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# Tactics Explained: Johan Cruyff at Ajax and Barcelona

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10th October 2017

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**It's often stated that good players do not become good coaches, but one man could claim to have been the very best at both. That man is Johan Cruyff.**

Cruyff's managerial career was relatively short. He spent three years at Ajax, before spending eight at Barcelona, where he won four consecutive La Liga trophies, he also won the Catalan giants' first two European trophies - the 1989 European Cup Winner's Cup and the 1992 European Cup - both with wins over Sampdoria.





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Indeed, the formation, he used was the one used Ajax as they won the 1995 Champions League, their first since Cruyff lead them to three in a row as a player - two decades before - seven years after he joined Barcelona.

Illness forced an early retirement in 1996 but Cruyff will go down in history as one of the, if not the greatest contributors to the game in history. His death in 2016, was met with an outpouring of grief as one of the few remaining living legends departed this world.

As a player, Cruyff had played under the great Rinus Michels. Michels had developed the Total Football style that lead the Dutch to two World Cup Finals and won Euro 1988.

Cruyff's tactics were built on a similar blueprint but were adapted slightly.

Cruyff had always been an advocate of playing the game in your head, skill was great and important, but you needed your head to make the most of it.

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He was a silky, technical genius, but he pointed out he used whatever skill was most appropriate for what he had to do, not to humiliate his opponent or entertain the crowd (though with the latter, he acknowledged this is what makes football beautiful).

Cruyff used a midfield diamond, in a 3-1-2-1-3 formation. He didn't like the now more traditional 4-1-2-1-2 diamond as he believed the loss in width was too severe. He also felt that the central players in the diamond couldn't move out on the wings for cover without damaging the balance of the side.

The three at the back were mobile defenders, each capable of quick movement to cover the entire backline. In front of them was a defensive midfielder, his job was to patrol the centre-circle. This meant he had the least running to do in the entire team, but had to have strong discipline.

By saying central at all times, this number 4 was able to work as a deep-lying playmaker. The centre position allowed him the best overview of the play in front of him, meaning he could play whatever pass into the forward position he wanted. He could play it simply into the supporting players around him or further afield into the forward lines. He would also be asked to break up play. Frank Rijkaard was wonderful in this role.

Just ahead of him were the two controlling players. They played slightly further forward, Ajax would use Davids and Seedorf in this role whilst Barcelona would play Pep Guardiola. The main job of these two players would be to supply the four forward players. Barcelona has used the likes of Xavi and Rakitic in this role in recent years.

At the tip of the diamond was the second striker. This role was the freest in the squad and the job was to occupy the space between the central midfielders in the power and create chances and also score goals.

The three forward men would feature two touchline hugging wide forwards, who would have possessed good pace and stamina as they would have to track back to prevent the opposition penetrating the wings and provide cover when the three at the back strayed towards one. They could sometimes, like Dennis Bergkamp, cut inside but would need the second striker to cover them.



At the top was a complete forward. Hristo Stoichkov, the Bulgarian hitman would be excellent in this role. This player would have to do everything, it's a role which would suit the likes of Harry Kane. Being able to score all types of goal, and hold up play.

This type of play allowed Cruyff's side to control the opposition, with play high up the pitch and a dynamic shifting structure to allow the team to attack and defend as a unit, without being exploited down the wings. The opposition was controlled and passed out of the game. The fact that Ajax still used the tactic under Van Gaal is a testament to this.

It's why in just eleven years in club management, Cruyff won 14 trophies and secured himself as a legend in both Ajax and Barcelona folklore even more so than he was as a player. Johan Cruyff: Europe's greatest footballer and greatest coach.

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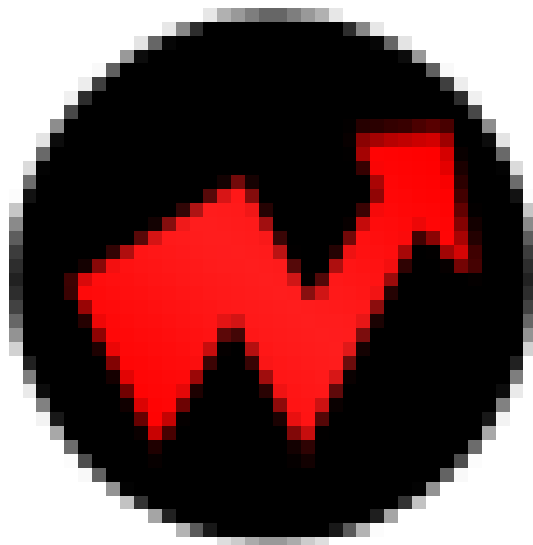
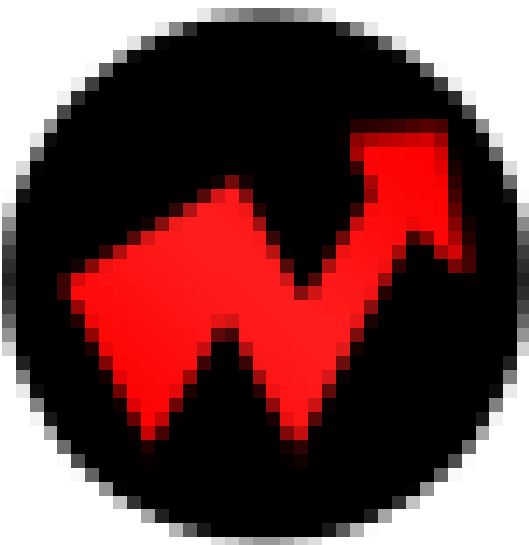


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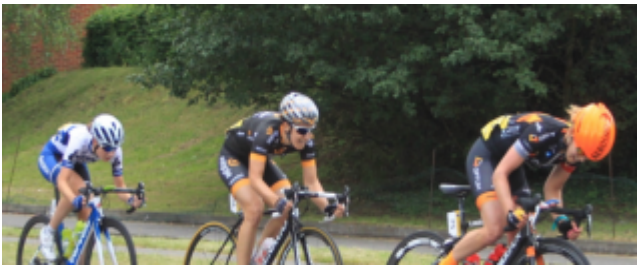


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