

Strategy and Tactics for Coaching Youth Soccer



Andrew Mintz
Stow Soccer Club
August 1999

All rights reserved, draft manuscript

Strategy and Tactics
for Coaching 6 v 6

Contents

Introduction

Diagram symbols

Chapter 1 The Playing Field

Chapter 2 The Team

Chapter 3 The Forwards

Chapter 4 The Fullbacks

Chapter 5 The Goalie

Chapter 6 The Playing Rules

Chapter 7 All Attack, All Defend

Chapter 8 Transition

Chapter 9 The Goalie is Captain

Chapter 10 The Law of Numbers

Chapter 11 Advice on Coaching Successful Soccer

Chapter 12 International Play





Introduction

This small book deals with strategies and tactics for coaching 6 v 6 soccer. Strategy is your game plan. Tactics are the 'how to' of coaching. They are subjects not normally covered in the majority of soccer publications and video's.

It is not enough to simply send your team onto the field and hope that they understand what to do. Strategy and tactics must be explained to your players so that they understand their position and how the game of soccer should be played.

While your players acquire soccer skills over time, they must be taught tactical play. They will have a better understanding of what is expected in each position as they are exposed to soccer tactics. They will also come to understand that there is a good and bad way of playing on the field. As their skill level increases, they will be able to execute soccer tactics at a higher level.

Key to symbols

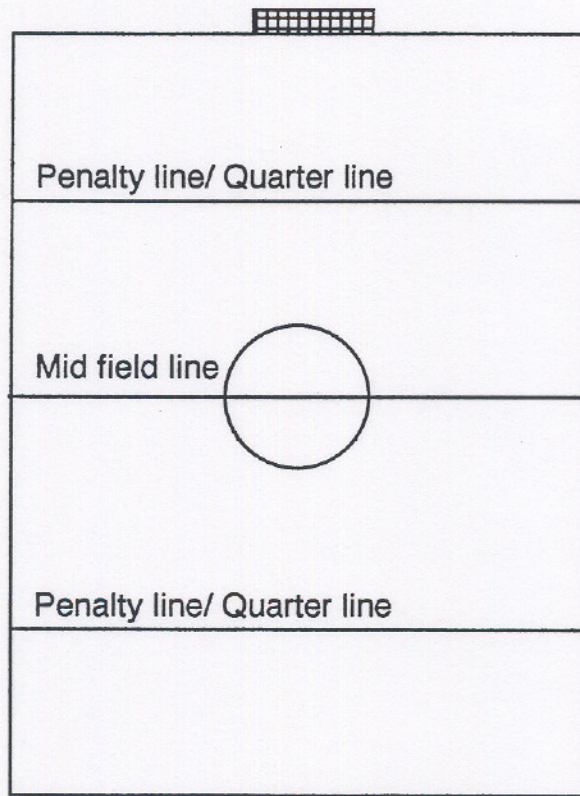
<u>Symbol</u>	<u>What it represents</u>
	Path of ball
	Path of player without the ball
	Dribbling
	Ball
X	Opposing Team

Chapter 1. The Playing Field

Most new coaches think in terms of football when they see a soccer field. The field is certainly similar in shape. There is mid-field line and two quarter lines. Teams are set up with fullbacks who defend their half and forwards who attacking the other half.

Soccer is not a game of lines and sides. It is fluid by nature and lines drawn on 6 v 6 fields have very little to do with playing the game.

The coaches vision



The soccer field is divided into thirds.

The field is divided in the attacking third, the controlling third and the defending third. The midfield line is used to start play by separating both teams. Once the ball is put into play, the mid-field line has served its purpose. You should make it disappear in the minds of your players.

In 6 v 6 play, the quarter line can serve as an arbitrary line for 1/3 of the field. Here's how the field should look to your player.

The actual play

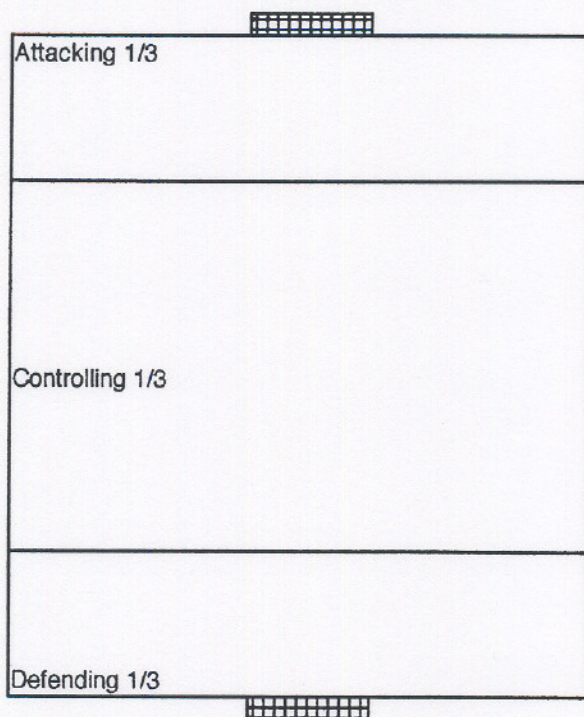


chart 2

Attacking 1/3.

The 'attacking 1/3' is the portion of the field where your team attacks the opponent's net. Once your team moves into the 'attacking 1/3' of the field, the team should attack the goal and put pressure on the goalie.

The 'attacking 1/3' is the portion of the field where your team should take the most chances. Players should shoot at the goal as often as possible. They do not have to wait until the ball is perfectly set up to take a shot. Put the opposing team under pressure with as many shots as possible.

The 'attacking 1/3' of the field is where your players want to overwhelm the other team with numbers. Ideally, the three forwards should be attacking the goal. The two fullbacks should be behind the forwards, supporting them. The Goalie should come out to cover the 'defending 1/3' of the field.

If your team loses the ball, they are not at risk. The opposing team cannot score in their 'defending 1/3'. See Chart 3

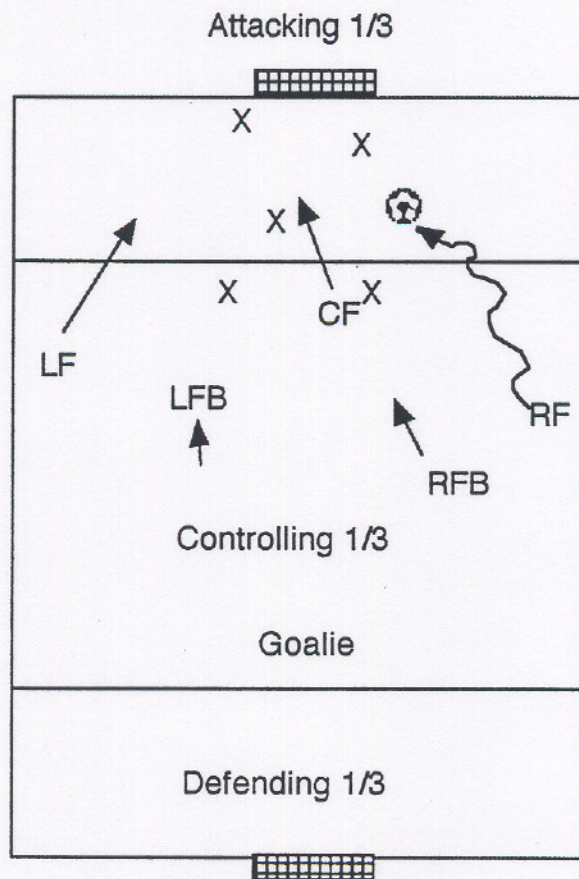


Chart 3

The Controlling 1/3

The game is controlled in the midfield. Both teams compete for possession of the ball in midfield. Win the ball in midfield, and you control the game. The ball must be fought for and won. The expression "win the ball, win the game" is critical in the 'controlling 1/3.' You can not emphasis enough to your players how important it is to win the ball in this part of the field.

Players should take only moderate risks in ball handling in the 'controlling 1/3.'

The Defending 1/3

You must defend your goal in the 'defending 1/3.' Take no risks. Teach your players, "When in doubt, kick it out!". Every player must defend the goal. This includes your forwards. Like the 'attacking 1/3', superiority in numbers is all important. The forwards must come back and defend.

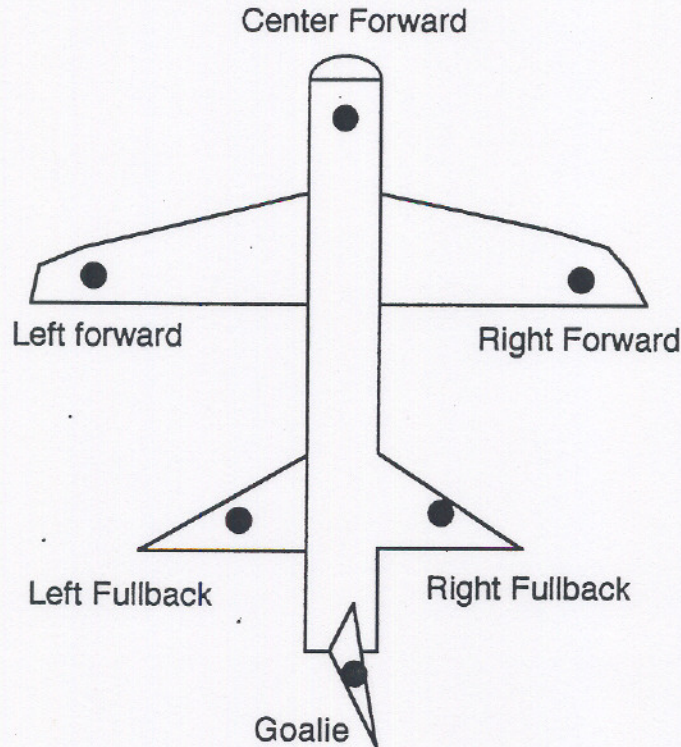
There are coaches who will teach forwards not to cross the "quarter line." The strategy in this type of play is to take advantage of a 'breakaway.' However, the more players you have defending the goal, the smaller the chance your team will be scored on. This will be dramatically illustrated in Chapter 10 - The Law of Numbers.

The opposing players must be (covered) marked. The player with the ball must be pressured and never allowed to take an 'open shot.'

Chapter 2. The Team

How to play as a unit: The Airplane Analogy

Young children like to be where the action is. Who doesn't? However, in order to play as a team, everyone now must have a specific responsibility. You can use the airplane to describe how we play:

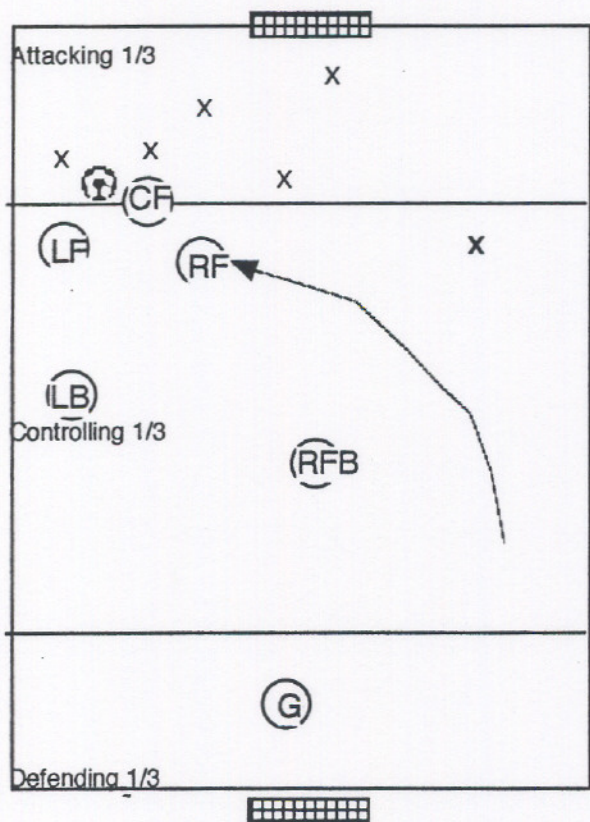


The *center forward* is the nose of the plane. The *left forward* is the left wing. The *right forward* is the right wing. The *left fullback* is the left tail, and the *right fullback* is the right tail. The *goalie* is the rudder. Draw an airplane on your soccer clipboard and explain the positions.

Ask, "Has anyone flown on an airplane?" Usually someone has. Ask, "Have you ever seen the right wing come over and touch the left wing? What would happen?" The plane would crash. "Have you ever seen the tail cross over and touch the Nose? What would happen?" The plane would crash.

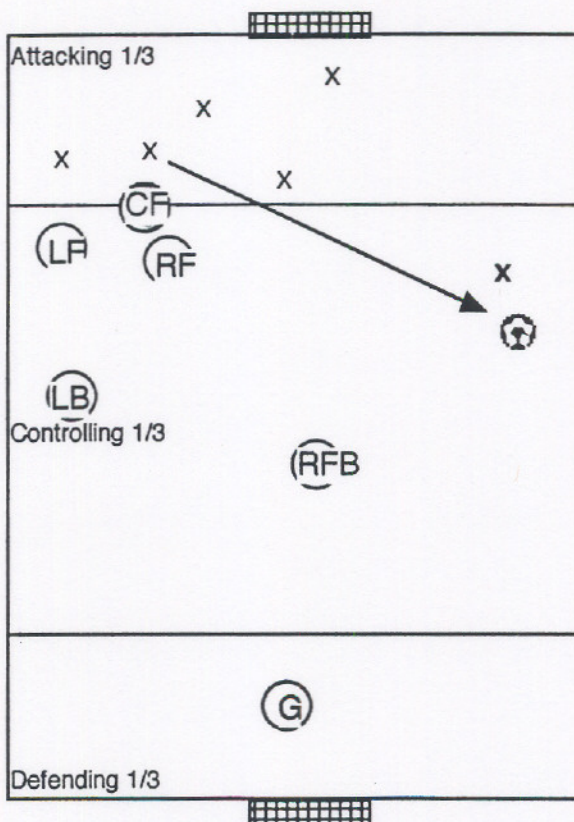
"The same is true on the field. Cross over to the other side of the field, leave your position and your team will crash!! The team can not fly without you in your position." Show how this happens with the example below. The *Left Forward* crosses over to the right side of the field, leaving the left side open. The player on the opposing team kicks the ball to the open player.

Left Forward crosses over field



RF leaves position to go to ball on other side of the field, leaving his area open.

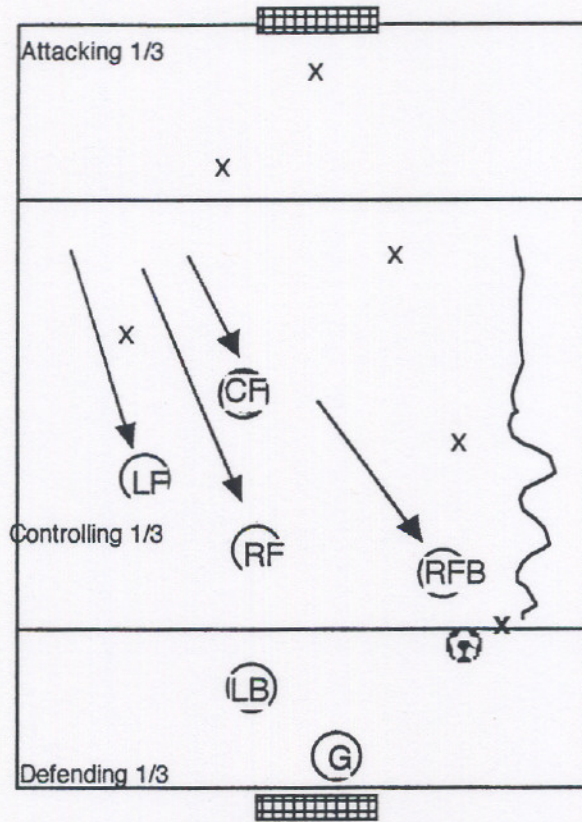
Opposing team finds the open player



CF on other team gets ball and makes a long pass to open player. Creating a breakaway with only the right fullback to beat.

Open Field

With no one there to fight for the ball, the opposing player can dribble down the field to your 'defending 1/3.'



The opposing forward beats the fullback and attacks the goal.

Strong and Weak player placement

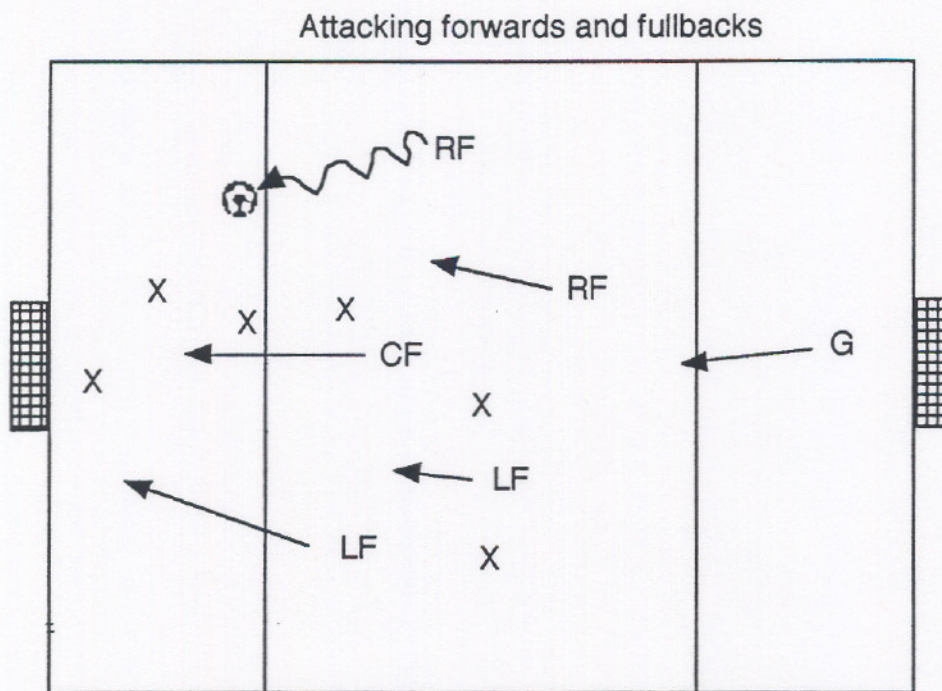
Identify your three best players. They should play the positions of goalie, center forward and full back. Your strength must go up the middle.

Identify your two weakest players. They will share the position of *right forward*. This will put them against the *left forward* on the opposing team. This is a great equalizer. Your weaker player will use a right foot against the opposing forward, who has to use a left foot.

Chapter 3. The Forwards

Attacking Forwards

Forwards must be taught to attack the goal as a unit. Making 'a run at the goal' is fundamental for a forward. It does not matter which forward has the ball; all forwards must run ahead in anticipation of the attack. By 'making a run at the goal,' the attacking forwards draw off opposing full backs, opening space and opportunities.



Forwards must be taught to 'make a run at the goal.' Fullbacks must support the forwards by following them down field. They should not get ahead of the forwards on the attack. However, they should be encouraged to shoot at the goal once they cross into the 'attacking 1/3.'

Forward Responsibilities:

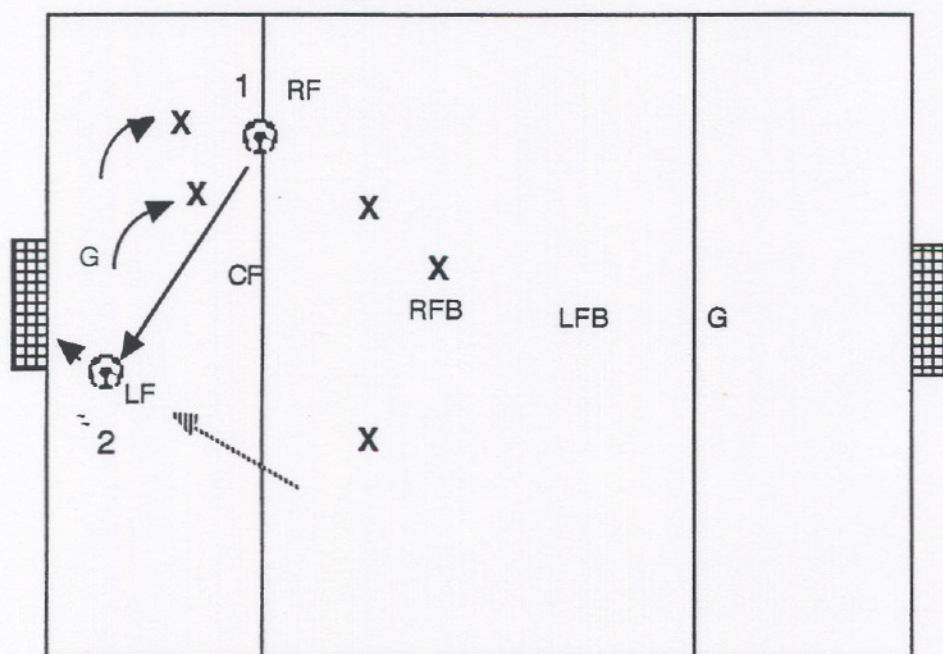
When your team has the ball in the 'controlling 1/3' or the 'attacking 1/3', the forwards must run towards the goal. Their responsibilities are, (1) to 'open space' by drawing off defenders. Two, move into position to 'strike' when the ball is passed.

Playing to the weak side

One of the best strategies that you can teach your team is to 'play to the weak side.' The player with the ball moves down the side of the field into the 'attacking 1/3.' The natural tendency for the the opposing fullbacks is to move to the player with the ball. The opposing goalie will move toward the attacking player and leave the goal exposed on 'the weak side', the side with no players.

Your forwards must make a 'run at the goal'. The forward wing without the ball heads to the weak side. The center forward heads towards the goal to cover the other side of the goal. The team must be taught that the player with the ball will make the pass to the "weak side." Once your team understands the concept of playing to "the weak side", the team goal production will show dramatic improvement.

Playing to the weak side



The defending team will naturally shift and move to the player with the ball. This leaves the net open. Attacking forwards move to the unprotected side of the goal. (1) The player with the ball passes across the field. (2) The player 'making a run at the goal' simply kicks the ball into an unprotected net. Your team will score more goals off this tactic than any other.

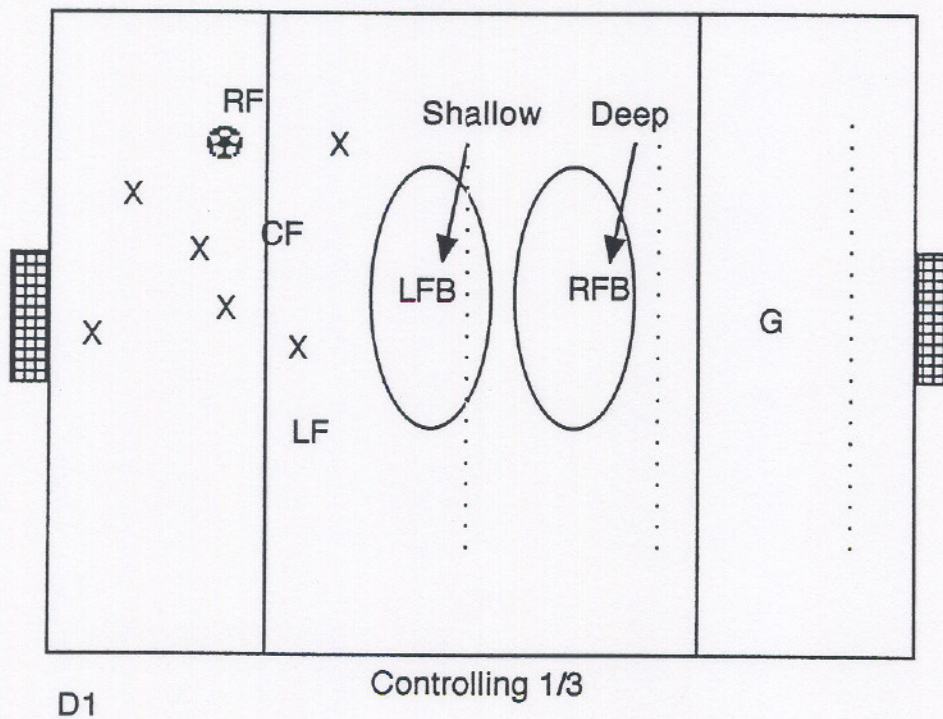
Chapter 4. The Fullback

Kids like to play fullback for several reasons. They think that they won't have to run up and down the field. They also feel coaches are always directing the forwards to move somewhere, kick the ball to someone or take shots at the goal. They feel that there is generally less pressure on fullbacks. If they can break a play up, then they have done their job.

Unknowing, coaches have traditionally placed weaker players in the fullback position. A coach might think that having fast forwards and stronger players as forwards is the best line up. This only gets your team into trouble. You end up giving away the 'controlling 1/3.'

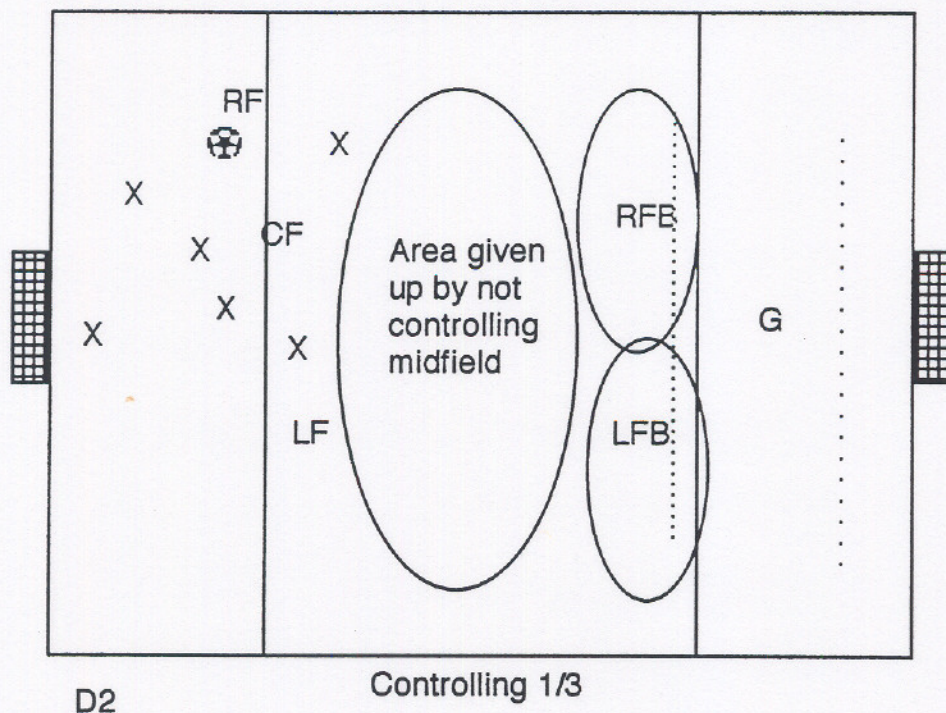
Fullbacks control the game. They set up the forwards with passes. They break up the opposing offense. They defend and attack. Do not look upon a fullback as a purely defensive position. Remember the airplane! Fullbacks are simply fully back behind forwards. They move up the field with the forwards. They must be taught to become masters of the 'controlling 1/3'. If you arbitrarily limit a fullback to a defensive position, you end up ceding the 'controlling 1/3' to the opposing team.

Chart D Shallow and deep Fullbacks control the mid field



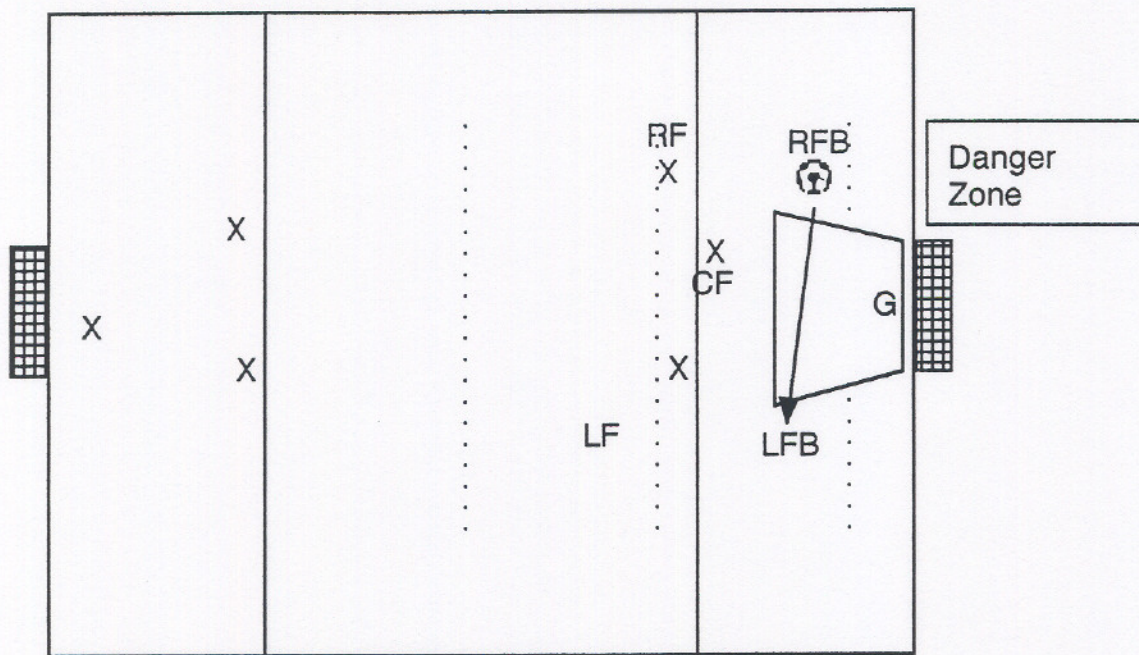
Divide the fullbacks in a shallow and deep formation. The logic is simple as illustrated in chart (D2). If you line fullbacks up as left and right, then opposing forwards only have one line to get through. If you have a shallow and deep fullback, you have created two defensive lines. The shallow fullback acts as a linebacker. The deep fullback becomes your safety. The Goalie is the last line of defense.

Side by side Fullbacks, defending their defensive 1/3



The Golden Rule for Fullbacks

"Never, ever, under any circumstance, kick the ball across the face of the goal when you are defending."



Never, ever, under any circumstances pass the ball across the throat of the goal. It is dangerous because it puts the ball in play to opposing forwards. The correct play for the Right Fullback is to kick the ball away from the goal to the touch line where the Right Forward has a 50/50 chance of gaining possession.

Tactic:

When it comes to defending your goal, this tactic should be taught to all defenders, which includes forwards. "When in doubt, kick it out." This gives your team time to reorganize and get back in position to defend.

Chapter Five. The Goalie

The goalie is the most important player on the team. The goalie is the last player on defense. The goalie is the first player on offense. The goalie is the only player who can see the entire field of play. The goalie is the captain of the team. The goalie should be one of the strongest players on your team. Good hand eye coordination is essential. Good athletic skills are a must. The goalie will keep you in the game.

The goalie should be taught to leave the net once the team has control of the ball and is moving downfield. The goalie should stand on the penalty line when the ball is downfield. When your five other players are attacking the opposing goal, the goalie should be somewhere in midfield.

This allows the goalie to kick cleared balls back into the 'attacking 1/3.' It also gives the goalie time to get back if necessary and defend the goal. Teach your goalie to be an aggressive player, not 'ditch diggers' with their toes scuffing dirt in front of the goal.

Make the Goalie position important. Put on a big show.

The goalie is the only player with a different uniform. Personally help the goalie get ready. Make sure the shirt is on properly and the gloves fit. Grab their attention and ask if they are ready.

Make the goalie 'Captain' of the team when the referee calls for captains. Let the goalie pick the co-captain for each game. Make sure everyone has a chance to be co-captain. The captains should always pick the goal to defend, not possession of the ball. Explain to the captains that they should look where the sun is located. Do they want the sun in their eyes or at their back in the first half? They should determine the direction of the wind and the condition of the field.

Choosing the correct goal is far more important than having the first touch. The ball will change hands in seconds. Show your goalie how to make the decision, do not do it for the goalie. Grab a handful of grass and let it float down, this determines wind direction. If the sun is a factor, ask the goalie which side to defend first. Will the sun change during the course of the game? Is the ground wet in front of the goal? Should you defend the dry side first? The dry side giving the team a first half tactical advantage.

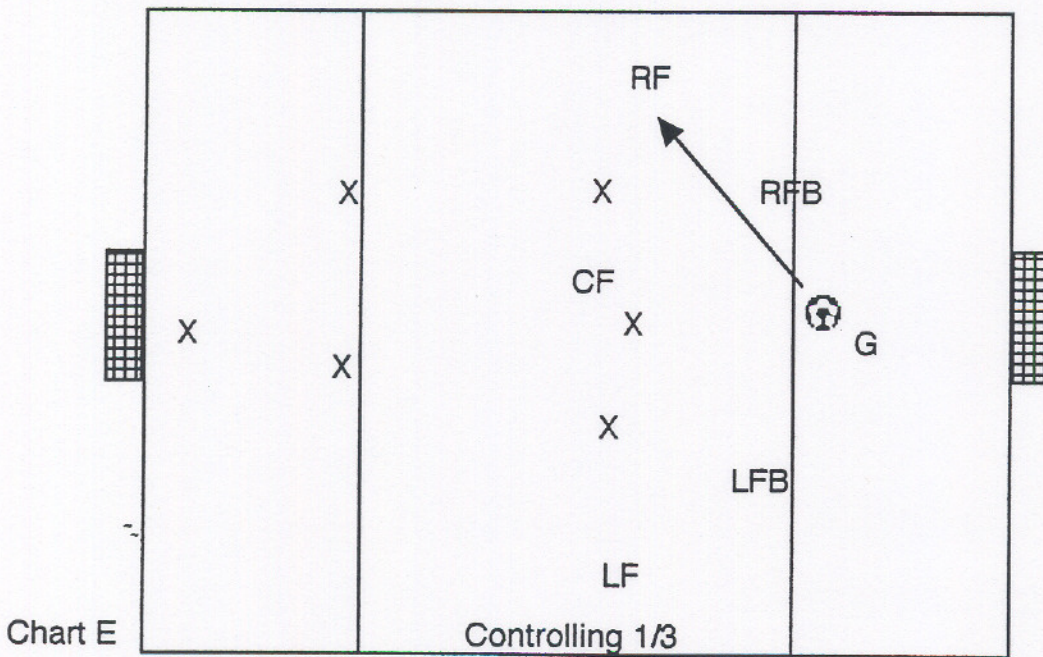
The above are questions to ask and explore with your Keeper. Let the Keeper choose the side to defend. Simply show the keeper how to make the right decision.

Goalie responsibility

Encourage your Goalie to take command of the defense. The following illustrations are do's and don't. 'Never, ever, ever kick the ball down the center of the field on a goal kick.' This where all of the opposing forwards are concentrated. They will win the ball and attack the goal.

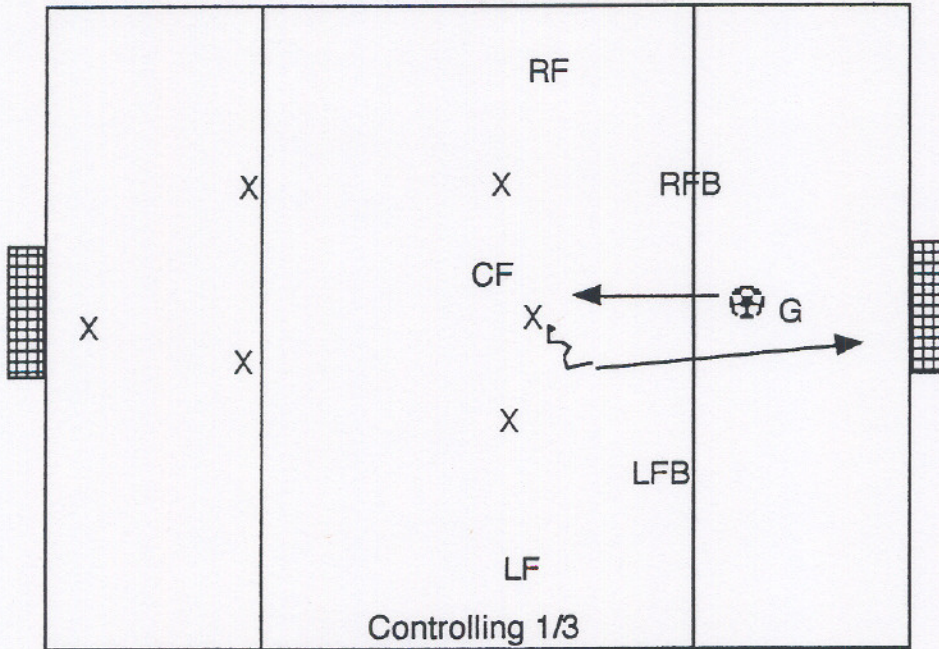
Have the goalie place the ball to one side of the center and kick the ball towards the sideline, also known as the 'touch line.' The opposing team always expects the ball down the center. Balls kicked to an open player on the side line will give your team a tactical advantage. First, the ball is out of harms way. Second, it sets up your Forward who can use the express lane down the field. See Chart E

Goal Kick - the right way



On a Goal Kick, the Goalie should always start play by kicking the ball to the Forward on the Touch line. Balls kicked to the center have a 50% chance of being turned over to the other team. They will attack. Not only is the goalie exposed but his team is downfield and can not get back to defend while the opposing forwards are attacking the goal.

Goal Kick - the wrong way



Goal kicks that are booted down the center of the field are a 50/50 ball. Since they are directly in front of the goal, this is not a high percentage ball.

Goalie as Keeper

If you look at a goalie only in the traditional sense, that of a purely defensive player, 'Keeper of the goal,' then you lose the opportunity to make your Keeper a field player. The tactical advantage you acquire is that you add a sixth player to the field. Your team will play six field players against the opposing five field players.

Coming out of the goal

The goalie's job is to defend the goal when the other team is attacking. As long as you have a defender in front of you, the goalie stays in the goal. However, when there is no longer a defender, the goalie must come out of the goal and attack the player with the ball.

A goalie is the last defender. If the Goalie waits in the goal for the attacker to shoot, then the Goalie is at a disadvantage. Leaving the goal and forcing a bad shot is the best option. Train your Goalie to 'come out' and attack.

Chart F

Positional play of Goalie as The keeper/Sweeper

