

Chivas Guadalajara climbs the ranks with structured soccer:

“It is striking that the team continually dares to build-up from the back”

Mexican soccer is climbing the ranks. The national competition provides players with both great athletic and financial opportunities, which is why we rarely see Mexicans playing in Europe. The quality of play in the Mexican competition is good and the Mexican national team has held a steady position in the Fifa top 10 rankings. One of Mexico's top teams, Chivas Guadalajara, stunned the competition and critics alike by beating Argentina's Boca Juniors with 4-0 in Copa Libertadores. SoccerCoachingInternational observed their U19 team this past summer, who like their senior counterparts stunned the critics with refreshing attacking soccer. An excellent opportunity to analyze how the Mexicans organize their team, and to uncover the secrets behind the resurrection of Mexican soccer.

By: Hans Slender

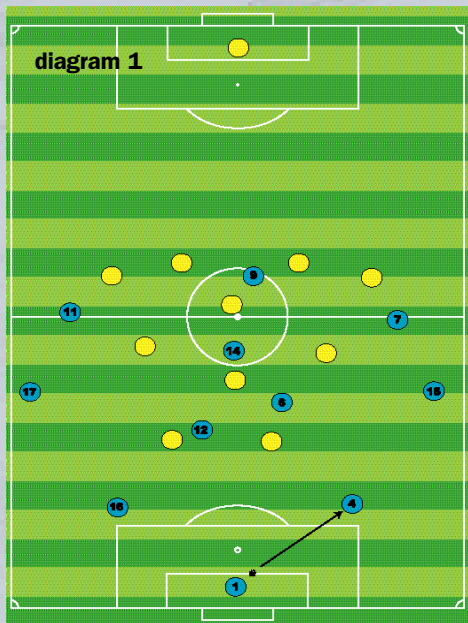
The summer is a time for many soccer coaches and fans to watch the vast amount of (youth) tournaments taking place across the world. Likewise, SoccerCoachingInternational visited many tournaments in order to get an idea of how soccer is developing across the world. It is always great to watch



different team from around the world in order to get an understanding of the systems of play they use, the way they play and which players are making names for themselves. Last season we witnessed how Argentina's Boca Juniors U19 team gave the competition a lesson in effectiveness in several youth tournaments across Europe, however this year it was Chivas Guadalajara who stole the show with their flashy offensive game play.

Organization

Chivas Guadalajara U19's coach goes by the name of Gregorio Sanchez. Like his players he is a short, compact little man. His size does, however not reflect his courage as he sends his team onto the pitch with an abundance of offensive chagrin. He does not place the emphasis on defending, but rather focuses on the offensive aspects. Where many of his competitors would opt for four offensive players and seven defensive players (sometimes even three offensive and eight defending players), Sanchez opts to take the field with five offensive players and only six defensive players. If we look at the ratio between offensive and defensive players, we see a similarity with the popular 4-3-3 system with the point backward in midfield.



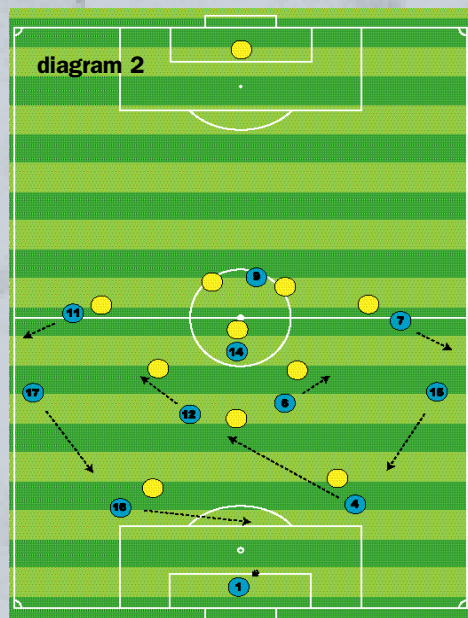
Field possession

Sanchez uses a 4-3-3 system whereby one defender always moves up to midfield while in possession. In that situation Chivas will be playing with a 3-4-3 system, which is daring to say the least. Pushing one defender up to midfield has consequences

for the rest of the team. This will create a diamond on the midfield, whereby the deepest man will play very closely behind the deepest forward. The build up starts with a 4-3-3 system with the point forward and changes to a 3-4-3 with a diamond on the midfield and even in a 3-3-4 as Chivas approached the opponent's goal. Because they play with many players in front of the ball, the players who move up must show a lot of courage. If they start doubting themselves they will create holes in midfield. By keeping the lines close together Chivas is able to win a lot of balls, because they have a lot of players on the midfield. Combined with the individual qualities and the ability to operate in small spaces it is possible for Chivas to play attractive offensive soccer.

Build up

The build up starts, as with most teams, with the central defenders on the point of the penalty area and the backs deep (diagram 1). If the opponent allows the team to build up, which is almost customary at a higher level nowadays, then the build up can easily take place from the back. If the opponent plays with



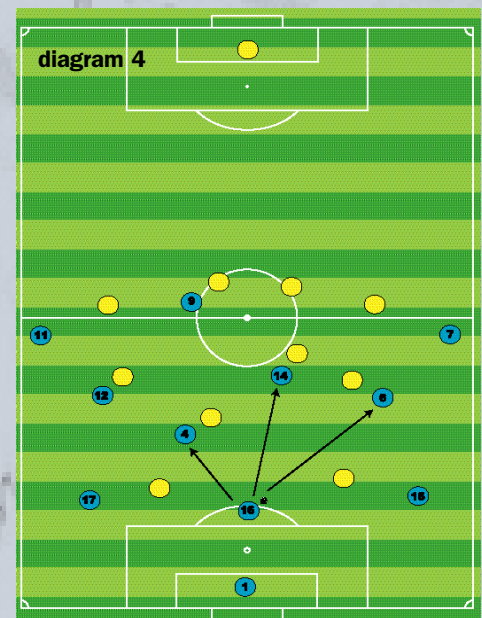
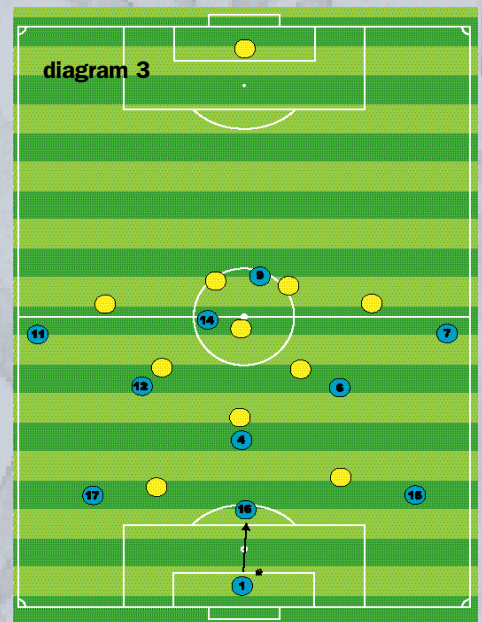
one central striker, he will always be faced with a 2 against 1 situation. When the opponent plays with two strikers and decides to press (for example when they are down) passing to the defenders will become more difficult. At that moment the team must quickly transition to a

3-4-3 system, whereby three diamonds are formed right on top of each other. One of the central defenders will walk away and a cumbersome situation will arise for the opponents strikers (diagram 2). Both backs drop back a little, creating a diamond in both midfield and defense. The defenders can

generally speaking deal with a 3 against 2 situation. The backs are no longer positioned close to the sidelines, because these distances would be too large in order to take advantage of a quick build up (diagram 3). Especially striking is the fact that Chivas constantly dares to build up, even when they are leading and the opponent pushes their players forward. An important component is that the goalkeeper is included in the play and that the defenders are not scared to receive a pass even when the opponent is nearby. The moment an attacker starts pressing the goalkeeper a 'player over' situation arises and the team can execute a careful build up from the back.

Distance

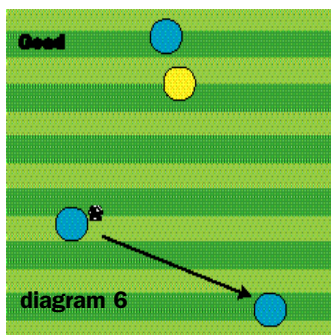
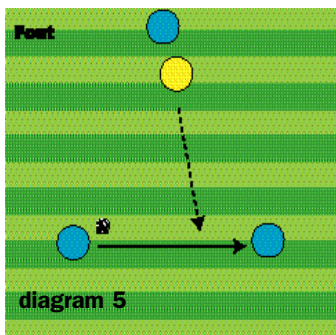
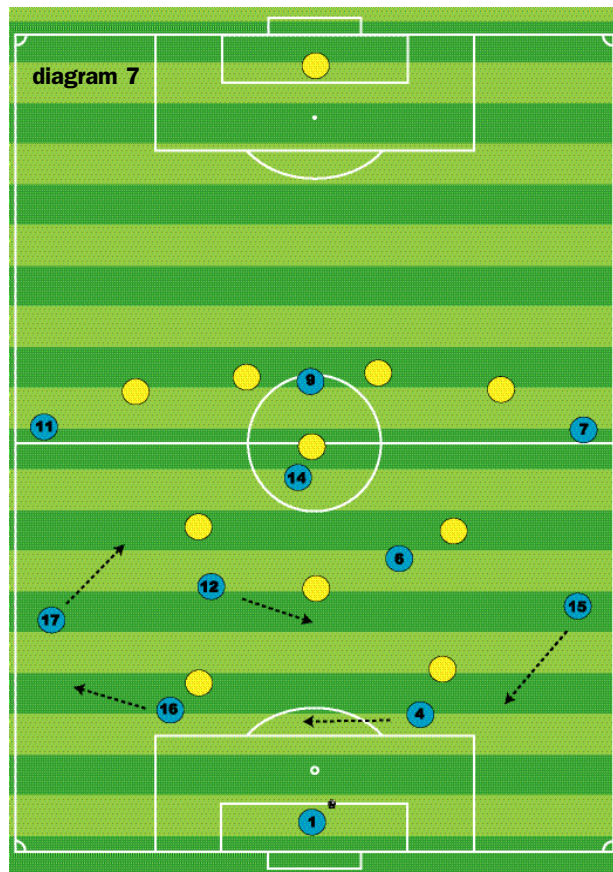
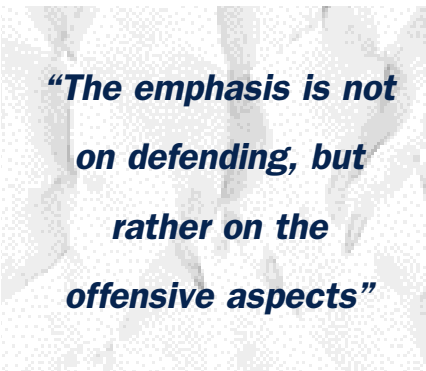
An important component for a good build up is positioning both midfielders and attackers as deep as possible. When the lines are positioned too close together at the start of the build up it will be fairly easy for the opponent to cover them. When the distances are greater, the opponent will most likely not dare to take the chance. If the opponent's midfielder or defenders do decide to press they will be taking a great risk, as their teammates will be faced with 1 v 1 situations in defense. Whenever the defenders



receive the ball, the distance will create the advantage of giving the players who are asking for the ball more space to come into the ball. Furthermore, loss of possession does not create any immediate risks, as the defenders will have time to reposition and/or recover. Up front Chivas makes the field as wide as possible, so that they always have sufficient passing options. A wide field has the advantage of being able to position your players in a way that they are covering each other. This way there is always an option to skip players (diagram 4).

Continuation

When passing to one of the defenders the way in which the pass is received is vital. A defender who wants to build up does not have to be an overly technical player, he just has to know what he is doing. Whenever he has moved away from the attacker he will have to turn and receive the ball well. The game can then be continued forward. If the defender has an



opponent in his back, he can receive a pass, however, he must immediately wall pass. The opponent might be tempted to pressure this player and as a result the opponent will be out of position. Once the defender has received the pass he must pursue with a good follow-up. The defender must be able to pass to a midfielder over the ground. If this is not possible, because there is no space, he may then opt for a wide pass. This pass is however extremely risky. The defender must never choose for a horizontal pass, because these can be easily intercepted. It is better to resume a withdrawn position, so that it is harder for the attacker to intervene (diagram 5, diagram 6).

Moving

Whoever observes the Chivas Guadalajara attack will immediately recognize the mobility of the players. Because the midfielders and attackers are constantly moving they play very attractive switching soccer. By movements we are not referring to constant positional changes, but rather referring to runs, on and off the ball, across short distances. Because the players are constantly moving in accordance with each other, a player with an opponent at his back will still have sufficient options to continue the game play. The players are basically constantly moving. A player will make a run of a couple of meters and



when he doesn't receive the ball he will immediately create space for another player.

The Chivas players also have a lot of freedom for individual actions. Individual actions and daring through passes are therefore used a lot. This does lead to more frequent loss of possession, but that's a loss they are willing to take.

Wing backs

During attack there is always one player who pushes up into midfield from the back in order to create an additional passing option or to maintain control. This is not always the same person, as the

opponent would be able to anticipate this person pushing up. For at a lot of South American teams it is customary for the wing backs to push up and seek depth on the wings. Players like Roberto Carlos, Cafu and Belletti are good examples of this type of wing back. Generally speaking Mexican players do not have the capacity to make these runs down the sidelines, so they opt for short play through the center. Because the field is kept wide by the wingers there is also very little room to allow for these runs. They definitely modified the play to the quality of their players. The left wing back is a player with a lot of attacking qualities and he is frequently found in midfield. Diagram 3 shows what happens if one of the central defenders pushes up. Diagram 7 illustrates what happens when the left wing back pushed up to midfield. I

in this situation the most controlling midfielder (the left midfielder) is the one who assumes a controlling position. The right midfielder is a player with a lot of depth and he remains in his own position. The right wing back, like the central defender, has less desire to push up to midfield and therefore remains in defense. The qualities of these players lies within neutralizing the attackers, including the 1 v 1 situations.

Preparation

In preparation for the new season the coach has to look at what kind of players he has and based on this he can decide what system of play to use. When determining the system of play one has to look at creating a balance between the lines (in length and width). Whenever one wing half likes going deep you will need a wing half on the other side who is more controlling. A lot of changes in the system of



play and players usually do not contribute to better game play. The players will miss the constant variable and will have troubles adapting. Chivas' choice to play offensively, whereby players are constantly pushing up in a line, is risky to say the least. Defensively they have to be (and are) strong in their duels. Besides being able to play with a 4 man zone defense, they are also able to do so with a 3 man zone defense. Being able to count on a strong defense is a must for this type of offensive soccer.

Chivas Guadalajara

Partly due to the Dutch input of former Chivas Guadalajara coach Hans Westerhof the club was able to grow into a top South American club. They are not only competing (and winning) prizes in their own country, but are also contenders for the Copa Libertadores, the South American Champions League. Together with Club América from Mexico City they are the most popular club in Mexico, but they are also very popular across their national borders. The USA counts millions of Chivas fans, which explains why MLS boss Garber gladly choose to start a sister-club in Los Angeles, in the form of Chivas USA.

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