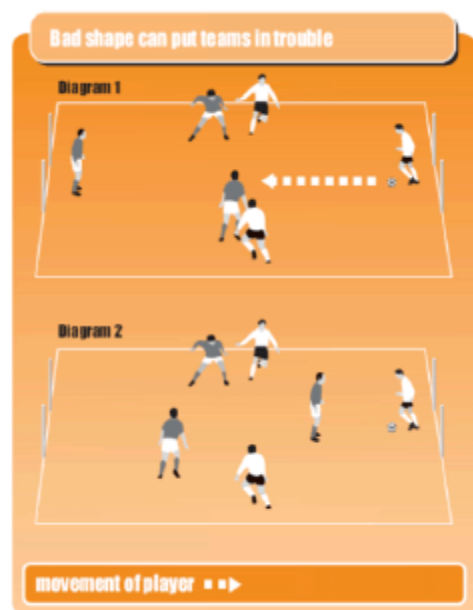


Shape up your team to defend all over the pitch

Shapes are important in soccer. They happen all over the pitch, but you must make sure your players know how they work. Playing 3v3 matches shows you how to use triangles, says David Clarke.

3v3 helps your players keep shape

Playing 3v3 brings up situations that often occur in 7-a-side or 11-a-side. It illustrates how poor shape has an effect on the other players, making their own job much harder. The triangular shape in midfield is very much something coaches can use to great effect all over the pitch. But you must use it properly. Have a look at the diagrams and I'll show you what I mean:



In the top diagram the white team have the ball and have to bring it out from their own goal. The grey team has adopted the shape of a triangle, however, the middle player has dropped back deep to protect his goal, in effect becoming a sweeper behind the other two grey team players. This means that the white player bringing the ball out is unmarked and can either directly attack straight down the middle or create 2v1 situations with his team mates. The two grey wingers have a problem. Do they mark their player or go towards the man with the ball.

A simple wall pass opens the path to goal

By moving away from the player they are marking they leave themselves open to a simple wall pass and leave the goal at their mercy. If they stay, this creates a 1v1 directly in front of their own goal. Or the white player can elect to move towards one of his teammates creating a 2v1.

Problem for the man on the ball

In the bottom diagram the grey team is still in a triangle but the middle player has moved up to the man on the ball. This gives the man on the ball an immediate problem as he tries to bring the ball out. He is under pressure to pass

the ball because he dare not dribble past him. Passing is difficult so the grey team are more likely to win the ball. The grey player can also force the player to pass one way or another by moving slightly to one side, forcing a pass and allowing a grey team mate to intercept.

The difference in these two situations highlights not only how bad shape can make effective team play more difficult, but also how important communication is. If you don't explain how it works young players might conclude that the situation in the first diagram is reasonable. They can play like this for quite a while believing they are following your coaching, and then blame one another for any mistakes that lead to goals.

Key coaching tip: Teach your players by showing them both these situations.