

Mentality

Broadly speaking, the mentality of your team determines how defensive or attacking your players set out to play. You can choose from five main mentalities; defensive, counter, standard, control and attacking. There are also the two extreme mentalities, contain and overload, although these are typically only used on a temporary basis when absolutely necessary during matches.

It would seem that you should simply select a mentality for your team's starting tactic based on the overall ability of your team relative to others in your league, with more attacking mentalities being suited to better teams. However, this is not necessarily the best approach. Despite their names, all five of the main mentalities can be effective both in both defending and attacking, and so it is highly advisable to also consider your desired style of play.

Although in order to select the most appropriate mentality for your team and then adjust it efficiently for your purposes, it is important that you first understand the basic mechanics of how the mentalities work.

Read Soccer Systems and Strategies to learn more about tactical strategies.

Basics of Defensive Mentalities

Defending

The more defensive the mentality, the deeper your team will position itself, playing closer to your own goal. As such, your defensive line will be lower, while when defending, your players will be more disciplined in retaining their defensive positions by standing off the opposition; in other words, closing down the opposition player on the ball later. They will also stay on their feet for longer by attempting later and less risky tackles when with an opposition player who is on the ball. This gives the opposition team more space and time on the ball to make decisions, but also makes it more difficult for them to find a way through your team, with your players being more focused containing attacks by holding up the player on the ball and reducing the passing options available to him, and generally protecting your goal. When opposition attackers do get behind your defensive line there will be less space available for them to exploit.

Attacking

When in possession your team will play at a lower tempo, meaning that your players' attacking play will be more patient. The team will focus more on keeping control of the ball and waiting for space to open up in the opposition defence. Your attacking players will be more likely to stick to their positions, allowing your team to play more conservatively. Although this can result in fewer chances created, the chances that are created are more likely to be of a higher quality. Furthermore, your team will try to waste time more when in possession by employing delaying tactics such as hanging onto the ball or taking time over throw-ins and set pieces, in order to reduce the opposition team's time on the ball.

Width

In addition, the more defensive the mentality the narrower your players will position themselves, closer to teammates to their left and right. Defensively, this will constrict space in the centre of the pitch and make it easier for your players to move into their defensive positions when possession is lost, while harder for the opposition team to attack through the central areas. When attacking, the narrower and more conservative positioning of your team will enable your players to keep possession more effectively at the expense of more adventurous attacking play, with more options available for simple short passes, therefore reducing the time the opposition has available to attack.

Passing

As such, players with attack duties will make shorter passes to teammates closer to them in order to help keep possession, and to build up attacks more slowly and carefully. In contrast, those with defend duties will tend to attempt more direct passes to teammates further away to clear the ball from dangerous areas, as well as to get the ball forward more quickly to attacking players who may be able to cause problems for a higher and more exposed opposition defence. Giving a player a more or less creative role, however, will itself affect the range of his passing.

Individual Player Mentalities

In line with the team's overall mentality, each of your player's own individual mentalities will also be more defensive, meaning that they position themselves more conservatively, backtrack more when the opposition has the ball and start forward runs later when a teammate has the ball. This contributes to the deeper overall positioning of your team, which will see attacks built up patiently in deeper areas of the pitch. Furthermore, more defensive mentalities mean that your players will be less likely to attempt more risky but potentially rewarding actions, including riskier forward passes, through balls, dribbles and shots, and more likely to prefer safer options instead.

A player's more general preferences for actions such as through balls, dribbles, long shots and forward runs are determined by player roles and duties, as well as being influenced by specific team instructions. Roles, and particularly duties, will also affect each player's individual mentality.

Basics of Attacking Mentalities

Defending

The more attacking the mentality, the higher up your team will position itself, playing closer to the opposition's goal. As such, your defensive line will be higher, while when defending, your players will be more aggressive in trying to win back the ball by hassling the opposition; in other words, closing down the opposition player on the ball earlier. They will also get stuck in by attempting earlier and more risky tackles when with an opposition player who is on the ball. This gives the opposition team less space and time on the ball to make to make decisions and can help your team win back possession quickly, but it can also create gaps in your defensive structure that can be potentially exploited by higher quality opponents. Since there will be a smaller gap between defence and midfield, attacks can be started more easily as well as from closer to goal.

Attacking

When in possession your team will play at a higher tempo, meaning that your players' attacking play will be more urgent. Your team will focus on moving the ball around quicker and working the opposition defence more. Your attacking players will be more likely to roam from their positions, allowing for more fluidity of movement. This can result in more chances created, but they are more likely to be of a lower quality. Furthermore, your team will waste time less in order to focus on attacking.

Width

In addition, the more attacking the mentality the wider your players will position themselves, further apart from teammates to their left and right. Defensively, this can make it difficult for your players to return to their defensive positions after losing possession and leave free space that the opposition may be able to exploit on the counter attack. But when attacking, the wider and more adventurous positioning of your team will give your players more space to use, making it easier to pass through the opposition, at the expense of potentially losing possession.

Passing

Players with attack duties will attempt more direct passes in an effort to penetrate the opposition, although those with defend duties will tend to make shorter passes to teammates closer to them in order to build up play as your team looks to feed the ball to more advanced players to create chances. Giving a player a more or less creative role, however, will also affect the range of his passing.

Individual Player Mentalities

In line with the team's overall mentality, each of your player's own individual mentalities will also be more attacking, meaning that they position themselves more aggressively, backtrack less when the opposition has the ball and start forward runs earlier when a teammate has the ball. This contributes to the higher overall positioning of your team, which will see attacks built up more quickly with the ball moved into more dangerous areas of the pitch. Furthermore, more attacking mentalities mean that your players will be more likely to attempt more risky but potentially rewarding actions, including riskier forward passes, through balls, dribbles and shots.

A player's more general preferences for actions such as through balls, dribbles, long shots and forward runs are determined by player roles and duties, as well as being influenced by specific team instructions. Roles, and particularly duties, will also affect each player's individual mentality.

The Standard Mentality

As you would expect, the standard mentality provides a balance between the style of play involved in the more defensive mentalities, and that involved in the more attacking mentalities.

If unsure of which mentality to use for a particular match, it can provide a useful starting mentality that allows you to assess the opposition and the performance of your own team before deciding whether to switch to an alternative mentality.

However, it can also be a useful mentality in its own right as it can be thought of as both the "least defensive" of the more defensive mentalities and the "least attacking" of the more attacking mentalities.

The Counter Mentality and Counter Attacking

The counter mentality differs from the other more defensive mentalities, including standard, by increasing the chances that your team will try to take advantage of counter attacking opportunities.

With any mentality, if your team wins back possession and there is a clear attacking opportunity created by opposition players being out of position following the breakdown of their own team's attack, your players will temporarily play with very attacking individual mentalities, make more forward runs off the ball, attempt more through balls, and dribble with the ball more. This means that your players will commit themselves to the attack and play more adventurously in an attempt to exploit the opportunity, until the counter attacking phase of play ends. The counter mentality specifically instructs players to attempt such attacking play after winning possession even in situations where counter attacking opportunities are slightly less apparent.

This combines well with the other principles of more defensive mentalities, which encourage your team to sit deep and invite the opposition forward, leaving them potentially vulnerable to a quick attack if your team wins back the ball, while also instructing deeper players to make more direct passes.

Counter attacking is most effective if you have attacking players with good Off The Ball, Pace and Acceleration attributes, while you would also benefit from having supporting and defensive players with good Passing, Technique, Anticipation, Creativity, Decisions and Teamwork, and a physical supporting striker with good First Touch, Heading, Teamwork, Jumping Reach and Strength.

The shorter you instruct your team to pass the more creative and technical ability your supporting and attacking players will need to successfully carry out a counter attack, and the quicker your supporting players will need to be to support attacks. With more direct passing you will be relying more on the off the ball movement and speed of your attacking players and the physical ability of your supporting striker, as well as the technical and creative abilities of your more defensive players.

If your counter attacks are ineffective and break down too often then this can be a dangerous tactic as the opposition themselves may counter quickly after regaining the ball.

How to Choose a Mentality

As discussed earlier, a basic approach to choosing a mentality for your main starting tactic is to compare the overall ability of your team to that of the other teams in your league. Although there are further things to be considered before you reach your final choice, this is the most appropriate place to start.

The easiest way to ascertain the relative ability of your team is to look at the media prediction shown on your club's Information screen. This shows you where the media expects you to finish at the end of the season, although it does not

take into account signings made by each club after the predictions were made at the start of pre-season, or any possible future signings.

You should then undertake a slightly more detailed analysis by looking at the Team Comparison screen in your squad's Team Report. This tells you how your team compares in various important attributes in each area of the pitch. For example, you can determine how your team compares in physical attributes such as Jumping Reach, Pace, Stamina and Strength, technical attributes such as Heading, Passing and Finishing, and mental attributes such as Creativity and Decisions.

Following this up with a more detailed look at your players, which you may have already done when initially choosing a formation, you should be able to determine a general attacking style that suits the players at your disposal. Some styles tend to suit a more defensive mentality, with others a more attacking one.

For example, the following attacking styles build up play patiently in deeper areas with more men behind the ball, and so suit a more defensive mentality:

- A counter attacking tactic relying on quick attackers with good movement (e.g. Anticipation, Off The Ball, Acceleration, Pace) and a creative and technically able midfield player (e.g. Passing, Technique, Anticipation, Creativity, Decisions, Teamwork) to release them behind the opposition defence, preferably with the help of a strong attacker to hold up the ball (e.g. First Touch, Heading, Jumping Reach, Strength).
- A slow, short passing tactic relying on creativity and technical ability in more attacking areas of central midfield (e.g. Passing, Technique, Anticipation, Creativity, Decisions, Teamwork) and movement and technical ability in attack (e.g. Dribbling, First Touch, Finishing, Anticipation, Off The Ball, Acceleration, Pace).
- A slow, short passing tactic relying on creativity on the wings (e.g. Passing, Technique, Anticipation, Creativity, Decisions, Teamwork) combined with movement and technical ability in central attack (e.g. Dribbling, First Touch, Finishing, Anticipation, Off The Ball, Acceleration, Pace).

Since the defence is deeper and stands off more with more defensive mentalities, these styles favour a defence with good Heading, Marking, Anticipation, Concentration, Positioning and physical ability, but not necessarily much Pace and Acceleration.

The following attacking styles build up play quickly and focus on getting the ball into dangerous areas, with more men moving ahead of the ball, and so suit a more attacking mentality:

- A quick, direct passing tactic relying on quick, skilful wingers (e.g. Dribbling, First Touch, Technique, Decisions, Flair, Acceleration, Agility, Balance, Pace), possibly with good Work Rate and Stamina throughout the team.
- A quick, short passing tactic relying on quick skilful attackers in all areas (e.g. Dribbling, First Touch, Technique, Decisions, Flair, Acceleration, Agility, Balance, Pace), possibly with good Work Rate and Stamina throughout the team.
- A quick, direct passing tactic relying on a tall, strong attacker with good aerial ability (e.g. Heading, Jumping Reach, Strength), possibly along with central defenders capable of effectively launching long balls forward (e.g. Passing, Technique) or wide defenders capable of crossing from deep (e.g. Crossing, Passing, Technique), and possibly with other players capable of physically dominating the opposition (e.g. Aggression, Work Rate, Strength).

Since the defence is higher and closes down more with more attacking mentalities, these styles favour a defence with good Tackling, Aggression, Decisions, Work Rate, Pace and Acceleration.

You can then combine your knowledge of the overall relative ability of your team with your desired attacking style's suitability to more defensive or attacking mentalities to arrive at an appropriate mentality for your starting tactic. For example, if you are managing a relatively poor team but your attacking style suits a more attacking mentality, you might want to choose standard or control. While if you are managing a relatively good team but your attacking style suits a more defensive mentality, you might want to choose counter or standard.

Alternatively, you may want to base your mentality on your desired defensive style, which we have not covered here. However, you will be able to adjust your tactic according to your desired defensive style later using specific team instructions.

Both defensive styles, and the six attacking styles introduced above, will be looked at in more detail in the context of specific team instructions in the tactical styles guide. Next though, you must decide how fluid you want your team's overall playing style to be.

Mentality and Match Strategies

Against particular types of opposition teams or in particular match situations it can sometimes be appropriate to change to a different mentality. This may be because your team is facing stronger or weaker opposition than usual, or it may be in order to suit a different attacking or defensive style that you believe will be more effective, perhaps temporarily in an attempt to score an urgent goal or to protect a lead. The Specific Team Instructions guide will look in more detail at applying particular team instructions, and hence tactical styles, suitable for different match strategies

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