



Loudoun Soccer – Systems of Play (9v9)

The following information is designed to assist coaches in Loudoun Soccer’s Rec program in organizing their team for game day. These are recommendations, and coaches may organize their teams as they see fit as long as they adhere to the club’s policies regarding playing time, goalkeeper rotation, etc.

Systems of Play

This is a team’s formation, or the positional arrangement of players on the field. In soccer parlance, the system of play is identified by the number of players within each line on the field (goalkeeper, defender, midfield, forward). For example: a common 11v11 lineup is a 1-4-4-2 (1 goalkeeper, 4 backs, 4 midfielders, 2 strikers). A common 9v9 lineup is a 1-3-4-1.

US Soccer Player Number System and Player Positions/Responsibilities:

US Soccer has recently implemented a player number system to better identify the positions and roles of the players on the field, using numbers 1-11. Note that these numbers relate to positions and primary responsibilities; certain numbers may be repeated or absent, depending on the formation, the role of players on the field, and the format of the game (11v1, 9v9, or 7v7).

Positional #	Common Name(s)	Role/Responsibilities
1	Goalkeeper, Keeper	Use hands within penalty area to save shots Accurate distribution from both feet and hands Communicates and leads team defense
2 and 3	Right Back and Left Back (respectively)	Good 1v1 defender Speed to cover ground, up and down the field Provide width in attack
4 and 5	Left Center Back and Right Center Back (respectively)	Organizer and leader Win balls in the air and tackling Connect with and support midfielders in attack
6	Holding Center Mid, Defensive Center Mid, Screening Center Mid	High work rate Strong in air and tackler – ball-winner Use vision and decision-making skills to distribute
8	Center Midfielder	Endless work rate – speed and endurance Good leadership and organization Creative playmaker Good in air, with long range finishing ability
7 and 11	Right and Left Wing (respectively), outside midfielder	Very fit and High Work Rate Ability to make long runs and recover Strong 1 vs 1 attacking ability Flank service, and long range shooting
10	Attacking Center Mid, Playmaker	Finishing/goal scoring Clinical passing in final third to create scoring opportunities for teammates (vision, creativity) Strong 1 vs 1 attacking skills in final third
9	Forward, Striker	Ability to play with back to the goal Creativity and technical finishing abilities Strong and tough



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Common 9v9 formations:

	<p>1-3-4-1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most balanced formation• Natural diamond and triangle shapes throughout the formation
	<p>1-3-3-2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note two #9s (strikers) to play together as a pair – will create 2v3 and 2v2 moments in attack• Strong, dynamic central player (#8) needed to cover additional space in middle
	<p>1-3-2-3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Front Three (11, 9, and 7) provide strong attack and high pressure in defense• Remaining players must stay connected to Front Three, both in attack and defense (and vice versa).



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Your team's system of play is usually identified in its shape when defending; team shape will be compact, and players should move together in a unit (like a pack of wolves, hunting the ball together).

That shape will change when teams are in possession of the ball, as it should expand to create additional width and depth to move the ball through and around the defending team. Player runs and combination play will alter the shape further, with the goal of producing a numbers-up advantage in the attack.

Formation Teaching Tips:

When introducing team shape, avoid creating artificial restrictions (e.g. defenders cannot cross the midfield line, etc.), as the positional lines should be connected within the flow of the game (backs should support the midfield, who in turn should support the striker).

The modern game requires all players to attack and defend – not just specific positions.

Instead, teach players to recognize the natural relationships between players (e.g. how a #2 and a #7 work together on the flanks, or a #6 and #8 work together in the middle) and shapes that occur between players within a system of play (triangles and diamonds), and to help create these shapes with their movement off the ball.

The lines of the formation should be “connected” to each other, adjusting each time the ball moves up, down or to the side of the field.