

FIELD HOCKEY

Captain's Bible

Match Day confidence
for Coaches & Team Captains



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Dear Team Captain / Coach,

Over the years in the many teams and clubs I have been involved in, either as a Team Captain, Team Coach or a Club Coach, I have been asked the same questions time and time again; what formation is best for my team, what short corners should I use and when and what should I say at half time?

For Team Captains and Coaches, especially at the beginning of the season, getting your team organised is key. In this document I hope to give you confidence in answering many of these questions, and give you tried and tested advice you can come back to, time and time again.

I know many of you have enough stress getting the team to the pitch on time, so this document will hopefully make the rest of your job, and especially match days, a little easier!

Yours in Hockey,



Bram van Asselt
Senior Coach
Editor of Sportplan Hockey
Found of Sportplan Ltd

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1. Systems of play

Choosing a system to play is never an easy decision.

When making your choice you must consider the type of hockey you and your team want to play and also if the players (all 13-15, remember it's a squad game) in your team are capable of playing that formation - do they have the necessary skill and / or fitness levels?

I've seen many great teams fail over the years as their captain or coach chooses a system which the players either never understand or are not comfortable or capable of playing

1.1 Formation 1-1-1-3-4-2



Description:

This system gives support to the back-line as well as the midfield.

It relies on the 2 forwards to do a lot of running in defence and play further forward when their team is in possession.



When to use:

If your team are very fit and want to force the other team back by creating overloads in your defence and midfield.



Disadvantages:

The disadvantage of this system is that you only have 2 forwards, however they can be assisted by the wide mid-fielders, who can support the attack (see image).



Limitations:

This formation should only be played with a very fit midfield and is not recommended to any team below a 2nd team level.



1.2 Diamond Shaped Midfield 1-3-4-3



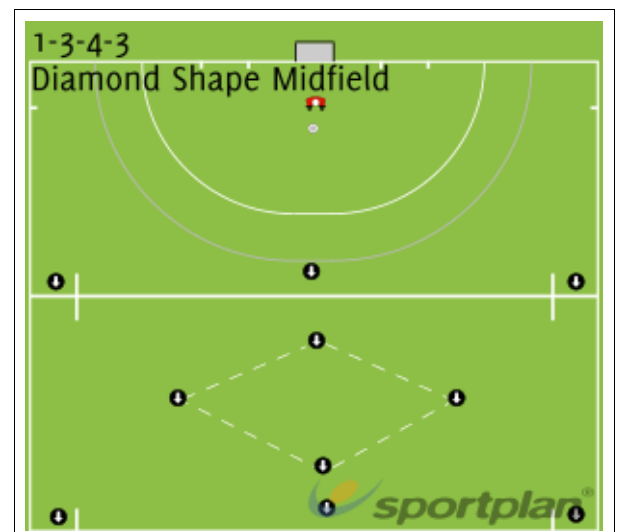
Description:

4 man midfield with the centre half pushing up higher up the pitch, supporting the front 3 and the midfield.



When to use:

This formation will help the team to transfer the ball when in possession.



Disadvantages:

The disadvantage of this set-up is that the back line is playing 1 against 1, so you will need to be confident that the 3 defenders can cope with the opposition's attackers

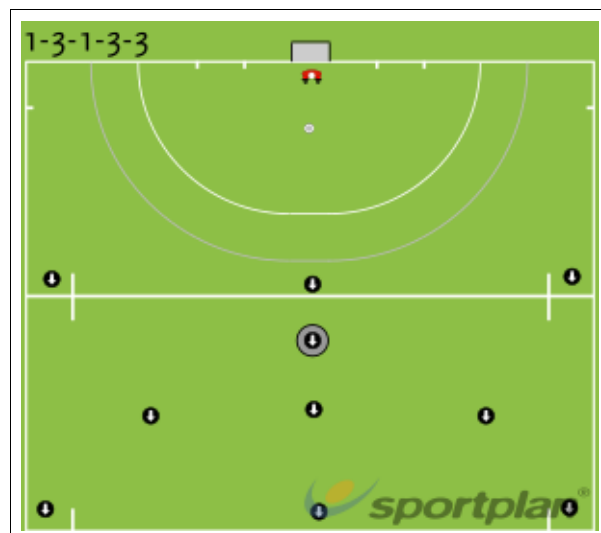
1.3 Formation 1-3-1-3-3

Description:

This system is more attacking than the sweeper behind system (1-1-3-3-3).

The advantage of this set-up is that you have a free player behind the midfield (highlighted). This creates a numerical advantage for your team in the middle. This overload will help your team, especially your attackers, to push forward and penetrate the opposition's circle.

When not in possession you will have an extra man to support your mid-fielders. This arrangement gives more opportunities to 1/2 court press and/or full press the opposition.



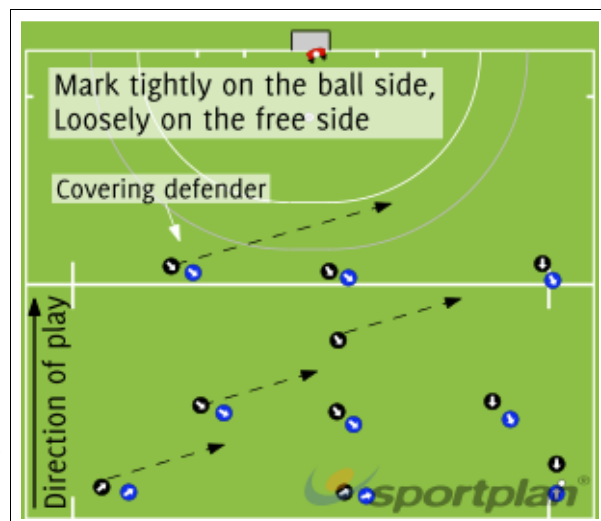
When to use:

You would employ this system if your midfield is being overrun and is struggling to cope with the opposition, but your back line is coping with their players.

Disadvantages:

A disadvantage of this system is that the back 3 have to play man to man (there is no sweeper support for your defenders.)

To cover this you may have to look at using the defender on the opposite side to the ball. The covering defender (see diagram) will move into the middle of the pitch to offer some support to the player engaged in the 1v1.



Limitations:

Captain's decision: This system only really applies if your back 3 are confident and can cope with the 3 forwards on the day.

1.4 Formation 1-1-3-3-3



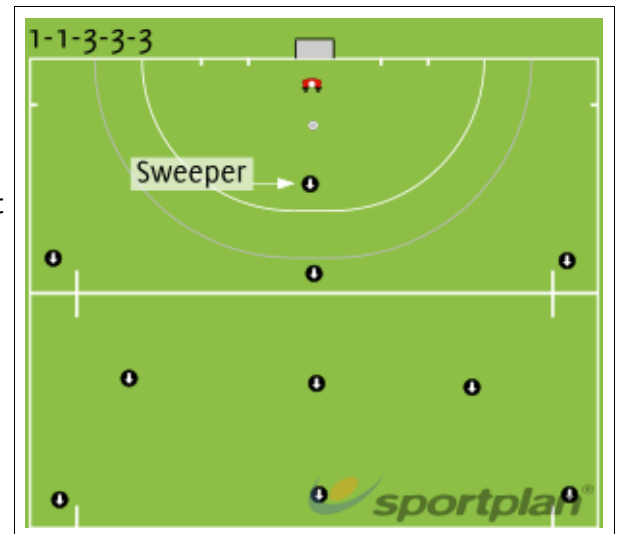
Description:

This set-up will see your team playing with a sweeper behind the back 3. The advantage of this system is that there is always a covering player to support the back 3 defenders.

Your back 3 can play this 2 ways:

1. Man to man back 3, with players sticking with the same player or
2. Zonal defending. Players stay in position and mark any player that comes into their area.

With this system you would look to attack using the width from the back.



When to use:

This system is good when:

- You have a slow back 3 players who keep being out run by forwards.
- The opposition is better and keep beating one of your back 3
- The opposition throw good long aerals landing in your 25.



Disadvantages:

With this formation it is hard for your team to create an overload situation in the midfield to help create a scoring chance for your forward line.

You will also find that you often finish up with your 'free' player in an unusable position at the back.

2. Simple Tactics

2.1. The Full Press - Putting Pressure on the Opposition



Description:

The basis of the press is that no player commits to the ball but a team screen is set up in the decided territory of the pitch. The aim is not to try and steal the ball from the opposition, but instead to make the opposition give the ball to you.

By pushing up you are trying to make the opposition make a mistake in trying to run or pass the ball out of these areas. After intercepting a bad pass your team should be looking to break and score.



When to use:

The Full Press should take place only if:

1. The opposition has a free hit in one of the 2 zones shown in the diagram.
2. Or a player in possession in the 23m area is given a very bad bobbly pass to their reverse stick side. However, this is slightly harder to read as all players need to react, because of this this tactic is probably not worth exploring to begin with.

Your team's press should prevent all lateral (sideways) passes across the pitch. All other passing options are easier to close down if you use the side lines to your advantage.

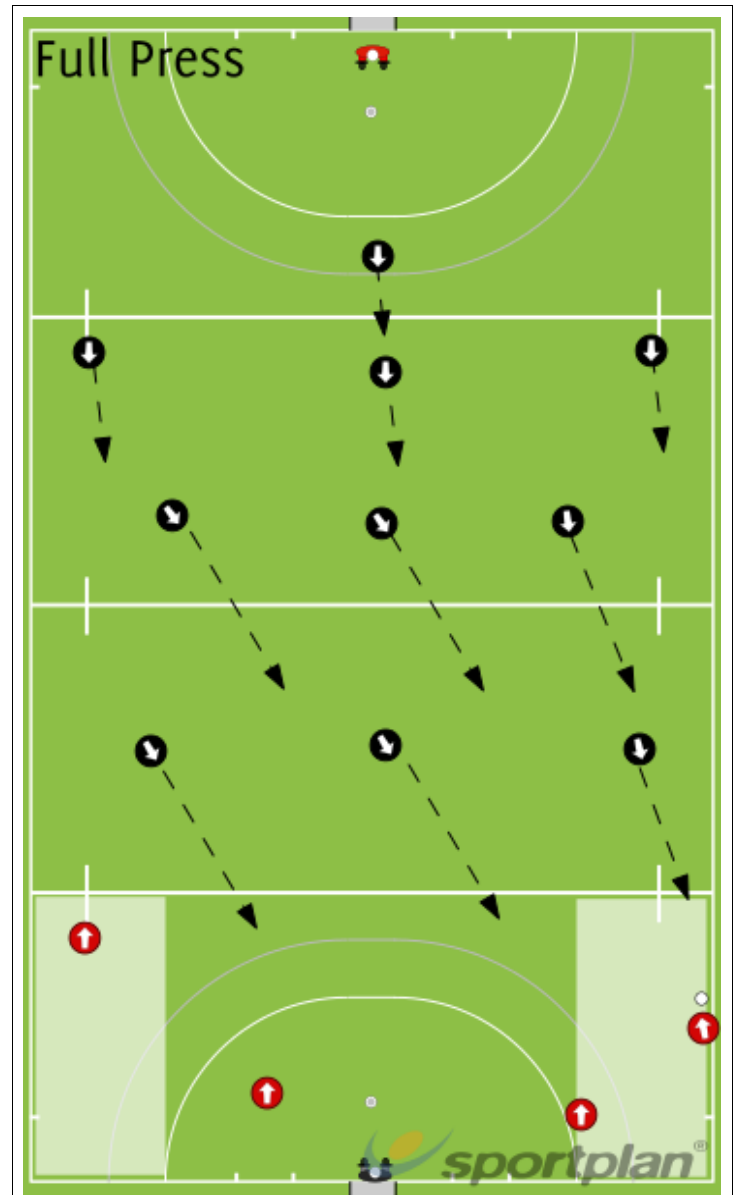


Limitations:

When the opposition has a player that can throw long aerals and therefore one pass can beat the press.

The press relies on all players to be disciplined and participate fully. If one player decides to not participate or try to win the ball this will often result in the break down of the press.

On a free hit inside the 23m area but in the centre of the pitch. This is very hard to defend as there are so many options to close down and means that there is no real numerical advantage for the pressing team.



2.2. The Full Court Press



Description:

The difference between the Full Press, which puts pressure on the specific areas on the pitch (wide areas in the opposition's 23m area) and the Full Court Press is that pressure is applied on all areas around the pitch. Each player marks their man tightly and looks to step in front of their man.



When to use:

When you want to keep the opposition as far away from your goal, and to prevent the opposition's back-line from playing the ball around (ideal when the opposition's back-line are skilled at passing the ball out).

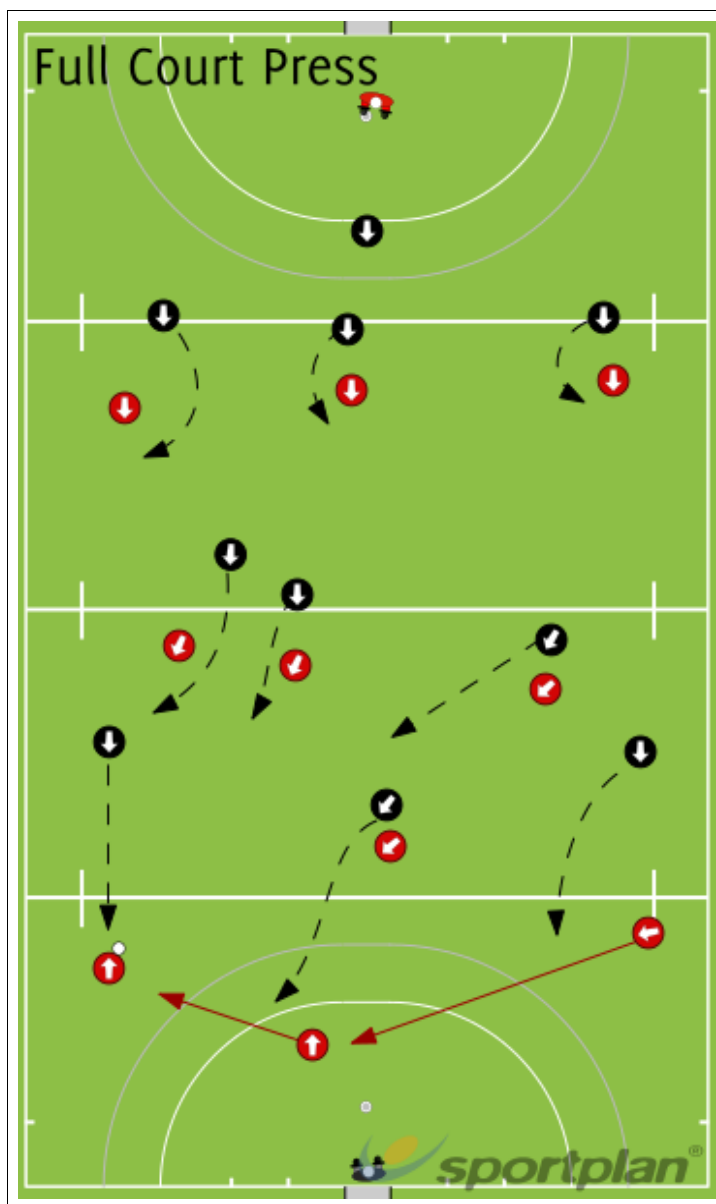


Limitations:

The Full Press can only be played for short periods of time as it requires a high level of fitness from all your players.

It also needs your team to be very disciplined because if one player decides not to join in, or dives in, the press tends to break down and results in a break opportunity for the opposition.

The final thing to remember with the Full Press is that a lot of energy is used to win back the ball and once it has been won your team needs to still have some energy left in the tank to use for their own fast break.



2.3. The 1/2 Court Press



Description:

The 1/2 court press is again a team effort and relies on all players joining in and being disciplined.

The 1/2 court press is a bit like space invaders - players must move as one unit, from side to side in front of the ball.

It is very important that once the ball has gone into the zone, past the highest defenders, the team goes in to full court press mode. But when the ball is played back out of the 1/2 court zone the 1/2 court disciplines have to be adhered to once again.

The advantage of the 1/2 court press is that it is easier than taking the initiative, also less agreements need to be made compared to the full press.



When to use:

The Half court Press is very good for the underdog team that is not able to create chances from their own possession.

So using this system you choose to let the opposition have most of the possession and wait for them to make a mistake.

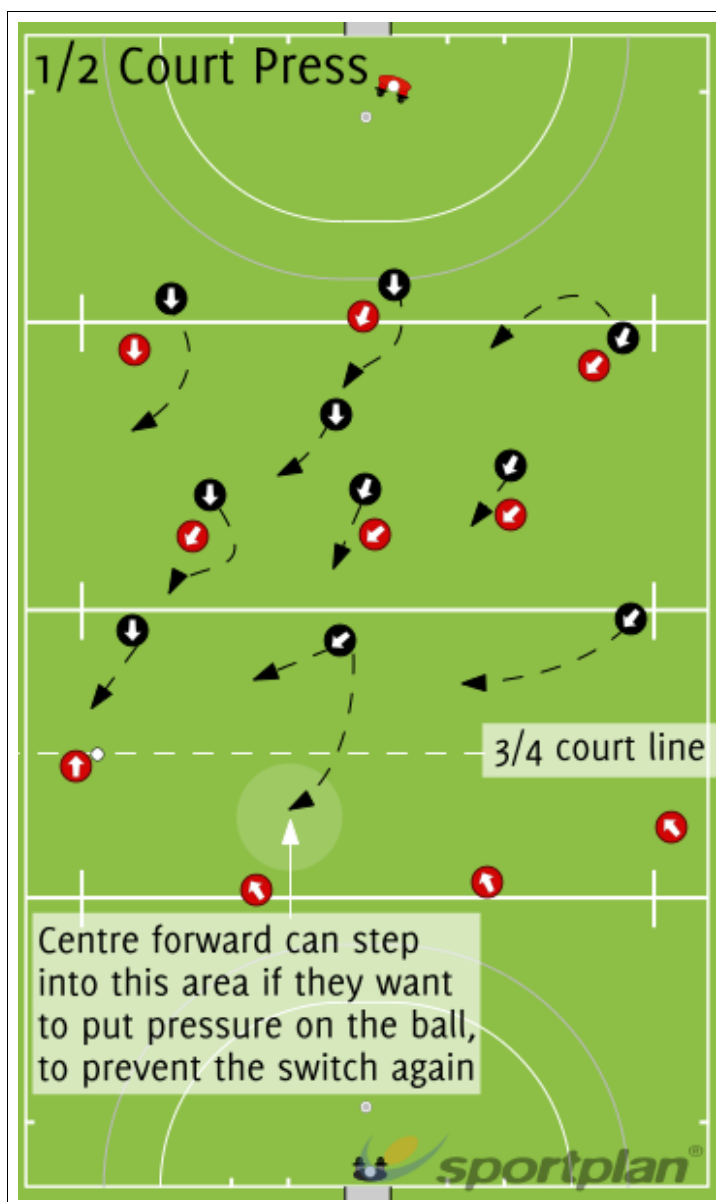
Your team will create lots of break opportunities because with every loss of possession the opposition will leave a large amount of space behind them which your side can exploit for the break.



Limitations:

If any of your players decide to full court press the ball the 1/2 court press will fall apart and the opposition will be gifted a break opportunity.

Do not play the 1/2 court press when you feel that you are allowing the opposition to get too close to your goal. In this instance you should change the 1/2 Court to 3/4 court or full press.



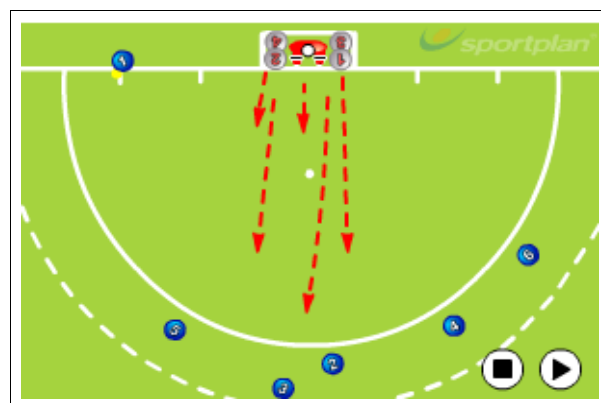
3. Short Corners: Defence

Click on the pictures with play buttons to watch the animations at <http://www.sportplan.com>

3.1. Short Corner Defence: 3-1

Set-up:

Position defence as shown, with 2 defenders inside the goal on either post. In front of them are two runners.



Description:

Once the ball is injected Player 1 runs to the top of the circle, with player 2 running three quarters of the way on their right-hand side to cover the slip left.

Player runs out on player number 1's left-hand side and runs level with Player 2. Player 4 comes 3 to 4 paces off the line to sweep the pads of the goalkeeper.

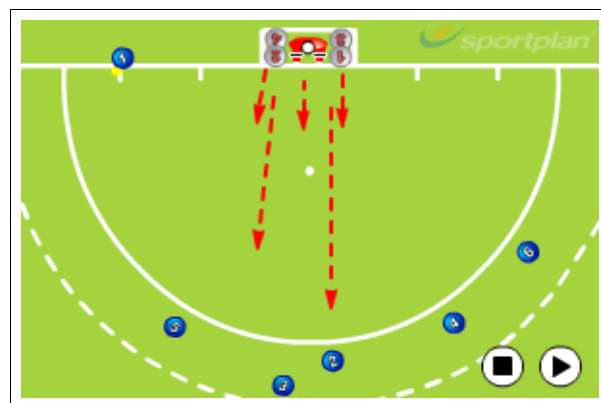
Note:

Important that Players 2 and 3 don't commit themselves and instead try to read the corner.

3.2. Short Corner Defence: 2-2

Set-up:

Position the defence as shown, with defenders on each post and a runner on each post.



Description:

Player 1 runs to the top of the circle with Player 2 running on their right-hand side, but only three quarters of the way out.

Player 2 is there to put pressure on any slip left or pass back to the injector.

Players 3 and 4 are responsible for picking up any rebounds of the keeper as well as adjusting their position to close down any moves the attack might try.

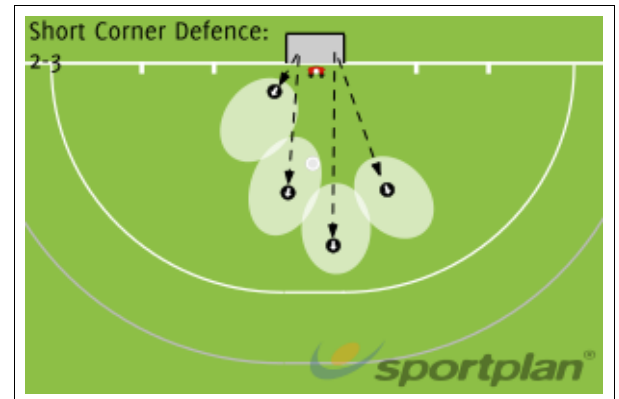
3.3. Short Corner Defence: Run out to prevent passing, 2-3



When to use:

If the attacking team is more likely to score from moving the ball because they have not got a big drag flick or hit from the top it is best to run out with all 4 defenders, each covering an area which is theirs to defend.

If executed well the opposition will pass the ball into the defenders or be forced to take a straight strike which the keeper should easily cope with.



3.4. Short Corner Defence: Against the Straight Strike, 3-2

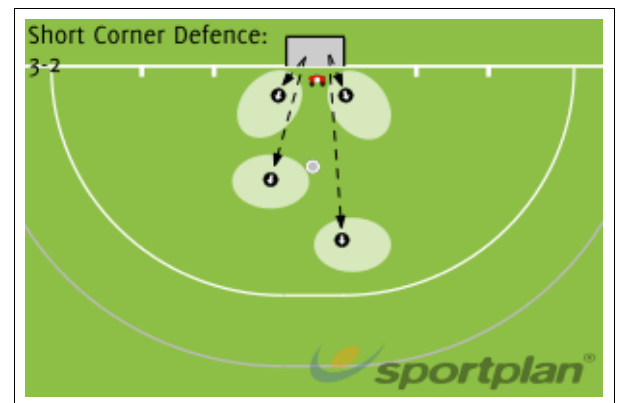


When to use:

If you feel that the opposition is likely to try and straight strike every time, and that they do have a strong drag flick or hit it may be best to run out with only two, to put pressure on the strike, but not interfere with the line to the goal so that the keeper can see the ball at all times.

The players that stay back are there to clear away the rebounds from the keeper.

The number 1 runner out is always best to come from the left of the keeper so the runner does not block the view of the ball at any time.



4.1. Standard Straight Strike

4.1. Standard Straight Strike



The ball is pushed out for the stopper to stop at the top of the circle, before moving the ball in for the striker to hit the ball at the goal.



Your striker should start their run as the ball is on its way out to the stopper. The ball should be struck as soon as it enters the circle.

4.2. Move left then strike



The ball is pushed out to the stopper at the top of the circle. The main striker (Blue 3) runs over the top of the ball giving the impression they are going to strike the ball. The stopper moves the ball to the left for a strike which is taken by blue 5.

Note:

Make sure that the striker on the left gets in a good initial body position to allow a strike at goal. Lastly, the transfer from the stopper must not be too fast.

4.3. The Drawbridge

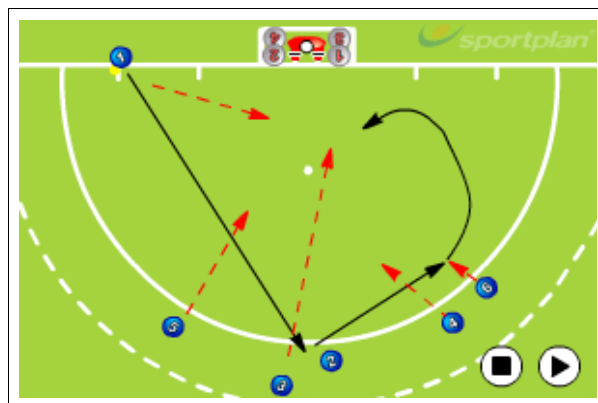


Description:

Players set up as shown in the diagram.

The ball is pushed out to the stopper at the top of the circle. The striker then moves the ball to the right. Blue 4 makes it look as though they are going to take the ball but dummies over the top of the ball and leaves it to roll on for blue 6.

Blue 6 picks up the ball and drives to the goal line before laying the ball back for blue 3 to score.



Note:

Ensure that Blue 4 gives the impression they are going to take the ball. It's vital that Blue 6 takes the ball to the goal line before passing the ball in order to draw the keeper out from their goal.

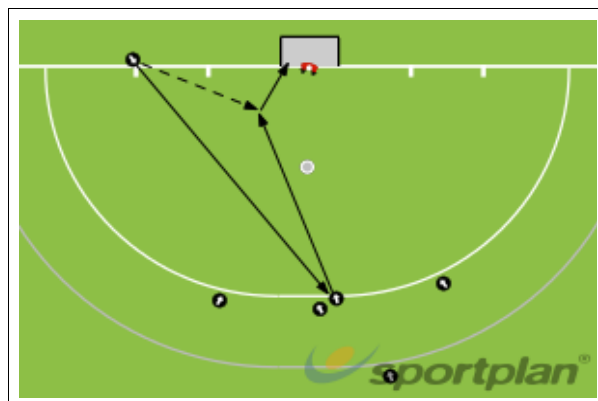
All players close in must be ready for rebounds in case one of the passes is closed down.

4.4. Short Corner: Under the Arm



Description:

The ball gets pushed out to the top of the circle where it gets stopped and the striker plays the ball to the near post, where the player who pushed the ball out has moved to after playing the ball to the top of the D for them to sweep the ball at goal.



5. Individual Roles / Qualities Required Per Position

5.1. When your team IS in Possession

Keeper

- To get the ball out of the circle
- Maybe set-up an attack

Sweeper

- Directs the play from the back
- Assists with transferring the ball
- Takes your 16 yard hits
- Supports the midfield when higher up the pitch

CB

- Makes themselves available to assist when playing the ball from the back

RB/LB

- Be in position to receive the ball wide on 16-yard hits
- Support the midfield when in possession

CM

- Always available to receive the ball.
- Looks to spread the ball, using their central connection point to help their whole team
- Take a lot of the free hits

RM/LM

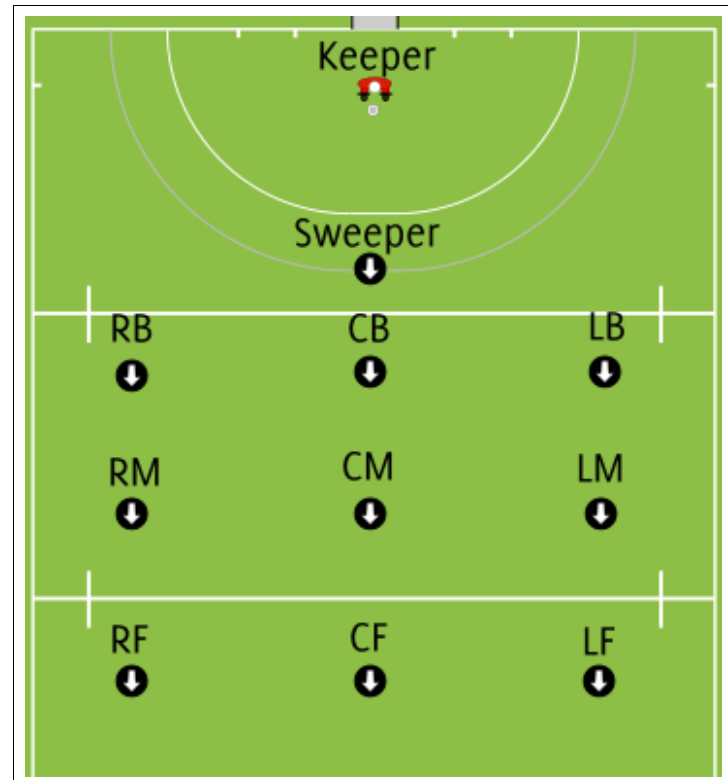
- Very important link in the attacking patterns & supports forwards by moving up the pitch
- Should sometimes take players on and Should offer a passing option to the defence
- Should also be able to score

CF

- Try to get free from their marker
- Pull defenders out of position to create space for other players to explore
- Able to receive the ball when being man to man marked
- Needs to be able to take players on in the one to one
- Able to shoot from all positions, win rebounds and win short corners

RF/LF

- Keep wide to receive the ball
- Able to take on players and can take some risks
- Should try to cross the ball into the circle and able to win short corners



5.2. When you're NOT in Possession

Keeper

- Organise the defensive players during play and short corners
- Ability to keep the ball out of the goal

Sweeper

- Organise the defence
- Fill in the spaces by pushing up
- Provide defensive cover for other defenders and sometimes for other midfielders and forwards
- Needs to be able to 'read the game' and see where the next danger is coming from
- Know when to push up to assist the press

CB

- Closely mark the opposition's CF
- Try to intercept the ball
- Must be very disciplined and look to anticipate and not react to dangers

RB/LB

- Closely mark the opposition's wide forwards & force them to attack away from the middle
- Provide cover when on the non-possession side and try to intercept the ball
- Try to anticipate and not react to dangers

CM

- Intercept the ball in order to break down the opposition's attacks
- Stop players coming through the middle and force players to the outside
- Front mark during full/full court press

RM/LM

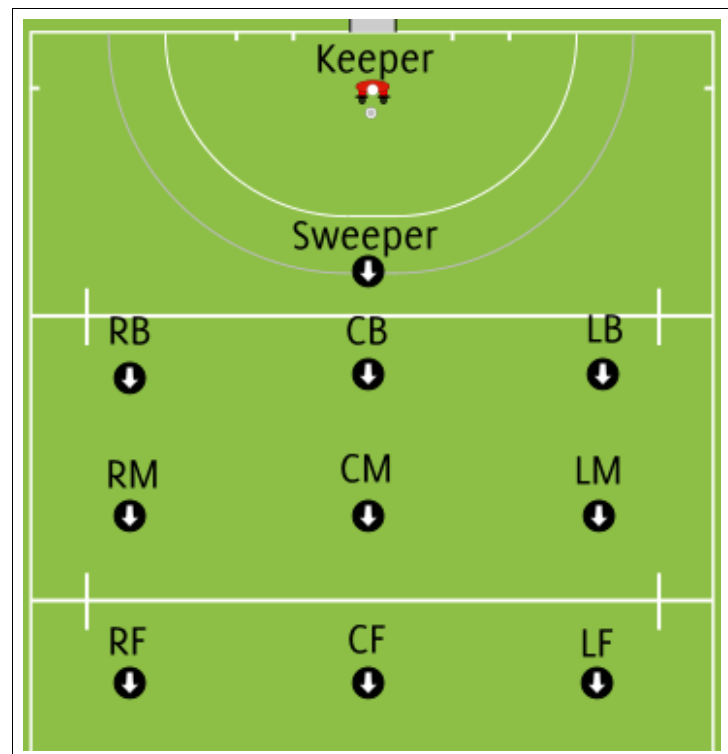
- Need to be able to decide when to zonal mark, man to man mark or front mark
- Try to intercept the ball and always be looking to break down the attacks

CF

- Close down and put pressure on the ball. Stop transfers of ball once it has gone wide
- Front mark 16 yard hits as soon as possible, making the ball go wide
- Marking and stopping the forward running central defender / sweeper

RF/LF

- Close down and put pressure on the player in possession
- Stand in the passing lines to the midfield (on their side)
- Stop and mark the forward running wide defenders
- Come back to support and mark if the RD/LD pushes higher up the pitch



6. Giving Half Time Team Talks

6.1. Guidelines for Team Analysis

- Stay focused when giving your team **analysis**.
- Try to get to the real issues and how to communicate them to the players.
- Remember don't waffle

“ Before you talk always ask yourself this question:

Is what you're about to say really going to make a difference? If not, don't say it! **”**

6.2. Guidelines for Game Analysis

6.2.1. Your team:

Focus primarily on your own team. Is your team sticking to the game plan?

- If not - why not?
- If yes - is the game plan effective?

If the game plan is not effective what needs to be changed?

Are your players individually keeping to the agreed game plan?

- If not - why not?
- If yes - are the agreements effective?

If the agreements are not effective what needs to be changed? Before you tell players ask, you might be surprised by the ideas they come up with!

6.2.2. The opposition

How are they trying to attack and how is it being defended by your side?

Which players did you notice playing positively or negatively?

Try to Focus on the weaknesses of the opposition, as they can be benefited from during the

match. You can learn from the opposition's strengths after the match.

6.3. Defending areas to look at:

- Are your players communicating?
- Do the players react or anticipate? (closing down the opposition asap)
- Do all players tackle back?
- Are the non-ball side players providing cover for the ball-side defenders?
- Are all the players in possession of the ball put under pressure?
- Are we allowing the opposition to get in behind us?
- Are the players respecting the umpires?

6.4. Attacking areas to look at:

- Are we taking the free hits quickly?
- Are we attacking at speed and maintaining the speed?
- What service are we giving our forwards?
- Are we creating good goal scoring opportunities?
- Are we using the whole of the pitch or are we only playing in a certain area of the pitch?
- Is every player getting stuck in and being involved?

6.5. Short Corners

6.5.1. Defence

- Are we coping defensively?
- What are the opposition trying to do - what's their game plan?
- Can we sort out how to stop this?

6.5.2. Attack

- Are our corners running well?
- Is the ball coming out fast enough?
- Is the ball being stopped well?
- Is the ball being struck well?
- Are we rebounding?
- How do the opposition run out?
- Which option should be used?