



# STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE 1-4-2-3-1 GAME SYSTEM.

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**I**t is a football game system that requires players to always be prepared to change tactical ideas and where the offensive phase is given particular attention, the manager must be flexible because he must adapt to each game situation, taking into account physical characteristics, techniques and tactics of their own players.



In recent seasons many managers have been playing using the game system with four forwards, two wingers and two centres. The 1-4-2-3-1 system was one of the most utilized systems among the great teams of Europe. But we have seen how, for example in Italy, many teams have changed the game system to use the 1-3-5-2. But the 1-4-4-1 is not dead yet.

**What does all this mean?**  
**That possibly the golden age of the 1-4-2-3-1 is coming to an end ?**

Football is constantly changing and never stops. In recent seasons the 1-4-2-3-1 system always has its charm, but some things are going to change.

Football is a sport where you will always try to find the best solution possible and where you will find the best answer to that solution, especially for the weaker teams.

The teams that are going to come out with three midfielders and one attacking midfielder, have four references on offence. This situation can be seen in another light: if the team plays vertically, where the main objective is to directly reach the forwards, the system with four forwards is going to give the team four supporting players in front on offence.

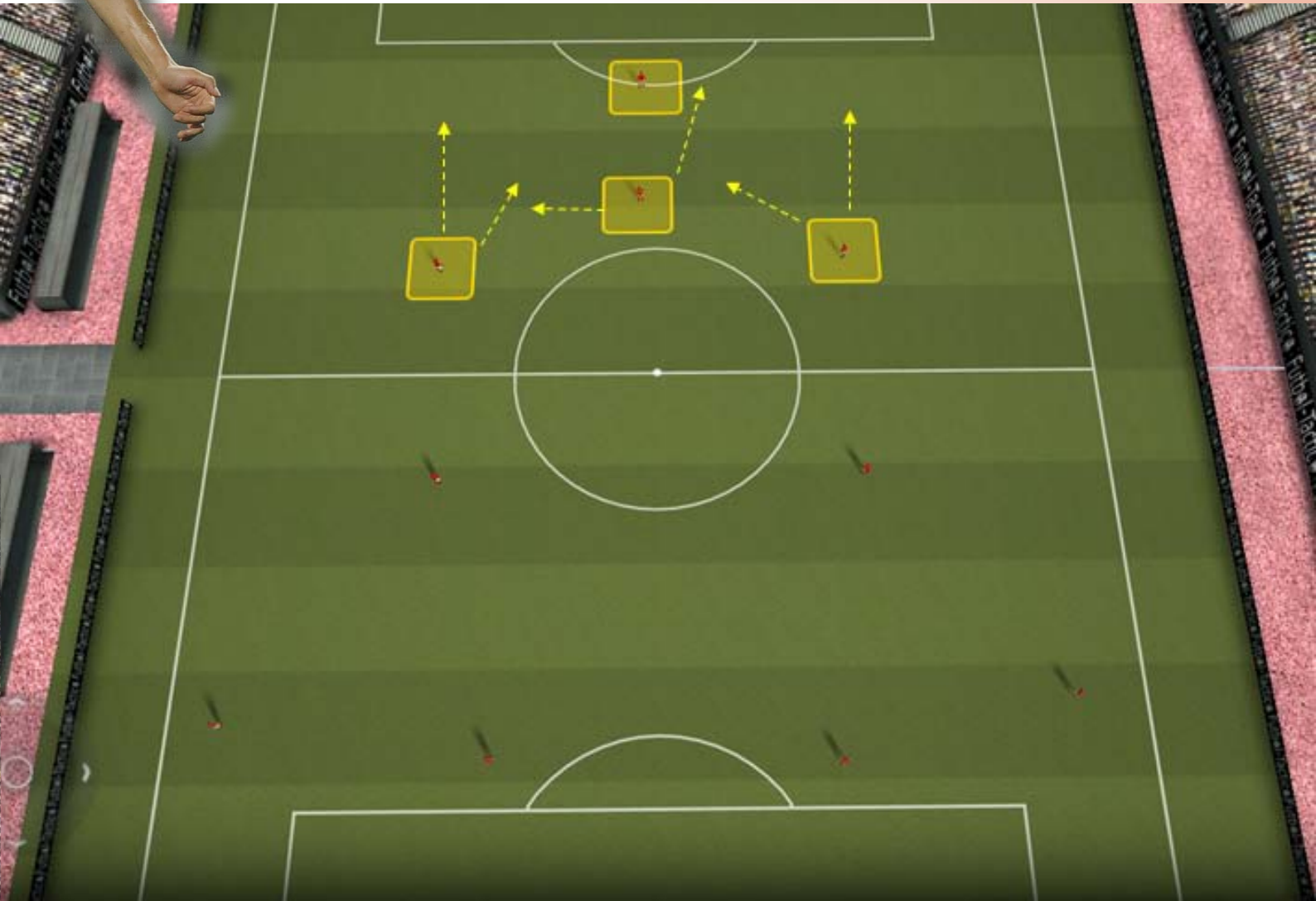


The 1-4-2-3-1 system allows us to thus gather four offensive players at the same time. Understanding football this was is more complete because it gives us the possibility of playing with a centre forward, two offensive wingers and an attacking midfielder. And the players who are behind the forward can be players with different characteristics.



The wingers can be just wingers, skilled on crossing to be able to get far passed the defensive line or they can be forward laterals, more skilled at entering the penalty area to look for a shot.

So the attacking midfielder can be the classic number 10, skilled as a passer or he can be a more skilled player for finding scoring opportunities.



And if the manager understands the system with four forwards as a system to have ball control, now the system with four forwards will have the same options to execute this type of football. Actually, a 1-4-2-3-1 can use two defenders, two wingbacks on the touchline and four players as offensive reference to maintain control of the ball in the offensive half of the pitch.

The four in front and the defensive backs that move forward are going to form many triangles in the other half of the pitch to achieve good offensive movement.





If on the other hand the other team is going to have the wingbacks playing wide, to cover the touchlines, the 1-4-2-3-1 can always look for the wingbacks to exploit a 1 vs. 1, if the other team is not going to duplicate the marking of those players; if not, the 1-4-2-3-1 can always look for depth with the centres that are going to play a dangerous two versus two in the middle:



This way, with four players in front on attack, the team has two players that can play with 1 vs. 1 along the touchline: if the defenders are going to restrict themselves to covering the centre of the pitch to help the centre backs, the 1-4-2-3-1 system can look for those players on the side:





## WEAKNESSES OF THE 1-4-2-3-1 SYSTEM

The first weakness of this system is that it is hard for the wingers on the side to fall back. They are almost always forward wingers and are not ready for the withdraw. Thus, the 1-4-2-3-1 has many spaces to cover between the offensive wingers and the defensive wingers.

Teams that play with a 1-4-5-1 are able to close those lateral spaces and can cover both the centre, with the blocks of 2 centre defenders + 3 centre midfielders as wingers, where the defensive wingers in the midfield can help the defenders on the touchline.

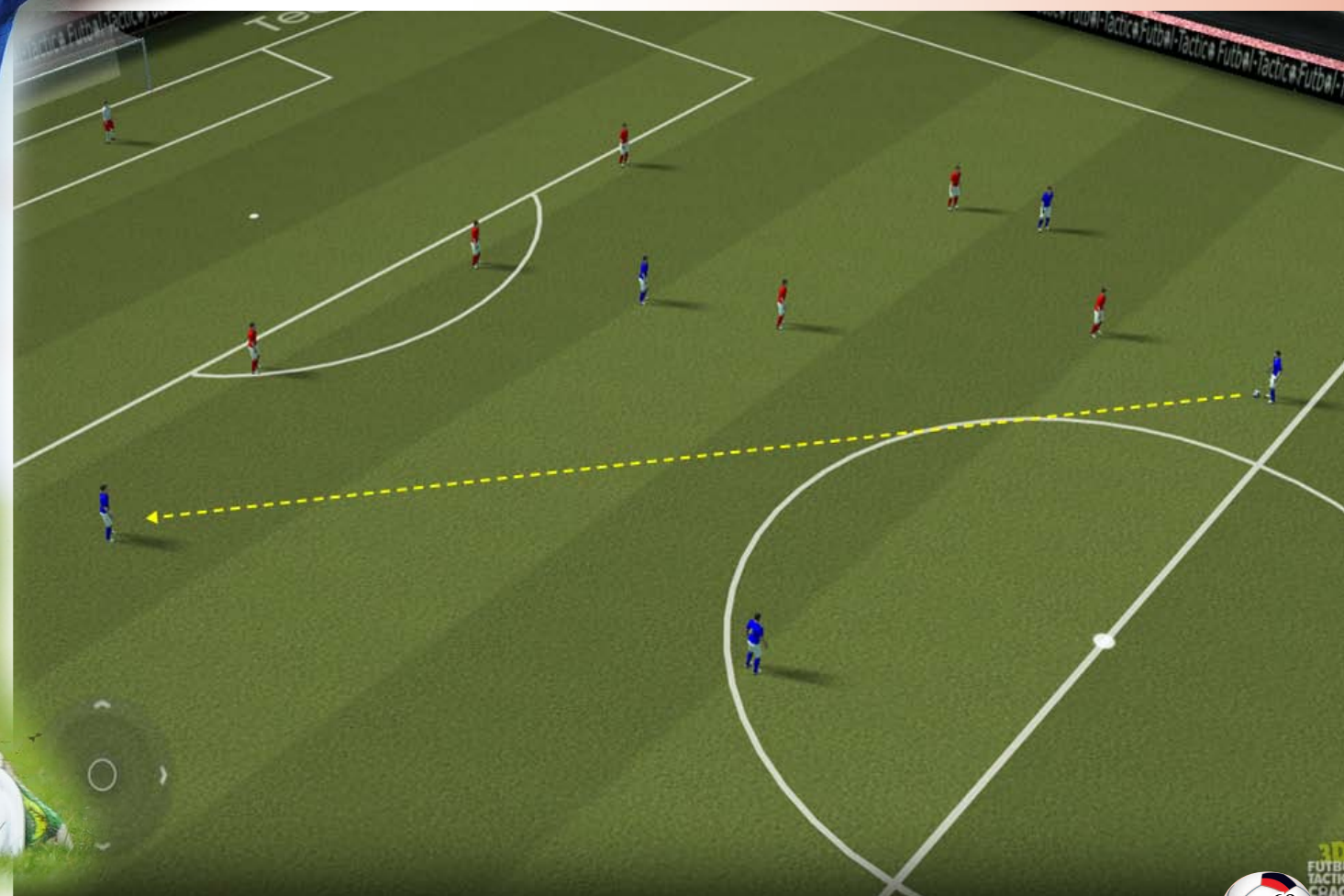
This is true and interpreted something like a well carried out 1-4-4-2. Since it is always difficult playing against a system where you play with 2 lines and 4 very closed lines, this way the team can create a block of 2 centre defenders + 2 centre midfielders to close the passing lines toward the number 10 of the 1-4-2-3-1 system and thus they can force this team to keep at least three defenders that are not going to play and participate in the offensive phase.

Otherwise, the risk of having a two against two in the attack phase would be greater.

Another problem with the 1-4-2-3-1 is that, really due to the offensive propensity of the four attackers on the offensive front the team can find itself in a situation where they have to defend with only 6 players on the defensive phase.



This was one of the problems that Leonardo's A.C. Milan had a few seasons back that allowed their opponents to find opportunities in the weak defensive side by varying the front of the attack.

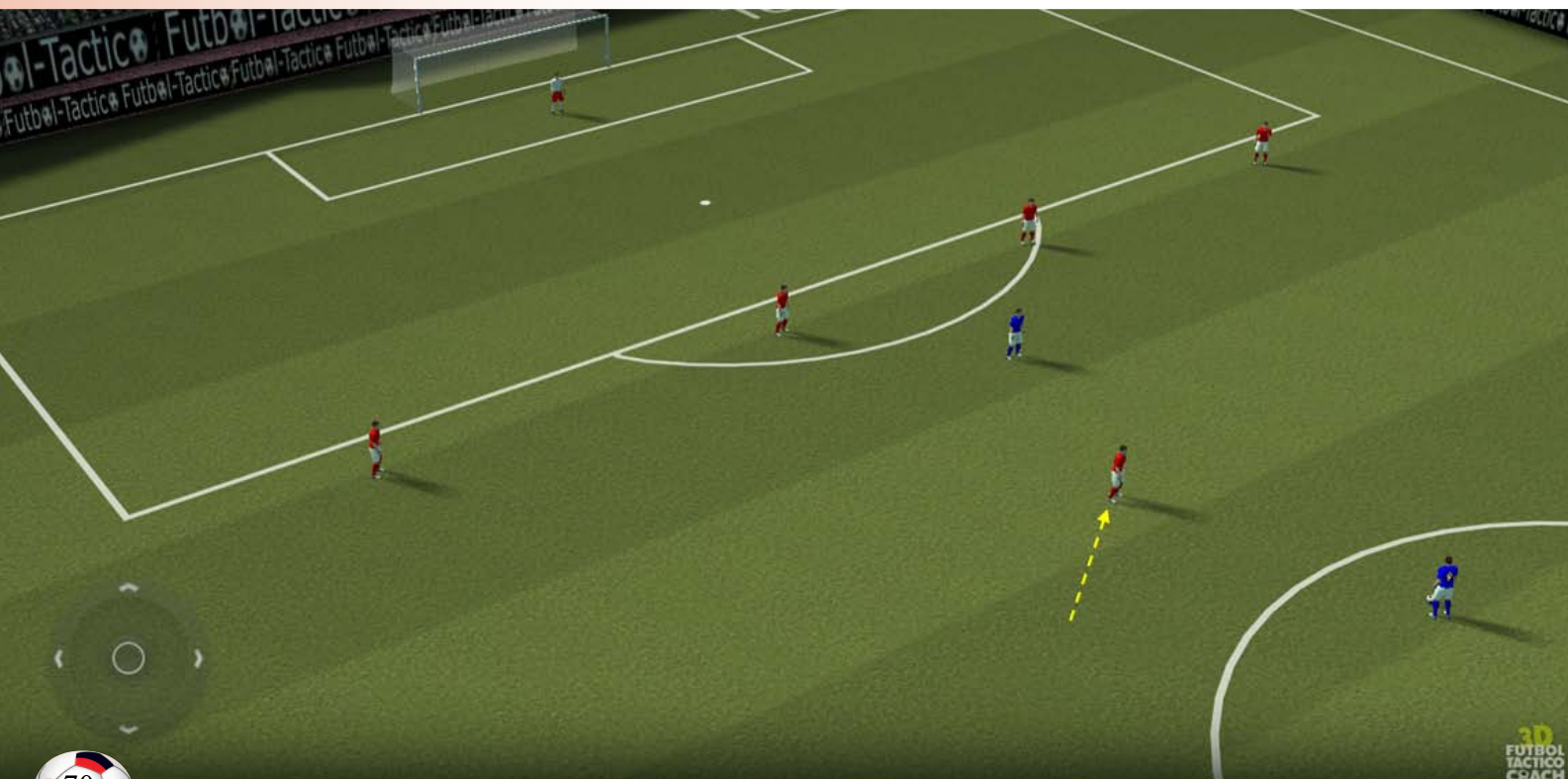




A systems with four forwards, against a team that plays with four defenders, has the drawback of allowing a centre forward against two defenders, with a clear disadvantage in the zone or centre lane. This will happen especially if the midfielders on the other team are skilled at attacking or referencing the offensive midfielder in the 1-4-2-3-1:



In this case the team that defends can drop their pressing line to be able to cover the offensive midfielder of the 1-4-2-3-1 and have the wingers in position to cover the offensive wingers while the centre are going to play a two versus one against the opposing centre forward.



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