opposing defenders off their lines.
- It promotes the creativity of attackers, encouraging them to use their technical talent in the finishing third.



Disadvantages

- It leaves a lot of empty spaces on the wide areas of the field, where the 3 central defenders are.
- The whole team must stay very focused and collaborate in defensive and offensive duties. As any mistake could be costly.
- The 3 center backs must be of very high defensive quality as well as technical, as they must constantly build the play from the back with good decision-making.



FORMATION: 1-3-4-1-2

Origin Of The Formation:

The origins of this formation come from the 1-3-5-2, where one of the midfielders moves up close to the forwards. The idea is to support immediately the forwards with an extra player.

Distribution and Application:

Uses 3 Lines

The most common distribution of this formation is:

- 1 Goalkeeper, 3 Defenders, 5 Midfielders, 2 Forwards

Defenders:

3 Center Backs. Characterized by their height, good aerial control, speed, aggressiveness as well as technical abilities.

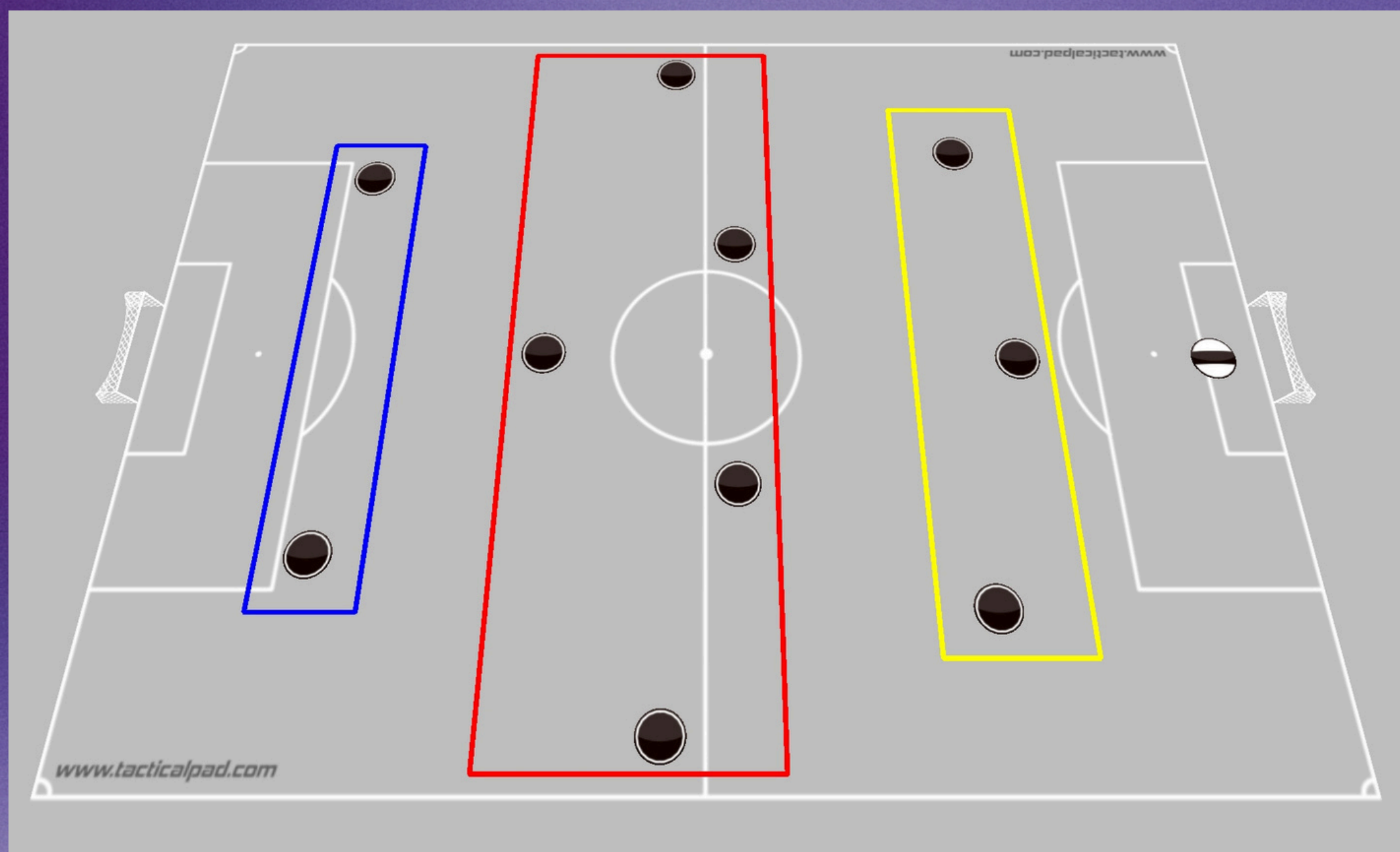
Midfielders:

3 Center Midfielders. Where one midfielder has a more attacking role and helps out the forwards. The defensive midfielders keep the team balance. The attacking midfielder has more attacking responsibilities, where he creates opportunities to move the team forward and feed the attackers with good passes and through balls, as well as joins the attack.

2 Wingbacks. Have mixed responsibilities, as they need to help build the attack and create width, and on defense must help out the defensive line.

Strikers:

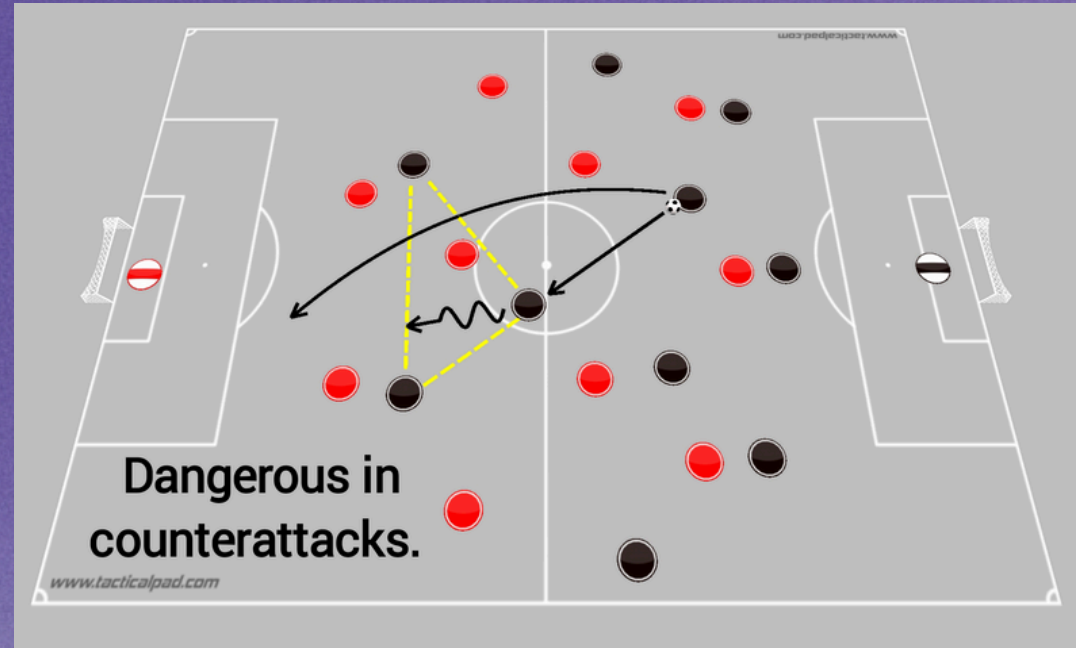
2 Strikers. Their characteristics are the same as the 1-3-5-2 formation. They must have good cooperation and communication in small spaces.



1-3-4-1-2 Advantages and Disadvantages

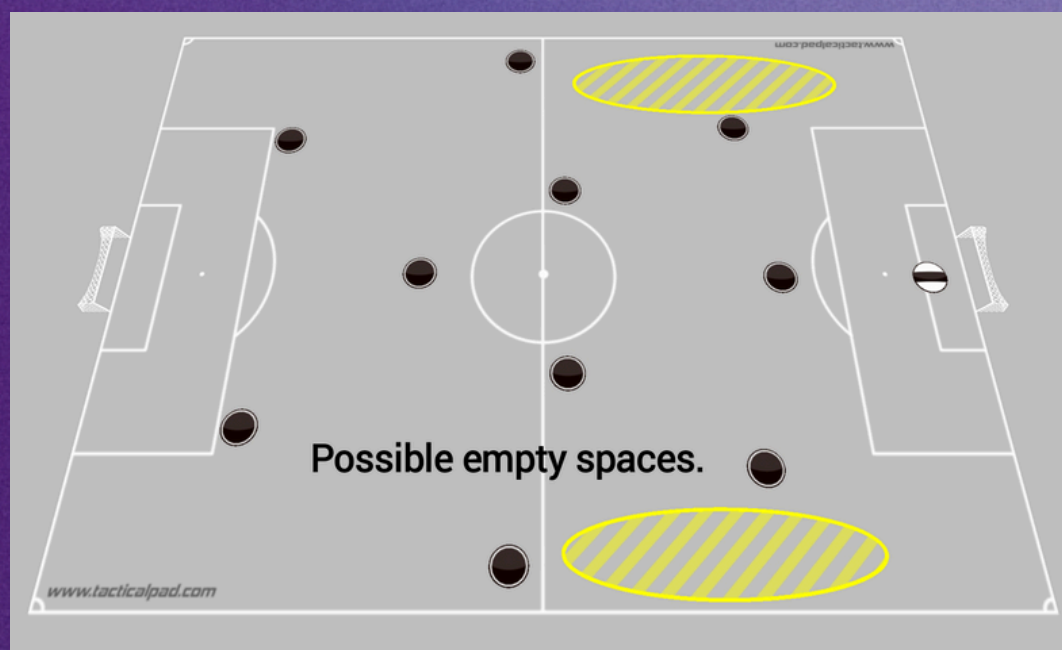
Advantages

- It creates numerical superiority in the middle of the field.
- It can bring many players in front of the defenders.
- The formation is very strong to defend centrally and press the opponent's middle line.
- It is appropriate for counterattacks.



Disadvantages

- It leaves a lot of empty spaces on the wide areas of the field, where the 3 central defenders are.
- The team must have quick movements to cover defensively the wings.
- The 3 center backs must have the support of the defensive midfielders in defense and attack.



CONCLUSION

Understanding different formations can give us insight into how to structure a football team. How many coaches, have fallen into the mistake of trying to use the most trendy formation used by the best coaches, to then realize that it's not working the way they expected?

The main mistake happens when, as coaches, we don't understand what type of players we have on the team.

As teams should be built based on what you have, not on what you wish you had.

Understanding formations can then give us a great idea of what we can do with our team, and how we use what we have in the best possible way to generate the best possible outcome against stronger teams.

