

PAIRS & COMBINATIONS: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

FM20 update for my complete Football Manager tactical guide

Llama3

Contents

Introduction **3**

Balance **4**

Goalkeepers **7**

Central Defence **9**

Central Midfield **13**

Width **16**

Forwards **19**

Building a team **22**

Introduction

I can't even remember when I wrote my first guide, but it was several years after I first started playing Football Manager. I hadn't particularly thought about doing any updates to my previous guide, but before you know it, it's been 5 years since I last wrote a guide and it is probably time to pick up the proverbial pen again. Some of what you read in this guide is the same as last time (hence it's an update), but there is a lot of new information for everyone to get stuck into.

Firstly, most importantly, there is no "right" or "wrong" way to play FM. Sure there are ways which are making it tougher for yourself and ways of making it easier for yourself, but there are many ways to play the game. I'm not talking about just tactical styles, but how you adapt to challenges, how you create variation and how you turn defeats into draws and draws into wins. I've generally stuck to a consistent playing style, with a balanced system. Football Manager has got smarter; it's tougher to break sides down, you get punished on the break for leaving gaps and you can't just press play and expect to win every game.

This guide is going to have some useful things in it for you, but there are so many brilliant writers, bloggers, vloggers and contributors to discussions; for this reason I have scrapped the sections on in-game management and team instructions – a lot of people do that a lot better than I do. I'm focusing on what comes more naturally to me – getting a balance setup together. Everyone who has had something useful to share has helped make me a better manager. I hope this makes you a better manager and I hope you share what you've learned and carry on contributing to the FM community.

Llama3



Balance

Firstly, let's define what we're talking about here, because it is *central* to what I do as a manager. What I mean by balance is having a team that can maximise our strengths and minimise our weaknesses, this is achieved by covering as much of the pitch as possible and fulfilling all the key functions that a team needs to be able to use.

How do we achieve balance?



Simple really, it's about using your roles and duties to spread your team well, create different types of chances and to have a coherent defensive strategy. In terms of duties, this means the number of *defend, support & attack* duties and how they are spread throughout the team. This will determine in large part how aggressive your team behaves, in terms of forward runs, take-ons and risky passes. Duties should be spread both vertically and laterally in your team – this means, not having all your attack duties at the top end of the pitch and not all down a single flank. If you have all your attack duties too high up the pitch it creates a disconnect between defence, midfield and attack – if you have all your attack duties over on a single flank, it can see you leave massive spaces on the break, whilst robbing you of penetration in other areas of the pitch. Let's look at a few examples:

Bad

This (LEFT) is a bad example of using duties, it will create large gaps between each area of the field; the defenders all stay back, the midfielders are isolated with the forwards all staying up front.



Good

This (RIGHT) is a much better example of how to use duties, with different areas of the team dropping off and pushing forward, creating different angles of attack. The middle and both flanks all have an element of penetration as well.

What difference does each duty make?

There's a reason I haven't yet said how many of each duty to use – the spread of duties affects your team shape. The more support duties you have, the closer your team will stick together – this can be useful if you're trying to sit compact or to move in a pack to support a pressing or possession game. Below is a rough indication of how you might spread your duties (excluding the goalkeeper):

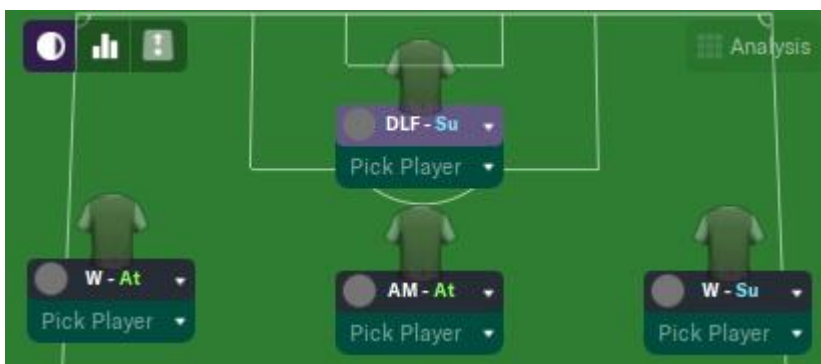
Defend	Support	Attack
●●●●	●●●●	●●
●●●●	●●●●●	●●
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●
●●●●	●●●	●●●●
●●●●	●●●	●●●●



Remember, this is a guide; other systems can work, it's just to help give you some balance! You may also wish to make some situation-dependent changes (late in the game for example).

What else do I need to think about when spreading duties?

We touched on the lateral spread of duties a few sentences up, what this means is not having all of your attack duties on a single flank or through the centre, so let's take a common example of a 4-2-3-1 and have a think about some key partnerships (after all, this guide is *pairs* and *combinations*)...



So we have already discussed not overloading all your attacking duties into the top end of the pitch. In this example we're trying to balance out 2 attacking duties and 2 support duties in the final third of the pitch. I tend to think of this as a quartet, as well as a series of pairings. I have got an attack duty on one flank and a support duty on the other, this helps change the angles of attack. My central pair also share an attack duty and a support duty – they could be placed the other way round very easily too. A striker on an attack duty, with a support duty AMC behind him can work well too – consider if you are trying to drive into space behind a defence, or if you want penetrating runs from deep instead.

So we have already discussed not overloading all your attacking duties into the top end of the pitch. In this example we're trying to balance out 2 attacking duties and 2 support duties in the final third of the pitch. I tend to think of this as a quartet, as well as a series of pairings. I have got an attack duty on one flank and a support duty on the other, this helps change the angles of attack. My central pair also share an attack duty and a support duty – they could be placed the other way round very easily too. A striker on an attack duty, with a support duty AMC behind him can work well too – consider if you are trying to drive into space behind a defence, or if you want penetrating runs from deep instead.



In this instance, the flanks are setup to provide different types of opportunities. The right flank will have a natural overlap created by the right back getting on past the right winger. The left back will offer more of a possession outlet for the left winger and central midfielder because of his support duty. We will obviously need to address the impact of roles (and we will) later on; for now I'm just showing how the spread of duties can positively improve the balance of the team!

In this instance, we have balanced



central midfield with a spread of duties. All central midfielders should have at least one defend duty, to offer protection to the defence. In this setup the midfield will all be close enough to each other, but has a mixture of passing, penetration and positioning. The duties can be mixed around here to create different areas of strength – a support duty in DMC with a defend duty at MLC could create confusion for the opposition regarding who to mark and how influential they will be in possession.



Goalkeepers

Goalkeepers are an integral part of your team's tactical setup. Their distribution and sweeping up are significantly linked to your overall team style of play, and the players in your team. A well set-up goalkeeper can significantly enhance your team's performances, turning a single point into three with a critical save or interception.

Distribution

Your goalkeeper has several options for distribution. He can act as a creative presence, or tend towards playing it safe. The options are as follows:

- *Roll It Out*
- *Throw It Long*
- *Short Kick*
- *Long Kick*

A short distribution option works well with building play from the back, and works particularly well when you have a good creative outlet, like a *Ball Playing Defender*, a *Deep Lying Playmaker*, or a *Regista*, who can help create chances from a deeper position and help maintain possession.

You also need to consider which players are in space to receive the ball. Your *Full Backs* are frequently the most likely players to have time on the ball, although their angles of passing are limited by playing out wide, conversely a centre back may have a wider range of passing angles, but may be pressed quicker by opponents.

A quick throwing option supports a more direct counter-attacking approach, appears to suit distribution to full backs/wing backs (who naturally tend to have the most space from the back) & helps speed play out from the back at a much quicker tempo. You could also ask your goalkeeper to distribute to the flanks at the same time to enhance this style of play.

The long kicking approach significantly suits a more physical taller option further up the field. If you play a *Target Man* or a *Wide Target Man*, these are highly suitable options to distribute long to - this also works well if your team is being pressed



ROLE

Goalkeeper

DUTY

Defend

MENTALITY

Defensive

INSTRUCTIONS FOR:

-

Also used for any other player in this position

The Goalkeeper role focuses on protecting his goal and making saves from shots and crosses. He is the last line of defence and is relied upon to help the team keep clean sheets. The Goalkeeper can distribute the ball in many ways. He can pass it short to his defenders, try to play out of defence, or he could play longer passes towards a target man or a wide player. The Goalkeeper is only available with a Defend duty.

WHEN OPPOSITION HAS THE BAL...

TACKLING

Tackle Harder

Ease Off Tackles

WHEN GOALKEEPER HAS THE BALL...

PASSING DIRECTNESS

Standard

PASSING RISKS

Take More Risks

Take Fewer Risks

DRIBBLING

Dribble More

Dribble Less

at the back and you are struggling to play the ball out from the back. This can alleviate pressure and get your team further up the field in a more comfortable area of the pitch.

Your goalkeeper can also help control the tempo of the game, and can hold on to the ball for long periods when you are trying to slow the game or hold on to a lead. He can distribute it quickly instead if you are trying to keep up the pressure on the game, or are desperately in search of a goal.

A *Sweeper Keeper* can provide more creative options from open play, and suits a counter-attacking game from the back in terms of his distribution.

Sweeping Up

A *Sweeper Keeper* will sweep up in front of, and wide of the penalty area. He can compensate for a high line & the offside trap being breached. A normal *Goalkeeper* will hold position far more, and as a result, tends to suit being sat behind a deeper defence, claiming crosses and distributing the ball safer.

If you have a higher line it may be more appropriate to try and beat the opposing forwards to the ball instead of standing up and facing a shot, where the opponent has time to set himself.

It may be less essential to play a *Sweeper Keeper* if you have a *Sweeper/Libero*, or if you have a Defender on a *Covering* duty.

ROLE

Sweeper Keeper

DUTY

Attack

MENTALITY

Attacking

INSTRUCTIONS FOR:

Also used for any other player in this position

The Sweeper Keeper aims to perform two roles, those of the standard Goalkeeper and the outfield Sweeper. Alongside standard goalkeeping duties, he will sweep up balls in front of and wide of the penalty area and initiate counter-attacking moves with direct through balls to breaking players. With an Attack duty, the Sweeper Keeper will travel some distance outside his area and be happy to move out with the ball at his feet.

WHEN OPPOSITION HAS THE BAL...

TACKLING

Tackle Harder

Ease Off Tackles

WHEN GOALKEEPER HAS THE BALL...

PASSING DIRECTNESS

Standard

PASSING RISKS

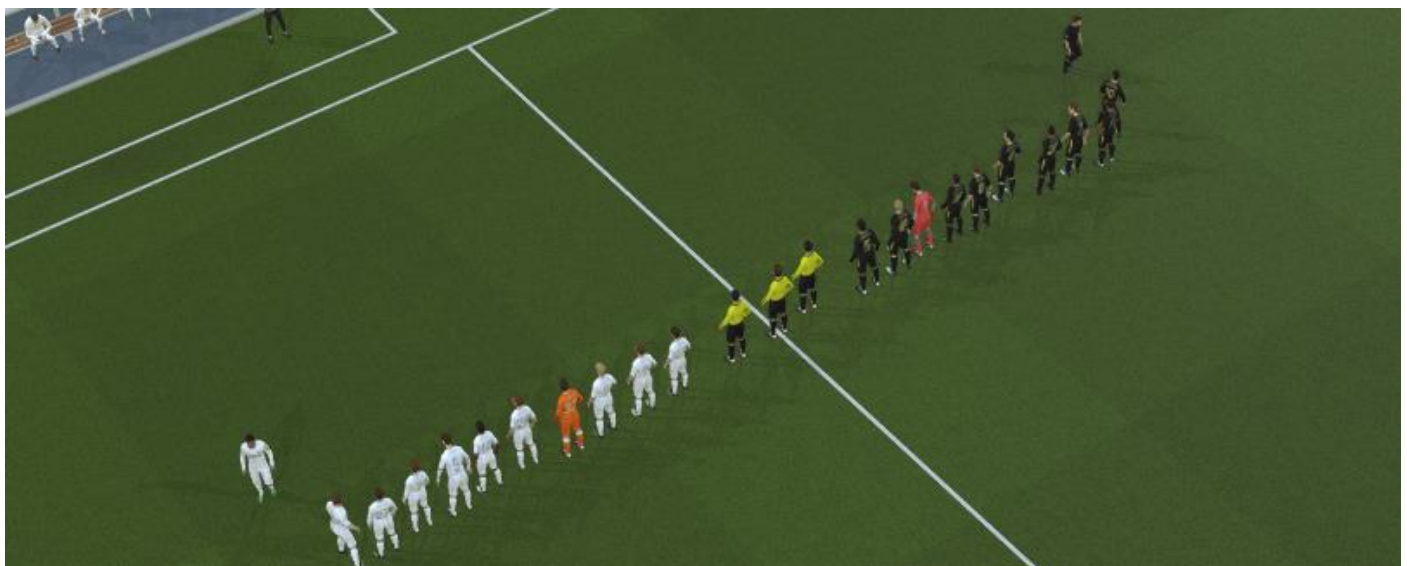
Take More Risks

Take Fewer Risks

DRIBBLING

Dribble More

Dribble Less



Central Defence

This guide is going to look in your central defensive set-ups, and how to achieve a cohesive backline. I will discuss your common central defensive pairing, and then the less common central trio.

Central Pair

You have 3 central defensive roles and 3 central defensive duties to choose from. The roles are as follows:

- *Central Defender*
- *No-Nonsense Defender*
- *Ball Playing Defender*

The duties are as follows:

- *Defend*
- *Stopper*
- *Cover*

The roles are fairly similar in most respects, and defensive distribution is the most significant difference in the roles. The *No-Nonsense Defender* tends to simply clear the ball as far away from goal as he can - ensures you do not get caught in possession at the back, but it does turn over possession to your opponents quicker and can leave you under sustained pressure. A good idea if your team does not possess the skill to keep hold of the ball in the backline.

The screenshot shows the player control interface for a **No-Nonsense Centre-Back** in a **Defensive** mentality with a **Defend** duty. The interface is divided into several sections:

- ROLE:** No-Nonsense Centre-Back
- DUTY:** Defend
- MENTALITY:** Defensive
- INSTRUCTIONS FOR:** - (Also used for any other player in this position)

The main job of the No-Nonsense Centre-Back is to stop the opposing attackers from playing and to clear the ball from danger when required. The aim is to win the ball and get it cleared safely up field in a simple and efficient manner, taking few risks with the ball. With a Defend duty, the No-Nonsense Centre-Back will stay in line with his defensive partner and look to break up attacks, mark opposing forwards and prevent the ball from getting into the box.

The interface is divided into three main columns:

- WHEN OPPOSITION HAS THE BALL...**
 - PRESSING INTENSITY:** Standard (indicated by a green bar)
 - TACKLING:** Tackle Harder (selected), Ease Off Tackles
 - MARK SPECIFIC PLAYER:** None
 - MARK SPECIFIC POSITION:** None
- WHEN TEAM HAS THE BALL...**
 - FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT:** Hold Position
- WHEN PLAYER HAS THE BALL...**
 - PASSING DIRECTNESS:** More Direct Passing (indicated by a green bar)
 - PASSING RISKS:** Take Fewer Risks (selected), Take More Risks
 - DRIBBLING:** Dribble More, Dribble Less
 - SHOOTING:** Shoot More Often, Shoot Less Often

The *Central Defender* will distribute the ball to nearby teammates, helping you keep possession in the backline, and to calmly distribute the ball to the midfield. There is the risk of getting caught in possession at the backline, however it can alleviate pressure on your backline by keeping the ball, and building attacks and distributing the ball to players in the midfield capable of influencing the game in the middle and final thirds.

ROLE Central Defender **DUTY** Defend **MENTALITY** Defensive

INSTRUCTIONS FOR:
- Also used for any other player in this position

The main job of the Central Defender is to stop the opposing attackers from playing and to clear the ball from danger when required. However, especially for more aggressive tactics, he must also possess the composure to be able to help the team maintain possession and lay off simple passes to more creative players. With a Defend duty, the Central Defender will stay in line with his defensive partner and look to break up attacks, mark opposing forwards and prevent the ball from getting into the box.

WHEN OPPOSITION HAS THE BALL...

PRESSING INTENSITY
Standard
Mark Tighter

TACKLING
Tackle Harder
Ease Off Tackles

MARK SPECIFIC PLAYER
None

MARK SPECIFIC POSITION
None

WHEN TEAM HAS THE BALL...

Stay Wider

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT
Hold Position

WHEN PLAYER HAS THE BALL...

PASSING DIRECTNESS
Standard

DRIBBLING
Dribble More
Dribble Less

SHOOTING
Shoot More Often
Shoot Less Often

PASSING RISKS
Take More Risks
Take Fewer Risks

The *Ball Playing Defender* will look to influence counter-attacking opportunities by playing through-balls in to players wide of, or in front of himself. He can also help the team maintain possession with his superior passing skills and licence, although he should be fairly creative and a good passer, otherwise you can turn over possession dangerously and cheaply if your player tries overly ambitious passes he is not capable of.

ROLE Ball Playing Defender **DUTY** Defend **MENTALITY** Defensive

INSTRUCTIONS FOR:
- Also used for any other player in this position

The main job of the Ball-Playing Defender is to stop the opposing attackers from playing and to clear the ball from danger when required. However, unlike standard central defenders, the Ball-Playing Defender is encouraged to launch defence splitting through balls from deep to generate counter-attacking opportunities. With a Defend duty, the Ball-Playing Defender will stay in line with his defensive partner and look to break up attacks, mark opposing forwards and prevent the ball from getting into the box.

WHEN OPPOSITION HAS THE BALL...

PRESSING INTENSITY
Standard
Mark Tighter

TACKLING
Tackle Harder
Ease Off Tackles

MARK SPECIFIC PLAYER
None

MARK SPECIFIC POSITION
None

WHEN TEAM HAS THE BALL...

Stay Wider

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT
Hold Position

WHEN PLAYER HAS THE BALL...

PASSING DIRECTNESS
Standard

DRIBBLING
Dribble More
Dribble Less

SHOOTING
Shoot More Often
Shoot Less Often

PASSING RISKS
Take More Risks
Take Fewer Risks

You can pair *No-Nonsense Defenders* as they do not affect the balance or overall passing structure as they simply play direct, focusing on clearing their lines; similarly you can pair *Central Defenders* who simply play a short passing game.

The *Ball Playing Defender* however plays through balls, and attempts more progressive passes due to the increased creativity, which suits teams playing out from the back. The *Ball Playing Defender* could be paired with just a simple *Central Defender* this works because the *Central Defender* can help maintain possession at the back, passing to his more creative partner instead of hoofing the ball clear like a *No-Nonsense Defender* and his "safety-first" approach. Having two *Ball Playing Defenders* can see your defenders attempting risky passes, but if you have the personnel for it then go for it!

The duties provide the variation in defensive approach, and these can significantly change the way your defence balances. The *Defend* duty is the standard approach, aiming to defend in line with the team instructions on marking and pressing, holding the defensive line and winning the ball when appropriate.

	Ball-Playing Defender	Central Defender	No-Nonsense Defender
Ball-Playing Defender	✓	✓	✗
Central Defender	✓	✓	✓
No-Nonsense Defender	✗	✓	✓

The *Stopper* duty aims to step up early to engage the opposition and quickly win the ball back. If this works, this can snuff out danger earlier before a player has had a chance to set himself. On the flip side, if your player is turned or passed round it can expose your team and open up space for your opposition, stepping ahead of your defensive line.

The *Cover* duty will drop off to try and catch any players breaching the defensive line. This can leave your opponents more time and space just in front of your defence unopposed, but it can also prevent your opponents from breaking through without a player to cover and track their runs, reducing their chances of getting a clean shot away in behind.

	Defend	Stopper	Cover
Defend	✓	✓	✓
Stopper	✓	✗	✓
Cover	✓	✓	✗

You can play most combinations of duties in the backline, however most importantly you should not play a pair of *Stoppers* or a pair of *Covering* Defenders. The *Stoppers* will expose too much space in behind, and the *Covers* will gift too much room in front of the defence, and fail to challenge for the ball often enough. Both pairings can badly expose your offside trap too, by either allowing room behind the *Full Back* or behind the centre backs, played onside by the full backs.

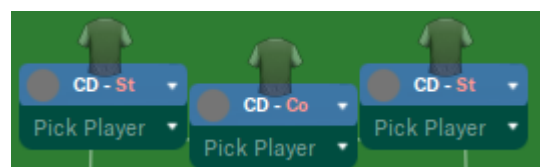
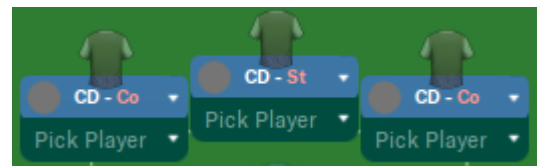
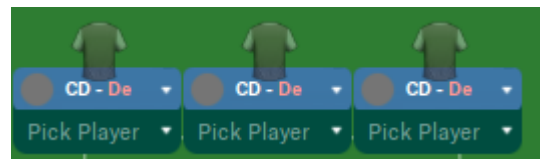
The *Defend-Defend* pairing tend to stay in line better and are significantly better for shape retention, and playing an Offside Trap. The *Stopper-Cover* pairing tends to exaggerate the best qualities of each individual, with an aggressive defender to attack the ball early, reducing room for the opposition forwards, and the covering defender can make up for the aggressiveness of the *Stopper* with his excellent positioning and pace. The *Stopper* can make up for the *Covering* Defender's deeper positioning and sometimes lack of aggression by closing down the space in front of the defence. This pairing can cause problems maintaining the offside trap as the defenders may not always hold their line, allowing gaps for your opponents to exploit.

Central Trio

When playing 3 at the back, you have to consider the implications of the wide players, and their positioning. If your full backs/wing backs are fairly attack-minded then your wide central defenders will have to be able to cover the space left out wide. Having a back 3 can take a player away from the flanks or the central zone in the pitch, and if this back 3 can help with this attacking deficit it is useful.

A *Ball Playing Defender* can help out with the deficit in creativity and *Central Defenders* can help retain possession. This is worth considering, but the suitability of your players for their roles is important. However, the real art with 3 at the back comes with the distribution of roles (SEE PICTURES).

The general theories are that you can either keep your entire defence in line, preserving your offside trap and shape by keeping all on the "Defend" duty. You can have *Stoppers* out wide, closing down opposition wide players to prevent crosses coming in, leaving 2 defenders in the centre to challenge the opponents, with the *Covering* defender capable of tracking the runs of players in behind the *Stoppers*. You can also invert this by having a *Stopper* to close down space in the centre, forcing the ball to be played wide, and cover the balls into the channels for the opposition wide players to chase in behind.



Libero

Your other tactical option with a back three is the use of a *Libero*. Due to the positioning of the role, it is best-suited only for use with a *defend*-duty pair.

The *Libero* is a creative option, who gets forward from his initial deep positioning, and gets into midfield to start dictating the game. This is suitable for a defender with good intelligence and technique, who can help add to the numbers in midfield. With a *Libero* breaking forward you need to consider where another defensive player may come from – if you have a back 3, with aggressive wing backs and a *Libero*, you may find you are

simply leaving two central defenders back to deal with counter attacks. In the setup opposite, the defend duty in central midfield provides that additional security that might be needed to accommodate a *Libero*.



ROLE

Libero

DUTY

Attack

MENTALITY

Positive

INSTRUCTIONS FOR:

-

Also used for any other player in this position

The Libero drops behind the defensive line, aiming to sweep up through balls, pick up extra attackers and make goal saving tackles, blocks and interceptions. His exceptional athleticism and reading of the game enable him to cover for defensive errors, take possession of loose balls from a deep position and secure possession. However, he will also roam forwards in support of the midfield when the team has possession. With an Attack duty, the Libero ventures much higher up the pitch to provide a goal scoring threat from distance alongside tackling to other attackers.

WHEN OPPOSITION HAS THE BALL...

PRESSING INTENSITY

Standard

Mark Tighter

TACKLING

Tackle Harder

Ease Off Tackles

MARK SPECIFIC PLAYER

None

MARK SPECIFIC POSITION

None

WHEN TEAM HAS THE BALL...

Get Further Forward

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Hold Position

WHEN PLAYER HAS THE BALL...

DRIBBLING

Dribble More

Dribble Less

SHOOTING

Shoot More Often

Shoot Less Often

PASSING DIRECTNESS

Standard

PASSING RISKS

Take More Risks

Take Fewer Risks

Half Back

The *Half Back* is an inversion of how a Sweeper plays. The *Half Back* sits in front of the defence whilst in possession, being a passing outlet to keep recycling the ball. When the team loses possession, he drops between the centre back pairing, and splits the centre backs wider, creating a back three. The *Half Back* is also only suited in front of a centre back pair because a third defender would cause problems with his defensive behaviour, getting in the way of his natural tendency to drop deep. This can allow you to play more aggressive full backs, with the half back providing additional cover against the counter.

Remember...

Your defensive roles affect your defensive distribution, and duties affect your defensive approach. *Defend* duties stay in line better, with *Stopper* and *Cover* duties useful in tandem closing down and tracking space and runs, but at the expense of your offside trap. Make sure you consider the space you vacate on the flanks if you play 3 at the back, and consider your approach to possession and your player's individual capabilities when assessing your roles and duties selection.

Central Midfield

The engine room now, the creative nerve centre, this is where it gets really serious. Good decisions in this area of the pitch win games, bad decisions lose games – simple. By central midfield, I am including all defensive, central & attacking midfield lines. There is so much room for variation here and your choices should be significantly affected by your style of play. A central midfield typically needs to provide all of the following:

- *Defensive security*
- *Dynamic running*
- *Technical control & creativity*

Defensive Security

This is quite a broad term. The first thing you need to understand is how you are going to defend – broadly it's a choice of pressing opponents or sitting in shape. Clearly there's much more nuance to it than that, but this ultimately defines – are you closing down opponents to deny them space, or are you providing a solid barrier to avoid them breaking through.

That's not to say that you can't have a hybrid too.

Whilst I am providing recommendations rather than “*you can't*” I would *strongly* suggest you always have a defend duty in your central midfield. There are ways of having dynamic running and technical control in your team that come from places other than central midfield, but you simply need to include defensive security as your first priority in central midfield. A quick run-down of your options and if they fit in with pressing or shape based systems is as follows:

Role (Defend Duty)	Pressing System	Shape System
Anchorman	✗	✓
Defensive Midfielder	✓	✓
Half Back	✓	✓
Ball Winning Midfielder	✓	✗
Deep Lying Playmaker	✓	✓
Central Midfielder	✓	✓

You may notice that the *Anchorman* and *Ball Winning Midfielder* are the only roles that really are suited to only a single type of defensive system. The *Anchorman* is designed to protect space, specifically that “number 10” area of the pitch, so by his nature he won't close down; if he used in a pressing system he is likely to create gaps by not maintaining pressure on the man. A *Ball-Winning Midfielder* is the complete opposite, he won't just protect space, he will go after players to deny space, which means in a shape system he will vacate areas you and trying to occupy.

There are defensive options available in both defensive and central midfield zones. Typically more pressing systems will include more players in advanced positions high up the pitch. Shape based systems will typically have players in deeper areas. As well as your roles and duties, the shape of your team can play a very significant role in how you defend. A 4-1-4-1 has a naturally compact defensive shape, with a defensive midfielder sitting between the lines – this means you can afford to be slightly more adventurous with your roles and duties if you wish. If you use just two central midfielders, you may need to consider being slightly more defensively minded with your roles and duties. You cannot afford a situation that involves a single central midfielder left to do all the defensive work in midfield.

Dynamic Running

This is another issue which is affected by how your team plays. If you tend to play on the break you need good ball carriers and aggressive running from deep. More direct teams may be less dependent on runs breaking into the penalty area, but may need people who can provide a threat from distance, or picking up balls to the edge of the box. A possession based team may be more focused on using the ball, but still needs effective running to provide the movement to support the use of possession – this running might be slightly less aggressive, but chances still need to be taken. The position of players

makes a difference to the types of runs they make; typically players making runs from deeper positions are more likely to be make aggressive surges towards goal, whereas those who sit in advanced positions typically tend to rely on short runs

nearer goal, or into lateral positions. Some of your runners may be those who break aggressively beyond the forwards, or who keep up with your team, covering large distances to be a presence all across the pitch. You can characterise these by “sprinters” (AGGRESSIVE RUNS AHEAD OF DEFENCE) and “endurance” runners (ENERGETICALLY KEEPING UP WITH PLAY).

Players who get forward aggressively can benefit from a reserve partner to provide cover for them if they are caught upfield. For example a *Segundo Volante* and an *Anchorman* suit, because both sit deeper naturally, but the *Segundo Volante* gets forward aggressively, while the *Anchorman* covers the space left.

Dynamic Running	Endurance	Sprinter
Defensive Midfielder (Support)	✓	✗
Ball Winning Midfielder (Support)	✓	✗
Segundo Volante	✗	✓
Roaming Playmaker	✓	✗
Central Midfielder (Support)	✓	✗
Central Midfielder (Attack)	✗	✓
Box to Box Midfielder	✓	✗
Carrilero	✓	✗
Mezzala	✗	✓
Attacking Midfielder (Support)	✓	✗
Attacking Midfielder (Attack)	✗	✓
Shadow Striker	✗	✓

Technical Control & Creativity

Similarly to dynamic running – you CAN get this from places other than central midfield, with the first question you need to ask – how are you going to play? If you play a direct styles, with only two central midfielders they may need to prioritise other aspects of a midfield performance. Possession based styles almost always require at least a reasonable element of technical and creative work in the centre of the pitch. The technical control can be provided from different areas of midfield. A *Regista* for example has complete freedom to receive the ball off the defence, drift around in space (laterally and vertically) and play killer balls or play passes that break the midfield lines. A *Trequartista* does much the same thing, but in the final third, drifting around in space, waiting to make the killer or pass, or become available for a one-two. You can use multiple playmakers to do try and offer technical control in multiple areas of the pitch. So for example a *Deep-Lying Playmaker* and an *Advanced Playmaker* can allow your team to play progressive passes into the final third, attempting to dominate space wherever it exists – this can be useful if opposition teams are strong where you traditionally like to dominate the ball.

Technical control is not just someone who likes playing forward passes or through balls; this can be reflected by players who like to dictate the passing and tempo in build-up play, those who are constantly looking forward players making runs in advanced positions, and those who look to drive with the ball at their feet. You will notice that we start to see some players appearing in multiple lists as they can fulfil several functions within a team.

Technical Control	Passer	Dribbler
Deep Lying Playmaker	✓	✗
Regista	✓	✓
Roaming Playmaker	✓	✓
Advanced Playmaker	✓	✓
Trequartista	✓	✓
Enganche	✓	✗
Mezzala	✓	✓
Attacking Midfielder	✓	✓

Creativity is not just earned through work on the ball, but often off it too; those who either drop deep, drift wide, or move into pockets of space can draw opponents out of position, or create overloads in other areas. The *Trequartista* has a lot of lateral movement, as well as simply roaming around. This can help create a third man overload in wide areas. An *Enganche* will stay within the “number 10” area of the pitch, without making lateral movement. As we’ve already discussed, this can attract opponents, freeing up teammates in space instead. The trade off with a *Trequartista* and *Enganche*, against say an *Advanced Playmaker* is that whilst the off the ball movement is better, offering an outlet in transition, it generally means that they don’t offer much defensive contribution, which can be a real challenge if you’re a high pressing side. You’ll need to factor that in to the roles in the rest of your team. You may need to select two more defensively aware players to compensate for this.

Consider the impact that a player has on your tempo too. More direct creators are will increase your tempo – which may not help if you're playing a controlled possession style, alternatively a considered passer (for example an *Advanced Playmaker*) is not likely to support a team playing rapid transitions from a deep block. There's no specific "this will" or "this won't" work, but all your decisions on style, formation, roles and duties should all complement each other.

No Wide Players

Some central midfields also need to have some responsibility for team width. This will sometimes be true for a three-man central midfield and almost always true for a four-man central midfield. Playing with 4 Central Midfielders is a great battering ram through the midfield, using great numbers to power through a defence. Obviously these numbers need to offer a great bulk of creativity and forward movement, as well as being a hard working defensive force, offering some alleviation for the lack of wide players in most of these systems. However, it is a great advantage to be able to flood the most important area of the pitch with players offering defensive stability but an offensive advantage and numbers. The most obvious ways of setting this up are to use a Diamond midfield, or, a Box Midfield. It is important to emphasise here that width is something you need to consider, both defensively and offensively – it either needs to come from your full backs/wing backs getting forward fairly aggressively, or, you can utilise lateral movement from central midfield roles like the *Trequartista* (which drifts wide), the *Mezzala* (who drives wide with and without the ball), or a *Carrilero*, who will shuttle up and down the half spaces. However much you like possession, or dominating the middle you *need* width, even if just to stretch opponents and create more space to play in. The roles you pick in a midfield like this will also depend on what kind of style you like to use (i.e. possession, off the ball running, dribbling, defensive shape etc.).

Central Players Providing Width

Carrilero

Mezzala

Trequartista

There are several different positions you can use for a Box Midfield, with two pairs of players in attacking, central or defensive midfield. A simple way of allocating the roles and duties here is to remember, you need a *more defensive* pair and a *more offensive* pair of players. Bring this decision back to the essential functions of a midfield: defensive security, dynamic running and technical control and creativity.

In a Diamond Midfield, the AMC is at a high risk of being marked out of the game, so you can manage this in two ways. You can either use him to attract opponents and then exploit the space they vacate (e.g. using an *Enganche* or *Advanced Playmaker* (Support), or you can ensure he has good lateral, or vertical movement to get away from opponents, or draw them with him. A *Trequartista* pulls into wide spaces, and a *Shadow Striker* tends to push forward aggressively. You can also consider the *Attacking Midfielder* which can fulfil both vertical & lateral movement depending on the situation.

A further function of four-man central midfield systems is that it allows for great degrees of speciality in midfield. For example, a *Regista* or *Deep Lying Playmaker* can benefit from the additional defensive help of teammates, whereas the *Ball Winning Midfielder* can often feel free to press in search of the ball, knowing that there are other players in sensible positions to cover should he be exposed.



Width

Your wide players consist of *Full Backs/Wing Backs* & *Wide Midfielders/Wingers*. Teams will have either two wide players, which need to perform in partnership, or a lone wide player. The formation you use will significantly impact on the choice of roles & duties in the wide areas. A solitary wide player has more responsibilities and has to be able to contribute to all areas of play, whereas a pair of wide players can specialise and achieve a more balanced set up.

Sacrificing wide players is a way of having more central defenders or midfielders to win control of the ball or territory; however wide men used well can contribute to a possession game, a creative game, or be used for their goal scoring exploits, or even their work rate and defensive abilities - this applies to all positions down the flank. A full back who gets into superb advanced positions is a great asset to have, as is a winger who tracks back and makes tackles too.

Lone Wide Player

Many systems in football utilise just a single natural source of width on each flank. Italy is a nation which in footballing terms, tends to distrust, or at least, not use Wingers. Italy traditionally also likes to use “three at the back” systems a lot more too, which means that the easiest place to find the extra man to use in the system, is often on the flanks.

When a player is tasked with providing the entirety of your offensive, defensive and supporting play down your flanks, he needs to be able to:

- *get forward & provide width*
- *track back and hold a good defensive position*
- *keep up with play, being a constant outlet on the flank to retain possession*
- *provide a source of penetration in wide areas*

All things considered, that is a hefty workload to consider. The other major concern, is where to place your lone wide player. The formation you select is your team’s defensive shape, so, you need to consider how far back you want your lone wide player to sit. If they sit further back they provide a more secure defensive shape, but, if they sit further forward, they could perhaps press quicker in wide areas, or provide a quicker counter attacking threat. The higher up the pitch you play your lone wide man, the more inclined he must be to track back instead, which you can reflect by more conservative duties. I have suggested the following roles & duties (RIGHT) to provide the width, penetration, defensive stability and work rate in a single player.

The reason why the *Wide Midfielder* & *Winger* are on support duties only, is because they have to provide width in front of them, but the inclination to track back into the space behind them to. An Attack duty will less be inclined to track enough, a Defend duty is unlikely to provide the width necessary in lone wide man systems. You will also notice the omission of some roles like the *Inverted Wing Back* & *Wide Playmaker* from this list; this is because they do not provide width. By their nature, they come inside, which will just congest a team crying out for a wide outlet.

Wide Partnerships

When you play with a pair of wide players in partnership, this allows an abundance of options available to you. Firstly, consider how your team should be creating the bulk of chances, and, therefore how you want your players to behave.

Lone Wide Player	
No-Nonsense Full Back (Defend)	✗
Full Back (Defend)	✗
Full Back (Support)	!
Full Back (Attack)	✓
Wing Back (Defend)	✗
Wing Back (Support)	✓
Wing Back (Attack)	✓
Inverted Wing Back (Defend)	✗
Inverted Wing Back (Support)	✗
Inverted Wing Back (Attack)	✗
Complete Wing Back (Support)	✓
Complete Wing Back (Attack)	✓
Defensive Winger (Defend)	✗
Defensive Winger (Support)	✓
Wide Midfielder (Defend)	✗
Wide Midfielder (Support)	✓
Wide Midfielder (Attack)	!
Wide Playmaker (Support)	✗
Wide Playmaker (Attack)	✗
Winger (Support)	✓
Winger (Attack)	!
Inverted Winger (Support)	✗
Inverted Winger (Attack)	✗

Some of the wide players can move into central areas, helping your midfield to dominate, while the other wide player on the flank provides the width. Some pairs both operate in wide areas, sometimes with an overlap, others with one player providing an outlet, or crossing from a different area (for example, one deep, one byline). Typically with a wide partnership, you almost always have players in the DR/L positions, as the tangible benefits of playing in the WB positions are often diminished by playing other wide players just in front of them.

Full/Wing Back	Midfielder																
	Defensive Winger (Defend)	Defensive Winger (Support)	Wide Midfielder (Defend)	Wide Midfielder (Support)	Wide Midfielder (Attack)	Wide Playmaker (Support)	Wide Playmaker (Attack)	Winger (Support)	Winger (Attack)	Inverted Winger (Support)	Inverted Winger (Attack)	Advanced Playmaker (Support)	Advanced Playmaker (Attack)	Wide Target Man (Support)	Wide Target Man (Attack)	Raumdeuter (Attack)	
No-Nonsense Full Back (Defend)	✗	✓	✗	✓	!	✗	✗	✓	!	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Full Back (Defend)	✗	✓	✗	✓	!	✗	✗	✓	!	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Full Back (Support)	✗	!	✗	!	✓	✗	✗	!	✓	!	!	✗	!	✗	✗	!	
Full Back (Attack)	✓	✓	✓	✓	!	✓	✓	✓	!	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Wing Back (Defend)	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	!	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Wing Back (Support)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	!	!	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Wing Back (Attack)	✓	✓	✓	✓	!	✓	!	!	✗	✓	!	✓	!	✓	!	!	
Inverted Wing Back (Defend)	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Inverted Wing Back (Support)	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Inverted Wing Back (Attack)	✗	✓	✗	✓	!	✗	✗	✓	!	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Complete Wing Back (Support)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Complete Wing Back (Attack)	✓	✓	✓	✓	!	✓	!	✗	✗	✓	!	✓	!	✓	!	!	

You can use combinations with a wide player moving inside to either support midfield dominance, or draw players out of position, with the other wide player driving on, retaining width. Types of player that come inside are *Inverted Wing Back*, *Wide Playmaker*, *Inside Forward* etc. – I would again emphasise that you really need to ensure that one of your wide players stays wide to stretch the pitch more; this can be the advanced player, or the deeper player. You can use two wide players who remain wide, who rely on overlaps to create space and the players in question attempting crosses from different positions (e.g. a deep and a byline) that can create different angles for your team. Overlaps are naturally created by a player making lots of forward runs (typically those with an attack duty and some with support duties) from deep, and an advanced player either moving inside, or having a lower duty (e.g. support or maybe even defend) that will encourage the deeper player to move on ahead – the aim being that you can overload the opposition full back (especially if the opposition winger doesn't track back), or to create confusion for which defensive player picks up which of your players. You could also use a typically traditional



pairing, with a lower duty behind and a more attacking duty ahead. This provides the defensive cover and an out-ball for the more attacking player. Your wide play will in this instance, be based more on your direct wide player getting into the final third to deliver crosses into the centre, while the FB behind links up to provide him with a passing option. A wise idea for the balance of your team is to have an attack duty full back (of whichever role) and support duty wide player on one flank, with a support duty full back on the other flank behind an attack duty wide player – again another way of working different angles of attack, different width and different crossing or passing positions. The variety is important if you're struggling to break down sides or create chances.

Remember...

Plan first how many wide players you are using before you decide on their roles. If you are playing a lone wide man you cannot afford to have them doing a defence-only job, they must offer an outlet. Consider that they must also have a good defensive position to begin with, or be able to track back and defend instead. Dual wide men must work in combination, ensure they do not get in each other's way, yet are still capable of providing overlaps and overloads.



Forwards

In the last section we discussed wide players in separate sections based on if they were lone wide players or playing in a pair. This does not work so well for forwards. The term "strike partnerships" does not simply include only the centre forward(s), it also includes the Wingers and Attacking Midfielders who have a particularly close link to the Centre-Forward(s). All Strikers have a partnership of some description, even lone forwards require supply and linkups of some description to function.

Football has moved from specialist to universalist theories of roles over time, with the roles demanding more of each player, to be able to fulfil additional requirements. The need to find and create space in modern tactics has also necessitated the need for more unconventional partnerships too. In this guide I will look at various types of pairing, from lone forwards with AM strata support to a more conventional strike pairing. Again, as I hope is clear throughout this guide – your role and duty selections, and your partnership selections need to complement your playing style as a whole. For example there is little point having a target man in a possession-heavy team trying to play tiki-taka – it just results in random long balls in a manner that the whole team is not geared towards. Similarly a False Nine makes little sense in a direct side utilising wing play – he simply isn't going to get the ball in the central areas he expects, with supporting runners.

You may also notice that I discuss the types of options you have here, but don't provide a reference table for specific combinations. It is so dependent on your style of play, the individual attributes your players have, the formation you use and the types of chances you create.

“Big-Man” – “Little-Man” Partnership

Many partnerships over the years have been built on getting the best out of the physical prowess of players. A large player can provide an effective target, holding the ball up or playing passes to a quicker team mate, or playing him in behind instead. The larger player generally plays deeper, flicking on the ball, winning aerial challenges, although it is possible for the larger player to stay higher up, flicking the ball back into space or to a teammate, coming in from slightly deeper, but at pace. The smaller player can look to break in behind or into pockets of space, often created by the larger forward beating a defender to the ball.

These partnerships generally rely on good wide delivery & crossing from wingers and full backs, or long balls from deep areas. These pairs generally suit fairly direct tactics. They are generally *Target Man* & *Poacher* combinations. Although an *Advanced Forward* can provide a more rounded version of the Poacher, and the larger forward can still be effective in a more rounded role if he possesses the skills, e.g. *Deep Lying Forward* or *Complete Forward*. This can still work with attacking midfielders to support too. A powerful lone forward such as *Target Man* or *Complete Forward* can be supported by an *Inside Forward*, *Raumdeuter*, *Shadow Striker* or *Attacking Midfielder*, attacking the box from deeper areas, and make better use of pace and/or movement. It is worth noting, that for systems with no players in AM line of the pitch, you can replicate this with a *Central Midfielder* (Attack) or *Mezzala* (Attack).

Creator - Scorer

Probably the most common type of partnership in football. This can simply be a case of one attacker sitting slightly deeper than the other, providing his more advanced partner with passes and through-balls to score, or occupying defenders to allow his partner to gain more time and space. The creator can exist as a forward, or as a midfielder instead, positioned to assist the striker effectively.

This type of system can rely on a number of attributes, not just necessarily physical, but technical ability and mental ability become more prevalent in cases of creative partnerships. It is a type of football that is fairly versatile, but has a slight

tendency to suit more creative/possession based systems as opposed to direct, attrition football - however its versatility can see it widely applied to many different systems.

The most balanced roles for this type of partnership are *Deep Lying Forward* & *Advanced Forward*, however a *Complete Forward* can be an exceptional creator or goal scorer (or both), generally shaped by his duty. A *Poacher* is obviously a good goal scorer, but is less likely to feed his supporting partner any chances in return. A *Pressing Forward* has become more and more important in modern football – despite the full range of duties available he will offensively ultimately act in a similar manner to an *Advanced Forward*.

A *Trequartista* is a superb creator, and needs someone capable of attacking the space & chances he creates. He can function from ST or AMC positions, but an *Advanced Playmaker* or *Enganche* can also be a superb deeper creative force to supply a goal scorer ahead of him.

Some roles are multi-functional – giving both creating and goal scoring support; the *Advanced Forward*, *Complete Forward* & *Deep-Lying Forward* are good examples of this too. The difference between the 3 roles are; the *Advanced Forward* stays high, tracking across the line into channels, looking to create space, and, return the pass if necessary. The *Complete Forward* tends to have more varied movement instead, and, the *Deep Lying Forward*, will stay more central, dropping deeper and holding the ball up more than an *Advanced Forward*. The key thing to consider here is what type of chances you want to create. More possession-based sides may prefer a *Deep-Lying Forward*, whereas an *Advanced Forward* might suit a quicker style of attack.

The *Inside Forward* can be an excellent creator on a support duty with angled balls from out wide into a breaking forward instead, whereas on an Attack duty, he can attack space left by a more creative forward in a more advanced position ahead of him, and be a prolific goal scorer.

This also applies very specifically for a *Raumdeuter* who will look to provide a goal scoring threat from wider positions, getting into channels, and linking up with a potentially creative presence. The *Raumdeuter* could in theory partner effectively with several support duty forwards.

False Nine - False Ten

The false nine & false ten system are based on the central striker dropping deep, attempting to draw a defender with him, or simply allowing space for him or a teammate to attack and unsettle the defence. The false ten aspect is the advanced midfielder pushing from deep into the vacated space to emerge as a significant or main goal scoring threat. The main & obvious way of achieving this is to select a *False Nine* & *Shadow Striker* partnership, which will link up well in the final third, and tends to significantly suit a possession & intricate movement based system.

There are other roles which can mimic this effect, sometimes by pulling wide instead, or simply drifting for space. The *Trequartista* in attack will naturally drift around, creating space that players can attack, and again this can cause the central defenders the conundrum to follow him, or allow him space. The *Trequartista* can drift wide too, whereas the *False Nine* is much more inclined to drop deeper, looking to drive at the defence from deep or playing passes in to an onrushing player.

The *Deep-Lying Forward* & *Complete Forward* (Support) will display some similar tendencies by dropping deep and playing with their back to goal, but are more capable of holding the ball up, and occupying more space higher up the pitch. They also have more defensive discipline than a *Trequartista* which can be an important aspect for many managers.

In terms of alternative "false ten" players - the *Inside Forward* or *Raumdeuter* on the flanks can attack the space vacated by a forward dropping deep/drifting wide, and cause the dilemma for full back's to choose to follow the player, opening up space wide, or to leave him to the central defenders, where he may gain space before he is even tracked. *Attacking Midfielders* can push into the box to support attacking moves, but are less suited to a prolific goal scoring role than the others outlined. The *Inverted Winger* has some similar movement to the *Inside Forward* with the ball, but less similarities

off the ball, which makes him less suitable to be a goal scoring focal point. Similarly to the “big-man” “little-man” partnerships, the deep onrushing player can really pull a defence apart – even a *Central Midfielder* (Attack) and *Mezzala* (Attack) can make a huge difference.

Remember

Remember to split your duties to create good movement. Base your attacking chances around multiple routes of attack to prevent uni-focal tactics being rendered useless by the opposition. Your attacking partnerships and link-ups extend to the AM line, as well general creative & running support from deeper midfield positions too. Your partnership needs to support your overall style of play – as an ill-suited role can lead to disjointed attacking play and ultimately a failure to score goals.

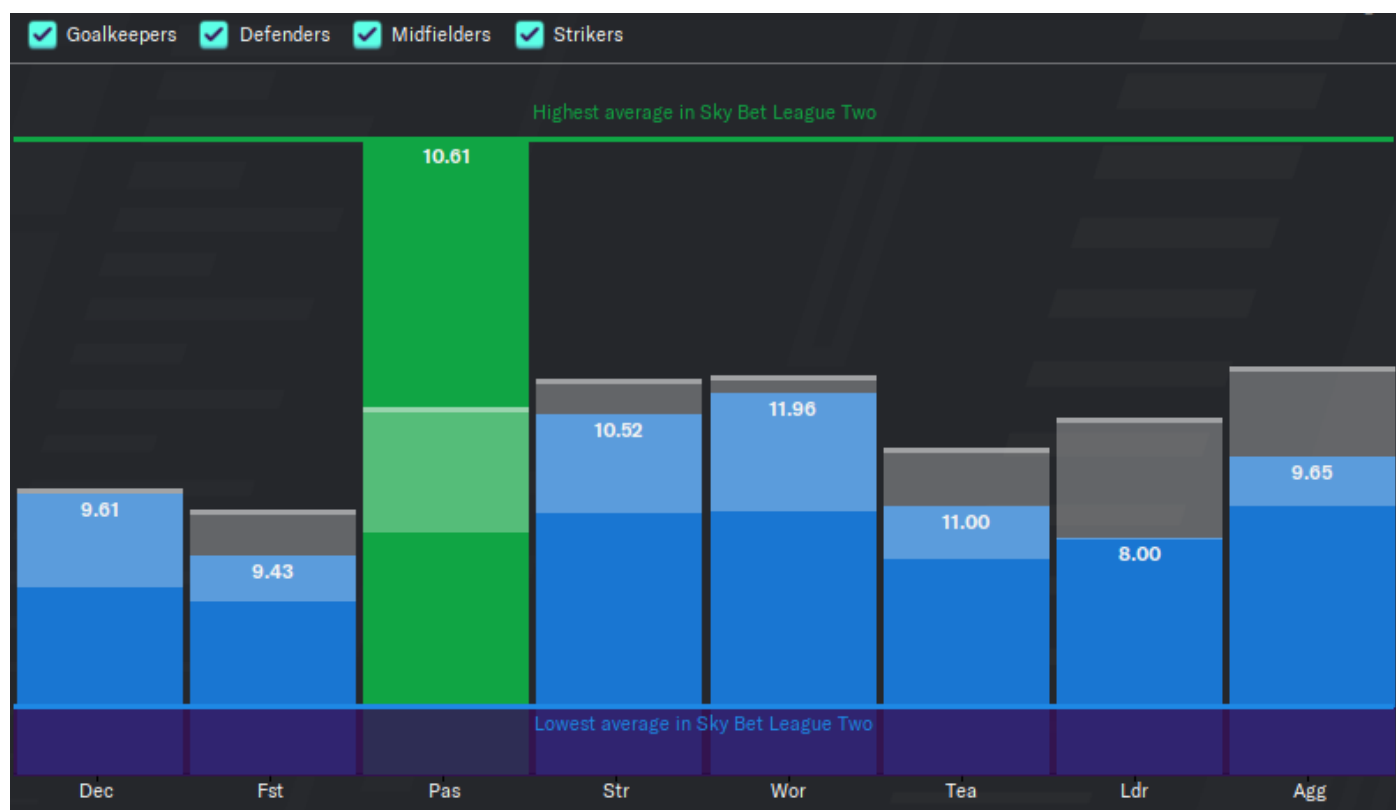


Building a Team

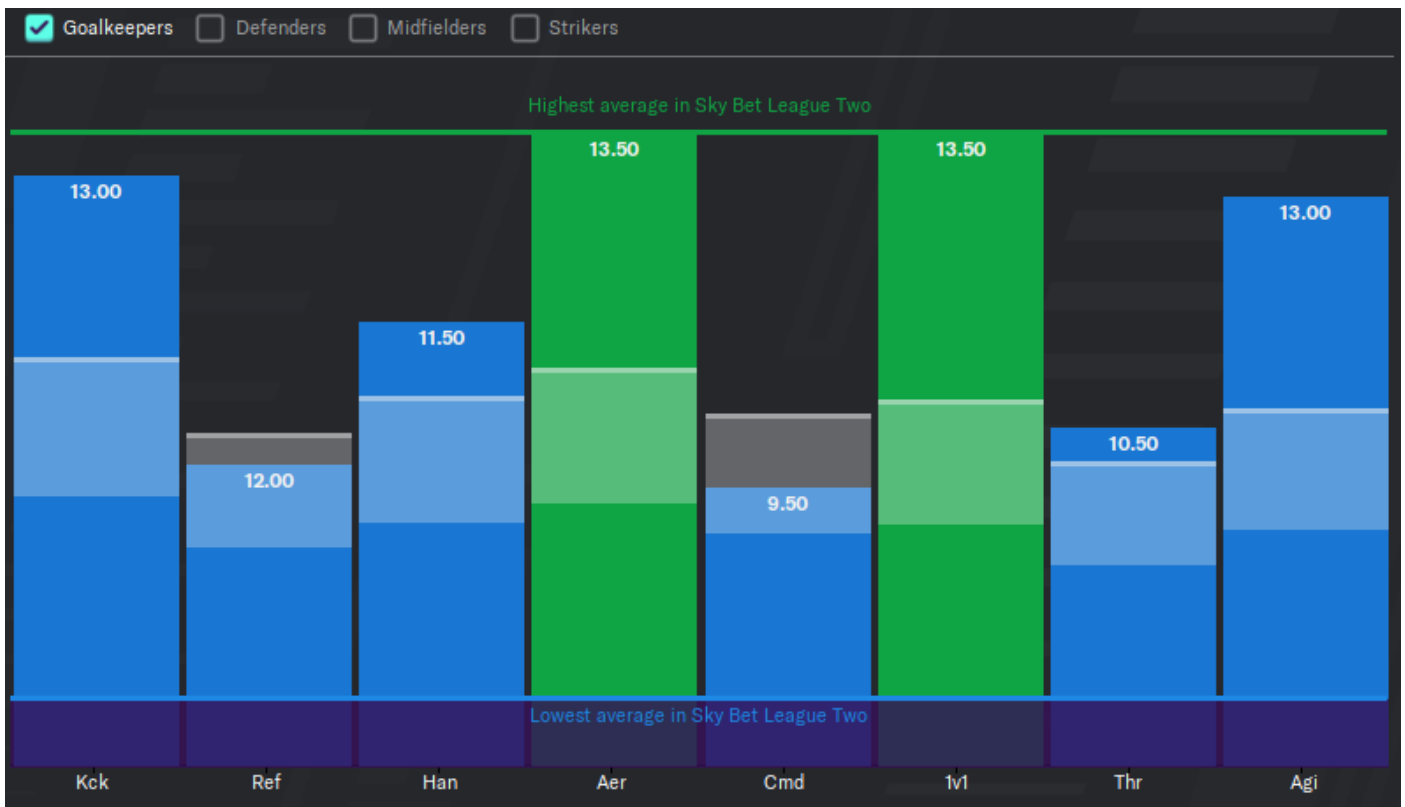
This is the point in the guide where I show you how I begin to put a team together, which is less straightforward than it sounds. As a starting point we need to assess the squad – both as a whole and as individuals; I need to understand what the squad overall does well and what key performers in my squad do well.

Normally I use Arsenal as my example, but this time I am going to take a team that you are less likely to be familiar with – **FOREST GREEN ROVERS**. Rovers have been in the football league since 2017, with a reputation built on their very eco-friendly principles. They are also my local club nowadays, so I have developed an interest and support in the club.

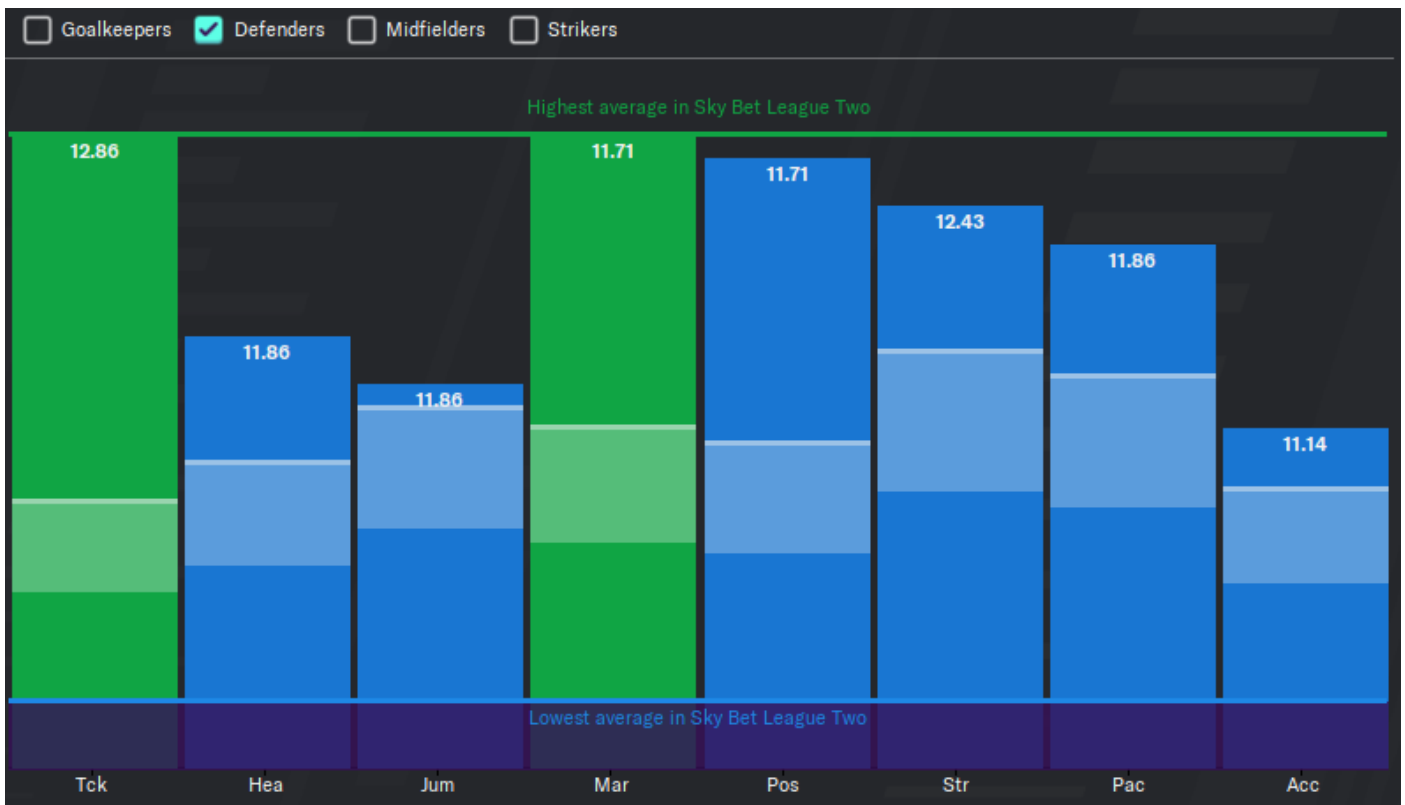
So firstly my squad as a whole is the first bit to assess. I need to know what we do well, what we do badly and this will begin to suggest possible styles of play to me; clearly we also need to understand not just what styles work best, but which areas of the team we can rely on most. On the overview of all positions it stands out to me that we have the best passing ability in the league – clearly we can make use of this either by dominance of the ball, or by incisive and quicker passing. Our lower first touch isn't great and does suggest that we may risk being pressed out of possession. It's also clear out leadership and aggression are poor, which suggests assertive defensive tactics as a whole might be harder to implement. Our teamwork being lower than ideal isn't great for any style of play, as it's pretty fundamental to defensive organisation, pressing patterns, attacking movements – you name it, teamwork makes it better!



Next up it's a look at our goalkeeping unit as a whole. What I am looking for here are clues to if the keepers prefer playing behind a high line (one on ones and reflexes), or taking dominating the penalty area behind a deep defence (command of area, handling, aerial ability). I'm also looking to see how we might distribute the ball to support either direct distribution, or playing from the base of the team. Looking at our strong aerial ability and one on ones, it's clear that we could support either option at this stage. Our strong kicking could be useful, allowing us to transition quickly from back to front.

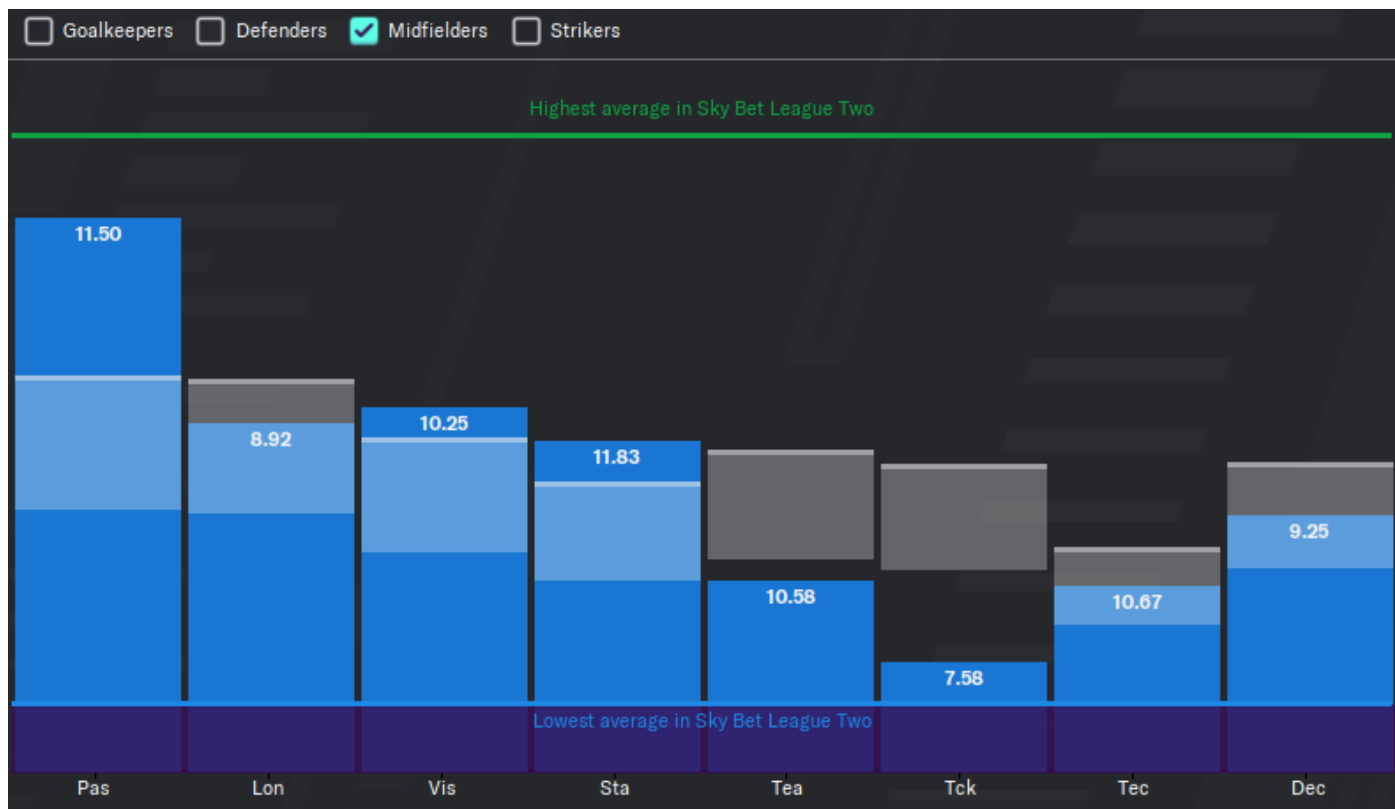


Next onto the defence, where we are looking at similar concepts to the goalkeepers – do we support playing behind a high line (pace, acceleration and tackling), or a deep defence (positioning, marking, heading, jumping). Clearly our defence is pretty strong overall. Our jumping isn't spectacular, but neither is our acceleration – overall this defence does look organised and strong though. I'm inclined to say that we suit a deeper defence slightly more due to the organisational attributes being so good, but if the rest of my team suited playing high I am confident we could do it at this stage.

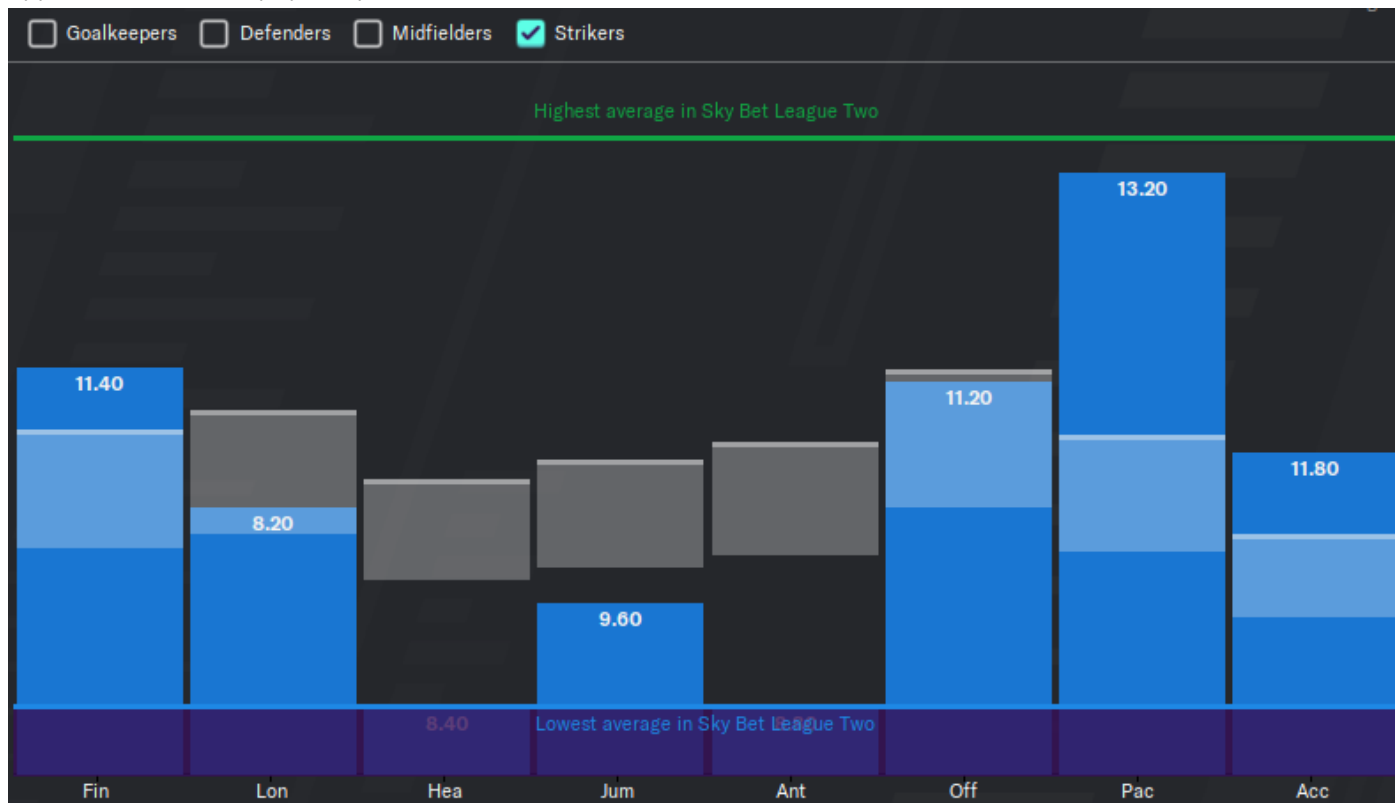


I hope by this stage you've heard me bang on about the importance of midfield enough over the years. Now we need to see how our midfield stacks up. Passing again looks positive for midfield, but otherwise midfield looks decidedly average – we clearly are not suited to aggressive ball winning though based on our poor tackling and teamwork. Our poor technique

and decisions don't merit us a great ball-retaining side either, so we're probably going to be more effective with space to play into. It's quite tricky at this stage, but it's clear my midfield isn't going to be one to rely on too greatly.



Lastly, a look at my forwards as a group. This shows some startling trends – we are a team which is clearly quick (although our higher pace than acceleration suggests we're quicker over large distances, rather than short ones). Our movement is fine, but intelligence is very poor, as is our jumping and heading – clearly we're not built for floated crosses, or challenging opposition defenders physically.



It appears fairly obvious to me that our midfield can pick a pass, but not retain the ball effectively and that our forwards can only play on the break – so a deep-defensive orientated system and counter-attacking style of play currently seems the direction to go in. What I need to consider though, is any stand-out individuals I have available, along with how to make the best use of them, within a structure that suits the team as a whole.

Lastly we also need to pay attention to squad depth. For example, if we have a system built around marauding wing backs, but only have a single player capable of fulfilling the role on each flank, we either need an effective plan B, or we need to reconsider a system based on effective squad depth. Specifically in the case of Forest Green, we appear to have decent options in goal, central defence and both full back positions, which solidifies our analysis that our defence is our strongest aspect of the team. We appear to be less well stocked in wing back positions. We seem to have ample bodies in midfield and attack, with AMR clearly having two very strong options, with MR appearing a notable downgrade – this may influence my choice of formation later on.



The final piece of my jigsaw is to review the stand-out individuals in my team. Each team will have approximately 3-5 players that should be considered stand-out. In my case, they appear to be:

- *Aaron Collins – AM (RLC), ST(C)*
- *Elliott Frear – WB/M/AM (L)*
- *Liam Shephard – D/WB (R)*

Additionally, we also have another six core members of the first team squad that we need to look at:

- *Carl Winchester – DM, M/AM (C)*
- *Nathan McGinley – D (LC)*
- *Farrend Rawson – D (RC)*
- *George Williams – M (RL), AM (RLC), ST (C)*
- *Joseph Mills – D/WB (L)*
- *Matt Mills – D (C)*

Aaron Collins

Best suited as a right sided AMR, as a *Winger*, although his crossing and dribbling fall below what I'd hope for a Winger and actually his attributes looks more like a centre-forward. He is quick, with decent technique and finishing and suits playing as an *Advanced Forward*.

Elliott Frear

A quick, left-footed player who wants to play on the left side of the pitch. His crossing and dribbling are also good, so essentially to maximise him he needs to be played as a *Winger*.

10. Aaron Collins
AM (RC), ST (C)

Welsh
22 years old (27/5/1997)
0 caps / 0 goals
No youth caps

Contracted to Forest Green
Valued at £375K
£1.5K p/w until 30/6/2021
Important Player

BEST POSITION >
Attacking Midfielder (Right)

BEST ROLE AND DUTY >
● **Winger**
Attack

ATTRIBUTES

TECHNICAL	MENTAL	PHYSICAL			
Corners	4	Aggression	5	Accelerati...	14
Crossing	8	Anticipation	9	Agility	13
Dribbling	10	Bravery	12	Balance	13
Finishing	13	Composure	8	Jumping R...	12
First Touch	11	Concentra...	9	Natural Fi...	15
Free Kick...	7	Decisions	8	Pace	15
Heading	8	Determina...	15	Stamina	12
Long Shots	10	Flair	15	Strength	8
Long Thro...	4	Leadership	6	Height	188 cm
Marking	4	Off The Ball	12	Weight	74 kg
Passing	8	Positioning	8		
Penalty Ta...	12	Teamwork	9		
Tackling	4	Vision	9		
Technique	12	Work Rate	9		

PREFERRED FOOT
Right

PERSONALITY
Fairly Determined

MEDIA DESCRIPTION
Striker

GOALKEEPER RATING
2

PLAYER TRAITS
Moves Into Channels

17. Elliott Frear
Midfielder/Attacking Midfielder (Left)

English
28 years old (11/9/1990)
0 caps / 0 goals
No youth caps

Contracted to Forest Green
Valued at £180K
£950 p/w until 2/1/2020
Important Player

BEST POSITION >
Attacking Midfielder (Left)

BEST ROLE AND DUTY >
● **Winger**
Support

ATTRIBUTES

TECHNICAL	MENTAL	PHYSICAL			
Corners	13	Aggression	4	Accelerati...	17
Crossing	15	Anticipation	8	Agility	10
Dribbling	13	Bravery	5	Balance	10
Finishing	9	Composure	13	Jumping R...	5
First Touch	11	Concentra...	6	Natural Fi...	9
Free Kick...	9	Decisions	7	Pace	14
Heading	3	Determina...	12	Stamina	13
Long Shots	8	Flair	12	Strength	9
Long Thro...	3	Leadership	4	Height	173 cm
Marking	3	Off The Ball	11	Weight	64 kg
Passing	13	Positioning	7		
Penalty Ta...	5	Teamwork	8		
Tackling	6	Vision	9		
Technique	10	Work Rate	12		

PREFERRED FOOT
Left

PERSONALITY
Balanced

MEDIA DESCRIPTION
Winger

GOALKEEPER RATING
2

PLAYER TRAITS
Runs With Ball
Down Left
Looks For Pass
Rather Than
Attempting To

Liam Shephard

A very effective full back, with a really balanced all-round game. He is good in many areas, although not standout in a single specific area. I also need to consider he will be unavailable for me with a long term injury in my first season and I will need to consider this before building a system entirely dependent on him. He has PPMs that support him getting forward, so should be at least a support duty in any system I use him in.

Carl Winchester

A bit of a Swiss Army Knife. His passing range is pretty ordinary, but he has good work rate, flair, stamina and decent technical ability and tackling. His best role is as a *Box to Box Midfielder*, where his PPMs will also support him by getting forward and on the ball.

Nathan McGinley

An accomplished *Ball Playing Defender*, with a genuinely balanced game and very encouraging technical ability for a League Two centre-back. He is left footed and likes to bring the ball out of defence. He can also play as a *Central Defender* too.

7. Carl Winchester
Midfielder (Centre)

Northern Irish
26 years old (12/4/1993)
1 cap / 0 goals
13 U21 caps / 0 U21 goals

Contracted to Forest Green
Valued at £190K
£1.5K p/w until 30/6/2020
Regular Starter

BEST POSITION >
Midfielder (Centre)

BEST ROLE AND DUTY >
● **Box To Box Midfielder**
Support

ATTRIBUTES

TECHNICAL	MENTAL	PHYSICAL			
Corners	9	Aggression	6	Accelerati...	11
Crossing	11	Anticipation	10	Agility	12
Dribbling	12	Bravery	7	Balance	14
Finishing	9	Composure	12	Jumping R...	8
First Touch	12	Concentra...	9	Natural Fi...	12
Free Kick...	9	Decisions	8	Pace	12
Heading	8	Determina...	8	Stamina	14
Long Shots	8	Flair	10	Strength	9
Long Thro...	4	Leadership	5	Height	178 cm
Marking	10	Off The Ball	12	Weight	74 kg
Passing	10	Positioning	11		
Penalty Ta...	9	Teamwork	8		
Tackling	13	Vision	11		
Technique	10	Work Rate	15		

PREFERRED FOOT
Right

PERSONALITY
Balanced


MEDIA DESCRIPTION
Midfielder

GOALKEEPER RATING
2

PLAYER TRAITS
Gets Forward
Whenever Possible
Dictates Tempo
Runs With Ball Often

George Williams

Williams is technically sound, with good flair. He suits playing as a *Winger* on the right or *Inverted Winger* on the left flank. His PPMs suggest he will want to come inside from either flank, but this could add variation to playing in a *Winger* role though. He can also play in attack, making use of his technical skills as a *False Nine*, or use his decent pace as an *Advanced Forward*, although this is not his strongest position.



11. George Williams
M (RL), AM (RLC), ST (C)

Welsh
23 years old (7/9/1995)
7 caps / 0 goals
3 U21 caps / 0 U21 goals

Contracted to Forest Green
Valued at £250K
£1.8K p/w until 30/6/2020
Regular Starter

BEST POSITION >
Attacking Midfielder (Right)

BEST ROLE AND DUTY >
Winger
Attack

ATTRIBUTES			
TECHNICAL	MENTAL	PHYSICAL	
Corners	11	Aggression	8
Crossing	11	Anticipation	8
Dribbling	13	Bravery	6
Finishing	11	Composure	8
First Touch	10	Concentration	8
Free Kick...	13	Decisions	7
Heading	7	Determination	14
Long Shots	11	Flair	16
Long Thro...	4	Leadership	8
Marking	5	Off The Ball	12
Passing	11	Positioning	8
Penalty Ta...	11	Teamwork	9
Tackling	5	Vision	12
Technique	11	Work Rate	12

PREFERRED FOOT	Right
PERSONALITY	Fairly Loyal
MEDIA DESCRIPTION	Winger
GOALKEEPER RATING	2
PLAYER TRAITS	Gets Forward Whenever Possible Tries Long Range Free Kicks Cuts Inside From

outstanding single aspect of his game.

Matt Mills

Brother of Joseph, Matt is another excellent centre-back, but is much more similar to Rawson. He is physical, but not quick, with plenty of aggression. He seems more suited to playing as a *No-Nonsense Centre Back*, but very adept as a *Central Defender*. He is also an excellent Stopper too, which adds another tactical dimension. His age means he is less of a key part of my long term plans.



19. Nathan McGinley
Defender (Centre)

English
22 years old (15/9/1996)
0 caps / 0 goals
No youth caps

Contracted to Forest Green
Valued at £250K
£1.2K p/w until 30/6/2020
Regular Starter

BEST POSITION >
Defender (Centre)

BEST ROLE AND DUTY >
Ball Playing Defender
Defend

ATTRIBUTES			
TECHNICAL	MENTAL	PHYSICAL	
Corners	3	Aggression	12
Crossing	8	Anticipation	10
Dribbling	12	Bravery	12
Finishing	4	Composure	12
First Touch	12	Concentration	9
Free Kick...	3	Decisions	9
Heading	13	Determination	12
Long Shots	4	Flair	5
Long Thro...	8	Leadership	11
Marking	12	Off The Ball	9
Passing	11	Positioning	12
Penalty Ta...	7	Teamwork	13
Tackling	13	Vision	11
Technique	11	Work Rate	10

PREFERRED FOOT	Left Only
PERSONALITY	Balanced
MEDIA DESCRIPTION	Centre-back
GOALKEEPER RATING	3
PLAYER TRAITS	Dives Into Tackles Brings Ball Out of Defence

Farrend Rawson

A very good centre back, who is more physical than McGinley and less technical. Rawson is right footed and looks like he could complement McGinley very well. He suits playing as either a *Central Defender* or a *No-Nonsense Centre-Back*.

Joseph Mills

Mills is an excellent full back, who likes to get forward down the left. Similarly to Shephard he does a lot of things well, but doesn't have a particularly



23. Joseph Mills
Defender (Left)

English
29 years old (30/10/1989)
0 caps / 0 goals
2 U21 caps / 0 U21 goals

Contracted to Forest Green
Valued at £210K
£900 p/w until 30/6/2020
Regular Starter

BEST POSITION >
Defender (Left)

BEST ROLE AND DUTY >
Full-Back
Attack

ATTRIBUTES			
TECHNICAL	MENTAL	PHYSICAL	
Corners	10	Aggression	12
Crossing	12	Anticipation	13
Dribbling	12	Bravery	13
Finishing	9	Composure	10
First Touch	12	Concentration	10
Free Kick...	13	Decisions	12
Heading	11	Determination	12
Long Shots	7	Flair	8
Long Thro...	9	Leadership	6
Marking	12	Off The Ball	9
Passing	11	Positioning	10
Penalty Ta...	9	Teamwork	11
Tackling	13	Vision	8
Technique	11	Work Rate	14

PREFERRED FOOT	Left Only
PERSONALITY	Balanced
MEDIA DESCRIPTION	Full-back
GOALKEEPER RATING	2
PLAYER TRAITS	Runs With Ball Down Left

Tactical Style

So, time to make a decision on how to setup this team. My assistant has recommended *Wing Play*, *Route One* and *Direct Counter-Attack* as options we might suit. Clearly as we can't press effectively, or control the ball in a dominant manner, we need to look at more direct and/or counter-attacking options. We do have some technical quality in our key players and from the back, so I am cautious about just lumping the ball forward. *Wing Play* makes use of our strong full backs and wide players who prefer playing wide, rather than coming inside, although we would be dependent on attacking low crosses only due to the lack of an aerial threat in attack. *Route One* looks less suitable as we do not have an effective target man, and does not complement our good full backs. *Direct Counter-Attack* suits us by playing a lower defensive line and line of engagement, which means we are not required to press as much, although this doesn't offer quite as much opportunity to play incisively. My other consideration is to play a *Fluid Counter-Attack* instead, which encourages the team to run at the defence more from deeper areas and aims to play on transition. With the further consideration of the decent pace in my team in transition and the ability to play out from the back, this looks like my best bet. I might consider Wing Play as a plan B option too.

TACTICAL STYLE

FLUID COUNTER-ATTACK

Looks to draw the opposition forward to leave them vulnerable on the break. Players will be fluid on the counter, trying to combine with each other and carry the ball with clear intent.

MENTALITY

- 🕒 Cautious
- ⚽ **IN POSSESSION**
 - Shorter Passing
 - Run At Defence
 - Slightly Higher Tempo
 - Narrow
- ⚡ **IN TRANSITION**
 - Distribute Quickly
 - Counter
 - Counter-Press
- 🛡️ **OUT OF POSSESSION**
 - Defend Narrower
 - Lower Defensive Line
 - Lower Line Of Engagement
 - More Urgent
 - Get Stuck In

Formation, Roles and Duties

The bit you're all still reading for, how I piece it together. All the roles and duties I select *must* complement my style of play. I use shorter passing, so don't need a *No-Nonsense Centre Back* to pump it long. My team is asked to Counter, so I am more likely to select more support duties in my team as a result, and/or select a formation that has players naturally in deeper areas. My team is asked to run at defence, so I need to select roles that may carry the ball.



In selecting my formation, the suggested options are *4-1-4-1 DM Wide*, *4-4-1-1* and *5-3-2 WB*. I am discarding the 5-3-2 option due to the fact many of my strongest options are wingers, so I want to utilise a wide partnership in my team. I'm going to lean to a *4-1-4-1 DM Wide*, as this will let me use my wide players in positions that suit them best (i.e. as AML & AMR, rather than ML & MR).

The default setup for the *4-1-4-1 DM Wide* system is on the left.

I will now slot in the key players I need to use and see how the balance of the team begins to look as a result. Once I have done this, I find that I only have four positions on the pitch to fill in, including goalkeeper. I have two options in goal, Jojo Wollacott is better with his feet, Adam Smith is better in the air – I am going to pick Wollacott for now, but I have a low threshold to change player here. In the DM role, I have a decision to make between Ebou Adams who is defensively orientated, or Lloyd James who lacks mobility but

has good technical ability – I’m going to select Adams for now, but again I might find that this is a game by game decision. I have to note the lack of quality in this position overall though.

The final central midfield role is by default a *Roaming Playmaker*, although I do need to consider plenty of other options. I am more likely to use a support duty, as this will make the team shape more fluid and compact, providing input to the team offensive, defensively and in transition. My remaining central midfield options are James Morton, Lloyd James and Kevin Dawson; James we have discussed is technically excellent, but not particularly mobile, so we could consider him as a *Deep-Lying Playmaker*, playing in those ahead of him, or as a *Central Midfielder* (Support) to try and stay up with play. Dawson is suited to playing a support role, due to his work rate, teamwork and energy. He is well balanced and can play a *Box to Box Midfielder*, *Carrilero* or *Mezzala* role well. Morton has good technical ability, is fairly balanced but less physically dominant. Morton can play as a *Mezzala* or *Central Midfielder*



(Attack), or as most other roles in midfield. This is probably going to be a game by game decision, or indeed one that I might have to make in-game with substitutions to change the flow of a game – for now, I’m going to select Dawson and try him as a *Carrilero*, to get up and down in transition and support the team – I will also consider using him as a *Mezzala* and observe which works better. Playing Dawson or Morton as a *Mezzala* or *Central Midfielder* (Attack) might work well if we play Williams as a *False Nine*, with the forward coming deeper and the central midfielder pushing on, but this would not be my default thinking for a team based on rapid back to front transition (but as we are playing a fluid counter style, rather than direct counter, this is much more relevant to consider what this kind of combination/movement might bring to the team – as always we need to consider plan B & C, not just A). The *False Nine* is highly effective in this formation, dropping into the vacant space left in the central attacking midfield area.



The final change role change from the default system is to change Elliott Frear to a *Winger*, as it suits him much more, although it is useful to know I have an *Inverted Winger* option in George Williams on the left. We have several support duties, as well as automatic duties set for both Wing Backs. As *Wing Backs* get forward more than *Full Backs*, we need to consider if they will complement the Wingers, or work counter to them. If you refer back to the wide players section, I am cautious over the use of Wing Backs, with Wingers, but provided you know they will not operate in the same space, there is less of a concern. I am going to set Shephard to a *Wing Back* (support) and Mills to a *Wing Back* (attack), with the opposite duties playing in front of them – again, we create natural overlaps this way on the ball, but also benefit from guaranteeing that in transition, some players are available deeper, whereas some will look to push on into space behind the opposition defence (striker and right winger). The relationship between a *Ball-Playing Defender* and an attacking full/wing back should not be underestimated – by having McGinley next to Mills, we have allowed opportunities for McGinley to play through-balls, or passes into space ahead of Mills (hopefully behind opponents) as he is breaking forward – this supports the counter-attacking element of this team. We also have a useful analysis heat map to see how effectively this will look ([TOP RIGHT, PREVIOUS PAGE](#)). My alternative system, which gives more technical control and combination movement with a *Deep-Lying Playmaker* at the base of midfield (where he is protected by not having to do much running – because we don't press high, the other midfielders push forward in transition and we sit deep so he shouldn't be caught on the turn), and better combination work centrally in the final third ([BOTTOM LEFT, PREVIOUS PAGE](#)). Ultimately, we achieve what we set out to do – achieve balance!

Good luck!

