

WORLD CUP TACTICAL ANALYSIS REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE TACTICS OF ALL 32 TEAMS
OF THE 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP

KEITH SCARLETT



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2014 FIFA World Cup*

by
Keith Scarlett

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World Cup Tactical Analysis Report

...Looking Back at What Brazil Brought Us!

Introduction

Well we made it. 32 days of unrelenting emotional twists and 64 matches to keep us on the edge of our seats. It is all over for this go around and a new Champion has been crowned. History has been buffed and we have seen things that we thought we would never see and some things we probably wished we had not.

Therefore, a question that may be bouncing around in the back of your mind about now is, *“how do we break down this World Cup now that it’s over and what do we take from it?”* Analysts, sports casters, networks and amateurs alike have been and will continue to do just that for the next four years until the world reconvenes once again in Russia, but let’s try to approach it using reverse “Bracketology,” or the study of the brackets and see what we can draw from what has transpired this summer.

To the novice, the process can seem a little daunting. Where do you start? What do I look for? What can you do to make sure you get the most out the World Cup? Well, that is why we are here! Therefore, just read on to find out everything you need to know concerning the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil; as we break down every nation including trends, adaptations and even some nuances that you may want to keep an eye on as the game continually develops.

Let us Begin by Taking a Broad and General Overall Look at the Entire Tournament

It was one entire month of an exhilarating football extravaganza at the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. The world’s most prestigious stage for football featured spectacular plays and performances from both football juggernauts and football underdogs. Tears of joy as well as the salty tears of distraught were ultimately shed from all of the participating nations over the course of the tournament. Germany secured their fourth title ever with a thrilling 1-nil win over Argentina in extra time, capping a month of thrilling, edge of your seat football. In a World Cup featuring crucial plays consistently being made by substitutes, it was only appropriate for German sub Mario Gotze to secure the cup with his goal in the final.

Here are some of my initial and general thoughts on some of the triumphs and failures; as well as what the future holds for the World Cup participants.

Europe Reigns Supreme

The last team standing, Germany, was unquestionably one of the most consistent teams throughout the entire tournament. They never wavered despite being challenged by African nations Ghana and Algeria and then ultimately Argentina in the final. Head coach Joachim

Low channeled a respectable calmness through the team all month long. The Germans kept a streak alive for Europe by claiming the continent's third straight World Cup title. Out of the six participants in the last three World Cup finals, five of them have hailed from Europe.

A Continent at Loss

The South American brigade at last fell with Germany's victory, making the 2014 World Cup the first of its kind in which a South American team hosting didn't win the title in their home continent. Argentina valiantly attempted resurrecting memories of 1986 with a sprint towards the final, but Lionel Messi couldn't be Diego Maradona and save the team from falling apart at the end. Meanwhile; Brazil was tossed to the curb unceremoniously with their last two losses coming at a combined 1-10 deficit. The host nation was not only embarrassed on the pitch, but off it as well with questions of financial legislation and social relations between the government and the country's inhabitants remaining at large. Somehow Brazil will have to recover quickly enough to host the Summer Olympics in 2016.

Most Impressive Team Performances

Costa Rica took the world by storm with a shocking 3-1 upset of Uruguay in their opening match and then advancing all the way to the quarterfinals. If not for the heroics of Netherland's Tim Krul in the penalty shootout, Costa Rica may very well of squeezed their way into the semifinal. It should also go without saying that Germany belongs on this list, but it's worth repeating. The Germans were one of the most fundamentally sound teams in the World Cup and the unit's work paid off with a championship.

Most Impressive Individual Performances

The World Cup is inevitably host to players looking to increase their international prestige. Colombia's James Rodriguez was arguably the best offensive player with six goals to his name which led all players in that category. Out of the talented cast of German midfielders, Toni Kroos consistently made the biggest impact with pinpoint passes and even a few goals under his belt as well. Defensively, it's hard not to tip your cap to United States goalkeeper Tim Howard who set a new single World Cup game record with 16 saves against Belgium.

Favorite Play

Out of the 171 goals scored, not one was more captivating than Robin Van Persie's tally for the Netherlands against Spain. Down 0-1 just before halftime, Van Persie launched a magnificent header to equalize against the Spanish. It was a perfectly placed service from teammate Daley Blind and Van Persie's efforts made for a beautiful execution. It was delightful to see Van Persie sprawl out like a dolphin in creating the first of many goals for the Dutch in that game.

Most Disappointing Team Performances

Brazil's thunderous exit from the World Cup garnered plenty of criticism globally. Head coach Luis Felipe Scolari is now out after the two clunkers the team finished the tournament with. However the most disappointing performances overall came from the former world champions and currently number one overall ranked Spain who were dismantled by the Netherlands 1-5 and Chile 0-2. After establishing a powerful brand of defensive football that won them two European Championships in 2008 and 2012 and a World Cup in between, Spain failed to escape the group stage and was eliminated after just two matches.

Most Disappointing Individual Performances

Brazil's David Luiz had been having a spectacular tournament up until the match where he faced off against Germany. Without Thiago Silva at his side and having been awarded the status of team captain for the match, Luiz crumbled under the German assault and looked completely hapless in the semifinal. Despite Messi snagging the golden ball award for best player in the World Cup, it's debatable if Argentina's superstar deserved the consolation prize as he seemingly disappeared in the knockout rounds. After scoring four goals in group play, Messi managed only an assist to Angel Di Maria against Switzerland and failed to score a single goal in any of the elimination matches. He was relatively quiet in the final as Germany blanketed him effectively. Messi may soon be leaving his prime and with it collecting even more doubts if he'll ever match the level of Diego Maradona.

Looking Forward

Europe once again looks to be strong heading out of the World Cup. France and Germany have a chance to rekindle their intense rivalry after squaring off in a gridlock match in the quarterfinals. Both teams host a slew of talent in their early to mid-twenties. France will host the Euro Cup in 2016 where Germany looks to pull off a similar feat to what Spain did from 2008-2012 in dominating the football universe. The Africa Cup of Nations will be played next January in Morocco. With Algeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Nigeria participating in the World Cup, it will be interesting to see where the football power lies in Africa. Most intriguing of all is where Russia will be four years down the road as it will be their turn to host the World Cup in 2018. The Winter Olympics in Sochi was a debacle and a detriment to Russia's public relations while they still have plenty of political controversy plaguing the country.

Chapter 1:

Country by Country Breakdown

A More Detailed Look at Every Team in the Tournament Field

The months after the draw leading up to the first kick-off drug on and on with it stories of roster changes, stadiums that weren't finished, protests in the streets, etc..., but once all of that was put aside, there was certainly no shortage of talking points.

At first glance, there was an immediate jostle between Group B and Group D for the coveted title of the "Group of Death," with the latter featuring a greater spread of quality across the four teams; England vs. Italy in particular was thought to be arguably the most high-profile dual-European affair in the entire group stage. Yet, the former included both finalists from the 2010 World Cup, along with Chile, one of the most exciting and up and coming national teams in the entire field. Group B, in particular, featured four sides that all were known for their possession-based systems, meaning that it should have also created the most attractive, attacking matches of the entire group stage. Unfortunately, neither group lived up to that billing.

At the other end of the spectrum, there was also a battle for the weakest group between Group E and Group H. France was no doubt delighted by the relative ease of which they progressed; however given the country's penchant for self-destruction at previous international tournaments what appeared a poor group on paper could have well turned into one of the more fascinating. Likewise for Group H, which featured no one single outstanding side, but rather a cluster of middle-range teams, although Belgium separated themselves from the rest and surely fancy their chances of finishing top level in future years.

The rest of the bracket definitely tossed up plenty of plot lines. Group G was nothing short of a FIFA sponsored reunion. Germany and Ghana were allowed to hangout again in the group stage just as they did in 2010 and for the third World Cup in a row, Ghana and the United States were also reconnected. Even without Portugal Group G was going to be a fascinating one, but the inclusion of the European side; who were boasting arguably the tournament's most decisive player in Cristiano Ronaldo coming in, took the group's dynamic to a whole other level. On top of this, the group was also the most competitive and the 'legitimate' "Group of Death."

Many make the claim that was the strongest pool of teams to ever assemble and compete at a World Cup. Even though this has been said about almost every World Cup, casting an eye back across every match from this summer that claim does become somewhat hard to argue. There were a host of tantalising matches providing plentiful entertainment.

Now, before we go any deeper into the individual teams, let us take one general, broad-stroked look at five of the top sides to come out of this World Cup to set the stage for us to move forward.

The Big Five

Germany

Conclusively, Germany goes home with the 2014 World Cup, with a promising young squad and immense talent in their ranks. Throughout the course of their campaign, they have surfaced as a side that never gives in and is brimming with young players who can step up to the big stage and perform. They are now one behind Brazil's tally of 5 World Cups titles.

Argentina

Second place is nothing to be snuffed at, but Sabella does retire on the back of a colossal disappointment. Strategically, *La Albiceleste* was questionable throughout the tournament, yet the prevalent factor that let them down was their misfiring frontline. Messi, named player of the tournament, will have to wait longer to get his hands on the gold trophy. As for the rest of his team, this was a hard fought Argentina performance; however, they were up against the most remarkable group of international footballers from this generation.

Netherlands

Apart from the 5-1 thrashing of Spain in their first group match, the Orange were not at their best this summer. However, van Gaal has made his side tough to beat and so it was the case for all opponents they faced except for Argentina, which could be argued that they didn't even beat the Dutch.

Truth be told, the Netherlands did not need to be at their best for long spells during many of the matches and they were never in danger of buckling in the face of Brazilian pressure. The 3-0 win over the hosts in the consolation match saw the Europeans pick up the bronze medal and exit the stage with their heads held high.

France

France remains an exceptionally young side that can continue to grow ahead of Euro 2016 on home ground. That will be the tournament they want to peak for and while they will obviously be disappointed about their early exit in Brazil, reflection will reveal that this was probably a good showing and Deschamps can be proud of his side.

Belgium

They were always the neutral's favourites. They successfully managed to do what most of the pundits expected of them; i.e., reach the Quarter Finals. Anything more than that would have been a bonus. Their young stars are just hitting their primes and this leaves them many positives to take.

Now let us take a better look at every team in the field of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

ALGERIA

Formation: Vahid Halilhodzic lined up an impressive youthful squad in a 4-1-4-1 formation. El Arbi Hillel Soudani was left up front as the focal point with Riyad Mahrez and star man Feghouli setting the attacking spark from midfield.

Carl Medjani was the middle of the park for the North African side.

Formation Changes: Halilhodzic stayed with his tried and tested 4-1-4-1 formation, for both of the first two group matches before switching to a 5-4-1 formation in their final group match vs. Russia. The versatile Carl Medjani sat in front of a restructured back line that included Essayed Belkalem who was replacing Captain Madjid Bougherra. The wide players, Abdelmoumene Djabou and Sofiane Feghouli, were pushed out to hug the touchline and get at Russia's immobile defence.

Algeria stayed with this 5-4-1 in their second-round match against Germany. The formation provided the stability in midfield they needed, while still allowing a counter-attacking style of play.

Germany's Loew had predicted that Algeria would be an uncomfortable team to play against, and he was right.

With Medhi Lacen deployed behind Feghouli and ahead of the back line to provide additional cover, Germany initially struggled to boss proceedings.

Again, Slimani was an influential figure and seemingly at the centre of everything that Algeria did well.

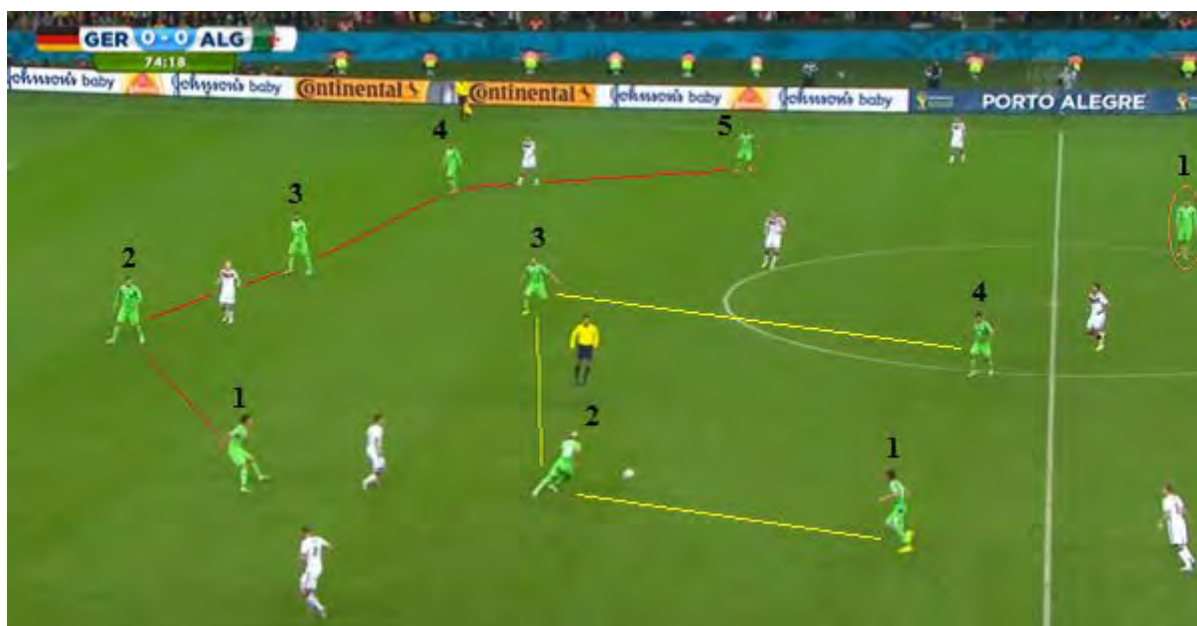
Going Forward: Their World Cup may be over but each and every member of the staff of the Algeria team has gained hero status among fans back home.

With the massive improvement from South Africa four years ago, the team was almost unrecognizable.

Halilhodzic has got his men playing a special, entertaining style of football and long may that continue.

The future is bright for Algeria, very bright indeed

Here we see both Algeria's 5-4-1 and how they began to break on the counter out of it:



ARGENTINA

Formation: Sabella opened-up with an untested 3-5-2, led by the rough-n-tough midfield of Javier Mascherano supporting the creativity of Angel Di Maria. The focus was cast on the stellar duo of Messi and Aguero.

Formation Changes: The South American heavyweights altered their starting line-up from their opening match victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina by including midfielder Fernando Gago and striker Gonzalo Higuain into the starting 11.

This also resulted in a change in structure for the Argentines, as they switched from a 3-5-2 to a 4-3-3 formation in an attempt occupy the Iran back-four with their crafty forward three.

Alejandro Sabella named an unchanged starting eleven for the final group match, but after difficulty linking up the attack in their first two games he reverted to his tried-and-true 4-3-3 formation in an effort to produce more goals against the Nigerians. Gonzalo Higuain and Sergio Aguero lined up next to Messi to make up a formidable front line, looking to create chances with Di Maria feeding the ball through from the midfield.

Going Forward: Messi misses out once more. Argentina were only seven minutes from forcing the dominant force of the 2014 World Cup into penalties and deserve the adulation of the world for their wonderful cup run.

The players will rue their missed chances, the fans wonder what might have been if injury had not been so harsh but the nation should be proud of their team's efforts and the beautiful respect with which La Albiceleste showed its opponents and the game.

Here we can see that un-tested 3-5-2 and how far apart the outside backs and midfield trio are stretched. This caused the ball to be moved around slowly instead of played with some urgency to it.



AUSTRALIA

Formation: Australia began with a conservative 4-2-3-1 formation with veteran Marco Bresciano drafted in to sit behind lone forward Tim Cahill, whilst on the wings, Matthew Leckie and Tommy Oar provided width. Mile Jedinak and Mark Milligan were in centre midfield shielding an inexperienced defence that saw Western Sydney's Matthew Spiranovic and Alex Wilkinson playing as the central partnership.

Formation Changes: Ange Postecoglou made two changes to the side that had faced Chile in their opening match, but he remained with the 4-2-3-1 formation for the Socceroos. Veteran Matt McKay made his 48th national appearance, playing alongside Jedinak in the defensive midfield while Ryan McGowan replaced the injured Ivan Franic at left back.

Postecoglou selected Adam Taggart to replace the suspended Tim Cahill in the same 4-2-3-1 line-up against Spain. The 21-year-old spearheaded the attack while FC Luzern midfielder, Oliver Bozanic, started in his first game at a World Cup finals in place of the injured Mark Bresciano. A consistent Matt McKay retained his spot after his energetic and impressive performance against the Dutch.

The Socceroos made two changes to Spain's seven, highlighting their defensive mentality. Fatigue had a role to play in the demise of the Aussies and was the difference between the 3-0 thrashing and a positive result.

Going Forward: Heads can be held high. All the score lines confirmed what many expected in the build-up to this tournament; that Australia would be ranked fourth in Group B. The fashion in which Australia bows out means far more, however, after narrow losses in the opening matches.

From a tactical perspective, this squad has improved leaps and bounds since the pragmatic approach of Holger Osieck and the inconsistent showings under Pim Verbeek.

The substitutions of Ben Halloran, James Troisi and Mark Bresciano outlined Postecoglou's attacking philosophy, despite the results.

This shift in attitude shows no fear, which gives the nation renewed hope heading into the 2015 Asian Cup and the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Australia in their 4-2-3-1:



BELGIUM

Formation: Despite having riches of talent in the squad, Marc Wilmots made no surprise in the starting XI, leaving both Fellaini and Mertens on the bench, as Belgium lined up in a 4-2-3-1 shape.

With four natural centre-backs across the defense, Belgium's creative spark was to come from attacking midfielders Nacer Chadli, De Bruyne and Eden Hazard; due to the lack of overlapping runs from the full backs.

Formation Changes: Lining up in the same formation that saw them dominate Group H, Belgium's 4-2-3-1 caused many problems for the USA's mirror 4-2-3-1 in the second round.

Belgian captain, Vincent Kompany shrugged off a groin strain to return to the starting XI.

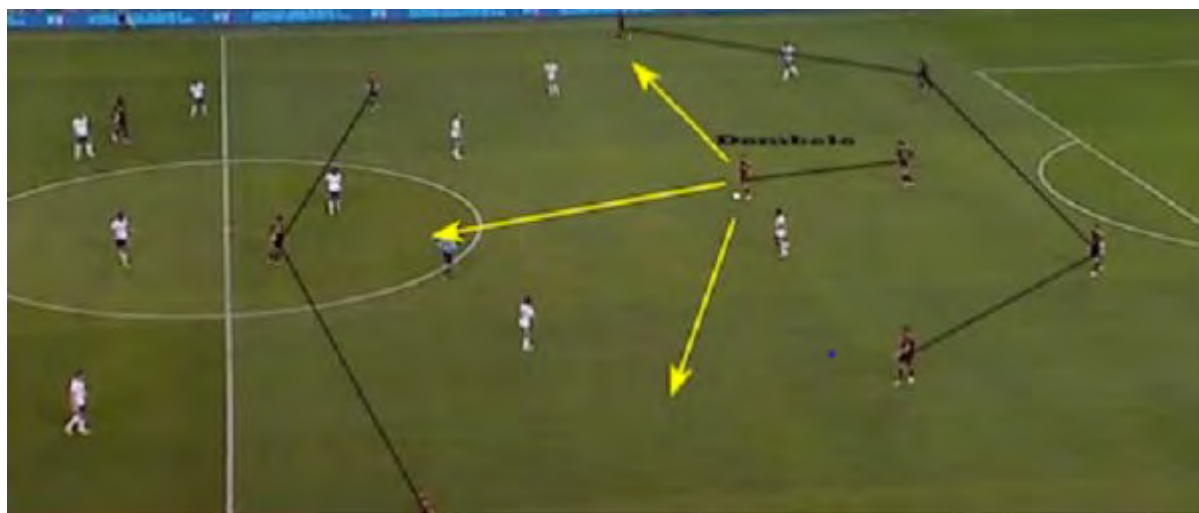
Changes further up the field saw 19 year-old, Divock Origi who scored the late winner against the Korean Republic replace the inconsistent Romelu Lukaku as the central striker.

Coach, Marc Wilmots opted with the Axel Witsel, Marouane Fellaini and De Bruyne combination in midfield that had bossed the group stage.

In the Quarterfinals, only one change was made to the team, which defeated the USA in extra time, with Kevin Mirallas replacing Dries Mertens on the right flank. The Belgians lined up in a familiar 4-2-3-1 formation, with De Bruyne occupying the No. 10 role and 19 year-old Divoc Origi leading the line. Marouane Fellani and Axel Witsel formed a midfield duo and were tasked the job of curbing the influence of Messi.

Going Forward: Despite winning four of their five matches, the Belgians were flattered to deceive on the big stage, providing some listless attacking displays in narrow victories both in their group matches and against the USA. Boasting one of the youngest and most talented squads in the entire field, Brazil 2014 proved a tournament too soon for Marc Wilmots' side. However, with stars such as De Bruyne, Hazard, Lukaku and Thibaut Courtois about to enter their peak footballing years, expect the Red Devils to be a force to be reckoned with come the European Championships in 2016.

Belgium in their 4-2-3-1 with the "spraying" holding midfielder.



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

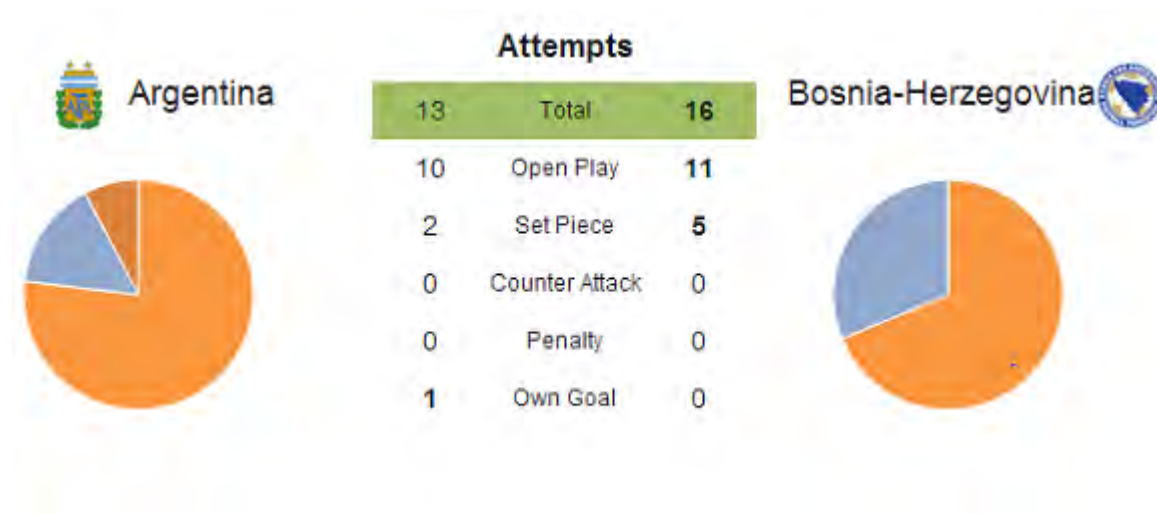
Formation: Bosnia lined-up in a 4-1-3-2 with a flat back four, a defensive midfielder, 3 central midfielders and 2 strikers up top.

The 4-1-3-2 was a perfect fit for Bosnia, especially in this World Cup, for a variety of reasons. First, it was defensively simple and easy to organize. Second, they could crowd the midfield and suppress the creativity of more talented teams. Third, it allowed the midfielders to transition from defense to attack very quickly. Finally, it provides the two strikers the ability to link up with the midfield and with each other. The main downside to this tactic is that it does not provide much width and most of Bosnia's attacks are going to come through the middle of the park, which allows their opponents to defend more easily.

Formation Changes: None

Going Forward: They will have to be happy to walk away from a match with Argentina in front of a huge pro-Argentina crowd having only lost by a goal and for sections of the match, being the better team. Against Nigeria and Iran, they will have harboured ambitions of getting out of the group but if they put in a performance like the one they did against Argentina and are slightly more clinical they would have easily advanced.

Post-Match Statistics vs. Argentina:



BRAZIL

Formation: Brazil lined up for their first match of the 2014 FIFA World cup exactly as they did in their last competitive match; the 2013 Confederations Cup final.

Their game was predicated on drawing runners from wide and deep areas in order to create, which caused Oscar to shoulder a lot of pressure as their central playmaker. Paulinho shuttled behind and Gustavo acted as the screening midfielder in front of Luiz while Thiago Silva dropped deep as a third auxiliary central defender.

Formation Changes: In their second group match against Mexico, Brazil adopted a 4-3-2-1 formation and replaced Hulk with Ramires on the right flank.

This line-up emphasized the importance of the outside-backs getting forward and supporting the attack.

Once again, Fred was selected as the lone striker, despite his below-average performance against Croatia. Scolari evidently favoured the attacking trio of Neymar, Oscar and Fred.

Brazil manager Luiz Felipe Scolari employed a consistent first eleven over the course of the tournament, but was forced to replace the injured Paulinho with Fernandinho in central midfield when they faced off with Chile in the second round. They returned to their trusty 4-2-3-1 formation, but Oscar played central instead of Neymar to help combat Chile's midfield.

Having seen off Chile via the dreaded penalty shoot-out in their round of 16 clash despite dominating large aspects of the game, Seleção boss Luis Felipe Scolari made two changes to his side.

Paulinho was preferred to Luis Gustavo in midfield as Scolari opted for more speed, whilst most interestingly the more attacking minded Dani Alves was replaced by veteran defender Maicon at right back. Fred continued to lead the line, despite coming under criticism from the Brazilian public for his lack of goals at the tournament with the usual trio of Oscar, Hulk and Neymar sitting in behind the former Lyon striker.

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari kept faith in his favoured 4-2-3-1 system going into the semi-final vs. Germany. However, a host of personnel changes were made, two of them forced and the others tactical. Neymar missed out after suffering a fractured vertebra against Colombia, while Thiago Silva was suspended due to his unnecessary challenge on David Ospina. Dante collaborated David Luiz as the Bayern Munich centre-back made his first appearance at the World Cup. Bernard replaced the injured Neymar as the wide player in the three-pronged attack behind the dreadful Fred. Luiz Gustavo was also restored to the line-up returning from his suspension against Chile.

Still again, Luiz Felipe Scolari stuck with his preferred 4-2-3-1 formation and still again he made six changes to the starting lineup from Tuesday's semi-final. Skipper Thiago Silva returned from suspension to partner with David Luiz in defense.

At the other end of the field, Jo replaced the underperforming Fred as the side's target man while Marcelo, Fernandinho, Hulk, and Bernard were relegated to the bench in place of Maxwell, Paulinho, Ramires, and Willian respectively.

Brazil crashed out of their own World Cup in this formation and line-up: (4-2-3-1): Julio Cesar, Maicon, Thiago Silva, David Luiz, Maxwell; Luiz Gustavo, Paulinho; Ramires, Oscar, Willian; Jo.

Going Forward: Brazil were ruthlessly exposed for the second time in as many matches by the Dutch counterparts and failed to restore the nation's pride after their seismic semifinal defeat to Germany.

Scolari insisted that he would not be stepping down as coach but the Federation had other idea after seeing him guide the Seleção to consecutive defeats for the first time in 74 years with his recent firing and subsequent hiring of Dunga.

The fans were very supportive throughout; but Brazil's sporting performance at their own World Cup finished on a sour note and the players were rightly jeered off the pitch at the final whistle.

Here we see the defensive nightmare Brazil was against Germany:



CAMEROON

Formation: Cameroon opened up play with a lone striker up front in Samuel Eto'o and utilised a 4-2-3-1 formation. Trying to maximize Eto'o's strengths, they sat deep and tried to serve long balls and crisp passes to the feet of their talismanic striker. Their lack of creative midfielders, however, proved problematic.

The Indomitable Lions tried to be compact and compress the spaces between the midfield and the back four; however, there was a distinct lack of cohesion playing right into the hands of the composed Mexican outfit in their opener.

Formation Changes: Volker Finke set his side up in a 4-5-1 bringing Schalke centre-back Joel Matip into midfield in an attempt to disrupt the creative minds of Luka Modric and Ivan Rakitic for their second match against Croatia.

Where Croatian were strengthened by the return of Mandzukic, Cameroon would have to do without their captain and iconic front man, Samuel Eto'o. After sustaining a knee injury during their opening match against Mexico, Eto'o, could only make the bench meaning Vincent Aboubakar would lead the line for the Indomitable Lions.

Against Brazil, an inability to keep possession in the midfield allowed Cameroon to carve out a number of chances, one of which was converted by Joel Matip to equalise in the first half.

However, these tactics failed to disrupt their opponents' attacking prowess. M'Bia, who was employed to sit deep in a 4-1-4-1 setup and block Neymar's link up play, failed to do so. Counter attacking opportunities were rare and the team's anguish without their key players was subjugated by a strong Brazilian display in the attacking third.

Going Forward: Cameroon bid farewell to the competition after finishing at the bottom of their group with zero points from three outings. It would be specious to state that Cameroonian football has become the nervous wreck of African football; unlike many other countries, notably South Africa, they do at least typically qualify for the finals. The problem is what happens when they get there, for Cameroon is a story of misspent potential. The squad needs major rebuilding and Finke, if he stays in charge, faces several challenges to deal with such as the rift between his own players being the primary concern.

Here we see Cameroon sitting back and allowing a composed Mexican side knock the ball at will.



CHILE

Formation: There was a spot in Jorge Sampaoli's side for returning star Arturo Vidal as the Chileans decided to open up with a 4-3-3 formation that saw defensive midfielder Gary Medel playing at right-back. Sanchez operated in the No. 10 role and supported Eduardo Vargas who spearheaded the attack.

Formation Changes: Jorge Sampaoli went with the uncanny approach of playing three at the back in a 3-4-1-2 formation against Spain. The decision proved a masterstroke as his side dealt with the Spanish attack all night. Arturo Vidal was fit for the clash after being taken off prematurely in the Chileans' previous match against Australia. However, Jorge Valdivia was dropped to the bench with Francisco Silva as his replacement.

Chile used a 3-4-3 formation throughout the rest of the tournament, even though there were doubts over whether manager Jorge Sampaoli would use this system against Brazil. Sampaoli persisted with the three-man defence, which had often left gaps out wide with the only change coming with the inclusion of Arturo Vidal, who played at the top of the midfield four.

Going Forward: It's was sad to see Chile eliminated. Their unique approach to football was a joy to watch and it is fair to say they would have gone further had the draw not been so cruel to them. While Sanchez and Vidal are obviously key players, what makes Chile so interesting is their collective approach to pressing and their willingness to throw players forward to attack. They were sorely missed as the tournament progressed and were extremely unlucky to lose the way they did.

Here is a look at that initial 4-3-3 from Chile:



COLOMBIA

Formation: Teófilo Gutiérrez was a surprise inclusion, with the River Plate forward getting the nod ahead of the likes of Sevilla man Carlos Bacca and Porto's Jackson Martinez in the opener. However, the striker reciprocated the faith to score after the interval. Manager José Néstor Pékerman utilised a more pragmatic approach, employing a 4-2-3-1 system that compacted the midfield. Fiorentina winger Juan Cuadrado was also installed on the wing to add speed and width to the side.

Formation Changes: Pékerman opted to maintain the line-up that delivered a crushing 3-0 victory against an uninspiring Greece in the second group match and in what became a staple tactical arrangement for the Colombians, Pékerman again fielded a 4-2-3-1 formation with a heavy reliance on pacey wingers Cuadrado and Segund Ibarbo, as well as young playmaker Rodriguez.

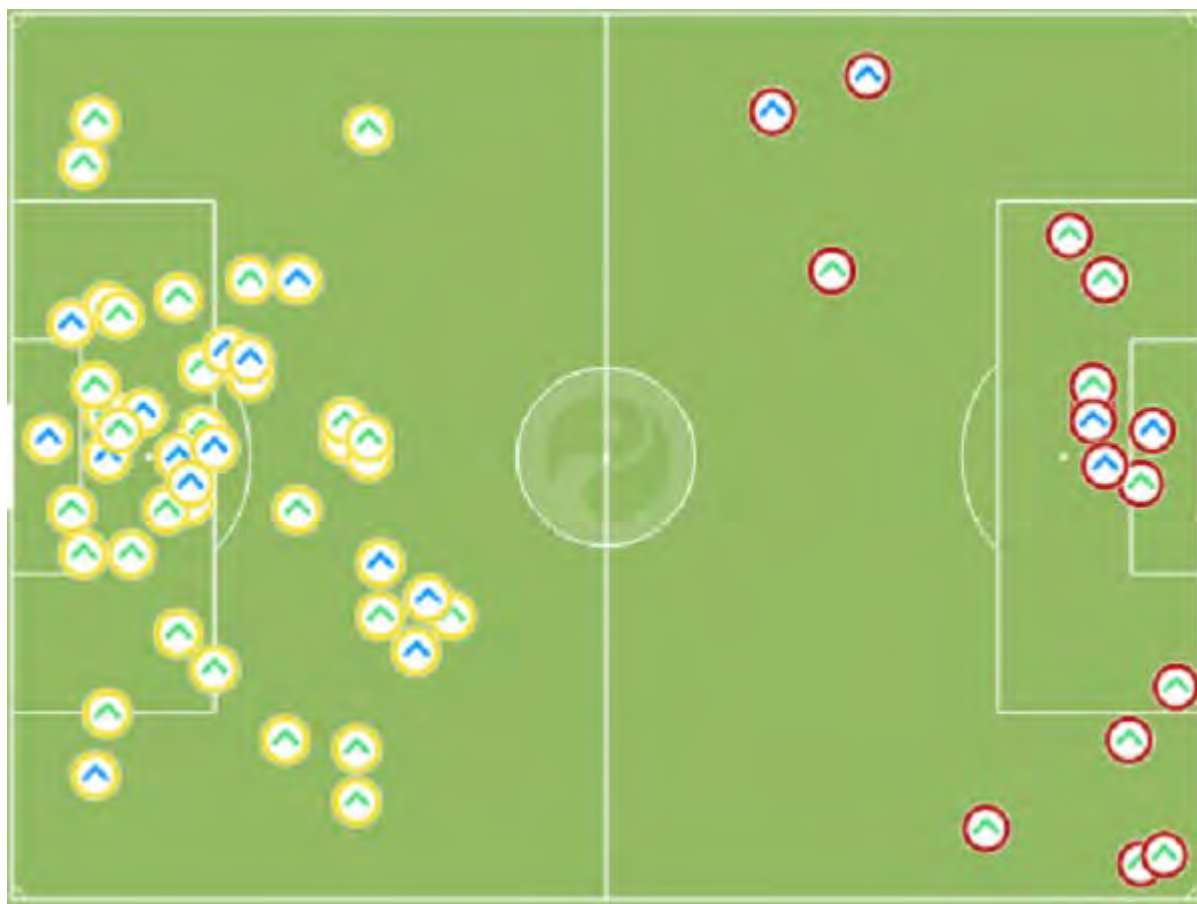
Against Japan, Colombia demonstrated their incredible depth with six changes to the eleven that won against Ivory Coast. In defence Santiago Aria, Eder Balanta and Carlos Valdes came in for Carlos Zuniga, Cristian Zapata and Mario Yepes, while Abel Aguilar and Carlos Sanchez made way for Juan Quintero and Alexander Mejia in the middle. Up front, Victor Ibarbo and Gutierrez were swapped out for Adrian Ramos and Martinez, but Jose Pékerman still utilised his aggressive 4-2-3-1.

Colombia's attacking intent was clear from the outset against Uruguay, lining up in a 4-4-2 with numerous changes to the side that decimated Japan in the last group stage match. Teófilo Gutierrez replaced Adrian Ramos and paired with Jackson Martinez up front, with the dynamic James on the wing to terrorise the Uruguayan defence. Abel Aguilar, Carlos Sanchez and Christian Zapata also returned to the starting eleven after being rested for the previous match.

Colombia coach Jose Pékerman displayed his tactical prowess throughout the tournament with his side having played some fantastic counter-attacking football. The Argentine opted for his usual 4-2-3-1 formation in the quarterfinals with Freddy Guarin and Carlos Sanchez continuing in their roles as screeners in front of the back four with Victor Ibarbo the only change to the starting line-up as he replaced Jackson Martinez. Rodriguez continued in his free role up high as the forward with the former Atletico Madrid man regularly seen to be dropping deep to receive the ball.

Going Forward: For all of their attacking talent it was Colombia's defending of set pieces that sent them home early. Conceding the early goal was a real kick in the teeth as Brazil proceeded to shut up shop at the back, limiting the influence of Colombia's key men in Ibarbo, Rodriguez and Cuadrado. Had they not conceded so early this match may well have ended differently, but ultimately it was an over reliance on Rodriguez to get them back into it which proved decisive.

The following graphic exemplifies Colombia's prolific attacking as they forced Brazil to make more than twice as many defensive clearances than they did.



COSTA RICA

Formation: Costa Rican coach Jorge Luis Pinto opened up play by utilising a 5-4-1 line-up with a five-man defence. Outside backs, Junior Diaz and Cristian Gamboa were expected to push forward on the flanks. The Los Ticos defence looked to negate any offensive onslaught and had stellar goalkeeper Keylor Navas as their final resort.

Formation Changes: Costa Rica manager Jorge Luis Pinto made two changes to the line-up that drew 0-0 with England with Michael Umana replacing Roy Miller in defence and Cristian Bolanos replacing Randall Brenes on the flank. Los Ticos remained in their defensively sound 5-4-1 formation, with outside-backs Junior Diaz and Cristian Gamboa providing the attacking width in the outside-back positions and allowing Ruiz to push further forward when in attack. Celso Borges and Yeltsin Tejeda provided the defensive shield in front of the back three, with Ruiz playing in behind in-form striker Joel Campbell.

In the quarterfinal, Costa Rica stayed in a 5-4-1 formation. Keylor Navas was once again resolute in goal. The suspension of defender Oscar Duarte led to the first start for Johnny Acosta, alongside Cristian Gamboa, Giancarlo Gonzalez, Michael Umana and Junior Diaz in a strong defence that only conceded two goals throughout the duration of their World Cup campaign. Yeltsin Tejeda, Celso Borges, Christian Bolanos and Bryan Ruiz were crucial in midfield, as Joel Campbell once again led the attack.

Going Forward: This is by no means the end of the road for Costa Rica. They have gained a worldwide following with an exciting, but yet defensively secure style of play. Players such as their goalkeeper Navas and striker Campbell have become stars in the making and will have attracted many clubs attention with their inspired performances throughout the entire tournament. It is now imperative for Costa Rica and their passionate coach Jorge Luis Pinto, to build on these World Cup performances and show the world that Costa Rica, as a strong footballing country, is here to stay.

Costa Rica and their 5-4-1:



COTE d'IVOIRE

Formation: Cote d'Ivoire started with a 4-2-1-3 formation, which attempted to make the most of both the superb playmaking abilities of Yaya Toure and the pace of wingers Gervinho and Salomon Kalou.

The biggest surprise though was the decision to start Bony over veteran Drogba up front. Kolo Toure also started from the bench, following his malaria scare over the previous two weeks.

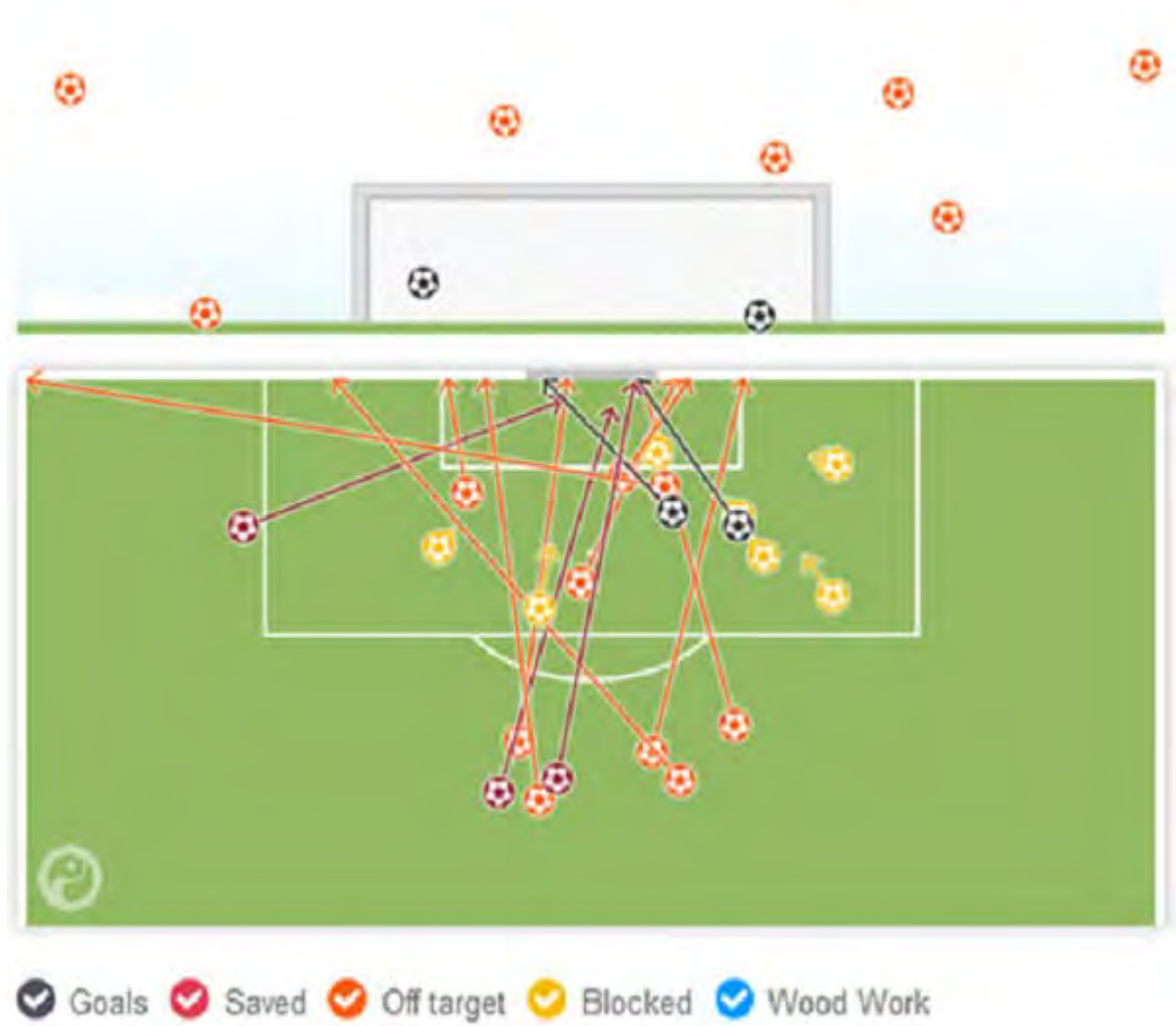
Formation Changes: Cote d'Ivoire only needed a draw out of their final group match and for Colombia to defeat Japan and they were off to the second round. Yet, Sabri Lamouchi was forced to make a change to the starting line-up with Didier Zokora out suspended. Therefore, Kolo Toure was brought in his place while the experienced Drogba was given his first start of the World Cup, being preferred over Swansea star Bony. Like their opponents Greece, Cote d'Ivoire began the match in a 4-2-3-1 shape.

Going Forward: It has become a case of underachievement for Cote d'Ivoire who has been the best African side on paper for the past three World Cups. Yet, they have also failed to qualify past the group stage each time.

Cote d'Ivoire will feel hard done by after conceding the dubious penalty that ultimately sent them home, but they only have themselves to blame for not creating enough clear opportunities against a confident Greek side in their third group match.

Lamouchi stood down as manager after the tournament, while Drogba is now retired from international football. With their golden generation now slowly exiting, Cote d'Ivoire have nothing to show for, despite all their lofty expectations.

An example of their “missed chances” is shown in the following ‘shot map’ from their match against Japan:



CROATIA

Formation: Croatia opened up the 2014 World Cup in a slightly modified 4-5-1 and its forward pressing qualities were somewhat reined in compared to their most recent friendly with Australia, as the threat of leaving gaps was far greater against Brazil.

Ivica Olic and Ivan Perisic acted as old-school wingers when in possession, but their narrow positioning when defending meant time and space in central areas was at a premium throughout; a tactic used to great effect at least initially.

Formation Changes: Niko Kovac's men lined up in a similar formation to the one that saw them fall desperately short of a first round upset against the host nation, Brazil, in their opening match.

Needing the three points to have any hope of progressing, Kovac employed a 4-3-3 with the attacking emphasis coming through inverted flanking midfielders and overlapping outside-backs providing early and quality balls into the box.

Three attacking changes to the team saw the marauding left back, Danijel Pranjin start the match, attacking midfielder Sammir preferred over the more conservative Kovacic and Bayern Munich's Mandzukic replacing Hull City's Nikica Jelavic as the central striker.

Kovac's preferred 4-2-3-1 structure was utilized in their final group match against Mexico. The changes that were made enforced the need for the Croatians to come away with the three points. Luka Modric was pushed in to a more advanced role alongside veteran Ivica Olic and star performer Ivan Perisic. Sime Vrsaljko replaced Sammir in the left-back position, while stellar goal scorer Mario Mandzukic anchored the forward line following his impressive performance in the demolition of Cameroon.

Going Forward: Croatia underperformed. Having watched them in their first game against Brazil, there was a sense that they should have at least gained a point but just could not produce when their big moment came. With the likes of Modric, Rakitic and Mandzukic, there is no doubt they possess some first class players, but it seems the World Cup is a hurdle too far and too soon for this talented bunch. Unfortunately, they went home after just three group games for the third world cup in a row.

Croatia in the modified 4-5-1:



ECUADOR

Formation: Ecuador decided to open with the classic 4-4-2 formation, looking to pass out wide and attack down the wings with Enner Valencia ready to finish at the front. Deadly midfielder Caicedo played a key left midfield role for most of the opening match, using his pace to link together the Ecuador counter attack and draw the Swiss defenders out of position.

Formation Changes: In the second group match, Ecuador lined up in its usual 4-4-2 with Antonio Valencia and Jefferson Montero on the flanks. Felipe Caicedo's presence as the focal point of Reinaldo Rueda's team would be crucial against an ultra-physical opponent such as Honduras.

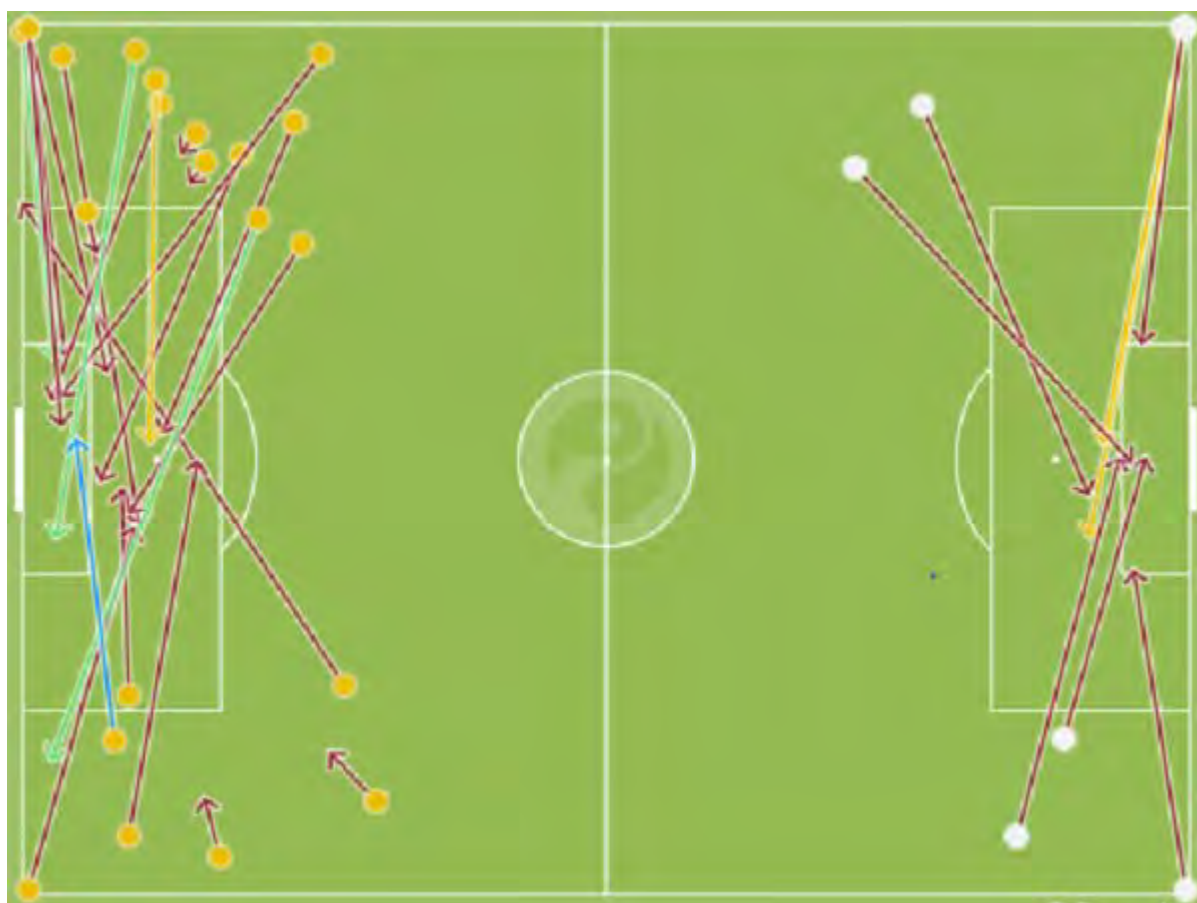
Rueda only made a single change after the loss against Switzerland, opting for the experience of Oswaldo Minda ahead of 19-year-old Stuttgart midfielder, Carlos Gruezo.

Going Forward: Rueda's men will still be ruing the opening day loss to the Swiss, which left this speedy outfit in a precarious position the rest of the way.

It can be argued that against lesser opposition, which Honduras were, they actually shown a worse performance. An early tactic to play open in such a careless manner proved ultimately detrimental to Ecuador's dreams of progression.

In truth, delivery from wide areas told the tale of their story.

This is evident from the following graphic showing services from both teams:



ENGLAND

Formation: Roy Hodgson entered the match with a 4-2-3-1 where protection for the back four was paramount, especially since they are not as blessed as they were when John Terry and Rio Ferdinand were marshalling the defence.

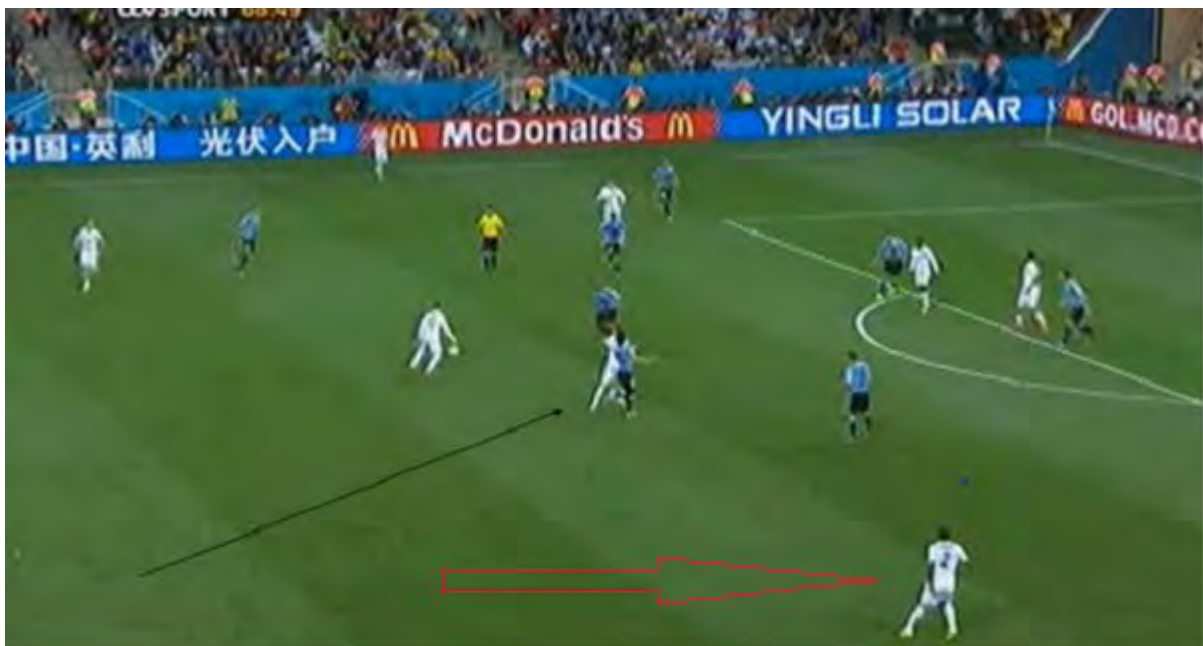
Formation Changes: Despite a 2-1 loss in their opener, England named an unchanged starting line up from the side that faced Italy in that opening match. The only tactical modification that Roy Hodgson made was to play Wayne Rooney in a central role behind main striker Daniel Sturridge in a 4-2-3-1 formation. Raheem Sterling played on the right hand side with Danny Welbeck on the left after widespread criticism of Hodgson's decision to play Rooney in the position against the Italians.

Going Forward: Hodgson's men gained confidence after an encouraging performance against Italy, but the high intensity and attacking vigor shown in Manaus could not be recreated again. The danger men: Sterling, Sturridge and Welbeck particularly; were quiet the rest of the way besides one or two flashes of skill. The only positive for England comes in the form of a Rooney goal, something that will remove a huge amount of pressure from the 28-year-old's shoulders.

However, no side has ever progressed after losing their first two group games and England made an early exit from this World Cup and will likely rue missed chances against Uruguay and Italy when they look back.

Hodgson will now look ahead to Euro 2016 after what has been an ultimately disappointing tournament for the Three Lions.

The image below shows Gerrard advancing beyond Rooney, as both outside backs provide the width:



FRANCE

Formation: Didier Deschamps's side lined up in a 4-3-3 for their opener vs. Honduras, with Mathieu Debuchy and Antoine Griezmann providing varied width behind lone-striker Karim Benzema. Debuchy and Patrice Evra provided the overlapping run behind the narrow pair, at times, giving the side added versatility. Yohan Cabaye acted as the deep-lying distributor with Blaise Matuidi and Paul Pogba serving as the shuttlers ahead.

Formation Changes: France manager Didier Deschamps set his team up in a 4-3-3 and made two changes from the comfortable 3-0 win against Honduras, with Moussa Sissoko replacing Paul Pogba in midfield and interestingly, Olivier Giroud replacing Antoine Griezmann. With Giroud and Karim Benzema both starting, the two rotated playing left and centre forward.

In the second-round Didier Deschamps opted for his preferred and positive minded 4-3-3 system that had brought his side so much joy thus far. This permitted them to get the lion's share of possession and create the bulk of the game's openings.

Laurent Koscielny shrugged off an Achilles niggle to take his place at the heart of the defense alongside Raphael Varane.

Meanwhile, Yohan Cabaye regained his spot in the starting 11 in place of Morgan Schneiderlin.

Against Germany, France returned to their 4-3-3 formation for the start of the match, with Mamadou Sakho replacing Laurent Koscielny as centre-back. Stopping the German exploitation of the middle of the pitch was key to victory for the French, while also looking to Yohan Cabaye to feed the ball into the path of the strikers.

Going Forward: After promising form in the group stage and the round of 16, France should rightfully feel disappointed with the manner in which they exited this World Cup and could have fought much harder to take the game away from Germany. It was clear in the quarterfinal clash that they missed Franck Ribery in attack, with Benzema unable to capitalise on a number of opportunities at an equaliser. Although they could have gone further, the French have made up for their horror of a 2010 tournament and will look at a group of young and talented players as a promising sign for the future.

Here we see the French in their 4-3-3 with the outside front-runner retracted back in order to force Germany to play the ball wide.



GERMANY

Formation: Germany adopted a 4-3-3 formation against the fourth ranked side in the world and used Muller in the false nine position that has gained significant prominence since Barcelona's years of success under Pep Guardiola.

Philipp Lahm sat in a deep lying midfield position in the absence of Bastian Schweinsteiger, which left Jerome Boateng and Benedikt Howedes playing as a makeshift outside-backs.

Sami Khedira and Toni Kroos were employed in midfield, whilst Mario Gotze and Mesut Ozil completed the forward three alongside Muller to provide the creative spark that inevitably tore Portugal apart.

Formation Changes: After Mats Hummels was declared fit to play Low saw no reason to change a winning formula, picking the same starting eleven that routed the Portuguese in Salvador for the their second group match. The German 4-3-3 would see a rigid back four while the midfield and forward trios rotated positions throughout the game.

Joachim Low continued with the 4-3-3 formation he has used in all previous matches in the World Cup against the United States, but left out Sami Khedira and Mario Gotze for Bastian Schweinsteiger and Lukas Podolski, respectively. Phillip Lahm screened the back four in a holding midfield role, with the diminutive midfielder covering for Toni Kroos and Schweinsteiger who were given the license to roam forward. Thomas Muller began as a striker before moving to the wing with the introduction of Miroslav Klose in the second half, who made an immediate difference by shifting the attention of the American defence away from Muller, leaving him unmarked to sink home the winner in the 55th minute.

Joachim Low stayed with the 4-3-3 line-up for Germany that had been successful against Algeria in the Round of 16. World Cup veteran Miroslav Klose returned to the team after recovering from a hamstring issue to join Thomas Muller and Mesut Ozil in attack, however, worryingly for the Germans the majority of the team had been exhibiting symptoms of the flu coming into the match which did affect their performance in the Brazilian heat.

Germany went unchanged from their victory over France and the continuity and stability was ever-present for the Germans. Joachim Loew also chose to stick with his preferred 4-3-3 with Miroslav Klose spearheading the attack. Centre-back Mats Hummels also preserved his place despite rumours he was unwell.

For the final, Joachim Löew was afforded the luxury of 100 percent squad fitness leading into the match. However, midfield linchpin Sami Khedira pulled out of the warm-up with a calf injury, forcing youngster Christoph Kramer into the starting lineup for just his fifth international cap. He was partnered by Toni Kroos and Bastian Schweinsteiger in midfield in what was the only change to the side who demolished the host nation 7-1.

Löew maintained the 4-3-3 that had served his side so well in their six previous World Cup matches, headed by an impressive strike force consisting of all-time top World Cup goal scorer, Miroslav Klose, the creative Mesut Özil and Golden Boot contender Thomas Müller.

Going Forward: Third place at Germany 2006, runners up at Euro 2008, third at the 2010 World Cup and third place at Euro 2012. This title had been a long time coming for the Germans.

Consistent competitiveness translated into dominance in Brazil 2014 where Germany plundered an incredible 18 goals on their way to the World Cup title.

Without an obvious star player, their fluid passing style of play within an articulate structure proved once more that an organized team unit trumps individual brilliance.

Congratulations Deutschland, champions of the world!



GHANA

Formation: Ghana opened World Cup play in a 4-4-2 formation. Muntari and Rabiu sat deeper in midfield with Andre Ayew in a more advanced role. Gyan, Atsu and Jordan Ayew comprised a versatile front three. Gyan stayed more central with Atsu and Ayew exposing the space in behind the American outside backs.

Formation Changes: Ghana coach Akwasi Appiah made three changes to the group that started against the United States going onto their second match, bringing in Harrison Afful on the right side of defence for Daniel Opare, switching out goalkeeper Adam Kwararsey in place of Fatau Dauda and Kevin-Prince Boateng started in place of Jordan Ayew in a classic 4-4-2.

Setting up in the same, narrow 4-4-2 formation that helped the Black Stars earn a valuable point against the Germans in their last match, Ghana named an unchanged back four with the first-choice goalkeeper Fatau Dauda in goal.

There were changes, however, in midfield and up front following the expulsion of key players Sulley Muntari of AC Milan and Kevin Prince Boateng of FC Schalke 04 after reported disciplinary indiscretions. This meant that the defensive-minded Emmanuel Badu started in midfield and Majeed Waris joined Gyan and Ayew in an attacking trio.

Going Forward: In a contrasting manner to their opponents, Ghana was on the wrong end of close score lines. However, some spirited displays instilled belief in the camp and at points; it looked as though they would secure progression. Ultimately, a lack of quality in the final third hurt the African nation who can be proud of their World Cup contributions, on the field at least.

Here is a perfect image of Ghana's 4-4-2:



GREECE

Formation: Greece opted to begin with the standard 4-4-2 formation. Consistent Roma defender Vasilis Torisidis was deployed in his usual right back position, renowned for his excellent defensive abilities as well as providing the incisive cross. Giorgos Samaras and Gekas were selected as the two strikers, offering experience up front, with the former posing an aerial threat.

Formation Changes: Fernando Santos made two changes to the starting line-up that lost 3-0 to Columbia in the opening match. Star striker Kostas Mitroglou returned to lead the line in place of Theofanis Gekas, while Loannis Fetfatzidis' impressive cameo off the bench in the previous match earned him a starting spot ahead of Dimitris Salpingidis. The Greeks lined up in a 4-1-2-2-1 formation, with captain Katsourinis, Maniatis and Kone forming a midfield trio in the centre of the park. Fetfatzidis and Samaras provided the width in behind lone striker Mitroglou.

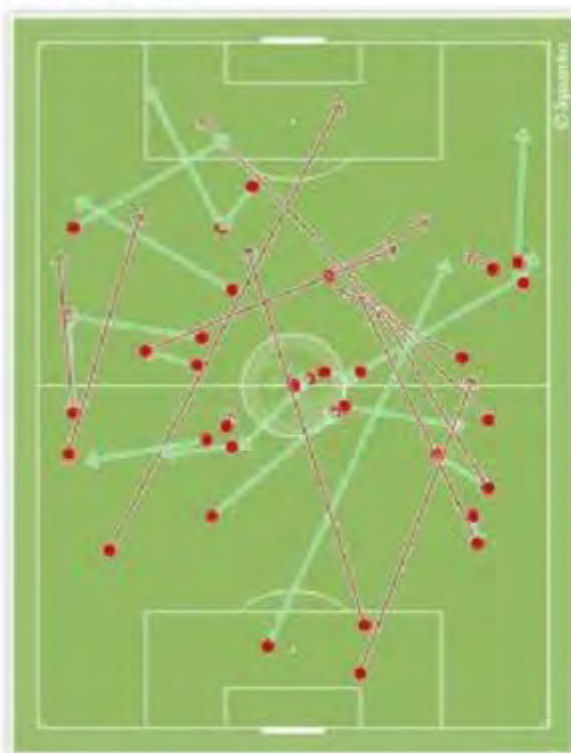
Needing a victory for any chance of qualification, Fernando Santos made three changes to the line-up that drew against Japan. In a blow for Greece, Kostas Mitroglou would see no part of the game due to a knock he sustained against Japan while Euro 2004 star Kostas Katsourinis was suspended. Veterans Dimitris Salpingidis and Giorgos Karagounis along with Lazaros Christodouloupoulos were given starts as Greece lined up in a 4-2-3-1 formation.

Fernandos Santos made only one change to the Greek side who beat Ivory Coast 2-1 in their thrilling final Group C match, with goal scorer Andreas Samaris earning a starting berth in replacing Panagotis Kone. The Greeks set out in a 4-1-4-1 formation, with Jose Holebas and Vasilis Torisidis providing the attacking outlet down the flanks next to the solid central defensive pairing of Sokratis and Manolas. Giorgos Karagounis retained his deep midfield role despite the availability of Konstantinos Katsourinis, with Giannis Maniatis and Andreas Samaris stationed in the centre of midfield to distribute to wide players Dimitris Salpingidis and Lazaros Christodouloupoulos. Georgios Samaras led the line after scoring the decisive penalty in the 2-1 victory against the Ivory Coast.

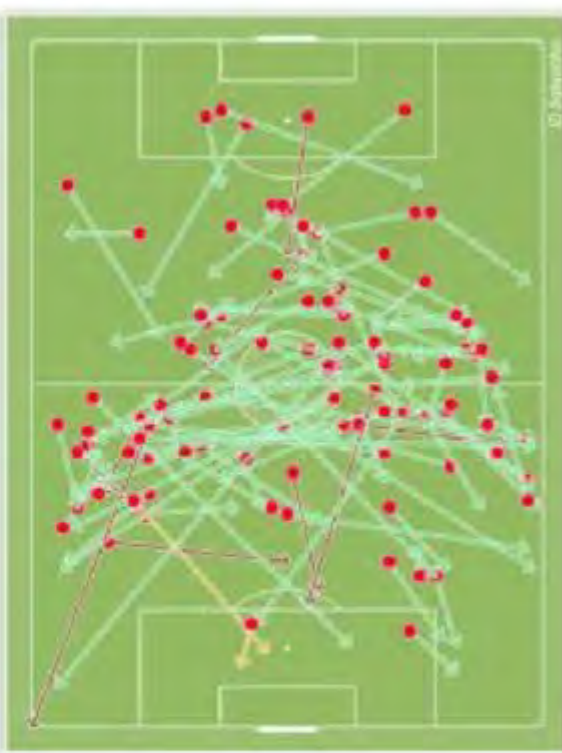
Going Forward: In what was arguably their best attacking display in a major tournament, the Greeks will be bitterly disappointed to have failed to capitalise on their opportunities. The exit signals the end of Fernando Santos's reign as manager and the Portuguese tactician can bow out with his head held high, as he became the first manager in Greece's history to lead the team past the group stage of the World Cup.

The following image shows the success of Greece's offense over this World Cup:

Costa Rica



Greece



Costa Rica ↑

☒ Completed
 ☒ Failed
 ☒ Key passes
 ☒ Assist
☒ Normal
 ☒ Longball
 ☒ Headed
 ☒ Through-ball

↓ Greece

HONDURAS

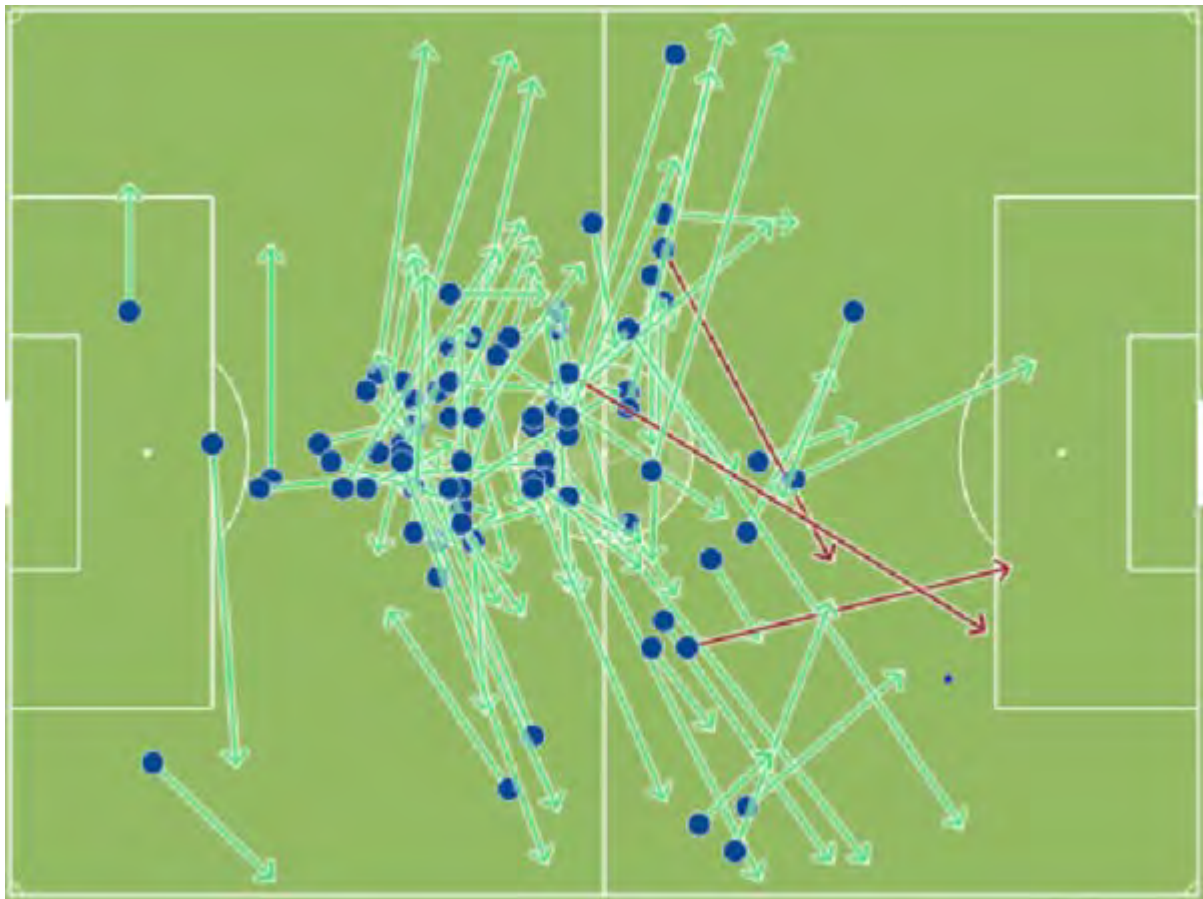
Formation: In their World Cup opener, Honduras coach Luis Suarez was happy to be outnumbered in midfield, but used second-striker Carlo Costly as the first line of defence in front of Palacios and Luis Garrido. Unfortunately for the Central American's, the battle was over before it started as this tactic was employed at Suarez and Honduras's detriment.

Formation Changes: Against Ecuador, Honduras coach Luis Suarez made the obvious decision to replace the suspended Wilson Palacios with Jorge Claros in a like-for-like switch, which helped the Central Americans to keep continuity to its system and ultimately, 11 men on the pitch.

Boniek Garcia's energy against France earned him a starting berth on the right ahead of Andy Najar, who did a terrible job of putting any serious pressure on Mathieu Valbuena last time out, while similarly failing with his own forward raids.

Going Forward: A spirited performance but ultimately lacking the cutting edge to really trouble teams at this level. Suarez drilled his troops well, but since the Hondurans' existence in this tournament did not extend beyond Wednesday evening in Manaus, a more aesthetically pleasing approach will need to be called upon in the future while much of this squad will be regenerated in the years to come.

The following image shows what opponents did against Honduras due to their inability to apply the proper pressure centrally.



IRAN

Formation: Unsurprisingly, Quiroz went for his standard 4-2-3-1 line-up, with Reez Ghoochannejhad being the lone striker, supported by the likes of Fulham's Ashkan Dejagah, Khosro Heydari and Enhan Hajsafi. Midfielders Andranik Teymourian and Javad Nekounam provided protection for the back four, with Nekounam the key man to lead the charge from deep.

Formation Changes: In their second group outing, Iran set out with their typical defensive mindset and tried to compress the space in midfield by adopting a 4-5-1 formation.

Reza led the line alone upfront, but was inevitably starved of any real opportunities in the first hour.

Going Forward: Queiroz's Iran side went into these clashes with nothing to lose and although they came away with zero points, they certainly left the pitch with plenty of admirers.

Not all is lost for the Middle Eastern nation, as they showed a glimmer of hope in reaching the knockout phase for the first time in their nation's history.

Iran will need to continue heading in the right direction with a slightly more attacking mind frame and draw on the confidence they gained.

Here we see how Iran likes to sit off the player with the ball and instead mark the midfield.



ITALY

Formation: Prandelli adopted a 4-1-2-1-2 to open-up World cup play, but with no Buffon in between the sticks and Abate playing as a centre-back.

Formation Changes: Against Costa Rica, Prandelli employed a 4-3-3 formation. Ignazio Abate was back in his preferred right back position and Captain Gianluigi Buffon gained back the number one goalkeeping spot. Brazilian-born Thiago Motta also featured in the squad at the right of midfield replacing Marco Verratti.

Balotelli spearheaded the attack for the Azzurri, with much of the onus placed on the centre of the park, with Pirlo acting as the holder and the left and right wingers running around him.

In their final group match vs Uruguay, Cesare Prandelli, as announced, switched to a 3-5-2 formation in order to strengthen Italy in the midfield. Paris St Germain's Marco Verratti was the choice to replace an unavailable Daniele De Rossi and Claudio Marchisio was moved into the central midfielder position. For the first time while in Brazil, Prandelli fielded two strikers with Cirio Immobile beside Mario Balotelli.

Going Forward: Although Italy appeared functional for most of the tournament, nothing can excuse the disappointing performance produced by the Azzurri. The decision to start Balotelli has been lamented by coach Prandelli, who has since resigned following Italy's elimination from the competition. Unfortunately, while Balotelli often shows sublime skills his disciplinary issues always mean that he is a risky proposition to start on the pitch. The Italians returned to their home country with the wrath of the media upon them, particularly after two disappointing performances.

A humorous take on the Italian's football perception:

JAPAN

Formation: Japan kept their usual 4-2-3-1 formation when they opened up their campaign with Honda operating as the No. 10 alongside Shinji Kagawa who started on the left and Okazaki on the right.

Captain Makoto Hasebe was brought back into the side despite having been under an injury cloud, as record appearance holder Yasuhito Endo was left on the bench.

Formation Changes: Japan manager Alberto Zaccheroni looked to make a statement following his side's 2-1 reverse against the Ivory Coast, emphasized by his bold decision to leave key midfielder Shinji Kagawa out of the starting eleven. Yoshito Okubo replaced the Manchester United star on the left flank, while Yasuyuki Konno came in to bolster the centre of defence in place of Masato Morishinge. The Blue Samurai lined up in their usual 4-2-3-1 formation, with star man Keisuke Honda again lining up in the No. 10 role and Shinji Okazaki and Okubo providing the width down the flanks. Yuya Osako retained his place as the lone striker.

Alberto Zaccheroni bemoaned the lack of pace and penetration his side exhibited against Greece and made an attacking change to his line-up by bringing in Shinji Kagawa for Yuya Osako. Hotaru Yamaguchi also made way for Toshihiro Aoyama in a like-for-like exchange in the middle of the park. Japan's 4-2-3-1 would see fluid interchange between the front four of Keisuke Honda, Kagawa, Okazaki and Yoshito Okubo.

Going Forward: For the reigning champions of Asia this was a disappointing tournament that could have been so much more. There are still a number of defensive issues that need to be addressed, while the lack of form exhibited by Shinji Kagawa robbed Zaccheroni's offence of a vital component. There is enough to suggest they will be competitive at January's Asian Cup, but changes are needed if they are to retain their trophy.

The following is Japan's positional graphic for all of their combined World Cup tournament matches. Notice the heavy overload toward their left side.



KOREA REPUBLIC

Formation: South Korea seemed to open with a 3-5-2 formation. The support in attack certainly aided the side and allowed the likes of Ki Sung-yueng, Park Chu-young and Son Heung-min to have the space from which they so often deliver.

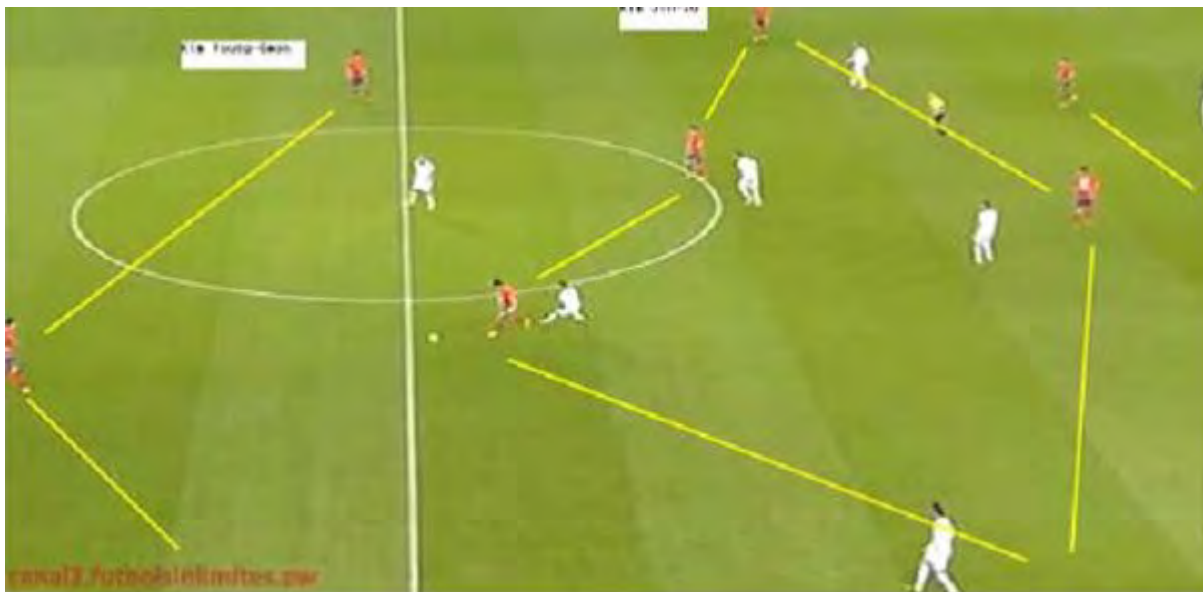
It could not have worked better in the opening stages. The midfield blocked out the Russians, while the Koreans continued to create opportunities.

After the break it was initially a different story, but the side regrouped before finding their feet again.

Formation Changes: South Korean head coach Hong Myung-bo stuck with the exact team and formation (3-5-2) that held on for 1-1 draw with Russia four days earlier.

Going Forward: This tournament was a huge blow for one of Asia's heavyweights. A lack of intensity from the beginning and a soft defensive centre saw Korea blow its chance to progress to the next stage. Their lack of quality showed.

A screenshot of the 3-5-2. Yellow lines connect the 'units.' Lee Yong, Lee Chung-Yong and Park Chu-Young are off screen.



MEXICO

Formation: The dilemma on whether to start Javier Hernandez or Peralta dominated the pre-match talk; however, Herrera's decision to elect the latter was vindicated by his match-winning goal.

Mexico's newly adopted formation of 3-5-2 was astutely executed and their ability to utilize the outside-backs going forward was crucial in breaking Cameroon down.

Peralta, dos Santos and Herrera were all at the heart of Mexico's fluid combination play and their timing of their passes rendered Cameroon's high defensive line nothing but mere bystanders at times.

Formation Changes: Mexico, vs. Brazil, opted for a defensive 5-3-2 formation, with outside backs Andres Guardado and Miguel Layun tucking into the back line when the squad was under pressure. This structure allowed El Tri to utilize the wider areas when attacking on the counter and stretch the Seleção defensively.

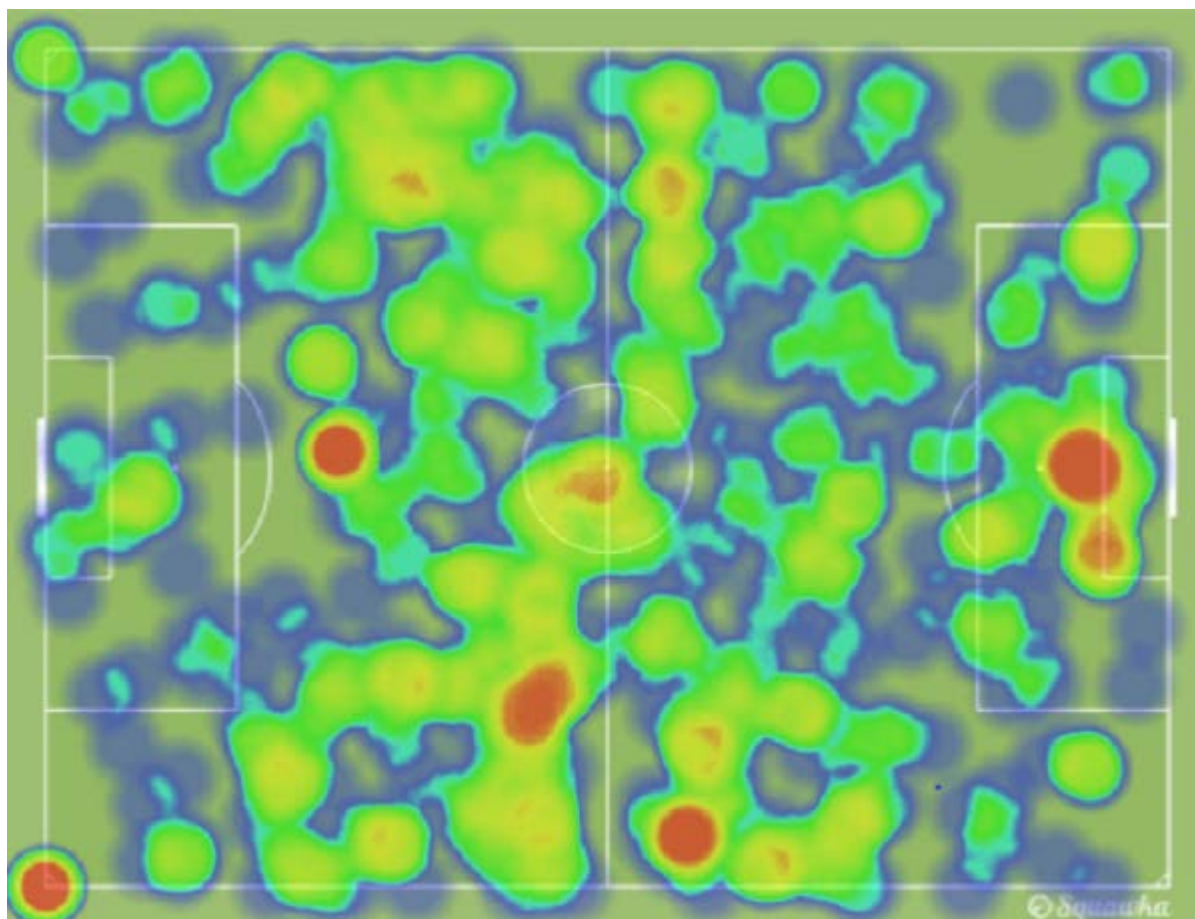
Oribe Peralta's goal against Cameroon earned him the starting forward position originally held by Javier Hernandez, who remained on the bench for the beginning of the match. Giovanni dos Santos was also included in the starting 11 and played slightly behind his Mexican compatriot.

Mexico's lively manager Miguel Herrera made no changes from the side that held Brazil to a nil all stalemate. The 5-3-2 formation was again used by El Tri with Aguilar and Layun operating as flying outside backs. Mexico's midfield three operated slightly behind striker's dos Santos and Peralta.

In the second round, Mexico employed a 5-3-2 formation, often adjusting to a 3-5-2 formation when in attack. Guillermo Ochoa was once again outstanding in goal, while centre back Rafael Marquez was at fault for the penalty. Fellow defenders Francisco Rodriguez, Hector Moreno, Miguel Layun and Paul Aguilar were solid, while the midfield three of Carlos Salcido, Hector Herrera and Andres Guardado were exceptional in stopping Sneijder and his fellow midfielders from having an influence. Giovanni dos Santos scored a wonderful long-range drive while Oribe Peralta was entrusted with leading the line.

Going Forward: It was a shame to see Miguel Herrera's Mexican team knocked out of the tournament at the round of 16 stage once again. However, they surpassed the world's expectations by progressing from a difficult group and players such as Ochoa caught the attention of clubs worldwide. This elimination should not dishearten this promising team as they look to the future on the back of a quality World Cup, gaining many followers throughout who enjoyed the fast-paced, lively Mexican style; always looking to entertain.

The following heat map is an example of the exciting brand of football that Mexico displayed showing how they were all over the field against Cameroon.



NETHERLANDS

Formation: In the days leading up to the eagerly awaited encounter, van Gaal conceded that his Dutch team would need to abandon their typical 4-3-3 and adopt a new system in order to derail an efficient Spain.

In a bold tactical move van Gaal set up his Dutch squad in a 3-5-2 formation, crowding the midfield corridor. The 3-5-2 also provided his side with an outlet through the wing-backs when they won possession.

Formation Changes: The Dutch looked to attack from the outset against Australia, starting in the 3-5-2 formation that had been so successful against Spain. However, as the match played out and the Netherlands realised they had a real test on their hands, Louis van Gaal reverted to the more conservative 4-3-3, which they utilised during the qualifying stages.

Louis van Gaal set the Netherlands in a 4-3-3 formation against Mexico, a change from the 3-5-2 formation relied upon throughout previous games. Ron Vlaar and Stefan de Vrij were solid as the centre-backs, while Paul Verhaegh and rising star Daley Blind played right and left-back respectively. The three-man midfield began with a core of Nigel de Jong, Dirk Kuyt and Georginio Wijnaldum; however, de Jong was replaced after eight minutes by Bruno Martins Indi, leading to Blind moving into the defensive midfield position. Wesley Sneijder, Arjen Robben and Robin van Persie made up a menacing frontline.

Louis van Gaal tweaked the starting line-up of the Netherlands side in the quarterfinal, deciding to play a 3-4-3 as opposed to the 4-3-3 formation from the previous game against Mexico. Ron Vlaar, Stefan de Vrij and, Bruno Martins Indi were stout in defence, while Dirk Kuyt, Georginio Wijnaldum, Wesley Sneijder and Daley Blind were strong in midfield, as Nigel de Jong missed his first World Cup game through injury. Memphis Depay was a surprise starter on the wing, while Arjen Robben and Robin van Persie made up the rest of the impressive front three.

Starting the semifinal match in the 3-5-2 they had adopted for the tournament, the Dutch were looking to nullify the flow of chances into a prolific Argentinian strike force.

Despite Tim Krul's shootout heroics against Costa Rica, Jasper Cillessen would hold on to his starting position for Le Oranje.

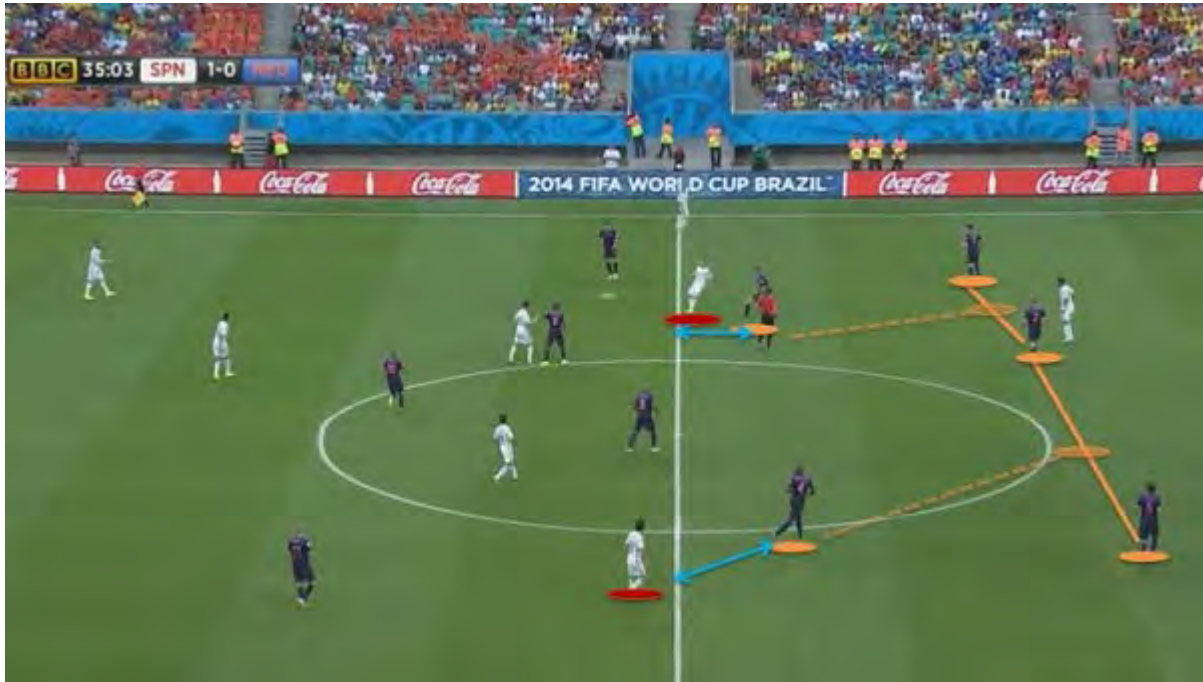
Louis van Gaal gambled on the fitness of dogged midfielder Nigel de Jong as he partnered with Georginio Wijnaldum in the centre of midfield. Utility man Dirk Kuyt would be employed as a right midfielder with the attacking trio of Wesley Sneijder, Arjen Robben and Robin Van Persie looking to cause Argentina problems.

In the consolation match, Van Gaal made just one change from the side that fell to Argentina on penalties in the second semi-final as Feyenoord midfielder Jordy Clasie replaced Nigel de Jong in the starting XI.

Robin van Persie and Arjen Robben led the Dutch attack with Sneijder just behind them. Dirk Kuyt retained his place at one of the outside backs in what was his final game for the Orange as he retired from international football after the tournament.

Going Forward: The Dutch will be left with a case of what might have been. Considering the level of expectations before the tournament though, they should be proud of what they have achieved. Van Gaal may be on his way out but he has built a strong base from which Hiddink can build. With plenty of young talent to choose from, the only way is up for Holland.

The following image shows the Dutch in their 3-5-2 and their man-marking system against Spain in the opener.



NIGERIA

Formation: Nigeria went for its 4-4-1-1 formation that it has become accustomed to, under Keshi in the opener. Chelsea's John Obi Mikel is the nation's key playmaker from his deep midfield position. Next to him was Ogenyi Onazi with the team's width offered by Victor Moses and Ahmed Musa. Up front, Emmanuel Emenike was leading the line.

Formation Changes: Needing a point to assure a place in the knockout stage, the Super Eagles remained with the 4-2-3-1 formation that had seen them defeat Bosnia and Herzegovina earlier in the group stage. However, Coach Stephen Keshi did make one change to his starting eleven, which looked to hit Argentina using pace down the wing, with Chelsea's Victor Moses making way for Michael Babatunde to sit behind Emmanuel Emenike.

Against France, Nigeria sought to take the game to their more illustrious opponents and boldly lined up with four attacking players in an attempt to overwhelm France's fullbacks, which they managed to do at times.

Michael Babatunde missed out due to injury, meaning Victor Moses regained his spot in the starting line-up.

Joseph Yobo was favoured over Godfrey Oboabona in the backline as the African champions came out hoping to secure their first quarter finals appearance in their history.

Going Forward: Keshi surprised many by resigning in the aftermath of the World Cup and his team's exit from the tournament.

With Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers beginning in September, they will need to make an astute appointment in order to maintain and build on the countless positives that have come out of their time in Brazil.

They managed to notch up their first win at the finals since 1998 and played a progressive and entertaining brand of football throughout, which will remain pleasing to their fans.

Joseph Yobo bids goodbye to international football after playing his 100th match. Enyeama's future lies in the balance, while the future is bright with the likes of Ahmed Musa, Kenneth Omeruo and Celtic's Efe Ambrose remaining in the core group of players.



PORTUGAL

Formation: To open up the tournament, Portugal employed a 4-3-3 formation, planning to utilize their pace out wide to penetrate the German defensive line and properly test the emergency outside-backs.

However, it was their own defensive line that caused them the most trouble with Pepe and Bruno Alves struggling to cope with the Germany mobility up front.

Formation Changes: Portugal lined up in a familiar 4-3-3 against the USA; Paulo Bento's preferred formation throughout qualifying. For Portugal, the changes were forced following Pepe's sending off and an injury to Hugo Almeida. A restructured backline saw Ricardo Costa start at centre-back and Andre Almeida replacing the injured Fabio Coentrao at left back. Veteran goal scorer, Helder Postiga started at the top of an attacking triumvirate with Nani and Cristiano Ronaldo for support.

Following a string of injuries in the opening two matches, Paulo Bento was forced into personnel changes but would not abandon his adored 4-3-3.

The rangy goal scorer, Eder earned his first start of the World Cup after featuring from the bench in the previous matches whilst youngster William Carvalho was brought in to anchor the midfield. Miguel Veloso was moved from central midfield to left-back following an injury to Real Madrid's Fabio Coentrao and the back four was bolstered by the return of Pepe after he served a one-match suspension.

Going Forward: Their first-match lashing at the hands of Germany meant that Portugal had to win out if they were going to advance. However, a lacklustre Cristiano Ronaldo could not produce despite his numerous chances. Portugal joined the lengthy list of European nations to take their exit at the group stage, a disappointing showing from a nation that was expected to qualify for the round of 16.

Here is Portugal in their beloved 4-3-3:



RUSSIA

Formation: Russian coach Fabio Capello's choice of a 5-4-1 formation was a tactical blunder that severely hindered Russia's attacking prowess. Up until conceding the freak goal, the Russian side were noticeably bare in attack and rarely penetrated the final third.

The error by Akinfeev would prove to be the catalyst, with Capello immediately moving substitute Aleksandr Kerzhakov up front to join Aleksandr Kokorin. The change to a more dynamic 4-4-2 formation sparked the Russians into life, changing the complexion of the match and inevitably saving Russia from defeat.

Formation Changes: Fabio Capello opted for a familiar 4-2-3-1 against Algeria, with all-time Russian leading goal scorer Aleksandr Kerzhakov given his first start. With an attacking triumvirate behind the poacher, Capello seemingly hoped to outnumber Algeria in the final third.

Going Forward: Taking a lead early did not perhaps suit Russia. After they scored, they would just fall back into a familiar defensive shape and appear happy to sit on their lead. Whilst they would construct a few more half-chances, they would also allow the opposition onto them, eventually creating pressure that led to goals. They needed wins to go through, so they needed to be adventurous. However, this has never been Capello's remit and Russia's elimination was the price for sour, unadventurous football and pragmatic team selection. Not many neutrals were disappointed to see them gone.

The following image shows how stagnant Russia was in their 5-4-1:



SPAIN

Formation: The addition of traditional front man, Diego Costa to the starting XI meant that Vicente Del Bosque's men would revert to a 4-5-1 for their World Cup opener against the Dutch. In a five-man midfield, Alonso and Busquets screened the back four with Iniesta, Xavi and David Silva operating in front of the two holding midfielders.

Formation Changes: Costa was again given the green light to start ahead of Fernando Torres and David Villa against Chile. However, despite coming close to scoring he was withdrawn in the second half. Vicente de Bosque utilised his regular 4-3-3 formation, opting for two holding midfielders in the three-man triangle. Goalkeeper Iker Casillas also kept his place, a sign of faith shown by Del Bosque.

Vicente Del Bosque made seven changes from the team that lost 2-0 to Chile in their final group match. It was a new-look midfield and attack as Villa, Torres, Cazorla and Koke replaced Diego Costa, Pedro Rodriguez, Sergio Busquets and David Silva. This allowed the 4-3-3 to take on a less predictable, more enterprising shape.

The Spaniards sacrificed a holding midfielder in the trio, with Xabi Alonso the anchor behind Koke and Andres Iniesta; a midfield with far more penetration and speed.

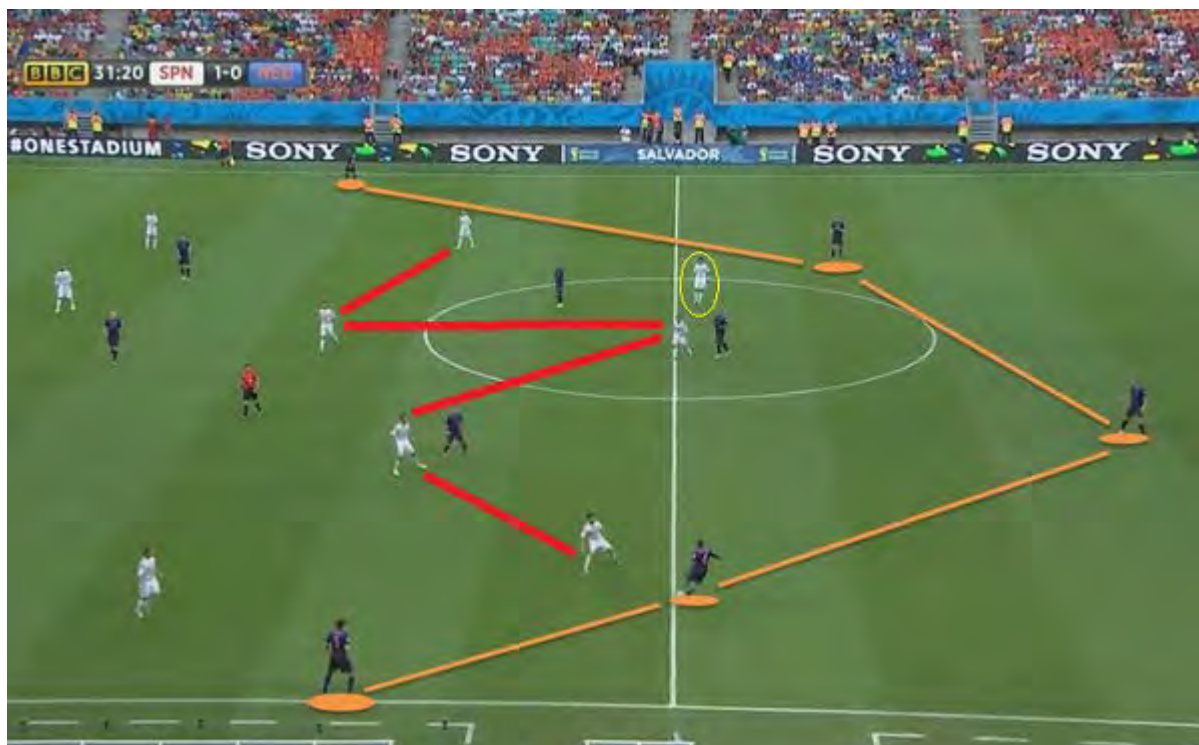
Going Forward: Did Del Bosque get his team selection all wrong as Spain bid farewell to Brazil? Crucial losses against the Dutch and Chile were compounded by a rigid and lethargic midfield.

The Diego Costa experiment failed in giving the Spanish attack another dimension and it is unclear whether Del Bosque will continue after the latest comments from the 63-year old.

"I want to repeat that I don't want to be a hindrance to the Spanish Football Federation. The good of Spanish football should become above all personalities," he said.

It is almost certainly the end of an era in Spanish football, but with an array of promising youngsters on the fringe of selection, another period of similar domination is not impossible to comprehend.

Here we can see Spain's 5-man midfield working against the Dutch with Blind and Janmaat pulling the line wide to exploit space on the attack.



SWITZERLAND

Formation: There was much talk over the new-look 4-3-3 formation for Switzerland, with Hitzfeld promising a much more attacking team than previous tournaments. An experienced backline featured veterans Lichtsteiner and Ricardo Rodriguez while new talents Granit Xhaka and Xherdan Shaqiri were expected to display the form that had brought high expectations upon the Swiss.

Formation Changes: Switzerland manager Ottmar Hitzfeld has often employed a 4-3-3 formation and continued to use this system against France. The only change he opted to make from the 2-1 win against Ecuador was replacing Valentin Stocker and Josip Drmic for goal scoring substitutes Admir Mehmedi and Haris Seferovic. While Steve von Bergen started as centre-back, Philippe Senderos replaced him after nine minutes due to injury.

Against Argentina, Ottmar Hitzfeld knew that a repeat display of the one that saw them concede five goals against France had to be avoided and chose to employ a defensive 4-2-3-1 formation that clogged the little pockets of space that the likes of Messi enjoy operating in.

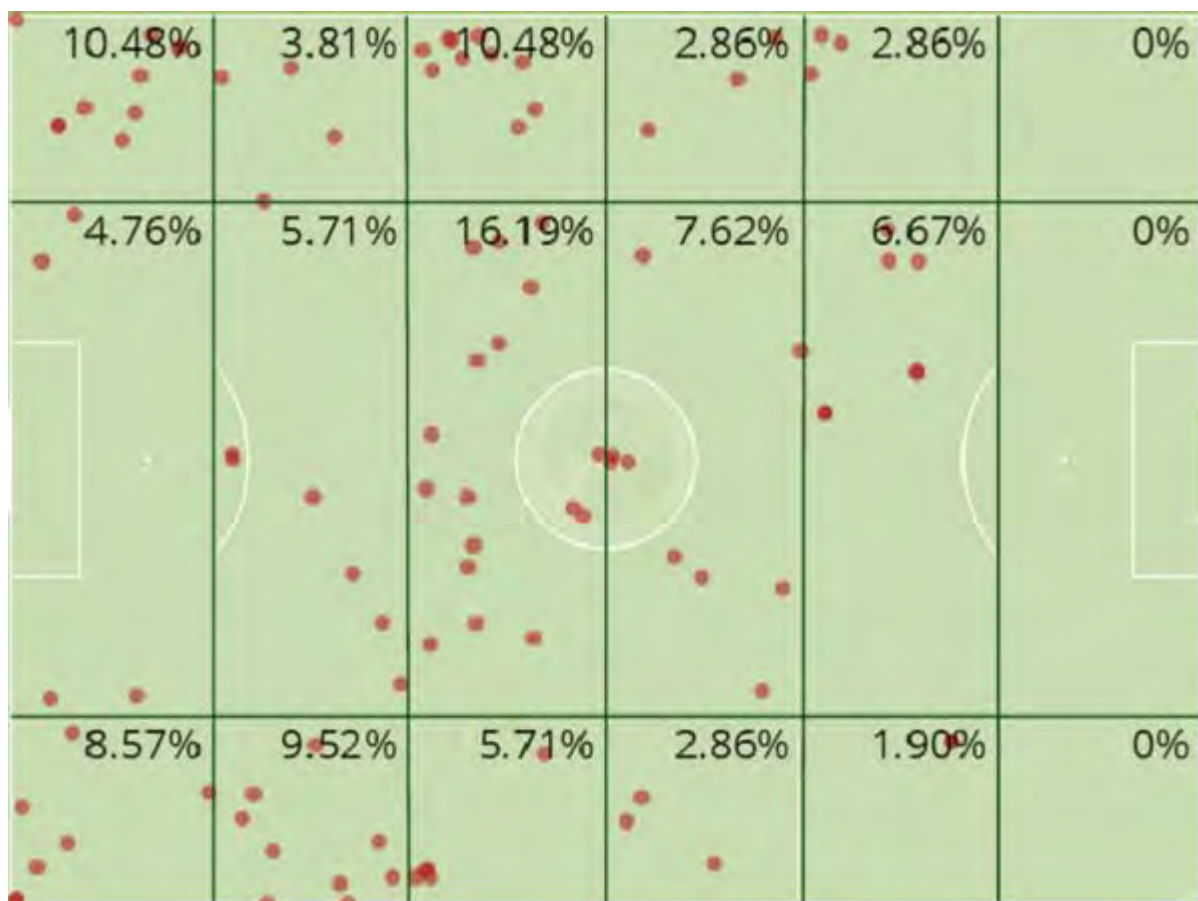
Josip Drmic played as the lone striker up front and the Swiss aimed to cause Argentina problems on the break, especially with the pace and direct style of Xherdan Shaqiri in the wide areas.

Going Forward: It was a harsh ending for a Switzerland side that successfully shut down the potentially menacing Argentina attack for the majority of the contest. They will rue the missed opportunities they had to take the lead in the match.

Hitzfeld announced his retirement from management at the end of his side's last-16 tie and he will be remembered as one of the most successful managers of his time.

There is lots of promise in the Swiss ranks for the future and they will be a serious threat to the powerhouse nations at the next European Championships.

The following graphic exemplifies that promise in that it shows the location of Switzerland's origination of positive play in their match against Argentina.



URUGUAY

Formation: Uruguay lined-up in a 4-4-2 formation, with PSG striker Edinson Cavani partnering Diego Forlan up-front. Cavani, along with Diego Godin and Cristian Rodriguez of Atletico Madrid, Martin Caceres of Juventus and Maximiliano Pereira of Benfica all won the domestic titles in their respective leagues and cemented a spot in the starting XI.

Formation Changes: Uruguay lined up in a 4-4-2 formation vs. England, making five changes to the team that was defeated by Costa Rica. Captain Diego Lugano was injured and full back Maxi Pereira was suspended for the game with veteran Diego Forlan making way for the triumphant return of Suarez.

Much of the pre-match focus had been on Suarez's fitness and whether he would struggle to make an impact just four weeks after knee surgery. It did not take long for the Premier League's best player to give an emphatic answer to any questions.

For Oscar Tabarez, the focus going into the final group match was undoubtedly on the replacement of Suarez, with the key striker banned for the rest of the tournament after the now infamous biting incident against Italy. Veteran Diego Forlan was given the task of collaborating Edinson Cavani in attack. On paper, the Uruguayans started in a 4-4-2 formation, with Maxi Pereira also switching for the injured Nicolas Lodeiro. However, as the game started it became clear that Cavani would play as a lone striker with Forlan taking up more of an attacking midfielder role.

Going Forward: After reaching the semi-finals of the 2010 tournament, Uruguay exited this World Cup amidst a shroud of controversy due to one individual. These disappointing performances have made evident that there is a large gap in quality for the Uruguayans when Suarez does and does not play; bringing a speed and killer instinct that none other in the team can replicate. In this case, they will lament the influence that the Liverpool star could have had against Colombia and wonder what could have been.

Uruguay was able to get forward with solid numbers through the midfield in their traditional 4-4-2.



UNITED STATES

Formation: The US opened up in a 4-2-3-1. Bedoya stuck mainly to the right side with Jones on the left. Bradley played as the more advanced of the central midfield pairing with Beckerman sitting deeper breaking up Ghana's attacks.

Formation Changes: Against Portugal, Klinsmann went with the same 4-2-3-1 that saw them win the three points against Ghana. Jermaine Jones and Kyle Beckerman anchored the midfield with Michael Bradley playing in a more advanced role. Jozy Altidore's injury forced Klinsmann to push Dempsey higher as a striker, with Graham Zusi coming into the side for the injured American.

Structured and setup as a counter attacking system, Klinsmann's starting line-up against Germany revolved around isolating Dempsey up front and hitting Germany on the break by aiming to interrupt their passing game. On paper it was a 4-2-3-1, but on the pitch it ended-up being a 4-5-1. Jermaine Jones was particularly active in midfield, very watchful of Schweinsteiger but also alert on the counter attack, with his pace and strength as a roaming midfielder a real concern for the German defence at times. Omar Gonzalez was drafted to centre back in favour of Geoff Cameron and the LA Galaxy defender was up against a quality German attack, working with Besler as a central defensive partnership. Outside backs Beasley and Fabian Johnson settled into the game after a poor start, where they were both constantly caught out of position and drawn into the centre of defence by the German passing game, which left the likes of Podolski and Mesut Ozil space on the wings to capitalise. However, with both outside backs playing out of position and more natural central defenders, they struggled to offer much going forward, which would ultimately spell trouble in the knockout stage. Despite defending with 11 players behind the ball, with the ever-industrious Michael Bradley missing in action for much of the tournament, the American system worked well-enough although they only mustered five shots at goal.

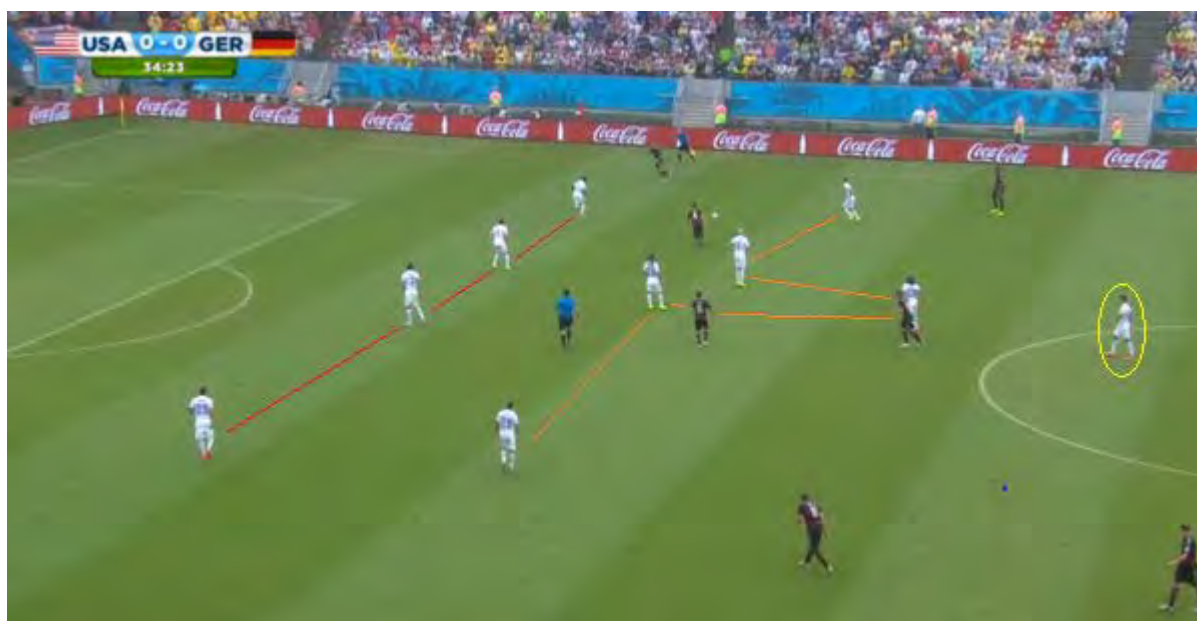
For the Round of 16, Klinsmann brought in the versatile Geoff Cameron to replace the suspended Kyle Beckerman in the defensive midfield role. Disappointingly, Sunderland target-man Jozy Altidore could only make the bench after sustaining a hamstring injury early in the group stage.

Once more, Clint Dempsey would be utilized as a makeshift number 9 with the invisible Michael Bradley looking to offer support from an attacking midfield role.

Going Forward: Although they had their chances, team USA were always unlikely to cause an upset in the knockout clash with Belgium. Their second consecutive exit at the round of 16 points to a deceitfully successful albeit frustrating period of American soccer.

Nonetheless, the squad of 2014 has certainly done their nation proud and has seen great success off-the-field in spreading the popularity of the game across the country. The iconic image of Barack Obama watching this match against Belgium is as much testament to a successful World Cup campaign, even more-so than their on-field performances.

Here we see the United States lined up in their 4-4-2 (*morphed into a 4-5-1*) against Germany:



Chapter 2: *The Final Eight*

Looking at the Final Eight Under a Microscope

Let's go a little further and take an even more detailed look at the tactics used by the teams who advanced to the penultimate round of the World Cup; the Elite Eight.

However, before we do so...there are always a few questions going into the World Cup that are asked and now that the tournament is over, let us look back and see if we can answer those questions.

If everything went according to expectations, the post-group stages of your World Cup bracket would be made up of the top two teams from each group. Of course, it almost never works out that way. Every World Cup we see some surprise teams squeak out of the group stage and into the knockout rounds. Some are only mild surprises that play well at the right time. However, there are those real longshots that just get hot at the right moment.

Before the tournament begins, everyone has all sorts of questions they need to find answers for...let us see if we can answer some of those vital questions.

Can Cinderella avoid the pumpkin?

As is usually the case in the Second-Round, we have a large collection of teams that are supposed to be here and a few that have really crashed the party. The United States looked the least like a non-group winning favourite of any team in recent history. It is hard to think of them as a real Cinderella team, but they were.

Is Brazil mortal?

The Canaries were favoured coming into the tournament and were by far the most popular choice to win it all. They looked just as good as expected in the Confederations Cup and friendlies. In those matches, they were flawless.

They were not tested, however and their focus faltered the first time it faced adversity. They were dialled in perfectly during the Confederations Cup, but that is not the World Cup.

They were able to keep face and somewhat cruise all the way to the Final Four as people expected, but it was there that they crashed back to earth with a thunderous thud!

Which Netherlands Shows Up?

The Dutch we have seen at various times would be very tough for any team in this tournament to beat. They are explosive on offense, strong on the ball and just plain good.

Then we have the Dutch side that would struggle to beat any team in the field. The team seems to have their swagger back and it now appears that we can trust them.

They days of playing as well as a team can in one-half, but then being a long way from inspiring in the next 45 minutes seem to be long-gone. The 90-minute version of this team is a tough one to beat.

Can Portugal turn up their game?

No team has been luckier than Portugal. They really did not deserve to be in Brazil, but Cristiano Ronaldo put the whole of his nation on his back and secured a spot in the finals for his side. They were almost as lucky to even be in the playoff match in the first-place.

They were viewed as quite the overrated team by many heading into the tournament and they did nothing to dispel those concerns.

Can Europe continue their strength?

UEFA has had a very good run of tournaments of late. Adding another triumph in Brazil to the equation, seven of the last eleven World Cups have been won by a team from Europe (*Brazil have won two of the remaining four*). Twelve of the top 20 in the FIFA World Rankings are from the UEFA region and six of the top ten. They are undoubtedly the best region in the world and looked good in Brazil.

Germany and Netherlands were quite dominant. Belgium and France faced very tough tests and passed them for the most part in impressive fashion in the end.

Now Let's Look at Those Final Eight Squads

ARGENTINA

Group: F; W 2-1 vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina, W 1-0 vs. Iran, W 3-2 vs. Nigeria

Second Round: W 1-0 vs. Switzerland

Quarterfinal: W 1-0 vs. Belgium

Semifinal: D 0-0 vs. Netherlands (*4-2 penalties*)

Final: L 0-1 vs. Germany

Messi dragged more holding midfielders out of position this tournament that they should rename the position, "HOLDING midfielder." However, this theoretically should have created a huge amount of space for another Argentine player to drift into, a pocket of space between the lines. "Created" is the key word there.

This did not happen, though. Argentina was alarmingly linear and whereas this side boasted three players capable of finding space between the lines; Messi, Aguero and Di Maria, only Messi was deal the creative responsibility.

Lavezzi did his usual thing, charging up and down the touchline without having too much impact with the ball at his feet and while Di Maria sometimes changed positions with him, neither attempted to move more centrally. In fairness, Di Maria was the liveliest player aside from Messi, but always seemed to get himself into good positions put wide before playing a poor final ball. Higuain contributed very little upfront, Fernando Gago's passing was poor and Argentina was flat throughout.

Everything, really, was going through Messi. Argentina fired the ball into his feet, even when he was tightly marked and asked him to produce moments of magic. He couldn't quite provide anything as good as his goal versus Iran a second-time, but there was a stream of good contributions; some clever one-twos through the middle, some dangerous crosses when he drifted to wide areas, a couple of great long-range shots, a clever chip into the box. It was difficult to imagine Argentina creating anything unless it came through Messi.

Messi instigated most of Argentina's attacks, but the crucial feature of his performance was how he calmed the pace of the game, holding onto the ball and allowing opponents to get goal side before delivering penetrative through-balls from deep positions.

This was an Argentina side based around Messi and therefore Messi's reserved approach to attacking meant a transformation of Argentina's tempo from the qualifiers, where they tended to break quickly and bypass the opposition defence immediately. The transformation was significant, with Argentina becoming more classically South American rather than European and Messi becoming a more typical Argentine number ten.

Argentina continually rotated the positions of Lavezzi and Perez and they were always more dangerous when Lavezzi was on the right. It is strange that Sabella seemed so happy for these players to switch flanks throughout; while that is a common tactic with wide players, it is difficult to think of two more contrasting wide players. Lavezzi is a quick forward, Perez a central midfield passer. They inevitably played completely different roles and against

completely different outside-backs, Sabella surely should have had a preference about their positioning.

Here we see their reliance upon a player such as Lavezzi where we can see him isolated on the right flank and outnumbered with little support.



BELGIUM

Group: H; W 2-1 vs. Algeria, W 1-0 vs. Russia, W 1-0 vs. Korea Republic

Second Round: W 2-1 vs. USA

Quarterfinal: L 0-1 vs. Argentina

The main tactical point of interest was the Belgian midfield zone. Belgium had too relaxed of an approach. Axel Witsel was the deepest midfielder, but Marouane Fellaini had plenty of license to move forward and join Kevin de Bruyne higher up, particularly when challenging for long goal kicks, when he became a second striker. This fluidity made the midfield zone very open and gave away plenty of space.

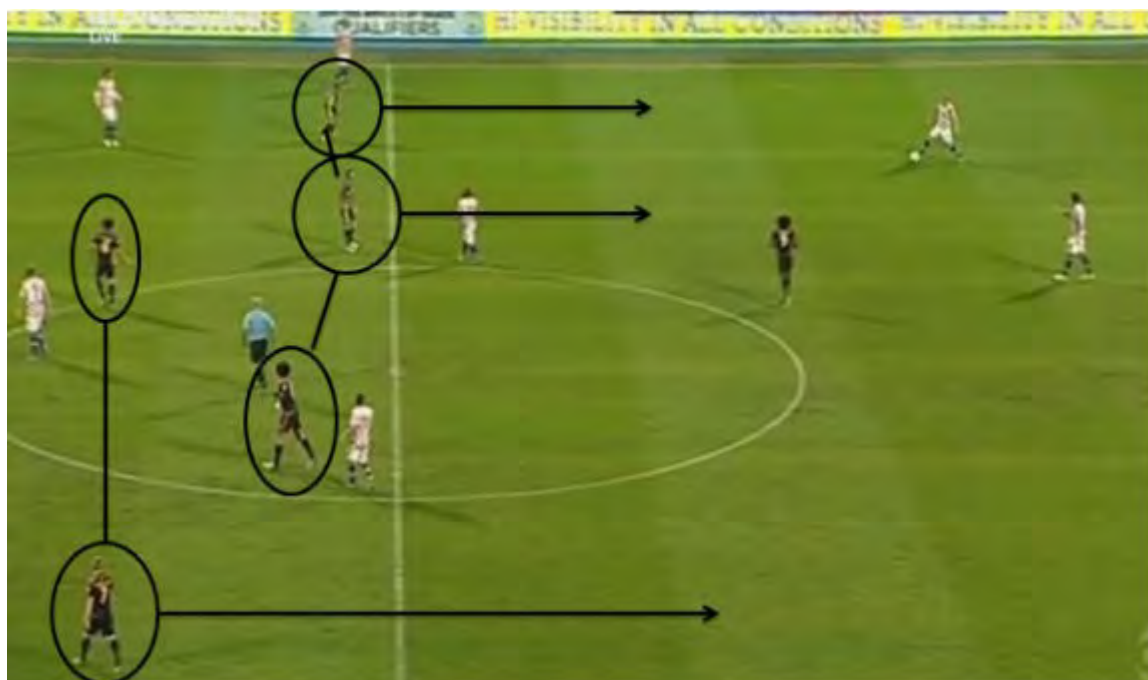
Another interesting factor was how the Belgian centre-backs moved up the pitch, with and without possession. They stuck tightly to their marks when they dropped into deep positions. Throughout this tournament, Belgium have looked much better towards the end of matches, generally having introduced substitutes. Wilmots has received some praise for this, but it's not as if his substitutions have significantly changed the shape of the side significantly; it's just about introducing fresh legs. Belgium's overall strategy still remains highly questionable, but more than any other side in this competition they have back-ups of a similar standard to their first-choices and therefore they've received significant boosts late on.

The key in Belgium's strong spell towards the end of matches, though, was the fact they became more direct. Rather than trying to find De Bruyne in pockets of space or get Hazard running at defenders, they played a much simpler strategy. Fellaini moved upfront more regularly and caused problems in the box, got his head to a couple of crosses (*although giving away too many free-kicks*). Vertonghen continued to be a threat on the left, while De Bruyne went right and crossed. Still, it shows how Belgium was being risky with the positioning of their centre-backs and central midfielders.

There was nothing clever about the approach, but it caused opponents problems and resulted in Belgium's best periods of play. They are, while clearly technically talented, primarily an extremely strong, physical side, with four centre-backs along the backline, plus Witsel and Fellaini in midfield and Origi or Lukaku upfront. A simpler, physical game plays to their strengths.

This tournament confirmed the suspicions about Belgium; they don't know their best XI but are good at rallying late on. Their tournament has been labelled disappointing, yet it's roughly what should have been expected. In fact, they overachieved slightly by reaching the quarter-final stage. Only in one match did they look impressive; against the USA and even then, they had a major problem converting promising moments into goals. They'll be stronger for Euro 2016.

Here we see how each of Belgium's midfielders was close to an opponent, cutting off the supply lines and eventually winning the ball through their defensive endeavours.



BRAZIL

Group: E; W 3-1 vs. Croatia, D 0-0 vs. Mexico, W 4-1 vs. Cameroon

Second Round: D 0-0 vs. Chile (3-2 on penalties)

Quarterfinal: W 2-1 vs. Colombia

Semifinal: L 1-7 vs. Germany

Consolation: L 0-3 vs. Netherlands

Putting their semi-final collapse aside, there was a period where Brazil's wide players kept finding space in behind the opposition's outside-backs, with Hulk's runs particularly interesting. Hulk resolutely tracked back, but simply does not have the defensive ability of Oscar, and many found space...but then Hulk was given opportunities to drive past. The more these matches went on, the more Brazil forced opponent's outside-backs to sit deeper; for example: *they would start with a back three and after about an hour they were clearly playing with a back five.*

Brazil lacked real quality from their midfield and particularly their substitutes. Ramires suited a high-tempo game, but showed little ability in possession and Hernanes would have been a better option. Willian replaced Oscar, but was also more about pace than precision. The tournament was Brazil's to lose, but they simply did not have the midfield guile, despite being afforded so much space.

Brazil was not impressive and increasingly looked heavily dependent upon Neymar. Fred's role was intended to be limited and specific, but it is tough to justify playing a striker who contributes so little in the way of movement. They also needed more from Oscar, who was brilliant in the opening day victory over Croatia, but did not provide the midfield creativity beyond that match. Scolari needed to make a small but telling tactical shift if Brazil were to win the competition, one that never came.

Neymar found life more difficult as the tournament grew older, but received space towards the left of the pitch, often in a pocket of space thanks to Aguilar or Guarin's advanced positioning and the fact that defenders stuck very tight to Hulk. Unfortunately, he often got the final pass wrong.

Hulk getting the final pass wrong early against Germany:



COLOMBIA

Group: C; W 3-0 vs. Greece, W 2-1 vs. Ivory Coast, W 4-1 vs. Japan

Second Round: W 2-0 vs. Uruguay

Quarterfinal: L 1-2 vs. Brazil

The star of this tournament for Colombia was James Rodriguez who was sensational in his number ten role and while the crucial passes didn't always come off, it's remarkable that he was so capable of finding space in such an utter bloodbath of attacking zones.

Rodriguez's spatial awareness was absolutely brilliant and he repeatedly darted in front of and then in behind, even the most ultra-physical midfield pairings. Unfortunately, only Rodriguez and Cuadrado shone going forward for Colombia, with Victor Ibarbo and Teo Gutierrez very quiet and with Cuadrado disappearing himself at times, it was all on Rodriguez way too much.

The moment that encapsulated Rodriguez's experience, however, was in the 24 minute of the Quarter final against Brazil, when he received the ball in front of Brazil's midfielders, dribbled past Paulinho and then was fouled by Fernandinho when attempting to dribble past him, too. Fernandinho left his foot in, Paulinho closed in and made sure Rodriguez couldn't get away and within seconds, ten players were around the ball scuffling. Rodriguez kept hold of the ball, played a quick free-kick and Colombia were on the attack; but Ibarbo didn't realize the referee had waved play on, and conceded possession.

It summarized their tournament perfectly: Rodriguez showing great skill, Rodriguez being fouled, Rodriguez the only man trying to play football and his teammates letting him down with poor play.

At times it felt like Rodriguez was trying too hard; his passing was sometimes too ambitious and he conceded possession frequently. Yet, he was trying to make things happen and the skill was about finding space in the first place, never mind actually playing the right passes. Rodriguez did that more than anyone.

COSTA RICA

Group: D; W 3-1 vs. Uruguay, W 1-0 vs. Italy, D 0-0 vs. England

Second Round: D 1-1 vs. Greece (5-3 *penalties*)

Quarterfinal: D 0-0 vs. Netherlands (3-4 *penalties*)

Both the Costa Rican outside backs movement forward was critical in supplying the ball to Joel Campbell. Getting Campbell, more into the match gave the Costa Ricans a sense of belief to which they responded.

The Costa Ricans might have pulled off the upset of the tournament in advancing to the semi-finals if not overlooking their weaknesses for even a second. The Costa Ricans at times were horrible in attacking. Yet, Campbell was at times given a free run by teams and they literally allowed him to dictate the game.

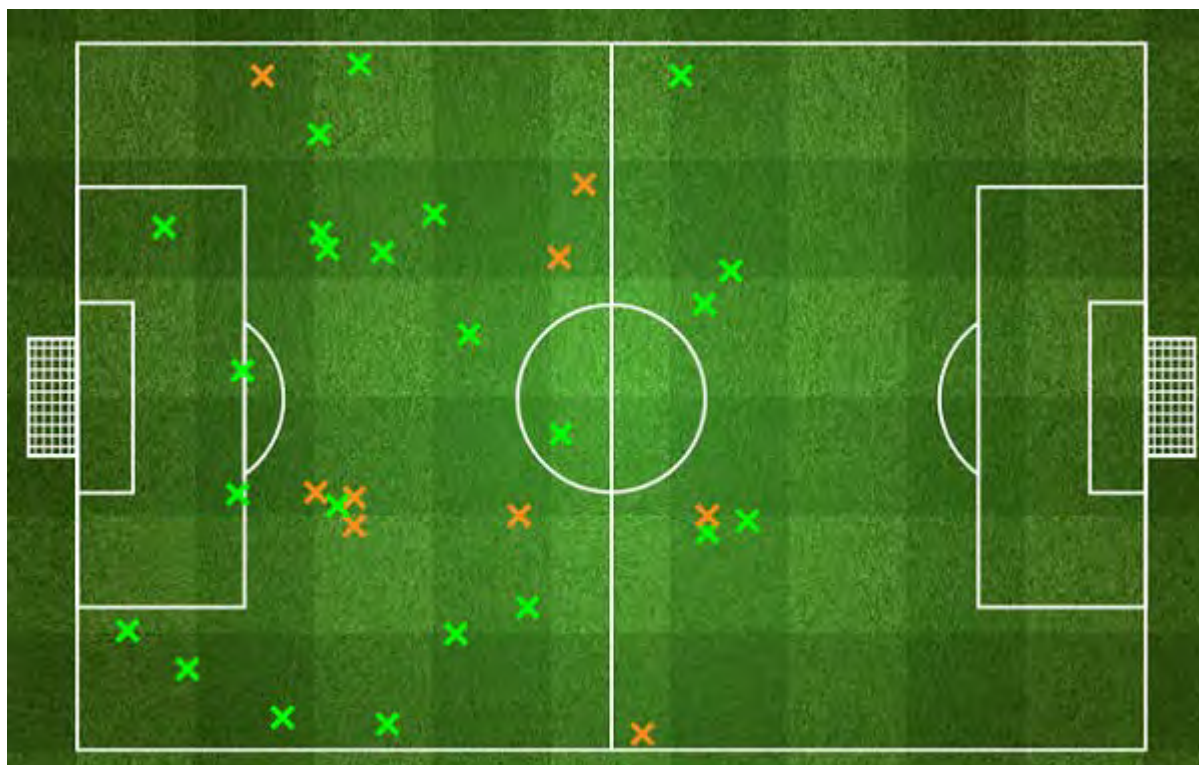
The 3 at the back meant that they could add another man to midfield and this automatically made it difficult for the opposition to control that area, as their man advantage was lost. Aside from this, Costa Rica played in a very narrow band on the field. Their defence pushed up and the attackers were quite deep, as well. Opposing sides could not string together the long threads of passes that they wanted to and lost their control on the match. Costa Rica allowed them to have the initiative, but did not allow them to control the game.

While they did very well to defend and stop most from playing their game, Costa Rica themselves had a hard time getting forward with any sort of potency and consistency. Their opponents had the initiative, but Costa Rica was more intent on foiling them. That is why a lot of passes and moves were made in the initial third for Costa Rica. They struggled to get the ball out from defence to midfield. They did not really have a good link between the two lines and relied on their wide men to get forward and provide the vertical thrust. The wide men too, were not too keen to get forward and were more concerned with protecting their own goal and their own zones.

The other attacking avenue for Costa Rica was the use of set pieces. Jorge Luis Pinto was well aware of the fact that focusing on foiling the impressive midfields he would face would mean sacrificing some of the attacking thrust. Therefore, Costa Rica tried their best to take full advantage of the set pieces they got. They had a well-rehearsed corner routine which they employed about 3 times in each match and managed to trouble the opposition's defense twice.

Thirdly, their pressing was also important in creating opportunities. Costa Rica pushed themselves pretty high up the pitch and hassling opposition players. This led to them winning the ball pretty high up the park on a number of occasions. Costa Rica managed to gain opportunities to get shots off at goal after winning ball possession in dangerous areas of the pitch.

The following graphic shows the locations where Costa Rica won ball possession against Italy.



FRANCE

Group: E; W 3-0 vs. Honduras, W 5-2 vs. Switzerland, W 0-0 vs. Ecuador

Second Round: W 2-0 vs. Nigeria

Quarterfinal: L 0-1 vs. Germany

When France attacked, they were all over the place with the exception of Pogba and Cabaye. They sat in the middle and pulled the strings, with Pogba at times pushing forward. France tried to use height to their advantage. When the ball was won on the left, overloads were caused on the right side of the pitch. Cabaye and Valbuena excel in crossing the ball right to the man they want to find. They mostly transitioned into 4-4-2 whenever they got forward, though that didn't give them many windows of opportunity to strike the ball cleanly.

They had an idea on what they had to do when they won the ball back, but if you were given an aerial shot of the entire pitch, you would not exactly call it a plan. They were reactive to each particular instance. Tactical aptitude of individual players came into the fray.

The real star for France was Mathieu Valbuena, who typically drifted inside into clever positions between the lines. He was the only player offering outright creativity or intelligent movement and he often found oceans of space in the 'number ten' position because the opposition's stalwarts were being drawn up the field into a midfield battle against Paul Pogba and Blaise Matuidi.

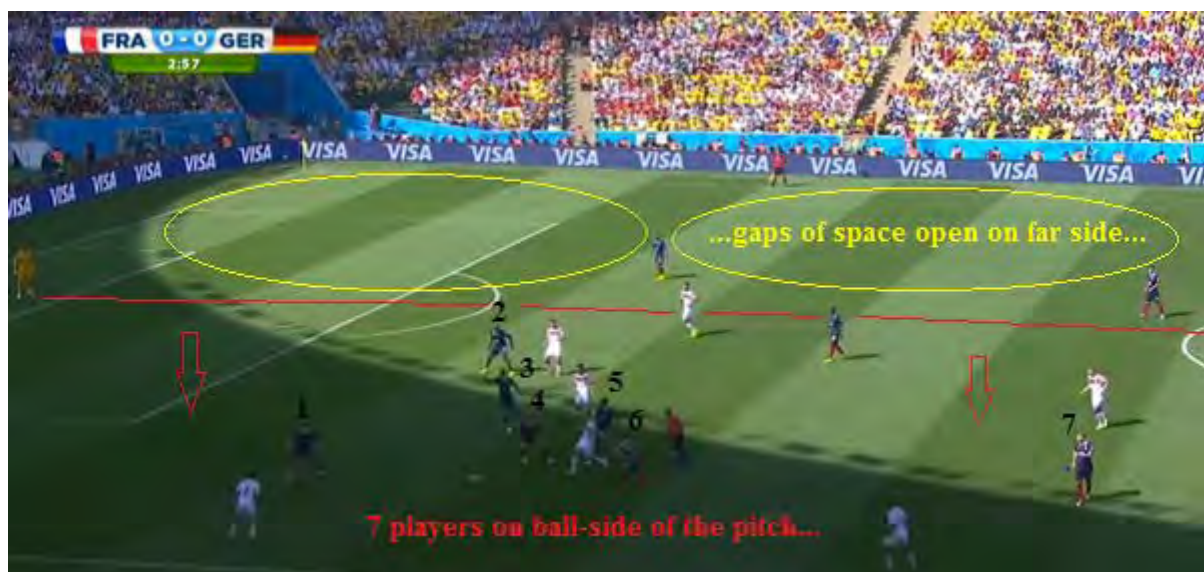
It was actually a shame Valbuena didn't play more permanently as a number ten, to consistently ask questions of the opposing teams' defence, because there was so much space in that zone. He initiated some good passing combinations, particularly one-twos with onrushing midfielders.

The story, however, was all about France's shape. Giroud played poorly, not holding up the ball effectively enough or making intelligent runs to create space for others. Benzema is less effective from the left, doesn't offer width and can't get into goal scoring positions as frequently. In turn, his narrowness means Valbuena's role was compromised.

However, arguably the most worrying thing was the fact Benzema isn't very good defensively, as you might expect. Against Switzerland this worked well, because Swiss right-back Stephane Lichtsteiner was constantly caught ahead of the ball when passing moves broke down and Benzema could counter-attack into space. Otherwise, other right-backs were allowed to move forward with no-one shutting them down and they combined with middies in the French left-back zone to cause problems.

Ironically, some of their best moments came when they went longer and bypassed the opponent's defense and midfield simultaneously. Often without pressure on the ball the French were able to knock the ball over and create easy chances.

Here is an example of how they would become suspect to overloading one side of the park:



GERMANY

Group: G; W 4-0 vs. Portugal, D 2-2 vs. Ghana, W 1-0 vs. USA

Second Round: W 2-1 vs. Algeria

Quarterfinal: W 1-0 vs. France

Semifinal: W 7-1 vs. Brazil

Final: W 1-0 vs. Argentina

Most teams were keen to exploit Per Mertesacker's lack of pace. That is a long-established weakness of the Arsenal centre-back, but it has rarely been so obvious and teams constantly attempted to hit long passes just beyond his reach.

The attacking nature of the German outside-backs did nothing to help their centre-backs. Yet again, they're both simply centre-backs shoved out wide and it's difficult to work out the point of them pushing so high up the pitch; neither contribute much in the final third and they surely would have been better sitting deep and protecting the centre-backs, who clearly struggled more often than not.

The most obvious tactical feature the German's displayed was the extremely aggressive role played by Manuel Neuer, who was not so much a sweeper-keeper as he was more just a sweeper. He took up extremely high starting positions and repeatedly collected the ball outside his box.

Any tiny mistake could have been catastrophic, but Neuer's decision-making was spot on throughout the tournament and had it not been for his proactive goalkeeping, Germany would have struggled against some sides even more.

Eventually in each match, Germany's quality became obvious; they retained the ball for longer periods, worked the ball into the feet of their attackers more and asserted their dominance. The outside-backs remained in deeper positions, too, which meant the centre-backs were not so prone to counter-attacking. That is not to say opponents gave up attacking, but it eventually became more of a classic 'possession against counter-attack' contest between a big side and a minnow.

The more the tournament went on, the more Germany showed their quality. The introduction of Andre Schurrle was crucial because it provided something different; pace in behind the defence. He could stretch the game and forced the defence into deeper positions and this helped put Germany in control of the midfield zone.

Most defenders do not like playing deep and gradually start to invite crosses while most middies concentrated on pressing when the ball was played into Toni Kroos, Sami Khedira or the 2 forwards, which meant Bastian Schweinsteiger was usually free, with only sporadic pressure from opposing strikers dropping back. Schweinsteiger is a very different player up against an energetic opponent and can become flustered and panicked with his distribution when pressed, but his freedom between the lines was a crucial part of Germany asserting

their control. He still looks more comfortable than Lahm with the ball in that deep position, because he is capable of penetrative balls into the attacking midfielders.

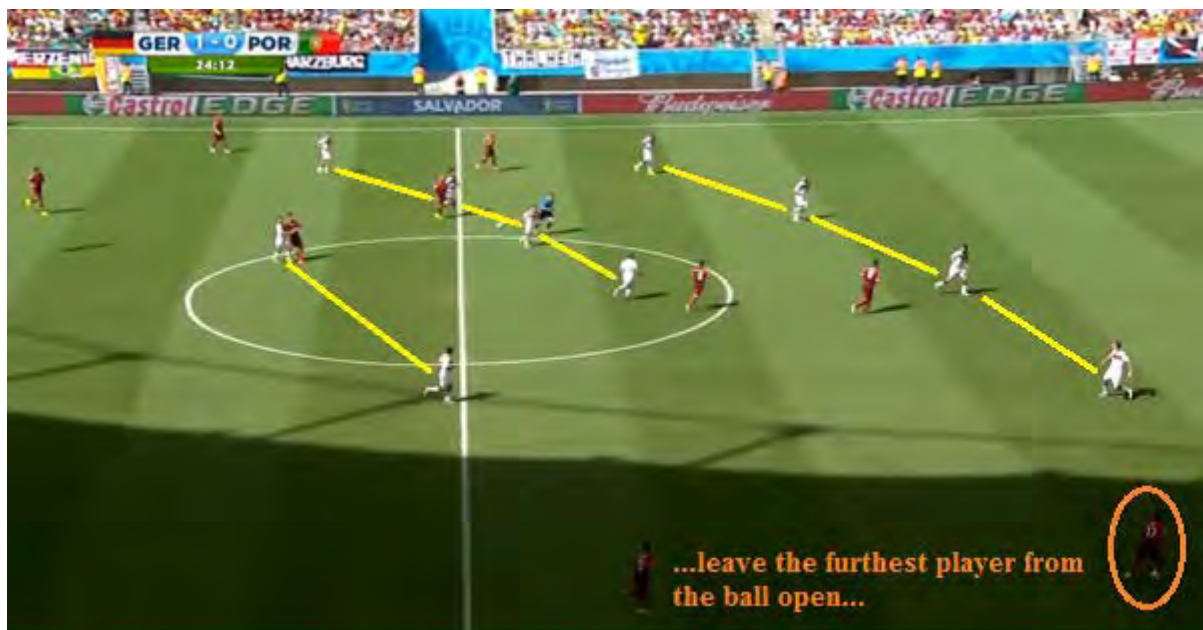
Germany's approach was to thread neat passes into players in the space between the defence and midfield and various players could pop up in this zone. Mesut Ozil drifted inside from the left, with Thomas Muller doing something similar from the right. Arguably more problematic for the opposition midfield, though, was Sami Khedira's tendency to shuttle forward into space between the lines.

Two things helped Germany get into these pockets of space. The first was simply good passing from midfield, with both Toni Kroos and Schweinsteiger knocking intelligent forward balls into the feet of teammates.

The other factor was Klose. Although he had little influence on the game in his natural zone, the penalty box, he helped push back the centre-backs, who were very reluctant to come forward from a deep position. Even when Klose moved towards the ball on occasion, they would tend to stay back and let him wander free.

It was a surprisingly passive approach and a very different situation than expected. With Klose pushing them back and penetrative balls from deep in midfield, Germany found space, although they could never quite play the final pass.

Here's a perfect image of Germany's layered defense in action:



NETHERLANDS

Group: B; W 5-1 vs. Spain, W 3-2 vs. Australia, W 2-0 vs. Chile

Second Round: W 2-1 vs. Mexico

Quarterfinal: D 0-0 vs. Costa Rica (4-3 penalties)

Semifinal: D 0-0 vs. Argentina (2-4 penalties)

Consolation: W 3-0 vs. Brazil

Louis van Gaal was very reactive with his formations in this World Cup playing a 3-4-3 in one match and then a 3-4-1-2 in another. The reason was simple; so he had an equal number of central midfielders as the opposition, which is vital considering he has instructed his midfielders to effectively man-mark their opponents throughout this competition. His opponents were spread more, whereas Holland always made tackles just inside their own half.

The man marking was simple: *De Jong was on someone and then Georginio Wijnaldum or Wesley Sneijder tracked someone.* They would always designate a midfielder who would receive the most space, usually the one who would drop deeper towards his centre-backs and surprisingly be the best source of creativity in the match. They would allow the spraying of some great passes out to the flanks, helping teammates break into the channels and hit straight balls forward, but from very deep positions.

The Dutch continued their approach of man marking the opposition in midfield, where the battle was usually 2 v 2 rather than 3 v 3 all throughout the tournament. At the back, the centre-backs always shut down the opponents' strikers when they collected the ball in central positions, which often meant Daley Blind dropped deeper to become an extra centre-back and Memphis Depay moved back from his wide position to become the outside back. As always, the Netherlands do not mind being drawn out of shape, as long as they have a spare man at the back.

Generally, they played against teams happy to dominate the game, retain the ball, push up and leave space at the back. That played into their hands, as they were able to use their pace on the break with direct balls to Arjen Robben.

The Dutch were frustrating at times in that Van Gaal was content to leave it at 3 v 1 at the back, with none of the three centre-backs stepping forward into midfield to force anyone forward, creating space elsewhere.

The three Dutch centre-backs spent much of games playing passes to one another. In fact, they ended most matches as the three most prolific passers on the pitch. The distribution of Martins Indi and Ron Vlaar, in particular, was incredibly unambitious.

Arjen Robben spent this tournament finding space in the channels from a central starting position, but sometimes it was the reverse; he was out wide and drifting into central, congested positions. Most problematically, he always had at least two opponents around him, usually showing him onto his right foot.

Robben was happy to dribble past them, though and got no fewer than three players booked.

Vlaar chasing Diego Costa of Spain as he checks back for a pass, while Indi & de Vrij instinctively tuck centrally is at the heart of Netherlands man-marking system.



Chapter 3: What We Learned

In the third and final chapter, we're going to look at some of the key tactical elements that were on display throughout this World Cup and what they may mean to the continued development of the game of football going forward.

Before we delve deeper into this section, it should be noted that the tactical gulf displayed over the course of this World Cup was tremendous. Teams lined up anywhere from the traditional 4-4-2 all the way to the untraditional, 3-4-1-2, with many changing from match-to-match, some even from half-to half (*i.e. Mexico*) and some even within the flow of the match itself (*i.e., Netherlands*). This tactical flexibility from both on and off the pitch and during the match is something that we will see much more prevalent in the game of football in the years to come.

The following chart breaks down the tactical choices of each team in the 2014 FFA World Cup:

Team:	Diff. Formations	Three-5-2	3-4-1-2	Three-4-3	3-4-1-4	Four-3-3	4-2-3-1	4-1-3-2	4-3-2-1	Four-5-1	4-1-4-1	Four-4-2	4-2-1-3	4-1-2-2-1	4-1-2-1-2	Five-4-1	4-4-1-1	Five-3-2
Algeria	2																	
Argentina	2																	
Australia	1																	
Belgium	1																	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1																	
Brazil	2																	
Cameroon	3																	
Chile	2																	
Colombia	2																	
Costa Rica	1																	
Ivory Coast	2																	
Croatia	3																	
Ecuador	1																	
England	1																	
France	1																	
Germany	1																	
Ghana	1																	
Greece	1																	
Iran	2																	
Italy	2																	
Japan	1																	
Korea Republic	1																	
Mexico	2																	
Netherlands	3																	
Nigeria	2																	
Portugal	1																	
Russia	3																	
Spain	2																	
Switzerland	2																	
Uruguay	1																	
United States	1																	
		5	1	1	1	10	15	1	1	5	2	6	1	1	1	3	1	1

TIKI-TAKA IS TIKI-GONE!

Last season, fast, direct, attacking football became an adopted style for some of the most successful teams. Manchester City and Liverpool both achieved high league finishes by employing these aggressive tactics. Real Madrid similarly blitzed their opponents, with the speed of Ronaldo, Bale and Benzema in the Champions League. This was a major factor in their 4-0 victory against previous holders Bayern Munich in the semi-finals.

The trend continued throughout the World Cup, with pace on the attack being key to several victories, including a major tournament upset when Holland demolished previous winner Spain in the opening group stages 5-1. Germany sealed their place in the finals with a crushing 7-1 victory against hosts Brazil, using aggressive tactics to push forward, intercept and overwhelm the opponents defence before the Brazilians had a chance to recover.

This is going to translate even more into the new season. With most teams playing their own style of football, the possession-based game is in decline on many fronts. With the departure of Michael Laudrup from Swansea, we may have seen the end of teams relying on

a heavy passing style to break down their opponents patiently. Perhaps we must look to acquire attacking assets that excel on the break.

...and in the same breath... **THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A CAT...**

Spain was so good, for so long (*three major trophies over a six-year reign*); we forgot there were different ways teams could succeed in a tournament.

All of that changed when Spain went out in the first round of this World Cup. Germany won the cup and while there were shades of the Spanish system evident in the German approach (*Germany and Spain develop youth as well as any two countries on the planet, creating great chemistry*), the Germans were far more adaptable than the Spanish was. Argentina succeeded by building a system designed to lean heavily on two big stars. Brazil focused on pragmatism, which worked until it did not and nobody tore up blueprints like the Netherlands. Manager Louis van Gaal abandoned almost 40 years of Dutch tradition, moving from a flowing 4-3-3 system to a structured, defensively oriented 5-3-2-ish man-marking approach. The third-place finish by a not particularly highly regarded Oranje team showed that success could come in all shapes and systems. It is a welcome change.

Let us look a little more closely at van Gaal in particular as he has twirled the job description of a manager quite hardily this summer. Many foresaw the Dutch using their tried and tested 4-3-3, but an injury to Roma midfielder Kevin Strootman saw Van Gaal restructure his plans entirely. Rolling out the attacking 3-4-1-2 and similar variants showed that Van Gaal was not afraid to mix things up on the greatest stage. Substitutions played a key part in the Dutch reaching the Semi-finals, with Memphis Depay, Klaas Jan Huntelaar and controversially, Tim Krul, all vindicating their manager's decisions to change his options mid-game.

Therefore, what can we expect from the new Manchester United manager? His ongoing restructuring of the team means any new faces are more likely to be utilised than the underachieving old guard of last year. The likes of Luke Shaw and Ander Herrera may come onto our radars, whereas Fellaini, Mata, and even Rooney, may struggle to convince.

A key point of interest falls upon Robin van Persie. Captain and all-time top goal scorer for the Dutch, many have pencilled him in as the first name on their team sheets, but as shown in the hotly contested 2-1 win against Mexico, Van Gaal is not afraid to sacrifice his captain should things not go to plan. Huntelaar went on to assist the first goal and score the winning penalty in the match. Whilst Van Persie is presumed to be, the first choice for Van Gaal's new United, pre-season and time will dictate where, if at all, he will fit in.

...this leads right into another tactical piece that will become quite evident in the game very soon: **THE USE OF IMPACT SUBSTITUTIONS AS A MORE VIABLE STRATEGY**

Whilst substitutes are afforded limited time to change the course of the game, their ability to influence off the bench means the way in which managers intend to use them throughout the domestic campaign could be crucial. Marouane Fellaini earned a recall to the squad after his goal gave Belgium a win in the group stages, whilst others remained as 'impact subs,' players designed to exploit the opponent's fatigue. Memphis Depay managed two goals and an assist despite only starting one game and Andre Schurrle cultivated three goals and an assist for himself, despite playing less than two games' worth of minutes.

Whether they like it or not, some players gain a reputation as a 'super sub.' A great example is Manchester United's Javier Hernandez. Considering Chelsea's growing midfield, it would not come as a surprise for Andre Schurrle to remain familiar to the substitute's bench, only to be called upon should Jose Mourinho deem it necessary. With the effectiveness of the substitute perhaps emphasised by the energy-sapping humidity of Brazil, it does lead us to question certain players' game-time, or likeliness to arrive late in the game.

PRESSING IS GOING TO BECOME THE NEW NORMAL

One thing every successful World Cup team had in common was that they all employed defensive pressing, to some degree or another. The extreme example was the cardiac kids of Chile, who took man marking to new, quasi-suicidal levels. However, everybody from Argentina to Costa Rica used some form of press or another. That is great for fans everywhere, because when teams press, it keeps the pace of the game high. This era of soccer is becoming increasingly unfriendly to sides that want to defend deeply *and* compactly, or teams that want to keep the ball in their own half and slow down the game while they conserve energy. This press-crazy philosophy sometimes leads to wide-open games with lots of goals, or you get two good defensive teams nullifying each other. It might be a tactical fad, or it might be the natural evolution of the sport: The game is being played by better athletes, with an increased emphasis on fitness to complement skill.

In conjunction with "Pressing" is the issue of **Man-Marking** and the dearth of zonal-defending, at least as we have come to know it. This was almost implemented to perfection by the Netherlands and will likely see even more life as van Gaal carries it over to Manchester United.

WE WILL SEE MORE FLEXIBILITY IN THE BACKLINE AND MAN MARKING WILL BECOME MUCH MORE PREVELANT

When dealing with a setup like the ones put out by Van Gaal, it is extremely difficult to contain the backline by numbers; is it a back three? A back five? This happens to be exactly what he wanted to achieve. In general, he set up with three centre-backs in Stefan de Vrij, Ron Vlaar and Bruno Martins Indi and two outside-backs in Daryl Janmaat and Daley Blind, but on the field, it was a very fluid system defensively which interchanged between a back three, four and five. This is inextricably also linked to the defensive strategy put into use.

Most team's buildup in attack heavily involved the front players dropping back, moving up and playing between themselves again in a series of linkups with free movement. In particular, the innate understanding and coordination of good attacking teams is what makes them so and is something opposing teams fail to keep at bay. To contain or minimize this, Van Gaal tasked each of his Centre backs with marking one each of the front three. Let's use their match against Spain as an example: Initially, de Vrij was given Iniesta, Martins Indi was assigned David Silva and Ron Vlaar against the strong and physical Brazilian-born Diego Costa.

In the opening stages of the match, any time any of the front three for Spain got a sniff of the ball near the mid stripe, the defender tasked with marking him chased him like a predator after its prey and tried to get the ball off him, forced him to play negative or stood him up until

his defence could regroup again to form a 4-man backline. All three have their eyes firmly fixed on their assigned target and stay close enough to them to be able to close them down on immediate notice. When Iniesta and Silva dropped, both Martins Indi and de Vrij assume pseudo defensive midfielder roles, resulting in a backline of Janmaat-Vlaar-Blind. As the game progressed, Iniesta and Silva switched flanks but the task remained the same for Martins Indi and de Vrij; close them down as soon as possible.

In the previously mentioned scenario, as soon as the ball is played to Costa, Vlaar surges out of the heart of the defense to take up a defensive midfielder-like role while the rest of the defense shifts to play out like a normal 4 man defense; de Vrij and Martins Indi backtrack a bit, becoming a centre back pairing and the outside backs tuck in. This switching is extremely fluid and resorting to Oranje clichés, like 'clockwork' which is understandable, given that Martins Indi and de Vrij are teammates at Feyenoord and Vlaar is an ex-teammate who left for Rotterdam in 2012.

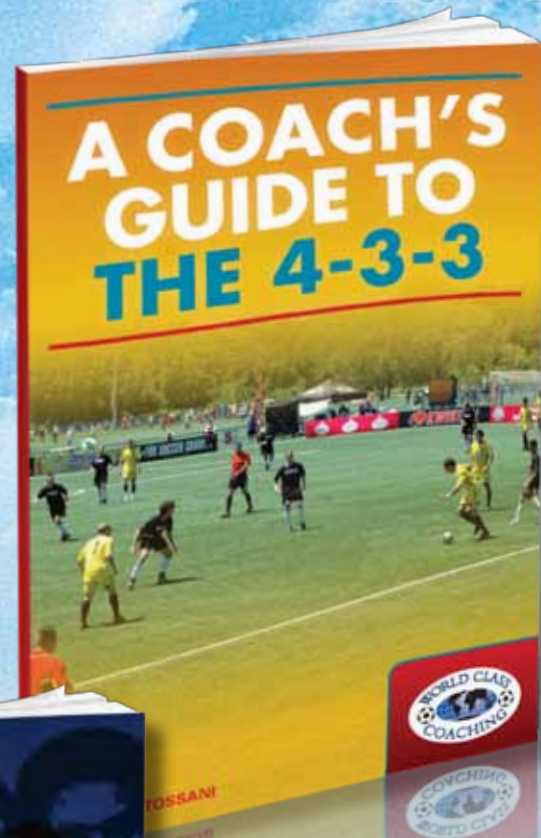
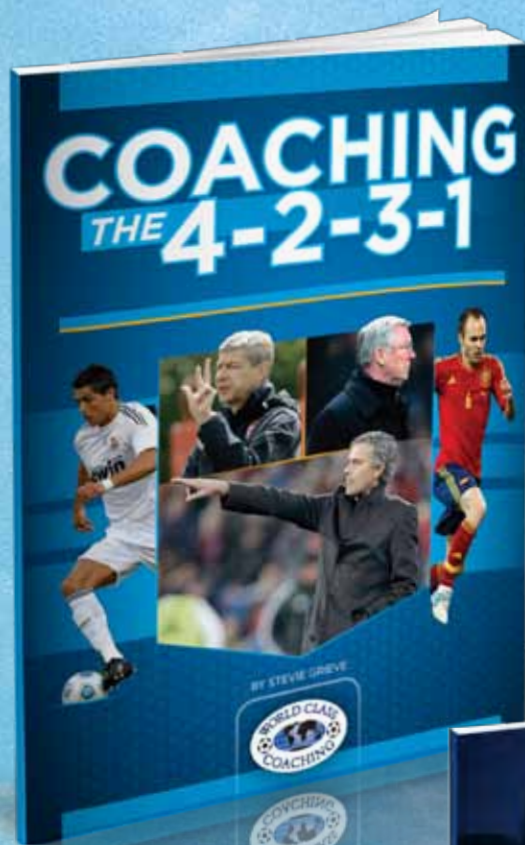
MIDFIELD MARSHALS WILL BECOME THE MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS

Many claimed that he was not even the best player in his team, despite Messi claiming a hotly disputed Golden Ball award for the player of the tournament. Javier Mascherano proved why Barcelona need to play him in the middle of the park, as he finished the tournament as one of the highest for pass attempts, completion rates and interceptions and was instrumental in his side's progression to the final. Sami Khedira and Bastian Schweinsteiger were key to screening the German defence, responsible for everything from ball winning to key passes and integral cogs to the German machine.

In essence, perhaps we should be eyeing up those teams that acquire excellent holding midfielders, knowing that their ability to command the pitch will reap fruits of that harvest. Manchester City's acquisition of Fernando suggests that they have better cover for Fernandinho, allowing Yaya Toure to push further forward, whilst Arsenal's potential target, Sami Khedira, will lead to placing Aaron Ramsey's forays forward, as well as the Gunners' miserly defence, on scouts' watch lists.

Therefore, now you should have everything you need to know in order to complete this course; **Bracketology 441; 2014 FIFA World Cup.**

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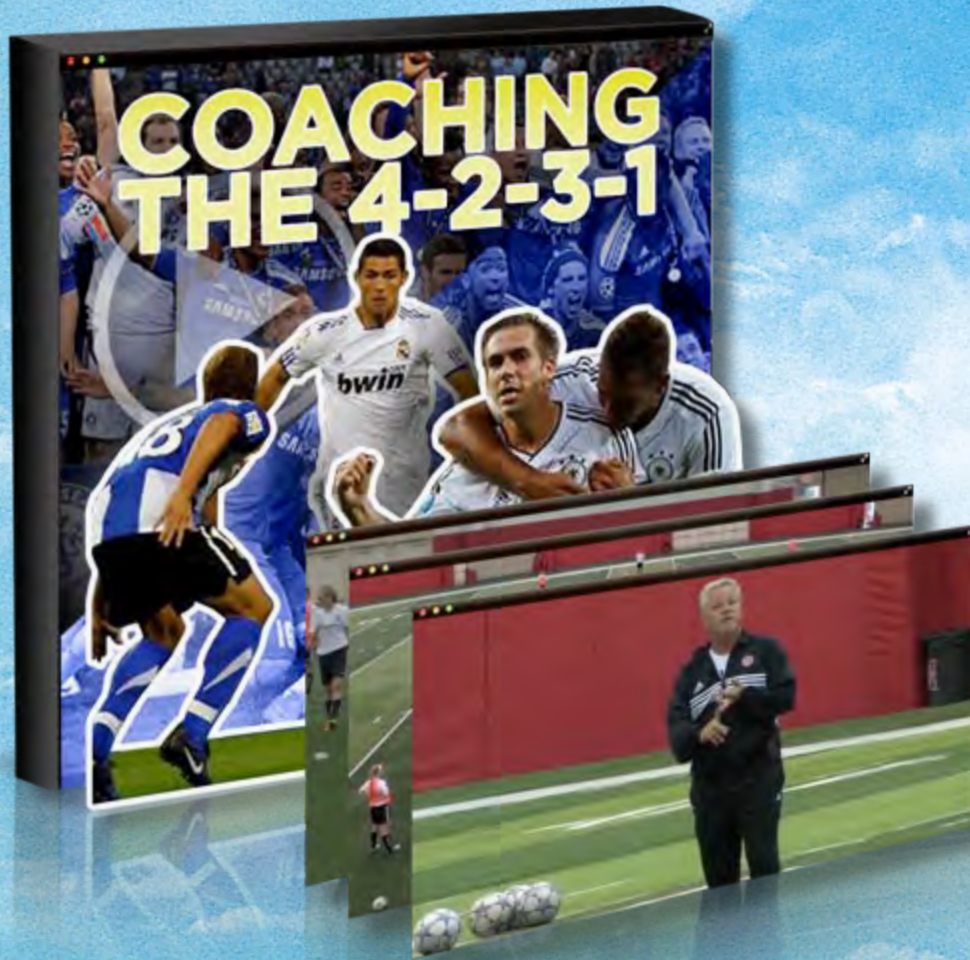


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