

# How to play 2-3-1

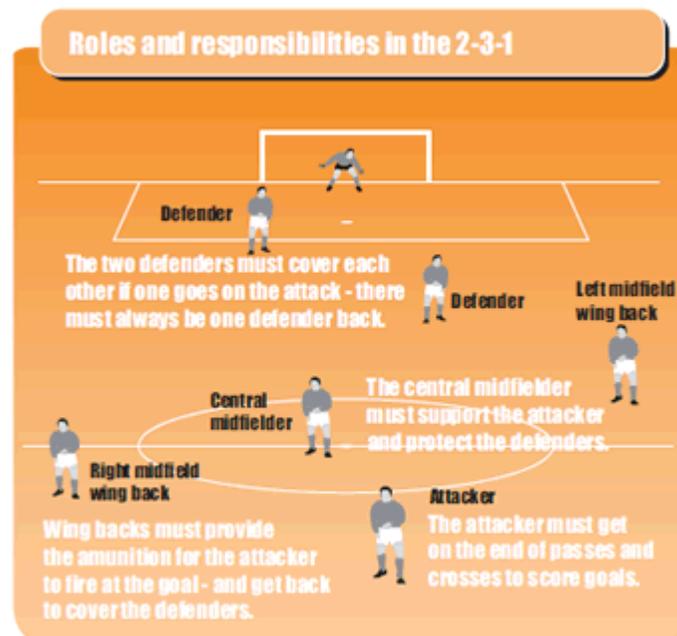
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Setting up your team in a formation when they first start playing matches is as much a learning curve for you as it is for your players.

When I coach a team that hasn't played matches or worked on formations before, I always find it best to start by looking at individual players and writing down the strong and weak parts of their game.

You will often see coaches put their weakest players in defense and their strongest players up front. This is wrong. You need balance throughout the team and, with U10s and below, you really need to be letting all your players try all the positions.

The 2-3-1 is an ideal formation to coach positions and give your players a good idea of what is expected when they move up to 11-a-side. This is because the responsibilities of each player are similar to the ones they will advance to.



## Defence

- You will ideally have at least one fast defender because you always need one covering player when your team has corners, free kicks and throw-ins in the opposition half.
- One of the defenders needs to push up into the space created when the central midfielder attacks.
- The defenders need to learn how far they can advance and talk to each other about covering each other.
- They will learn together as they play matches and grow into their roles.

## Midfield

- The two wide midfielders can play as wing backs.
- They need to get used to pushing forward using the wings to support the central attacker and dropping back to protect the defenders when they lose the ball.

- Your central midfielder has to support the attacker and protect the defense. He pushes into the hole behind the attacker when the team is going forward, but drops deep when defending.
- Midfielders are pivotal to the team and usually see a lot of the ball. The central midfielder is an ideal position for your captain or most advanced player in the team.

## **Attack**

- In seven-a-side, you are looking for a player who can finish moves off. Because of the pitch size and support from the three midfielders, your attacker does not have to be especially good at holding the ball. The central midfielder will do that.
- Also, if it is not possible to get the ball across to the attacker from the wing, the advancing defenders will offer the wing backs a way out. Your players may be passing back but, in doing so, they are keeping possession and the ball can be recycled through the central midfielder.