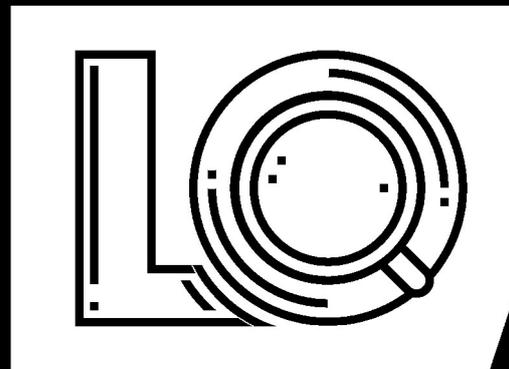


LATTE QUARTERLY



Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training... Everything FM | Issue Nine

Editor's Note

With Issue Number Nine, Latte Quarterly glides into its third 'season', if you like. We set out with the intention of publishing a small collection of articles every few months that would bring you some genuine insight, well thought opinion and the odd laugh along the way. I like to think we have, are and will continue to deliver on this for some time.

To get things going, I provide the inevitable Newcastle save. Throw enough "fit and proper" money at football and you can even rebuild Kevin Keegan's infamous 90s Entertainers. Sort of.

We are delighted to publish a number of FM Girl's hilarious Football Manager Web Comics. We came across the web comics on Twitter and couldn't help but laugh along. Get ready to relate!

FM Stag brings us a review of Jonathan Wilson's "The Names Heard Long Ago" - a book that tells of the great impact of Hungarian coaches on world football. Stag give us a view into how reading this book shaped his plans for FM22.

FM Grasshopper introduces us to what he calls "The Realism Spectrum". A deep level look at the mindset of us as players of the Football Manager game and where we find ourselves on the sliding scale from Anarchy to Realism.

LQ9 wraps up with a fantastic look at the flexibility of the humble 4-4-2. Is Mike Bassett (England Manager) to blame for the snide derision of this supremely flexible base set up? FM Rensie and FromElevenOne talk us through their take on the 4-4-2.

As ever, we hope you enjoy what we've put together for you this month. Kick back, relax and grab yourself a latte...

fmadventure

LQ Issue Eight:

Keegan's Entertainers 2021

By fmadventure

4-3-3, A Football Manager Web Comic

By FM Girl

LQ Book Reviews

By FM Stag

The Realism Spectrum

By FM Grasshopper

Flexible 4-4-2s

By FM Rensie & FromElevenOne



Keegan's Entertainers 2021 – fmadventure

Yes, it's finally happened! After what feels like decades of waiting, Newcastle have managed to oust Mike Ashley. The despicable tyrant had more money than sense but that couldn't fix his questionable attitude toward the rights and wellbeing of his people. Still, it's all changed now with the investment of the Saudi royal family, eh?

The acquisition has naturally caused uproar around the Premier League, no doubt due to the self anointed "Big Six" worrying about a potential new challenger to their collective throne. Is there anything that the Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund could do to win us all over? Rebuild Kevin Keegan's Entertainers team, you say? Okay.

The Entertainers

For anyone of a certain age, Keegan's "Entertainers" will hold a special place in their heart. Most popular current day tactical styles could almost largely be placed into one of two categories: pragmatic build up (pensive, possession based) or organised chaos (ultra high pressing, fast counter attacking). Keegan's Newcastle is a way of football that almost seemed engineered toward the highlight reel - expansive, attacking play at whatever cost.

Former Newcastle midfielder Lee Clark explained, in an interview with BBC, "[Keegan] wanted to keep clean sheets if he could but if that wasn't possible, just go and score more than the opponents". Keegan himself apparently explained his simple methodology when quizzed by an unnamed player - "I buy good players and let them play".

By all accounts, Keegan's talent lay in motivating his team to do well rather than any grandly laid out tactical systems. More often than not it was a simple set up: a goalkeeper; four defenders (who also liked to venture forward, none more so than Phillippe Albert); two central midfielders; two skillful players on the flanks; two talented finishers up top with the perfect combo of strength and pace.

So is this just another Newcastle save for FM22?

It's true, FM22 is going to be a blizzard of save after save with Newcastle and their newly found riches. From hoarding Wonderkids to building the new Galacticos, you're going to see a lot of Newcastle this year.

What follows is something slightly different. We don't want to chase the Wonderkids, nor do we want to build a team of World Beaters. What we want is a man for man replacement of Kevin Keegan's 90s Newcastle for the modern day.

They'll play an attacking 4-4-2. There's not really too much 'dialling in' on the tactical set up here. Get it forward, score goals and hopefully concede less than we score.

Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training... Everything FM

Building The Entertainers for the modern day

How to recreate the famous Keegan years in the current season was always going to be tricky. I'm not going to claim that each of the players is an identical representation of the player they replace - in some cases it's a tenuous link (at best). I picked out 11 (+1) players that I felt were key during Keegan's first reign at Newcastle and set about picking their replacements.

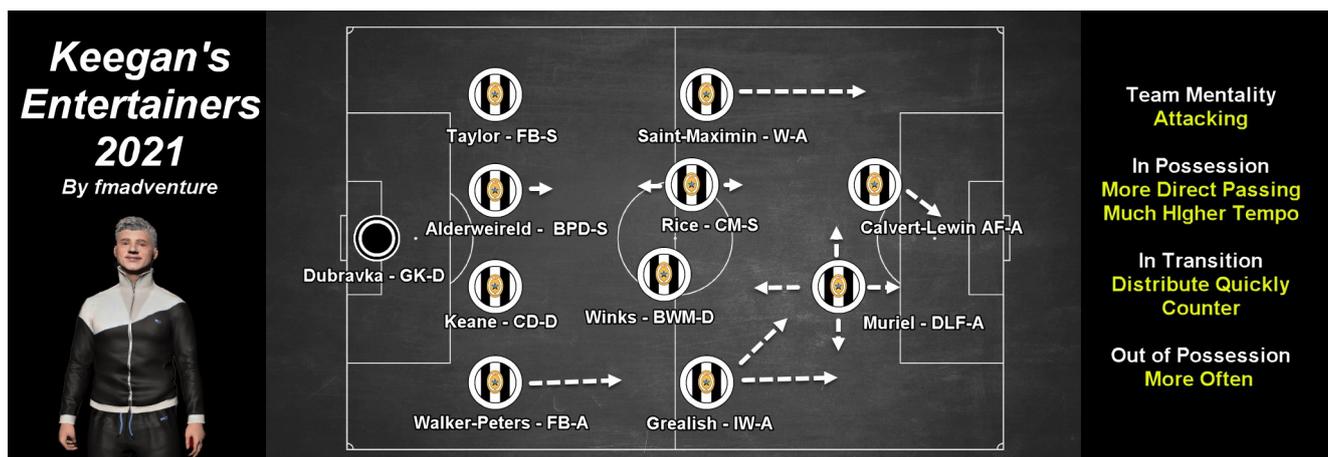
Pavel Srníček was born in (what was then) Czechoslovakia. Newcastle have a ready made replacement in the Slovakian [Martin Dúbravka](#). At the risk of ruining all of my diplomatic ties in Europe - that's good enough, yeah? I told you some were tenuous.

David Ginola was a fleet footed wide man who was Head and Shoulders above his replacement. However, they both share that beguiling trickery on the ball... and they're both French. Enter: [Allan Saint-Maximin](#).

Faustino Asprilla's time on Tyneside was short but in my mind he's a bit of an icon of that era. I'm not sure that Atalanta's [Luis Muriel](#) would turn up at St. James' Park in a snowstorm wearing a fur coat but his flair and ability to run at defenders makes him an adequate replacement for me.

This side wouldn't be complete without Sir Les. Les Ferdinand had the ideal attributes for a centre forward: he was strong, tactically intelligent and a clinical finisher. [Dominic Calvert-Lewin](#) seems like the perfect alternative.

The remainder of the XI is filled out as follows: [Kyle Walker-Peters](#) (Steve Watson), [Toby Alderweireld](#) (Philippe Albert), [Michael Keane](#) (Steve Howey), [Charlie Taylor](#) (John Beresford), [Jack Grealish](#) (Peter Beardsley), [Declan Rice](#) (David Batty) and [Harry Winks](#) (Rob Lee). The squad is supplemented by such already Magpie-talent as [Jamal Lascelles](#), [Sean Longstaff](#), [Callum Wilson](#) and (fittingly) the 16 year old son of John - [Beau Beresford](#).



How will they fare?

The Dynamic of the English Premier League has changed quite drastically over the last quarter of a century - as you rightly would expect it to. In the mid-to-late-nineties Manchester United and Arsenal were powerful forces, Wimbledon FC still had a soul and the word 'Oligarch' hadn't yet entered the lexicon of the English footballing fan.

I would argue that then-Keegan's Newcastle would struggle in the modern day Premiership where defensive pragmatism is much more prevalent than it was then. Maybe that's just me preparing for my ultimate failure...

Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training... Everything FM

KEEGAN MEANS GOALS

The above headline popped up in my inbox around March 2022. Our virtual manager-man definitely understood the assignment.

Pre-season is as pre-season does. A nervy battle with the Second XI, a demolition of a local non-league side before a training camp abroad with an incomprehensible defeat before two comprehensive victories against the cannon fodder of central Europe. We finished that off with a convincing win over a reasonably strong Italian Serie A side before inevitably drawing a blank against a middle-lower German Bundesliga team to make me question all of our pre-season preparations. Lovely.

I'm a firm believer in the 'start as you mean to go on' mantra, and so an opening day 6-2 win over Watford had me salivating in my chair. We followed that up with a 3-3 draw with Arsenal. As if things couldn't get any better we were treated to a Tyne & Wear derby in the Carabao Cup - smashing the Black Cats 5-1 in front of a capacity St. James' Park!

The good times can't always roll though, as September and October gave us just four wins from our nine games - despite scoring 16 goals in the process. Cue the long, hard winter which brought such heavyweights as Manchester City, Tottenham and Burnley. 9 points gained from a potential 30, the silver haired Keegan slumped still and motionless over the advertising hoardings come new year. Our new Saudi overlords refrained from pulling the trigger this time - even if Ms. Staveley's steeley-eyed stare was icier than the winter winds. December's 5-1 and 8-1 reverses to Liverpool and Southampton served only to motivate the January transfer machine.

I mentioned our XI (+1) We needed a saviour. We needed a Shearer! A complete forward with the physique to hold the ball, the ability to carry the ball, the knowledge to release the ball and the sheer prowess to finish the bloody thing! It could only be the man more loyal than a golden retriever - England's Harry Kane.

The lift was almost immediate. Manchester United were too strong for us but another score draw with Arsenal followed before Everton were sent packing with a 5-1 humping. January was dismissed with a 5-4 win away to Crystal Palace. 5-4! In the words of Maximus Decimus Meridius - "Are you not entertained?"

Forget the fact that Ipswich Town knocked us out of the FA Cup. We were hitting form in the league! From January through February we went on a run of five games unbeaten - Chelsea having to fight back on their own turf to claim a draw. Brighton and Brentford slain 5-3 and 5-4 respectively. It was pure box office football!

March and April. They were cruel months. Just 3 points from seven games - all thanks to three draws. Dominic Calvert-Lewin was the only one who seemed to still get the message as his seven league goals in those games kept the hope alive that there would be a final month redemption.

But there was not.. 2-1 and 3-1 wins over Southampton and Burnley, either side of 1-3 and 0-3 defeats to Wolves and West Ham finished off the 2021/22 season for this Newcastle side. The players had simply run out of steam - and who could blame them.

Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training... Everything FM

Mid-Table Delight

If you've read any of my blogging then I know what you're thinking. "He's going to talk about how happy he is despite the mediocre finish" - you're damn right.

We finished the season in 12th position. Knocked out in the Fourth Round of the Carabao Cup, the Third Round of the FA Cup. In spite of all of that, I'd have been a fool not to have enjoyed this save.

We finished the season as the third highest scorers - 79 goals - with the worst defensive record - 89 conceded - **KEEGAN MEANS GOALS!**

Dominic Calvert-Lewin's 34 goals in 36 appearances was bettered only by the super-human Cristiano Ronaldo's 37 in 35 appearances. Jack Grealish laid on 18 assists, just two less than Ronaldo's right hand man Bruno Fernandes. Dubravka only managed 3 clean sheets but who cares about that?

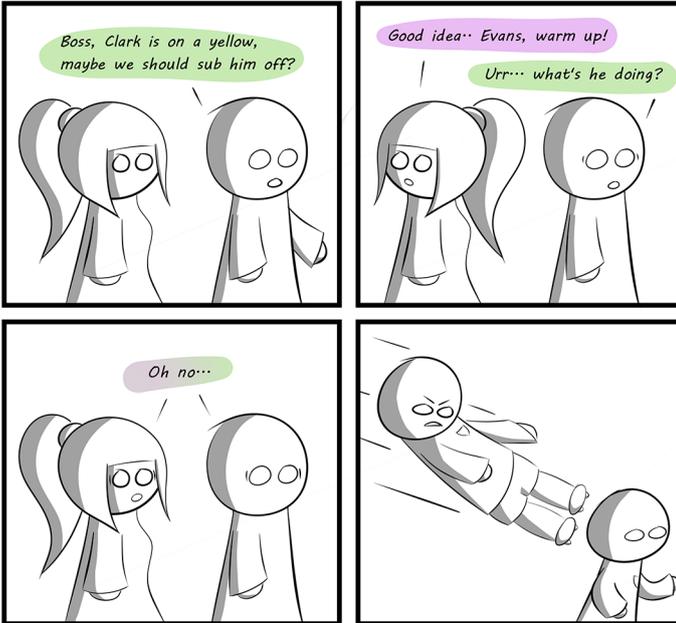
 Premier League	+	-	PTS
10 - Leicester	53	73	49
11 - Brentford	51	59	46
12 - Newcastle	79	89	46
13 - Wolves	52	62	42
14 - Tottenham	43	63	37

4-3-3

4-3-3, a Football Manager Web Comic - FM Girl

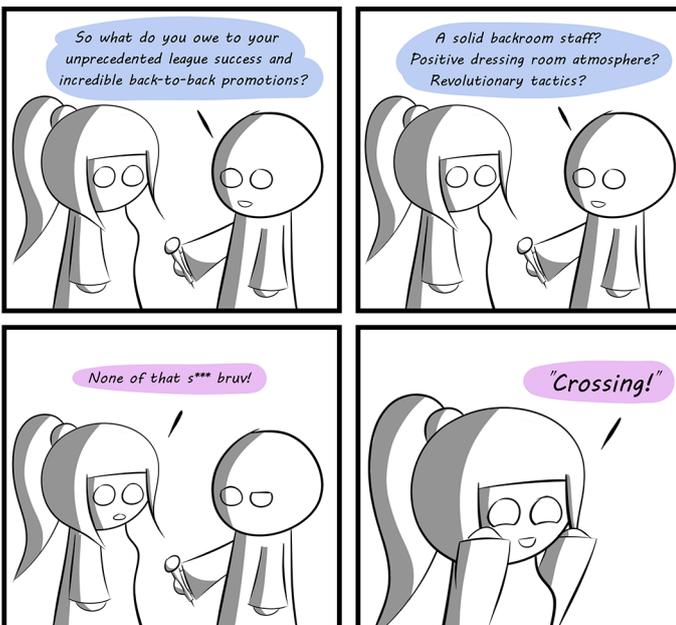
Chpt #8 - On a Yellow

[@FM_Girl433](#)



Chpt #12 - Success

[@FM_Girl433](#)



We loved what Alice (FM Girl) was doing over on Twitter and wanted to share her comics with you in our magazine.

Take a browse of some of our favourites from 4-3-3, a Football Manager comic...

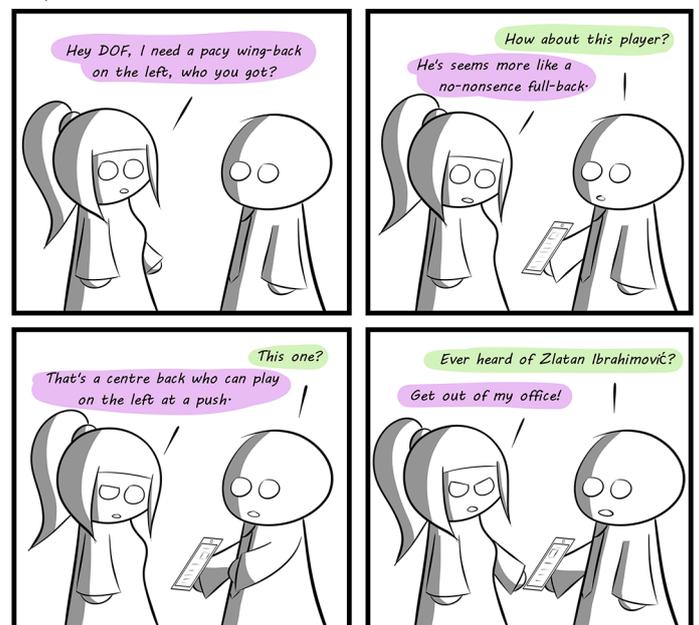
Chpt #9 - Dreams

[@FM_Girl433](#)



Chpt #13 - DOF

[@FM_Girl433](#)





LQ Book Reviews – FM Stag

"In history, a great volume is unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind."

While Edmund Burke undoubtedly meant this as a philosophical ideal and absolutely nothing to do with winning football matches, this is a pertinent quote. There are many ways in which the rich past of innovative historic tacticians can inspire and motivate us to think differently about the chess match that is every football match we may (virtually) manage in future.

A wonderful way to investigate this past is by reading some of the excellent books written on the history of football, and the iconic and influential figures within it.

In a new semi-regular feature for Latte Quarterly, an FM blogger will tell us about a football book from their collection. They will let us know a little about the content and its key themes, but most importantly; how a deeper understanding of football or at least how unique lessons picked up from this title influenced how they play Football Manager, and the lessons you could learn too.

"The Names Heard Long Ago" – Jonathan Wilson

To say that this book merely documents the influence of Hungarian coaches on world football literally and tactically, would be to do Jonathan Wilson a massive disservice.

In parallel with documenting the 1910s origins of MTK's quick passing style into István Tóth's "combination" game of the late 20s which planted tactical seeds in Uruguay that bloomed across South America, into Ernő Erbstein's impression on Italian football and the prodigious impact of the well-travelled Béla Guttmann, you also learn in incredible detail about the horrors of war and the resilience of the human spirit.

The impact of Nazi rule on Hungary and surrounding countries is relentlessly explored, laced with expertly researched detail on some of the heart-breaking tragic stories of certain players, managers and their families trying to escape and survive.

While you may expect from the book a focus on Ferenc Puskás and that 1953 game at Wembley, Wilson's approach is more nuanced and thoughtful. The focus is instead on the prior years of pain yet threads of hope that formed and eventually led to Hungary's footballing golden era.

You leave the book informed but humbled. It certainly opened my eyes to the scale of Hungarian influence on the game we love, be that Hirschl, Kürschner, Weisz or those mentioned earlier. More than that though, investing time into the book strengthened my respect for football as something beyond politics and tragedy. Something to be treasured as well as celebrated.

Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training... Everything FM

The impact on playing Football Manager

In a literal sense I was compelled to manage in Hungary for my blog this year and chose Honvéd as my virtual home after reading.

Less obviously, I was inspired to build teams with pace. I don't mean running pace and acceleration but playing the game at a high tempo. Out-thinking opponents with a short passing combination style which tires out the opposition. This is a key tenet of typically Hungarian football of the 1900s. In Hungarian football there was also a lack of fear to innovate. Filippo Pascucci was the first known conditioning coach in world football in 1937, hired by Ernő Erbstein when managing Lucchese in Italy. Béla Guttmann also rigorously focused on player fitness while pioneering the 424 tactical shape in Brazil and beyond.

There's much to digest in the book, but many elements of it you can bring into your next FM save. Give it a read. If not just for the historic tactical inspiration but for the stories. For the catastrophe and the catharsis.

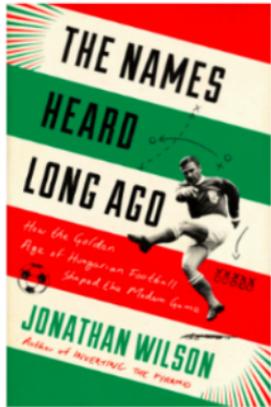
I'll leave you with a snippet of Wilson's own words taken from the book.

"Hungary taught the world to play. When the game is at its most appealing, we still hear some strain of old Budapest. Of the game of the coffee houses and the 'grunds'. Of the most beautiful and tragic of footballing cultures."

Thanks for reading.

FM Stag

Biography › Sport › Football



The Names Heard Long Ago: Shortlisted for Football Book of the Year, Sports Book Awards Hardcover – 8 Aug. 2019

Follow the author

 Jonathan Wilson  @jonawils

Print length	Language	Publisher	Publication date	Dimensions	ISBN-10
 400 pages	 English	 Blink Publishing	 8 Aug. 2019	 16.2 x 3.6 x 24 cm	 1788702263





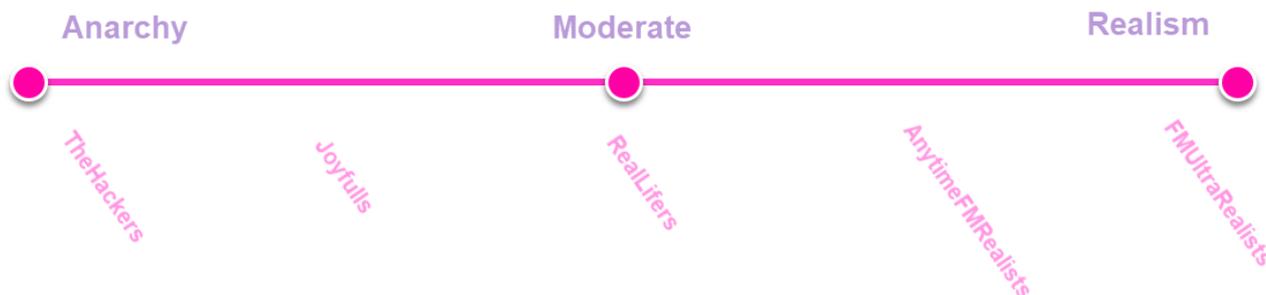
The Realism Spectrum - FM Grasshopper

I reviewed FM21 last time out in LQ8 and came to a conclusion that Sports Interactive had a hard time finding its place with that of growing realism, and also continuing to make FM as a video game. I both loved and loathed different elements of the FM21 Match Day Experience and Touchline Tablet. Some things made sense to me, some did not.

So, I wanted to continue this theme in LQ9; but instead look at realism and the player itself. Today, I want to ask you what kind of player you are, and whether you can position yourself in the left-right Realism Spectrum that I have created below. Let's begin.

the ReAlIsM sPeCtRuM

by FM Grasshopper



Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training... Everything FM

We're going to start with the far-right (don't worry, it's not as bad as it sounds). In the Realism Spectrum, the far-right is the place for those players hell-bent on realism. Let's call them **FMUltraRealists**. If you're an FMUltraRealist, you will do whatever it takes to make the game as realistic as possible...this will include:

- Going **Attribute-less** - you don't want to know if a player has 15 Finishing...you want to guess in the Match Engine and take note of his statistics. Whilst also hoping it's not too late and you've not been playing a Finishing 7 rated Striker all season.
- **Contractless** - Who on earth wants to be negotiating an u18 Physio's contract. This is not what a manager does, the FMUltraRealist will delegate contract deals to staff members. In fact, they'll delegate a lot of what a Manager doesn't do in real life. They'll close their eyes on the Finance page. They'll never bid for a player and they certainly won't arrange a friendly. They'll have strong opinions about all facets of the game...but hardly use any of them.
- The most devout FMUltraRealists I know will often delve **deep into the player created performance data** too. Not happy with stats in total, they want per-90. They'll be putting vast amounts of data into tables outside of FM, and crunching the numbers in search for the marginal gains. Football Management is a full-time job, Football Manager 2022 should be too.
- There's also a rumoured ancient body of FMUltraRealists in a covenant somewhere who practice **Full Match mode** and **FM In Real Time**. Progress a day, and only a day. The FM save is so realistic that they'll curse at the processing screen when it takes them forward a day into the future on clicking Continue.

The FMUltraRealist is a hard life. It will put you at odds at a lot of FM22 Headline Features, and you'll internally rage at Fantasy Drafts and all the fun those on the left seem to have. But you do get that level of satisfaction when FM clicks...when the self-built tactic you've spent hundreds of hours on starts to work...or the MoneyBall approach pays for the extra Affiliate Club.

If we moved left slightly, you'll perhaps find yours truly (and a whole host of FM Bloggers) positioned. We're the **AnytimeFMRealists**...we like to base our approach on realism but we accept it's a video game. For the AnytimeFMRealist you will most likely:

- **Base your tactics in the real-world.** You like to replicate systems, or provide a level of thought as to what should work and apply it. Always one for learning, you will look to other FM tactics in circulation as an inspiration via blogs or YouTube...but you're not one for copying. You'll adapt and make it work for your squad.
- The AnytimeFMRealist will see the value in data and statistics, but you'll very **rarely do maths outside of FM**. If the game screws some data up, or tracks something not quite right...you will moan and likely not do FM Analytical for a bit citing inconsolable differences with this edition.
- The AnytimeFMRealist will look at the FMUltraRealist and see their differences, but they accept a shared ideology in **playing the game "the right way"**. Transfers need to be sensible and the use of glitches/bugs are frowned upon.

AnytimeFMRealists will more often than not be moody and unhappy. They're simultaneously in a state of flux between realism and playing the game. Contradiction between such things as attribute-masking will be commonplace and regional differences will exist in the AnytimeFMRealist sphere. It's a hard ideology to position, but they will definitely tell you they are not centre or centre-left!

Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training... Everything FM

The centre will see the vast majority of players. Most of them you will never know, or hear about, as they're not usually FM content creators...they play the game for a few months of the year whilst subscribing to the gripping free-to-play MMORPG called real-life: let's call them the **RealLifers**. This is Sports Interactive's lion share of purchases, they will lap up the updated data release for the next -10 Wonderkid and make good use of the broad FM headline features. They will most likely:

- Dip in-and-out of FM, as previously discussed. Saves are around 2-3 years max...and they will not worry about squad numbering in the slightest.
- The RealLifers will sometimes engage on social media with real-world football knowledge and offer valuable insight for some of the groups either side of the centre.
- RealLifers love big signings and fairytales. Nothing is more exciting than seeing Derby or Bolton win an FA Cup on penalties...so much so that they will put on a suit and tie for the @FootballManager tweet.
- Ironically, FM content creators should seek to appeal to this market...but very few do (including some quarterly based Football Manager e-magazines).

RealLifers don't tend to worry about the state or development of the Football Manager title. If Sports Interactive did not release one year, they'd likely turn to FIFA or go back to 5-a-sides twice a week. This group won't even care to position themselves on the Realism Spectrum..."you f***ing what mate?"

Now we move on to the centre-left, where you will find many visual content creators. Unlike the realists on the right, they broadly aim to have fun and fully accept Football Manager as a video game. I'm going to call them **Joyfulls** (I had trouble finding a name I like for them). Joyfulls will most likely:

- Get attached to a player they sign on most saves. It's hilarious isn't it? That Championship standard Striker playing for Barcelona (wait, is this realistic now!?). Signings are fun, they'll give big bonuses to players and hope they never reach the point in the save of paying them off.
- FM to the Joyfulls is as much about the off-screen backroom set-up. Money will be spent on comfy chairs, lights, framed shirts, energy drinks and more lights. The irony is that during FM time, the lights will most likely be switched off...in favour of a VDU Assessment failure.
- The Joyfulls will happily download tactics and set-piece routines in order to get one another a rival in a FM PvP match. The dream is to win one of the FM streamer competitions, and they'll happily put the work in and grind for it.
- The Joyfulls love Football Manager's appeal, the game gets better every year for them and they generally like the direction the game is headed in...providing FM Divergence is purged forever!

Joyfulls are a good bunch to watch in moderation. They will make you want to pick up the game if you position yourself in the centre. Those that aren't content creators are also still fun in their own right - you will most likely find them at gaming expos or the Warhammer shops in town.

Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training... Everything FM

My wife once told me that most people who want to be anarchists change their mind once they see what true anarchy really is. She spent some childhood in Marseille after all, I believe her! It stuck with me, and I'm not joking when I say that I am fearful of the proper far-left. In Football Manager terms, these are called TheHackers. These guys do not give a flying f**k how you play the game, do as you want: it's pure anarchy out there! The mission is simple: Break.The.Game. As an anon-member of **TheHackers** you will:

- Seek out the best game-breaking high-press tactic out there. All the Team Instructions, with no worries about conflicting duties or real-world thought...winning is everything. You even have FM Base bookmarked as a favourite.
- Reap the rewards of a half-baked AI and in-game financial system and earn your club as much cash as possible. It's only a game...so why not enjoy it? Don't worry about fussing over contracts or transfer values like the centre-right...hammer the loan deals out and go big elsewhere on marquee signings.
- So, what...you 'own' 700 players across 5 clubs concurrently in the same 40 year save? They're each on a different continent.
- You look at the far-right in equal admiration. They're mental, you're mental...but who cares...it's anarchy!

TheHackers don't really fuss too much over the headline features. As long as the game arrives in November and obvious flaws still exist, they're happy and winning.

Conclusion

So, where am I heading with this piece? Good question, I don't really know. Last time in LQ8 I concluded that realism and being a video game was the balancing act that Sports Interactive had to juggle with. But now I'm throwing an added complication into the mix: the player.

The player is also a problem. We're all so different, and strive towards different levels of realism. From right to left, and all the bits in between...Sports Interactive's Football Manager series seeks to cater for us all. In addition to this, positioning yourself on the Realism Spectrum may also ground yourself in your own expectations about the game; whilst acknowledging both the challenge SI face and our acceptance of others.

Where do you sit?

FM Grasshopper



Leagues, Analysis, Tactics, Training...Everything FM

Latte Quarterly is collated, edited and published by FMSamo, fmadventure, FMGrasshopper and Ted Redwood, but we will happily open our inbox to considering submissions from the wider community.

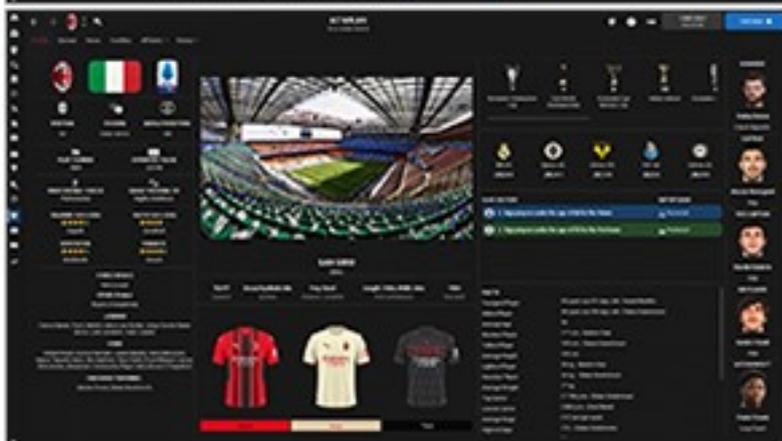
We invite articles of serious analysis, tactical discussion, guides, hints and tips or even tongue in cheek humour.

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Flexible 4-4-2s - FM Rensie & From Eleven, One

To paraphrase one of the greatest ever minds in football, Arsène Wenger of course: “the 4-4-2 formation is suited to the dimension of the football pitch, because 60% of your team (the two central defenders, the two central midfielders and the two strikers) cover 60% of the pitch’s surface; and the other 40% (the two wide players on each side, so four players) cover 40% of the pitch. It is mathematically the best suited system to cover, in a rational way, the surface of a football pitch”.

Whilst his words rang true to me, as I lay down in bed one evening, it also dawned on me that the 4-4-2 is supremely flexible. As a tactic it can be the rigid 4-4-2 with two banks of four and a traditional big man/little man combo up top. But also, you can bend/shape it into something a lot more fluid. Think of an Inverted Wing Back tucking in to act as a Defensive Midfielder, with central runners linking up with Strikers drifting wide into channels. Wide man can be inverted...or erm...wide. Plus you can get a Full Back to overlap and predominantly be ahead of them for the majority of the time.

The purpose of this post today is to show how a 4-4-2 can morph, and to do this I wanted to push two of my blogging peers a bit more than just a simple replication of a 4-4-2. Rather, I wanted to give them a known non 4-4-2 tactic and for them to get to it from a base 4-4-2 starting shape in Football Manager 2022. That’s two banks of four, no diamonds. The roles, the team and player instructions would rather get them there. Welcome to Flexible 4-4-2s.

I hope you enjoy,

FM Grasshopper

FM Rensie's Euro2004 Czech Republic

When Tony mentioned this for the first time, I didn't have a clue what to replicate, with the added instruction to use 4-4-2. When I thought about it more, it was too easy to pick one tactic.

The 4-1-3-2 by the Czech Republic national team from the EURO 2004. The Czech team led by coach Karel Brückner ended in the semi-final after Greece scored the winning silver goal (one of the most stupid things ever) at the end of the extra-time 1st half.

This team had something special. I was 18 years old when the match between the Czech and the Netherlands (3:2, full match) was played. It's still one of the best. The older I am, the more I enjoy this match.

What to replicate?

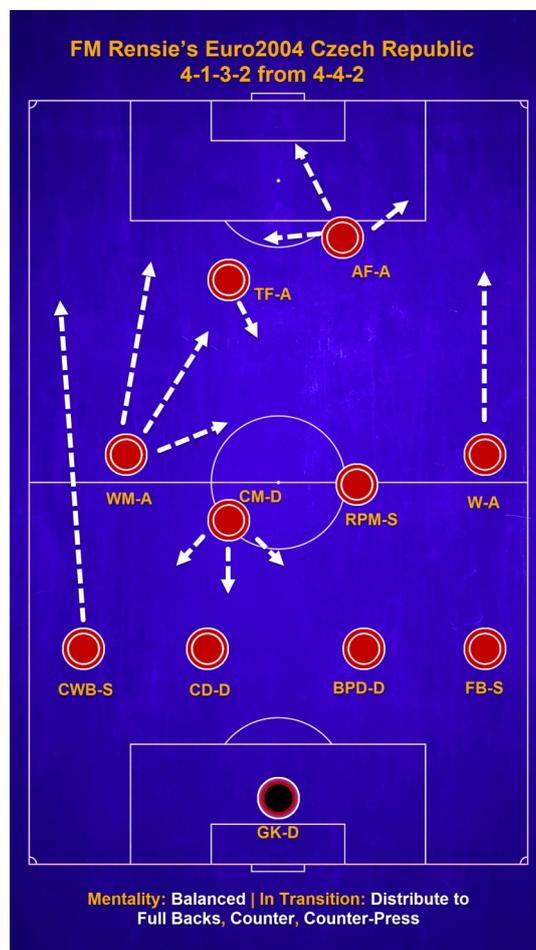
The main thing I always liked about this team was the simple way of football the players produced. The simple triangle between the central defenders and both central midfielders worked perfectly. There was always someone available to receive the ball. It was all about the player's abilities rather than complicated team instructions and heavy tactical style. That's why I used only three team instructions - Distribute To Full-Backs, Counter and Counter-Press. Just make it simple.

The combination of good (BPD - Kjaer in Milan side) and ugly (CD-D with tackle harder instruction - Ujfaluši /find his tackle on Messi on YouTube/ in the Czech team, Romanogli in Milan side) central defenders. The young Daniel Maldini (would it even be FM save with Milan but without some Maldini!?) took the MR slot as W(A) to replicate Karel Poborský and his crosses and clever finishes. Sandro Tonali as RPM to play as Tomáš Rosický - to be available to receive the ball in every situation and to be able to move forward. The CM(D) role of Tomáš Galásek (one of the most underappreciated players from this team) to just cover everything in the middle.

Marek Jankulovski = the unstoppable motorbike on the left side

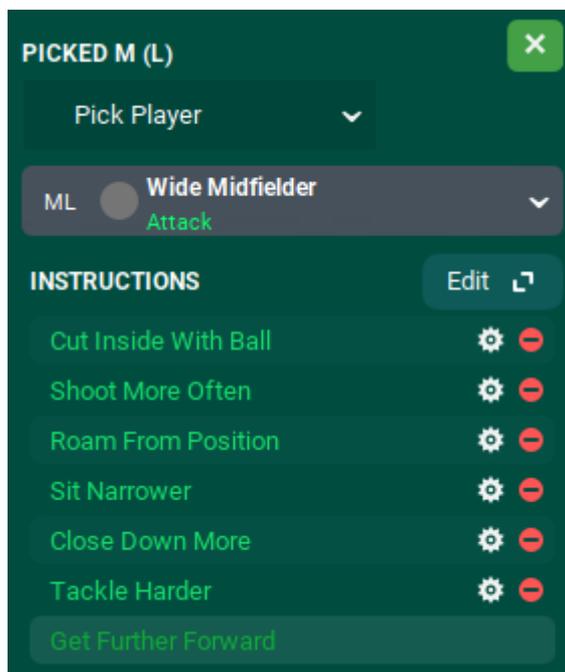
When we talked about what team we will use, the AC Milan choice was ideal also because of Marek Jankulovski who played for the Czech national team but also for the Milan side. He was a typically unstoppable wing-back. Like the motorbike with the bottomless tank.

The current Milan side includes Theo Hernández. He is probably a better player in terms of his technical abilities but the power he can show on the left side of the pitch is fantastic. My first thought was to use the Complete Wing Back role with support duty. It's a complete role and it met my expectations. Hernández (or his backup Fodé Ballo-Touré) did a great job. Hernández with his Acceleration - 17, Pace - 18 and Stamina - 15 was predestined to be great in combination with the empty left side of the pitch ahead of him. Five assists in the six league appearances speak for itself.



Wide roaming ball-winning box-to-box midfielder - Pavel Nedvěd = impossible to replicate

If something was harder to replicate, it had to be the role of Pavel Nedvěd. The legendary Czech midfielder was everywhere around the pitch. He was great defensively and offensively. He was able to shoot from distance, he knew how to cross, he cut inside a lot from the wing, he tackled and pressed hard. As I said, he was everywhere. That's the reason for the name role - WRBWBBM(A).



In terms of FM, I decided to use the WM(A) role and added individual instructions to tweak this monster role - Cut Inside With Ball, Shoot More Often, Roam From Position, Sit Narrower, Close Down More, Tackle Harder + Get Further Forward (default with the attack duty). Not many individual instructions are left available. I don't think many players would fit well to these expectations. I tried several players in that role and all of them were decent. I know it's not a good enough rating. But they all were always the first adepts to be subbed of. When I was in the middle of October 2021, I decided to try Hernández here because of his physical attributes. But not even Hernández was able to handle it physically and I had to sub him in the first match in this role after 70 minutes. Maybe a typical box to box midfielder would be able to play here. But the overall conclusion is that I created the most demanding role I've ever used in FM. Rafael Leao as an Advanced Forward played 14 games, scored 11 and made 3 assists.

Baroš & Koller = the big one with the fastest one, and through balls

The great thing about this simple system is that everything worked together naturally. When I mentioned the simple triangle in the middle, we have to count the Target Forward role in it too. Jan Koller role, who was able to hold the ball for himself or his teammates. But also pass the ball to the sides or for the second striker (Milan Baroš - Rafael Leao). Zlatan Ibrahimovic was injured at the beginning of the save, so I decided to use Olivier Giroud here. He scored 8 goals and made 5 assists in 11(2) appearances, all 5 assists for goals by Leao who has very good off the ball movement and was able to read the game well.

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Simple patterns turn into goals

Set Pieces

Karel Brückner was a fantastic coach in terms of the complete strategy for the matches. And how to read & analyse his opponent. One of his favourite things within football was planning the set pieces. I always like to remember when his team scored some set-piece goals, it was almost the only moment when he smiled in the dugout. He just knew it works and he can create something new.

One of my aims for the time with AC Milan was to score as many set pieces goals as possible. I think I replicate it very well. Mainly thanks to the corner kick near post routine and also thanks to a couple of very well taken throw-ins. Thirteen corner kick goals in 19 matches is a good statistic and Karel Brückner would like it.

Conclusion

The simple 4-4-2 tactic worked much better than I expected and my Milan side won all opening 11 Serie A matches with 34 goals scored and only 1 conceded. We lost 1 match during this test when Real Madrid beat us 2:1 at the Santiago Bernabeu. Less is definitely more!

From Eleven, One's 2006/7 AC Milan

I immediately had three tactics in mind when Tony brought this idea up, all from the days when I enjoyed football the most. Spain 2008 and Man United 07/08 were two of my favourite teams (independent of fandom), but for the purposes of this, I thought the shapes would be fairly simple to replicate.

So instead, I went for the 4-3-2-1 of Carlo Ancelotti's AC Milan side. Kaká at the absolute peak of his powers, and Pirlo, bloody hell.

What a side this was (in the Champions League anyway, where they lifted the big cup). Maldini - Defender of the Year, Seedorf - Midfielder of the Year, and Kaká - Forward of the Year. Kaká's 10 goals in Europe alone, left him head and shoulders above the rest in this season.

Aim

I started with the primary goal of attempting to replicate the Christmas Tree shape, with any thoughts of style of play coming later, although choosing "Focus Play Through The Middle" and "Fairly Narrow" were choices for both.

Methods

First of all I filled in the player roles that seemed most obvious to me. Here I should add a disclaimer that my thoughts are no doubt coloured by personal bias, and memories that are approaching a decade and a half old. Also, I chose to base the side around the players I liked best, from what was a strong squad, with an array of options Ancelotti wasn't afraid of using.

Easy Choices

Dida seems a likely SK-D to me. I don't recall him being super aggressive. In central defence, the glorious combo of Maldini and Nesta is represented by a simple but effective CD-D, and a BPD on cover. Present day Milan has good options here, in the shapes of Maignan, Tomori, and Kjær respectively.

At full back, I first considered a pair of FB-As for Jankulovski and Cafu, to provide the requisite width for the team. With a little more thought, I changed Cafu's role to WB-S, with the default PI "run wide with ball", I hoped it would encourage the MR to go narrower more. I exacerbated that by adding "stay wider" into the mix. In his pomp, there's no doubt Cafu could pull off a CWB role, but at this point with Milan he was in his late 30s, and often switched out for Massimo Oddo. Theo Hernandez is a supreme choice for LB, and Calabria or Florenzi will do the job on the right.

Speaking of Massimo's, next up is Ambrosini. A BWM-S seemed like an easy call here. Franck Kessié is a superb player, more than capable of excelling here.



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Inzaghi. If you look up poacher in the dictionary, there's bound to be a description of some random with a brace of coney, and a picture of Filippo Inzaghi's face. The thing is, in my opinion, the current Milan side doesn't have someone perfect for this. I started with Giroud, but his trait of playing with his back to goal wasn't what I had in mind. Sure he scored 6 in 6...but that's not the point. I swapped him out for Rafael Leão, and was rewarded with a couple of lovely goals coming off of the shoulder of the last man.

More Thought Required

The ideal role for Pirlo is probably Regista. But as that's not available in CM, I first went for the RPM. It was quickly apparent that he was stationed too far forward, so I switched to DLP, but on support, which defaults to "takes more risks", and doesn't come with the unwanted "dribble less" PI that a DLP-D would be saddled with. Tonalì was the clear choice for this role.

Kaka was a Trequartista right? So naturally I first chose to try a false nine, and then a DLF-S. You can shake your head. I thought a Treq in a forward position would stay too high, so opted to tweak the other roles instead. Neither really worked. When Ibrahimovic returned from injury, I went to a Treq (duh) and believe Ibra's "comes deep to get ball" trait helped get closer to the positioning I wanted.

The two roles that required the most thought, were those of the wide midfielders. After a brief dalliance with a wide playmaker on the left (probably the better role to describe Seedorf tbh), I switched to an Inverted Winger on attack. This got him further forward, and I hoped would mean the ball would go through Pirlo/Tonalì more. Brahim Diaz was my first choice on the left, with his passing ability, and trait "cuts inside from both flanks" ideal.



The right midfielder (AKA Gattuso) took the most effort, and to be honest, it only really worked as I liked when Ismaël Bennacer was doing it. I think him being a left-footed central midfielder had more effect than most of my changes. I tried a defensive winger on defend, and though it was certainly combative enough (red card klaxon), he stayed too wide for my tastes. Using the blank slate wide midfielder support role allowed me to mould the role more. The "mark specific position" was a fairly late flash of inspiration, and when set to the opponents MCL, had a big impact on our shape.

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The team instructions of "shorter passing" and "take short kicks" were added primarily to reduce the instances of long balls launched from the back, and in particular from the 'keeper. I had a brief tinker with "be more expressive", but felt it hindered the attempts at getting the right shape.

Results

Somehow, despite my ongoing changes being rolled out solely with team shape in mind, we won every game. Even deservedly beating PSG in the Champions League.

We scored a few very nice goals, my favourite of which involved Tonali through balls, and the absolute best is outlined below:



If only the poacher had been on the end of it, it would've been perfection.

In terms of the shape, there were moments when it looked very much as intended, particularly in transition, though I'm sure there are improvements that could be made given more time.

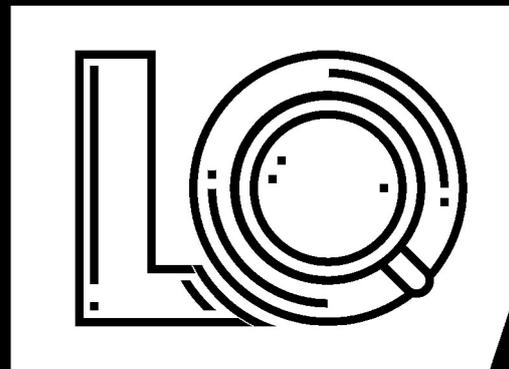
Conclusion

I went in thinking that the most important tweaks would be my changes to player roles and instructions. After watching eleven Serie A matches, and three CL games, I've come to the conclusion that the players selected are themselves, just as important, if not more so. Ibrahimovic in the Kaká role, and Bennacer as Gattuso are the two that particularly stand out. When they were out of the line-up, my attempts at replication were much farther off.

If I was to continue for a bit longer, I'd next try and force more of the play through the centre. Despite the set-up, the wide midfielders, and the irrepressible Theo Hernandez at left back were the source of most of our good build up play. Tonali hasn't been involved as much as I would have liked so far.

It was a fun idea to play around with, and some of the attacking moves that came out of it were lovely to see. I also think the way I look at my own tactics in future will be less formulaic, and perhaps even more creative.

LATTE QUARTERLY



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