

NSCAA Convention 2006

-Report By Hardy Kalisher, Boulder County Force Soccer Club

Topic: 4-3-3 “Santa Clara University”

Presenter: Jerry Smith, Head Coach Santa Clara University Women’s Soccer



Jerry Smith is considered one of the top four college coaches in women’s soccer.

Jerry Smith Bio: http://santaclarabroncos.collegesports.com/sports/w-soccer/mtt/smith_jerry00.html

*This is an overview Santa Clara’s tactical coaching plan that has led to a National title, a consistent NCAA Top 5 ranking and victories over University of North Carolina, UCLA, Notre Dame and Portland. In great detail he explained how he instructs his team to play with and with out the ball and how he turns the perceived weaknesses of the 4-3-3 into its strength. Smith is an example of a coach who has taken the “guess work out” of the game for his players and he has given his team a **plan** to win games.–hk*

I noticed Smith never referred to his four defenders as “defenders”. They are simply “backs.” I think Smith does this intentionally because a player who thinks of herself as a “defender” is not likely to make forward runs or be attacking minded...and Santa Clara ATTACKS.

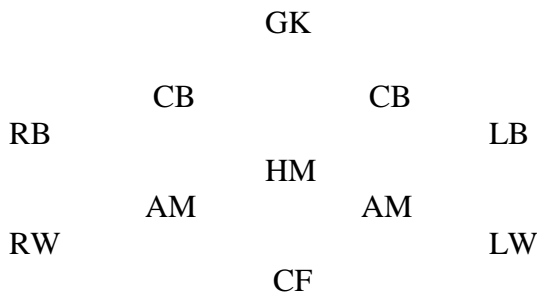
3 VERSIONS OF THE SANTA CLARA 4-3-3

Santa Clara Formation Shape:

*Note: With each version of the 4-3-3 Jerry Smith instructs his left AND right defenders to fully commit to forward runs. Smith’s video example was a left back making a run up the flank and crossing the ball into the six yard box where the **right back** finish the goal...against UNC!-hk*

Starting Shape:

“Contrary to what coaches may assume, this shape is actually better for us defensively” –JS:

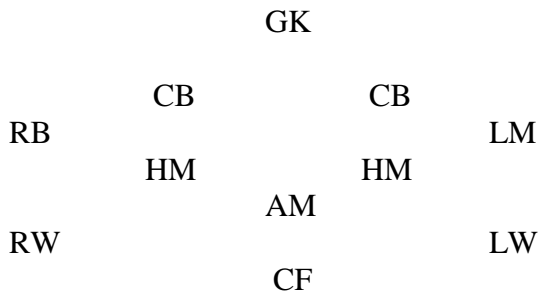


-How can this be a better defensive shape? It is because Santa Clara plays high pressure with the forwards and the two Attacking Midfielders (AM) provide cover and clog central passing lanes, making it very difficult for the opponent to build out of the back. Santa Clara’s first line of defense is its front 5 players! The CM (HM in diagram above) becomes a central ball winner and the back four steps to win the forced long balls. It works. I used a similar set up against the defending U17 National Champions last summer and found it to be very effective. Eventually one

of my AM's stripped the ball off a defender and scored the game winner. The key is having the two AM focus on "clogging the passing lanes to the opponents central midfielders." – hk

When looking to maintain possession:

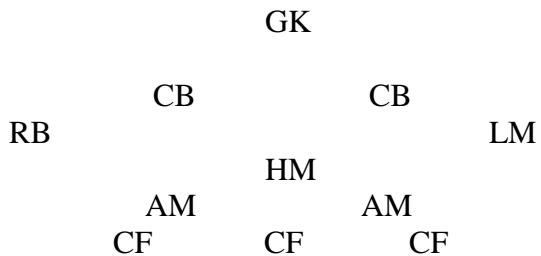
"The shift to the two Holding Midfielders (HM) makes it easier for the back four to link with the midfield and keep possession." –JS



When looking to play direct and in need of a goal:

"The forwards pinch in centrally"

The outside backs will continue to push up the flanks, maintaining wing play -hk



"Why formations are overrated...including the 4-3-3"

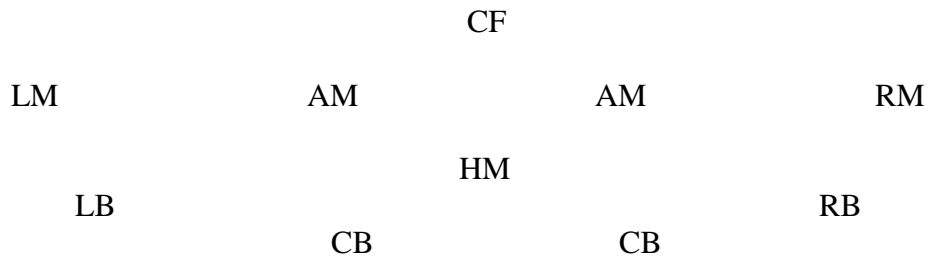
More important than the formation of a team are:

- 1) The player's technical ability, tactical knowledge, mentality and physical attributes
- 2) The application of the fundamental principles of play (principles of attack, principles of defense)
- 3) The successful execution of deadballs (corners, freekicks, etc.) on offense and defense
- 4) The ability of the goalkeeper
- 5) The Team Chemistry

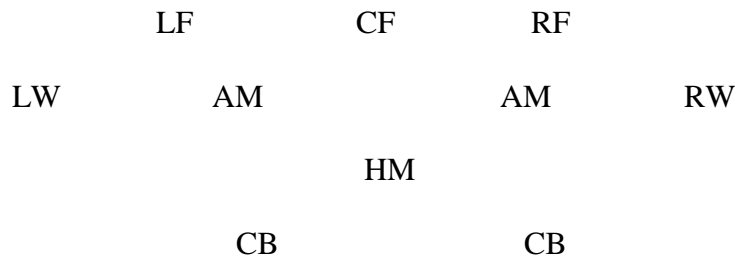
Why Santa Clara plays a 4-3-3

- 1) The goalkeeper is a field player (pass back to the goalkeeper)
- 2) The "payoff" of three forwards "pressing" the opponent
- 3) Four backs can deal with 2 or 3 forwards – there is no need to adjust to the opponent's forward scheme

- 4) Three central midfielders creates numbers up in the center of the midfield
- 5) Easily create hybrids of traditional positioning (4-4-2)
- 6) New “look” for opposing team to deal with can throw opponents off their game plan
- 7) Fits Santa Clara’s general tactical philosophy of: “Going around the opponent, on offense, and preventing the opponent from going around us, on defense.” -JS
- 8) Easy transition to “End of game tactics”:
 - a. If defending a lead, then shift to a 4-5-1 formation:



- a. If chasing a lead, then shift to a 2-5-3 formation:



STYLE OF PLAY

1) Team in possession of the ball:

SUMMARY-

- “Attack” with 7 players in the Attacking Third (i.e. 3 forwards, 2 Attacking Midfielders, 2 Outside Backs)
- “Possession” in the Middle and Defensive third
- Two types of “playmakers” on the field: Holding Midfielder and Outside Backs
 - The Holding Midfielder must be the total player.
 - Playmaking ability of the Holding Midfielder is more important than being a “Ball Winner” – It is great when the player possesses both attributes.
 - The Outside Back must be able to “read” the flow of the build up and anticipate when to step into attacking space and make plays
- Maintain WIDE support
- Encourage combination play in the flank channels:
 - Especially Overlaps and 3rd Man Running

- Unbalance the opponent's defense with penetrating runs by the Attacking Midfielders and Outside Backs
- "Vertical Place Changes" with all three lines (backs, midfield, forwards) during the flow of the game (i.e. a midfielder switches "position" with a forward)
- "Horizontal Place Changes" in the front line (i.e. a right wing forward switches "position" with a left wing forward)

KEY PARTS-

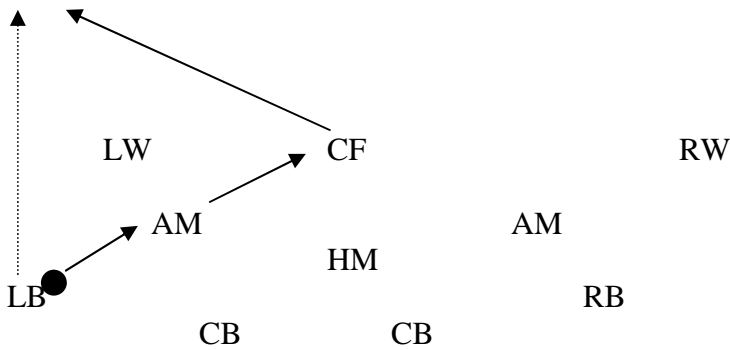
"The 4 Backs"

- The 4 backs (left, left center, right center, right) are instructed to have "Big Shape" in the back line across the width of the field:

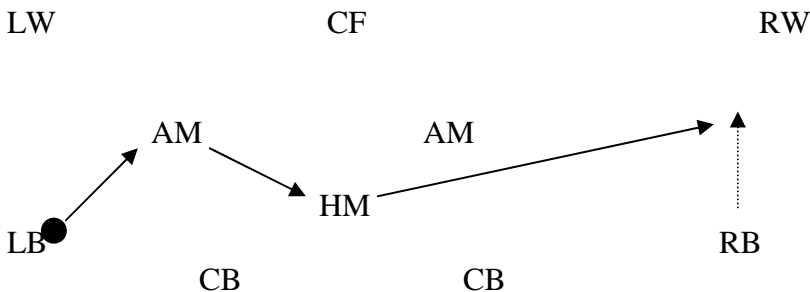


- The Outside Backs are instructed to "get forward" all the way to the opposite end line if necessary.
 - Methods of getting forward are: Stepping up into space, overlapping runs, give and go, 3rd Man Run.

Example of Outside Left Back making a 3rd Man Run:

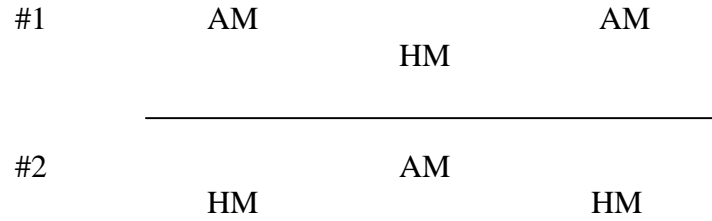


Example of Outside Right Back "Stepping up into Space":

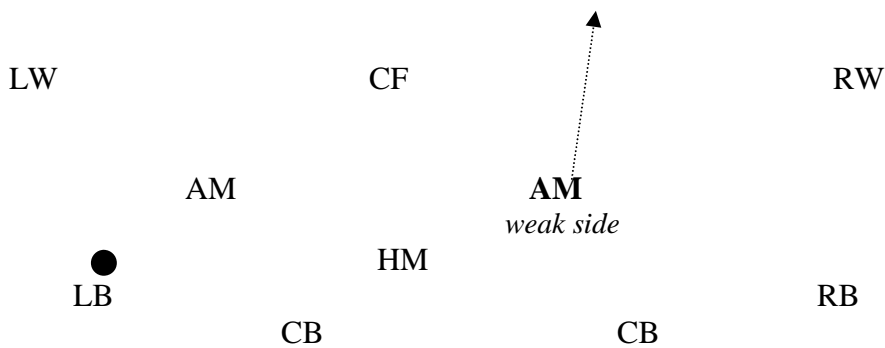


Midfielders in Attack

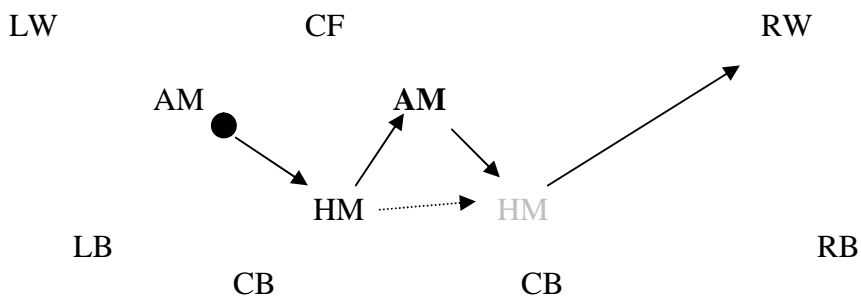
- 2 Types of midfielders: Attacking Midfielders (AM) and Holding Midfielders (HM)
- 2 Types of midfield formations:



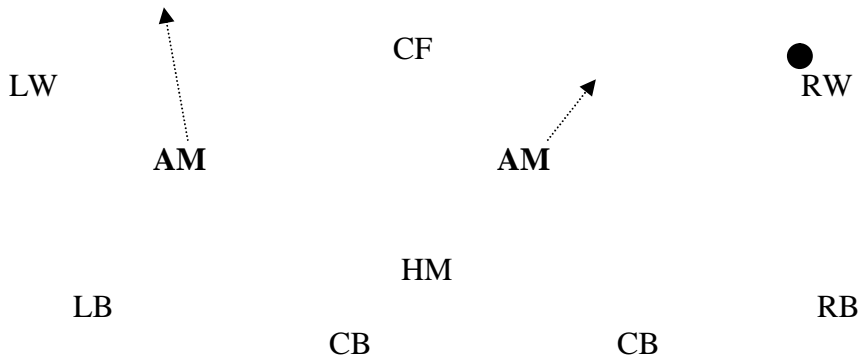
- The “Weak side” Attacking Midfielder makes penetrating “unbalancing runs” off the ball to unbalance the opponent’s defense.



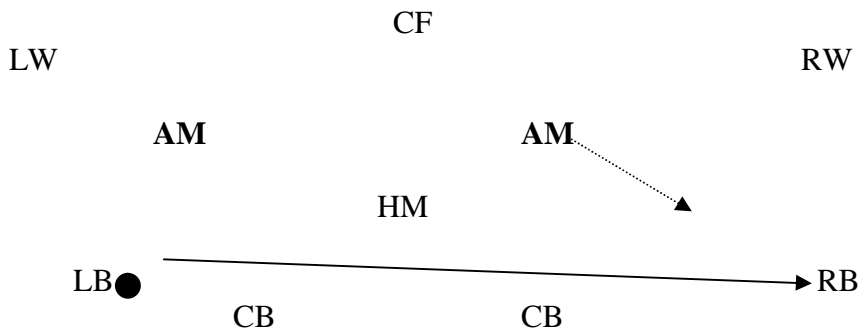
- Change the "point of attack"



- Attacking Midfielders join the attack



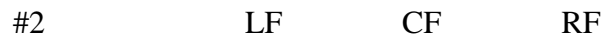
- “Weak side” Attacking Midfielders give the “short support” on quick switches



- The weak side Attacking Midfielder and/or weak side Outside Back exploits “Weak side” midfield space. It is not the responsibility of the weak side winger, who should be looking to make runs into the attacking third.

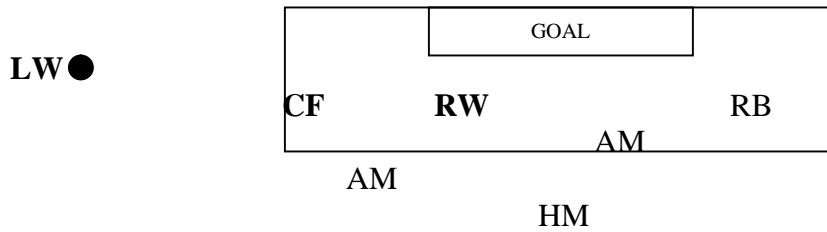
Forwards in Attack (“3 Forwards to Combine”)

- 2 Types of Forwards: Central Forwards (aka Targets) and Wingers (LW or RW)
- 2 Types of forward formations:



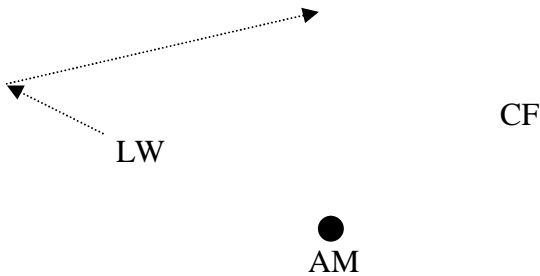
- Three Forwards create “width in attack”
- In attacking third the three Forwards work to “flood” the same side of the field to create a “numbers up” situation (while maintaining balance and shape).
- The weak side Winger is encouraged to “finish their run” lined up with the strong side post of the goal.

Example of 3 forwards “flooding” the left side (same side) of the field when the left has penetrated deep into the opponent’s corner. The RW is lined up with the strong side post of the goal.

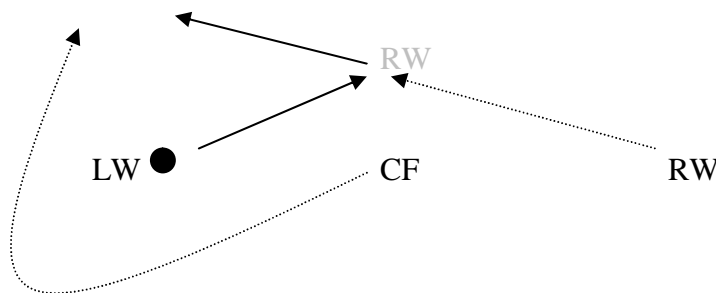


- Notice the position of the right outside back and the weakside attacking midfielder and the presence of 7 attacking players -hk.

- Wingers are encouraged to make “strong side then weak side” runs. This means first create width then run central -hk.



- Central Forward “overlaps” around Winger to set up space in the center of the attack and also to set up potential 3rd man running plays.



- Central Forward does NOT cut across winger. Smith didn’t address why cutting across the winger is a really poor tactical choice...here are some reasons:
 - It will not unbalance a well-organized defense.
 - The CF will clog the forward space of Winger.
 - The CF will draw another defender across the forward space.
 - Space is less likely to open in the middle with a cutting across run.
 - If the Winger plays the ball to the CF, then the CF will be facing away from the goal when the ball arrives and she will end up having to figure out how to turn and face the field of play in order to continue the attack. Or the attack will be slowed because the CF will now have to drop the ball back to go forward again. With an overlap the CF will be

facing towards the goal and can continue attacking forward on the dribble, with combination passing, crosses, or shots etc.

Summary of Attack: Santa Clara builds out of the back and uses possession in the defensive and middle third of the field to establish a rhythm of play. As the team moves into the attacking third it attacks in numbers (7) and looks to play around the opponents using the flanks, gaining a numbers advantage with attackers in the box. - hk

1) Team in with-out possession of the ball:

A key element in the Santa Clara attack is to create offense out of its defense. Yes, the first job of defense is to prevent goals, but it is clear that the Santa Clara defensive plan is to spring board many quick lethal attacks. - hk

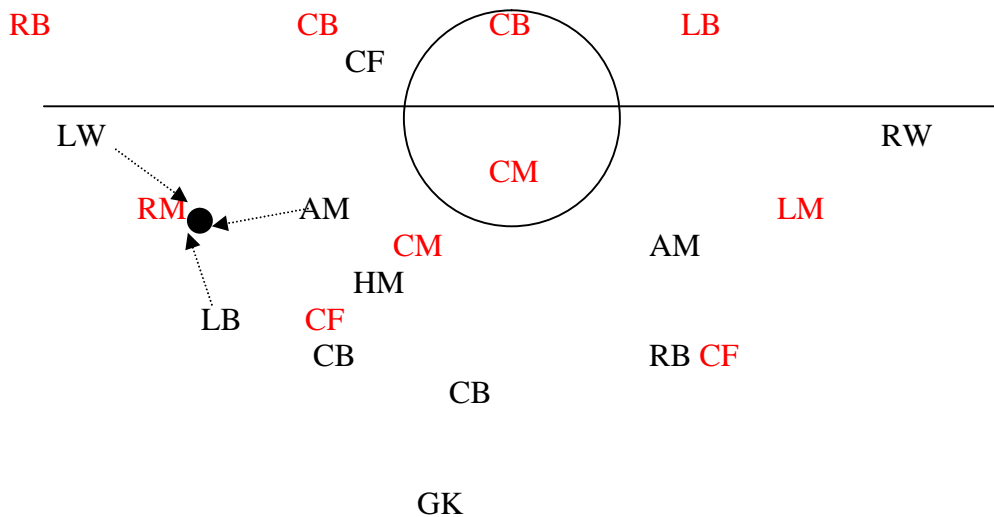
SUMMARY-

- The defensive plan follows the principle of defense
- “Defend” with 8 players + GK in own Defensive Third (i.e. 4 backs, 3 Midfielders, 1 Wing Forward)
- Double and Triple team the ball handler in the Flanks of the Middle Third of the field.
- Nearest Forward’s defensive responsibility is to defend and track back (AS FAR BACK AS NECESSARY, EVEN ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE DEFENSIVE END LINE!)
- First defender “shows inside” (forcing opponent inside) to the covering teammate, **ESPECIALLY IN THE DEFENSIVE THIRD.** *This concept is probably the most debated defensive tactic in modern coaching...Smith insists that the team defend by showing inside and reinforced his commitment to this idea with numerous video clips of Santa Clara “showing inside” in their own defensive third against UNC, Notre Dame etc. –hk*
 - The Santa Clara team defensive philosophy is “Don’t let teams go around us.” Santa Clara would rather defend the in-swinging cross than the out-swinging cross. When a player is able to get around a team the cross is usually an out-swinger that travels away from the keeper and defenders towards the incoming forwards. An in-swinger is just easier to defend.
 - *The defensive principle of compacting is especially important in the defensive third. By showing outside in the defensive third opponents can create width and space. By showing outside Santa Clara would be encouraging opponents to do exactly what they want to do...go around the outside. Showing outside also creates 1v1 situations on the flanks, which makes it easier for teams to cross the ball into the box (and send in that out swinging ball). Showing inside creates numbers up for the defense (1v2, 1v3) because of the covering defenders. In order for “showing inside” to work the team must be very well organized and disciplined in their defensive shape, pressure, cover, balance and depth. It is my opinion that most coaches have little faith in their own ability to organize a defense to play well enough to show inside and they therefore coach “show outside” and hope that the defenders can win the 1v1 dual and prevent the crosses into the box. – hk*
- Funneling at each line
 - The center forward and the winger funnel the opposing ball handler towards the (our) attacking midfielder
 - The two attacking midfielders funnel the opposing ball handler towards the (our) hold midfielder

- The outside defender and the holding midfielder funnel the opposing ball handler towards the (our) center back.
- The ball is won back by “interception”
 - Funneling will encourage long touches that the covering defender can intercept
 - High pressure will encourage poor technical application of passes and create interception opportunities
 - High pressure will force long balls for interception

This example illustrates all of the above:

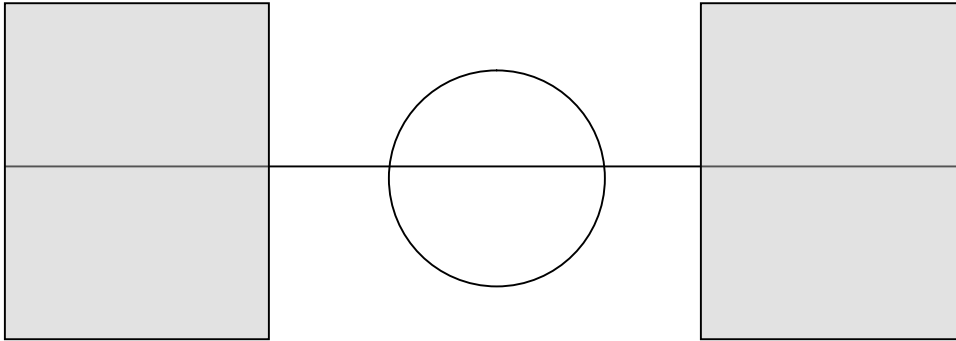
- 8 players + GK are defending
- The opposing ball handler (**RM**) is triple teamed on the flank of the middle third
- The near side Winger (**LW**) is tracking back
- The first defender (**LB**) is showing inside and preventing the player from going around the defense.
- The **LB** and **AM** are funneling the player towards the **HM** and **CB**
- The **HM** or **CBs** can intercept any long touch or passes
- The defense is compact, there is cover, balance and depth



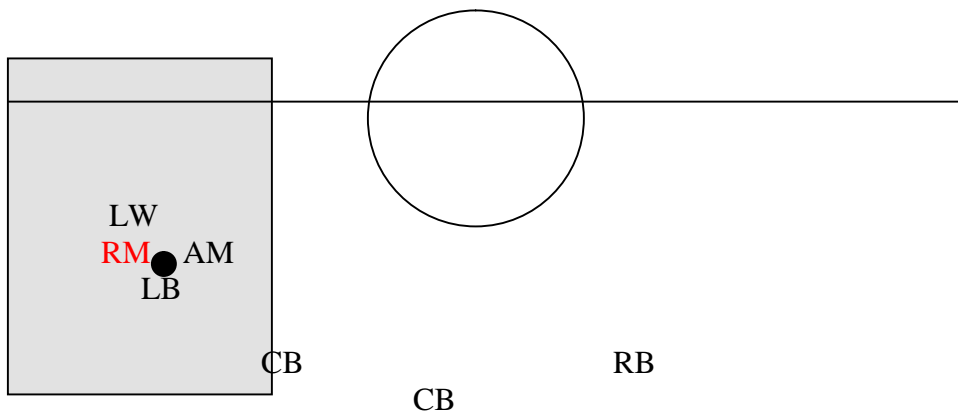
Notice the RB and weak side AM will cover the weak side “goal side of the ball and inside the attacker”. It is important the defending block (of 8 +GK) can concentrate on their defensive responsibility and still be aware of the general positioning of the CF and RW. This allows the RW and CF to be positioned for a quick counter attack once the ball is intercepted. -hk

“Defending in the Midfield Flanks”

- This area is the perceived weakness of the 4-3-3 formation. Santa Clara works to make defending in the midfield flank a strength. *Coaches need to know how they will deal with this area of concern or the opponent will exploit it and the team will lose confidence in the system. Once players are taught that they can win the ball and counter attack from this area they will have greater confidence in this system of play. –hk*



This area of concern is address by having the nearest Winger track back as far as necessary to pressure the ball while the nearest Outside Back steps up to double team the ball carrier. If possible a triple team is ideal, with additional pressure from the near side attacking midfielder.



Notice the presence of the left inside Center Back as cover to the pressuring Left Back. The team still maintains good defensive shape and numbers with the three remaining defenders.

The opposing team is almost suckered into thinking they can build up the flank and go around the Santa Clara defense, after all, that is where space appears to be. –hk

- The goal is to win the ball in the midfield flank and then launch a quick counter attack.
- By knowing that the opposing team is going to try and use the midfield flanks (and having a defensive plan to break down this expected tactic) Santa Clara turned the formation “weakness” into a strength.

