

## EVOLUTION OF THE GAME OF FOOTBALL IN TERMS OF RULES AND FORMATIONS OF PLAY

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**Abstract.** The game of football has, throughout its history, provided moments of unparalleled spectacle and popularity, with a global following. From the earliest documented instances of ball games played with the feet, without clearly defined rules, to the most sophisticated styles of play observed in modern times, the evolution of football has been a continuous process. The development of football has been influenced by the contributions of renowned coaches and players who have introduced innovative techniques, such as "tiki-taka" and the "Galacticos." These innovations have shaped the evolution of the sport in response to the demands of the modern era. A number of renowned coaches, including Helenio Herrera, Sir Alex Ferguson, Rinus Michels, Enzo Bearzot, Johan Cruyff, Pep Guardiola and others, have employed creativity to devise innovative systems of play and principles to enhance the abilities of their players, with the objective of achieving victories. The objective of this study was to analyse the literature on the subject and illustrate the game systems that were employed in the earliest official matches and how they evolved in response to changes in the regulations. Over time, international governing bodies have issued regulations that have compelled coaches to be creative and identify optimal strategies for their teams to achieve victory and perform at their best. Each system of play has been described in chronological order, with the aim of establishing a correlation between the rules of play and the systems employed at the time. The field of football is undergoing continuous development, with technology playing an increasingly significant role in the conduct of matches. Software and statistical data are being used by referees and coaches to inform decision-making, thereby reducing the time required for decision-making.

**Keywords:** history of football, formations of play, rules.

### Introduction

Football, or "the king sport," as it is known, is the spectacle that brings millions of people to the stadiums and screens. Every technical execution, every goal scored, and the whole atmosphere that characterizes a football match arouses the spectator's curiosity, pleasure, and adrenaline, bringing him to the most beautiful feelings and emotions. The game of football has developed with society and has deep roots in the culture of historical peoples. The sport has become renowned for its numerous dynamic actions, which facilitate rapid ball turnover. (Dolci, 2018) The game has evolved with the introduction of new rules that simultaneously enhance its spectacle, while also instilling discipline, rigour and responsibility.

The tactics employed in the game are structured according to the laws of the game, as well as the specific attributes of both the home and away teams. A multitude of strategists devised diverse formations of play, integrating both their practical experience and theoretical knowledge in order to achieve success.



In order to ascertain concrete data on the evolution of playing systems and the rules of the game of football, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. In order to achieve this objective, a search was conducted on Google Scholar, SPORTDiscus and Web of Science using the keywords "history of the game of football", "systems of play used in football" and "evolution of the rules in football". The articles that provided the most conclusive information on the subject of the research were selected.

The objective of this study was to examine the evolution of game systems and determine whether they have been adapted in accordance with the regulations. In addition, the impact of the regulations that have been introduced over time on the game of football will be analysed.

## **Results**

### **FOOTBALL IN MEDIEVAL TIMES**

The issues presented from this period concern the country where football has its origins and where it has experienced its greatest expansion – England.

The medieval period, also known as the "*mafia football*" period (Mal, 2021), is characterised by a variety of ball games with no limit on the number of players and almost no rules.

During this period, the sole unambiguous rule governing ball sports was that opponents were not to be killed. (Broeke, 2014). Given the considerable disorder that had ensued, as early as 1314, the Mayor of London was compelled to issue a proclamation banning football in the city. (Klotz, 2016)

The King, Edward IV, continued to oppose the ever-expanding game. In 1477, he enacted legislation that prohibited the playing of illicit games, including dice, knife, football, and other games. (Vasilev, 2009) Additionally, in Manchester, football was prohibited in 1608.

In the Middle Ages, football was perceived as a brutal sport, a perception that does not align with the modern game. In the present era, the concept of fair play and equal opportunities is actively promoted, and any act of violence, whether physical or verbal, is met with appropriate disciplinary action.

### **ENGLAND, THE BIRTHPLACE OF MODERN FOOTBALL**

The game of football, which was played in the British Isles from the 8th to the 19th century, had a wide range of local and regional variations. These eventually led to the creation of modern games such as rugby. (FIFA, 2020)

From the 1850s onwards, factory workers utilised their leisure time after work and at weekends to engage in football-related activities. These teams were organised by various institutions, including trade unions, educational establishments and religious organisations. The dimensions and weight of the football were first standardised in 1863. (Gerhardt, 2019)

In 1863, the development of football reached a pinnacle. Affiliated members of eleven London clubs and colleges visited the Freemason Tavern. This event is regarded as the genesis of association football. A number of factors were taken into account, including the manner in which the ball was propelled, the actions of opponents who kicked the shin or tripped the player. (Witzig, 2006)

On 8 December 1863, football was distinguished from rugby, and over the following eight years, 50 clubs affiliated with the Football Association (FA).

In 1866, the initial 90 minutes of the match between London and Sheffield were played. The popularity of school football increased significantly during the 19th century, particularly at renowned public schools. The game lacked a standardised format, resulting in relatively straightforward rules. In the nineteenth century, football became an integral component of the school curriculum.

The influence of Britain and the subsequent global dissemination of football were rapid and extensive. Subsequently, in the period following 1880, a number of countries established football associations. Consequently, the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA) was established in Paris in May 1904. At that time, the total number of FIFA members (countries) was seven, but by 1930 this had increased to 41. Between 1937 and 1938, FIFA President Stanley Rous established the modern laws of the game. Over the subsequent two decades, football's continued success attracted new followers from across the globe, with the Association of Men's National

Football Teams reporting that there are now 211 members from every corner of the world. (FIFA, 2020).

This paper presents a historical overview of the game systems (created with SoccerTutor.com Tactics Manager) that have been used for the past 200 years.

1. System of play with 10 attacking players and one goalkeeper (Fig. 1.) - the first system of play used between 1810-1860.
2. Eight-player forward system (1-1-1-8) or T-system (Fig. 2.) - this system of play was first played by the England team in the 1870-1871 England-Scotland meetings. For the first time in history players were allocated to positions (one defender, one midfielder and eight forwards).
3. The 1-1-2-7 system ( Fig. 3.) – this system of play was also used by the England and Scotland teams between 1870-1871, involving one defensive player, two midfielders and seven forwards.
4. The 6-forward system or Scottish formula - 1-2-2-6 (Fig. 4.). This system was used for the first time by the Scottish team in 1872 in the England-Scotland match, as the systems used until then had not brought the desired results.
5. The pyramid game system or the 1-2-3-5 triangle (Fig. 5.). It is in fact the tactical system of play: the WM-orthodox, which the English team Nottingham Forest first used in 1883. The main tactical feature of this system is that the tactical positioning of the players equates to 5 players in defence and 5 players in attack, a similar positioning in the tactical development of contemporary football.
6. The M 1-2-3-2-3 double game system (Fig. 6.). It is the predecessor of the famous tactical system of play - WM and was first used in 1925. The main tactical feature of this system is that the positioning of the players on the pitch allows for a much more optimal coverage of the playing space, which contributes to the optimisation of playing relationships in the form of triads.
7. Game system WM 1-3-2-5 (Fig. 7.). This is the tactical system of play that has revolutionised performance football from a tactical point of view. It was created by Herbert Chapman and the team that first used it was Arsenal London – England (1930).

In the microhistory of game systems by Allen Wade, the following requirements for the WM system are mentioned:

- *creating a diagonal defence, whose strong point is the central midfielder (the stopper);*
- *organise a strong defence, capable of initiating rapid offensive action;*
- *the use of a dispatcher to control the construction of offensive actions;*
- *the presence of fast, strong and incisive forwards in the team: the wingers and the centre forward.* (Wade, 2013)

In view of the above, we can say that in the WM system improvement action, the focus was not on improving the players' technical-tactical actions, but on developing their physical qualities.

8. WM system of play – the 1-3-2-2-3 magic box (Fig. 8.). First introduced in the 1930s, this system of play is actually a variant of the classic WM system, which has undergone some modifications due to the refinement of the tactical positioning of the players. Specifically, the midfielders are positioned in such a way that they form a penalty box, which is how this tactical system got its name. The main tactical feature of this system is that the formation of these squares strengthens the midfield area - the area where the game is built.
9. System of play – wall, wall or concrete 1-1-3-2-2-2 (Fig. 9). This tactical system of play (1942) is the creation of the great coach Helenio Herrera. It was first used by the French team Stade Francaise and represents the beginning of defensive tactics in football.
10. Italian Catenaccio 1-1-4-2-3 system of play (Fig. 10.). In 1960, Internazionale Milano coach Helenio Herrera came up with an important change at World level, asking one of the

midfielders to position himself behind the fullback line, playing as a libero (to double the fullbacks and play anticipation).

11. The 1-4-4-2 system of play (Fig. 11.). It is a system that originated in 1960 and was used by the England coach Sir Ramsey. In this system, players could execute pressing more effectively to make it difficult for opponents. It was a system that excelled at 'catching the opponent offside'.
12. 1-4-3-3 system (Fig. 12.). It is an attacking system that is still practised and has been applied by coach Rinus Michels since 1965 at Ajax Amsterdam.
13. The 1-1-3-4-2 system (Fig. 13.) is a system first used in 1977 by Italy's coach *Enzo Berzot*. Italy participated successfully in the 1978 and 1982 World Championships, playing an open and spectacular game.
14. The 1-4-2-3-1 system (Fig. 14.) is a system used a lot in football today. The system involves two defensive midfielders with the role of closing down the space in the center very tightly in order to recover balls and increase the efficiency of the build-up.
15. The 1-5-3-2 system (Fig. 15.). This system was used and promoted at the 1990 World Cup, played in Italy by West Germany. The numerical superiority in the defensive phase and the use of two central strikers are the strengths of this system.
16. 1-3-4-3 system (Fig. 16.). It is a system that was also widely used in Romania in the 2000s and is one of the most spectacular and offensive systems of play.

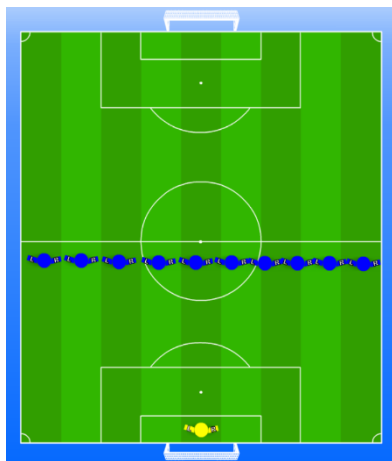


Figure 1. System 1-10

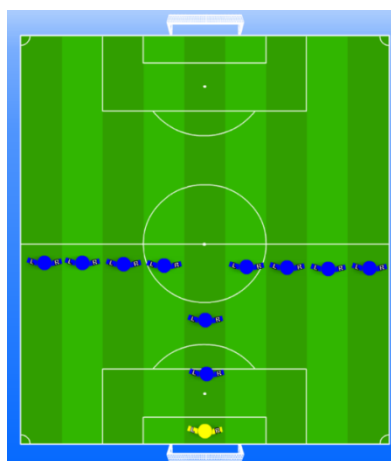


Figure 2. T System

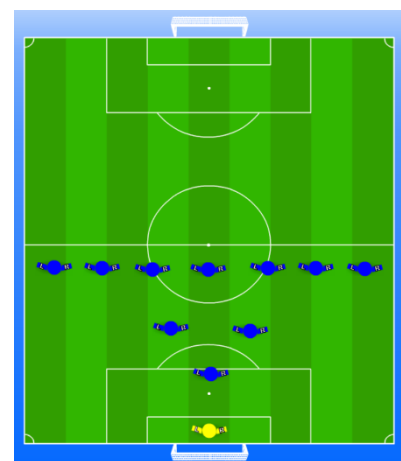


Figure 3. 1-1-2-7 System

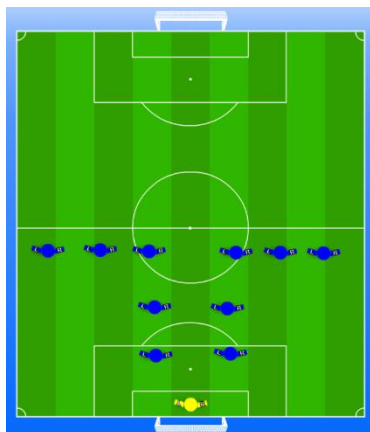


Figure 4. Scottish Formula

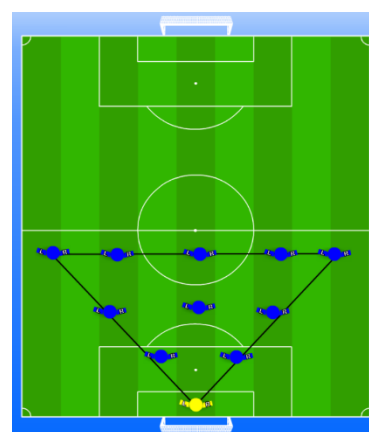


Figure 5. Pyramid

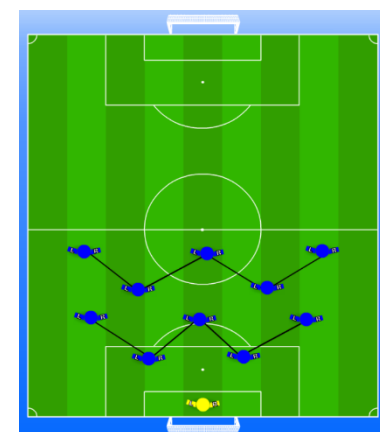
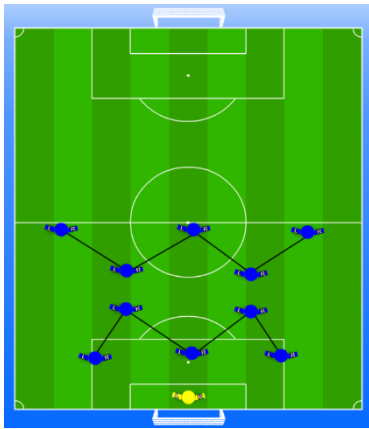
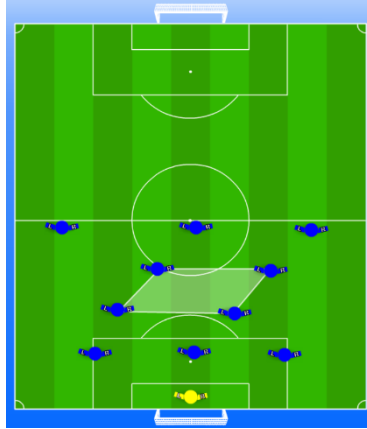


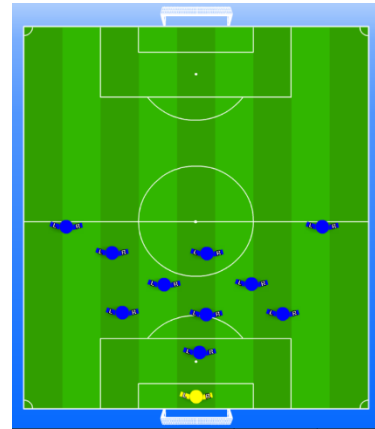
Figure 6. Double M system



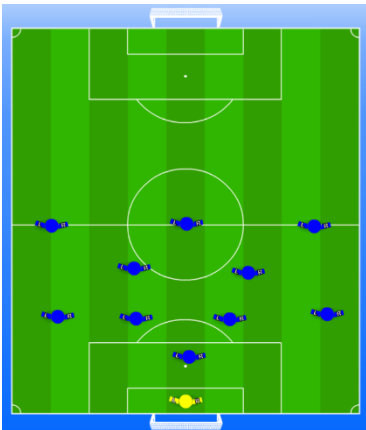
**Figure 7.** WM System



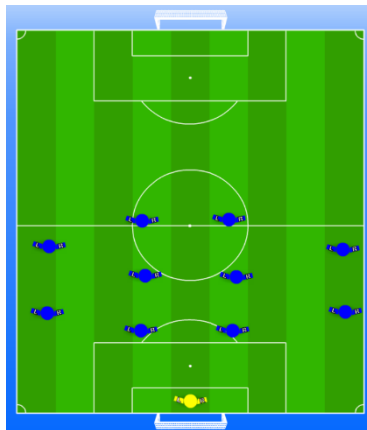
**Figure 8.** The Magic box



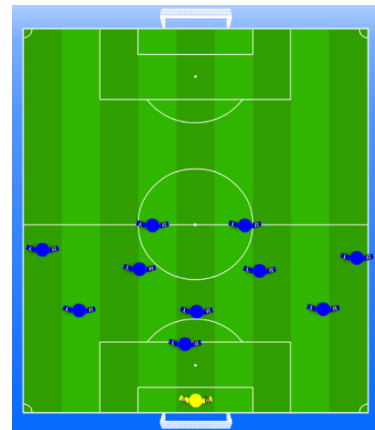
**Figure 9.** The 1-3-2-2-2 System



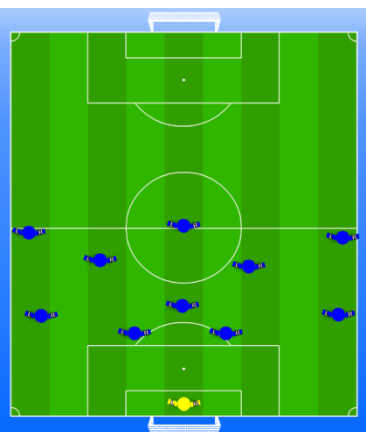
**Figure 10.** Italian Catenaccio



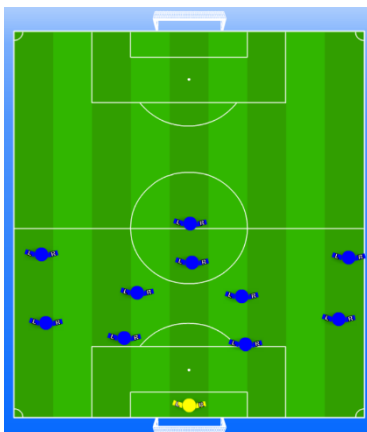
**Figure 11.** 1-4-4-2 System



**Figure 12.** 1-4-3-3 System



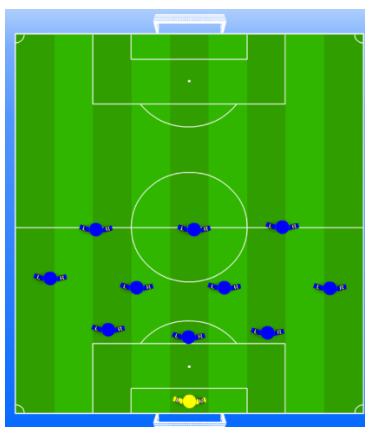
**Figure 13.** 1-1-3-4-2 System



**Figure 14.** 1-4-2-3-1 System



**Figure 15.** 1-5-3-2 System



**Figure 16.** 1-3-4-3 Sys

**Table 1.** Evolution of rules and systems of play in football

Relationship between the rules and the game system			
Year	Regulation	Year/Years	Game system
1300	A variety of ball games with no limit on the number of players and almost no rules.		
1314	The Mayor of London has seen fit to issue a proclamation banning football in the city		
1608	Football has been banned in Manchester		
1810	Teams of workers are formed		1-10
1856	Offside rule – 3 defenders in front of the attacker	<b>1810-1860</b>	
1863	The length (137.16 m) and width of the land (91.44 m) have been determined. (Jia, 2017)	<b>1860-1872</b>	1-1-1-8
1866	There was no standard form of the game, the rules were very simple		1-3-7
1869	The goal kick (goal out) has been introduced.		1-2-2-6
1870	First international game England - Scotland (1-1)		1-1-2-7
1872	The corner kick has been introduced.	<b>1872-1883</b>	
1875	The crossbar has been introduced.		
1878	The referee blew the whistle for the first time for a foul. Since then, the whistle has become the referee's "main tool".		1-2-2-6
1891	The penalty kick has been introduced. At the same time, nets were installed at the football gates.	<b>1883-1925</b>	1-2-3-5
1925	Offside rule – 2 defenders in front of the attacker	<b>1925-1942</b>	1-2-3-2-3 1-3-2-5 1-3-2-2-3 1-1-3-2-2
1958	The rule that players can be replaced has been introduced	<b>1942-1960</b>	1-3-2-3-2
1970	The first cards (yellow and red) were awarded at the World Cup in Mexico.	<b>1960-1990</b>	1-4-2-4 1-4-2-3 1-4-4-2 1-4-3-3 1-1-3-4-2
1990	Offside rule – the attacker is not offside if he is in line with the penultimate opponent		

1992	The rule has been introduced that the goalkeeper cannot catch the ball passed by a teammate.	<b>1990–1998</b>	1-1-4-3-2
1993	The rule has been introduced that a player may be given a yellow card if he 'stalls'.		1-4-4-2
1998	The referee may award a red card to penalise gross fouls (intended to endanger the bodily integrity of the contestants).		1-3-5-2
2003	FIFA is issuing strict rules on offside to encourage offensive play.	<b>2003 to present</b>	
2006	The referee may give a red card to a player for simulation of a foul.		1-4-3-3
2014	Goal-line technology has been introduced to help referees determine whether the ball has crossed the goal line.		1-4-2-3-1
2016	Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology has been introduced.		1-4-1-4-1
			1-3-4-3
		1-5-3-2	
		1-4-3-2-1	
		1-4-1-4-1	

While in the early years (1810–1860) the game was chaotic, there were no clear rules on the size of the pitch, there were no referees and the game was very different from the modern game, in 1856 a first rule was introduced to regulate the position of a player in offside. For a player to be able to receive and play the ball he had to have at least 3 defenders between him and the goal. The system of play practiced at that time where we are presented with teams of 11 vs 11, presents a 1-10, especially on the offensive phase, and this rule was implemented so that teams were more carefully organized on the defensive phase.

When the dimensions of the pitch, the execution of the corner and the kick were clearly established (1860–1872) and after some years of practice, the system of play adapted slightly, positioning one player in goal, one in defence and the other 8 forward. With these rules, the coaches tried to provide a certain degree of security by always positioning a player who had purely defensive duties.

Until 1875 the gate had no crossbar, and in that year a horizontal bar was introduced at a height of 2.44. In 1878 the first referee's whistle was blown, indicating a deviation from the rules. The foul would change the system of the game, leading coaches to position 2 players in defence and midfield and only 6 in attack. This adaptation of the playing system was intended to avoid counter-attacks and also to remove the danger from the fixed phases caused by possible fouls.

The penalty kick was introduced in 1891, and coaches were determined to drop another player, using the 1-2-3-5 system to support defensive players. Players were tasked with doubling up on each other, so five players had defensive duties.

A revolutionary rule that changed the conception of the game at that time is the adaptation of offside to only 2 defenders who must be placed between the attacker and the ball. Immediately after the application of the last amendment, coaches were creative and from 1925 onwards three new systems of play emerged (1-2-3-2-3; 1-3-2-5; 1-3-2-2-3). As a consequence, the number of goals in matches doubled and the game became more organised but at the same time more spectacular.

Until the 1960s, the systems of play already listed were used, and then more and more teams were set up, which were involved in both domestic and international competitions (European Champions Cup). During these years, the rules were not significantly changed, strengthening the specific skills of the game of football, as well as a good physical training of the players, which led them to get into sporting shape and be selected for the national teams in order to participate in the European and World Championships. In 1970 the first cards (yellow and red) were awarded at the World Cup in Mexico and since then two other systems of play (1-4-2-4 and 1-4-2-3) have been used. Modern football tactics originated from these two systems, which revolutionised the game at the time by placing four players in defence, thus placing a strong emphasis on both defensive and offensive phases of play.

The offside rule was changed in 1990, and since then new systems of play (1-4-3-2; 1-4-4-2; 1-3-5-2) have been consolidated. This rule was particularly important and led coaches to change their tactical thinking because it favoured the attack more, the game no longer had so many static moments and deep passes were often used.

In 2003, FIFA issued strict rules on offside because it wanted to encourage more offense. In this sense, even if a player did not touch the ball, but blocked the field of vision of the goalkeeper or a defender, he was considered in an offside position. As the rules were refined, other systems of play were used by coaches of the time. Since then, systems such as 1-4-3-3; 4-2-3-1; 3-4-3 are still used today.

The game is increasingly dynamic, the players are able to perform remarkable actions, putting their thorough training to good use, and the game is very thoroughly tacticized. The advent of VAR makes the players more precise in their offside exits, as well as in the organisation of the defensive compartment, because every inch more or less is analysed and claimed by the team that deserves it.

### Conclusions

Throughout history, football has been characterised by its positive development. It has always adapted to problematic situations and tried to come up with a better way of playing the game. The rules, training and performances of the athletes have been constantly on an upward slope, thus managing to achieve impressive Figs in the current period.

The relationship between the rules that emerged along the way and the formations used is an important one. The systems of play used by the coaches were supposed to surprise the opponent, to showcase their team's athletes, but all within the limits of the rules.

Playing systems have evolved constantly, the great coaches of the current period are still looking for the most efficient ways to play their own football philosophy. No one system is established as the most effective and it always has to be adapted to suit the specifics of one's own team and those of the opponent.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed to this study.

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