

Ferguson and Wenger's 4-2-3-1



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Developing the #6 and #10

by
Stevie Grieve

Published by
WORLD CLASS COACHING

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This is your free eBook, “Ferguson and Wenger’s 4-2-3-1”. This eBook will give you an inside look at how the tactics of these two great managers have developed over time and how they came to use the 4-2-3-1 with their world-class teams.

Two of the most pivotal positions in this system are the traditional #6 (defensive midfielder) and the #10 (attacking playmaker). Given their importance in the success of a team playing the 4-2-3-1, special attention is paid to these players in this eBook. The author, Stevie Grieve, shows you how to train your players to master the techniques and tactics of these positions to give your team the advantage over the competition.

Grieve has coached in his home country of Scotland where he developed players that went on to be selected by various Elite Youth Academy Teams each season. He also spent time coaching in New Jersey , USA with three different youth academies before moving back to Scotland to coach at Dundee. He spent two seasons at Dundee as the U17 coach before moving to Raith Rovers then East Fife, where he was employed both times as a talent scout and youth coach.

Grieve then made the move abroad to Intersoccer in Switzerland, where he continues to work today as a youth coach and coach development consultant. In his current role Grieve helps to develop the structure for educating coaches in how to put the right skills in the right order to accelerate skills acquisition. He is now the head coach of, the Swiss team FC Gland 3.

There is a lot more to know about the 4-2-3-1 beyond the roles and responsibilities of the #6 and #10 players. Grieve has created a complete overview of the 4-2-3-1. Everything is included from a history of its evolution to how to train your team in every aspect of play. You can click [HERE](#) to see more about this great resource which is available both in eBook and hard copy forms.



Sir Alex Ferguson's 4-2-3-1 – Pure Wingers and Midfield Runners

Sir Alex Ferguson has been working at the top level of coaching since the early 1980's, with Aberdeen where he famously won the Cup Winners' Cup against Real Madrid in 1983, before moving to Manchester United in 1986. He played a normal, British 4-4-2 system with wingers who dribbled on the outside, strikers who stayed central and midfielders who supported from deep. This system of play in Britain was a normal way of playing and most of the teams who had success either had better players than the opposition, or better tactics. In Scotland, it was his mentality and tactics which brought success to Aberdeen. When he moved to Manchester United his tactics remained similar to the Aberdeen days of a 4-4-2 with wingers and 2 central strikers. His ethos of making sure the team were a tight defensive unit and played with wingers, supplying lots of crosses into the box continued at Manchester United, and 25 years on from taking over at Man Utd, his ethos is still the same, although he, like football has, evolved and changed his tactics with the times. Almost gone are the days of a basic flat 4-4-2 that Sir Alex used to employ so successfully – the 1983 Cup Winners Cup with Aberdeen and the 1999 Champions League Final with Man Utd – and he has now adapted his successful wide 4-4-2 into a successful 4-2-3-1, dropping one of the strikers between the lines and although he looks for the same things he did 30 years ago, the system has changed and a new way of playing formed – the 'little and large' combination of Target Man and Fast Dribbler of the 4-4-2 has moved to a 'withdrawn striker' who is able to create from deep positions and score when inside the box, like Wayne Rooney, and either a 'Penetrative Striker' who runs behind the defence and stretches the play, not getting too involved in the build-up play, like 'Chicharito' Hernandez, or the other option of a striker who can do everything, but isn't quite as fast as a player like 'Chicharito', a player like Robin Van Persie, who he has just signed to play and interchange positions with Rooney.

Sir Alex Ferguson's 4-2-3-1 – Wingers and Runners from midfield

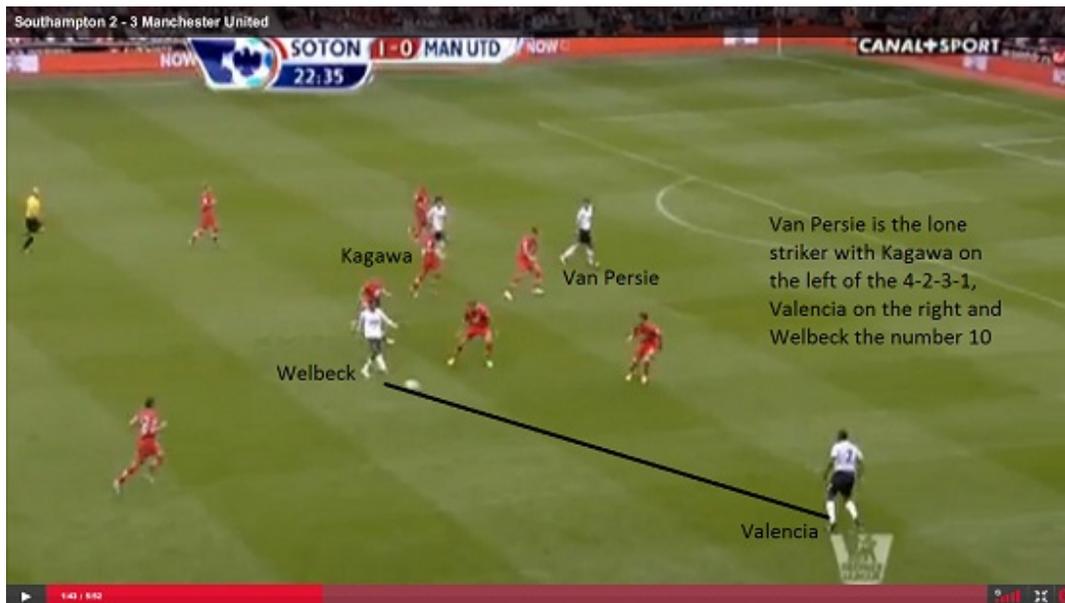


The system Sir Alex employs is to emphasise width and quality delivery into the box. With a 4-2-3-1, this must be a more patient system than a 4-4-2 as the winger needs targets to hit inside the box. If the ball is on the right, the left winger must enter the box at the far post to support the striker.

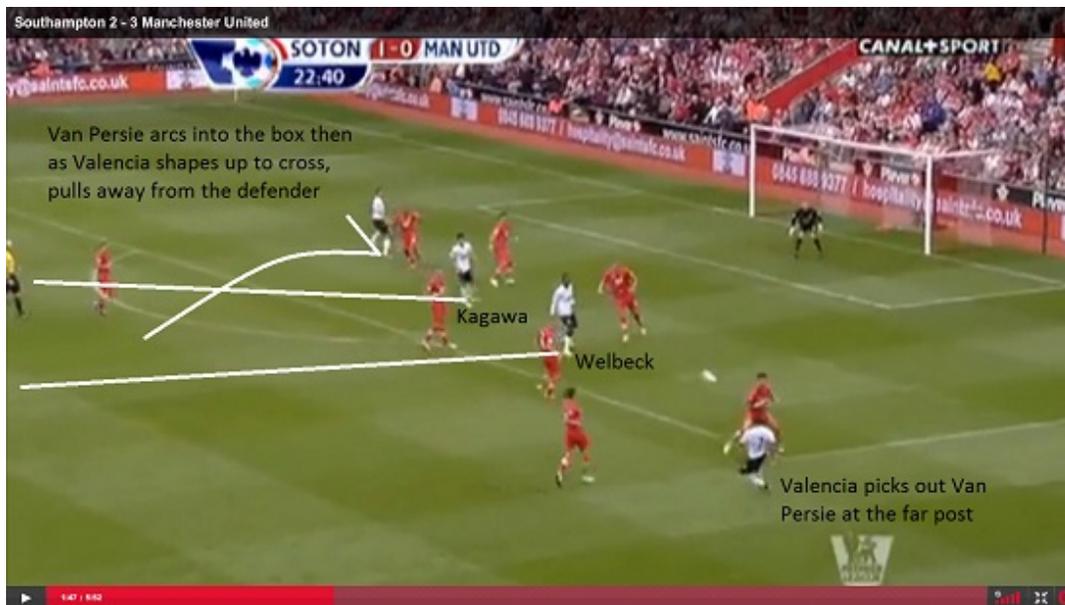
Sir Alex Ferguson's 4-2-3-1 – Outballs and delivery's into the box

In the recent league match against Southampton, the Sir Alex Ferguson philosophy of having a pure winger constantly delivering crosses into the box paid off, with 2 goals coming directly from crosses, and 1 from a corner.

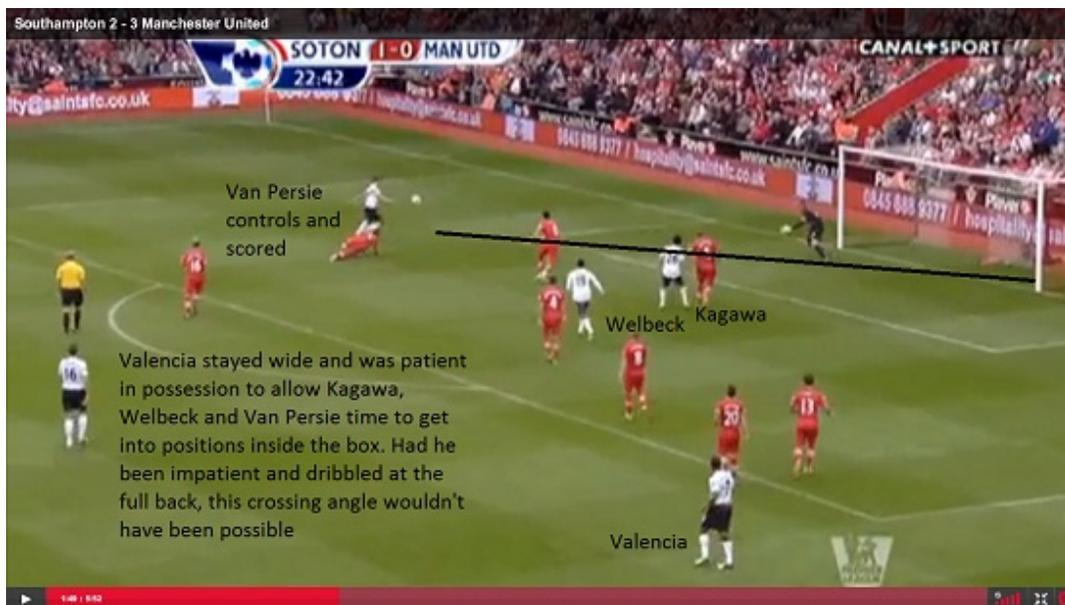
Van Persie's 1st goal – Valencia's patience allows support to enter the box



Valencia hangs wide while Welbeck receives a lay off from Van Persie, then Welbeck delivers a pass wide. In most teams, the winger would go straight for the space and try to play 1v1 against the full back. At Manchester United, the winger in most cases will delay, and allow support to enter the box, the theory being that the more targets in the box, the more chance there is of scoring. Valencia does that here, allowing Kagawa, Welbeck and Van Persie to enter the box.

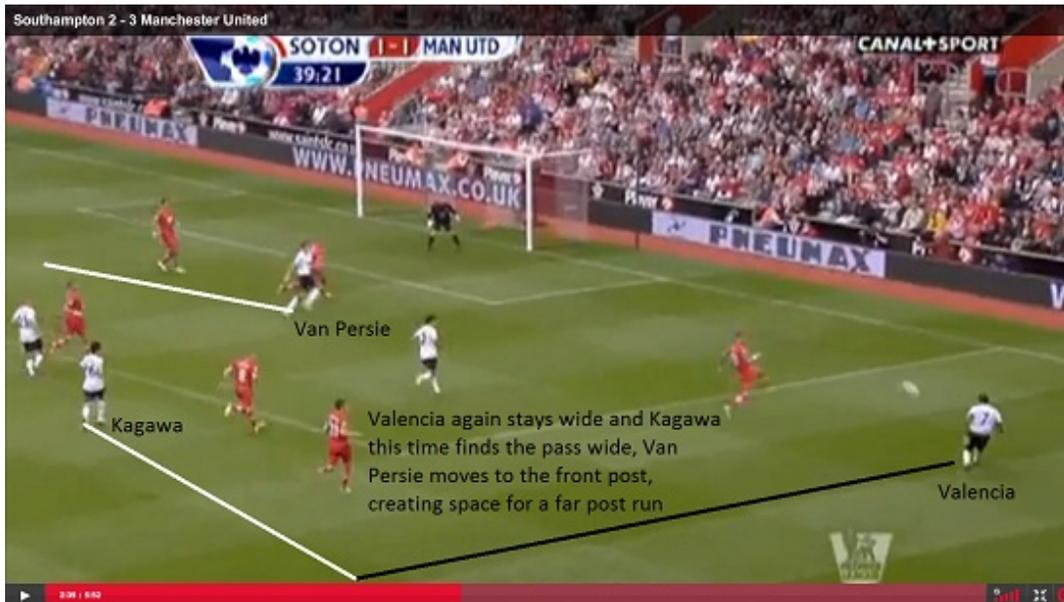


Valencia advances slowly and alters the angle of his cross, but is still in enough space to deliver a cross accurately to the far post. Van Persie has pulled away from the defender expecting a lofted cross to the far post.

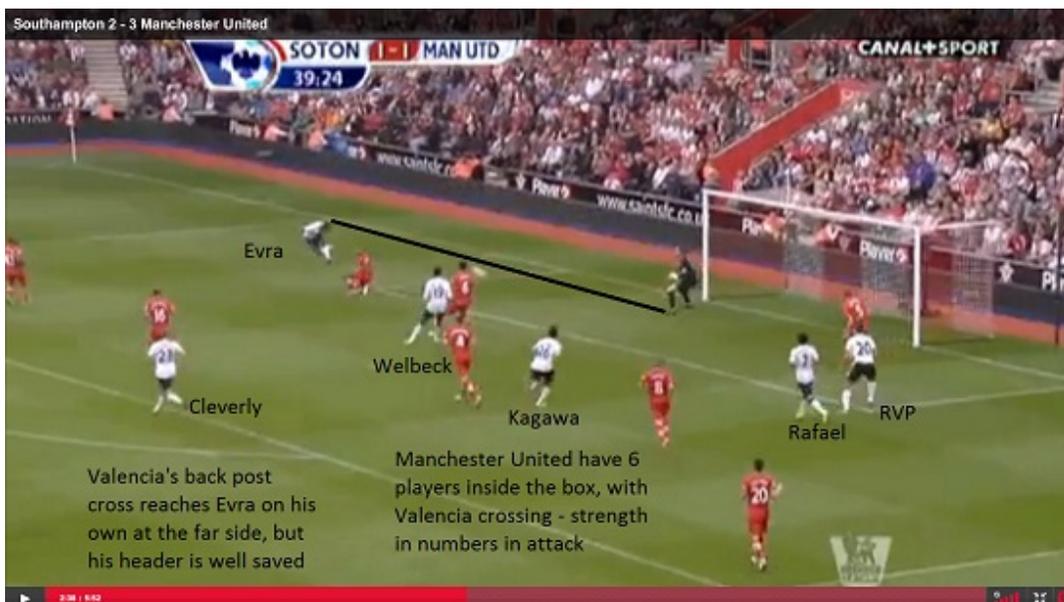


Van Persie receives the cross behind the defender, chests it down and smashes a volley past the goalkeeper for an equalising goal.

Evra chance at the back post – Man Utd flood the box with runners from deep



Again, Valencia is the player to stay wide and supply the cross, as Kagawa is drifting from the left, Evra will move forward and offer the crossing option from the left side, to provide balance and crossing options from both sides. Rafael has entered the box as he moved up to support Valencia, but Valencia had enough time and space to cross, so Rafael moved inside the box to provide another attacker who can score from a cross.

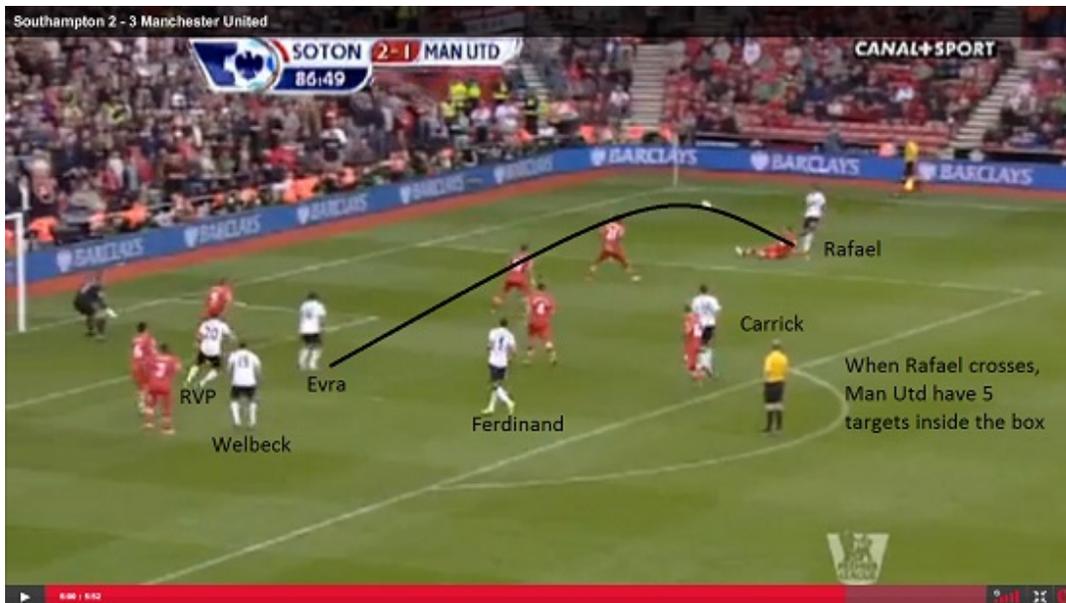


Evra, who has pushed up to offer width on the left, enters the box as it is obvious Valencia will cross the ball. The goalkeeper saves the header well but had he pushed it into the centre of the box, or across goal, Man Utd has 4 players who can score from a rebound, and Cleverly 18 yards out.

Rafael and Valencia play 2v1 to supply the equalising goal



A corner is headered clear and the ball is recycled to Valencia. Rafael knows Valencia will be pressured so offers an overlap and a 2v1. Valencia passes to Rafael who crosses into the box.



Rafael delivers the cross and Man Utd has 5 players inside the box. There is a 3v3 around 6 yards out and Ferdinand on his own 15 yards out, able to attack a cross to the penalty spot.

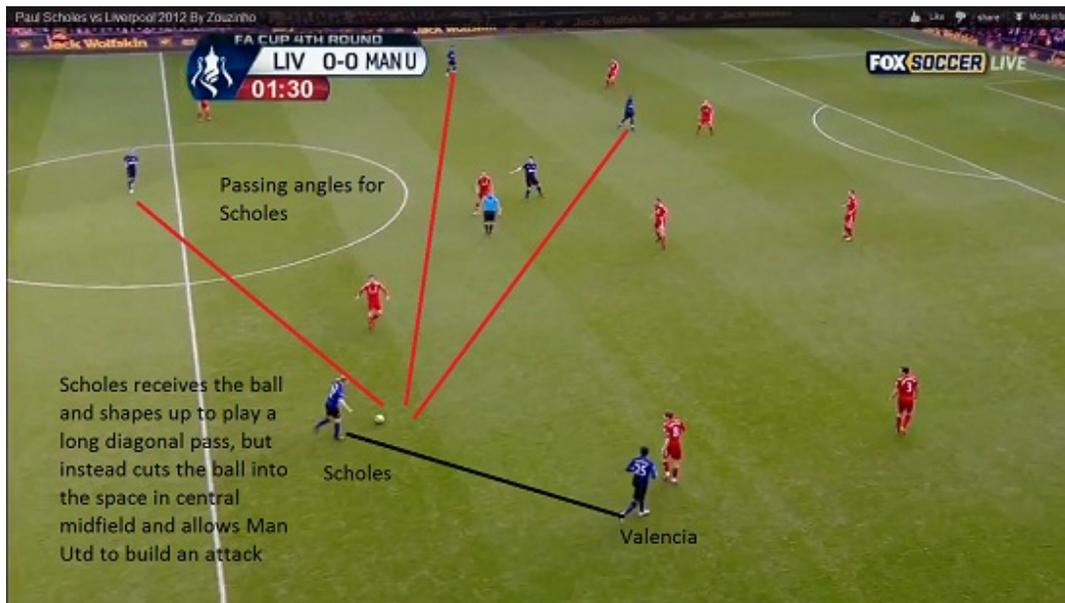


The cross is delivered to Ferdinand and he heads against the post, but Van Persie is on hand to score from the rebound 4 yards from goal, to score an equaliser in the 87th minute.

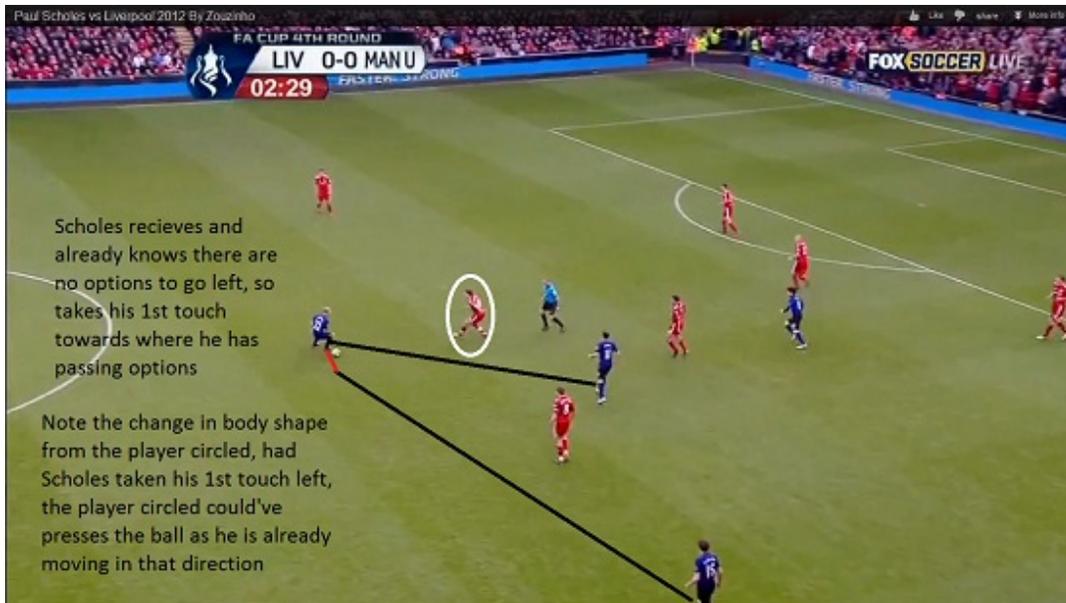
Man Utd went on to win the game 3-2 in the 91st minute, Van Persie scored a header from a front post cross into the far corner. Man Utd's insistence on getting the ball wide, getting players inside the box and making quality deliveries are a big reason why they were always able to get back into the game despite going 1-0 and 2-1 down.

Sir Alex's 4-2-3-1 – Players who dominate a game from midfield

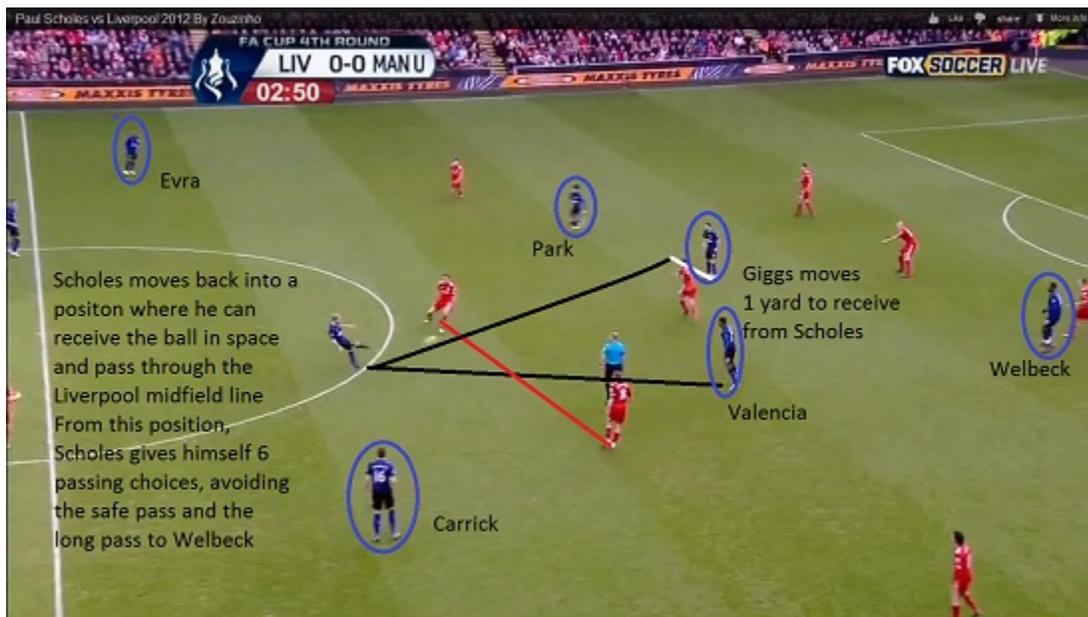
Over the years, Sir Alex Ferguson's philosophies haven't changed; the way he has coached, set his teams up, built new teams and promoted youth team players have evolved but he has stayed the same – Have a strong back 4, a defensive partnership in the centre, a dominating central midfielder, and wingers with good deliveries and strikers who score. All these players know their jobs and the central midfielder is a focal point of this. Players like Roy Keane and Paul Scholes have been the men Sir Alex relied on to dominate a midfield. I will look at one of Paul Scholes' first games after returning to the Man Utd team after retiring, in an FA Cup tie against Liverpool. If you can, please watch the genius of Paul Scholes on the internet. In all of the clips, Scholes and Carrick are the 2 central midfielders, Park, Giggs and Valencia are the 3 attacking midfielders.



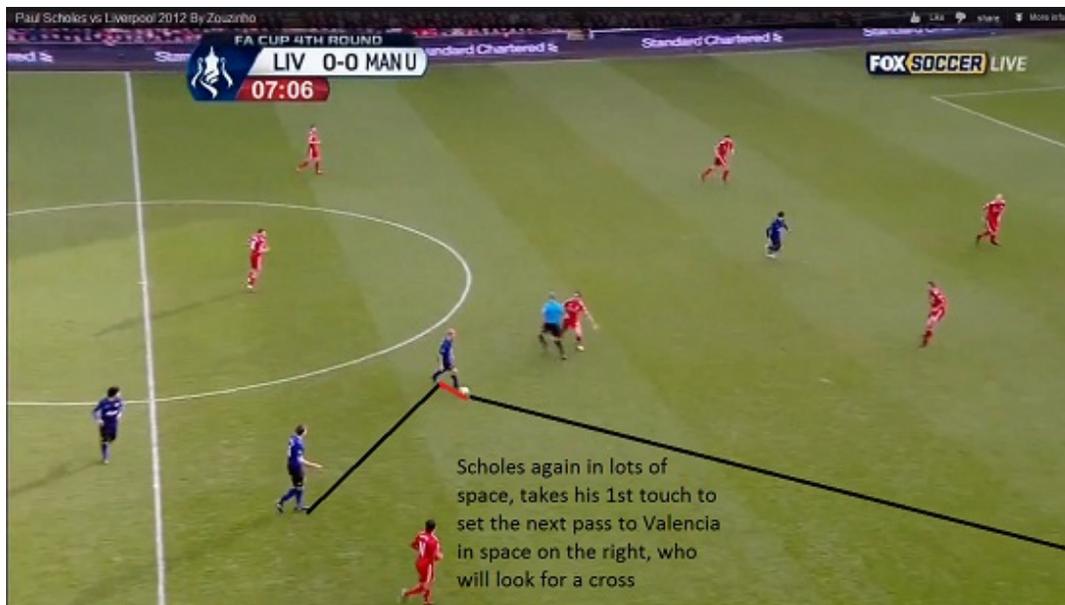
Scholes receives in plenty of space (a regular feature of his play) and has 3 passing angles, he shapes up to play the long diagonal pass but disguise it beautifully and passes inside to central midfield to build an attack. Simple, but effective use of possession.



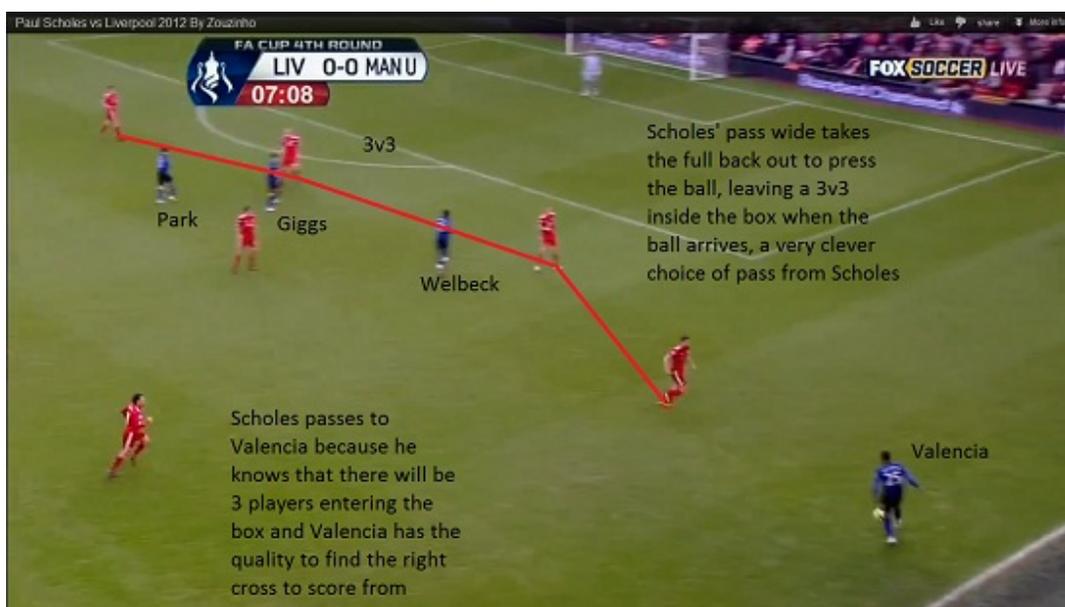
As Scholes receives, he has already scanned the play and takes his touch to the side where he has team mates and passing options. He knows Carrick is on his own, so plays the simple pass to Carrick. Carrick could pass wide to Valencia and start a wide attack, or into Park's feet in front of the Liverpool defence.



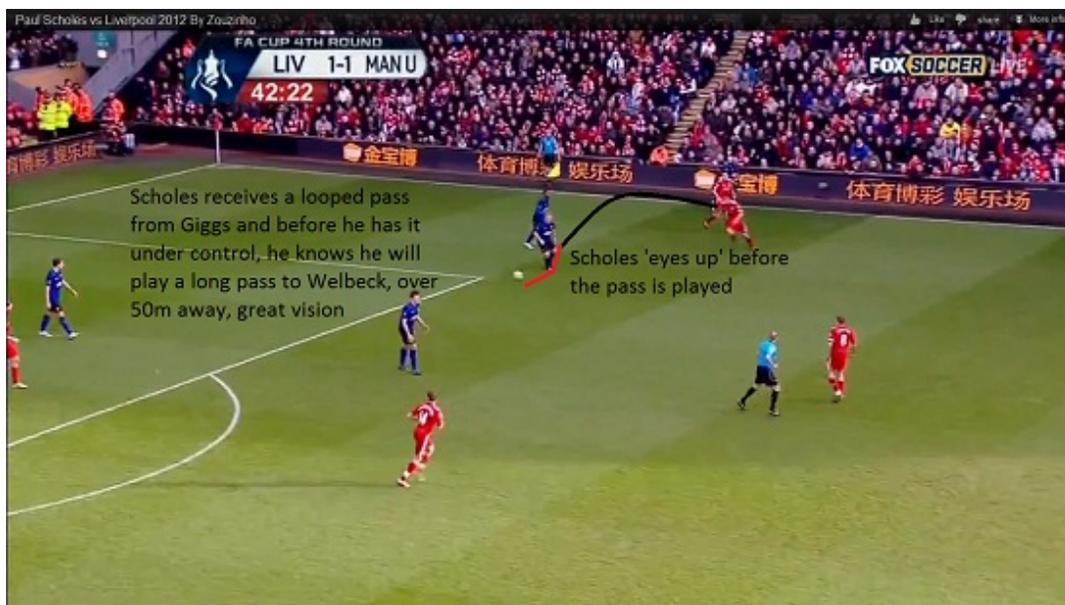
Scholes receives and passes into the space between Liverpool's defence and midfield to Giggs. Scholes has 6 choices for passes here, 2 simple, easy passes, 3 penetrating passes or a longer pass into Welbeck's feet. Scholes chooses a pass that he knows will penetrate the defence but also because Giggs has support from Park and Valencia to the side for a lay-off, and an option to use Welbeck if he makes a diagonal run when Giggs is pressed by the defender.



Scholes, again in lots of space, chooses a pass wide to Valencia who has an opportunity to play 1v1 against the full back, and with a 3v3 possibility for the cross, Scholes makes a wide passing decision.

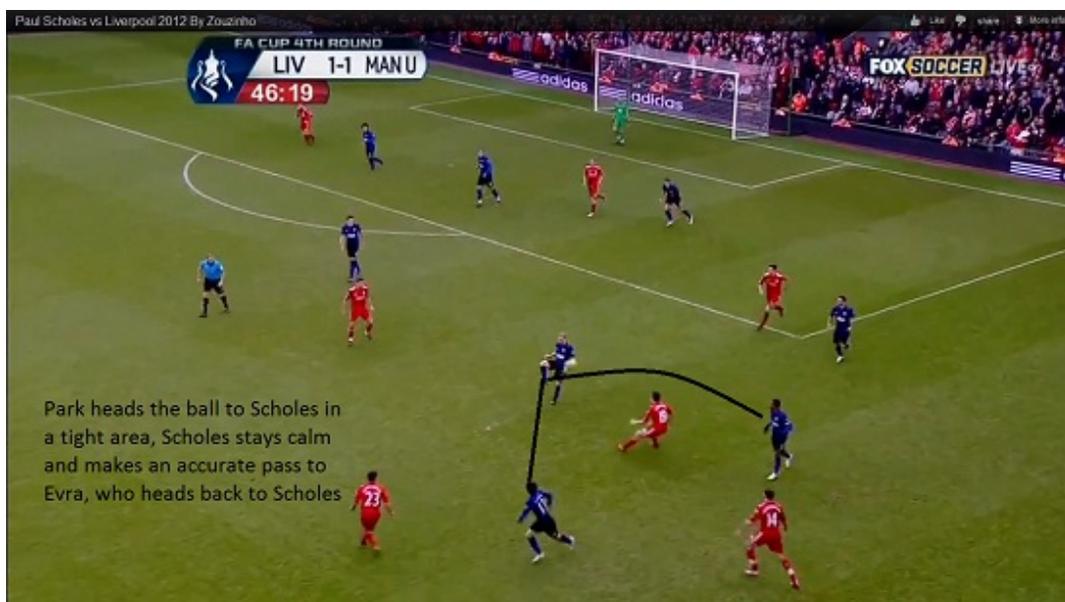


Valencia receives in lots of space, and as the full back presses, he can dribble into a 3v3 situation, or go by the full back and have the possibility of a dribble before finding a pass as he is pressed again.

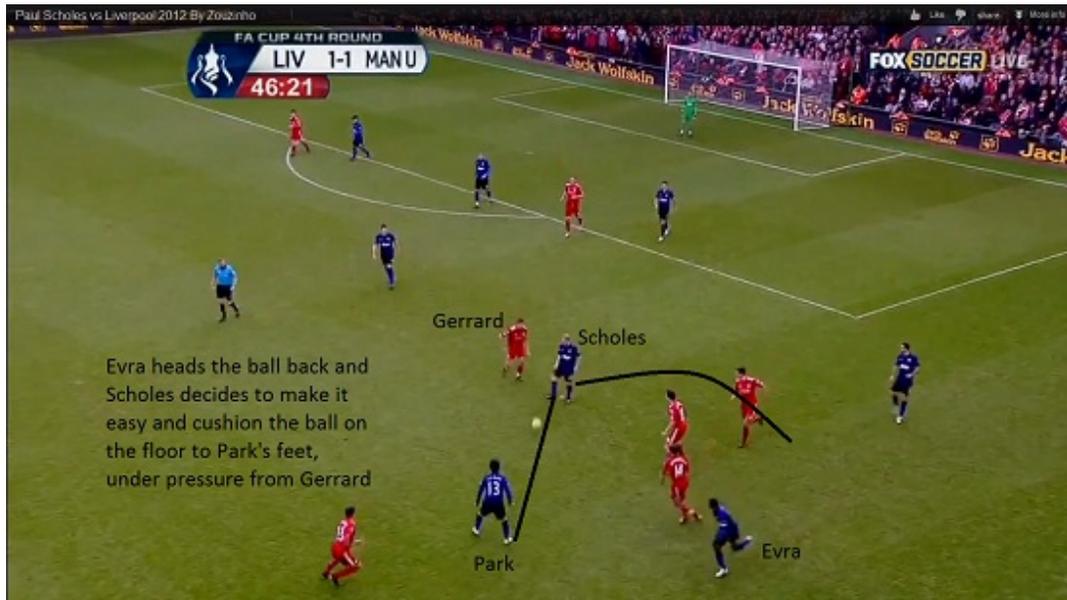


Giggs receives a bouncing ball and loops a pass over the Liverpool players head to Scholes, it's not an easy ball to deal with but Scholes has already scanned the play, and knows that Liverpool's midfield can be taken out with a long pass to Welbeck over the halfway line. His 1st touch sets up the long pass which he executes perfectly and Welbeck has no trouble controlling the long pass.

This is a perfect example of decision making, awareness and technique in an area where most coaches will be telling players to clear the ball to safety. Scholes makes himself time with his 1st touch and because of his awareness and vision, knows he can be calm in possession to make the pass a good one.

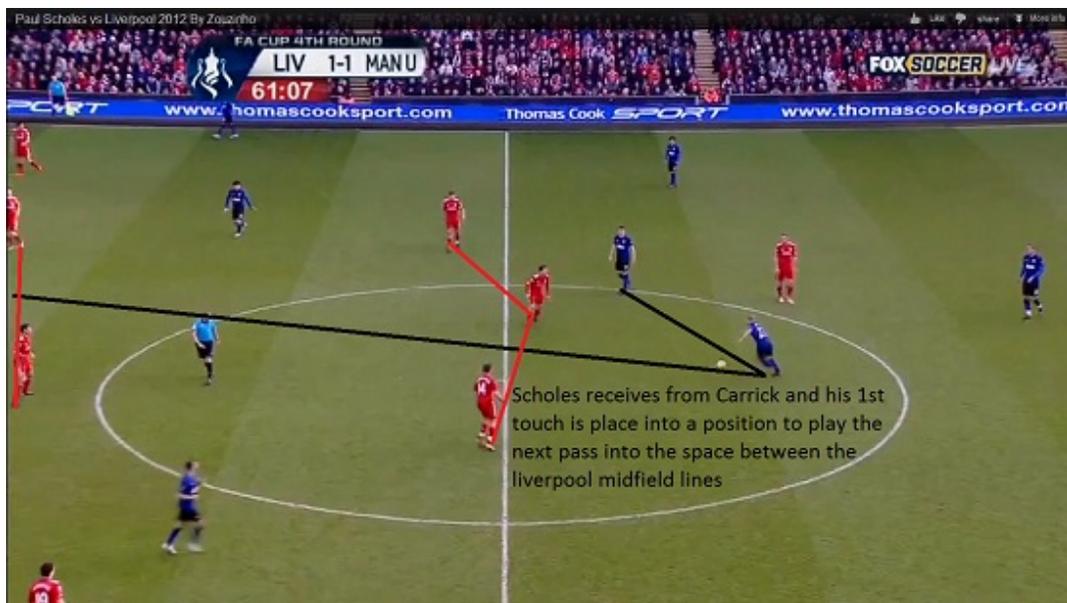


In a tight space, Park heads the ball to Scholes, who stays calm and uses his flawless 1 touch ability to knock a pass onto Evra's head, over the head of Downing. Evra heads the ball back to Scholes.

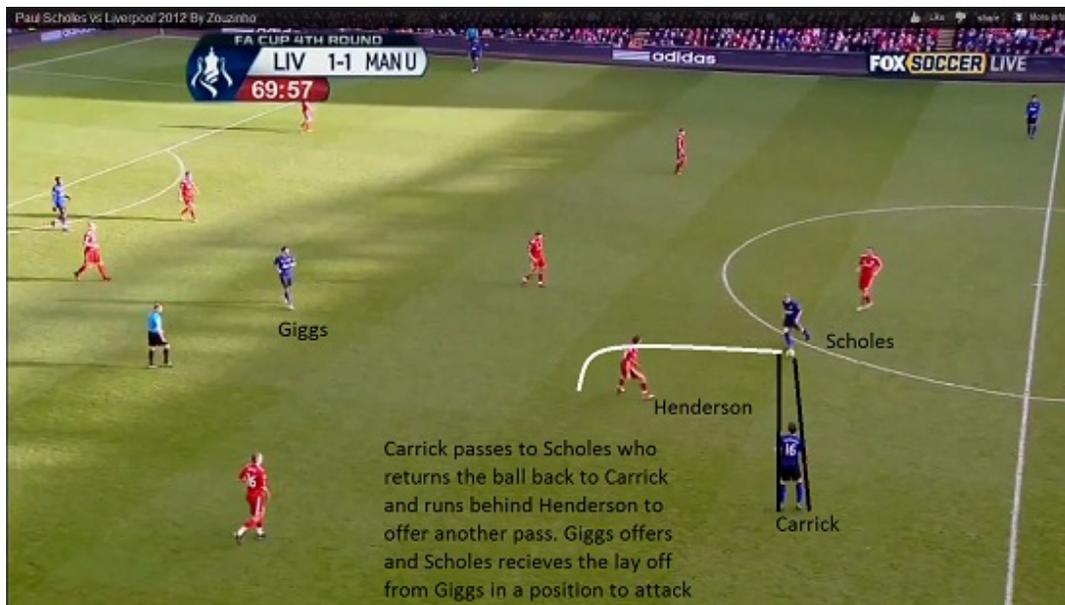


Scholes decides to make the receive for Park and easy one and cushion the ball into Park's feet. Park flicks the ball 1st time into Evra's path but play breaks down and goes out for a Liverpool throw in.

Scholes doesn't need to move here, his technique and accuracy make the defender chase the ball, and when the ball into Park can be volleyed or cushioned to the floor, Scholes makes it easy for his team mate. Many players may have panicked and tried something fancy or cleared it, but the class of Scholes make this passage of play, although very difficult, look easy.



Scholes plays a pass into midfield then circles round Carroll into a position where Carrick will give him the ball back with 3 Liverpool players close. Scholes has as usual, already scanned the play and made his decision, which is to pass through the space between Liverpool's midfield lines and find Welbeck, who links with Park to build an attack in front of the Liverpool defence.



Scholes again finds himself in space, but this time he is moving ahead of the ball. He plays a 1-2 with Carrick who has the option of Scholes in the space behind Henderson, or Giggs, who will likely lay the ball off to Scholes to continue the attack. Giggs receives and lays to Scholes who plays the next pass into Welbeck, who makes a run away from where Scholes wants to pass to (he wanted to pass into Welbeck who would link with Giggs) and play breaks down.

A major part of Man Utd's success using 4-2-3-1 has been having a dominating midfielder like Scholes, in this 70 minute appearance in one of his 1st games back after retirement showed just how much Man Utd and Sir Alex Ferguson need a player like Scholes to dominate midfield in a 4-2-3-1.

Combined with the 'United Way' of wingers, deep runners and a dominating midfielder, Sir Alex's 4-4-2 has evolved into the 4-2-3-1 that it is today. It will be interesting to see how Rooney playing in the number 10 role, rotating with Van Persie will fare this and indeed next season.

Arsene Wenger's 4-2-3-1 – The Evolution of the Arsenal 4-4-2 since 1996

Arsene Wenger joined Arsenal in 1996 and started to change the way football was played in Britain. He revolutionised diet and introduced a philosophy that winning football should also be entertaining. He played with the recognisable defenders, Dixon, Adams, Keown, Bould, Winterburn, and a midfield 4, with 2 strikers. Peripheral striker Dennis Bergkamp's career was rejuvenated by Wenger joining Arsenal, and the beginning of the shift from 4-4-2 to 4-4-1-1 began when Bergkamp became a main player in the attacking play, as he liked to drop off and link with the midfield, with Ian Wright being almost a lone

striker, looking to penetrate the defence with runs in behind the defence from Bergkamp's intelligent passes.

As Wenger's team became more successful, around the time between 1999 and 2002, the team was starting to slowly evolve into a 4-2-3-1, Emmanuel Petit and Patrick Vieira were the holding midfielders and being the base of the midfield, with the attacking midfield often playing with Marc Overmars as a pure left winger closer to the attacking line, ahead of the midfield with Parlour playing more of a wide midfield role on the right, becoming almost a 4-2-3-1 with Thierry Henry who joined in 1999, playing ahead of Dennis Bergkamp who was in the number 10 position. Robert Pires joined in 2000 and offered an alternative to the system, as he could play as a playmaker from the side, starting off wide and moving central and often curling shots into the far corner from distance, or finding Thierry Henry with passes into the left channel. Freddie Ljungberg became the right winger in some games and offered penetrating runs from the side, but Ljungberg was given a lot of freedom, like Pires, to drift from position and help Thierry Henry and Dennis Bergkamp in the forward line, much like Theo Walcott was in the 2011/2012 season.

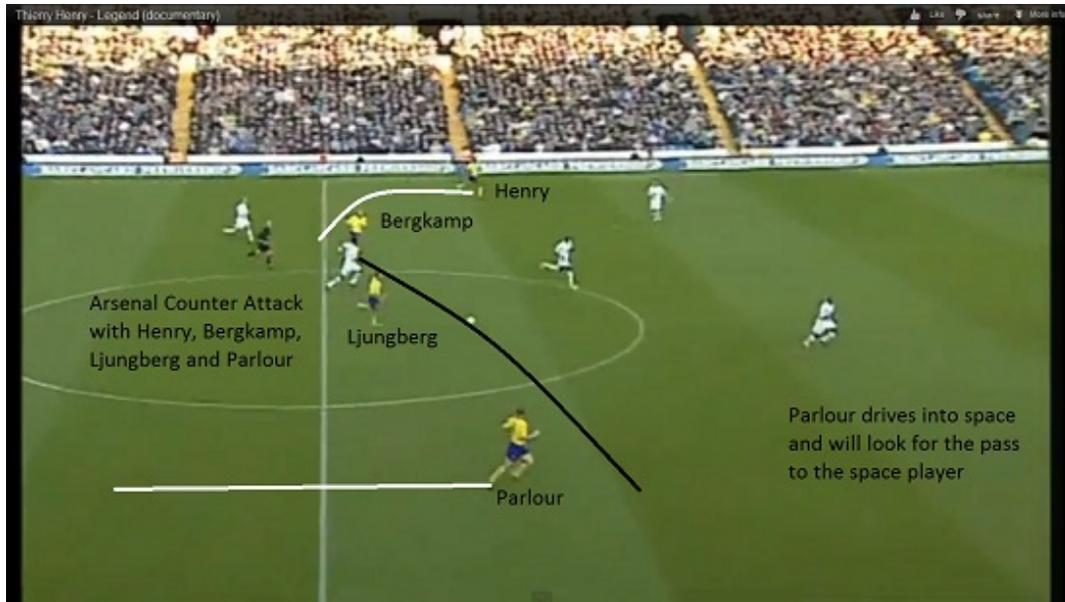
Wengers' Evolution of the 4-4-2 becomes a 4-2-3-1 in the years between 1999- 2002



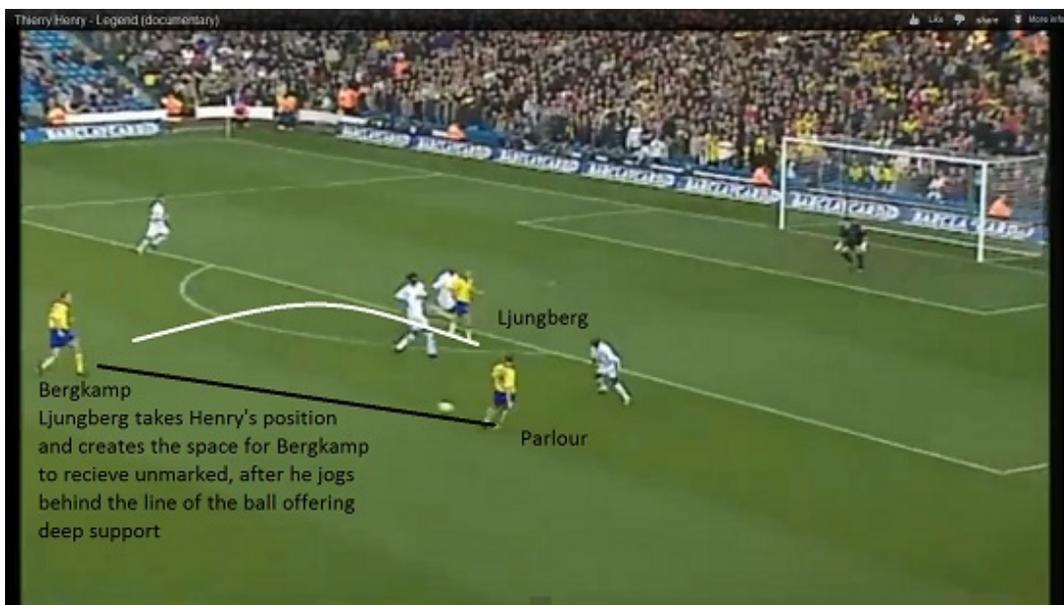
The system Wenger employed became a 4-2-3-1 after starting as a 4-4-2. Cole would push ahead from left back as Pires moves inside from the left; Ljungberg would break ahead of the attack from the right, as Henry drifts left. Petit and Vieira would anchor the midfield and break ahead to link the play when Ljungberg and Pires stayed wide, with Arsenal always passing to the player who was free, simple football.

In 2004, Arsenal played this same system as previous years, but it was now refined and all players knew their roles. They strengthened and signed players such as Nwankwo Kanu as an extra player who could play number 10 in place of Bergkamp, and Jose Reyes who could play all over the front 4 positions. This system for Wenger was in place and allowed the team an unbeaten league season. A regular feature was Henry pulling left as Pires moved inside, changing positions on different lines, causing confusion in the defence.

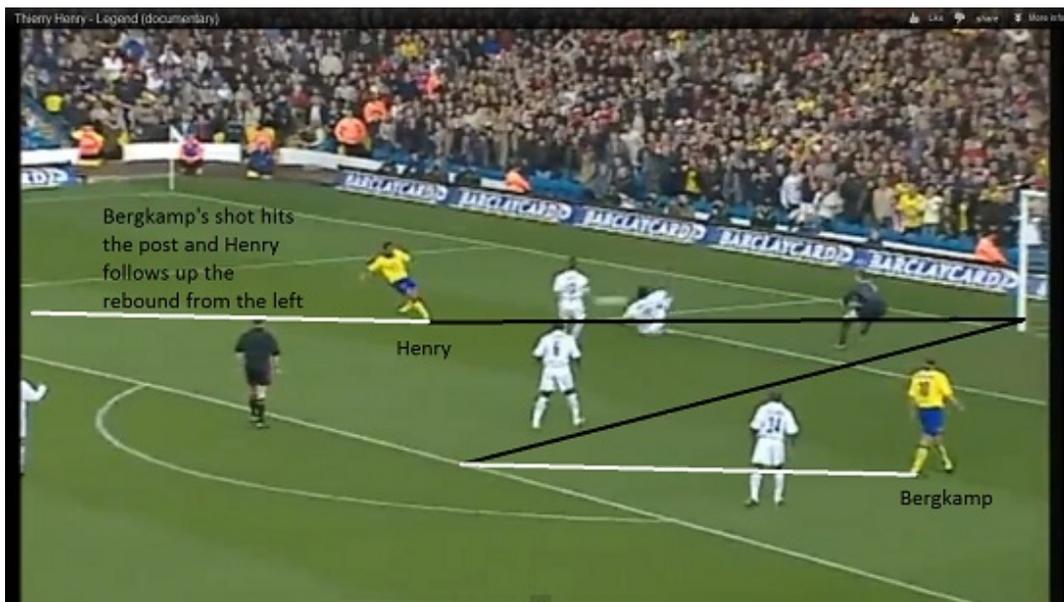
Arsenal 2004- The Invincibles - Ljungberg and Henry changing positions in a 4-2-3-1



On a counter attack, Bergkamp receives a pass and Ljungberg runs through the centre as Henry pulls wide, Bergkamp switches play over to Parlour in space and Bergkamp will hang behind the play, keeping the 3-1 shape in attack.

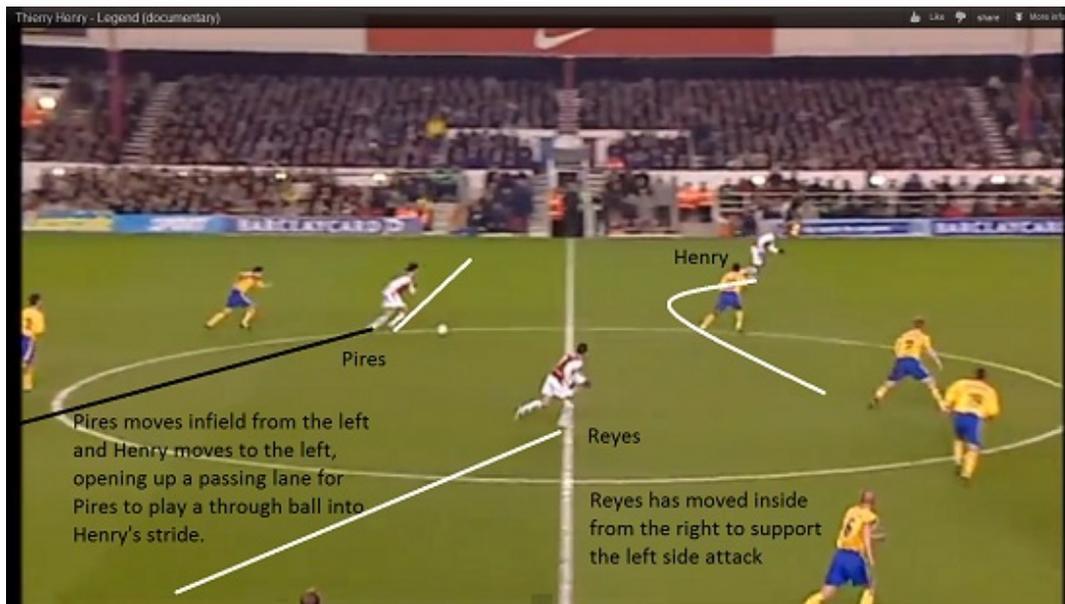


Ljungberg creates some space by making a diagonal run across the defence, and Parlour passes across to Bergkamp in the number 10 position. Henry is on the left in Ljungberg's position on the left side of the attack.

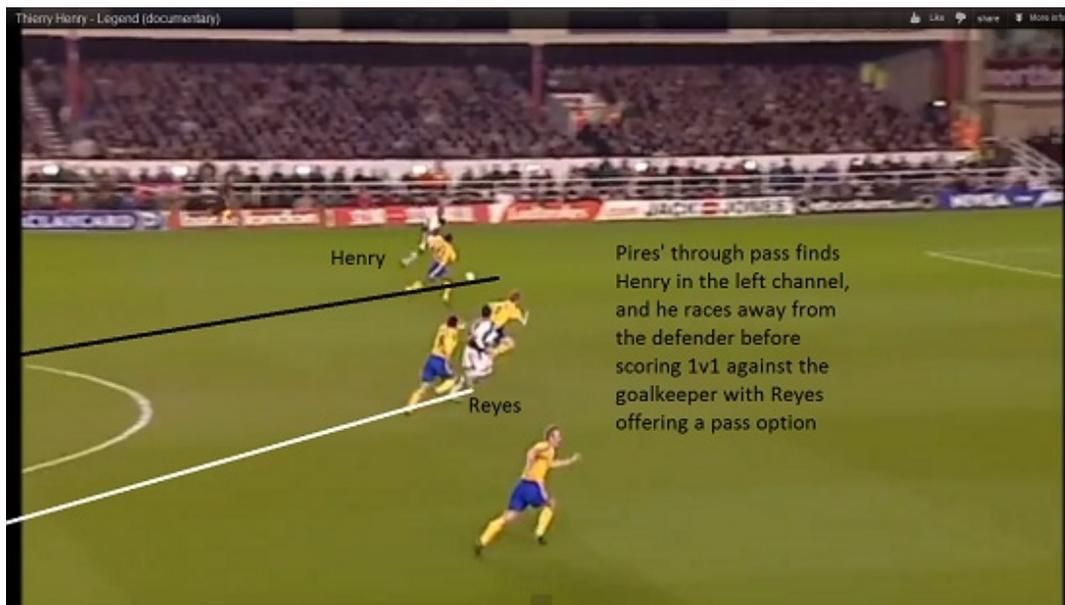


Bergkamp takes a touch and curls a shot against the post, but Henry comes inside from the left to score the rebound.

Arsenal 2004: Pires and Henry change positions in a 4-2-3-1



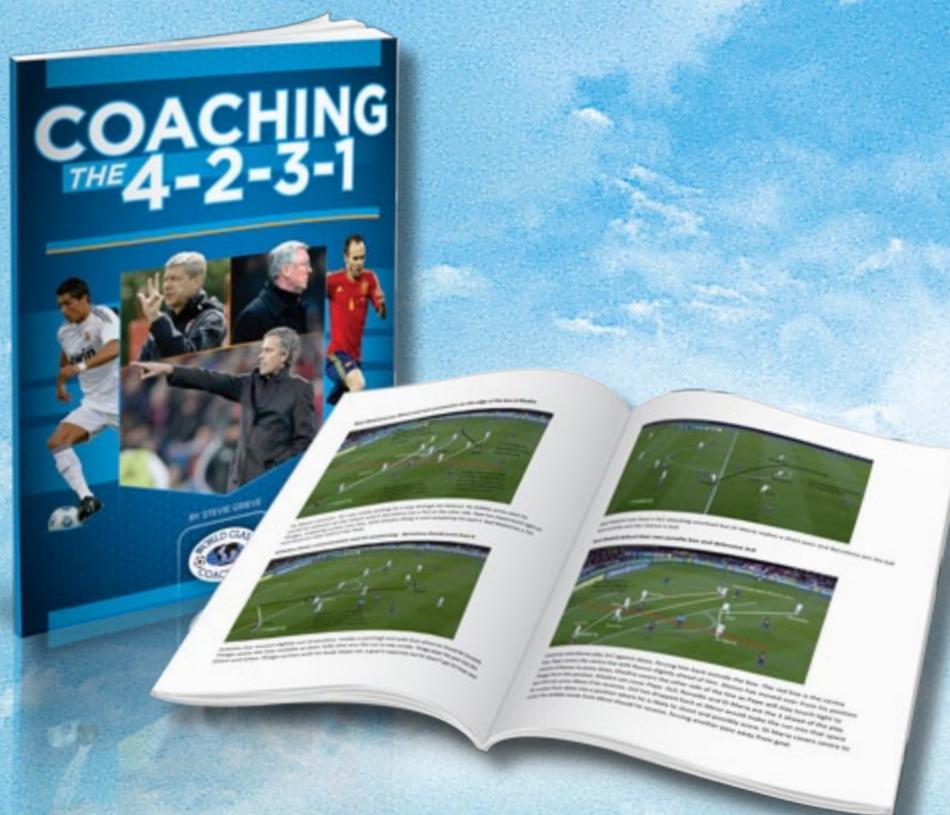
Pires moves inside to collect a pass, with Henry moving wide left. Bergkamp has drifted wide to the right, and Reyes makes a supporting run through the centre from the right into Bergkamp's position.



As Pires slides the pass into Henry's stride in the left channel, and he races away from the defender and 1v1 against the goalkeeper, and scores with a good finish.

This movement was typical of Arsenal, players interchanging positions in attack, and playing with a number 10 behind the striker caused defences new problems that were uncommon at the time. With the supporting cast of Ljungberg, Pires, Kanu, Bergkamp and Parlour behind lone striker Henry, 'The Invincibles' showed the way forward using a 4-2-3-1 formation.

Coaching the 4-2-3-1



Coaching the 4-2-3-1 is a book focused on developing both your team's understanding of how to play this fast paced formation effectively. Soccer is a game that is constantly changing, with new formations and philosophies evolving to challenge the status quo. The 4-2-3-1 is a formation that is now used by many of the world's elite coaches, like Jose Mourinho, Arsene Wenger and Sir Alex Ferguson, to counter the 4-4-2 and other more static formations.

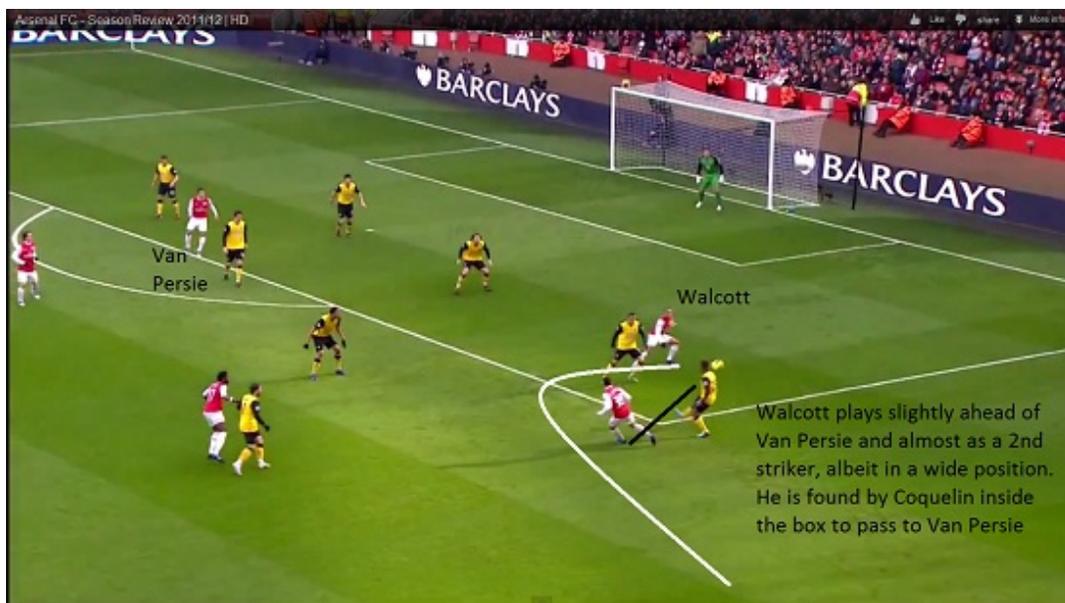
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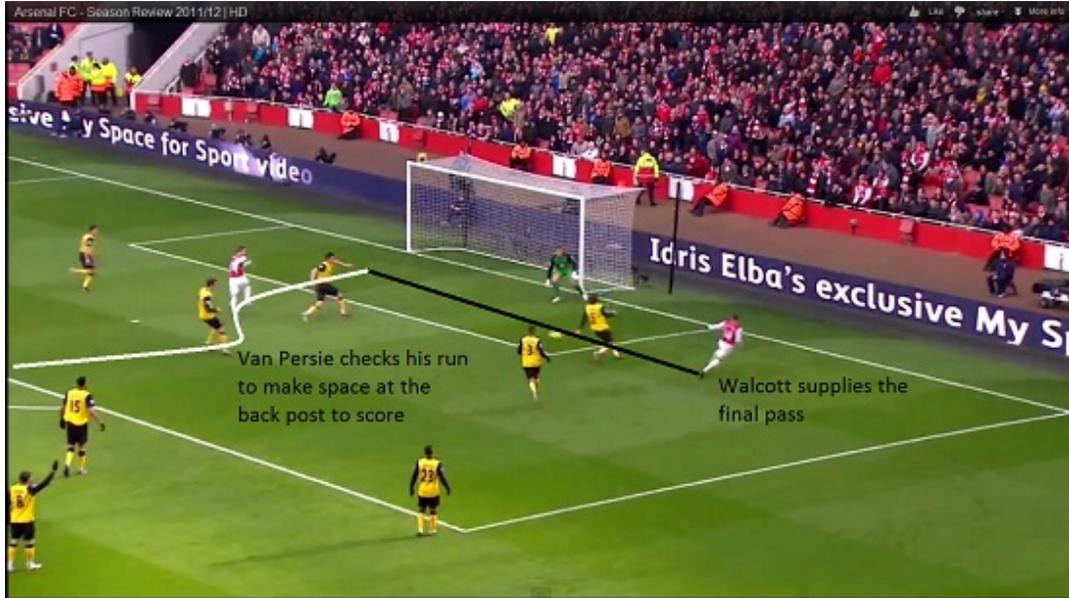
Wenger's 4-2-3-1 continued evolution with Arsenal – 2011/2012 – Walcott plays as a wide forward



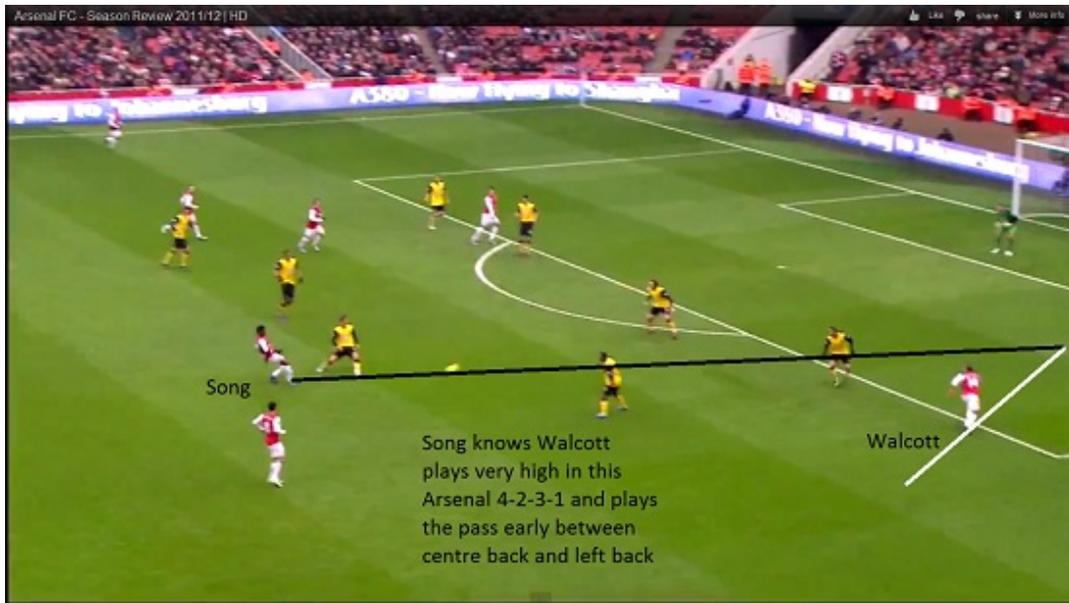
Walcott playing on the last line of the defence supplies 2 identical goals for Van Persie v Blackburn



Walcott is on the last line of the defence, as he arcs inside from the touchline and positions himself on the same line as Van Persie. He receives the pass into the space from Coquelin and knows to look for Van Persie inside the 6 yard box as he turns.



As he turns, he see's Van Persie making a run to the front, then check way to the far post. Walcott expects this movement and passes to the back post before Van Persie makes the 2nd part of his run.

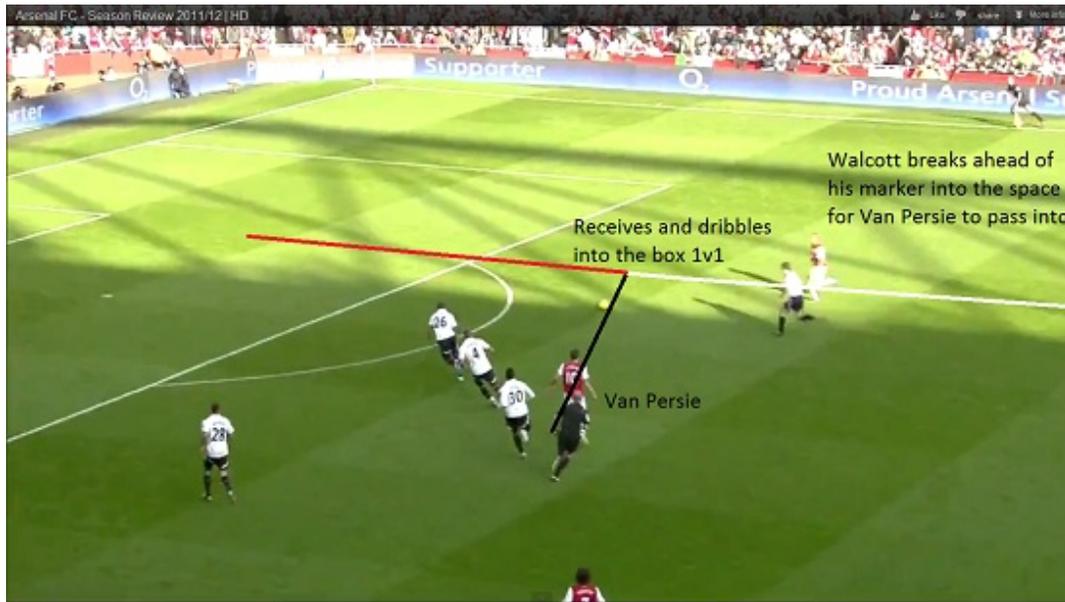


Walcott is again on the last line of the defence, and as Song passes between centre back and full back, Walcott begins to run behind. He again looks for Van Persie inside the box before he receives.



As he reaches the ball, Van Persie delays his run slightly as Walcott is stretching and has less control over the direction of the pass. The ball is rolled into his path and he scores another goal from Walcott playing higher than usual in a 4-2-3-1 formation.

Walcott running from deep to support Van Persie centrally creates a goal



As Van Persie receives the pass to feet, he turns and is expecting Walcott to be in support on the right side. He scans and sees Walcott breaking away from his marker with his pace and rolls the ball in front of him. He takes a touch ahead of him to get into the box 1v1 against the goalkeeper.



As Walcott reaches the pass, he cleverly chips it over Freidel's body as he dives for the ball.

Again, the slight change in Walcott's position within the 4-2-3-1 has allowed Van Persie and Walcott to connect to score a goal.

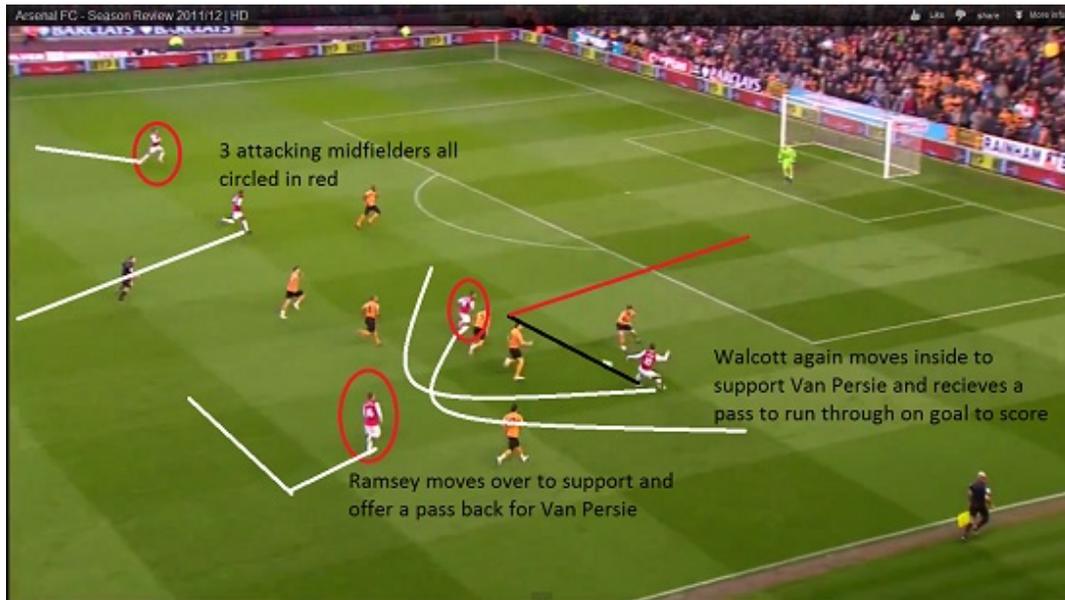


Song collects the ball on the touchline and Walcott has already made his run inside then onto the last line of the defence, Song is expecting this run and chips it over the top, knowing the only way Walcott can be stopped is if he takes a bad touch. The pass has backspin to make it easier to control and set to shoot.



As Walcott brings it down, the 1st touch is perfect and he manages to drive a shot low across goal and past Freidel for 5-2 Arsenal after being 2-0 down against local rivals Tottenham. Walcott's advanced positioning ahead of the midfield has helped Arsenal score 2 goals and win the match.

Van Persie provides Walcott with a 1v1 after Walcott moves central on the last line of defence



As Walcott sees Van Persie moving more to the right, the centre back has followed Van Persie, leaving the space for a central run. Walcott is allowed to play much higher than he should do in a 4-2-3-1 and as such, he is close enough to Van Persie to cover the distance quickly to exploit the space. Van Persie receives and passes inside quickly to Walcott who takes a touch into the space and is now 1v1 with the goalkeeper.



Walcott's first touch is good and under pressure, he stays calm and slides the ball past the goalkeeper into the near post for another well taken finish. Walcott's advanced position has again helped Arsenal score.

The way the old 4-2-3-1 system was slightly changed to benefit 2 players in particular – Van Persie needing players to be drawn away from him to become even more effective and having a good understanding of where Walcott will be, and with Walcott needing to play closer to goal to best utilise his strengths of Speed and awareness of Van Persie's positioning – this has helped enormously to Arsenal recovering from their worst start in almost 60 years, to finish 3rd in the league. Obviously it wasn't down to two players as special mentions must go to Thomas Vermaelen and Mikel Arteta as both players were fantastic during the season.

Robin Van Persie's 30 league goals had 11 Theo Walcott assists, and 8 goals for Walcott himself. The slight change of system has helped both players but the 2012/2013 season will be entirely different.

Long time left midfield playmaker Arshavin , who was incredible in his first season, moving inside from the flank to dictate play and provide new creativity in attack; will be a peripheral figure this season, expect him to be replaced by emerging attacker Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, who can play on the left or the right. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain will be providing competition for Gervinho on the left, Walcott on the right and he can also compete with Santi Cazorla who was the star buy of the summer and he will most likely be the new number 10. Expect to see a lot of AOC as he is a star for the future. Aaron Ramsey should also help provide creativity in the Arsenal midfield, with Jack Wilshere returning soon, who can play in any position across midfield with ease. Although this is good news for Arsenal, cohesion and fluidity will take time.

Arsenal however will need to somehow find a way to replace Alex Song and Robin Van Persie in the 4-2-3-1 which Arsene Wenger has cultivated over the years, as Song was sold to Barcelona and Van Persie was sold to Man Utd, and replaced with Lukas Podolski and Olivier Giroud. Podolski plays wide left for Germany while Giroud is a pure goalscorer. It will be an interesting season for Arsenal's new team, although it's going to be the same formation, and Arsene has bought a lot of players who are used to the system, new players take time to settle in, and although after 2 games, Cazorla looks like he could play in any team at number 10, Podolski has scored his 1st goal and they haven't conceded in the 1st 3 games of the new season.

Questions we will need to ask of Arsenal for the 2012/2013 4-2-3-1 formation.

Will Walcott play in the same advanced role as last season without Van Persie?

Will Podolski be able to have the same understanding with Walcott as Van Persie had?

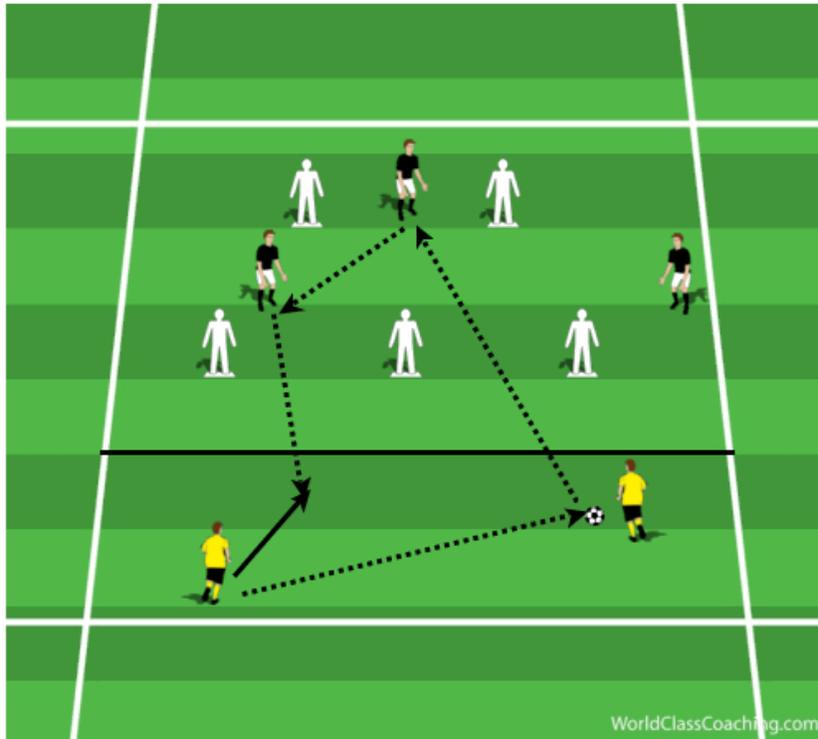
Will Cazorla be able to be the new Dennis Bergkamp?

Where will Wilshere play, beside Arteta in central midfield or will Arsene Wenger change shape slightly to accommodate a player like Wilshere who can do everything?

How will Arsenal cope without one of their regular patterns of play – the Alex Song diagonal pass to Robin Van Persie to control and volley (or just volley like against Liverpool and Everton)?

Developing Holding Midfielders, and Number 10 Playmakers

Developing Holding Central Midfielders – Session 1



Mark out an area 20 yards squared. Mark a dividing line 8 yards from the base of the activity and place 5 mannequins inside the 12x20 yard area; they will act as defenders to avoid with forward passes.

The 2 holding midfielders are in Yellow, the 3 Attacking Midfielders are in Black. The Yellows will inter-pass and move until one of the Blacks move into a position to receive a pass in, and then make a pass back to either Yellow via another Black, or straight back.

Coaching Points:

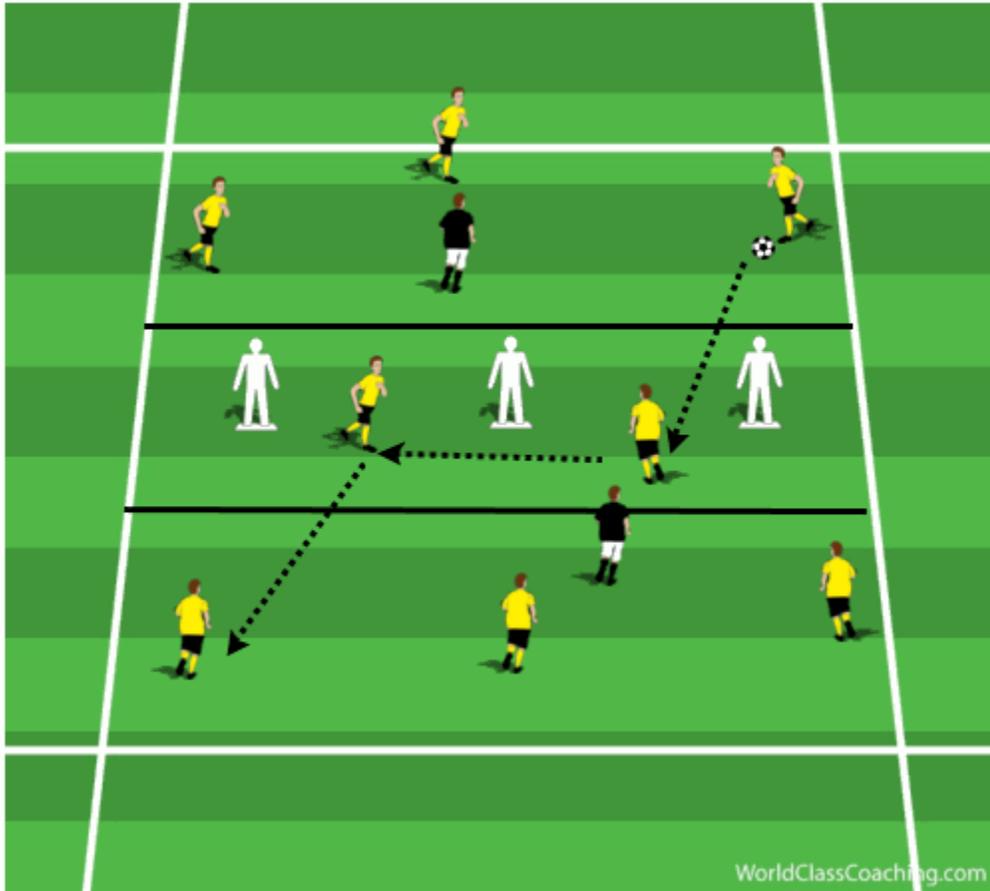
- Move into passing lanes on time to offer 1st time passes forward
- Communication to pass forward “In the hole”
- If you can’t pass straight back, lay off to a team mate who passes back
- Rotate positions from wide – central to work on moving with correct body shape

Progressions/Variations:

- Place a goal 15-25 yards behind the box
- When the ball is passed forward, receive on the half turn to shoot
- As the receiver to lay off to a team mate to shoot
- Add in a striker to receive a through ball to score 1v1 against the GK
- Add in 2 centre backs who mark the striker

- Receiver can turn and play 2v2 if they run with it, a lay off makes a 3v2 overload
- Add in a complete back 4

Offering passes into midfield – defence under pressure



Mark out a zone 30 yards squared. Mark out 3 x 10 long yard zones, placing 3 mannequins inside the central zone.

The holding midfielders play inside the central zone, offering passes from the defence into midfield. There will be 1 player pressing the back 3, while the mannequins block passing lanes. Once the holding midfielders receive the ball, they should lay off to the other holding player, who passes forward into the 3rd zone, who again play 3v1 and try to pass back into midfield once every player has touched the ball.

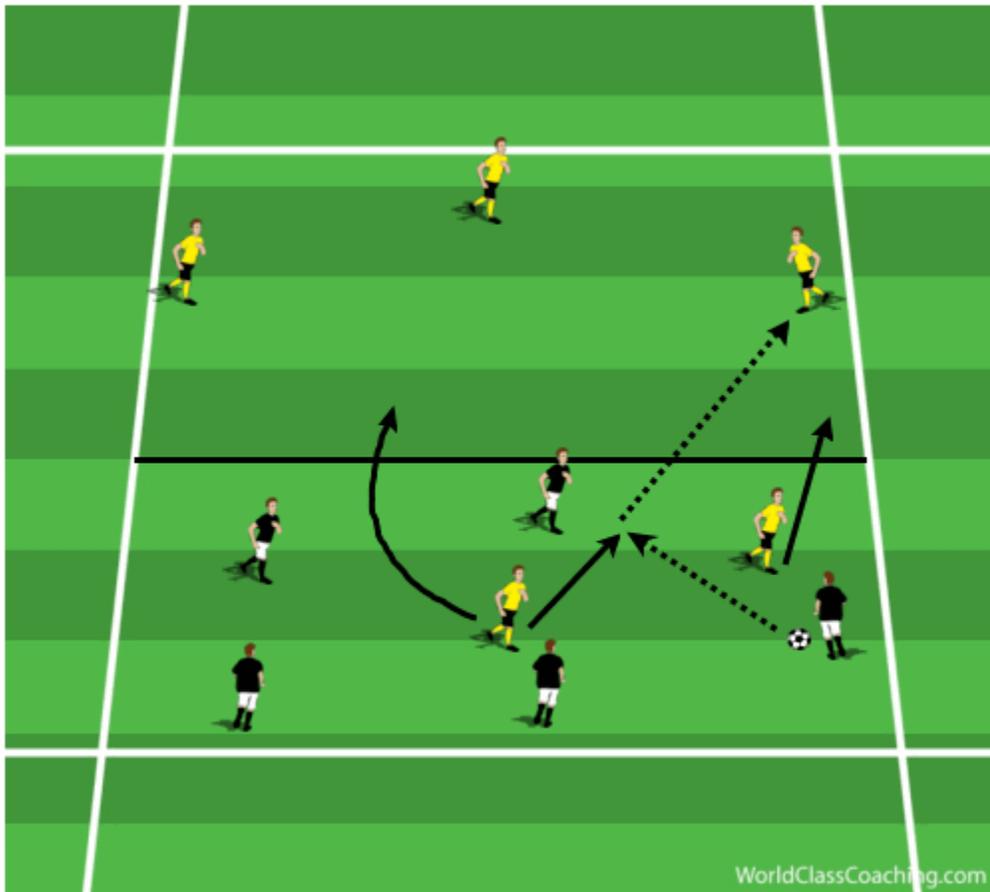
Coaching Points:

- Both Holding Midfielders should check the run before dropping deep
- Practicing 'circle runs' behind mannequins can make space for yourself or your team mate
- Make a triangle between defence, lay off player and pass forward player
- Before you receive the lay-off, scan the play and see where the best place for the forward pass is, move in transition to where the pass was played

Progressions/Variations:

- Add in a 2nd defender then build up to a back 4 in the last zone to simulate the 2-3 midfield
- Add in a 4th zone, with a striker v 2 centre backs, and play 3v4 in the attacking midfield zone
- Add in a number 10 who plays against the holding players (number 6's)

Winning Possession and movement to support the next pass



Mark out a 36x20 yard box and split into half.

A team of 5 Blacks will pass and move to keep the ball from 2 holding midfielders. When the 2 win the ball back, they transfer it to the 3 team mates in the far side box and support. 2 Blacks will move up to press and win the ball and do the same.

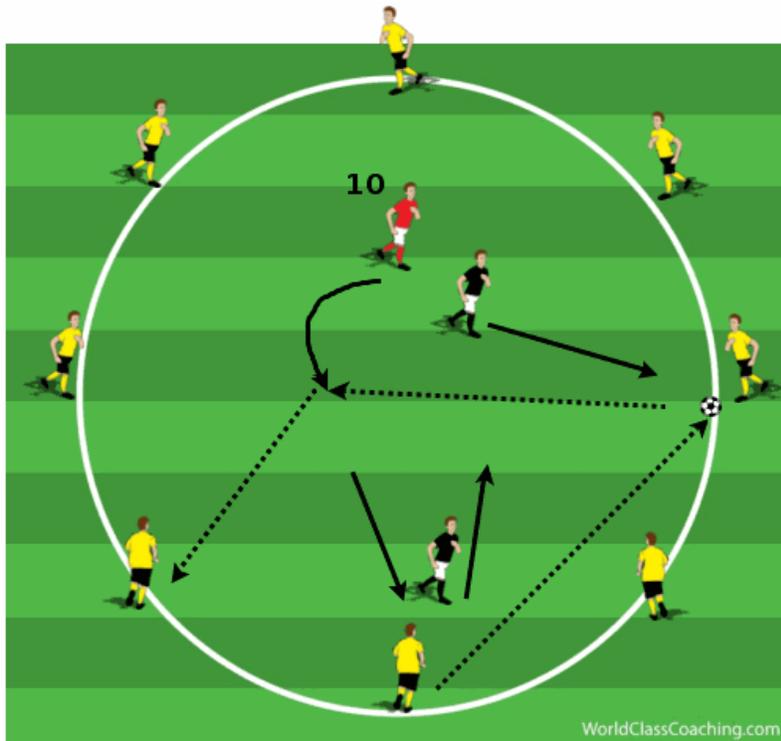
Coaching Points:

- Work as a pair, staying close together to block off passes into the space between the 2 pressing players
- Work as a 'see-saw' with one pressing and the other covering, ready to press the next pass.

develop an attack from this position, and where to move when the ball is in various positions. Who marks number 10, when, why and where? Where to cover in transition?

Allow the players to play and occasionally stop play and ask questions of the players to allow them to give you the logic and thoughts behind the decisions they have made.

Developing Playmakers (the Number 10) – Session 1



Make a simple game of 'Rondo', or Keep Away. Make the circle large enough so that 2 defenders can press, and a number 10 can play inside the circle. The play doesn't need to go through the number 10, but for every 3 times they use the number 10, the team are given a 'life' (a bad pass is unpunished for that player, although when they go inside, they need to be passed to 4 times)

Above, the number 10 has watched the defenders split up when pressing the ball, stayed on the wrong side and when the chance has been open, moved into the space to ask for the split pass.

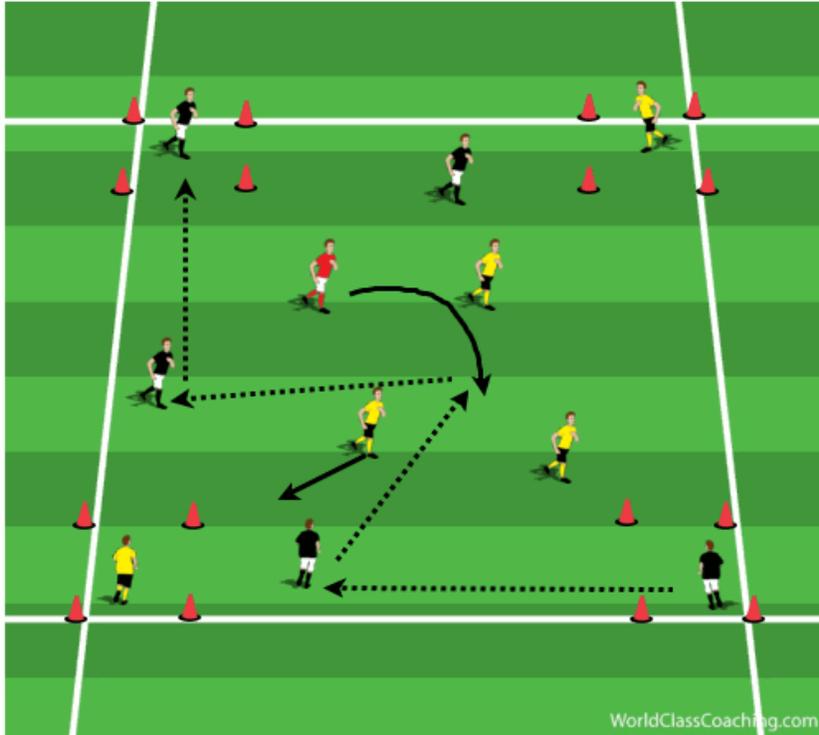
Coaching Points:

- The number 10 should keep distance away from the play to give the team a chance to split the defenders – too close and he blocks play in, too far away and he won't be used
- Play on the half turn
- Watch the defenders eyes and movements, anticipate ahead where the space will appear
- If you can't turn, play a return pass 1st time and move away again

Progressions/Variations:

- Play with 3 defenders inside, the number 10 will need to learn when to play between the 3 of the defenders and when to create space for the team to retain possession
- Make the circle smaller and play 1 touch for all and 2 touch for playmaker, to develop speed of thought and early decision making

Possession Game – Playmaker plays with 2 touches



3v3 Directional Game. The Yellows v Blacks - 1 player from each team will play inside the corner box, and rotate positions with the player who passed to them. Above, the playmaker (red) has watched the yellow defence open up and circled behind the defender to receive in the space that has just been left.

Coaching Points:

- Use the playmaker as often as possible in the centre as this is the extra player
- Make a shape relevant to where the corner players are positioned
- Communication to tell each other where to move to – make triangles to keep possession
- If the playmaker loses the ball, the playmaker swaps with the player who won possession

Progressions/Variations:

- Play with 4v4 inside the centre so space is reduced for the extra player
- Playmaker plays 1 touch
- Playmaker must do all the talking for the team

- Playmaker can only play weak footed
- Playmaker must try to play 1-2s when in possession
- Xavi Challenge – How many passes can the playmaker make in x amount of minutes? Give all players the chance to be the playmaker and see who most often in possession is. If playmaker finds the corner player, this counts as a 'goal' for the playmaker. Count passes and goals.

5v5 Playmaker Game – Playmaker can change zones



Mark out an area 30 yards squared. Split into 3 x 10 yard zones. The players in each zone must stay inside this zone, but the playmaker can change zones to make overloads. The opposition playmaker can move zones to cancel out the overload and can almost play as a man-marker.

Coaching Points:

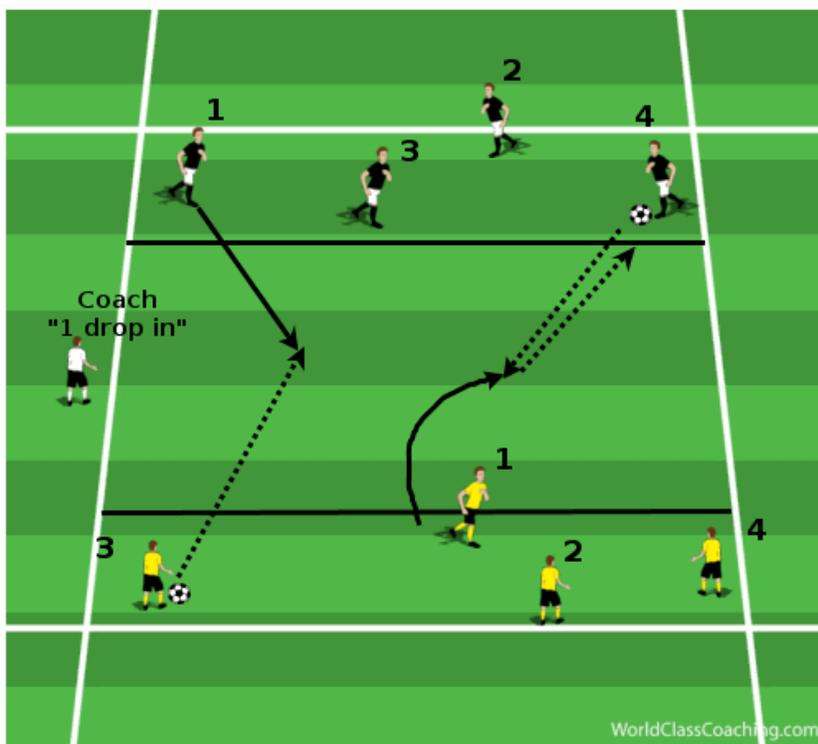
- Ask questions of the playmaker, when do you change zones? How often should you move away from play to create space or offer new solutions?
- Play close to opponents when possible – this can draw out players, create space and open up 1-2's, dribbling opportunities and less predictability in the attacking phase.
- Wide players should be checking the runs to offer outballs and runs behind opponent to offer penetration
- Be brave in possession, dictate play and keep the ball under pressure – the opposition can't score if they don't have the ball

Progressions/Variations:

- Play with a small goal at the end of each zone, look for overloads and maybe to exploit a weak player in the opposition
- Split the field into halves – 2 of the back 4 must stay back, the playmaker and 2 wide full backs can join in the opposite zone, the striker and centre backs must stay inside designated zones
- Play with 3 or 4 lines of play – only the playmaker or full backs can play in all zones, all other players must stay inside 2 designated zones (like a game of netball)

Finish the session with a match, giving the playmaker responsibility to build attacks.

Developing Playmakers – Session 2 – When to drop deep, link play, and playing in congestion



Mark out a zone of 40 yards long by 40 yards wide, with 2 end zones of 12 yards deep, and a central zone of 16 yards. Each player is numbered. The players pass and move around the zone, playing 2 touch maximum, looking to play triangles and with fluidity.

When the coach calls out a number, “1 drop in”, number 1 will drop in, receive from the opposite box, take a touch and return to the same player who passed it.

Coaching Points:

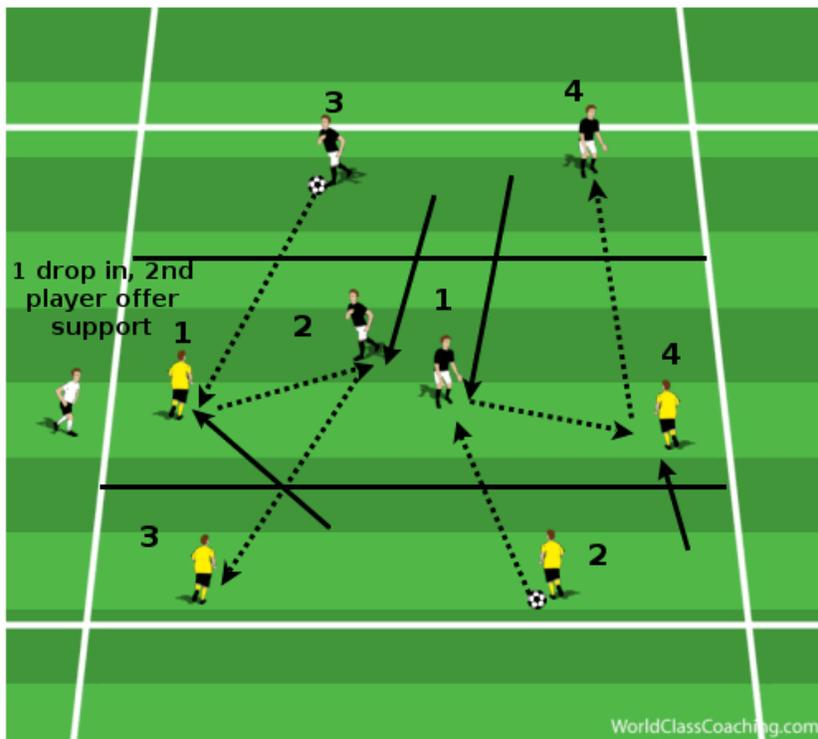
- Drop in at the correct body shape and to the correct distance – too deep is ineffective
- Turn body to protect the ball, turn right shoulder and hips to the ball to receive on outstep to protect the ball and pass back

- Communicate with the passer – the ball may still be in transit to the passer – don't wait on it

Progressions/Variations:

- Return pass to a different player
- Receive on half turn and pass to your own colour (receive from yellow, pass to black)
- Ask a 2nd player to drop off from the same box, Player 1 in Yellow passes to player 2 in Black, who returns to the Yellow box, Black team Player 1 drops in, player 4 from Yellow supports wide (next picture) to return to the black box
- Add a man-marker to press the playmaker (dropping in) from behind

Playmaker dropping off practice variation – deep and wide support



As we can see, player 1 from both teams has dropped in to receive from the opposite team. One player has supported from deep and will receive a pass from the playmaker, then pass across to the opposite group.

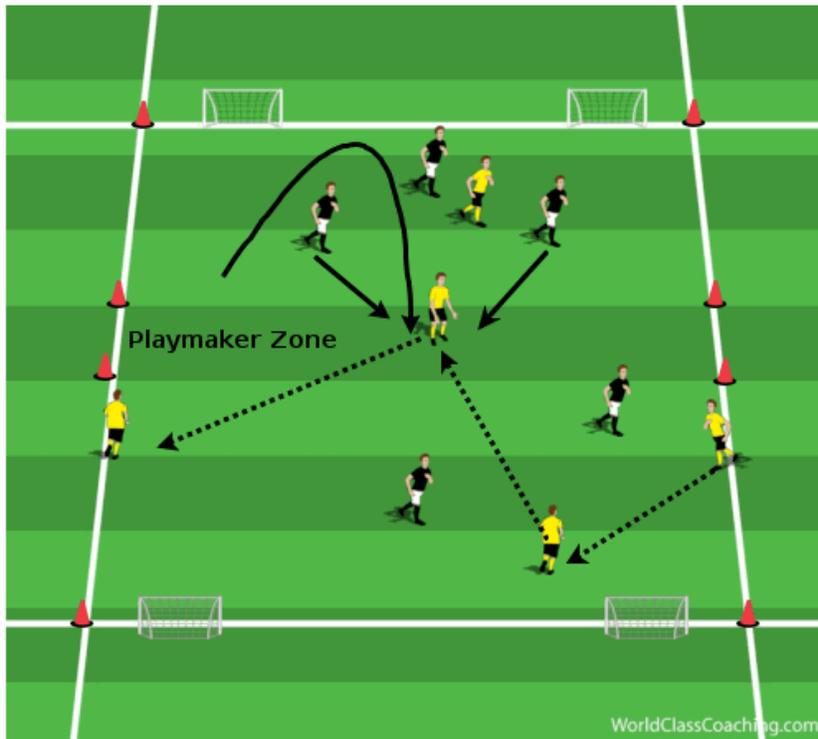
Coaching Points:

- Communication,
- Angle and distance of support
- Speed of support
- Weight on pass – if powerful, cushion the lay off

Progressions/Variations:

- Play a backheel 'Ronaldinho Pass' when dropping in
- Play a double 1-2 with the supporting player
- When the ball reaches the end zone, play another 1-2 with the receiving player and keep the ball moving

4 Goal Game with Playmaker zone



Set up 2 boxes with a 6 yard 'playmaker zone', where one of the 2 attackers can drop in to receive a pass to turn and attack the 3 defenders to score in one of the 2 small goals in the corner.

Play 3v2 inside each zone and encourage the 'Playmaker's to drop in, and help release one of the 3 defenders from the box to allow support to play 3v3 in the attacking zone, leaving 2v2 at the back.

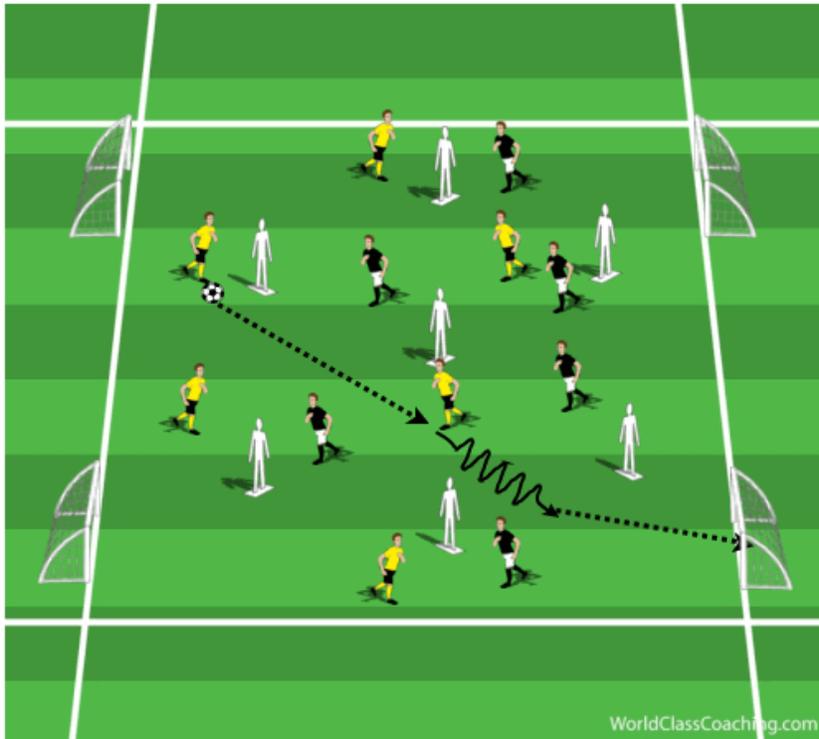
Coaching Points:

- Drop in on time and demand the pass to feet
- Look to provide support and offer an outball if defender is close
- If defender isn't close, encourage the playmaker to turn and use the support and an overlap
- The furthest player forward should angle off and offer a 1-2 if the playmaker can turn

Progressions/Variations:

- Play a 4-3 formation and work on the 3 playmakers taking turns to make 'fake drop ins'
- Rotate positions and look for the quick support and work on an overload to create a goal.
- Play with either 6 small goals or 2 large goals with goalkeepers

Playing in congestion in a 2-3-1 or a 4-2 (building from the back or attacking in the final 3rd)



Mark out an area 40x40 yards squared, with 4 goals, 6 a side. Place mannequins over the field.

Play a formation to either build from the back, using 2 playmakers or attacking in the final 3rd with a number 10 playmaker.

Players must pass, move and dribble, being aware of the spaces being reduced because of the mannequins and the defenders positions and pressing. The team in possession should be careful and think ahead of each pass – can the mannequin block a defender or can it block your passing lane?

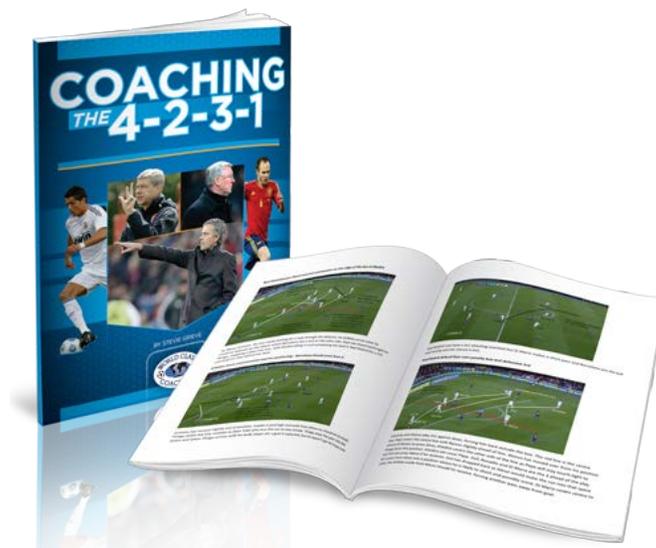
Coaching Points:

- Play in triangles around the mannequins
- Be aware of where you are on the field
- Be aware of defenders positions, where pressure and support comes from
- Try and create or score a goal each time you receive the ball
- Look for the spaces between mannequins and defenders to find team mates and passing lanes.

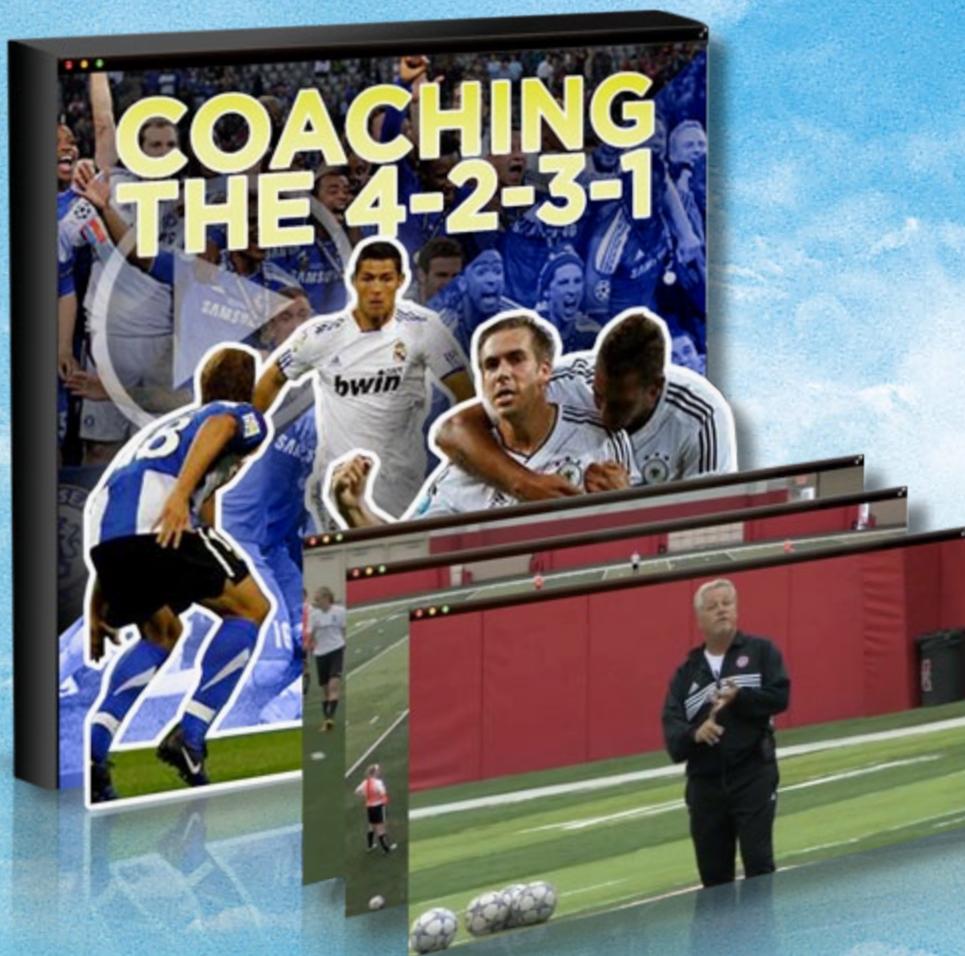
Progressions/Variations:

- Play 2 touch maximum
- Increase the number of players
- Introduce a full time playmaker
- Play with centralized goals

There is a lot more to know about the 4-2-3-1 beyond the roles and responsibilities of the #6 and #10 players. Grieve has created a complete overview of the 4-2-3-1. Everything is included from a history of its evolution to how to train your team in every aspect of play. You can click [HERE](#) to see more about this great resource which is available both in eBook and hard copy forms.



Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Videos



If you've been looking for a way to coach your team how to play the 4-2-3-1, you've just found it. Coaching the 4-2-3-1 is a special 12-part video series which provides a comprehensive tactical and training guide to this exciting formation. Utilized by Real Madrid, Chelsea and the most successful sides in the Euro 2012 tournament, the 4-2-3-1's flexibility and attacking power is fast becoming the formation of choice for leading coaches all over the world.

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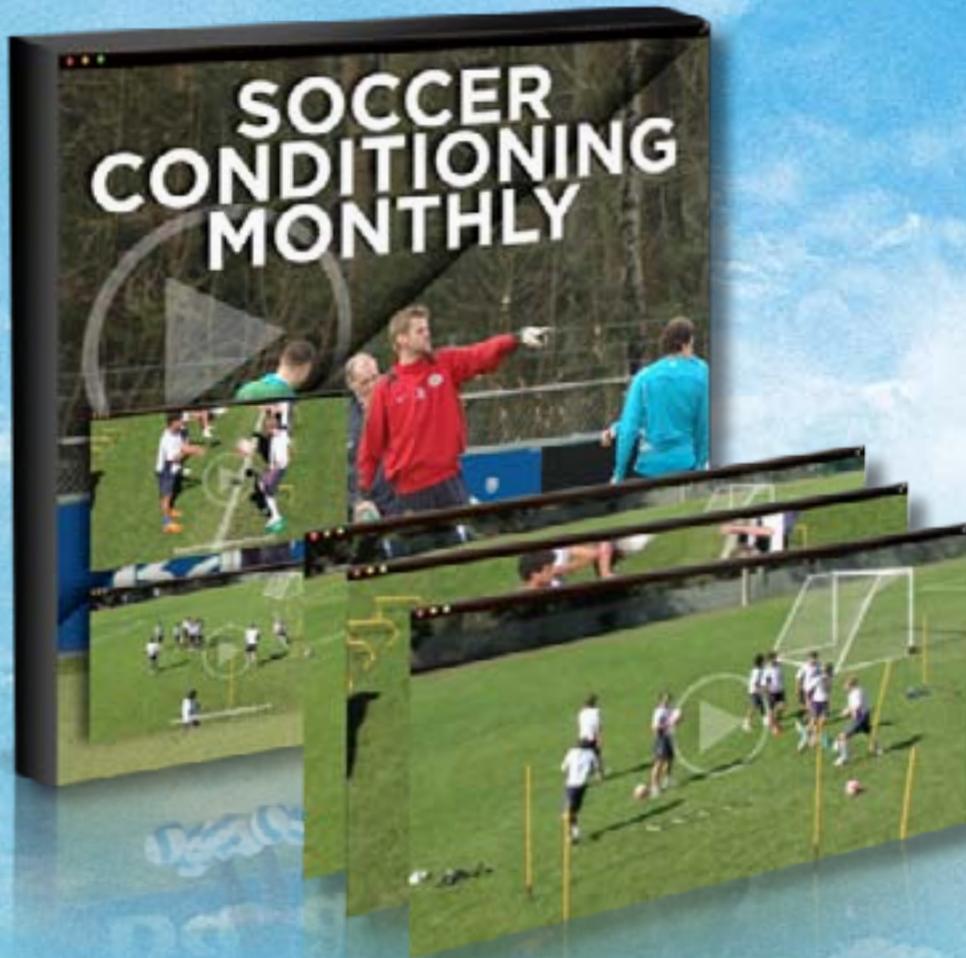
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