






# Module 3. Core Principles of Scouting



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# 1. Essential Positions and Roles of Football Players

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As covered in previous modules, a scout specializes in identifying and assessing talent that can boost a team's success. To excel in this role, a scout must master various aspects of football, including technical and tactical knowledge, as well as sharp analytical and observational skills. This module will delve into the technical and tactical aspects of football, focusing on both the game itself and individual player roles.

We'll also explore game scenarios, roles, and responsibilities for each position within a football team. Modern football teams employ various systems, but in this section, we'll focus on player positions and roles in the 1-4-3-3 formation - a classic and popular system used by many renowned teams throughout football history. This formation typically consists of 1 goalkeeper, 4 defenders, 3 midfielders (1 defensive and 2 central), and 3 forwards (2 wingers and 1 center forward).

## **The Goalkeeper (1)**

The 1992 rule change regarding back-passes to goalkeepers revolutionized their role, leading to significant shifts in playing styles and perceptions of the game, particularly for goalkeepers. These changes impacted all aspects of the game (technique, tactics, physical conditioning, etc.) and have elevated the goalkeeper to a key player in recent years, now viewed as an integral part of the team.

Today's goalkeeper must actively participate in organizing play, both in defensive and attack. Let's examine their most crucial roles.

## Defensive Role

The goalkeeper's primary role is to prevent goals. They serve as the team's last line of defense. Their main objective is to keep the ball out of the net, employing various techniques such as stopping direct shots, deflecting the ball, and making crucial saves. This is their most

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One key role is mastering footwork. Playing the ball with their feet has become

# Attacking Role

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increasingly crucial for goalkeepers. This involves a wide range of technical skills, primarily focused on ball control and distribution. Effective ball control is vital,

POSITION	DEFENSIVE ROLE	ATTACKING ROLE
<b>GOALKEEPER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prevent goals by means of all goalkeeper-specific techniques.</li><li>• Make sound decisions in one-on-one situations and when dealing with aerial balls.</li><li>• Maintain and adjust defensive</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Excel in ball control, passing, and kicking to effectively distribute the ball from the back.</li><li>• Provide a constant passing option for teammates struggling to start play from the back.</li><li>• Perform goal kicks with clear attacking purpose (short passes, long</li></ul>

	<p>organization, leveraging their unique vantage point from the back.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide teammates on necessary defensive adjustments.</li> <li>• Stay alert to cut off long passes played behind the defensive line.</li> </ul>	<p>clearances, wide distributions, etc.)</p>

Source: Original work

### Full-backs (2/3)

In the 1-4-3-3 formation, full-backs are the players who make up the four-player defensive line, positioned on either side of the center-

backs. They play crucial roles in both defense and attack. Here are the main responsibilities of full-backs in this tactical system:

## Defensive Role

Full-backs must excel at defensive coverage and stay alert to the runs of opposing wingers and forwards, providing cover and support to the center-backs when needed. Their primary task is to mark and neutralize opposing wingers, preventing them from receiving the ball

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## Attacking Role

When attacking, full-backs should join when their team has the ball, offering a passing option on the flanks and stretching the field. They need to stay wide to create both width and depth. In this system, it's crucial for full-backs to create diagonal passing lanes to teammates,

**Table 2. The Role of Full-backs**

POSITION	DEFENSIVE ROLE	ATTACKING ROLE
<p><b>FULL-BACKS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide defensive cover.</li> <li>● Mark and neutralize opposing wingers.</li> <li>● Intercept passes and crosses.</li> <li>● Close defensive line with center-backs to block central channels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide width when playing out from the back.</li> <li>● Offer a passing option on the flank.</li> <li>● Make forward runs when space opens up, before opponents can shift.</li> <li>● Overlap with team's</li> </ul>

			wingers.

Source: Original work

## The Center-backs (4/5)

In a football team, center-backs occupy the central line of a defensive line. They play a crucial role in the team's defensive structure. Their responsibilities are fundamental for maintaining defensive solidity and contributing to the overall game. We will now describe their main roles:

# Defensive Role

One of their main defensive roles is to mark and control the opposing team's forwards, especially in one-on-one situations inside the penalty area.

They must apply pressure on the ball carrier and nearby players, marking them to

# Attacking Role


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These days, center-backs are increasingly expected to initiate play from the back, either with precise passes to midfielders and full-backs or by carrying the ball forward when safe.

Effective ball distribution is crucial for center-backs. They

## CENTER-BACKS

- Contain and shut down opposing forwards.
- Apply pressure on the ball carrier in and around the box to prevent easy shots.
- Read the game and intercept passes to opponents near or inside
- Build play from the back with short, medium, or long passes as the situation demands.
- Create diagonal passing options when starting attacks.
- Step up with the ball if no teammates are open and the situation allows.



the penalty  
area.

- Judge  
when to play  
out from the  
back and when  
to clear the ball.

- Excel in  
aerial play, with  
strong jumping  
ability and  
physical  
presence.

- Provide  
cover for full-  
backs and  
defensive  
midfielders.

- Maintain  
defensive shape

- Contribute to  
attacking set-  
pieces with strong  
headers.

	when full-backs push forward.	

Source: Original work

## Midfielders

The 1-4-3-3 formation features 3 players in the middle of the field: 1 defensive midfielder and 2 central midfielders (number 8 and 10).

### Defensive Midfielders

Defensive midfielders position themselves just ahead of the defensive line. They control the middle of the field, typically orchestrating the team's attacking play and maintaining defensive balance. Here are their key responsibilities in both attack and defense.

# Defensive Role

A primary defensive role for defensive midfielders in this system is the individual marking of opponents, trying to win the ball high up the field by applying pressure on

# Attacking Role

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the ball carrier and nearby players.

A defensive midfielder must be an excellent playmaker, distributing the ball accurately with short passes to maintain possession or long passes to change the game's tempo or launch quick attacks. Defensive midfielders should position themselves with appropriate spacing and

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**Table 4. The Role of Defensive Midfielders**

POSITION	DEFENSIVE ROLE	ATTACKING ROLE
<b>DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Occupy and defend spaces to hinder opponent progression.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Distribute play quickly and accurately.</li><li>• Make swift decisions on whether to play</li></ul>



- Attempt to win the ball before the opponent advances.

- If unable to win the ball, apply pressure to block and prevent progression through the center.

- Intercept short passes in the central area. Cover the spaces left by advancing interior players.


- Keep an eye on forward opponents who

short passes or switch to medium or long passes to relieve pressure.

- Continuously create passing options and support teammates when under pressure from opponents.

- Play quick passes through the middle to central midfielders and forwards, or spread the play wide to involve wingers or fullbacks.

- Control the game's rhythm, speeding up or



aren't directly involved in the play.

- Provide aggressive coverage during defensive transitions and stop dangerous opponent advances.

- Maintain team balance, keeping the formation compact when the match intensity causes the team to stretch and lines to

slowing down as necessary.

	separate excessively.	

Source: Original work

## Central Midfielders

These players operate in the middle of the field, flanking the defensive midfielder to form a triangle. Their key responsibilities are as follows:

# Defensive Role

In the initial defensive phase, central midfielders employ man-marking to disrupt the opponent's build-up play. They aim to win the ball in advanced positions, often marking the opposing central midfielder, and apply targeted pressure on the ball carrier and nearby players.

1 of 2

Central midfielders exploit

# Attacking Role

2 of 2

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spaces between lines, creating width and depth as the game situation demands. They maintain constant movement to provide and create numerous passing options.

They offer direct support to

## CENTRAL MIDFIELDERS

- Mark opponents in the initial defensive phase to disrupt central build-up play.
- Mark the ball carrier to regain possession or impede progression.
- Maintain balanced spacing with other lines to
- Exploit emerging spaces on the field.
- Stay mobile to offer central passing options.
- Provide face-to-face support for defensive midfielders, enabling central passes.
- Execute quick and precise passes.



eliminate central gaps for opponents.

- Look for opportunities to take medium-range shots.
- Make unexpected runs into the box, either dribbling or sprinting, to break down the opponent's defensive structure.

Source: Original work

## **Forwards**

The 1-4-3-3 formation employs three forwards: two wingers and one center forward.

## **Wingers (7/11)**

In a 1-4-3-3 formation, wingers operate on the flanks, contributing to both attack and defense.

## Defensive Role

Wingers should position themselves between the opponent's center-back and full-back to disrupt their defensive structure and complicate passing options.

They must press aggressively high up the field to win possession and trigger quick

1 of 2


## Attacking Role

Wingers should initially position themselves wide to maximize the team's width. They make strategic inside runs to add depth and create space for overlapping full-backs, adapting to the flow of the game.

When build-up play is

**Table 6. The Role of Wingers**

POSITION	DEFENSIVE ROLE	ATTACKING ROLE
<b>WINGERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Apply pressure during build-up play to win the ball or force errors.</li> <li>● Disrupt the defensive line by positioning between full-back and center-back.</li> <li>● Prevent easy ball progression down the flanks.</li> <li>● Keep an eye on opposing full-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create width by staying wide.</li> <li>● Make supporting runs and penetrating runs on the outside.</li> <li>● Move inside to facilitate combination play.</li> <li>● Use diagonal runs to break down defensive organization.</li> </ul>



backs and central  
midfielders.

- Support their  
own full-back in  
defensive  
situations.

- Move infield  
to create space for  
advancing full-  
backs.

- Take on  
defenders with  
dribbling skills.

- Deliver  
accurate and  
powerful crosses.

- Maintain  
constant  
movement to  
create spaces in  
and around the  
box.

- Look for  
opportunities to  
shoot from  
medium range.



- Get into scoring positions when the opposite winger is attacking.

Source: Original work

## The center forward (number 9)

In a 1-4-3-3 formation, the center forward is crucial to the team's attack while also having defensive duties. The following are some of their key responsibilities.

# Defensive Role

During the defensive phase, forwards lead the press against the opposing defense and goalkeeper, aiming to win back possession in advanced areas. Their intense pressing can force errors in the opponent's build-up play.

One defensive task of

1 of 2

This formation employs a

# Attacking Role

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single center forward. This player consistently provides depth, stretching the opposing defensive line, and occupying the center-backs.

When facing intense pressure that hinders comfortable ball

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## CENTER FORWARDS

- Apply pressure during build-up play to win the ball or force errors.
- Split the defensive block by positioning between the center-backs.
- Mark advanced opposing players to prevent them from receiving the ball.
- Provide depth to the attack.
- Offer short passing options to support playing out from the back.
- Make runs behind the defense.
- Make runs towards the wings.



- Be available during transitions.
- Finish scoring chances.
- Hold up play with back to goal to maintain possession.
- Link up with teammates and provide goal assists.

Source: Original work

We will now explore a series of aspects that a scout should ideally be familiar with. These are macro-level aspects, meaning they are general in nature. We'll first discuss aspects related to football itself and its dynamics. Following that, we'll analyze general aspects related to the football player. The goal is to understand a range of

factors that will help us grasp the game's context and observe players more critically.

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## 2. Macro-level football aspects that a scout should master

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As covered in module 1, scouts should have a broad understanding of football history.

They need to be familiar with basic game systems and fundamental principles of football tactics. Understanding these principles is crucial for comprehending the game and evaluating players' movements and individual actions.

This knowledge enables scouts to use appropriate terminology and produce efficient, clear, and concise player reports.

Let's now delve into the basic fundamentals a scout should master.

### **Game Formations**

A game formation is the set of rules governing individual, group, and collective actions of a football team, aimed at maximizing performance. Game formations are flexible rather than rigid, and

should serve the team's needs. Football features numerous game formations that teams use to organize their tactics and strategy on the field. Scouts should be familiar with the main characteristics of these formations.

**We will now outline the most common game formations:** —

- **1-4-4-2.** This formation employs four defenders, four midfielders, and two forwards. It offers a balanced approach, providing both defensive solidity and attacking options. This formation enhances space distribution and effort allocation, balancing defensive and attacking actions. It promotes control of the game in midfield.
- **1-4-3-3.** This formation features four defenders, three midfielders, and three forwards. It's favored by teams aiming to dominate possession and create attacking opportunities. This formation is ideal for developing a strong attack phase. It adheres to offensive tactical principles and facilitates quick defense-to-attack transitions.
- **1-4-2-3-1.** This formation consists of four defenders, two defensive midfielders, three attacking midfielders, and one center forward. It's well-suited for developing an effective attack phase. The formation respects attacking tactical principles. It creates ample space on the attacking front, allowing for insertions and penetrations by full-backs, central midfielders, wingers, and forwards. Additionally, it supports quick defense-to-attack transitions, focusing on threatening the opposing goal.

## Defensive principles in football —

- **Marking** involves all actions players take to control opponents possessing the ball and prevent effective use if they receive it.
- We can distinguish the following types of marking:
  - Zone marking occurs when a player is responsible for marking any opponent entering their designated field area.
  - In man-to-man marking, each defender is assigned to mark a specific opposing player, aiming to prevent them from receiving the ball.
  - Mixed marking combines zone and man-to-man techniques, where a defender follows an attacker who enters their zone, even if it means leaving that area until the play ends.
- **Covering** involves helping a teammate who is at risk of being beaten by an opponent.
- **Exchanging** happens when an overrun player quickly occupies the space left by a teammate who came to their defensive aid.
- **Defensive awareness** refers to visually tracking opposing players who could potentially become involved in play while our team is not in possession of the ball.
- **Pressing** is an action taken immediately after losing possession, applying pressure on one or more opponents to limit their options and disrupt their play.
- **Anticipation** in football involves a defender acting preemptively to prevent an attacker from receiving a pass.
- **Interceptions** are actions where a defending player prevents a pass from reaching its intended target by cutting off or deflecting its path. For

an action to be considered an interception, the player must make contact with the ball.

- **Defensive delay** involves deliberate, slow actions during play to gain a tactical advantage. These actions often aim to allow teammates to return to defensive positions or roles.
- **Falling back** refers to the retreating movements made by players after losing possession during an attack to reorganize their defense. This can be done individually or collectively.

### Attacking principles in football —

- **Running** is a player's ability to evade an opponent's attention when their team gains possession.
- **Attacking** involves the entire team's effort to advance towards the opponent's goal once in possession or after regaining the ball. This requires team effort. There are different types of attacks:
  - Combined attack. It relies on short passes and quick ball circulation, emphasizing passes that spread the play wide.
  - Direct attack. In a direct attack, players aim to advance quickly towards the opposing goal using a mix of short and long passes, prioritizing forward movement. Forward-thinking passes dominate the play.
  - Counterattacks occur when the team quickly transitions from defense to attacking after winning the ball, aiming to catch the opponent off guard.

- Positional attack focus on maintaining possession and creating space, aiming to control the game and disorganize the defense through patient, intelligent use of space.
- **Support** involves players moving towards or away from the ball carrier to provide passing options and maintain possession.
- **Game Tempo** refers to the speed at which a team plays, affecting both attacking and defensive actions.
- **Open Spaces** are areas of the field left unoccupied when players move, creating opportunities for the attacking team.
- **Game Progression** involves actions that move the ball vertically towards the opposing goal.
- **Switching Play** refers to passes that change the ball's trajectory across the field to exploit open spaces or catch the opponent player out of position.
- **Attacking awareness** involves visually tracking opposing players who might become involved in play while our team is in possession of the ball.

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## 3. Macro-level player aspects that a scout should master

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A comprehensive view of a football player encompasses not just technical and physical skills, but also tactical and psychological aspects. These elements are crucial for the overall performance of a professional footballer. Let's explore these aspects in greater detail.

### Physical Aspects —

Scouts must consider players' ages, potential for growth, and position-specific physical requirements.

Basic physical attributes include strength, endurance, speed, agility, and flexibility; while scouts don't need expert knowledge, they should be able to identify these during gameplay. These physical demands vary by position. Some positions, like full-backs and wingers, require more speed, while others, such as midfielders, prioritize endurance.

Regardless of position, speed in all its forms (movement, perception, execution, reaction) is the most critical physical attribute.

When evaluating youth players, it's important to consider their potential for physical improvement, which is generally greater in younger players.

While observing a player's performance provides insight into their physical abilities, comparing them to teammates and opponents can also be helpful. If a player stands out as the fastest, strongest, or best jumper among teammates and opponents, it's a good indicator that they're above average in these areas for their age group.

Comparing a young player's height and physique to their peers can provide clues about their maturation stage, indicating whether they're physically developing ahead of or behind the typical timeline for their age group.

### **Technical Aspects** —

Scouts don't need to perform technical skills themselves, but they must recognize and evaluate them accurately. Technical skills are key indicators of a player's ability and potential.

Scouts should assess a player's ball control in various situations, including under pressure, in the air, and while moving. They should also evaluate the player's ability to beat opponents in one-on-one situations. These evaluations should be tailored to the player's position. For example, central players need excellent ball control and passing, while wide players and forwards require strong dribbling skills.

Regardless of age or position, mastering ball control and passing is essential for reaching a high level in modern football. These foundational skills are crucial; without them, a player cannot achieve top-level performance. Scouts should assess passing effectiveness and precision for both short and long passes, as well as the ability to make game-changing passes that break defensive lines.

Another key aspect to evaluate is the player's shooting ability, considering both power and accuracy. Ideally, shooting proficiency with both feet should be assessed.

Crossing ability, particularly the accuracy of crosses from wide positions, is another important skill to evaluate.

Aerial ability in both attack and defense should be assessed. One-on-one skills in both attacking and defensive situations are crucial aspects for scouts to monitor.

Defensive techniques, including marking, anticipation, tackling, interceptions, and clearances, should also be evaluated.

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### **Tactical Aspects** —

Strong tactical understanding allows players to perform more efficiently, maximizing their efforts and minimizing errors.

Let's explore some key tactical aspects that scouts should look for and players should master.

Players must be able to control the game's tempo, speeding up or slowing down play as needed to maintain an advantage. Understanding how and when to occupy different areas of the field is another crucial skill.

Maintaining good positioning at all times is essential. Defensively, players should know how to disrupt passing lanes, press opponents, and maintain team shape.

In attack, players must find and exploit open spaces while supporting teammates.

Game intelligence – the ability to quickly assess and react to on-field situations – is a vital attribute.

### **Psychological Aspects** —

A player's emotional stability, both in good times and bad, is a key indicator of their competitive level.

Scouts also evaluate aspects like teamwork, positive attitude, constructive communication, work ethic, and ability to handle pressure.

A player's behavior during challenging periods, such as injuries or lack of playing time, can be assessed over the course of a season.

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# Self-Assessment

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1. What game formation is analyzed in the text to describe player positions and roles in a football team?

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- 1-3-5-2
- 1-4-4-2
- 1-4-2-3-1
- 1-4-3-3
- 1-3-4-3

SUBMIT

1. What skills and qualities should a football goalkeeper have?

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- Just being able to stop shots and having good physical fitness.
- Organize the defense, distribute the ball accurately, maintain a medium-high technical level, and have specific physical and mental qualities.
- Design game strategies and train field players.
- Serve as the team captain and make all tactical decisions.
- Handle tasks and coordinate club events.

SUBMIT

1. What is the role of full-backs during the attacking phase in a football team?

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- Stay in defense and avoid joining the attack.
- Offer an option for passes along the flanks and provide width to the field.
- Play in midfield to control ball possession.
- Organize the defense and mark opposing forwards.
- Execute long throws and throw-ins.

SUBMIT

1. What should scouts know about game formations in football?

- 
- The main characteristics of the game formations used by teams.
  - Just the rules of football.
  - The training schedules of the teams.
  - Journalists' opinions about the teams.
  - Statistics related to the teams' physical preparation.

SUBMIT

1. Man-to-man marking refers to marking a specific player within a designated area on the field.

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- True.



False.

SUBMIT

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