

# Midfield Rotation: Coordinated Movement Patterns



- Can the triangle formed by the 3 midfield players be off-set?

The red lines in the diagram show an ideal shape for the rotating midfield 3. So, for example, when playing out to the right, can the triangle the players form be off-set to the right and vice-versa when playing out to the left?

- Can the 3 midfield players show discipline and focus in achieving this challenge?

By off-setting the triangle as shown, **the midfielders create more space to provide a support angle as they rotate**. The aim, of course, is for them to lose their markers and win themselves a “pocket of space” to receive a diagonal forward pass (e.g. from the centre back No. 6 in the diagram).

**As noted, it is vital the 3 midfield players maintain an “open body position” as they rotate so they can always see their teammate with the ball. As they do so, they must also try and maintain an effective distance from the ball and their teammates** (see positioning of No.’s 6, 2 and 10 in the diagram).

- Can the midfielders keep creating clear triangles relative to the ball, looking to receive a pass in a “pocket of space”?

To achieve success with this, it is important the rotating midfielders (e.g. No. 8 in the diagram) **retain their shape and spin out at the correct distance. On occasions where the pass is NOT “on”, it is vital that the rotating midfielder spin away, opening the space for the next midfielder to arrive.**

When a player receives a pass in space, they should look to turn and play forward. If, however, their run is tracked by an opponent, can they “bounce” the ball (first time pass) to the full back (e.g. No. 2), or play a diagonal forward pass to the winger who should be positioned further up the pitch?

The strength of **this rotational approach is that it also provides defensive “security”** in the central area in front of the box (“zone 14” as it’s sometimes called). This can be seen in the diagram above, from the way the No.4 rotates his position to arrive centrally in front of the 2 centre backs with an “open” body shape. This helps provide protection in this vital and vulnerable zone, in the event possession is lost to opponents e.g. through a misplaced pass. If this happens, the 2 centre backs will also want to “tuck in” quickly. This will ensure defensive compactness with the full backs also dropping back to provide further cover and balance.

# The Transition from the Build Up Phase to the Consolidation Phase



This diagram shows the basic coordinated movements of the midfield.

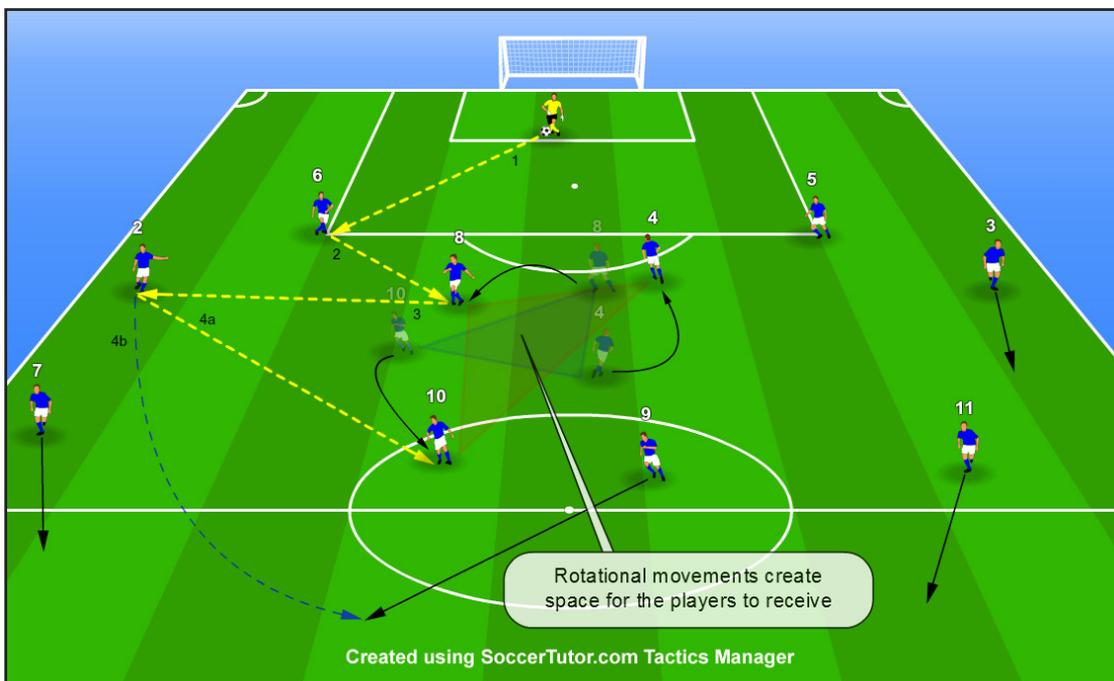
**This coordinated movement functions like a rotating triangle.** This is how I describe it to my players to help them understand and see the bigger picture. The diagram also shows a few of the basic passing options available to the centre back (No.6 in the diagram) as he “opens up” to receive from the keeper. Notice the triangles created by the rotation of the midfield 3. The No.6 can play out wide to the right back (No.2) or into the path of the rotating No.8 (as shown in the diagram) or, if possible, up to the No.10.

**The trigger for the midfield rotation is when the keeper looks up ready to play the ball.** If the No.8 or No.4’s run is NOT tracked by opponents, then our keeper also has the option of passing into these players. For this reason, once again, it’s vital that our midfield players “arc their runs” across so they are positioned “side-on” to receive with a good view of the rest of the pitch. They can then turn and advance with the ball or play a first-time pass (“bounce pass” into a supporting wide player) e.g. from No.6 to No.8 to No. 2 or No.7 as shown in the diagram.

- Meanwhile, can the keeper try to provide a good support angle behind the ball for a back pass?
- When opponents press intensely and the keeper receives a back-pass, can he look to spread the play wide with a driven or lofted pass? (This will be further explored in this section)

# Passing Options of Rotating Midfield 3

## Consolidation Phase: Midfielders and Wide Players Combine



These two diagrams show the basic rotational movements of the midfield 3 and subsequent passing options. The starting positions are represented by the transparent players. When these rotational movements create space for the players to receive, chances are there will be pressure from opponents closing them down. As we will see, it is therefore important to coach your players to use "bounce" passes (1 touch) or quickly use 2 touches - control and pass.

The diagrams show examples of a midfielder (No. 8 in diagram) passing first time to No.2 / No.7. These wide supporting players can then look to play diagonal passes for the forward runs of the rotating No.10 or, alternatively, lofted passes or driven ground passes through a channel and into the path of the No.9 who makes a diagonal run, as shown.



This diagram shows another option. A centre back drops back to the 18 yard line looking to receive. If no opponent closes him down, the keeper can look to play into him while the other players make supporting movements. However, if the opposition striker presses the centre back, this opens up a space and opportunity to play out.

- **Can the midfield 3 rotate and can the keeper play into the No.4 as he drops into the space created?**
- **Can the No.4 arrive with his body half-turned to receive the pass?**
- **If an opponent presses the No.4, can the full back (e.g. No.3) look to make a well timed supporting run in front of his marker? If so, can the No.4 now play a first time pass to him?**

The No.3 can now either run forward with the ball if there is space or, otherwise, look to “ping a pass” into a forward “running the channel” (e.g. No. 11 in the diagram). Failing this, **the No.4, if highly pressed, can simply “set” the ball back to the keeper who should position himself so he is available to receive the back pass.**

- Can the keeper now look for his back-line to quickly “reload” in terms of their shape and the team try another coordinated movement together?
- When the keeper is pressed by an on-rushing opponent, can he look to strike a long diagonal lofted pass into No.7 or No. 11? This option can be effective when done with precision. Indeed, **the “set” ball is easier to strike long, especially for younger players.**

Also, as the opponent team will likely be pushed up pressing hard for a “turnover”, one precise long ball can eliminate a number of opponents and trigger a quick and dangerous counter attack down the flank. Take note, that in situations like this, **it is vital you coach your keeper to clearly target the wingers.** This is a much safer option than the keeper simply kicking it up the middle of the pitch, where the opposition are likely to win the ball, which could leave your team very exposed in central areas.

These are just some of the many variations that are possible, allowing your team to be flexible and creative in exploring ways to play out from the keeper. We will look at more examples shortly, extending from the build-up to the consolidation phase of play. Firstly however, I want to suggest a few key exercises you can use with your players to introduce them to the basic shape and movement patterns involved. These exercises are easy to set up and easy for players to understand. Given a bit of practice with these, your players will start to see the shape and rotations clearly. This will give them the confidence to go out and explore them against opponents in competitive games.

## PROGRESSION

# Position Specific Pass & Move Combinations



### Practice Organisation

We divide half a full sized pitch into 2 equal sections and mark out 5 cones in each half in the positions shown. We have 14 outfield players in this practice. There are also 2 full sized goals and 2 goalkeepers.

Both goalkeepers start the sequence at the same time with a pass to the centre back position (CB). The other cones represent the positions of a central midfielder (CM), a full back (FB), an attacking midfielder/forward (AM/F) and a winger (W).

The passing sequence is as shown in the diagram (1-5) and the players move to the next cone, following their pass. When the winger (W) receives a pass, he shoots at goal and then runs round to join the group on the other side. This is a continuous practice, working in an anti-clockwise direction.

The players should use a maximum of 2 touches ("control & pass") but you can adapt this depending on player ability. The players are positioned behind the cones and should check away from the cone (as shown) to receive on the move.

This practice benefits all the players as they get to explore the shape and movement needed from all the key positions on the pitch. This will help enhance their understanding and ability to visualise the pattern of play.

### Coaching Points

1. Can you make well timed movements to create space (check away) and receive the pass?
2. Can you signal where you want the pass using clear communication?
3. Can you adopt a good half-turned body position to ensure you can see the full field of play?
4. Can you receive the ball showing good control and then deliver precise and weighted passes using good technique to comply with the 2 touch condition?



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