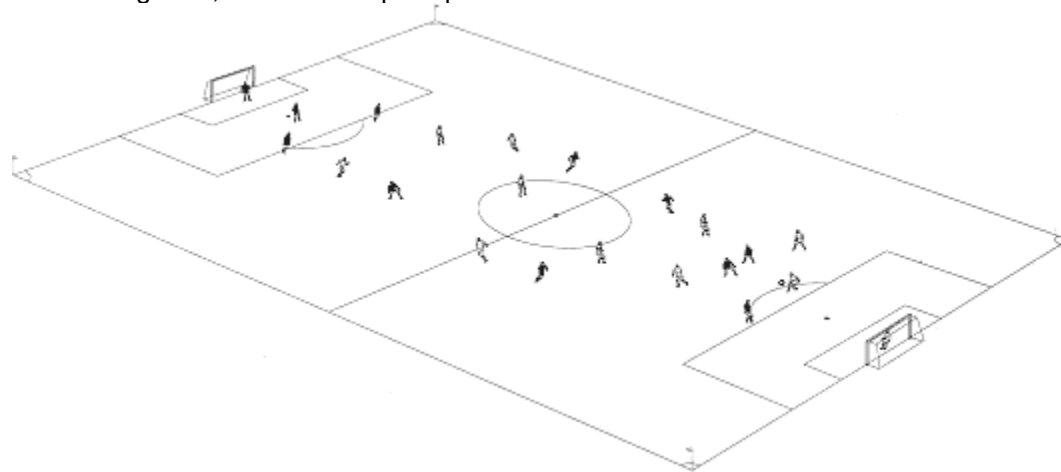




## Team Shape

It is important to keep in mind the principles of team play: in particular, the requirements of all round ATTACKING and DEFENSIVE SUPPORT, UTILIZING THE WIDTH and awareness of the advantage of exploiting and implementing the OFFSIDE rule. A TEAM SHAPE will be established irrespective of the numerical arrangement of players. In the illustration shown in Figure 1, the team shape is poor. Both teams have allowed themselves to become stretched

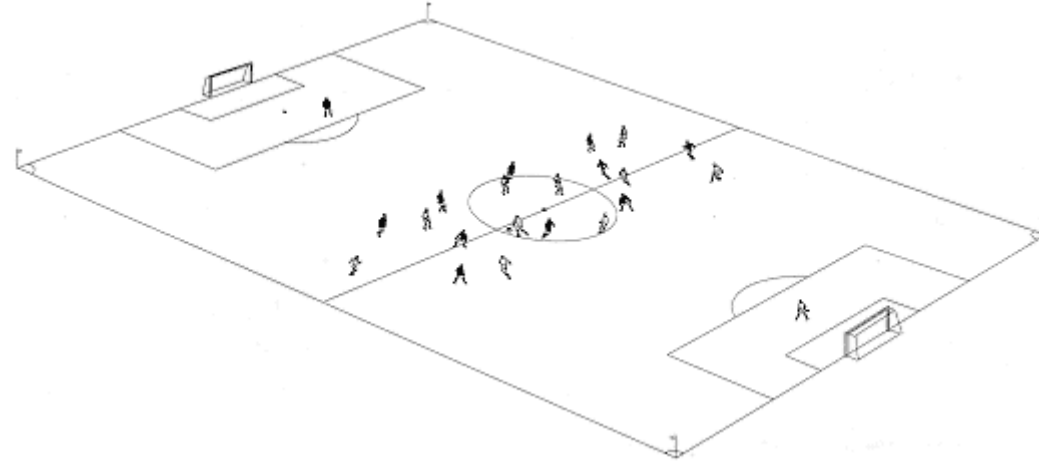


*Figure 1. Elongated shape due to both teams being stretched end to end.*

from end to end. Players are not in positions to support one another; no advantage has been taken of the offside rule; and the elongated "shape" give little opportunity for players to exploit the areas on the flanks. Only the "big boot" has any chance of success here and these tactics were abandoned by Coach Noah and his team, long ago!

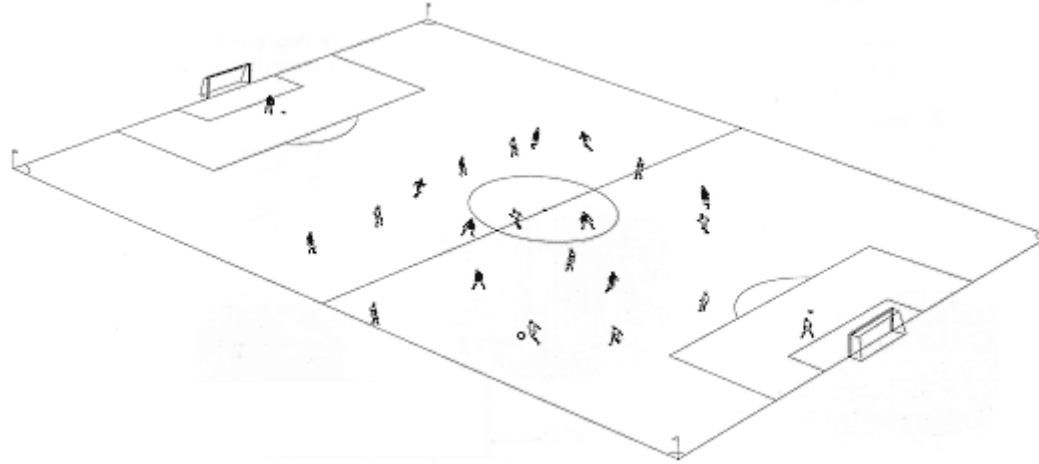
With both teams taking full advantage of the protection that the offside rule offers, an almost diametrically-opposite shape can result - as shown in Figure 2. (This situation occurred in many English soccer games in the '70s and '80s).

It makes for very tight, aggressive, often exciting play but with many whistles for offside. It is not recommended for young players still in the development phase. They would not have the experience to apply the tactics, nor would it help skill development, other than defensive ones. From an attacking perspective, the supporting positions are too tight. The "SHAPE" shown in Figure 3 is a good one. The team is supporting itself well from the back, through the midfield to the front players. The triangles between players are evident all over the field (see the 4th illustration in this section). The ability to use the width of the field through the positioning of players is apparent.



*Figure 2. Both teams have pushed up to take advantage of offside.*

The team in the illustration below is in the attacking mode. It is spread out more than if the team was defending, and therefore compacting, to withstand an assault on its goal. After successfully defending, and on regaining possession, a team should once more spread itself



*Figure 3. Spacing plus use of width equals good shape.*

outwards, backwards and forwards to give the space to play and the attacking shape. It's like breathing in and out. Expanding and contracting.

Naturally, as the ball moves, each player moves. But the basic team shape tends to be retained. However, from an attacking point of view, the team shape must only be the base from which players may spring forward.

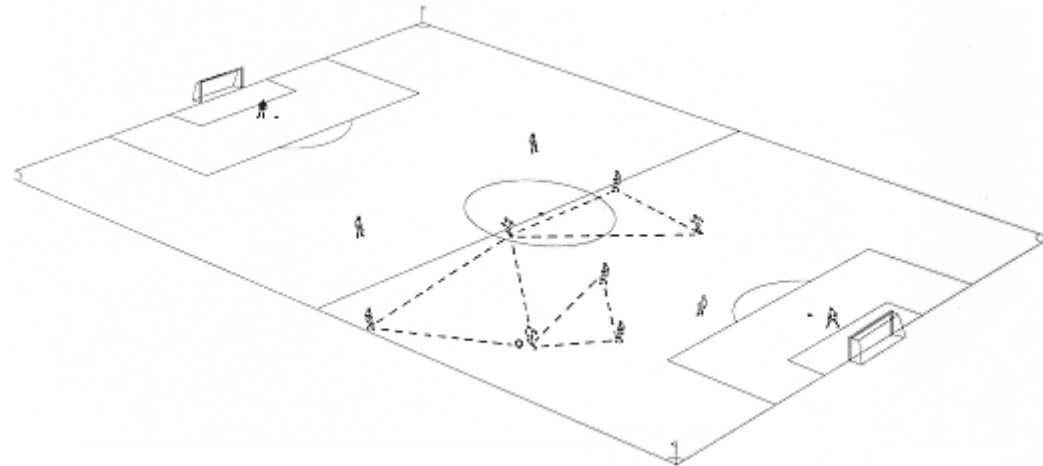
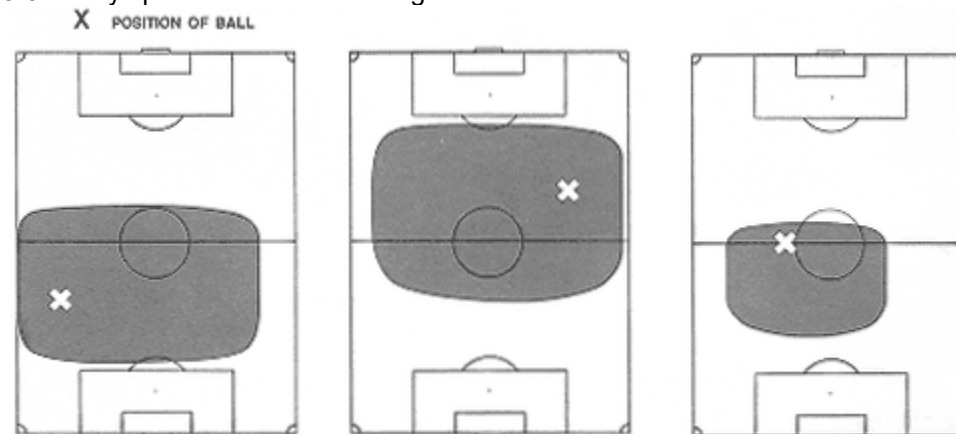


Figure 4. Illustration shows just 3 of many triangles produced by good support

Every encouragement should be given for players to take calculated risks, particularly in the final "third" of the field. When possession is lost, all players must react instantly and fall back into the defending team shape to compact and consolidate.

Team shape, as I continue to point out, is not a numbers game, and the deployment of players in the illustration is not meant to suggest a 4-2-4, 4-3-3 or any specific numerical arrangement.



Attacking shape in build-up from back. Attacking shape in attacking half. Defensive shape showing compaction goal-side of ball.

As the coach, I put together a system of play which will include basic field positions BEST FOR THOSE PLAYERS, and not employ a system successfully used in Argentina, Liverpool FC or whomever.  
What a team coach should borrow from the world's top teams is their insistence in having good defensive and attacking support, and their solid understanding of the principles of attack and defense that produce a well-balanced "TEAM SHAPE."

### **Key Considerations in Team Shape**

The "Team" unit should be considered like a giant ameba: a single cell moving up and down the field, changing its positions and, to a lesser extent, its shape to meet demands, but always retaining its "ONENESS."

The "shape" of the team and its actual position within the field of play will be determined by:

- a. The position of the ball.
- b. The deployment of players by the opposition.
- c. The mode of play (whether attacking or defending).

Good "shape" requires:

1. Good support - linking the back, the midfield and the front players.
2. The right distances and angles between players - giving triangles throughout the team.
3. A team understanding of how "offside" should be addressed collectively.
4. Utilization of width in the attacking mode, or consolidation and compaction in the defensive mode.