

Key Roles of a Midfielder
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Establishing a style of play for your team or club is something that has become a rarity at the youth soccer level. Many teams at the highest level set up to counter against their opponents for individual games rather than building a pattern for the long term. Of course it is obvious that you have to change the system or style for certain games but there may be two key elements to help you establish control of a game in the most critical third of the field.

It will become difficult for you to establish any control of the game if you have a strong back line but a weak midfield as the pressure will continuously be on you. The same accounts for having a powerful strike force but with limited midfield support, scoring goals will become a problem.

A team's formation will have some effect on the performance, but establishing a formation and a style will depend on the skills of the players that a coach has at his or her disposal. One key skill a midfielder needs to possess is good mobility and endurance. Whether the midfielders are playing in the center or on one of the flanks, they will be more involved and cover more ground than any other player on the field. The average midfield player at some of the highest professional leagues around the world covers in excess of 7 miles during a 90 minute match. This distance has not altered much since 2002, however the speed at which they travel over this distance has almost doubled. Possessing a high level of speed is another key quality that a midfielder should possess - this even applies for a player who likes to sit in a more defensive role. With the speed of the game increasing, midfielders need to have good mental and physical speed. You need the wide players to have good physical speed, not just for getting forward into 1 v1 situations against opposing fullbacks but also to track back in for cover and defensive support.

Midfield players need to possess the ability to make split second decisions within tight high combative areas in the middle of the park. They need to be comfortable on the ball and as well as recognize when to slow the game down and when attack with conviction. With a wide range of passing and other tactical decisions needed, a center midfielder needs to be able to read the game well. Too many young players observe the movement and actions taken by their own team mates when the best play makers observe the opposition to see what they are giving so an attack can be started. Not only do they have an influential part in a team's attack, their defensive responsibilities can help teams win games by protecting the back four and allowing the fullbacks to push on in to the attack. This Holding Midfielder may still be seen as a relatively new role within the game for some but is often one of the first players selected by a coach/manager when selecting their starting lineup. Such players need to have good discipline and anticipation for breaking down the oppositions attacks, but their ability to tackle and keep the units connected are skills a holding midfield player must possess to fill this role.

To help players become efficient for playing in midfield you need to set up realistic environments during the training sessions. It is sometimes difficult for players to try and emulate the speed of the game at training, but you must demand this from your players so you can help them keep possession and control the tempo of the game. You also need them to build up a great work ethic for playing in midfield as this is the catalyst of the team.

Most of these technical and tactical skills can be used in economical practice sessions. This will help you work with the a players on their first touch, range of passing, mobility, endurance, speed of play and also improve their field awareness. When you are setting up to work with midfield play you can see which players suit these roles and can fill the responsibilities within your team so you can establish a formation that will suit their abilities. If the respective players can not fit the formation you have selected then you may have to either revamp the style you want to play or find different players within your squad that can do the job. For example, if you select to play in a 4-4-2 and require the wide players to push on to support or go beyond the strikers, if these players lack mobility, speed, and endurance, you may have to consider changing the style that you play. With so much work required from your midfield the way you set up to play and the players you select will have a large bearing on how much possession and field position your team enjoys during the game.