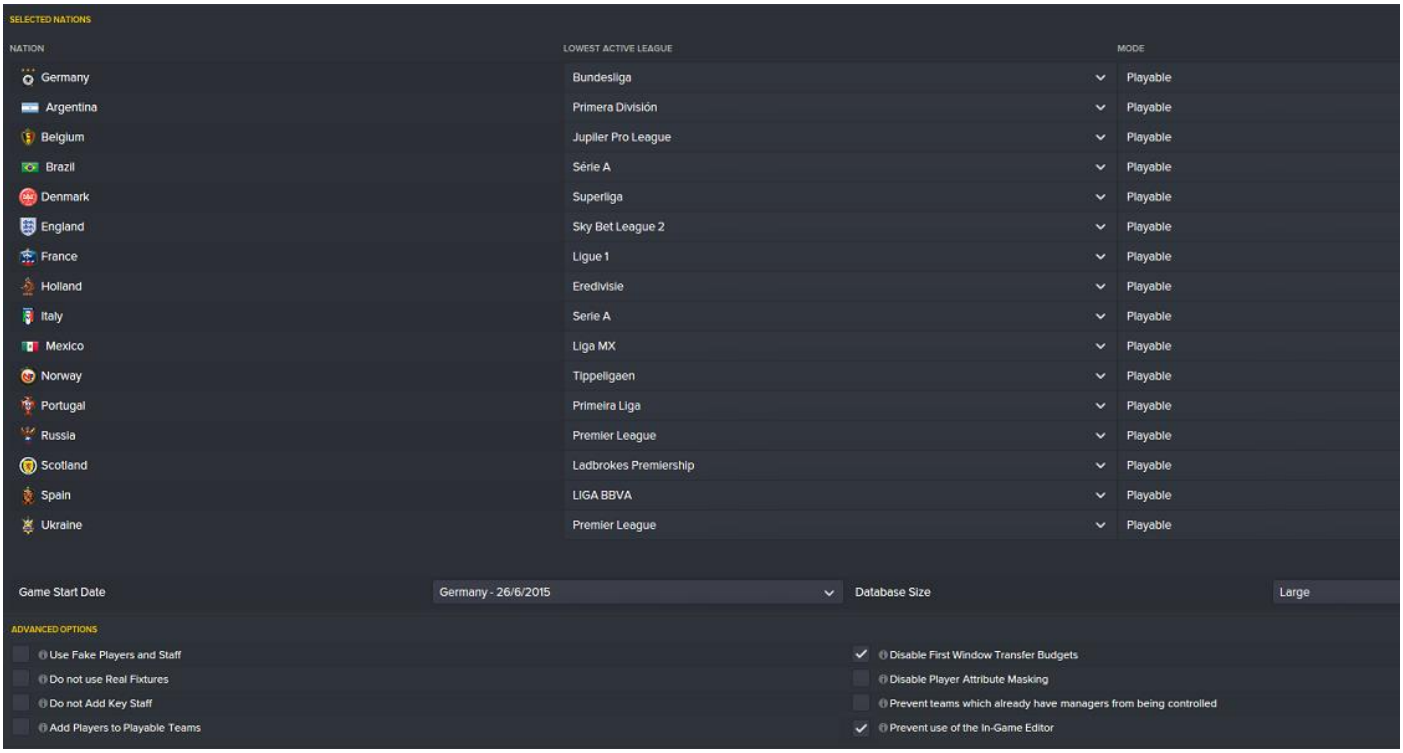
First Steps

We have to start somewhere, and for me it starts when I hit the "New Career Game" option.

I think this is an often overlooked area with many people (quite rightly) eager to get involved with their new club. But the choices we make here can have quite an impact on how the game plays and the strategies we adopt. Some of the choices you make now *can't be changed* once you start playing, whilst others can take a very long time to change, so it's important to get things right now. Much of it is of course down to your personalpreferences and there is no right or wrong way of doing things - just the *fun* way. For the save I'm starting, this is how I'm setting things up:

1. Playable Leagues and Advanced Options



The amount of playable leagues you load will to an extent be governed by both the computing power of your PC and also by the speed at which you like to play. People with less powerful PCs or those who don't want to wait too long for game time to update each time they hit "Continue" will choose a lot less leagues than I load. Nothing wrong with that at all. I personally like to have lots of leagues loaded (with the Database set to "Large") to help with things like the transfer market, player and staff choice. Once in game you can change which leagues to load, but the changes won't come into effect until the end of the season.

You will also notice I've selected the "Game Start Date" to be Germany - 26/6/2015. The club I intend to manage is not a German club, however if I selected the country where the club is, the start date would have been 1/7/2015. By changing this start date, I get an extra few days of pre-season to help with things like player match fitness, tactical familiarity and team cohesion. It may not sound like much, but this is a game where numerous small things can add up to make noticeable differences. Do you *have* to do this? No of course not, it's personal preference.

And finally comes a few more personal preferences in the Advanced Options section. I like to start saves as the beginning of the real football season started, without making any additional transfers in the first transfer window. As I also have the In-Game Editor installed, I disable it for actual saves I do. Sometimes I play games with Attribute Masking disabled, but I intend to write about Scouting so will leave this enabled. Again, all of this is personal preference based on what you find fun to do.

2. Club Choice

Club choice for me is important. I have to feel a connection to the club I manage, otherwise I'll get bored and the save will die. That connection could be a real life connection, a challenge I set myself, or just a team I've enjoyed watching in the past. It doesn't matter what the connection is, so long as I have one.

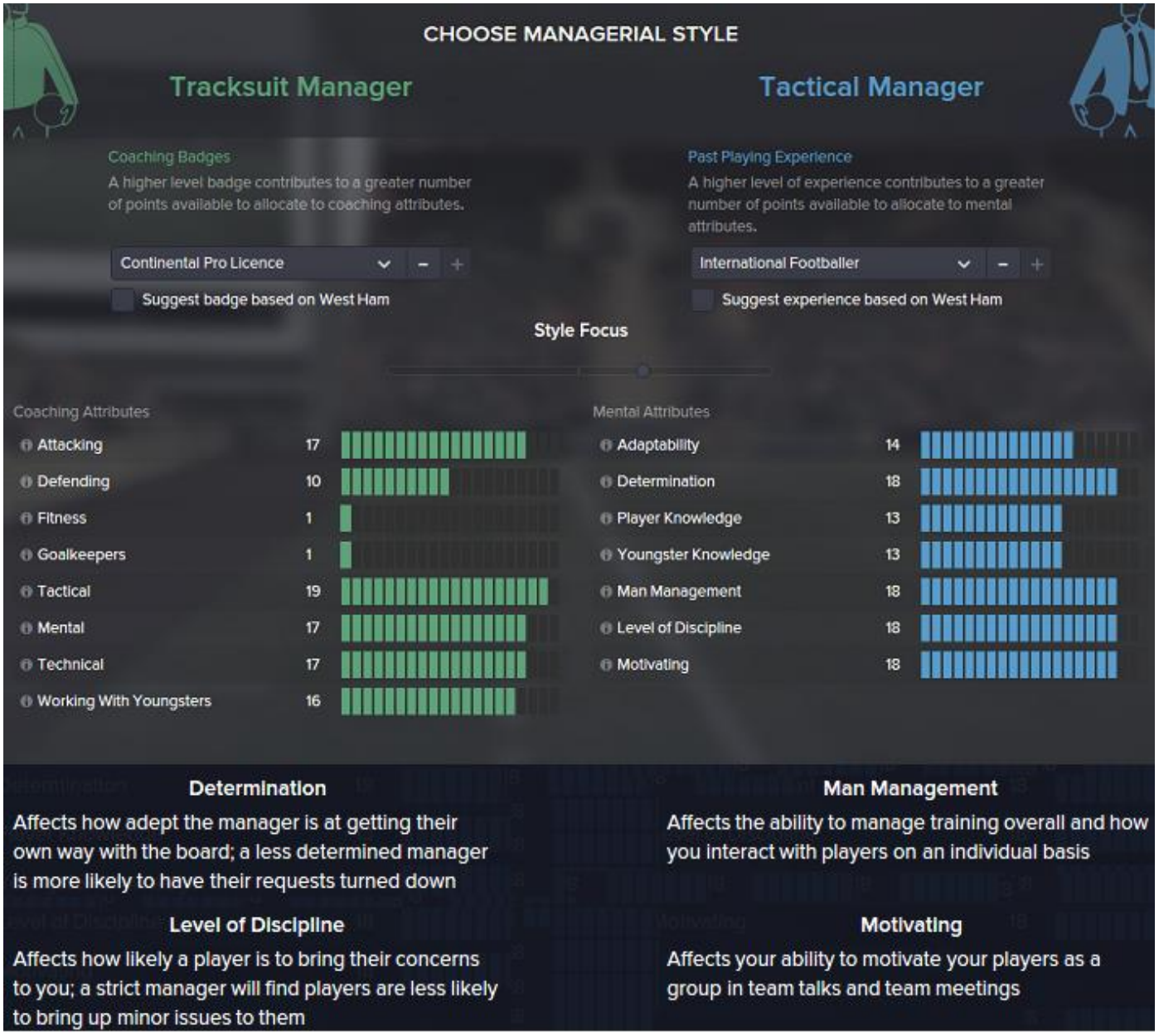
I also don't enjoy Lower League Management. That's just me. A friend of mine has completed all sorts of LLM challenges, from San Marino to Iceland via Wales, and the things he achieves is incredible. Inspired by him, I've tried similar things, but it's just not my cup of tea, so to all those people out there who do love this aspect of the game I tip my hat to you. You're all as mad as badgers of course, but I tip my hat 😁.

So, the club I have chosen is West Ham United - and not just because I happen to support them. They have a decent enough squad and massive potential to grow as a club, but their finances are in a bit of a mess, their training and youth set up needs an overhaul and there is plenty of scope to develop the team. It's a bit of a challenge and will hopefully make for good reading.

3. Manager Profile

For me, this is a very important aspect to get right as it impacts lots of areas within the game - team talks, player conversations, Board meetings, contracts & transfers and training to name but a few. Now, just as players and staff members can improve their attributes, so can your manager avatar. However, for me the rate of increase is interminably slow and I don't have the patience for it. That's just me. Many players set their manager up with very low reputation and attributes, and the development therein is an integral part of their gameplay. Hats off to them, much respect. I just can't do it.

Anyway, based on the club and league I intend to be managing in, I made the following choices and adjustments:



As you can I see, I have chosen a slight favoring towards being a Tactical Manager. I'll run through my choices, which are all geared towards helping me with my coaching staff and team/club interaction:

a) Coaching Attributes

From experience, it can be relatively easy to find Goalkeeping, Fitness and Defending coaches. It can be hard to find decent Ball Control and Shooting coaches especially, so my coaching attributes are skewed towards setting myself up as one or other of this type of coach. To see exactly which attributes are important for every type of coach, check the FAQs sticky at the top of this forum.

I also give myself extra points in Working with Youngsters as (i) your Manager/Coach will be coaching all levels of your clubs' squads, not just the senior squad and (ii) players are classified as "youngsters" until the age of 23, by which time anyone half decent should be fully installed in your senior squad.

b) Mental Attributes

Here, I want to fill out as much as possible in Determination, Man Management, Level of Discipline and Motivating, whilst still having a healthy dose in the other 3 categories. Take another look at that screen shot above to see the in game definitions of Determination, Man Management, Level of Discipline and Motivating - hopefully you can see why I've placed an emphasis here, given all the interaction with people I'll be having in the game.

If you had a look at the FAQs sticky for desired coach attributes, you'll also understand why I want a good showing in Determination, Discipline and Motivation for my own "coach".

In conclusion then, hopefully you can start to see why I spend a little extra time getting the game set up as I do. It's incredibly difficult or slow to change any of these choices once you have actually started a game, so a little patience here can go a long way.

The First Day at Your New Club

Initial Meetings

So I've just taken charge at West Ham, and been welcomed by my new Chairman. Other meetings can now follow, which I suggest you don't skip. You start building relationships right from the get go, so buttering up such people as your Managing Director, Assistant Manager, Back Room staff, players and the Press will only help you in the future. Poor relationships can and will be noted by your Board and, in extreme cases, lead to you being sacked. So press the flesh, grit your teeth and suck it up.

At this point, I'll make a note of how I play the game. There are of course "optimal" ways of doing pretty much everything. Micro-managing this, min/maxing that, to squeeze every last drop out to help you "win". Lots of people do that, I used to, and jolly good luck to them.

I've now changed a little. Sure, I still get involved in some "optimal" techniques, but I now play the game with a little "role playing" element. I've found this adds a new dimension and increases the fun. What I've stopped trying to do is "beating the game". There is no "beating the game" in the traditional sense of computer games, which I think many people don't always understand at first.

Now, when I say "role play" I'm not by any means walking around pretending to be Slaven Bilic or anything daft like that, but I will accept a few less than optimal strategies or oddities that the game will inevitably throw my way.

At certain points, the game will tell us something we just don't agree with (the forums are full of people complaining about this), but for me now I just accept what I've been told, think the "person" telling me this is barking and I deal with the situation. If that results in my star player throwing a strop and our relationship breaking down, so be it. I'll sell the little princess and bring someone else in. It *happens*, so just play it out.

So, I've met Karren Brady, told my Assistant Manager to not bother me again for the next 3 months, ignored my Back Room staffs' recommendations (I'm in charge, they literally have *no* idea what I want) and agreed to meet the press. What next? Well, plenty...

Getting Things Organised and Familiarisation

I'm newly arrived and know nothing about the club. I don't know the players, the staff, the training facilities, nothing. I need to start work and understand what good things are, what needs changing immediately and what I can leave for a later date. I'm going to start with my Staff.

Back Room Staff

My first port of call is the Board screen, to see how many staff I actually have. And on the face of it it's ok:

STAFF

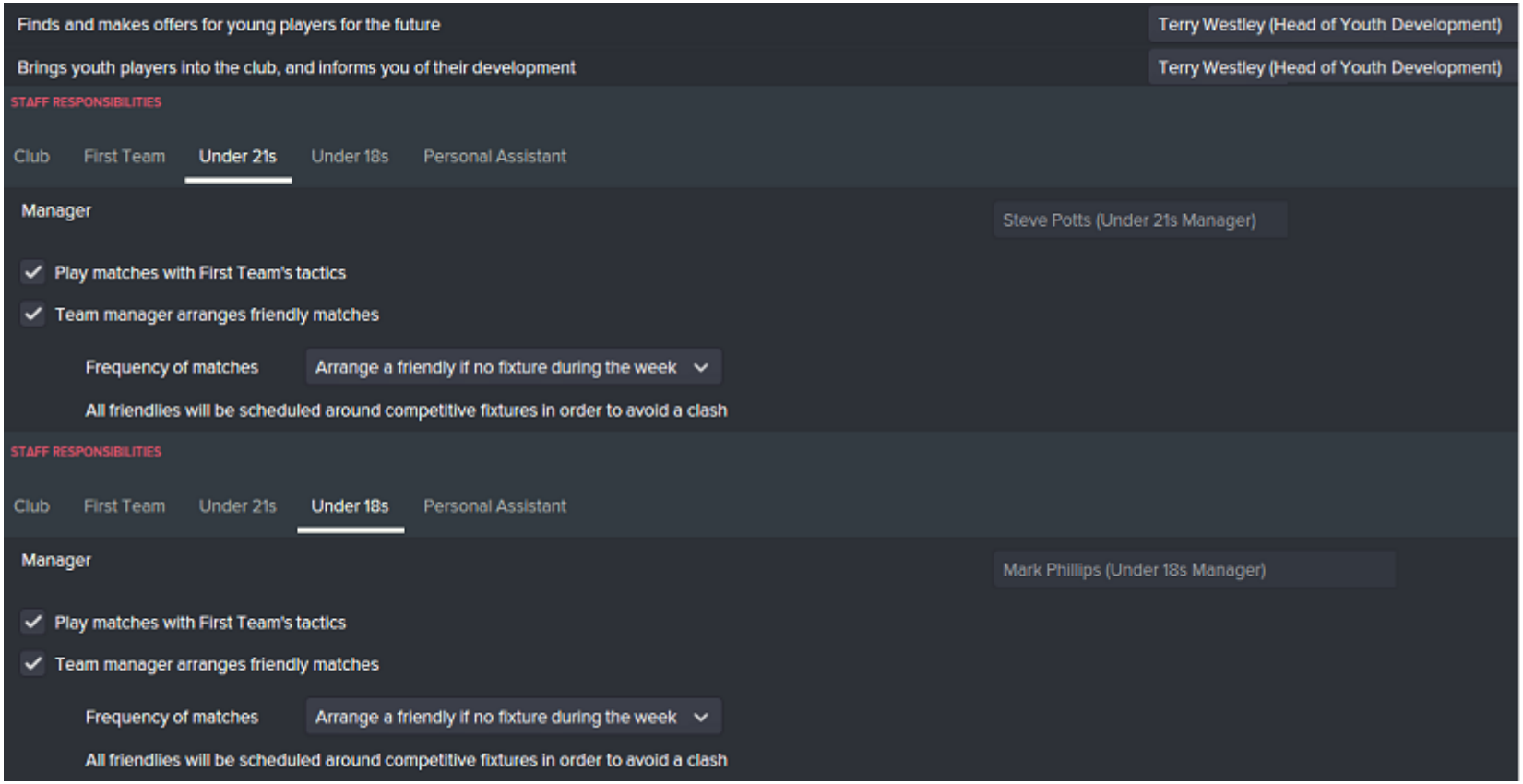
STAFF ROLE	CURRENT	ADVISED
Director of Football	0	1
Head of Youth Development	1	1
Under 21s Manager	1	1
Under 18s Manager	1	1
Assistant Manager	1	1
Under 21s Assistant Manager	0	1
Under 18s Assistant Manager	0	1
West Ham Coaching Staff	5	7
Head Physio	1	1
Physio	2	3
Under 21s Coaching Staff	0	1
Under 21s Physio	0	1
Under 18s Coaching Staff	2	5
Under 18s Physio	0	3
Chief Scout	1	1
Scout	1	8

Now, I don't know the quality of my staff yet, but at least I have something to work with. I'll assess them soon and determine my needs. From this initial look: I'm glad I don't have a Director of Football (a complete waste of money as far as I am concerned); my U18s coaches look a bit thin on the ground; and my scouting network is practically non-existent. Once I check my Training screens to assess the quality of coaches I'll consider changes, but this gives me a starting point. My U18s and U21s are also missing an Assistant Manager, but that's really just an extra coach over and above my allowance, so it's probably something more for the future.

A quick word on the DoF - I never use them simply because I like to take control of most aspects of the club. So to me they are just an expensive and unnecessary overhead. However, if you like to relinquish some aspects of control, then employ a DoF.

Now that I have checked number, I need to check responsibilities. I like to control pretty much everything, because quite simply I know what I want to do and the AI doesn't. The AI has its own thoughts about what to do. There is, of course, absolutely nothing wrong with letting the AI control many aspects if that's how you have fun playing. Let the AI take charge of Training (for example) and you will have a team full of fit players, who will develop ok. For me however, "ok" isn't enough and I know I can do better.

So, I head into Staff > Responsibilities and change everything except the following options to be controlled by me:



I'm quite happy for my HOYD to make offers on young players, so long as I have final say over whether to sign them or not. Everything else I will do for now, at least until I have a much healthier scouting network.

I also want my Youth Team Managers making friendlies to make sure my young players have plenty of game time and to save me the bother of arranging them. These Managers are perfectly capable of doing this, but I do want my Youth teams to play with my senior squad tactics. This will help me develop players how I want them to develop and so fit into my chosen tactical system.

Staff Quality

1) Coaches

If you take a look at the FAQs sticky at the top of this forum, optimal attributes are described there for each coach and their area of expertise. So I could simply look at each coach to assess their suitability.

However, before I get into that, I'm going to take an initial look at my coach star ratings. Star ratings are a visual representation of those attributes, so it's a quick method of checking things out. These are my senior and U18s coach ratings:

Senior Squad coaches

The more areas a coach covers, the less time he's able to spend on each area, reducing the quality of training

	Fitness		General					Goalkeeping	
COACH/JOB	STRENGTH	AEROBIC	TACTICS	BALL CONTROL	DEFENDING	ATTACKING	SHOOTING	SHOT STOPPING	HANDLING
Steve Potts Under 21s Manager	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★★★☆	-	-	-	-
Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★★★½	-	-
Nikola Jurcevic Assistant Manager	-	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★★☆☆	-	-	-
Edin Terzic Coach	-	-	✓ ★★★★☆	-	-	-	-	-	-
Eamon Swift Fitness Coach	-	✓ ★★★★☆	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Miljenko Rak Fitness Coach	✓ ★★★★☆	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chris Woods Goalkeeping Coach	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★★☆☆	✓ ★★★☆☆
Julian Dicks Coach	-	-	-	✓ ★★★☆☆	-	-	-	-	-
Coaches' Workload	Average	Average	Heavy	Heavy	Heavy	Heavy	Heavy	Light	Light
Lead Coach	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆	★★★★½	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

U18s coaches:

The more areas a coach covers, the less time he's able to spend on each area, reducing the quality of training

	Fitness		General					Goalkeeping	
COACH/JOB	STRENGTH	AEROBIC	TACTICS	BALL CONTROL	DEFENDING	ATTACKING	SHOOTING	SHOT STOPPING	HANDLING
Mark Phillips Under 18s Manager	-	-	-	✓ ★★★☆☆	-	-	-	-	-
Steve Potts Under 21s Manager	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★★★☆	-	-	-	-
Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★★★½	-	-
Terry Westley Head of Youth Development	-	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★½☆☆	-	-	-
Eamon Swift Fitness Coach	-	✓ ★★★★☆	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Miljenko Rak Fitness Coach	✓ ★★★★☆	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chris Woods Goalkeeping Coach	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★★★☆	-
Jerome John Under 18s Goalkeeping Coach	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓ ★★★☆☆
Peter Drake Under 18s Coach	-	-	✓ ★★★½☆	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coaches' Workload	Light	Light	Average	Average	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Lead Coach	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★½☆	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆	★★½☆☆	★★★★½	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆

All in all, not too bad. My Senior Squad has at least 4 star coaches in every area apart from Ball Control and Attacking, and my U18s have a similar issue. Note that I'm not mentioning my U21s squad. This is because my U21s share training facilities with my senior squad, so whatever I do with my seniors will affect my U21s as well. Some countries and leagues differ and their 2 youth teams share facilities instead, so always take note of who is training with who. You'll also notice that some of my senior coaches have a "Heavy" workload. This is something I'll need to fix pretty quickly otherwise players will start complaining they aren't getting enough one-on-one training. More on that later.

For a team such as West Ham, I should really be looking for a minimum of 4 star coaches across the board. If I was trying to optimize things, I'd be looking to do this ASAP. However, I'm actually going to RP this a bit for now. I've started the game with no transfers allowed in the first window, so I'll do the same with my coaches. Also I don't have much in the way of really decent prospects in my youth teams (I had a quick look, more on that later), so bringing in replacement coaches right at the start is not on my list of priorities. Further, given my lack of scouting knowledge and club reputation, my choice of decent available coaches is somewhat limited. So I decide to leave things as they are for now, and revisit this either around January or at the end of the season. I may however bring in one or two additions to help with the Heavy workload, but again more on that later.

In terms of a pressing recruitment need, my only real concern is my Head of Youth Development. Not only do I want him to be a decent coach, but his personality can directly influence the personality of newgen players. This is West Ham's HOYD, and his Balanced personality is just not good enough:

I want somebody with high levels of Professionalism, as Professionalism has a direct impact on how well players train and develop. Youth Recruitment day isn't for a few months yet, but I'm afraid Terry's days are numbered. We are supposed to be the "Academy of Football" after all. I'll also mention here a point where I won't be looking to optimize something and rather rely on an RP element for my own fun, and that's my U21s Manager, Steve Potts.

I used to love watching Pottsy play for West Ham, so I'm going to be a bit sentimental here and keep him as my U21s Manager no matter what. He's not the best choice for an U21s Manager I've seen (although by no means the worst either), and I like having him around the place. Go on Pottsy, get stuck in ☺.

2) Medical Team

From the staff list pictured above, I have one Head Physio and two senior squad Physios (who will also help out with the youth teams). The "Physiotherapy" attribute is really the only thing I am interested in here. Other attributes may or may not help a little, but Physiotherapy is the key element and I ignore all others - it just over complicates things. A quick look at all 3 of my Physios show they all have at least 15 for Physiotherapy (two have 16) which is fine for now. Anything lower than 15 and I'd look to replace them.

Ultimately I want one physio for each of my youth squads as well, and that's something I may sort out sooner rather than later. Having a Youth Physio is also a requirement for your annual Youth facilities review, so something else to bear in mind.

3) Scouting Team

To use a little cockney, this is absolute pony. Just 2 scouts, and West Ham are rated worst in the division for judging potential and second worst for judging current ability. My Chief Scout (Tony Henry) is actually quite good, with 16 for judging both potential and current ability. My only other scout (George Cowie) rates at only 10 for judging potential and 9 for current ability. As previously stated, pony.

I have scope for recruiting a further 7 scouts, which I'll need to get working on. When recruiting scouts, I only look at 3 key factors: their ability to judge potential, judge current ability and their nation of origin. Nothing else matters to me, although adaptability can help scouts decide which country to scout and how much time to spend there. I like a variety of nationalities for my scouts as this gives a built in knowledge of countries, so aiding my player searches. I also intend to use scouts (and other staff) to broaden my knowledge of the world, to help me find more and better staff. Having staff with knowledge of different countries can help lift the fog and show additional staffing options, so sometimes I'm quite happy to employ a lower quality staff member if it means I get even more choice. These types of staff members I tend to keep on short term contracts, as they are pretty useless after all.

Staff Recruitment Plans

My immediate needs are:

- A Senior Squad coach to help with the Heavy Training Workload;
- Some new scouts from a variety of countries.

My medium term needs are:

- A new HOYD (needs to be in place before youth intake day, sometime in March for England);
- An U18s Physio;
- A new U18s Manager (see below).

My long term needs are:

- Gradual replacement of most coaches (4 star coaches are fine for now, but I want better);
- A new Assistant Manager (see below);
- Better Physios;
- Youth Team Assistant Managers.

Breaking things down like this makes things a bit more manageable, plus if I spread things out it'll give me more to do at a later point. I should also have a broader choice of new staff later in the game as I increase my club's standing and improve my world knowledge.

Assistant Manager

My current Assistant Manager, Nikola Jurcevic:

Pretty terrible in all honesty. Lots of people use their Assistant for many purposes, from organizing Training to handling Press Conferences and even taking charge of matches. I keep mine much simpler: he needs to be a good coach in one or more categories; and he needs decent judging of potential and current ability so that he can keep me properly updated with player development.

Jurcevic has neither of these, but what he does have is a big fat £10k a week for the next 3 years, so he'll cost a fortune to get rid of. I'll keep him for the first season, but replace him after that.

U18s Manager

My current U18s Manager, Mark Phillips:

Again, not up to standard. Not only do I need my Youth Team Managers to be decent coaches, they should also score well for judging potential and current ability; Working with Youngsters; and a good personality.

Mark has none of these and will be replaced, possibly before the end of the season depending on who is available. At just £1k a week for 2 years, he's fairly cheap to get rid of too.

Recruitment

1) Senior Squad Coach

From the images above, I have choices here:

- I could "game" the system and just bring in any old low quality coach, assigning him to all training categories that have a Heavy workload. This would reduce the workload, is cheap and wouldn't affect player development as the main coach for each category is still assigned.

- I could bring in a better Attacking coach than I already have and then use my existing coach to cover all Heavy workload categories.

- I could bring in a better Ball Control coach than I already have and then use my existing coach to cover all Heavy workload categories.

Decent Ball Control coaches can be hard to find, and with a little RP I decide not to bring in a rubbish coach just to save my workloads (I'm West Ham, I don't want to employ rubbish). So I decide to find a new Attacking coach.

Setting at a level of 15 in Attack coaching, Determination, Discipline and Motivation, my search only brings up one hit, who is the HOYD at RB Leipzig (handy to know when I look for a new HOYD). So I reduce my criteria by one and get a few more hits:

Overview | Backroom Advice | Responsibilities | Staff Search | Staff Shortlist | Job Centre | Job Security

STAFF SEARCH

Reset

CONDITIONS: Add

ATTRIBUTES: Pick – + Match 4 / 4

Filter Options | Show Filters

	Attacking	Is At Least	15
And	Determination	Is At Least	15
And	Level Of Discipline	Is At Least	15
And	Motivating	Is At Least	15

1 PERSON FOUND — Copy of Contract

NAME	AGE	PREFERRED JOB	CLUB	CLUB JOB	INTERNATIONAL JOB	F/PT	TYPE	WAGE	EXPIRES	WR	PERSONALITY
Thomas Albeck	59	Head of Youth Development	RB Leipzig	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£2,500 p/w	30/6/2017	★★☆☆☆	Driven

Overview | Backroom Advice | Responsibilities | Staff Search | Staff Shortlist | Job Centre | Job Security

STAFF SEARCH

Reset

CONDITIONS: Add

ATTRIBUTES: Pick – + Match 4 / 4

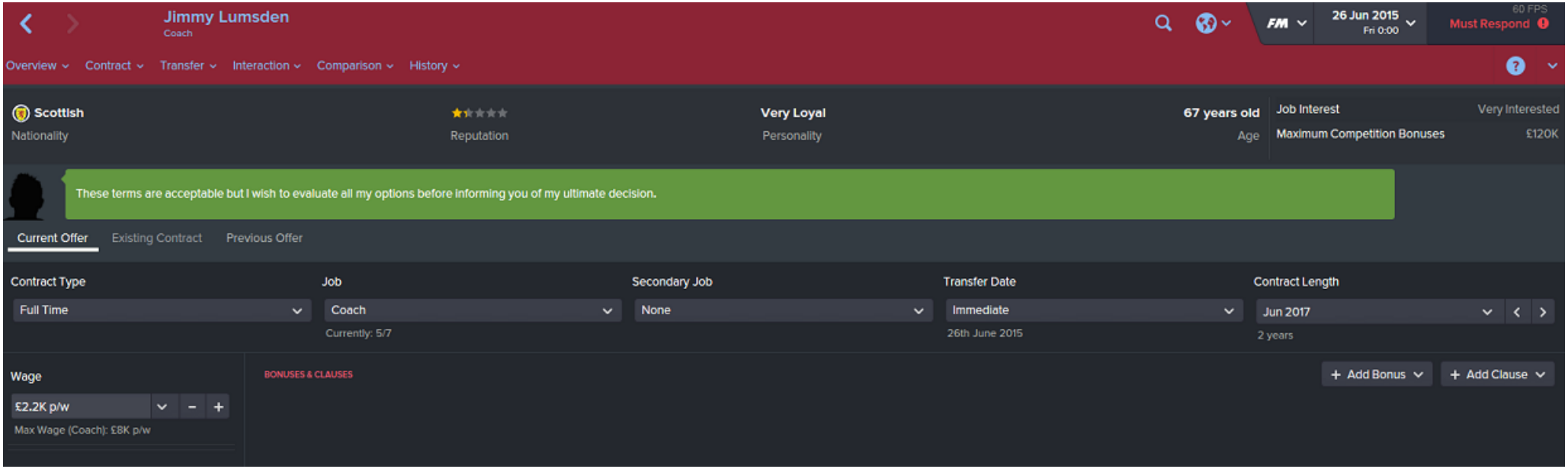
Filter Options | Show Filters

	Attacking	Is At Least	14
And	Determination	Is At Least	14
And	Level Of Discipline	Is At Least	14
And	Motivating	Is At Least	14

5 PEOPLE FOUND — Copy of Contract

NAME	AGE	PREFERRED JOB	CLUB	CLUB JOB	INTERNATIONAL JOB	F/PT	TYPE	WAGE	EXPIRES	WR	PERSONALITY
Thomas Albeck	59	Head of Youth Development	RB Leipzig	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£2,500 p/w	30/6/2017	★★☆☆☆	Driven
Wim Jonk	48	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	★★★☆☆	Light-Hearted
Jimmy Lumsden	67	Coach		-	-	-	-	-	-	★☆☆☆☆	Very Loyal
David Moss	46	Head of Youth Development	Celtic	Scout	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£1,000 p/w	31/5/2017	★☆☆☆☆	Determined
Henk ten Cate	60	Manager	Sparta	Director of Football	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£925 p/w	30/6/2016	★★☆☆☆	Fairly Loyal

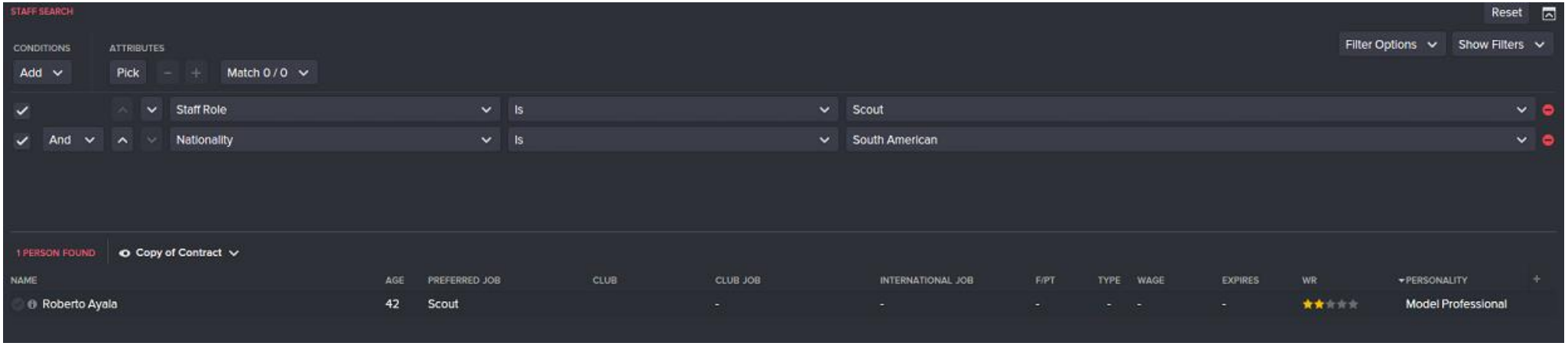
I decide to go after Jimmy Lumsden. He's 67, so it probably won't be long until he retires, but he'll be a decent stop gap until someone better turns up. He wants £3k a week for a two year contract, I beat him down to £2.2k a week (good use of my Manager profile set up):



2) Scouts

As mentioned above, I want a broad selection of nationalities to start off improving my global knowledge. In particular I want to cover much of South America and Europe, ultimately branching out into Africa and Asia.

I start with South America and get just one hit:



With his reputation he's not going to be cheap and sure enough he wants £3.9k a week for a 3 year deal. He has decent attributes for a scout (13 JCA and 17 JPA), so I'm going to offer him a long term deal. He eventually agrees to sign for £2.9k a week for 4 years.

I continue the search until I have secured the services of 2 Central European scouts; a Southern European scout; a UK & Irish scout; and an African scout. All have decent attributes, all currently unemployed (so no compensation to pay) and all pretty cheap (except Angel Vales who will cost me £3k a week):

That fills up 6 of my available 7 scout positions, which is fine for now.

Pre-Season

Pre-Season is purely about the following:

- Team Cohesion

- Match Fitness

- Player Morale

- Tactical Familiarity

The first of those is sorted by a specific General Training setting. The next 2 are done through (usually) playing Friendly matches (West Ham in season one are slightly different due to early Europa League qualifying rounds). Tactical Familiarity also requires a specific General Training setting as well as playing matches.

Arranging Friendly Matches

Ideally you will arrange a Home friendly match every 3 or 4 days, against very low quality opposition. If managing a small club, it can also prove financially attractive to arrange a friendly against a large club, however be careful of the fees these clubs command and your expected income. Sometimes you will actually receive a larger profit by playing a friendly against a slightly smaller club as their fees will be lower but you should still attract a large crowd.

Playing Friendlies is the only way to improve player Match Fitness before competitive matches start. There is a bit of a myth that setting General Training to "Fitness" will also help here. It doesn't. Fitness General Training will attempt to develop your players' physical attributes (eg., stamina, strength, pace and so on) and so has absolutely nothing to do with Match Fitness.

The reason to pick low quality opposition for opponents in Friendlies is so that you are pretty much guaranteed a win. Winning matches improves morale, and happy players with good morale at the start of the season can help get you off to a flier.

Team Cohesion

During Pre-Season, General Training should be set to Team Cohesion. The intensity level should be at least Medium - High if you think your players can handle it. Team Cohesion is important at the start of each season to help players blend together well. New faces from either promoted Youth team players and/or transfers can rapidly destroy cohesion, so it's important to get it back up. Players who are unfamiliar with each other won't perform as well on the pitch.

You can check on your squad cohesion by looking at your Assistant Manager's Team Talk Feedback Report. Here is mine at the start of the season:

Not very good, so I'll set Team Cohesion in General Training and leave it on that until such time as this report improves (generally 4-6 weeks). I'll have to check it periodically.

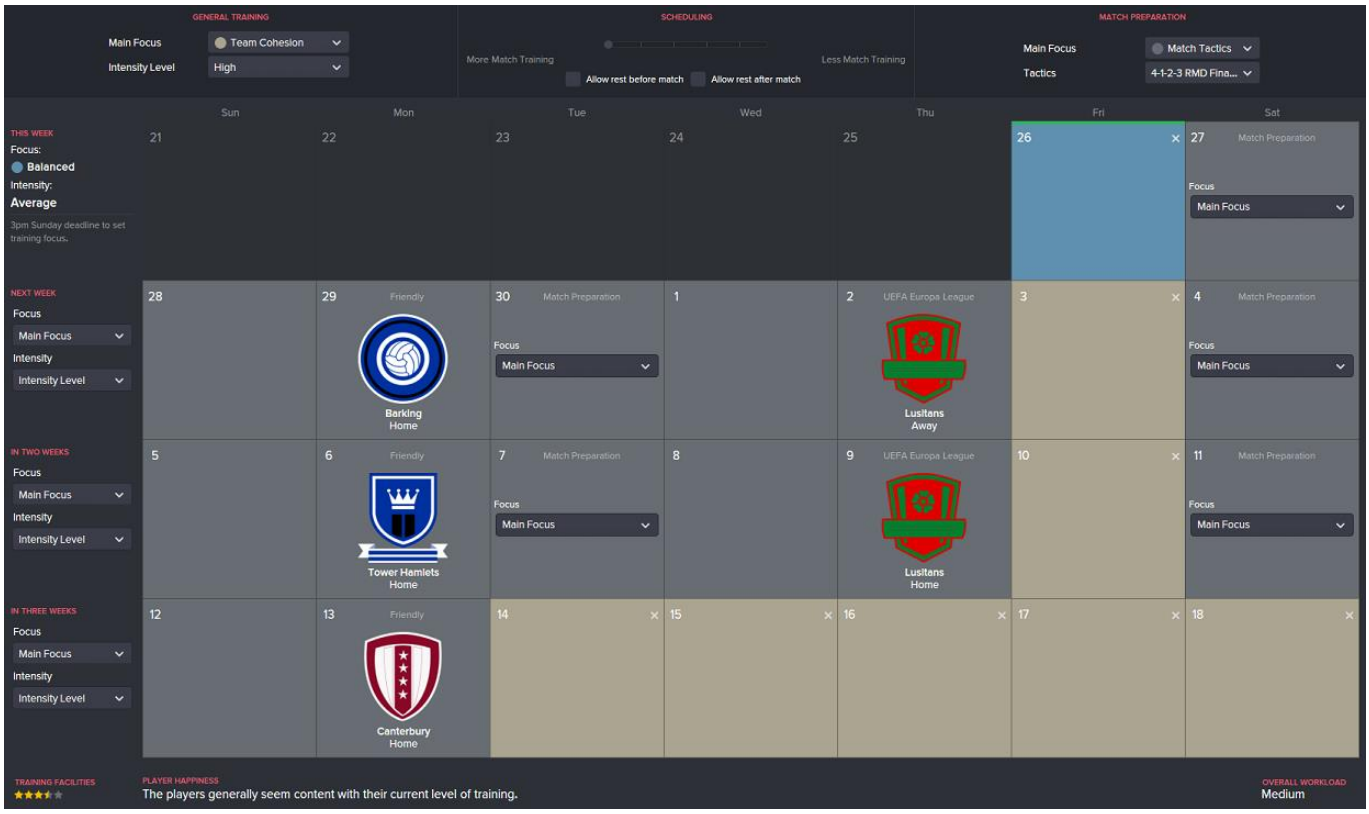
Tactical Familiarity

Once you have created (or downloaded) tactics, your players need to learn them. Playing with an unfamiliar tactic isn't the worst thing in the world, but it can certainly help kick start your season.

To maximise the speed at which your team becomes familiar with your tactics, you need to set your Match Preparation in your Training screen to Match Tactics. Note that the more tactics you have set up (maximum three), the longer familiarity will take. You also need to maximise the amount of time your team spend at the training ground practising your tactics. This is done using the Scheduling slider at the top centre of the screen to set "More Match Training".

You should also not allow any rest before or after matches, as this will impact on the amount of time your team spend studying their tactics.

Putting it all Together



This is how West Ham's Pre-Season Training and match schedule looks.

You can see:

- Team Cohesion is being worked on;

- Easy Friendly matches have been arranged;

- Match Preparation is set to tactics (although I haven't actually created any tactics yet);

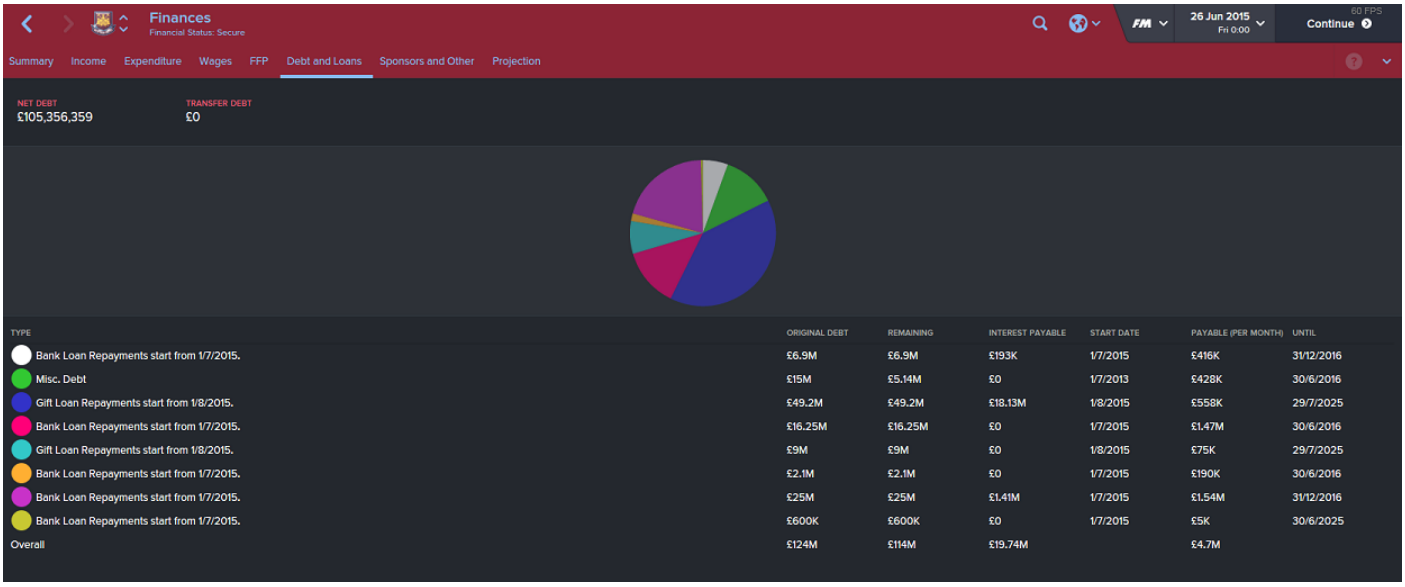
- Scheduling has been increased to maximize time spent preparing Match Tactics.

This also shows why I mentioned way back at the start of this article why I set the season to start with Germany 26/6/2015, instead of England 1/7/2015. If I had left it until 1/7/2015, I'd be missing out on a few days of training and a Friendly match - I'd be launching straight into my first Europa League qualifying match against Lusitans.

Speaking of this, I'm treating these Europa League matches as additional Friendly matches. I really should be winning these games with some ease, so they take the place of some Friendlies. You'll notice that after the Canterbury match there is a gap - assuming I beat Lusitans, the next round of qualifying will appear here. If I fail to beat Lusitans I can simply arrange a Friendly in this place. And then uninstall the game.

Finances

At first glance, West Ham's finances are in a bit of a mess:



TYPE	ORIGINAL DEBT	REMAINING	INTEREST PAYABLE	START DATE	PAYABLE (PER MONTH)	UNTIL
Bank Loan Repayments start from 1/7/2015.	£6.9M	£6.9M	£193K	1/7/2015	£416K	31/12/2016
Misc. Debt	£15M	£5.14M	£0	1/7/2013	£428K	30/6/2016
Gift Loan Repayments start from 1/8/2015.	£49.2M	£49.2M	£18.13M	1/8/2015	£558K	29/7/2025
Bank Loan Repayments start from 1/7/2015.	£16.25M	£16.25M	£0	1/7/2015	£1.47M	30/6/2016
Gift Loan Repayments start from 1/8/2015.	£9M	£9M	£0	1/8/2015	£75K	29/7/2025
Bank Loan Repayments start from 1/7/2015.	£2.1M	£2.1M	£0	1/7/2015	£190K	30/6/2016
Bank Loan Repayments start from 1/7/2015.	£25M	£25M	£1.41M	1/7/2015	£1.54M	31/12/2016
Bank Loan Repayments start from 1/7/2015.	£600K	£600K	£0	1/7/2015	£5K	30/6/2025
Overall	£124M	£114M	£19.74M		£4.7M	

Net debt of £105m is a bit eye watering. However, on closer inspection, roughly half of the existing debt will be gone by the end of the season. Add on the new TV deal money that'll take affect soon and it's actually looking fairly rosey.

However, I don't want to go over board with my own spending. I have a Board condition to develop my own youth players, so I want to be able to channel a lot of money into developing my facilities rather than spending huge amounts on transfer fees, agent fees and player wages. For the time being, I'm therefore going to give myself some self-imposed salary caps.

To do that, I need to take a first look at my senior squad:

GK | DR | DCR | DCL | DL | MCR | MCL | AMR | AMC | AML | STC | S1 | S2 | S3 | S4 | S5 | S6 | S7 | S8 | S9 | S10 | S11 | S12

PKD	INF	NAME	NAT	AGE	NO.	POSITION	SQUAD STATUS	WAGE	EXPIRES	VALUE	MORALE	PERSONALITY	DET	ABILITY	POTENTIAL	APPS	AV RAT	HOME-GROWN STATUS
-		Alex Song	CMR	27	4	DM, M (C)	Key Player	£140,000 p/w	30/6/2016	£17M	Fairly Good	Spirited	17	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Dimitri Payet	FRA	28	27	AM (RLC)	Key Player	£70,000 p/w	30/6/2020	£27M	Fairly Good	Fairly Ambitious	14	★★★★	★★★★	-	-	-
-		Andy Carroll	ENG	26	9	ST (C)	First Team	£70,000 p/w	30/6/2019	£16.5M	Very Good	Fairly Determin...	15	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Angelo Ogbonna	ITA	27	21	D (LC)	First Team	£60,000 p/w	30/6/2019	£10.5M	Okay	Ambitious	12	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	-
-		Winston Reid	NZL	26	2	D (C)	First Team	£60,000 p/w	30/6/2021	£13M	Good	Fairly Determin...	15	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	-
-		Pedro Obiang	ESP	23	14	DM, M (C)	First Team	£50,000 p/w	30/6/2019	£7.75M	Fairly Good	Spirited	15	★★★½	★★★★	-	-	-
-		Aaron Cresswell	ENG	25	3	D/WB (L)	First Team	£50,000 p/w	30/6/2020	£11.5M	Fairly Good	Fairly Ambitious	14	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Mark Noble	ENG	28	16	DM, M (C)	First Team	£50,000 p/w	30/6/2020	£9M	Fairly Good	Model Professi...	15	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		James Tomkins	ENG	26	5	D (RC)	Rotation	£42,000 p/w	30/6/2020	£7.5M	Very Good	Fairly Ambitious	13	★★½	★★½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Enner Valencia	ECU	25	11	AM (RL), ST (C)	First Team	£40,000 p/w	30/6/2019	£16.5M	Fairly Good	Ambitious	17	★★★★	★★★★	-	-	-
-		Carl Jenkinson	ENG	23	12	D (RC)	First Team	£40,000 p/w	31/5/2016	£7M	Very Good	Fairly Determin...	15	★★★	★★★½	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-	Unr	Emmanuel Emenike	NGA	28	29	ST (C)	Backup	£39,000 p/w	30/6/2016	£5.75M	Very Good	Ambitious	13	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	-
-		Adrián	ESP	28	13	GK	First Team	£35,000 p/w	30/6/2017	£6M	Fairly Good	Spirited	17	★★★	★★★	-	-	-
-		James Collins	WAL	31	19	D (C)	Rotation	£35,000 p/w	30/6/2018	£1.6M	Fairly Good	Resolute	16	★★½	★★½	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-	Wnt	Cheikhou Kouyaté	SEN	25	8	DM, M (C)	Rotation	£30,000 p/w	30/6/2018	£8.75M	Okay	Balanced	13	★★★	★★★	-	-	-
-		Victor Moses	NGA	24	20	M/AM (RL)	First Team	£30,000 p/w	31/5/2016	£11M	Fairly Good	Balanced	8	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Sam Byram	ENG	21	22	D/M/AM (R)	Hot Prospect	£25,000 p/w	30/6/2020	£4.9M	Fairly Good	Balanced	9	★★½	★★★	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Michail Antonio	ENG	25	30	M/AM (RL)	Rotation	£25,000 p/w	30/6/2019	£7.75M	Fairly Good	Balanced	8	★★★	★★★	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Manuel Lanzini	ARG	22	28	M (C), AM (RLC)	First Team	£25,000 p/w	30/6/2016	£2.6M	Fairly Good	Balanced	13	★★★½	★★★★	-	-	-
-		Joey O'Brien	IRL	29	17	D (RL)	Backup	£25,000 p/w	30/6/2016	£2.3M	Good	Resolute	17	★★½	★★½	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-	Wnt	Diafra Sakho	SEN	25	15	ST (C)	Rotation	£20,000 p/w	30/6/2018	£12.25M	Very Good	Fairly Determin...	16	★★★½	★★★½	-	-	-
-		Doneil Henry	CAN	22	25	D (C)	Backup	£15,000 p/w	30/6/2019	£1.7M	Good	Fairly Professio...	14	★★	★★★	-	-	-
-		Stephen Hendrie	SCO	20	33	D (L)	Youngster	£8,000 p/w	30/6/2017	£475K	Fairly Good	Fairly Professio...	10	★½	★★	-	-	-
-		Darren Randolph	IRL	28	1	GK	Backup	£6,000 p/w	30/6/2017	£4.2M	Fairly Good	Resolute	15	★★½	★★½	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)

This is a custom view I've created, which gives me a great general overview of my players. I can see how much they earn, their personality, squad status, home-grown status and so on.

I can immediately see I only have one senior player earning over £100k a week - Alex Song who is on loan from Barcelona - and he's earning double the next best paid player. Pretty ridiculous really, and I may not keep him beyond the January transfer window (assuming I can cancel his loan, which I may not be able to).

Looking at my next best paid players (Payet and Carroll), they earn £70k a week + £10k appearance fee and £10k goal bonus (Payet) / £7k goal bonus (Carroll).

Working out percentages, I'm leaning towards a wage structure of up to £100k a week for a key player + up to 30% in bonuses. £75k a week for a First Team status; £40k a week for Rotation; £25k a week for back up are nothing more than arbitrary numbers but sound at least plausible to me, and don't seem to rock the boat too much in terms of my existing squad. We'll see how it goes, but there's my line in the sand for now.

Meet the Players and Initial Tactical Musings

So far, I've checked out my staff, set up Pre-Season and even dabbled with some Finances. It really is about time I did something with my players.

I'll make a confession here. I'm writing about a new save I'm starting in June 2016, a year ahead of the game's actual start date. The last thing I want to be doing is messing around with player injuries which healed many months ago in real life. That just isn't fun for me at this particular point in time, so I've edited them out. If I had started this save much nearer the game start date then not a problem, everything would be left untouched. But 12 months after the fact? That's just an inconvenience to me now. Obviously any injuries that players pick up from here on in will remain, as that's now part of the game world.

Where Do I Start?

To an extent this is going to depend on your own knowledge of the club. I'm already pretty familiar with West Ham, and I already have some ideas of the direction I want to go in, but what if I didn't have any knowledge? How do I start to familiarise myself with my squad of players? What are the strengths and weaknesses? What type of tactical system should I adopt? How do I tell if my players are even capable of playing in the manner in which I want them to?

That's a lot of questions, and questions not exactly uncommon on these forums either. And the answers to those questions can be quite varied. The thing to remember is there is no right or wrong answer - just the way in which you feel most comfortable with and adds to your game experience.

So, onto some examples to illustrate the point.

Some people recommend starting with the Team Report screens, comparing how your new club compares with other clubs in your division to help assess your strengths and weaknesses:

ATTRIBUTE	TEAM RATING	WORST TEAM	BEST TEAM
Finishing	1st (15.25)	12.00 (Aston Villa)	15.25 (West Ham)
Long Shots	7th (12.25)	9.00 (Newcastle)	14.00 (Man Utd)
Heading	2nd (14.75)	10.25 (Swansea)	15.33 (Aston Villa)
Jumping Reach	1st (14.25)	10.00 (Man Utd)	14.25 (West Ham)
Anticipation	13th (12.50)	10.00 (Watford)	14.33 (Man City)
Movement	11th (14.25)	11.67 (Aston Villa)	16.00 (Man City)
Pace	10th (14.50)	13.20 (Stoke)	16.00 (Arsenal)
Acceleration	9th (14.75)	11.20 (Stoke)	16.20 (Bournemouth)

(I have no idea how West Ham are first for Finishing btw 😜).

Perhaps your midfield are particularly good passers, in which case a possession oriented game may be wise. On the other hand perhaps you have big strong strikers, so a long ball tactic might more up your street. There are all manner of ways in which these reports can be analysed, which many people find very useful as a starting point.

Others will go straight to the Squad screen (or will move onto the squad screen after their initial assessment in the Team Report screens above) and get stuck straight into player attribute analysis. For example, here is the West Ham squads' Technical attributes sorted by Crossing ability:

PLAYERS | Technical | Quick Pick | Show Filters

GK | DR | DCR | DCL | DL | MCR | MCL | AMR | AMC | AML | STC | S1 | S2 | S3 | S4 | S5 | S6 | S7 | S8 | S9 | S10 | S11 | S12

PKD	INF	NAME	COR	CRO	DRI	FIN	FIR	FRE	HEA	LON	L TH	MAR	PAS	PEN	TCK	TEC
-		Aaron Cresswell	15	17	13	8	15	14	13	14	11	14	14	13	15	14
-		Carl Jenkinson	7	16	12	4	10	9	9	14	13	10	10	8	14	11
-		Sam Byram	5	14	13	11	13	3	13	8	13	12	13	5	12	14
-		Mark Noble	15	14	12	8	14	14	10	10	6	10	16	18	13	13
-		Manuel Lanzini	15	14	16	12	16	15	10	14	2	7	15	12	5	16
-		Michail Antonio	11	14	16	11	11	9	12	12	16	7	12	12	6	12
-		Dimitri Payet	13	14	18	15	16	16	7	15	6	7	16	12	5	16
-		Andy Carroll	4	13	11	14	13	7	19	11	6	8	12	13	10	12
-		Stephen Hendrie	8	12	12	4	9	6	12	6	9	14	12	6	13	10
-		Joey O'Brien	9	11	11	10	12	7	11	8	9	14	12	2	15	12
-		Alex Song	5	10	12	9	13	5	15	7	10	14	15	10	15	13
-		Pedro Obiang	10	10	14	8	14	10	12	12	8	14	15	10	14	12
-		Victor Moses	8	10	15	11	12	9	10	11	16	4	13	9	9	12
-		Enner Valencia	8	10	16	14	13	8	16	12	11	6	12	10	7	13
-	Unr	Emmanuel Emenike	3	10	14	16	13	7	8	15	4	2	8	12	3	14
-	Wnt	Cheikhou Kouyaté	8	8	12	11	13	8	15	10	12	14	13	12	16	12
-	Wnt	Diafra Sakho	4	7	11	17	13	10	16	11	5	5	11	13	4	12
-		Winston Reid	4	6	8	6	12	13	15	8	11	14	10	12	17	12
-		Doneil Henry	4	6	7	8	11	4	14	9	6	13	11	9	14	11
-		James Tomkins	6	4	11	4	9	4	16	4	6	14	10	2	15	10
-		James Collins	5	4	6	5	8	11	18	7	9	15	10	14	15	9
-		Darren Randolph	3	3	2	2	11	5	6	3	10	1	11	4	5	11
-		Adrián	6	3	1	1	8	10	2	1	3	2	7	3	3	4
-		Angelo Ogbonna	5	3	12	5	12	5	14	6	12	14	14	7	13	12

Any number of attributes can be listed for you to analyse with the ability to sort players by relevant attributes to help you decide whether your team are actually capable of playing in the manner in which you wish. You can also create your own custom lists to show even more information that you may be interested in all in one place.

So for example, if you want to play with Wingers and use them to cross the ball into the box for your strikers to get on the end of, are your wingers actually capable of crossing the ball? These screens can tell you that. From there, you can then start to shape your tactical system and/or your transfer requirements. Following through that example, if you want to play with wingers, but the ones you have can't cross a ball, there's a possible transfer target for you. Alternatively, they may not be able to cross the ball, but perhaps they can dribble, shoot and pass, so an Inside Forward instead could be a good starting point.

Until you are used to looking at such reports, *it takes time*. If you just go crashing in, giving your players any old role without much thought, don't be surprised if things go awry when you start playing matches.

A third view is to just go straight to the Tactics screen, set your tactic up according to how you want and then try to fit players into it. Just bear in mind that it can help if you have an idea of how you want to play before you go down this road. Sometimes when you see players actually in a formation, it can help you to visualise where you may be weak or strong and lead you to little tweaks and adjustments - or even if your idea of how to play is just a complete non-starter for now and should therefore become your long term plan instead:

Just for demonstration purposes, all I've done here is select a formation and get the AI to fill in the players. Straight away this can give you a very visual idea of how players may be able to fit in, and areas you may need to change. For example, I can easily now click on each player in that formation and, based on my understanding of what the role does, see if the player is suitable. So, is Dmitri Payet (for example) going to be ok as a winger?

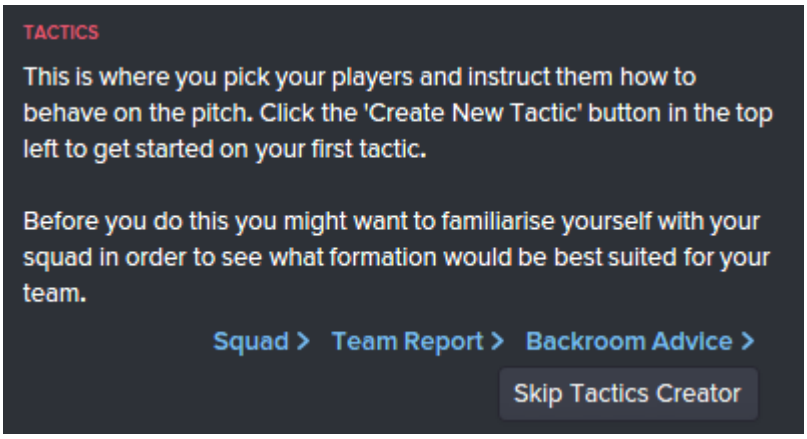
Well he's not going to be *bad*, but with those attributes and PPMs I'd perhaps think about playing him as an Inside Forward or Advanced playmaker - assuming I was going to leave him out on the wing. Alternatively I could move him to a different position if I thought he suited that better instead or, if I like the winger role, replace him with someone more suitable (assuming there is someone).

However, while doing this for each player, you still need to be aware of your other players and their roles. We're starting to stray into actually creating a tactic now, which I'll be covering later, but suffice to say for now that all roles will have an impact on all other roles, so don't ignore everything else you are doing.

Now, if you are really *really* struggling to start a tactic and *really* don't know even what formation your players may be capable of playing, then honestly at this point you *really* should spend a little time getting to know your players. If you still can't and are just confused by the whole thing, there are two other options you can try.

Now, I do not recommend doing this, but I know sometimes people just want a little starting point.

So option 1) - Go to your tactics screen and when you see the following, click on "Skip Tactics Creator":



The game will then pick a formation for you that it thinks is ok based on the players at your disposal. This is what it gave me for West Ham:

Now, some of the roles and duties in there are a bit suspect (I wouldn't use "Auto" duties, and that AF may get a bit isolated), but it's a starting point. Really this is a properly last resort option, but it can help you visually - and sometimes that's the start a few of us need.

The second option you can try involves relying on the game to set things up for you. Go to your Squad screen and from the tabs at the top select Squad Depth > Best XI:

Then simply select a formation from the drop down box highlighted (I've selected 4-2-3-1) and have your Assistant Manager select player roles/duties and the players themselves. And straight away you have another starting point. Now it doesn't select tactical settings for you, and neither can you just switch to your Tactics screen and see this newly created formation appear there, so you'll need to take some notes. But you've now created something that at least makes some sense and gives you a platform to build on. It'll never replace your own time spent studying your team and getting to know your strengths and weaknesses, but not everyone finds that fun.

Tactical Thinking - My Club

Well then, West Ham. What to do.

Before I get into the nitty gritty of detailed tactical instructions, I want to consider a framework within which the detail will sit. For this I need to think about the formation with which I want to play and the overall style of football I am looking to achieve. It can be *very* useful to spend a little time thinking about this before launching into the tactic creator. Now ok, in the previous post I mentioned different techniques of finding out your player's strengths and weaknesses, or even just letting the game take control. So this can already start leading you down the path of your framework and style. But I already have an idea about how I want to play. Whether I'll actually be able to play that way or not only time (and playing matches) will tell. So I'm going to set things up, for now, based on what I want to do. If I then find that any of my players are unsuitable for what I want, I'll:

a) make short term tweaks to accommodate those players;

b) develop my tactic and squad over a period of time to recruit players that do suit how I want to play; and

c) experiment in the mean time because you never definitively know whether a player will be suitable or not until you actually play a match.

Style of Play

Aggressive. I've had enough of tippy tappy hope you're happy football for the time being. I want a bit of edge and excitement. I'm not saying I want my players charging around like headless chickens getting themselves booked and sent off. Far from it. By "aggressive" I mean win the ball back quickly and use the ball constructively. Don't just stand off waiting for the opportune moment (that may never come) and then donk the ball in a vaguely sideways motion.

Let's have some

Now, whether West Ham are actually capable of that or not remains to be seen. If they are then great (looking at you Dmitri), if not then this becomes my long term development plan - and any recruitment or player development needs to be geared towards that.

So how do I start to define my style of play, as the last time I looked "Pizazz" wasn't an in-game attribute or tactical setting.

Club DNA

Leaving "Pizazz" to one side for a second, I intend to play in a fairly Aggressive manner. In defence I want my players to be proactive in closing down opposition players to force quick turn over of the ball. In attack I want them actively seeking space in dangerous areas to make themselves available for a pass. Again, I don't yet know for sure whether the West Ham squad are capable of doing this or not, so I need to lay some foundations - my club DNA - something I want most or even all of my players to have.

In terms of Attributes, this is how I'm defining things:

- They need Aggression to help give them the desire to move proactively around the pitch;

- Work Rate and Stamina to keep them doing it for 90 minutes;

- Decisions so they know when to do it;

- and First Touch to help them control the ball when they get there.

There will of course be the odd exception. Centre Backs and Goalkeepers don't need too much in the way of Aggression and Work Rate in the same way as a Central Midfielder may (for example) as they don't move around too much. But you get the idea.

Individual roles may get some further DNA refinements as well, once I actually set them, to help those players play in the style I want. Somebody is eventually going to need Flair in his DNA for example, to add that Pizazz.

Formation

For what I have in mind, I'm going to use two different formations. I don't yet know when exactly I'll use each one I set up, but setting up the two options now will save a lot of faffing around later and allow me to experiment in the relative safety of pre-season.

One formation is an aggressive formation (the 4-2-3-1 wide) by default. Four players stationed high up the pitch lends itself automatically to a high press.

The other formation (4-1-2-3 DM Wide) is less aggressive by nature, and thus should be stronger in defence, but I can still add some aggression to it.

Those are my basic formations, which I'll then (hopefully !) shape into how I want to be playing using the tactical settings. If it turns out my West Ham team are not yet capable of playing in my chosen manner, I can always take out some aggression until I improve my squad.

This is where it's important to be patient - you simply can't force players that are unsuitable for a certain play style to play in that manner, so sometimes you need a long term development plan.

These are my initial thoughts on the two formations and player roles / duties:

4-1-2-3 DM Wide

1) Sweeper Keeper (support) - I intend to play with a relatively high defensive line (more on that later, but fits in with my Aggressive style), so a Sweeper Keeper makes sense. Need to check if my keepers are any good at "Rushing Out" otherwise I may need to tweak this role to a regular Goalkeeper.

2) Right Back: Fullback (support) - In selecting this role and duty, I need to be aware of the roles ahead of him on his flank: a CM(attack) and a Winger(support). With a Winger ahead I don't need a Wingback role, and with a CM(attack) I don't want him running too far ahead and leaving the flank exposed. If I change the role of the Winger to, say, an Inside Forward (see below) I could consider changing this role to a Wingback.

Hopefully you can see how I'm not just focusing on a single role and hoping it will work. Everything needs to work with everything else and be balanced. This is very important.

3) Left Back: Wingback (support) - As above, I'm considering what is happening ahead of this player. A Raumdeuter is going to be sitting narrower, looking for runs inside, thus giving a Wingback more room to operate in. It also has an attack duty, and two attack duties on the same flank isn't always a good idea. I also have an Advanced Playmaker on this side of the midfield, which may not be all that great defensively. I may consider changing the Raumdeuter to an IF, but that won't affect the role selection here.

4) Centre Backs: Central Defender (defend) - Nothing fancy here. I do however want them to be comfortable on the ball without just mindlessly punting it forwards, but at the same time I don't need them to be taking the role of a pseudo-playmaker. The Central Defender role will cover this well, and no need for a stopper or cover duty.

5) Defensive Midfield: Defensive Midfielder (defend) - Kind of similar to my central defenders, just in the DM position. Comfortable on the ball, but no mindless punting. Also prepared to aggressively move to cut off attacks, but not overly so. I just plain don't like the Half Back role; the Anchor Man is a little too passive (no additional closing down by default); while the Ball Winning Midfielder is a little over the top and can run the risk of getting caught out of position too often.

NOTE - How do I know these things? Because I look at the Player Instructions that are set by default. When creating a tactic I wholeheartedly recommend everyone to read the PIs when selecting all roles and duties - it tells you a lot about how that role should play in matches. You can learn so much from this. Look at the differences between AM, DM and BWM:

6) MCL: Advanced Playmaker (support) - Now we're starting to get into the "Pizazz". I'm actually a little undecided here and a Deep Lying Playmaker may work better, however I'm prepared to experiment. Given the players ahead of my AP (a Raumdeuter and an F9), they will be looking to run the channels (read their PIs). So I want a player here who will look to make through balls (aka "More Risky Passes"). An Advanced Playmaker is set up to do that by default, whereas a DLP is not. I'm a little concerned here about defensive duties, but I plan (hope!) to cover that by my player selection - in this case, Mark Noble. Check his attributes (key attributes for an AP highlighted):

The guy has a phenomenal work rate with good aggression and stamina. He can also pass the ball and has complimentary PPMs. Perhaps not your first thought about what an Advanced Playmaker should look like, but I also want to get across the principle of adapting and being creative with player selection. You don't have to follow what the game tells you, think about what you want the player to do. In this case I want Noble to be a "creative terrier" on the pitch - pizazz in attack, relentless in defence.

7) MCR: Central Midfield (attack) - This is where I see Dmitri Payet playing. This could be a risk and backfire on me, so I have to watch how this plays out. What I want is a player getting in and around the box from midfield to both support attacks and be a goal threat. I'll also give him a PI to play More Risky Passes (aka through balls) as people ahead of him are mobile and messing around in channels. Payet has great attacking attributes and Flair, but he lacks drive and aggression, so goes against my club DNA. Whether I can support that type of player long term or not remains to be seen and (shock) I may end up selling him. We'll see.

8) AML: Raumdeuter - If you want to know what type of player makes a good Raumdeuter, look up Thomas Müller. He is *the* Raumdeuter. I want this player to be running the channels, using his Off the Ball movement and intelligence to get into pockets of space prior to shooting. I couple this with a False 9 striker who should help open this space for the Raumdeuter who then gets fed the ball by the Advanced Playmaker. That's the theory anyway. Whether I have the player to be able to handle this role or not I'm unsure (Enner Valencia looks ok but lacks some mental attributes) so I may end up changing this role to an Inside Forward until I have someone better. I'll see how it plays out.

9) AMR: Winger (support) - Variety in attack can be important. A Winger staying wide and making crosses gives me a nice alternative to all that channel running and through balls. It also gives me something else - helping to create space for my CM(attack) runner from deep. A Winger staying wide should pull the opposition Fullback wide, which would (hopefully) help to free up space for my CM(attack) to take advantage of. The support duty will help defensively with tracking back.

10) STC: False 9 - I want somebody who is going to be a goal threat; someone to create space for others; someone who isn't shy of dropping deep to help link attack with midfield; someone who can create chances for others. I'm starting with a False 9, but whether the likes of Carroll and Sakho are capable of performing this role remains to be seen. I may end up changing roles here.

4-2-3-1 Wide

NOTE - please ensure you read through of the 4-1-2-3 DM Wide description above before reading through this 4-2-3-1. Principles are discussed there which may not be repeated below but are still important to understand.

1) Sweeper Keeper (support) - As 4-1-2-3 DM Wide above.

2) Right Back: Wingback (attack) - Balance is a key word, and the aim here is to balance the right flank with this role and duty. MCR has a defend duty (see below) so can provide adequate cover if this Wingback is caught out of position high up the pitch. An Inside Forward is placed higher up the flank, so the Wingback should be able to provide good overlaps.

3) Left Back: Wingback (support) - With an attack duty player positioned high up this flank, giving this Wingback a support duty helps to maintain balance in addition to supporting runs when in possession.

4) Centre Backs: Central Defender (defend) - Nothing fancy here. I do however want them to be comfortable on the ball without just mindlessly punting it forwards, but at the same time I don't need them to be taking the role of a pseudo-playmaker. The Central Defender role will cover this well, and no need for a stopper or cover duty.

Note - with no player positioned in the DM position, it's important to make sure one or both central defenders don't get sucked into this area to close down opponents. That can lead to sudden gaps appearing behind in a very dangerous position. Something to watch out for during matches and make adjustments if needed.

5) MCL and MCR: Deep Lying Playmaker (defend) + Central Midfielder (defend) - I'll mention these two together as quite frankly they are the key, in my opinion, to the success or failure of this formation. Whilst it is perfectly feasible to not have two defend duty players in central midfield for this formation to do well, it becomes harder to balance properly and is just not necessary. With this formation, you don't need a runner from midfield as you already have 4 players stationed high up the pitch to take the lead in final third attacking play. They're already there, so let them get on with it. And don't forget one or both wingbacks will also be helping out.

So both roles given a defend duty, with one role as a creator, the other as a play breaker-upper. Both should play a full part in protecting the central defence and provide cover for any wingbacks that happen to go walkabout. Club DNA will be super important for these players.

6) AML: Raumdeuter - Again, I want this player to be running the channels, using his Off the Ball movement and intelligence to get into pockets of space prior to shooting. I'll need to watch the interaction with the DLP and AMC (see below) to make sure passing techniques work (ie., through balls). Whether I have the player to be able to handle this role or not I'm unsure (Enner Valencia looks ok but lacks some mental attributes) so I may end up changing this role to an Inside Forward until I have someone better. I'll see how it plays out.

7) AMR: Inside Forward (support) - Variety in attack can be important. Whereas the Raumdeuter is looking to move into space to receive a pass, the IF will be running at defenders with the ball, using his dribbling skills and deft passing to move into dangerous areas. I'll be looking for good interplay between the IF, the AMC and the striker, so something to watch and tweak if needed. The support duty will help defensively with tracking back.

8) AMC: Attacking Midfielder (support) - My first thought here was to use the Advanced Playmaker role, however I want this player to not only provide good close support to the striker, Raumdeuter and IF, but also to provide a goal threat himself. The Advanced Playmaker role, whilst still a goal threat from this position, may be perhaps a little too support oriented, so changing to an attacking midfielder with perhaps a PI to increase risky passes (through balls) seems like a good compromise. I'm expecting big things from Payet in this position.

9) STC: Complete Forward (attack) - I'm a little undecided here, so to begin with I'm hedging my bets and going with the jack of all trades striker. I'm also unsure how my two main strikers (Carroll and Sakho) are going to work out, so tweaking may be the order of the day. Support and Attack duties are both options here and will play an important part in how the two wide attackers work out.

On the one hand having an attack duty striker can help to keep opposition defenders deep and so open up space in front of the defence for my AMC/L/R players to take advantage of. On the other hand, giving him a support duty can suck defenders higher leaving space behind them to exploit. On balance, and as I have a player in the AMC position, I start with the idea of pushing defenders deeper to open space in front of the defence where my players actually are. From that point of view, telling my AMC to increase through balls may be a bad idea, so I need to watch this interaction carefully.

Hopefully you can see my thought processes and understand that everything needs to balance as everything interacts with everything else. Sometimes just the smallest tweak (like taking out the more risky passes PI or changing a role) can make all the difference. Flinging roles without much thought at your formation rarely works out well. As ever, taking a little time to read through the default Player Instructions and role/duty tooltips can really help improve your understanding of how roles are designed. It's well worth spending a little time doing that now rather than scratching your head later if something doesn't work out. The more you understand up front when creating a tactic will immeasurably help you later when trying to fix something.

Tactical Settings

Mentality

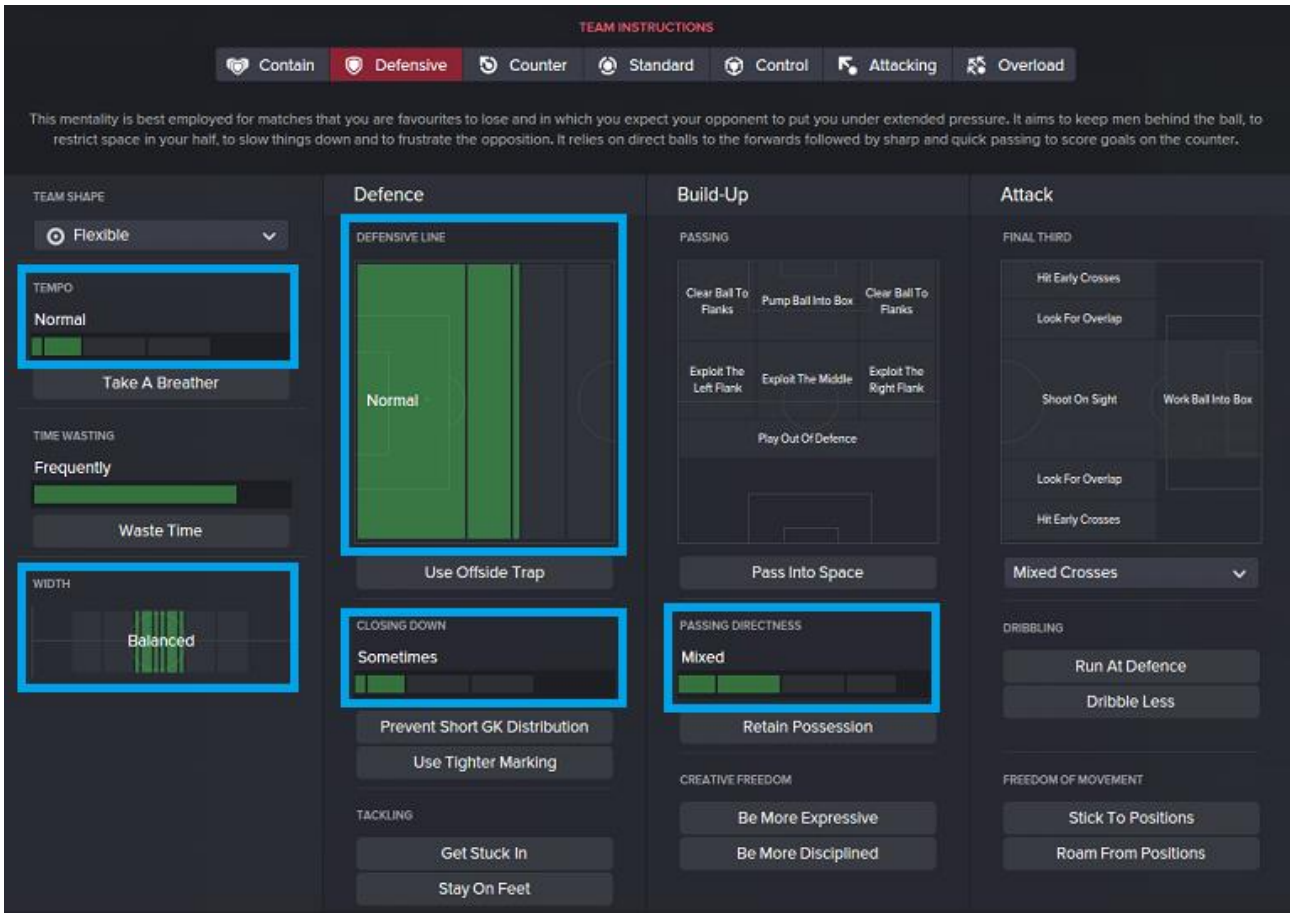
I won't write too much about mentality as there are other detailed guides out there (check the stickies at the top of the forum). Suffice to say, Mentality essentially boils down to risk. In other words, how much risk you are prepared to let your team take on the pitch. Each Mentality change you select is merely a step change along the risk taken.

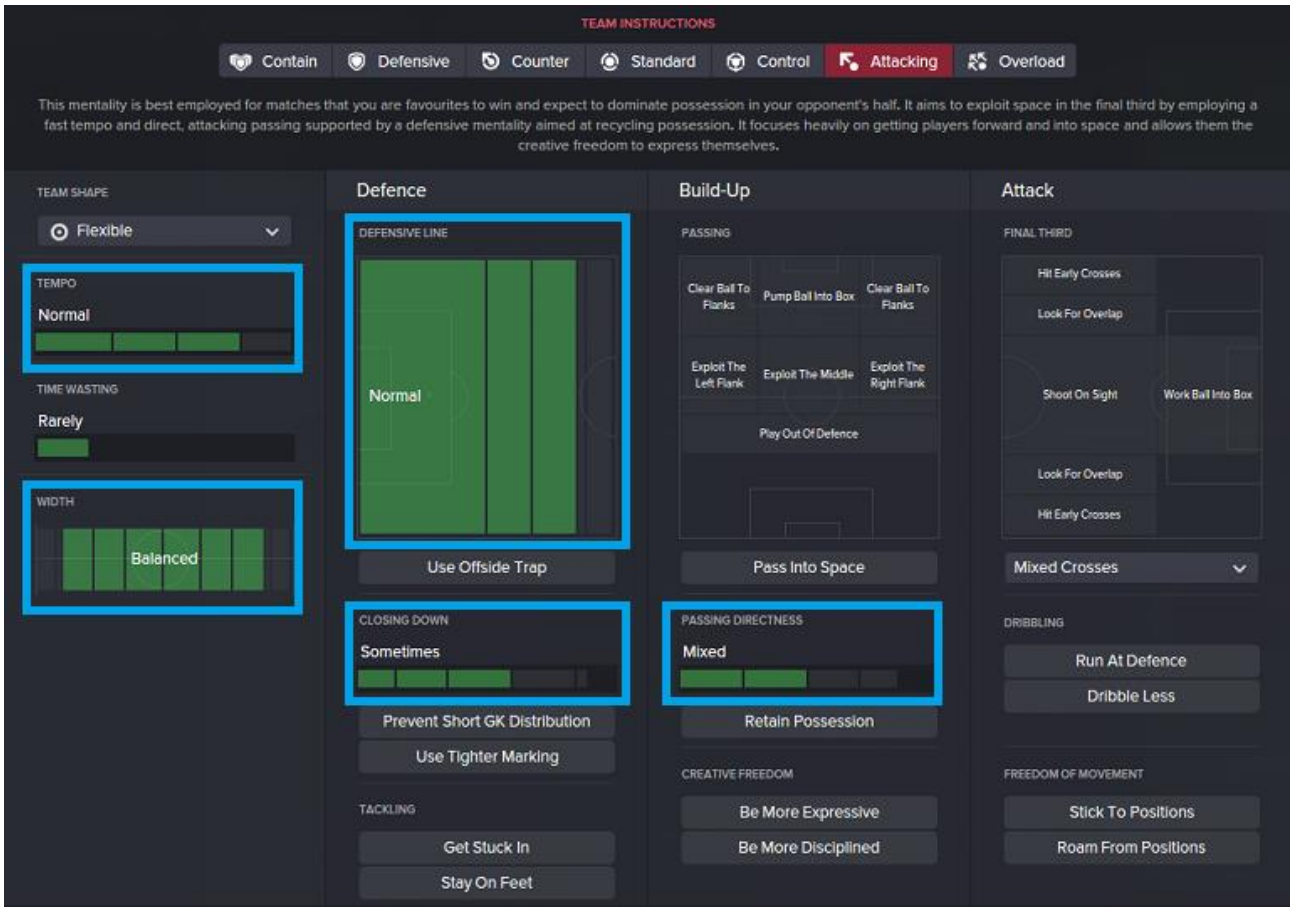
But what actually is "risk"? In summary, this is taken from the FAQs sticky:

Defensively, risk relates to how willing players are to make tackles, press the opposition, sit deep and make long clearances from dangerous situations. The lower the risk from the chosen mentality, the more likely players are to stand off the opposition, sitting deep and holding their shape. Defenders will also clear the ball long to relieve pressure. In more risky mentalities, the opposite is true - your defensive line will be set higher, players will close down more aggressively and look to play the ball out from the back.

When in possession, risk dictates how patient your build up play will be, how narrow your team will play and the rate at which they go about their business. Less risky mentalities will encourage your more advanced players to pass the ball at a slower tempo, making shorter passes to each other and playing without any great width. Overall this should result in fewer goal scoring opportunities, but of better quality. More risky mentalities are the opposite - players will move the ball around with greater urgency and length, playing wider to stretch the opposition. The number of shots may be greater, but can generally be of lesser quality.

You can visually see this in action - click on Team Instructions, select a mentality, then select a different mentality. Watch how different Team Instructions change simply by switching mentality. Take a look at how the Defensive and Attacking mentalities compare:





"Passing Directness" can be a little hard to see as defenders and attackers have their individual passing adjusted, but hopefully you get the idea.

Applying this to my Club

So, given that I've stated I want to play with an Aggressive style, and what we now know about mentality and risk, should I pick a Defensive or Counter mentality, or an Attacking or Control mentality? Or something slap bang in the middle (Standard)?

If you said Attacking or Control, take +1 internet ☺.

I'm actually going to start with Control. West Ham are not exactly the best team in the division (yet!) so going the whole hog and selecting Attacking would, I think, be over ambitious at this stage of the clubs' development. Once I start playing matches, I may even find that Control is too much so may possibly have to bring it down a notch to Standard, especially against the big clubs. We'll have to see. For now though, Control will be my starting point for both the tactics I'm developing.

Something else to remember - the two different formations have naturally different levels of aggression simply from the positioning of players. So whilst I say on occasion I may need to tone down the mentality, actually I may only need to change formation. Again, we'll have to see how it plays out, but something to bear in mind.

Team Shape

Team Shape seems to confuse a lot of people, but it's actually relatively straight forward.

What it all boils down to is creativity and space. Or, more precisely, creative freedom and vertical space. In other words:

The more Fluid the selected Team Shape is, more creative freedom is added to each of your players and the more compact your team will be from front to back.

The more Structured the selected Team Shape is, less creative freedom is added to each of your players and the more spread out they will be from front to back.

OK, so what the hell is "creative freedom"? Again, I'll borrow a passage from the FAQs sticky:

Creative Freedom affects how willing and by how much a player will deviate from their assigned task. With more Creative Freedom, a player can rely more on his own mental attributes (eg. decision making) to decide when to attempt something "outside of the box" which would more usually be dictated by your own tactical settings. You may see a player attempt more risky passes; dribble more; off the ball runs. This can lead to a loss of structure in your team but of course can lead to greater rewards.

So, for example, in my 4123DM formation, I have a Defensive Midfielder selected. If I now make my Team Shape "Very Structured" I can expect the gaps between him & the central defenders and him & the central midfielders to increase slightly. I can also expect him to very rarely deviate from the instructions of his assigned role (his PIs give you a starting point for that). The benefit of this is he should go about his business in an orderly fashion, remaining part of a collectively strong unit.

But if I select Very Fluid instead, those gaps are going to reduce a little and he'll start thinking outside of the box - so I'd better make sure the player is actually capable of doing that.

So what am I going to start West Ham with? It's tempting to go with Fluid, to allow my players to get creative, and eventually I may do that. However, I still want to retain some control myself and not let them completely off the leash just yet, so I'm going to start with Flexible for both tactics.

I'll also add this thought - if you have any doubt of what to do, select Flexible.

Team Instructions

Team Instructions are used to refine your style of play. If you've read the section above on Mentality, you'll already know that different mentalities have different Team Instructions set by default. So if you want to play with a high defensive line (for example) and have selected the Attacking mentality, then you already have a very high def line without needing to add in a TI to make it even higher. You can add it on if you really want such a high def line, just be aware of your starting point.

Of course there's nothing to stop you adding in a higher def line to the Defensive mentality if that's how you want to play. It all adds up to creating your own style.

NOTE - different Mentality starting points + the same TI do not end up with the same end result. Lets follow through that def line example: Defensive mentality + higher def line TI does <u>not</u> give you the same height of def line as Attacking mentality + higher def line. It'll actually give you a similar def line position as the default Standard mentality.

This is true for many settings. Think of it in these terms: you have 5 mentalities to choose from (excluding Contain and Overload) and with many TIs you also have 5 different settings. Each single step in TI change results in (roughly) where the default setting for what that TI would be in the next mentality. TI changes will also cap out.

To demonstrate:

Select Defensive mentality and look at Tempo. You can increase the default TI tempo instruction to Higher or Much Higher. In this example, Defensive mentality + Higher Tempo results in roughly the same default tempo setting as the Counter mentality. Likewise, Defensive + Much Higher tempo = roughly the same as the default Standard mentality tempo. But you can't go higher than this. You can't set a similar tempo that the Control or Attacking mentalities set by default from your starting point of the Defensive mentality.

This follows for other TIs as well, so always be conscious of your starting point and the maximum you can achieve from there.

I'll caveat that slightly as there are other settings in the game that can impact the end position of certain settings such as Passing Directness and some Player Instructions, but as a general rule of thumb you can follow this principle.

My Team Instructions

I'm going to maintain some commonality between both tactics to compliment my chosen aggressive style of play. There will also be a subtle difference between them.

Common Team Instructions

1) Shorter Passing - With the Control mentality, team width (when in possession) is pretty wide by default. Tempo is also quite fast and it allows my more attacking players to be quite direct with their passing. Whilst this can lead to that "pizazz" I mentioned earlier, it can also be quite wasteful (that's the risk element). To counteract this risk a little, I'll use this TI which will bring my players a little closer together and slow the tempo down a bit. Nothing too drastic, just a little.

2) Roam from Positions - This should encourage my players to find pockets of space to be available for a pass they may not otherwise be available for. This can help possession and building attacks. The downside is if they roam too much they'll get caught out of position, so I need to be aware of this when watching matches.

3) Dribble Less - I want the players passing and moving, not dribbling the ball. Certain roles that set high dribbling by default (eg., Inside Forward) will continue doing so, but the last thing I want is my DM trying to dribble his way out of trouble.

Unique Team Instructions: 4-1-2-3

Push Higher Up - As we know, the Control mentality sets a pretty high defensive line by default. However, having someone positioned in the DM position will the push the def line a little lower than normal. This TI pushes the def line back up to roughly where it was.

Unique Team Instructions: 4-2-3-1

Close Down Much More - With an aggressive formation I'm happy to increase the amount of default closing down which the Control mentality sets by default (which is quite a lot). This may be a step too far as too much closing down can result in the team losing shape, so I'll need to watch this. Central defenders especially can be prone to mistakes with too much closing down set.

That's essentially it for Tactical Settings. What I'm attempting to demonstrate here is I really just have one way of playing - one system if you like - but two ways of playing it. The two tactics are essentially the same, just subtle variations between the two of them.

Player Instructions

Use Player Instructions to put the icing on the cake. Your final flourish as it were.

I'm not setting many:

Sweeper Keeper - Distribute to Centre Backs; Roll it Out; Slow Pace Down. Keepers can lose silly amounts of possession by simply kicking the ball long all the time, so these TIs are designed to address that issue.

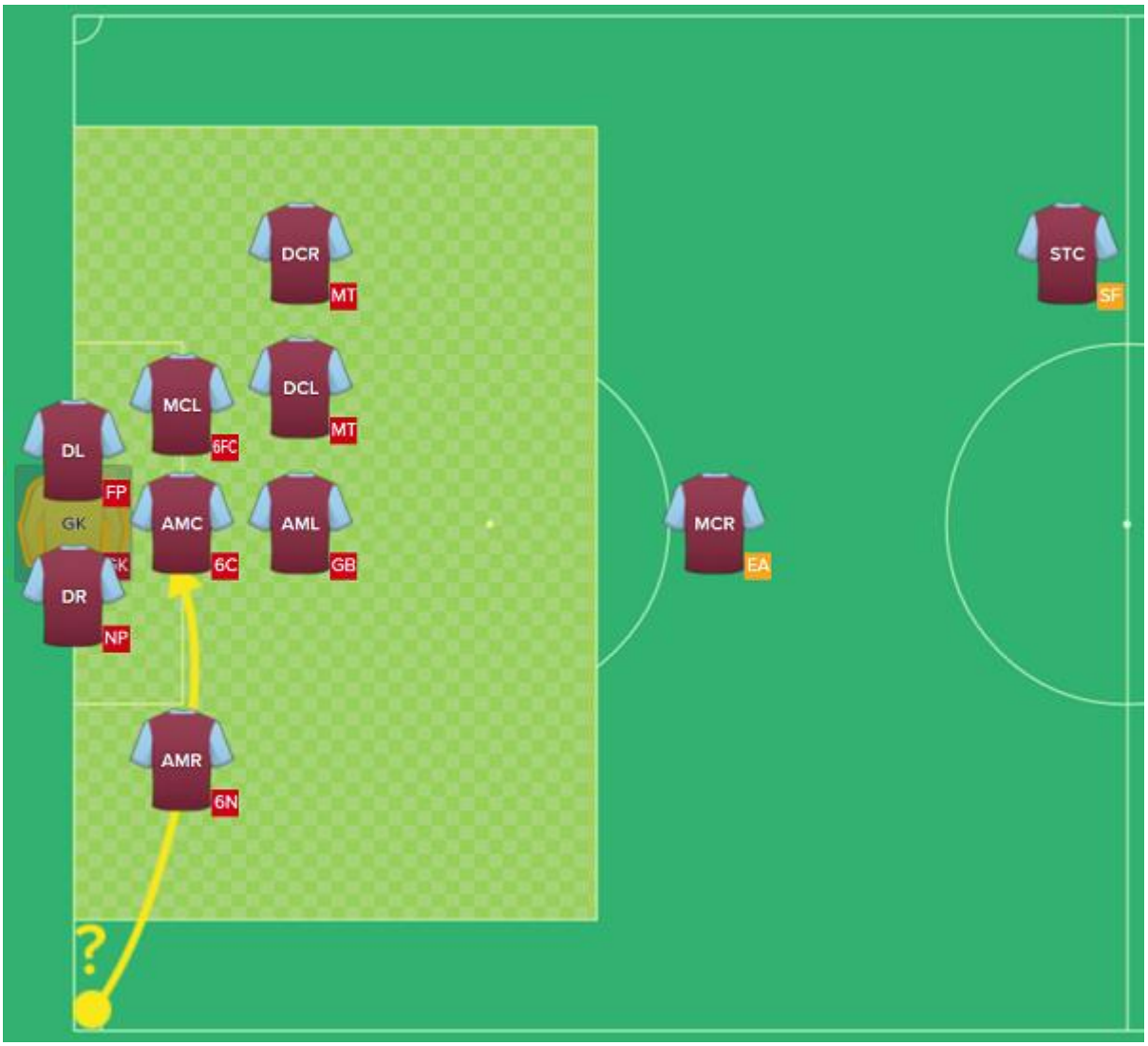
Support Duty Fullbacks and Wingbacks - Cross Less Often. My system is based on pass and move, not ping it into the box and hope someone gets on the end of it. I want my fullbacks and wingbacks supporting possession by offering a wide passing option, then passing it on to somebody else (hopefully) in a more dangerous position. Asking them to cross less should help that.

Central Midfielder (attack) - More Risky Passes. To encourage through balls in keeping with my pizazz and player movement.

Attacking Midfielder (support) - More Risky Passes. Same as above.

Set Pieces

I won't go through the minute detail of everything I set up, but I'll mention some general principles I follow:



- Have a man on each post when defending corners.
- Leave someone forward when defending corners and freekicks.
- Have someone disrupt the wall when taking free kicks.
- Have two players stay back when taking corners and free kicks.
- Have a player lurk outside the area.
- Have someone challenge the keeper, and someone else attacking the near post when taking corners.

Sorting out the Squads

Senior Squad

For me, it's important to sort out the squad status of all of my senior squad players at the start of the season.

If I leave it for a few months I run the risk of players moaning about having their status reduced. It may still happen now, but from what I've seen previously it's less likely to happen. Here's the senior squad sorted by squad status. I've picked my "best" starting eleven, so they should be the ones who'll play the most:

That's an awful lot of players with First Team status. Which means that's an awful lot of players who will expect to play in a large majority of games, and if they don't they'll come moaning to me. Bless. My personal preference is not to have more than a couple of "Key Players", with 5 or 6 given a status of "First Team". It'll save my wage bill as well.

Pretty harsh, and some of the choices may surprise you. But then I am supposed to be in charge. My reasoning is:

- I don't like having loanees with a squad status higher than Rotation. Song, Lanzini and Jenks may all get starting places in the team, but I'd rather manage expectations of my actual players first,before pandering to someone who'll leave the club soon anyway.

- The more players you have as Backup or Rotation, the less likely they are to moan about lack of playing time.

- It gives me an idea of which players fall outside of my new wage structure.

- It allows me to see who I can loan out or get rid of. Emenike is superfluous to my needs and will have his loan terminated. Henry will be loaned out when the game allows (I cancelled first transfer window moves if you remember).

PKD	INF	NAME	NAT	AGE	NO.	POSITION	SQUAD STATUS
DM		Alex Song	CMR	27	4	DM, M (C)	Key Player
MCR		Dimitri Payet	FRA	28	27	AM (RLC)	Key Player
DCR		Winston Reid	NZL	26	2	D (C)	First Team
-		Victor Moses	NGA	24	20	M/AM (RL)	First Team
MCL		Mark Noble	ENG	28	16	DM, M (C)	First Team
STC		Andy Carroll	ENG	26	9	ST (C)	First Team
AMR		Manuel Lanzini	ARG	22	28	M (C), AM (RLC)	First Team
DL		Aaron Cresswell	ENG	25	3	D/WB (L)	First Team
DR		Carl Jenkinson	ENG	23	12	D (RC)	First Team
DCL		Angelo Ogbonna	ITA	27	21	D (LC)	First Team
-		Pedro Obiang	ESP	23	14	DM, M (C)	First Team
GK		Adrián	ESP	28	13	GK	First Team
AML		Enner Valencia	ECU	25	11	AM (RL), ST (C)	First Team
-		James Collins	WAL	31	19	D (C)	Rotation
-		James Tomkins	ENG	26	5	D (RC)	Rotation
-	Wnt	Cheikhou Kouyaté	SEN	25	8	DM, M (C)	Rotation
-		Michail Antonio	ENG	25	30	M/AM (RL)	Rotation
-	Wnt	Diafra Sakho	SEN	25	15	ST (C)	Rotation
-		Darren Randolph	IRL	28	1	GK	Backup
-		Joey O'Brien	IRL	29	17	D (RL)	Backup
-	Unr	Emmanuel Emenike	NGA	28	29	ST (C)	Backup
-		Doneil Henry	CAN	22	25	D (C)	Backup
-		Sam Byram	ENG	21	22	D/M/AM (R)	Hot Prospect
-		Stephen Hendrie	SCO	20	33	D (L)	Youngster

2 Original Squad

PKD	INF	NAME	NAT	AGE	NO.	POSITION	SQUAD STATUS
MCR		Dimitri Payet	FRA	28	27	AM (RLC)	Key Player
DCR		Winston Reid	NZL	26	2	D (C)	First Team
MCL		Mark Noble	ENG	28	16	DM, M (C)	First Team
STC		Andy Carroll	ENG	26	9	ST (C)	First Team
DL		Aaron Cresswell	ENG	25	3	D/WB (L)	First Team
DCL		Angelo Ogbonna	ITA	27	21	D (LC)	First Team
DM		Alex Song	CMR	27	4	DM, M (C)	Rotation
AMR		Manuel Lanzini	ARG	22	28	M (C), AM (RLC)	Rotation
DR		Carl Jenkinson	ENG	23	12	D (RC)	Rotation
-		Michail Antonio	ENG	25	30	M/AM (RL)	Rotation
-		Pedro Obiang	ESP	23	14	DM, M (C)	Rotation
GK		Adrián	ESP	28	13	GK	Rotation
-	Wnt	Diafra Sakho	SEN	25	15	ST (C)	Rotation
AML		Enner Valencia	ECU	25	11	AM (RL), ST (C)	Rotation
-		Darren Randolph	IRL	28	1	GK	Backup
-		Victor Moses	NGA	24	20	M/AM (RL)	Backup
-		James Collins	WAL	31	19	D (C)	Backup
-		Joey O'Brien	IRL	29	17	D (RL)	Backup
-		James Tomkins	ENG	26	5	D (RC)	Backup
-	Wnt	Cheikhou Kouyaté	SEN	25	8	DM, M (C)	Backup
-	Unr	Emmanuel Emenike	NGA	28	29	ST (C)	Backup
-		Doneil Henry	CAN	22	25	D (C)	Backup
-		Sam Byram	ENG	21	22	D/M/AM (R)	Hot Prospect
-		Stephen Hendrie	SCO	20	33	D (L)	Youngster

1 After Changes

Under 21s

PKD	INF	NAME	NAT	AGE	NO.	POSITION	SQUAD STATUS	WAGE	EXPIRES	VALUE	MORALE	PERSONALITY	DET	ABILITY	POTENTIAL	APPS	AV RAT	HOME-GROWN STATUS
-		Luka Belic	SRB	19	31	ST (C)	Hot Prospect	£2,300 p/w	30/6/2016	£245K	Okay	Balanced	12			-	-	-
-		Reece Burke	ENG	18	-	D (C)	-	£2,500 p/w	30/6/2017	£850K	Very Good	Balanced	14			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Martin Samuelsen	NOR	18	-	M/AM (RLC)	-	£2,000 p/w	30/6/2017	£725K	Good	Fairly Determin...	20			-	-	-
-		Diego Poyet	URU	20	-	DM, M (C)	-	£15,000 p/w	30/6/2018	£2.4M	Fairly Good	Ambitious	17			-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Jaanai Gordon	ENG	19	-	ST (C)	-	£5,000 p/w	30/6/2017	£300K	Fairly Good	Balanced	11			17	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Kyle Knoyle	ENG	18	-	D (RC)	-	£1,000 p/w	30/6/2017	£170K	Very Good	Balanced	5			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Elliot Lee	ENG	20	-	ST (C)	-	£4,000 p/w	30/6/2016	£300K	Fairly Good	Balanced	9			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Marcus Browne	ENG	17	41	M (C), AM (RC)	Youngster	£350 p/w	30/6/2017	£34K	Fairly Good	Fairly Sporting	4			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Sam Howes	ENG	17	46	GK	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£65K	Fairly Good	Balanced	7			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Jordan Brown	ENG	18	-	ST (C)	Youngster	£3,000 p/w	30/6/2016	£33K	Okay	Balanced	4			-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Djair Parfitt-Williams	BER	18	40	AM (RLC)	Youngster	£1,000 p/w	30/6/2017	£100K	Very Good	Balanced	4			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Alex Pike	ENG	18	-	D (R)	Youngster	£1,000 p/w	30/6/2017	£13.5K	Very Good	Fairly Professio...	3			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Wnt	Leo Chambers	ENG	19	-	D (RC)	Backup	£750 p/w	30/6/2016	£80K	Very Good	Balanced	10			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		George Dobson	ENG	17	-	D (C), DM, M (C)	Youngster	£1,500 p/w	30/6/2017	£28.5K	Fairly Good	Balanced	8			-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Josh Cullen	IRL	19	39	M/AM (C)	Backup	£600 p/w	30/6/2016	£78K	Fairly Good	Balanced	7			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Sam Westley	ENG	21	-	D (RLC)	-	£1,000 p/w	30/6/2016	£24.5K	Okay	Balanced	10			-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-	Loa	Raphael Spiegel	SUI	22	34	GK	Backup	£4,000 p/w	30/6/2016	£160K	Good	Balanced	10			-	-	-
-	Yth	Tim Brown	ENG	18	-	GK	Backup	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£6.5K	Very Good	Fairly Professio...	13			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Loa	Danny Boness	ENG	18	-	GK	Backup	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£6.5K	Very Good	Balanced	9			-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-		Lewis Page	ENG	19	37	D (RL), WB (L)	Youngster	£700 p/w	30/6/2016	£15.25K	Okay	Balanced	3			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Nathan Mavila	ENG	19	-	D/WB (L), DM, M/...	Youngster	£600 p/w	30/6/2016	£6.25K	Fairly Good	Balanced	9			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Moses Makasi	ENG	19	-	DM	Youngster	£700 p/w	30/6/2016	£11.75K	Very Good	Fairly Professio...	10			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Amos Nasha	ENG	19	-	DM	Youngster	£650 p/w	30/6/2016	£23.5K	Okay	Balanced	10			-	-	Trained at club (15-21)

I sort my Youth teams by Potential.

Now, you have to take star ratings with a bit of a pinch of salt. They can be misleading so treat them as a guideline only. Star ratings are reliant on how well your Assistant Manager knows your squads and how well they can judge player potential. We've already met my Assistant Manager, and know he's pretty rubbish.

So, some decent prospects to keep an eye on, although most are away on loan. I may recall Reece Burke (if I can) as I don't like having my main hot prospects away from the club - I lose all development control if they are away on loan.

You'll notice that I also have Personality and Determination listed. I use this to help decide on my Tutoring targets (more on that later).

Under 18s

PKD	INF	NAME	NAT	AGE	NO.	POSITION	SQUAD STATUS	WAGE	EXPIRES	VALUE	MORALE	PERSONALITY	DET	ABILITY	POTENTIAL	APPS	AV RAT	HOME-GROWN STATUS
-	Yth	Joe Powell	ENG	16	-	M/AM (C)	Hot Prospect	£100 p/w	30/6/2018	£40K	Fairly Good	Fairly Ambitious	10	★★★★½	★★★★	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Vashon Neufville	ENG	15	-	D (L)	Hot Prospect	£100 p/w	30/6/2017	£37.5K	Okay	Balanced	4	★★★★★	★★★★	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Reece Oxford	ENG	16	35	D (C), DM	Hot Prospect	£100 p/w	30/6/2017	£500K	Fairly Good	Fairly Determin...	15	★	★★★★	-	-	Trained at club (0-21)
-	Yth	Oscar Borg	ENG	17	32	D/WB (L), M/AM (...	Hot Prospect	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£44K	Good	Balanced	8	★★★★½	★★½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Josh Pask	ENG	17	-	D (C)	Hot Prospect	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£34K	Fairly Good	Fairly Determin...	16	★★★★½	★★	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Jahmal Hector-Ingram	ENG	16	-	AM (RL), ST (C)	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2017	£30K	Okay	Balanced	6	★★½	★½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Anthony Scully	IRL	16	-	M/AM (R)	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2017	£4.7K	Fairly Good	Balanced	6	★★½	★	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Declan Rice	IRL	16	-	D (C), DM	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2017	£12.75K	Okay	Balanced	10	★★★½	★	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Jake Eggleton	ENG	16	-	D (RC)	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2017	£3.8K	Okay	Balanced	10	★★½	★	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Matt Carter	ENG	17	-	DM, M (C)	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£21.5K	Fairly Good	Balanced	4	★★★★	★	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Tunji Akinola	ENG	16	-	D (C)	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2017	£4.3K	Fairly Good	Balanced	3	★★½	½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Daniel Kemp	ENG	16	-	AM (RLC)	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2017	£5K	Fairly Good	Balanced	7	★★★	½	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	Yth	Noha Sylvestre	SUI	17	-	D (R), DM, M (C)	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£21.5K	Good	Balanced	10	★★★½	½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Ross Elsom	ENG	17	-	M (C)	Youngster	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£4.8K	Very Good	Balanced	3	★★	½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Clarke Bogard	ENG	17	-	GK	Backup	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£3.3K	Very Good	Balanced	4	★★½	½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-	Yth	Grady Diangana	ENG	17	-	M (LC), AM (RLC)	Backup	£100 p/w	30/6/2016	£10K	Okay	Balanced	10	★★★	½	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)
-		Leon Worthington	ENG	16	-	GK	-	-	-	£0	Okay		6	Unknown	Unknown	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)

3 or 4 decent looking prospects there (pinch of salt at the ready).

One or two of these were in the U21s squad for some reason, so I moved them back to the U18s. Again, try and do this at the start of the season as it can upset players. I moved them back to the U18s as I like to have a set progression without moving players into higher squads too quickly (unless I have a real superstar on my hands). I'm again looking at Tutoring targets but also any hot prospects still on Youth contracts (noted with a "YTH" symbol). Anyone I want to develop I'll look to sign immediately onto a fulltime professional contract - if I don't I'll run the risk of another club coming in under the radar and signing them from under my nose.

Now that I've started looking at my Youth squads, what I'll do next is a case study of how I set up my development program for one of my hot prospects.

Youth Development Case Study

Rather than just speak in general terms of methods to go about developing young players, I thought it might be more interesting to do a case study of taking one player and looking at my thought process of starting him off on the long road to stardom (hopefully).

Now it is of course perfectly feasible to just go back to your Staff Responsibilities at this point and let one of your staff deal with training and/or player development. If that side of the game doesn't interest you, then not a problem - do the things that you find fun and forget the rest. And you know what? Your players will still turn out to be alright. For me though, "alright" isn't quite good enough, so I take charge of things.

So, onto the player I've chosen for this study - Joe Powell, who is just 16 years old and in the U18s squad. Lets take a detailed look at him:

Attributes

Personal Information

Coach Report

Joe Powell
Attacking Midfielder (Centre) / M (C) - West Ham Under 18s

FM | 26 Jun 2015 Fri 0:00 | Continue | 61 FPS

Overview | Contract | Transfer | Development | Reports | Interaction | Comparison | History

COACH REPORT BY Terry Westley (General)

Judging Ability 14 Judging Potential 16

PROS

Eligibility (Continental)
The player counts towards:
Minimum of 4 players trained by West Ham for 3 years between 15th and 21st birthdays (1st Team Total: 2)

Potential Ability (Division)
Could improve a lot in the future.

Individual Personality
Shows a fairly ambitious nature.

Dressing Room
We have a determined group of players and Powell fits in well.

Strongest Area of Game
Fairly good team player.

Preferred Foot
Is adept at using either foot.

Versatility
Can play in a couple of positions.

Role Model
May benefit from being tutored by Dimitri Payet.

Eligibility (League)
The player counts towards:
Minimum of 8 players trained in England for 3 years before 21st birthday (1st Team Total: 12)

Eligibility (Continental)
The player counts towards:
Minimum of 8 players trained in England for 3 years between 15th and 21st birthdays (1st Team Total: 12)

CONS

Weakest Attribute
Has work to do on improving his stamina.

Current Ability (Division)
Is very well-suited to Vanarama National football.

Weakest Area of Game
Should be in the gym working on his overall athleticism.

Training Focus
Should be put on an individual training regime to improve his first touch.

Current Ability ★★★★½
Potential Ability ★★★★
Recommendation ★★★★

POSITIONS: Attacking Midfielder (Centre)

BEST PLAYERS

1	Dimitri Payet	★★★½
2	Manuel Lanzini	★★★
3	Victor Moses	½
4	Enner Valencia	½
5	Michail Antonio	½
6	Joe Powell	★★★★½
7	Djair Parfitt-Williams	★★★★½
8	Marcus Browne	★★★★

ROLE SUITABILITY

1	Advanced playmaker	
2	Attacking midfielder	
3	Shadow striker	
4	Enganche	
5	Trequartista	

Positional Abilities >

Coach Summary
Potential to be a key member of the first-team squad.

So what am I looking for here to help me decide how to kick start his development program? Several things:

1) Potential. According to my coach report, he has loads of potential. However it's important to understand the star ratings are (i) only as good as the coach's own judging ability and (ii) is only a comparison against other similar players at my club. So he may not be quite as good as initial impressions, but it's a starting point.

2) Pros and Cons. Always useful to have a quick read though of your coach opinions, but again do not rely on it. You'll notice at the top you can select which coach you want to see the report from, and they will differ. I've selected the report from my coach with the best judging ability, so it should be at least ok.

The Cons I'm not paying too much attention to here as the kid is only 16 and things like the mentioned stamina and athleticism issues will improve naturally over time. I'll keep an eye on how these related attributes develop and change his regime if needed.

3) Attributes and Personality. If Joe is going to have a long term future at my club, he needs to fit in with my DNA (Aggression, Work Rate, Stamina, Decisions, First Touch). Looking at his attributes, Aggression worries me (it's just 5). Aggression cannot be specifically trained, so to increase this I'm going to have to get creative with which role I train him in, as not many roles will look to train Aggression as part of their plan. I'll also have to cross my fingers a bit and hope it improves naturally over time.

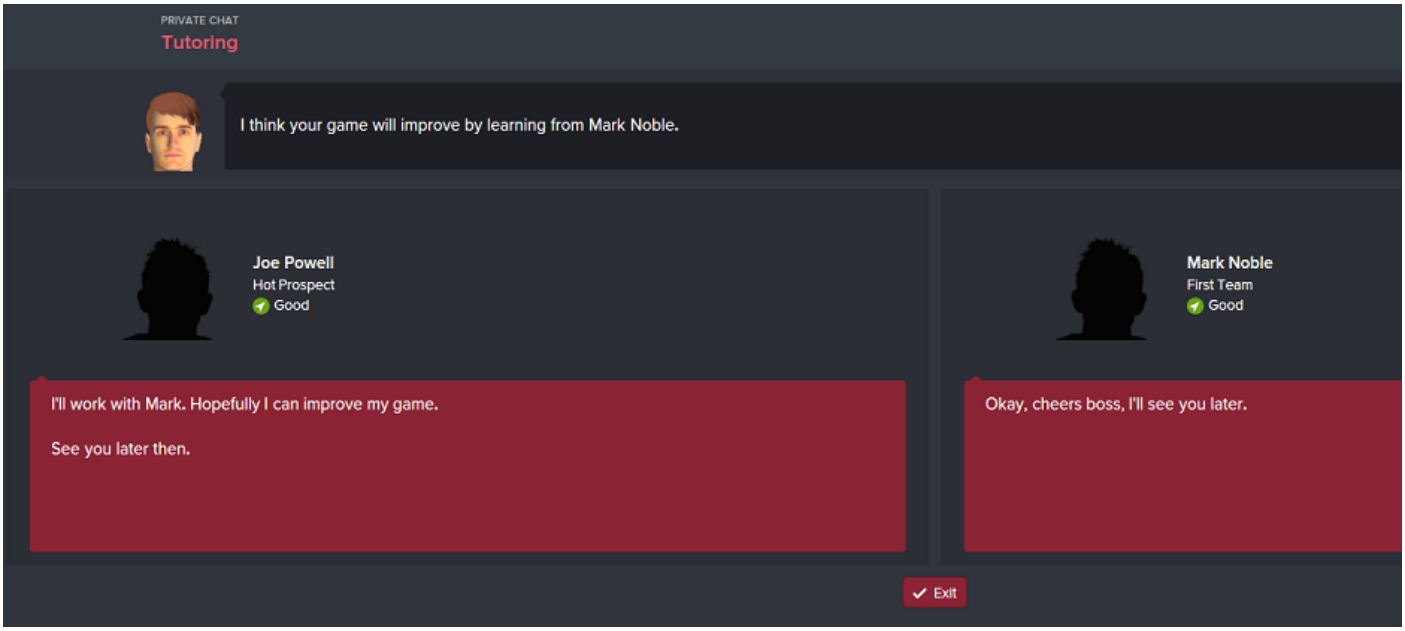
Looking at his personal information, he has a personality of "Fairly Ambitious" and a Media Handling Style of "Media Friendly". (If you want a very detailed explanation of how to read these traits, check out this thread http://community.sigames.com/showthread.php/307808-The-Ultimate-Personality-Media-Handling-Guide found in the stickies at the top).

If any player is going to stand a chance of reaching their potential, they need the right personality traits. To train well, they need high level of Professionalism and (to a lesser extent) Ambition. Joe's personality leads me to believe he has decent levels of Ambition, but he needs a boost of Professionalism. As he is "Media Friendly", he should also be fairly uncontroversial and have a decent temperament so I shouldn't worry too much about him bitching about stuff.

So, I need to change his personality to improve the chances of him reaching his potential, and the only way I can do that is to Tutor him. And to do that, I need to find a senior player who does have the right qualities which he'll (hopefully) pass on to Joe.

NOTE - Determination will also be passed on during Tutoring. This is an important attribute when playing matches, so whilst selecting a Tutor for Joe, not only does the Tutor need a good personality, but also decent levels of Determination.

The player I therefore select as my Tutor for Joe is my club captain, Mark Noble. Mark has a great personality (Model Professional) and decent levels of Determination (15). In my opinion he's a great role model for Joe and I'll get the two of them working together straight away.



Joe's Training Plan

I need to decide where I ultimately see Joe fitting into my team.

As he's just 16, he's young enough for me to start training him into any position and role I want to. Given some of his attributes and standing 187cm tall, he might make a decent central defender for example. However, he's already proficient in the MC and AMC positions, and as I see my Central Midfielder (attack) in my 4123DM tactic also doubling up as my Attacking Midfielder (support) in my 4231 tactic, I'll keep him training in these positions. Onto attribute development. As already mentioned, Aggression needs improving but can be hard to improve, so I go to Joe's Training screen and start flicking through different roles to see which roles train which attributes. And I come across two possibles (note the highlighted attributes):

Here's the thing to remember - just because you select a certain role in Training, doesn't mean to say that's how you'll play the player in your team. Use the roles in Training to simply train the attributes that you want the player to develop.

So, clearly I don't have room in my tactics for a Shadow Striker or a Ball Winning Midfielder, but look at the attributes that will be trained and think about the roles that Joe will carry out in my team. As a CM(a) / AM(s), I want him being a creative goal threat from deep, willing to get up and down the pitch and help out in both attack and defence.

So going by those two Training roles, what if I could somehow combine them? The Shadow Striker training is going to help him move around aggressively in attack, and the BWM Training role will help his defensive work. That sounds perfect to me. To do this, I'll set him on a 6 month rotation - for 6 months he'll train as a BWM, for the other 6 he'll train as a Shadow Striker. I can even use the in game Notes function to send me a reminder every 6 months to swap things around so I don't have to rely on remembering.

For an "Additional Focus", I'll set this to First Touch. Part of my DNA and an area that needs a boost.

And what about a PPM or two? For now I'm going to hold fire on that until I've watched my tactics play out a bit, which should help me decide what (if anything) may be useful.

That covers this case study here, which I hope you found interesting. I wanted to show how it's possible to apply a little creative thinking to training plans without resorting to the "I've got a DLP so I'm going to train him as a DLP" mindset.

There are of course other methods of setting up training plans, and if you really want to maximise the possibilities you should have a read of Rashidi's blog https://www.addictedtofm.com/.

I'm going to finish off my individual training plans and once that is complete I may actually (finally!) be ready to hit that Continue button for the first. Phew .

In-Season Training

As noted above, pre-season training is all about player morale, match fitness, blending and tactical familiarity. Once the above is completed (usually done by the first league match of the season, sometimes a little longer), I refocus "in-season" training to concentrate on player development. Individual training plans play a full part in this, although I've already set this up during pre-season. This leaves General Training to take into account.

Note - if this isn't your cup of tea, you can always head into Staff Responsibilities and task one of your team to take care of it.

This is noted in the FAQs sticky at the top of this section, but it's worth reiterating here - different General Training selections will develop different player attributes, and this will affect *everyone* in your team. The areas affected are:

Fitness - all physical attributes + Work Rate.

Tactical - Anticipation, Composure, Decisions, Concentration, Teamwork.

Ball Control - Dribbling, First Touch, Heading, Technique, Flair.

Defending - Marking, Tackling, Positioning.

Attacking - Crossing, Finishing, Long Shots, Passing, Off the Ball, Vision.

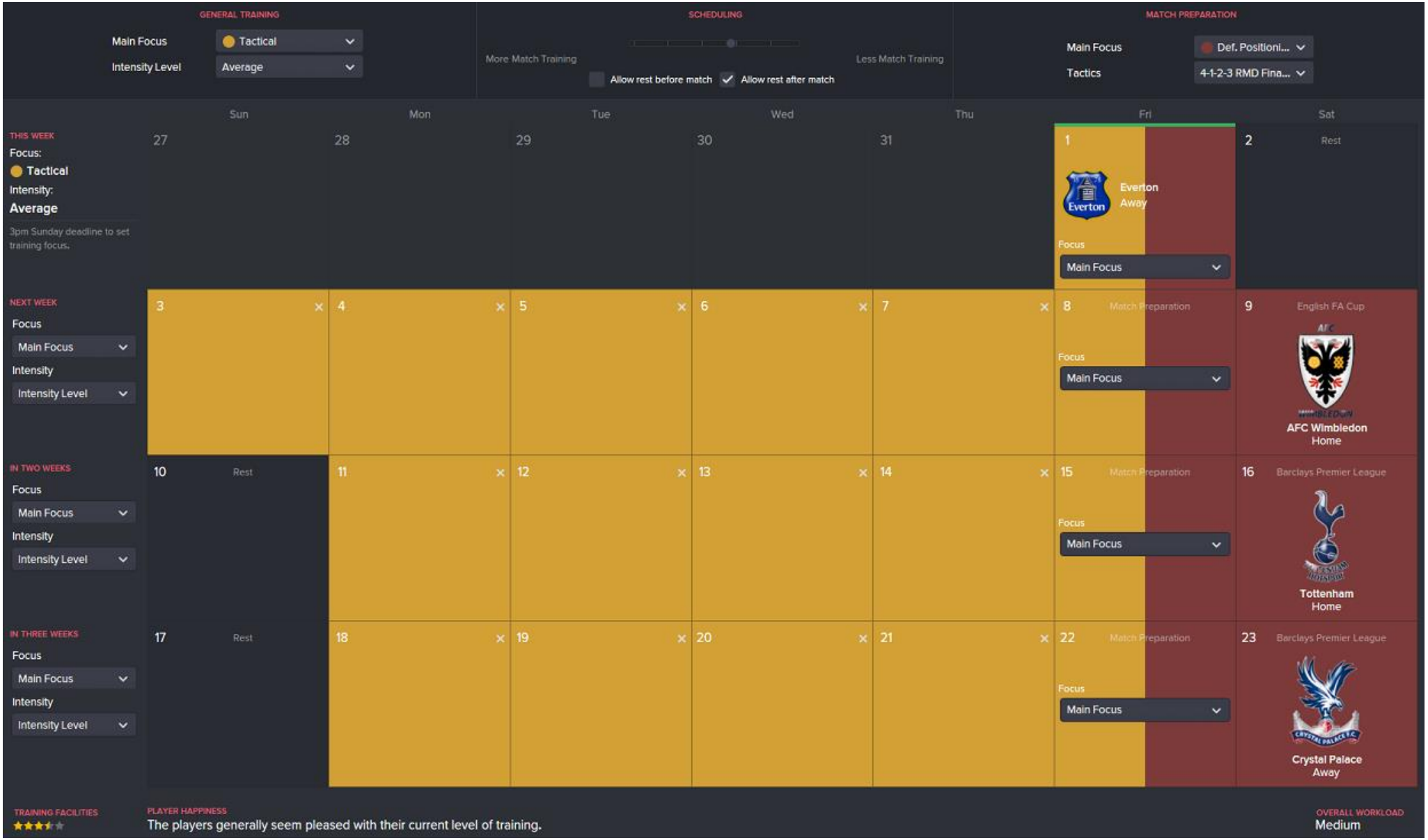
Balanced - all of the above

So you can see that if, for example, you decide you want to set "Defending" as your General Training, everyone in your team will start working on Marking, Tackling and Positioning. Even your Strikers.

Personally I usually focus my General Training on something a bit more neutral that I don't mind everyone training. Therefore I'll primarily look at Tactical, sometimes Ball Control and occasionally Fitness. If you really want to min/max this, you should check out Rashidi's blog.

Remember, if you are going to change Training around during the season, leave each Training area in place for at least 3 months at a time in order for it to have any kind of meaningful impact.

This is how my in-season General Training looks:



You can see that I have:

- Set Tactical Training at a Medium intensity. Tactical will remain as the set Training for 6 months, after which I'll change to Ball Control until the next pre-season starts. Originally I set a High intensity but some players were picking up small injuries so I knocked it back to Medium.

- Players are allowed a day's rest after each match to help them recover properly and regain Condition in time for the next match.

- I have reduced the amount of Match Training to allow more time on General Training (and thus improving player attributes). You can reduce this to zero if you want to fully focus 100% on developing attributes, but here I use a little RP element and spend a little time preparing for matches.

- And as you can see, I use Defensive Positioning as my Match Preparation. Match Preparation provides a small, temporary boost to the area being worked on. It's perfectly plausible to not work on match prep and focus 100% on General Training, however be aware that not setting any match prep can reduce Tactical Familiarity.

Youth Teams

In England, the U21s squad share facilities with the senior squad, so everything is already taken care of.

For the U18s squad, I set things up in exactly the same way except I have Teamwork set for match preparation. Again that's just a small RP element (they're young so get them working together kind of thing).

Mini Update

Just a quick update on some outstanding issues that I mentioned earlier.

Youth Contracts Negotiated

All Youth players identified as high potential have agreed new professional contracts. This will at least prevent rival clubs making an approach to sign them.

Contracts Extended

Steve Potts' (U21s Manager) was due to expire at the end of the season. He agreed a new contract with no salary increase.

Joey O'Briens' (senior squad player) was also due to expire. I considered letting him go, but he is a decent enough backup player and has a good personality (Resolute) and Determination, so happy to keep him on and use him in the odd game and as a Tutor. He accepted a small pay cut as well ☺.

Player Training Plans Sorted

All players have had individual training plans put in place. Those that will be on a rotation plan (such as Joe Powell - see above) have had reminder notes added so the game will now tell me when to change their plan, so I don't need to remember (which I wouldn't).

All Tutoring now started for young players.

Staff Recruited

All identified staff have been recruited. Coach training schedule has been updated accordingly.

New available staff to recruit have already become apparent thanks to bringing in staff of various nationalities. For example - remember above where I could originally only see one available scout in South America? After recruiting Ayala (Argentinian), this is how South American available scouts looks to me now:

STAFF SEARCH

Reset

CONDITIONS: Add

ATTRIBUTES: Pick – + Match 0 / 0

Filter Options | Show Filters

✓		Staff Role	Is	Scout
✓	And	Nationality	Is	South American

22 PEOPLE FOUND | Copy of Contract

NAME	AGE	PREFERRED JOB	CLUB	CLUB JOB	INTERNATIONAL JOB	F/PT	TYPE	WAGE	EXPIRES	WR	PERSONALITY
Iván Zamorano	48	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	★★★☆☆	Balanced
Martín Viberti	44	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	★½☆☆☆	Balanced
Nicolás Frutos	34	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	★☆☆☆☆	Fairly Professional
Riccardo Paciocco	54	Manager		-	-	-	-	-	-	★☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Gaspar Barrios	37	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Temperamental
Luciano Da Luz	38	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Brian Pascuet	35	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Ariel Pérez	39	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Gastón Oses	36	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Low Determination
Gabriel Diez	38	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Brian Minetti	37	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Juan Acastello	34	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Low Determination
Sebastián Capogrosso	36	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Easily Discouraged
José Luis De Ciancio	35	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Spirited
Julián Barrios	36	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Tomas Bravo	39	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Roberto Brundo	37	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Julio Oronás	37	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Low Determination
Lucas Cuello	37	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Easily Discouraged
Carlos Sambueza	36	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Temperamental
José Noguera	36	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced
Diego Vélez	37	Scout		-	-	-	-	-	-	½☆☆☆☆	Balanced

Scouting Network Established

I now have 7 scouts employed from around the world, plus my Chief Scout. Because I have a very limited knowledge of players at present, I have set up individual scouting assignments for each to scout their own home region (not just their home country). I have not selected any particular player criteria yet (no age limits or star ratings for example) simply because I want to start to get some generalised views on players and countries, just to get on overview or feel for what is out there.

Once I start to build up knowledge I can begin to target in a more specific way. I'm just trying to build up a general knowledge at the moment. This is where my scouts currently are, and you can see they have already started sending me plenty of reports:

PRIORITY	SCOUTING		SCOUT	REPORTS	START	REMAINING
	Next Opposition		George Cowie	1	26/6/2015	Ongoing
	South America (Scouting Chile)	Details	Roberto Ayala	307	29/6/2015	N/A
	Central Europe (Scouting Luxembourg)	Details	Klaus-Dieter Kreft	33	28/6/2015	N/A
	Central Europe (Scouting Italy)	Details	Ángel Vales	303	28/6/2015	N/A
	South Europe (Scouting Greece)	Details	Murat Kuş	86	28/6/2015	N/A
	UK & Ireland (Scouting N.Ireland)	Details	Jimmy Hampson	305	28/6/2015	N/A
	UK & Ireland (Scouting Scotland)	Details	Tony Henry	313	28/6/2015	N/A
	Western Africa (Scouting Mali)	Details	Ibrahim Tanko	2	28/6/2015	N/A

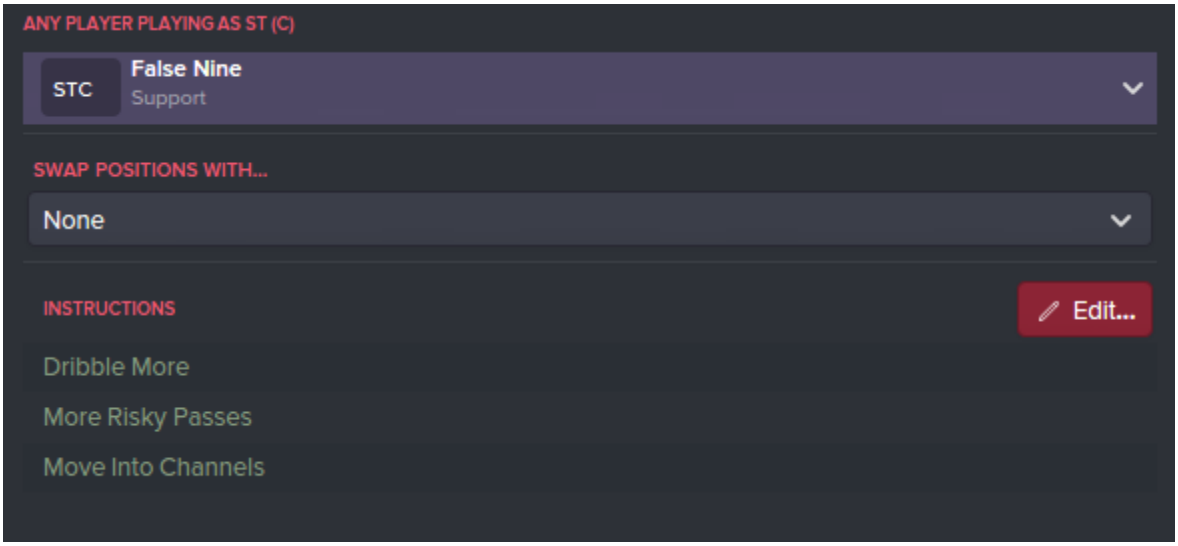
The downside to this of course is that I have no control over which country the scout visits. Perhaps the beer is cold in Luxembourg...

Adapting

First League Game of the Season

Sometimes you need to accept that the players you have available for selection just aren't cut out for how you want to play. And this is how things turned out for my first league match of the season against Everton.

Now I am still experimenting with one or two positions and players. My striker (for example) in the 4123DM formation is set as an F9 - an F9 has the following PIs set by default:



So Ideally I want a player here who can pass the ball, dribble a bit and has good off the ball movement. My two strikers (Andy Carroll and Diafra Sakho) are not exactly overly burdened with related attributes. Perhaps I should try Payet there...

However, for this first match I don't have the luxury of choice. Whilst I've had a good pre-season (comfortably getting through the Europa League preliminaries), I've also lost 3 of my wide men to injury - Valencia (Thigh Strain), Antonio (Twisted Ankle) and Moses (Shin Splints). This leaves me with a choice between Payet, Lanzini and Byram to play at AML/R.

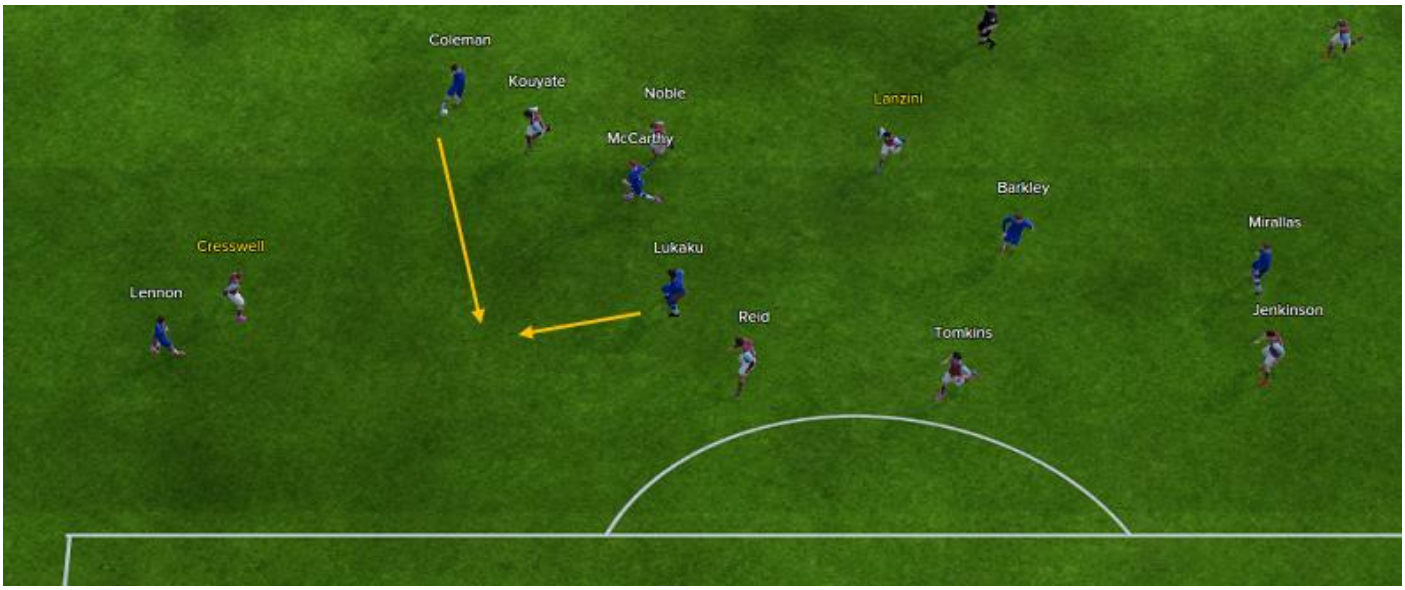
I could play all 3 if I choose to go with my 4231 formation, but that leaves me short on options if i need to make a substitution. So I'm going to play 4123DM which may also help me against Everton's dangerous (from past experience) 4231 line up.

But - and here's the adapting I need to consider - I have a Raumdeuter selected at AML in this formation, and Payet, Lanzini nor Byram are really cut out for that. So I make a small tweak to change the Raumdeuter to an IF and go with this line up:

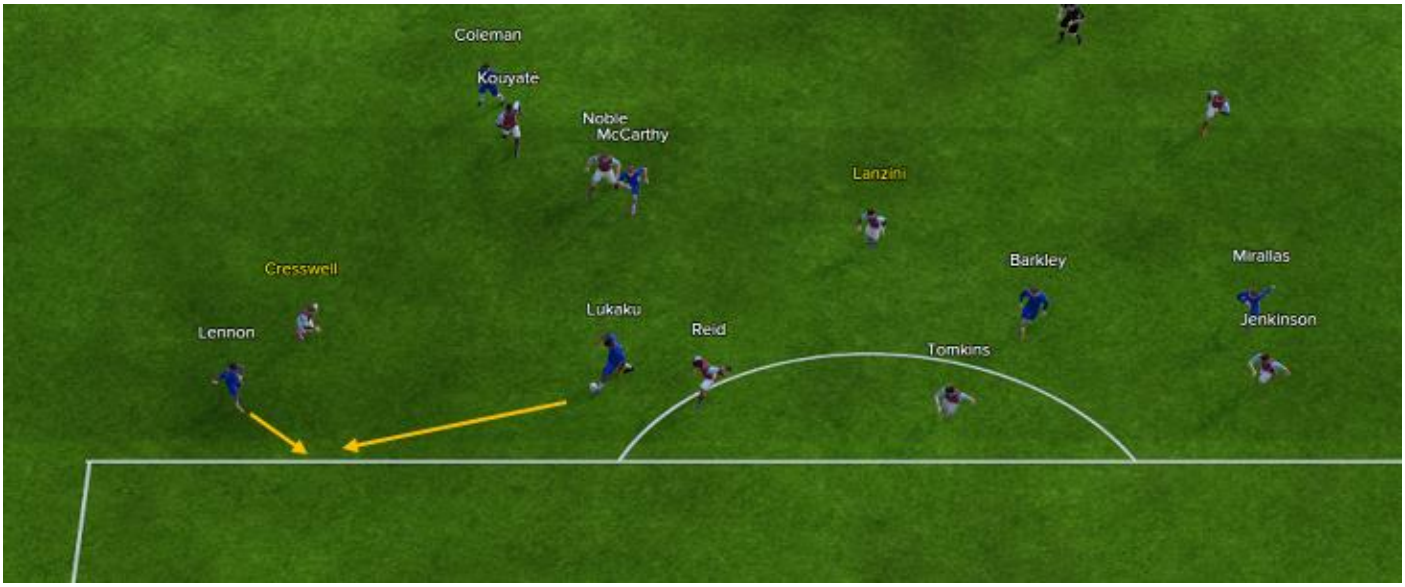
It's only a small tweak, but sometimes this is the kind of thing we can do as managers that can make the difference between succeeding and failing. I could have just started Payet as a Raumdeuter, but if a simple change of role is going to be more suited to his attributes & PPMs and the change won't have a major impact on how the team plays, then I'm quite happy to play to someone's strengths in this manner.

So the match. The match itself was a game of two halves (to coin a phrase). We came in at the break somehow losing 1-0, thanks to a moment of madness from my centre back Winston Reid. Take a look at this little sequence of events:

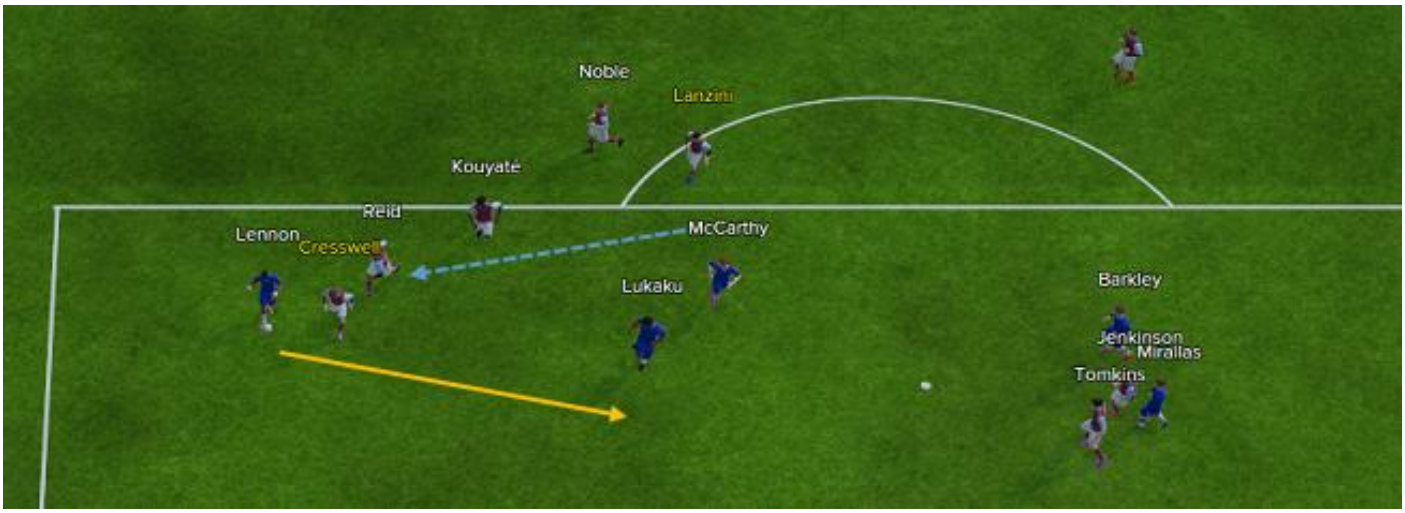
1) Coleman on the ball, makes a decent pass to Lukaku. Reid is covering Lukaku, Tomkins and Jenkinson also well positioned and I have runners tracking back.



2) Lennon has got ahead of Cresswell to receive a pass from Lukaku. I'm still pretty well covered elsewhere, but Everton also have runners advancing.



3) And now this is where Reid has brain failure. Lennon has received the ball but Reid has followed the dotted blue line and decided it's much better to double team Lennon than protect the centre of the penalty box where Everton now have 2 players completely unmarked. Idiot. So yeh, guess what Lennon does - passes the ball to two unmarked players.

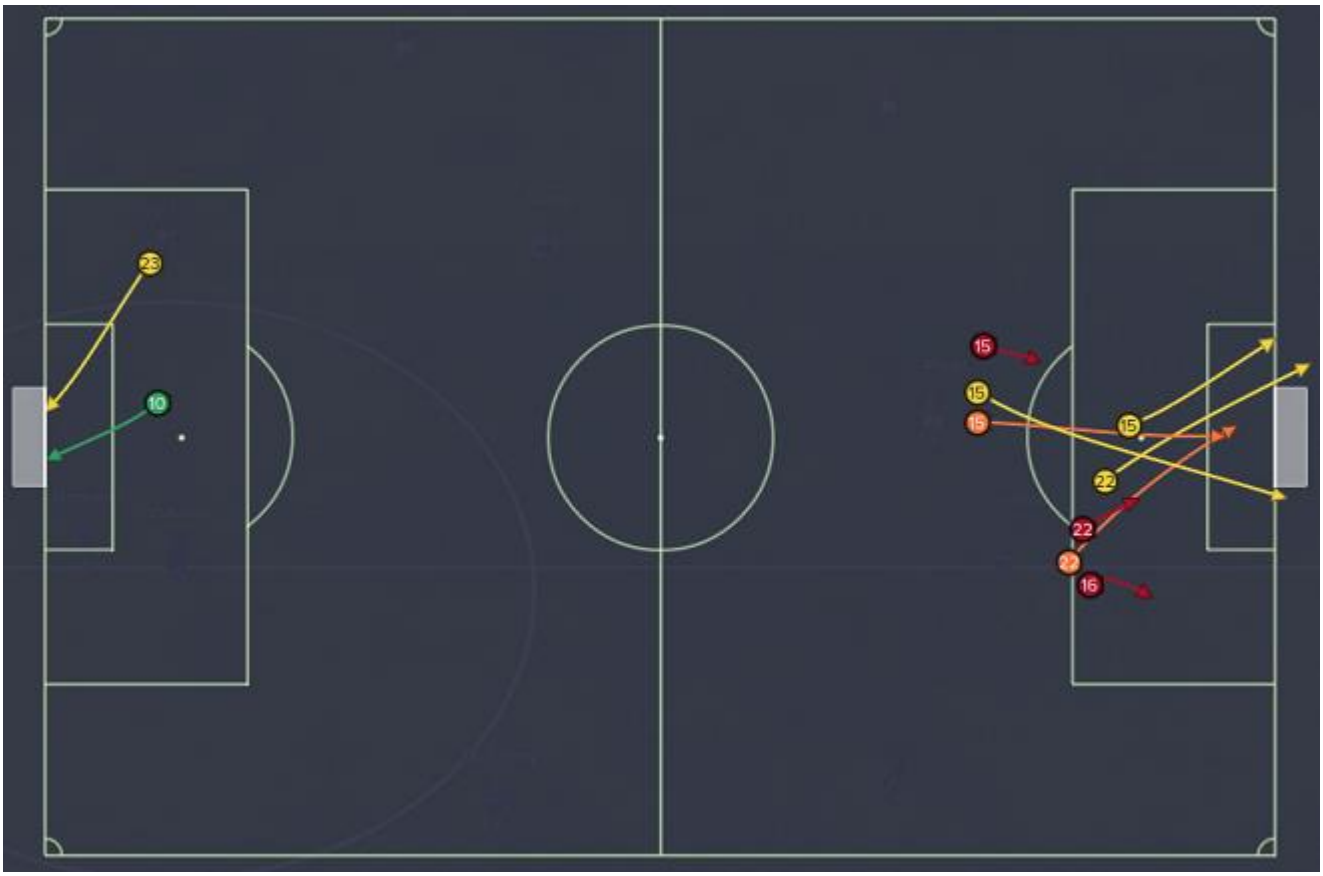


4) The inevitable happens. McCarthy says "after you Romelu" who needs no second invitation to score. Reid of course is nowhere to be found and about to incur the wrath of his Manager.

Now on the face of it, this is bad. And it is, it's very poor play from a player who should know better and he's cost us a goal. This in itself would be enough for some people to start writing bug reports, complaints and crying about the state of the game. Barely a week goes by without that type of rubbish on the forums.

But, and this is a Kardashian sized but, you have to look at the bigger picture. If this was *typical* behaviour by my players, I'd be in deep doodoo and need to make changes. But it isn't. It's an aberration. A one off. Even if I wasn't watching the match (which I am) I could tell simply by looking at how many shots Everton have had.

First half shots - Everton on the left:



So we're doing alright. Apart from losing 😄.

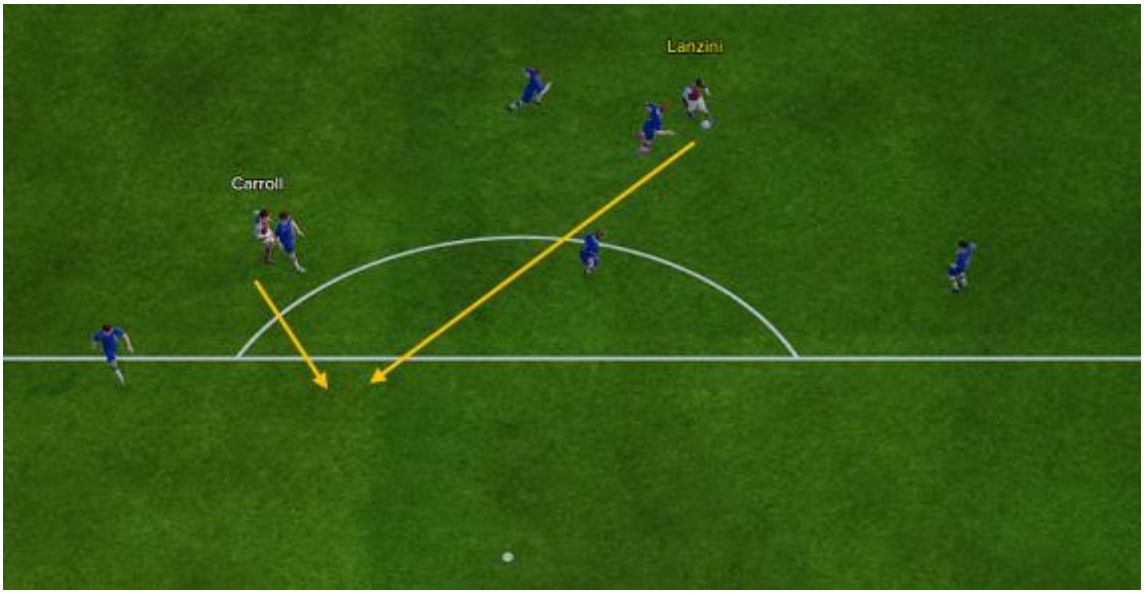
One other thing here as well. Many people struggle to watch matches and see what is happening. I can completely understand this as I was in exactly the same position not so long ago. But here's the thing - I haven't taken that sequence of screenshots that led to Everton's goal "live". I've used Pause and Rewind. I've changed camera angles. I've played the sequence over and over again watching different players and their movement until I know what has happened. I don't know *why* Reid suddenly turned into a douche, but I do know he did and that's what caused the goal.

That's how I started to learn how to watch matches - just selecting small chunks of play and watching them over and over. Do that often enough and eventually you'll start to pick up on such patterns of play during live sequences. Unfortunately there is no shortcut here, it requires patience.

Anyway, I'm in at half time 1-0 down and I've got the hump. And this is where part of my manager's profile that I set up back at the start of the save kicks in again. I'm not an arm around the shoulder you've just been unlucky type. I have a rant and tell my players they need to show me something better. I get a positive "green" reaction from everyone.

And they do show me something better. We go 4-1 up before Lukaku grabs his second of the match and it finishes 4-2. Lanzini at CM(a) is my best player scoring a goal and grabbing an assist (gives me something to think about for future matches) and Payet also plays well in the Inside Forward adapted role. Byram scores a total fluke on his debut from the touchline, with Sakho (who limped off) and Carroll scoring the other 2. I'll quickly show you Carroll's goal as it is a great example of the CM(a) PI "More Risky Passes" (ie., more through balls):

A 6 v 2 situation, Lanzini makes a great pass which Carroll latches onto and scores. Great through ball. Given that Sakho also scored in this match, the F9 experiment paid off on this occasion - they were also heavily involved with support play as well.



All in all a good start to the season, and I'll need to play out a few more matches to make sure the tactical systems are sound, but I'm happy with the foundation so far and pleased with the small adaptation.

January 2016 Update - Part 1

Head of Youth Development

As we've seen before, Terry Westley just isn't good enough. His personality especially (Balanced) is an issue as the HOYD's personality can have a direct impact on the personality of newgens. Terry also doesn't have very good coaching attributes, so I need to replace him before the newgens hit (usually sometime in March for England).

So I go to Staff Search, look for HOYD and sort the results by reputation. I'm looking for people with good personalities (something with high professionalism); good judgement skills, working with youth and coaching ability; and preferably free agents so I don't have to pay compensation to their current club. Westley is costing me £230k to mutually terminate his contract, so I don't want to pay much. These are the results:

CONDITIONS: Add | ATTRIBUTES: Pick | Match 0 / 0 | Filter Options | Show Filters

Staff Role | Is | Head of Youth Development

436 PEOPLE FOUND | Copy of Contract

NAME	AGE	PREFERRED JOB	CLUB	CLUB JOB	INTERNATIONAL JOB	F/PT	TYPE	WAGE	EXPIRES	WR	PERSONALITY
Huw Jennings	55	Head of Youth Development	Fulham	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£2,000 p/w	30/6/2016	★★★☆☆	Fairly Professional
Gerry Hamstra	45	Head of Youth Development	Vitesse	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£2,300 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Fairly Determined
Bryan Klug	55	Head of Youth Development	Ipswich	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£2,500 p/w	30/6/2016	★★★☆☆	Professional
Kai Timm	48	Head of Youth Development		-	-	-	-	-	-	★★★☆☆	Fairly Loyal
Jochen Saier	37	Head of Youth Development	SC Freiburg	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£2,200 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Resolute
Andy Welsh	53	Head of Youth Development	Sunderland	Under 21s Manager	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£3,000 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Fairly Determined
Massimiliano Cappellini	44	Head of Youth Development		-	-	-	-	-	-	★★★☆☆	Fairly Loyal
Alan Irvine	57	Head of Youth Development		-	-	-	-	-	-	★★★☆☆	Professional
Antonio Bongiorni	68	Head of Youth Development	Atalanta	Scout	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£725 p/w	30/6/2016	★★★☆☆	Fairly Determined
Thomas Albeck	59	Head of Youth Development	RB Leipzig	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£2,500 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Driven
Angelo Trevisan	57	Head of Youth Development		-	-	-	-	-	-	★★★☆☆	Fairly Determined
Maurizio Costanzi	58	Head of Youth Development	Atalanta	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£3,000 p/w	30/6/2019	★★★☆☆	Fairly Determined
Brian McClair	52	Head of Youth Development		-	Head of Youth Development	-	-	-	-	★★★☆☆	Professional
Edmund Becker	59	Head of Youth Development	Karlsruher SC	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£975 p/w	30/6/2016	★★★☆☆	Fairly Loyal
Graeme Liveston	67	Head of Youth Development	Doncaster	Chief Scout	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£750 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Fairly Professional
Mario Beretta	56	Head of Youth Development	Cagliari	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£1,500 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Balanced
Giancarlo Finardi	61	Head of Youth Development	Atalanta	Scout	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£1,200 p/w	30/6/2018	★★★☆☆	Fairly Professional
Paul Hart	62	Head of Youth Development	Leeds	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£2,000 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Fairly Professional
Luis Fradua	50	Head of Youth Development		-	-	-	-	-	-	★★★☆☆	Fairly Determined
Kevin Thelwell	42	Director of Football	Wolves	Director of Football	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£5,000 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Fairly Sporting
Eric Kinder	57	Head of Youth Development	Blackburn	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£1,500 p/w	1/1/2017	★★★☆☆	Fairly Loyal
Luca Zaffanella	43	Head of Youth Development	Chievo	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£1,600 p/w	30/6/2017	★★★☆☆	Balanced
Dario Baccin	39	Director of Football	Palermo	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£1,600 p/w	30/6/2016	★★★☆☆	Fairly Sporting
Daniele Corazza	46	Head of Youth Development	Bologna	Head of Youth Development	-	F/T	Full Cont...	£825 p/w	30/6/2018	★★★☆☆	Balanced

I have a quick look at likely candidates to assess their attributes. This is Alan Irvine for example:

Good personality, would be cheap to employ (no compensation), but let down by his coaching attributes and judging skills. Eventually I come across Brian McClair, and he's perfect: good personality, great attributes and no compensation to pay.

He wants £4.4k a week for 4 years, I snap him up for £3.4k a week for 5 years.

Facilities

Met with my Board who have agreed to start work on upgrading both my Youth facilities and my regular Training facilities. Constant upgrades here will become more and more important as I develop my current an future Youth players. I haven't yet been given the option to improve Youth Recruitment and Junior Coaching, but as soon as I can I will.

Tutoring

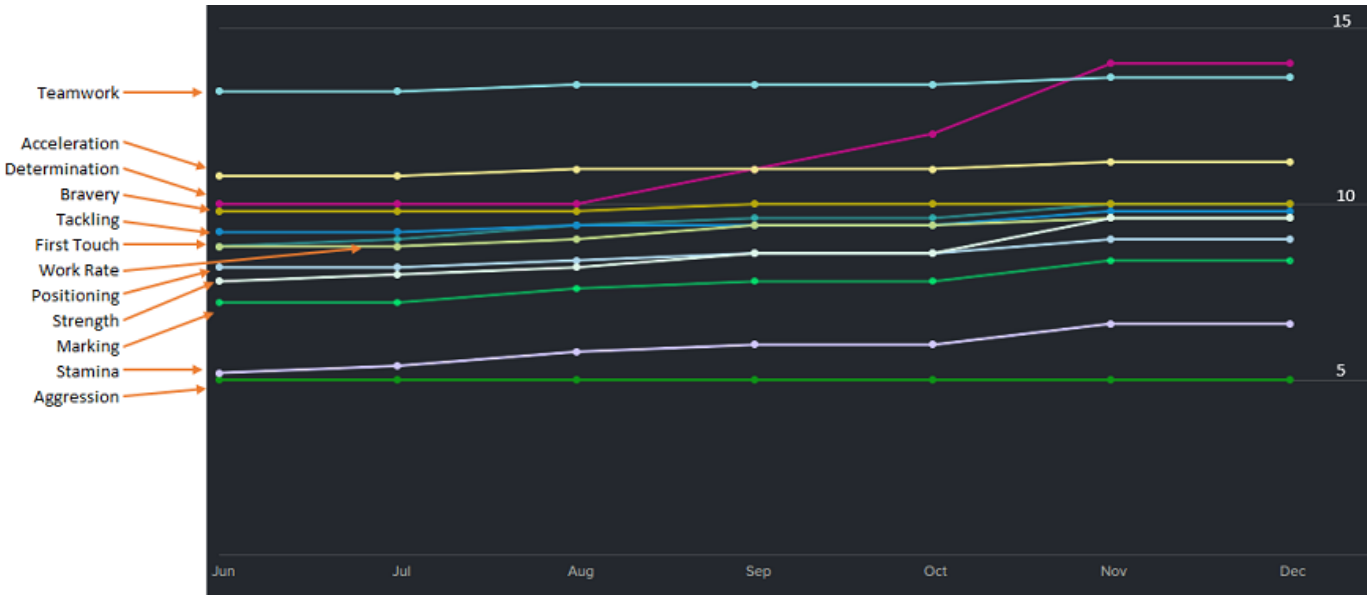
All Tutoring completed successfully (always a bonus as it can sometimes be a bit random). Some young players will require a second round of tutoring as whilst their personalities and determination have improved, they still aren't quite at the level I'm looking for.

For example, one of my young goalkeepers started with a Personality of Fairly Ambitious, Media Handling skills of Media Friendly, and Determination of 7. We're now at Balanced, Level Headed and 12.

Any further tutoring (for anyone) will now be held up for a month as Tutors cannot immediately start tutoring someone else (or the same person again). They have to wait about a month to become "eligible" to start tutoring again. People who require tutoring can begin being tutored again as soon as the previous tutoring session ended. However I don't have anyone that I consider to be suitable to be a tutor able to start.

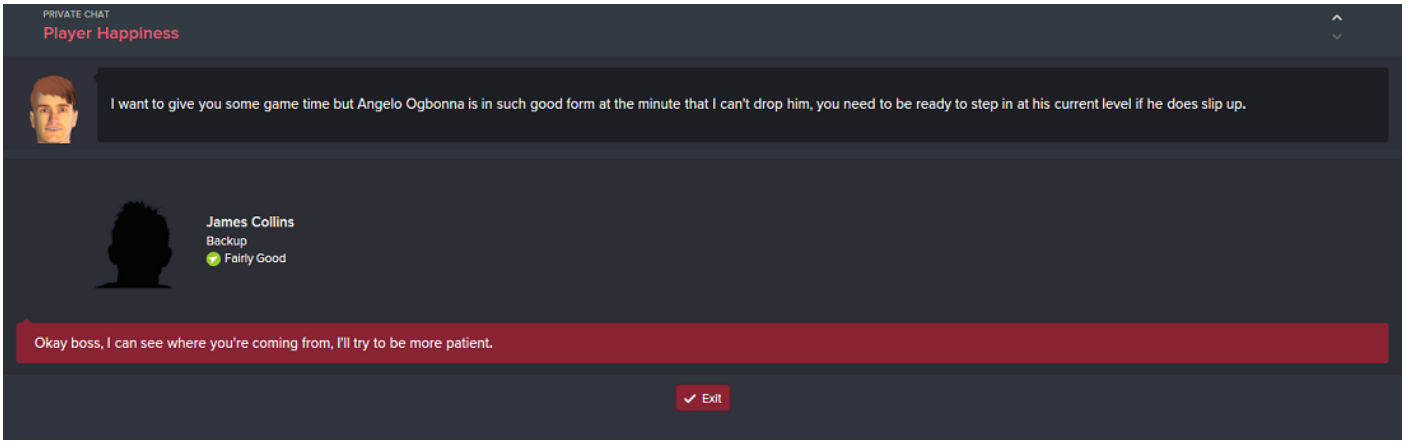
Joe Powell

Joe is progressing ok, although I'd like to see a little more progress be made. This is probably due to his relatively poor starting personality (Fairly Ambitious) and quality of coaches and facilities. He now has a Balanced personality and his Determination has improved from 10 to 14. Having spent the first part of the year working on Ball Winning Midfielder training, he'll now be switched over to Shadow Striker training. As soon as another suitable Tutor becomes available (probably Mark Noble again) he'll get started on that. However, he's seen no movement at all in his Aggression, which is a concern. This is Joes' BWM training progress:



Squad Issues

Game Time:- Only two players have come to me so far asking for more game time: Collins and Tomkins (both central defenders, both Backup status). I told them both (Calmly) to be more patient, which they accepted.



I plan on writing a section on people interaction (players, media, team talks etc) but suffice to say for now I kind of role play discussions - there are no "right" answers because people are different and what one person may accept, another won't. So if we end the conversation happy then fine, if we don't then that's also fine as well. And if a player goes all sulky on me I'll just sell him.

Transfers:- The January transfer window is about to open and several of my players have a lot of interest from big clubs:

PKD	INF	NAME
GK		Adrián
DR	PR	Carl Jenkinson
DCR	Wnt	Winston Reid
DCL		Angelo Ogbonna
DL	Wnt	Aaron Cresswell
MCR		Pedro Obiang
MCL		Mark Noble
AMR		Sam Byram
AMC		Dimitri Payet
AML	Wnt	Enner Valencia
STC	Wnt	Diafra Sakho
S1		Darren Randolph
S2		Andy Carroll
S3		Joey O'Brien
S4		Victor Moses
S5	Wnt	Cheikhou Kouyaté
S6	PR	Michail Antonio
S7		James Collins
-	Inj	James Tomkins
-		Alex Song
-	Inj	Manuel Lanzini
-		Stephen Hendrie
-	Loa	Donell Henry

Sakho has already come to me to ask about leaving for Atletico Madrid. I told him no problem as quite honestly there aren't many players I won't consider selling - and Sakho is nowhere near that list:

I'm also hoping I can terminate Alex Song's loan agreement. He is an absolute liability on the pitch - if he's not getting booked he's getting sent off. He even got a straight red card inside the first minute of one of my early European matches. He has to go. As replacement, I'll be looking to recall Diego Poyet (if I can) or use Reece Oxford (currently in my U18s squad) if I have to. If I free up transfer funds I could also look to buy someone - Kouyate is also interesting several clubs so buying in someone new (and better) is a real option.

Transfer Targets

My scouts have been hard at work in different parts of the world uncovering plenty of choice for me. I need to be careful that I don't start buying/selling and find I fall foul of league rules about home grown talent, so watching who I sell and their home grown status could be important (I need at least 8 registered players trained in England - I currently have 12, so a little wiggle room).

I also need to be aware of my Transfer funds. I currently have about £1.3m to play with (🤢) and if I sell anyone I'll only receive 75% of the value to reinvest. I have a few possibles identified and will increase my scouting attention on them now that I know who in my team are on other clubs' radars.

Players loaned in are also on my mind as come the end of the season they'll need replacing (if I can't keep them). Lanzini has been a superstar for me so far from central midfield (who knew!) and I have a £5m future fee agreed as part of his loan contract. However, this bright young thing popped up on my scout reports recently (I employed a new Eastern European scout), and is available to sign on a free at the end of his contract (small compensation):

11. Andrija Zivkovic
Attacking Midfielder (Right) / M (R), AM (L) - Partizan

Overview | Contract | Transfer | Reports | Interaction | Comparison | History

19 years old (11/7/1996)
Serbian
5 caps / 0 goals
4 U21 caps / 1 U21 goal

Contracted to Partizan
Valued at £750K
Earning £1.3K p/w until 30/6/2016
Rotation

Scout Summary
★★★ 10 Pros / 0 Cons - 52% Scouted
It might be worth keeping a close eye on his development.

Estimated Cost
Compensation - £0

Wage Demands
£15K p/w - £29K p/w

POSITIONS > Highlight

Attacking Midfielder (Right)

ROLE AND DUTY

Inside Forward	Support
Raumdeuter	Attack
Advanced Playmaker	Support
Winger	Support
Wide Target Man	Support

TECHNICAL		MENTAL		PHYSICAL	
Corners	14-17	Aggression	12-16	Acceleration	15
Crossing	11-15	Anticipation	12-15	Agility	12-15
Dribbling	14-17	Bravery	12-15	Balance	12-15
Finishing	12	Composure	10-13	Jumping Reach	6
First Touch	14	Concentration	13-16	Natural Fitness	11-15
Free Kick Taking	12-15	Decisions	13-17	Pace	14
Heading	6	Determination	12-15	Stamina	13-17
Long Shots	12	Flair	16-19	Strength	11
Long Throws	9-12	Leadership	11-15	Height	171 cm
Marking	8-11	Off The Ball	14	Weight	66 kg
Passing	13	Positioning	6-9		
Penalty Taking	9-12	Teamwork	10-14		
Tackling	5-9	Vision	10-14		
Technique	15	Work Rate	14		

PREFERRED FOOT: Left
PERSONALITY: Resolute
MEDIA DESCRIPTION: Midfielder
GOALKEEPER RATING: -
PREFERRED MOVES: Scouting Required

He's accepted just £9.5k a week so I'd be stupid not to.

[January 2016 Update Part 2 - A Tactical Rethink]

Sun, 9/8/2015	16:00	Everton	TV	H		4 - 2	Premier League
Sun, 16/8/2015	13:30	Tottenham	TV	A		2 - 2	Premier League
Thu, 20/8/2015	19:45	IFK Göteborg		H		2 - 1	Europa League Playoff Leg 1
Sun, 23/8/2015	16:00	Crystal Palace	TV	H		2 - 0	Premier League
Thu, 27/8/2015	19:45	IFK Göteborg		A		3 - 2	Europa League Playoff Leg 2
Sun, 30/8/2015	16:00	Southampton	TV	A		1 - 0	Premier League
Sat, 12/9/2015	15:00	Watford		H		2 - 1	Premier League
Thu, 17/9/2015	19:45	FC Midtjylland		A		2 - 1	Europa League Grp F
Sun, 20/9/2015	16:00	Norwich		A		2 - 1	Premier League

Pretty good start to the season right? So why the hell would I want a tactical rethink? It's because I'm working bloody hard to get those results, practically playing each match in full, consistently making lots of tweaks & adjustments. And with the exception of Spurs (and perhaps Everton), I haven't really played anyone of note - just scraping out single goal wins. There's no way I'm going to carry on working hard during matches.

Here's the thing - if you find yourself consistently making similar adjustments to your system during matches over a period of time, there is something fundamentally wrong. Either your system is flawed, your players aren't suited, or a combination of the two. So I need a rethink, but first I need to decide if it's my system, my players, or both. What I am not going to do is rethink my overall philosophy, style and DNA.

I'll tackle the easy one first - my players. Overall, my players are actually pretty well suited to my philosophy. We have decent amounts of workrate, aggression, stamina and so on. Sure there are a few exceptions (Tomkins and Collins could use better First Touch and don't even talk to me about Payet's aggression) but nobody is exactly poor in all (or even even most) DNA areas. This is my worst senior squad player, but he's young and (to be frank) not good enough, so isn't someone I'll be keeping long term:

PKD	INF	NAME	POSITION	AGG	DEC	WOR	STA	FIR
S5		Stephen Hendrie	D (L)	10	10	12	14	9

So overall I'm happy my players are capable of playing in my chosen manner. Yes I need to strengthen and improve in some areas, and over time most players are going to be replaced, but they aren't currently capable of playing with my exact tactical systems setup (and described above in post #7). That's supported by my results - if they really weren't capable I wouldn't be winning no matter what tweaks I made. So it must be my system. Balls.

Tactical Rethink

Long term I can still consider playing with my original tactical systems as and when I start to improve my squad, but at the moment I'm asking too much of them. I need to break things down into what's good and what's bad.

Good Points

- DNA is sound. Aggressive play *generally* is working, a high press *generally* is forcing good turnover. Fast transitions work to keep opponents *generally* on the back foot.
- Some roles and combinations are producing good football. The AP(s) / CM(a) / winger(s) in the 4123DM is especially looking good, as is the AM(s) in the 4231.

Bad Points

- I'm using the word "generally" far too much above, and it's papering over the cracks. We're getting caught far too often on the break or with through balls / balls over the top. We're also getting caught in possession too often, so there's probably a little too much pizazz at the moment for the quality of my players to deal with.
- Some roles and combinations may well be producing good football, most are not. A lot of that is probably down to the players I'm using. Carroll and Sakho (for example) are just not cut out to be a False 9. Valencia is not a Raumdeuter. In other areas I'm not using space very well - having a Raumdueter, and IF and an Attacking Midfielder all trying to run into the middle at the same time is smothering my attacking play.
- Mentality + TIs are causing too many risks to be taken. There's too much closing down and pushing up and roaming around, especially in conjunction with my Fluid Team Shape. Better players with better decision making may(?) be capable, but not my starting squad.
- The DM in the 4123DM is getting pushed and pulled all over the place. I need him protecting my central defence and he's not.
- The two defensive midfielders in the 4231 look good on paper, but in reality don't offer enough. The CM(d) is probably fine, the DLP(d) is just a bot of a wet lettuce really - not doing much wrong per se, but not doing much right either. No pizazz.

So lots to change and I need to be a little creative here if I'm going to stay true to my overall philosophy.

A Defensive Solution

There's been some discussion on the forum recently about "Defensive" systems which can be quite attacking (contradictory I know, but bear with me) which got me thinking, and also reminded me of an article which Cleon wrote for FM14. It's linked in the stickies at the top and I'll link it again here http://community.sigames.com/showthread.php/391083-The-School-of-the-Defensive-Arts.

Essentially it shows how using the Defensive mentality can be used to produce quite attacking football. This is where people can start to get confused, because that sounds like a complete misnomer. The important thing to understand is the difference between "mentality" and "style of football".

The Defensive Mentality is ***not*** the same thing as Defensive Football. Defensive football is an amalgamation of several different things, including formation, mentality, player roles and duties, team and player instructions.

You can apply the same logic to "Attacking Football", or "Counter Attacking Football" as well for example.

Mentality on it's own is nothing more than Risk. So before any modifiers are applied (such as Team Instructions, player roles and duties etc), the Defensive mentality is low risk, while the attacking mentality is high risk. Each mentality between those two is merely a step along how much or little risk your team will take.

I really can't stress enough how important it is to understand this.

So now, when looking at mentalities, understand that the names given to each are just that - names. They are merely labels given to a drop down box to help you make a selection. ***Do not*** confuse them with styles of football - sure they can be used as one of the building blocks to help you achieve a style of football, but they are not styles in and of themselves.

Applying this to West Ham

I'll show the Before and After formations for both my 4123DM and 4231 formations, with new player roles and duties. The original ("Before") tactics used Control / Fluid. The rethink ("After") tactics use Defensive / Structured. New TIs are also in place. All of that will be discussed below.

Before is on the left, After on the right.

Thought Process

1) 4123DM

Starting from the top:

- *F9 changed to DLF(s).* Carroll / Sakho are not capable of playing as an F9. I tried Payet there as well but he lacks physicality. DLF(s) is a much more suitable role for my two main strikers, although I'll still look to change this back to an F9 once I have the player(s) for the role. I actually changed to a DLF(s) before this overall rethink.

- *Raumdeuter changed to IF(s).* A Raumdeuter needs to find space by his intelligent movement. Off the Ball, Anticipation, Acceleration, Composure, Decisions and so on all play a major part. Pairing with a suitable striker is also essential to help create the space for the Raumdeuter. I simply don't have those kind of players at present, so an Inside Forward instead is appropriate. I've used a support duty to compliment the attacking fullback behind (see below) and to slightly take the edge off having such a goal focused player in this position.

- *DM(d) to Anchor Man.* As mentioned, my DM was being pulled around the pitch too much, leaving my defence uncomfortably exposed. Whilst part if the reason here was my Mentality and Team Shape, an Anchor Man is a little less prone to run around trying to close people down.

- *Both fullbacks changed to Fullback(a).* This adds aggression down the flanks and good support for the midfield and more advanced wide players. With the Defensive mentality their attacking play is a little tempered, so they won't over commit - which was part of the initial problem.

- *Sweeper Keeper changed to Goalkeeper.* There's simply no need for a Sweeper Keeper.

2) 4231

Overall, I'm keeping (as far as I can) a commonality of roles between the two systems. So:

- *CF(a) changed to DLF(a).* The CF(a) role was actually doing alright, and there isn't a significant difference between the two roles. Easy to switch back if needed.

RMD changed to IF(s). Same as above.

IF(s) changed to Winger(s). This is possibly the biggest single change that has the largest impact. As I mentioned, space was getting squeezed in the centre, with everyone converging into the centre. This role will stay wider, forcing the opposition to commit someone wide and thus opening space that my other 3 main attackers can make better use of. He also scores a surprising number of goals.

AP(s) changed to AM(s). I've moved the creative player back a row to help the AM focus a little more on being a goal threat. He also uses the newly created space (from the new winger) better than if he remained as an AP. He's been given the PI "more risky passes" as well to help feed anyone running between channels.

DLP(d) changed to AP(s). Given everything we keep hearing about the central midfield pairing in a 4231, this might seem pretty crazy, and to be fair I'm still not 100% on it - but only because of other roles, not because of this role. The AP can indeed be more offensive than defensive, which could be suicidal in such a two man midfield, but lets think how I'm using him. First I have the Defensive mentality and Structured team shape. This will temper his attacking instincts and force him into a more rigid defensive structure. But he's still going to be looking to play clever through balls - and that is why I'm not quite 100% on him yet. With no Raumdeuter, plus an AM ahead who is also looking at playing throughballs, it is possible overkill. This may become better when / if I ever start playing with a RMD, or if I take off the AM's PI. He's still playing very well though, so this is merely fine tuning. Changing to simple CM(s) is something I'm experimenting with.

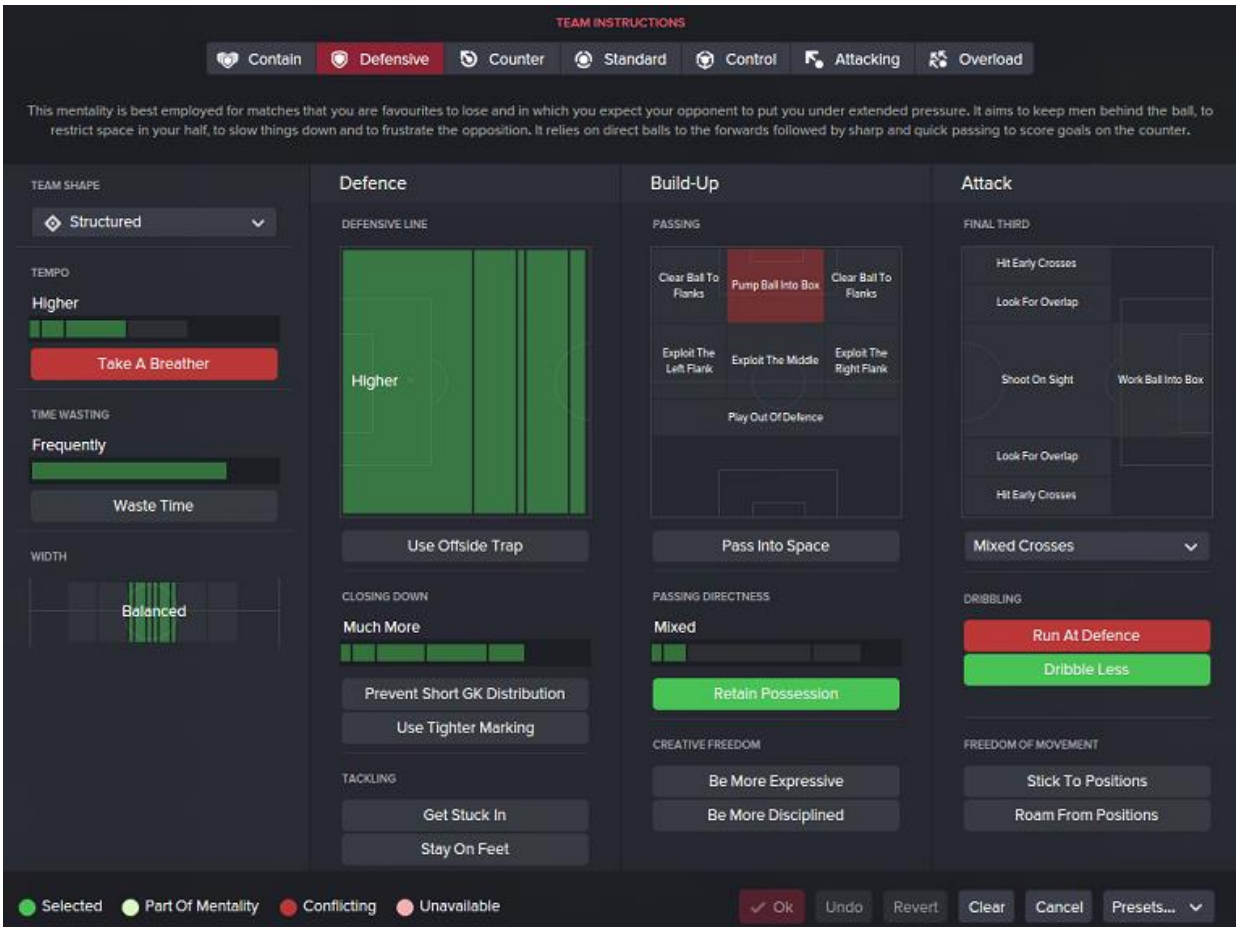
I'll also mention the type of player here. I wouldn't play someone who isn't industrious, tenacious, defensively sound and can pick a pass. Noble and Obiang both play well here. I wouldn't play Mesut Ozil here for example.

- *Fullbacks / Goalie.* Similar changes as mentioned above.

Overall, I hope you can see that I've left in good amounts of aggression, but in subtly different ways. It all feeds off the Defensive / Structured settings to help me maintain shape and form whilst targeting specific players to give me the "pizazz" I'm looking for. Of course this all needs to compliment my other tactical settings.

Team Instructions

I'm using the exact same TIs for both formations:



Hopefully you can see how I am adding aggression and urgency back into my system. Tempo is increased to help stop players dwelling on the ball for too long. The Defensive Line and Closing Down are both increased - add those settings onto my desirable traits for players and suddenly we become more tenacious in our defence, harrying opponents into making mistakes. Retain Possession is used to prevent players needlessly giving the ball away from making risky passes (although Structured will help with that anyway) as well bringing players closer together when in possession (Structured forces them further apart). Dribble Less is again designed to help with possession - I want passing and movement, not running into trouble with the ball. Players who can dribble (or who are supposed to dribble such as the IF) will still dribble.

Team Shape

Changed from Fluid to Structured. I was giving too many players too much creative freedom in the original system. We were getting caught out of position too often leaving myself overly exposed at the back. Structured forces most of the creative freedom out of my players, who will instead primarily rely on their own roles and duties to carry out their tasks. I did consider using Highly Structured, but they have enough quality and decision making (ref my DNA) to give them a little bit of leeway. Overall, hopefully you can understand how using the Defensive mentality can be used to create attacking themes. We're conceding less and scoring just as many - that will only improve as I strengthen my squad (January is getting interesting). And I'm not working as hard during matches to get results

January 2016 Transfer Window

It soon became clear that the big clubs (and some of the smaller ones) were awash with money. Having closed the starting transfer window, clubs seemed eager to make up for lost time, and once the likes of Bayern, PSG, Arsenal started sniffing around some of my players I was in for a battle to keep them. So why bother? With the possible exception of Mark Noble, there is nobody I wouldn't consider selling. So my only task becomes getting as much money as possible from the buying club to fund replacements.

Selling

I think many people view selling players as a bit of a dark art and something to be feared. As such it frequently leaves people frustrated thinking the AI is just trying to screw us over by offering stupidly low amounts way below a player's value. If that happens (and it will) the AI is only doing to us what we would do to the AI in a heart beat. How many of us want to sign players for the lowest price possible, maybe trying to unsettle someone else's player to get a favourable reaction? So why would the AI think any differently? And something else - don't think of it as "the AI". It's just another Manager, just like you, trying to do what's best for their club.

But sometimes we don't want to sell our best players, and sometimes we don't have to. Players don't always want to leave, in which case they'll be quite happy for you to reject offers. Sometimes you can talk them round, convincing them they'll be better off with you. And sometimes, no matter what you do, they want out - especially if a big club comes calling. So let them go. Never become so attached to a player that you believe you can't do with out them. And always have a *fair and reasonable* price that you would be ok accepting. Be realistic. Think how much you would be prepared to pay for that player. Sure, everybody likes to see big numbers, but be sensible - would you pay £50m for your star player who's only valued at £20m? Then why expect someone else to?

Anyway, I have some big clubs with "major" interest in a few of my players (Sakho, Valencia, Kouyate, Reid, Cresswell) and two of them (Sakho, Valencia) have already approached me to ask about leaving if an offer is made. And I've agreed, because 1) they're not irreplacable; 2) I need to generate transfer funds; and 3) if I refuse they'll just throw their toys out of the pram and give me a headache to manage them. For reference, their game values are: £19.5m (Sakho); £25m (Valencia); £8.5m (Kouyate); £12.5m (Reid); £10m (Cresswell). Here's how I got on:

OUT

DATE	PERSON	TO	FEE
5/1/2016	Winston Reid	Paris Saint-Germain	£15M
6/1/2016	Cheikhou Kouyaté	VfL Wolfsburg	£10M
9/1/2016	Enner Valencia	FC Bayern München	£30M
12/1/2016	Diafra Sakho	Borussia Dortmund	£27.5M
14/1/2016	Doneil Henry	Hearts	Ln Fee £5.5K p/m

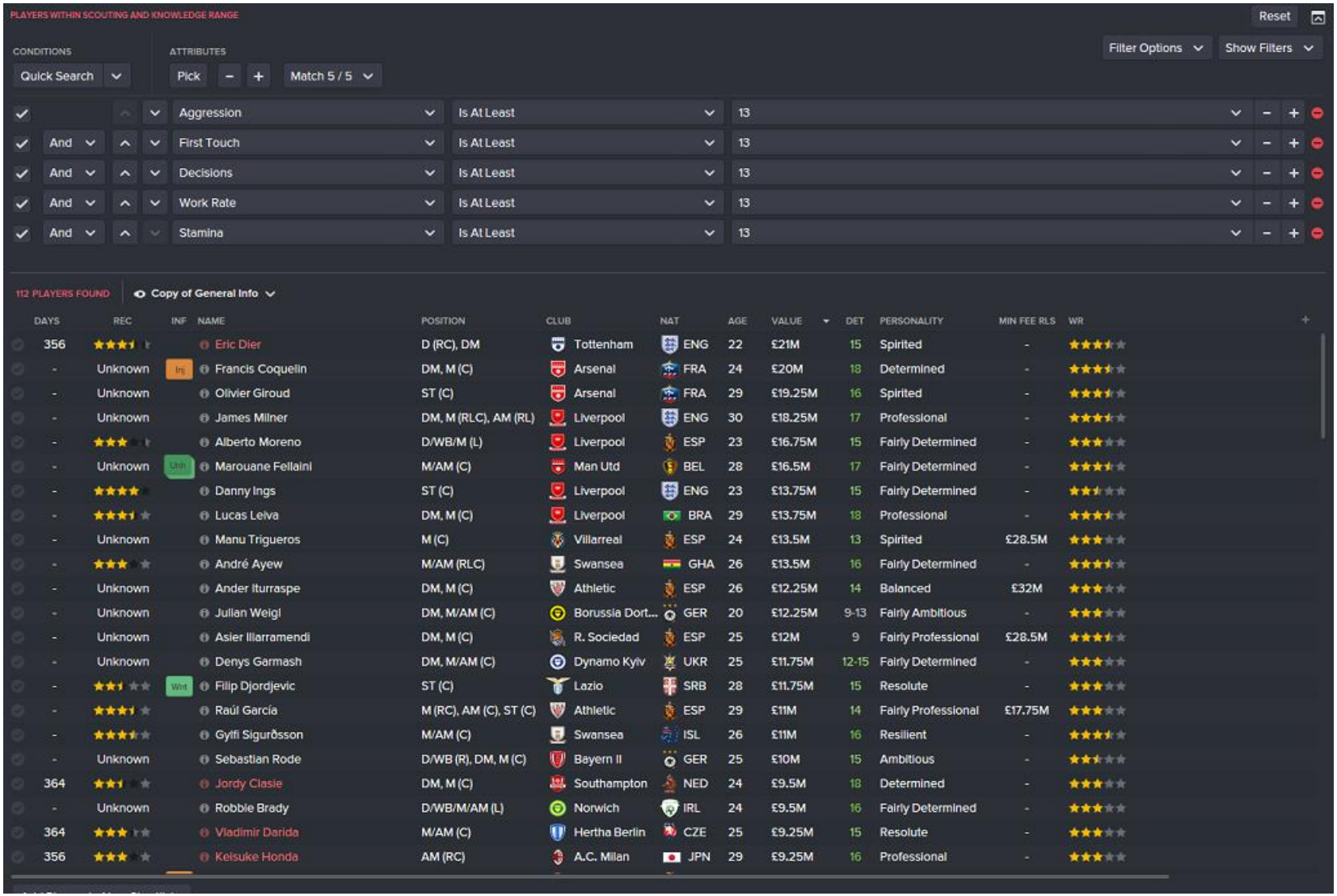
It doesn't show here, but I also negotiated some add ons for each of those deals, such as appearance money, monthly payments and so on. Wold I have liked to get more money for those transfers? Yes of course. Am I happy with the money generated? Absolutely.

Luckily no offers for Cresswell materialised.

Buying

So I have some rather large holes to fill, and I've also terminated Song's loan. I'm not paying someone £140k a week to sit in the stands every other week because he's been banned again (one of the reasons why you should ***never*** just rely on someone's current or potential ability).

Because I've had my scouts having a good general look around, I've already got a nice selection of initial reports stored to help target my replacements. I can also set my databse to look for players that match my DNA, which I need to think about when purchasing:



Ideally I also want players with high levels of professionalism.

Now that's my *general* club DNA. Something I expect everyone to have in varying degrees. Individual roles and positions need their own secondary DNA as well - attributes that will help them perform their tasks that I set them. That area probably deserves it's own write up, so for now I'll just focus on my pressing needs: a new striker; a new defensively minded midfielder; and a central defender. Valencia's absence I can cover from within my existing squad.

So what am I looking for?

Striker: I'm after a player capable of playing as a False 9. Being able to also play as a DLF or CF would be a bonus. My secondary DNA here becomes: Off the Ball, Anticipation, Composure, Passing, Dribbling. A False 9 needs great movement, with the ability to play others in (as well as himself). This is who I snapped up from Ajax for £12.5m (plus £2.5m over 12 months):

Great all round ability, ticks all the DNA boxes, good personality, and stays within my wage structure. I'm not overly keen on his PPMs, but they'll be fine (I'll see if I can unlearn his Gets Forward Whenever Possible PPM, but it's not the end of the world).

Defensively Minded Midfielder: Here I need a player who is equally happy breaking up opposition attacks in either the central or defensive midfield positions. Tenacious, strong in the tackle, taking up good positions and will lay the ball off to a teammate with simple passes. Secondary DNA here is: Marking, Tackling, Positioning, Strength, Bravery. And as luck would have it, the following player pops up on the Transfer List for just £3.6m. I can't believe my luck:

Again, ticks all DNA boxes (I'll work on his First Touch), fantastic personality and well inside the wage structure. Dortmund, what were you thinking.

Central Defender: This proved a little troublesome, and I ended up going for raw youthful talent with decent ability and bags of potential rather than a more established player. I was coming up against clubs who wanted ridiculous fees, agents who wanted ridiculous wages for their clients, or both. Perhaps I was trying to be a little too picky with my general and secondary DNA, but I'm not prepared to compromise on that. Secondary DNA is: Pace, Anticipation, Positioning, Tackling, Marking, Strength. My Argentinian scout spotted this young player who has a great starting point and bags of potential:

£5m for someone I can slot straight into the first team and fast track his development. He needs no tutoring either.

Right side Fullback: I made one further purchase here, which I was kind of forced into. At the end of the season I'll be losing my right fullback Jenkinson when his loan finishes. So a new fullback was always going to be a priority, but I was happy to wait until the end of the season. I'd already identified a few possibles, one of which was transfer listed and English (needed for squad registration rules). However, a rival club came in with a bid - I knew this as I had put the player on my shortlist and so received notice of the rival bid (***always*** put your possible transfer targets onto your shortlist otherwise you may not know about rival bids until it's too late). So my hand was forced. For an attacking fullback, this is my secondary DNA: Crossing, Pace, Stamina, Tackling, Positioning, Off the Ball. Here's the player, who had the good sense to leave Spurs and join the Hammers:

Transfer listed for £6m and even took a pretty hefty wage cut he was that desperate to get away from the Lane (understandable). His personality is a compromise, but you can't always have everything and maybe my squad personality will rub off on him a bit.

Oh and before all you Spurs fans start crying (as usual) about my little digs, both my wife and my twin brother support Tottenham, so there's nothing I haven't heard ten times over before.

Hopefully that gives you all a little insight into how I went about my transfer business. Everyone is a tradeable commodity; everyone has a price; and all new players brought in must be for a reason.

Goalkeepers

What I didn't mention above in the Jan transfers update was that I also signed a goalkeeper. Or more accurately I signed a keeper from when his contract expires in July, so he joins me on a free transfer.

I didn't mention this above because I wanted to write a little about goalkeepers and how I view them because, well, when did you ever see anything written about keepers? I haven't. And yet they are arguably the most important player on the pitch - take an outfield player away and you can still reasonably expect to get a result, but take a keeper away and you'll lose.

This is who I've signed:

1. Gerónimo Rulli
Goalkeeper - R. Sociedad

Overview | Contract | Transfer | Reports | Interaction | Comparison | History

FM | 22 Feb 2016 Mon 21:45 | Continue

Knowledge Level - 100%

Current Assignment Duration: 4 weeks

SCOUT REPORT BY Vales - 22/2/2016

Judging Ability 16 Judging Potential 16

Estimated Cost
-

Wage Demands
N/A

Current Ability

Potential Ability

Recommendation

PROS

Potential Ability (Division)
Potential to be a star Premier League goalkeeper in the future.

Individual Personality
Complete role model for younger players.

Dressing Room
We have a determined squad and Rulli would add to the determined nature of the squad.

Strongest Attribute
One-on-one situations.

Current Ability (Division)
Leading player for most Premier League sides.

Adaptability
Could adapt well to living in another country.

Consistency
Consistent performer.

Important Matches
Enjoys big matches.

International Experience
Is a current international.

CONS

Communication
Would need to learn the language.

Preferred Foot
Is very one-footed.

POSITIONS Goalkeeper

BEST PLAYERS

1 Gerónimo Rulli
2 Adrián
3 Darren Randolph

ROLE SUITABILITY

1 Goalkeeper
2 Sweeper keeper

So what am I looking for?

Well to answer that, the first thing I did was assign a scout to him to achieve 100% scouting. Look at the top left corner of the scout report where it says "Knowledge Level 100%". I've scouted this guy to make sure no stone is unturned to help me make an informed decision. I actually assigned a scout to watch him for a month (right click a player's name, select Scouting, select the scout and time period).

This tells me everything I need to know about his ability. His personality is just perfect; massive potential and current ability (I'm not talking about CA/PA there, I really couldn't care less about those numbers); he's going to adapt well to living in England; he's consistent (too often this gets overlooked by people - ***always*** pay attention to that); and he's not going to wilt under the pressure of big matches. Always always always read scout reports. Did I mention always? Now in terms of club DNA I'm not too concerned here. Work Rate, Stamina and Aggression just don't come into my decision making process - Decisions remains important as does (to a lesser extent) First Touch. Keepers still need to decide what to do, but they only really need First Touch if a defender gives them a dodgy back pass (in my opinion).

For me, I only have three key attributes that I look for in a keeper: One v Ones, Reflexes and Handling. Strikers are going to break through my defensive line now and again, so I need my keeper to be able to stand up to them. He'll also need cat like reflexes to stop those close range shots/headers that will inevitably come his way. And finally I don't want him spilling the ball by mistake at the feet of an opposition striker - grab the ball and hold onto it. You can see for yourself just how good Rulli is here. Bravery also has a part to play in selection, although the same could be said for any player. Aerial Reach (c'mon, the guy is 189cm + arm stretch + jumping, there is no issue there), Command of Area and Communication all have an impact, but for me at least they are of lesser importance compared to his ability to actually stop shots. And what about Rushing Out for Sweeper Keepers? Well yes I agree, but in all honesty I'm really not sure how effective the "sweeper" part of that role actually is. I'm not sure the game is much good at simulating Neuer's (to use a real life example) movement, although if anyone has good examples of this I'm very happy to see it . However, having said that, if I were using a tactic with a high def line I'd still use a SK - just in case. Hopefully you can see why I wanted to write a little section on the oft-forgotten Goalkeeper. They really are incredibly important, plus this should give a good insight into how to go about using scouts to help you make informed decisions.

And remember - ***always read your scout reports*** .

Youth Intake Day

Is there ever a day so looked forward to, and disappoints you so much when it arrives?

Yep, Annual Youth Intake Day has arrived. Or more accurately, the day in which we all look at Man City and think "Really? *Again*?" I'm not expecting too much this year. The quality of "newgens" is dictated by such things and club reputation; league reputation; and quality of facilities and whilst West Ham are in a high rep league, club rep and facilities are still lacking:

Training Facilities	Impressive training facilities
Youth Facilities	Great youth facilities
Youth Level	1
Stadium Sponsor	3-year stadium sponsorship deal at £3.33M per season. Ends 2018
Planned Move	Due to move into the 54000 capacity Olympic Stadium on 1/7/2016
Youth Stadium	Little Heath Sports Ground, Romford
Training Ground	Little Heath Sports Ground, Romford
Junior Coaching	Average junior coaching
Youth Recruitment	Established youth recruitment

I'll mention a few things here in terms of how to gauge your level of facilities and what they affect.

Youth Recruitment

Affects how wide you cast your net when looking for new talent, and the potential ability of youngsters. It's also modified by your club's reputation, so you could have the best facilities in the world but if your reputation is very low you'll be unlikely to attract top talent. TL;DR - it affects PA.

On a scale of 1-20:

1-2 Limited
3-5 Basic
6-8 Fairly Basic
9-11 Average
13-14 Above Average
15-16 Established
17-18 Well Established
19-20 Extensive

Junior Coaching

This relates to the quality of coaches at your club at a junior level. We all have our U18s / U19s Youth squads and coaches we recruit individually. However imagine there are lower levels of youth teams below what we see (eg., U12s, U15s and so on) - that is what this area relates to: the quality of those coaches. In game terms then, it impacts upon the ability of Youth Candidates. TL;DR - it affects CA.

On a scale of 1-20:

1-2 Minimal
3-5 Basic
6-9 Adequate
10-13 Average
14-16 Good
17-19 Excellent
20 Exceptional

Youth Facilities

As you may expect, these facilities are your Youth Team(s) training facilities. As such, this has a direct impact on the rate of development of your young players. As mentioned above, these facilities will be used by at least your youngest squad (eg., U18s) and, depending on the league/country you are managing in, may be shared with your second youngest squad (eg., U20s).

On a scale of 1-20:

1-3 Basic
4-5 Poor
6-7 Below Average
8-9 Adequate
10-11 Average
12-13 Good
14-15 Great
16-17 Superb
18-19 Excellent
20 Top

Training Facilities

Your Senior Squad training facilities. Has a direct impact on the rate of development of your senior players. These facilities will be used by at least your Senior squad and, depending on the league/country you are managing in, may be shared with your second youngest (or "Reserve") squad (eg., U21s).

On a scale of 1-20:

1-3 Poor
4-5 Basic
6-7 Below Average
8-9 Adequate
10-11 Average
12-13 Good
14-15 Great
16-17 Superb
18-19 Excellent
20 Top

(The same scale as Youth Facilities, except the wording for the first two categories are switched. Go figure).

Youth Intake

West Ham United Youth Candidates

Squad · Tactics · Training · Report · Match · Past Meetings · Staff

PLAYERS · Main Squad View 2 · Quick Pick

GK · DR · DCR · DCL · DL · MCR · MCL · AMR · AMC · AML · STC · S1 · S2 · S3 · S4 · S5 · S6 · S7 · S8 · S9 · S10 · S11 · S12

PKD	INF	NAME	NAT	AGE	NO.	POSITION	SQUAD STATUS	WAGE	EXPIRES	VALUE	MORALE	PERSONALITY	DET	ABILITY	POTENTIAL	APPS	AV RAT	HOME-GROWN STATUS
-	FrA	George Wood	ENG	16	-	M/AM (RL)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Good	Professional	16	★☆☆☆☆	★★★½☆	-	-	Trained at club (0-21)
-	FrA	Paul Foley	ENG	16	-	DM, M (C)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Very Good	Spirited	15	★☆☆☆☆	★★★☆☆	-	-	Trained at club (0-21)
-	FrA	Tommy Cummins	ENG	16	-	M/AM (R)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Fairly Poor	Fairly Determin...	17	★☆☆☆☆	★★½☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	FrA	Cristián Mansilla	ENG	16	-	D (RC)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Fairly Good	Fairly Ambitious	12	★☆☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	FrA	Kyle Stephens	WAL	16	-	D/WB (R)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Okay	Spirited	12	★☆☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (15-21)
-	FrA	Sizwe Mthembu	ENG	16	-	D/WB (L)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Okay	Fairly Sporting	3	★☆☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	FrA	Darryl Draper	ENG	16	-	AM (RL)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Fairly Good	Sporting	8	★☆☆☆☆	★½☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	FrA	Chijioke Udo	ENG	16	-	AM (RL)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Okay	Balanced	9	★☆☆☆☆	★½☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	FrA	Ryan Fraser	ENG	16	-	AM (LC), ST (C)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Fairly Poor	Professional	15	★☆☆☆☆	★½☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	FrA	Chris Chalk	ENG	16	-	ST (C)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Fairly Poor	Balanced	13	★☆☆☆☆	★½☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	FrA	Adam Taylor	ENG	16	-	D (C)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Okay	Fairly Ambitious	11	★☆☆☆☆	★½☆☆☆	-	-	Trained at club (0-21)
-	FrA	Benjamin Ayenew	ENG	16	-	M (C)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Okay	Balanced	4	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-	FrA	Ray Robinson	ENG	16	-	GK	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Okay	Balanced	9	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆	-	-	Trained at club (0-21)
-	FrA	Jack Melham	ENG	16	-	AM (L)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Fairly Good	Balanced	4	★☆☆☆☆	½☆☆☆☆	-	-	Trained at club (0-21)
-	FrA	Justin Wilkinson	AUS	16	-	M (C)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Okay	Ambitious	7	★☆☆☆☆	½☆☆☆☆	-	-	-
-	FrA	Kyle Worthington	ENG	16	-	D (L)	-	N/A	17/4/2016	£0	Fairly Poor	Balanced	9	★☆☆☆☆	½☆☆☆☆	-	-	Trained in nation (0-21)
-		Joleon Bird	ENG	18	-	GK	-	-	-	£0	Okay		7	Unknown	Unknown	-	-	Trained at club (15-21)

I've sorted my intake by "Potential". However, this has to be taken with a big pinch of salt. Potential is reliant on two things:

1) The ability of your Assistant Manager to be able to judge ability. My AM isn't very good at that.

2) Accuracy of comparing against the rest of my squad. This "potential" isn't a star rating of the fabled "Potential Ability" that all players are limited to (up to a maximum of 200 - ie., Messi). It is merely a comparison of potential - judged by your Assistant Manager - to the rest of your squad. So these potential star ratings can (and will) change as we both improve the quality of your staff and our senior playing squad.

For example, and assuming we have an AM who is capable of making judgements, if you have a newgen with a PA of 150, and the rest of your squad that plays in a similar position have a max PA of 140, you'll probably see a 5 star rating. But after two years and lots of senior squad transfers which now gets youup to around 180 PA, the potential star rating for that 150 PA newgen will have dropped dramatically down to 3? 2? stars. This can also explain why after a few years people start to believe the quality of their newgens drops, even though they've improved their facilities. Newgen quality doesn't drop (although it can be pretty random), it's the quality of your squad that has improved. Anyway, back to my intake. Because I'm concerned about the quality of my AM's assessment, I'm going to sign everyone with a star rating of 2.5 and above (everyone down to and including Adam Taylor). This will give me a good opportunity to assess players myself, and see how they train over the next few months. It'll also pad out my U18s team which is looking a little thread bare.

Making Informed Decisions

Buying a new player is a big undertaking. It doesn't matter if you are managing a non-league club or one of the global elite - make the wrong choice and it can cost you your job. So how can we do everything we can to make sure we get it right? To understand that, I'll first mention the infamous CA and PA (Current Ability and Potential Ability).

CA and PA

CA and PA are hidden numbers, so unless you have some form of Editor program you won't see them. However many people can get quite caught up in worrying about how much CA is going to be used up, or what a player's PA is to determine how much they may develop. So what are CA and PA?

PA = a hard cap number beyond which a player cannot develop. It's there to basically stop players exponentially developing and everybody ending up with each attribute maxed out to 20.

CA = an aggregate score of a player's attributes. CA cannot exceed the PA cap. It's simply a way of the game being able to tell your coaches or scouts (and thus you) whether a player is able to develop further.

So as a player develops, their CA increases up to a possible maximum of whatever their PA is. Which is why people worry and ask questions about developing players so that they don't use up CA. So whilst they may not be able to see the CA/PA of a player, they know this basic principle and want to avoid "wasting" CA, which is understandable. Also remember this is nothing to do with star ratings for ability and potential. Star ratings are a comparison between players at your club and how they measure up to each other.

However, this line of thought that focuses so much on CA/PA is ***wrong***. Even forgetting CA/PA for a moment and just thinking instead about developing your player's visible attributes on their profile page is also ***wrong***. What if I told you that a player with lower attributes (and therefore lower CA) can perform better for you and your club than someone with higher attributes and CA? I must be mad right?

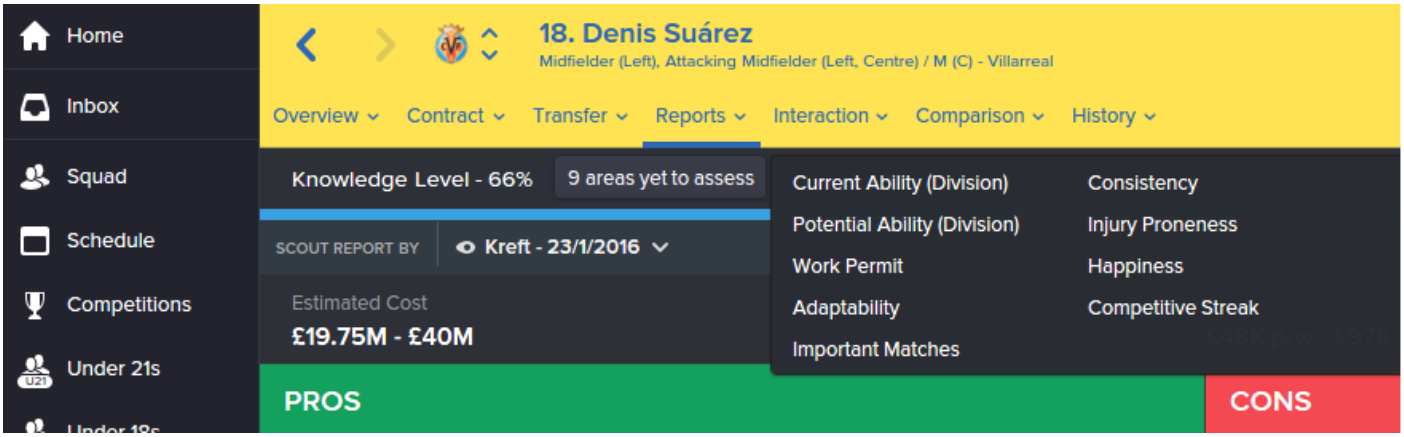
Hidden Attributes

Again, unless you have an editor program, you can't see these - but they are extremely important and should not be overlooked. They govern your player's personalities and behavior. You might remember how I cancelled the loan of Alex Song. Not because of the cost (although that was significant), but because of his hidden attributes - or rather one in particular. On paper, Song was my best player at the club. Great attributes and (probably) the highest "CA". But he kept picking up yellow and red cards. He even had two matches where in one he got a straight red inside 90 seconds of kick off, and in another a straight red within 5 minutes of kick off.

What's the point in having all that lovely "CA", and all of those great looking attributes, if he's sitting in the stands for half the season? This is what I mean when I say players with lower attributes can perform better for you. I'd rather have a player with lower attributes that will actually play regularly for me. So how to apply that to helping us make informed decisions about which player(s) to buy? These are "hidden" attributes after all. Well actually, they're not quite as hidden as you may think.

Proper Scouting

If you are interested in a player, don't just scout him once. This is why:



I've had an initial scout of Denis Suarez, and my knowledge level is only 66%. There are still 9 areas to scout, and 5 of them are *hidden attributes*:

- Adaptability: how well a player will settle into a new country;
- Important Matches: how well he'll handle the pressure of those big games;
- Consistency: will he perform well for you week in week out;
- Injury Proneness: will he miss half the season because he keeps picking up knocks?;
- Competitive Streak: is there a chance he'll pick up a lot of bookings?

Always get your prime transfer targets 100% scouted and always read these scout reports. (Right click a player's name, select scouting, get him scouted for at least two weeks). Don't just look at somebody's attributes on their profile, think they look decent and buy them. His attributes could be as good as Messi's, but if he's always injured, won't like living in your country, and when he does play he either gets sent off or he's forgotten how to kick a ball, you're wasting your money.

Applying this to West Ham

I need a new right winger (amongst others). Sam Byram played really well for me there last season, but he doesn't really match up to my DNA and Man City came in with a big offer for him. My rotation option (Antonio) is just that - a rotation option. So I'm looking for targets - take a look at these two player attribute profiles (no names!):

(Note - both players are too old to be tutored).

POSITIONS > Highlight

Attacking Midfielder (Right)

ROLE AND DUTY

Winger	Support
Inside Forward	Support
Advanced Playmaker	Support
Raumdeuter	Attack
Wide Target Man	Support

TECHNICAL		MENTAL		PHYSICAL	
Corners	15	Aggression	13	Acceleration	17
Crossing	16	Anticipation	12	Agility	16
Dribbling	18	Bravery	11	Balance	14
Finishing	10	Composure	12	Jumping Reach	7
First Touch	15	Concentration	13	Natural Fitness	13
Free Kick Taking	12	Decisions	14	Pace	15
Heading	5	Determination	10	Stamina	14
Long Shots	12	Flair	18	Strength	12
Long Throws	8	Leadership	4	Height	176 cm
Marking	2	Off The Ball	13	Weight	70 kg
Passing	13	Positioning	7		
Penalty Taking	9	Teamwork	12		
Tackling	6	Vision	13		
Technique	17	Work Rate	13		

POSITIONS > Highlight

Midfielder (Right)

ROLE AND DUTY

Winger	Support
Defensive Winger	Defend
Wide Midfielder	Defend
Wide Playmaker	Support

TECHNICAL		MENTAL		PHYSICAL	
Corners	12	Aggression	17	Acceleration	14
Crossing	13	Anticipation	14	Agility	14
Dribbling	12	Bravery	10	Balance	9
Finishing	10	Composure	13	Jumping Reach	8
First Touch	14	Concentration	12	Natural Fitness	13
Free Kick Taking	11	Decisions	14	Pace	17
Heading	5	Determination	16	Stamina	15
Long Shots	8	Flair	12	Strength	9
Long Throws	15	Leadership	9	Height	176 cm
Marking	7	Off The Ball	16	Weight	65 kg
Passing	12	Positioning	9		
Penalty Taking	11	Teamwork	15		
Tackling	8	Vision	13		
Technique	13	Work Rate	17		

Both decent looking players on paper, and match up well to my DNA. Going purely by these attributes alone (which many people do) I'd probably favor the first player as he has better crossing and dribbling skills for a winger. And I'd be making a big mistake. Look at these scout reports once both players are scouted to 100% knowledge (in the same order):

Hands up who'd still buy the first player? He's unprofessional (so won't train well); he's inconsistent; his "competitive streak" will lead to bookings (or worse); and even though the report says it's a "Pro", he only has a Balanced personality. The likelihood of him regularly playing anywhere near his ability is pretty slim.

On the other hand, all that contestant number two needs to do is learn how to speak English, which won't be a problem anyway. He'd also be a great Tutor for my Youngsters.

Hopefully you can see why it's so important to get your scouting done right. Remember, if you buy a team full of duds and they don't perform well, it won't be them that'll be sacked .

Second Season - July 2016

Having qualified for the Champions' League, not only do I need to continue developing my squad along my Club DNA lines, I have to try to get them ready for top European competition. Outstanding issues I'll be covering here:

- Role & Position DNA;
- Transfer dealings;
- Staff changes;
- Joe Powell update;
- Future tactical developments.

Positional DNA

I'll cover this first as it leads into my Transfer dealings. Any attributes I mention here for Role & Position DNA are over and above Club DNA. Club DNA is the common theme running through all of my players, whereas Role & Position DNA is specific in relation to the player's role.

Note - the attributes I mention here are only what I value for this particular save and for what I want from my players. In different saves I could quite easily look at different DNA (both Club and Role DNA), so don't read any of this as what will always be useful.

Club DNA - Aggression; Work Rate; Stamina; Decisions; First Touch.

NOTE - Club DNA only covers 5 attributes. However, I also value a highly professional and determined squad, to encourage better training and match performance. I should perhaps update the Club DNA section to reflect this.

1) Goalkeeper - One v Ones; Reflexes; Handling. Decisions and (to a lesser extent) First Touch are the only Club DNA I pay attention to.

2) Fullbacks / Wingbacks (support) - Pace; Passing; Teamwork, Tackling.

3) Fullbacks / Wingbacks (attack) - Crossing; Off the Ball; Pace; Decisions.

4) Central Defenders - Pace, Anticipation, Positioning, Tackling, Marking, Strength. Bravery should also be high so that the defender won't shy away from challenges. I also want at least one central defender with decent Passing ability and (ideally) Vision in case I choose to play with a Ball Playing Defender at some point.

5) Anchor Man / CM(D) - Marking, Tackling, Positioning, Strength, Bravery.

6) AP(S) - Passing; Vision; Team Work; Composure. I also require this player to be able to play as an industrious all-round midfielder so Club DNA is extremely important to me here. Think Box to Box Midfielder / Advanced Playmaker rolled into one (not a Roaming Playmaker).

7) CM(A) / AM(S) - Flair; Passing; Vision; Off the Ball; Composure; Technique.

8) Raumdeuter - Finishing; Composure; Anticipation; Off the Ball; Technique. This player will also play as an Inside Forward, so Dribbling ability is required.

9) Winger (Support) / WM(S) - Team Work; Passing; Technique; Off the Ball; Crossing. Dribbling will also be useful if I persist with the "Winger" role, however future tactical developments may see me use a WM(S) instead.

10) Striker - Off the Ball, Anticipation, Composure, Passing, Dribbling, Finishing. I want well-rounded strikers, not just a False 9 so that I can change roles if needed.

Transfers

Transfers Out:

PERSON	TO	FEE
Dimitri Payet	Man Utd	£35M
Andy Carroll	Leicester	£17.5M
Doneil Henry	AS Saint-Etienne	Loan
Stephen Hendrie	Hamilton	Loan
Sam Byram	Man City	£19.75M
Sam Westley	Free Transfer	Free
Amos Nasha	Free Transfer	Free
Josh Cullen	Free Transfer	Free
Moses Makasi	Free Transfer	Free
Nathan Mavila	Free Transfer	Free
Lewis Page	Free Transfer	Free
Leo Chambers	Free Transfer	Free
Elliot Lee	Free Transfer	Free
Raphael Spiegel	Free Transfer	Free
Adrián	Roma	£5M

Dmitri Payet was disappointing for me last season, probably because the roles and positions I've chosen don't really suit him. On the odd occasion I used a Trequartista at AMC he shone, and he did ok as an Inside Forward, but he doesn't fit into my DNA requirements either. Man Utd came in with a decent offer for him, which I negotiated up to £40m including add ons. He was valued at £27.5m so decent enough.

Andy Carroll fits neither my chosen style of play nor my role requirements. He is also difficult to manage (he spent half the season upset with me because I sold Winston Reid and didn't consider my signings good enough) and is injury prone. I transfer listed him to drum up business with a value above what the game was applying (£20m vs £15m) and Leicester, who qualified for the Europa League, are welcome to him.

Sam Byram performed really well for me last season as a Winger (AMR), and I'm sorry to see him go. However his Aggression isn't up to standard, and he asked to leave once Man City came in for him with a low bid that unsettled him. I negotiated City up to about £20m with add ons, which isn't at all bad for someone valued at just £7.5m.

Adrian I fully expected to become more difficult to manage with the arrival of Rulli, as he'd expect plenty of game time. He'd never be happy as a back up 'keeper, so he was transfer listed and sold to Roma. £5m is probably on the low side, but Roma aren't overly rich and nobody else was interested. I took what I could, happy that I have avoided a management issue.

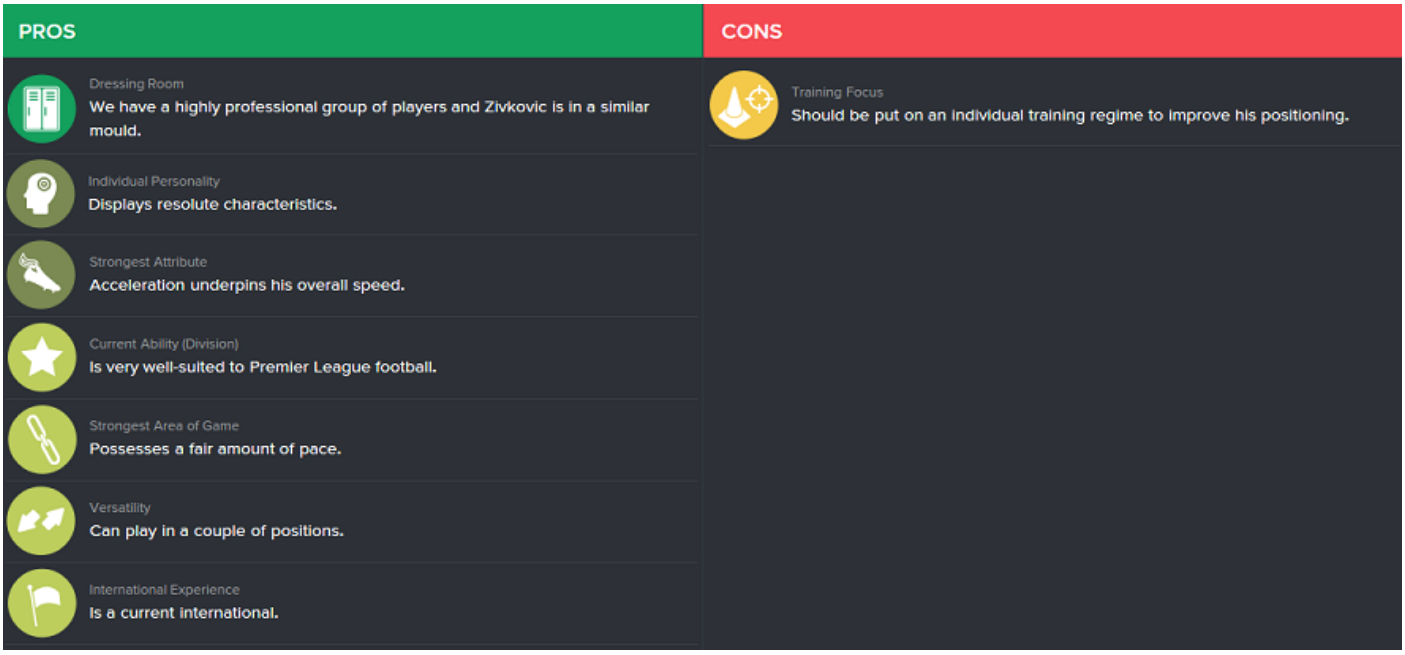
I wanted to sell *Stephen Hendrie*, as I don't rate his potential, but only loan offers materialised following his transfer listing. Perhaps he'll come back worth more at the end of the season and I'll sell him for more then 😜.

Transfers In:

PERSON	FROM	FEE
Rico Henry	Walsall	£2M
Andrija Zivkovic	Partizan	Free
Gerónimo Rulli	R. Sociedad	Free
Vincent Aboubakar	F.C. Porto	£12.5M
Julian Brandt	Leverkusen	£10M
Petar Stojanovic	Dinamo	£9.5M

Rico Henry is a great prospect for left back. I'll keep him in the senior squad where he'll get the odd game, although he'll mainly play in the Reserves for now. Needs Tutoring, great potential and adds to my Home Grown requirements. Bought him for £2m and he's already valued at £3m. He'll develop into my DNA.

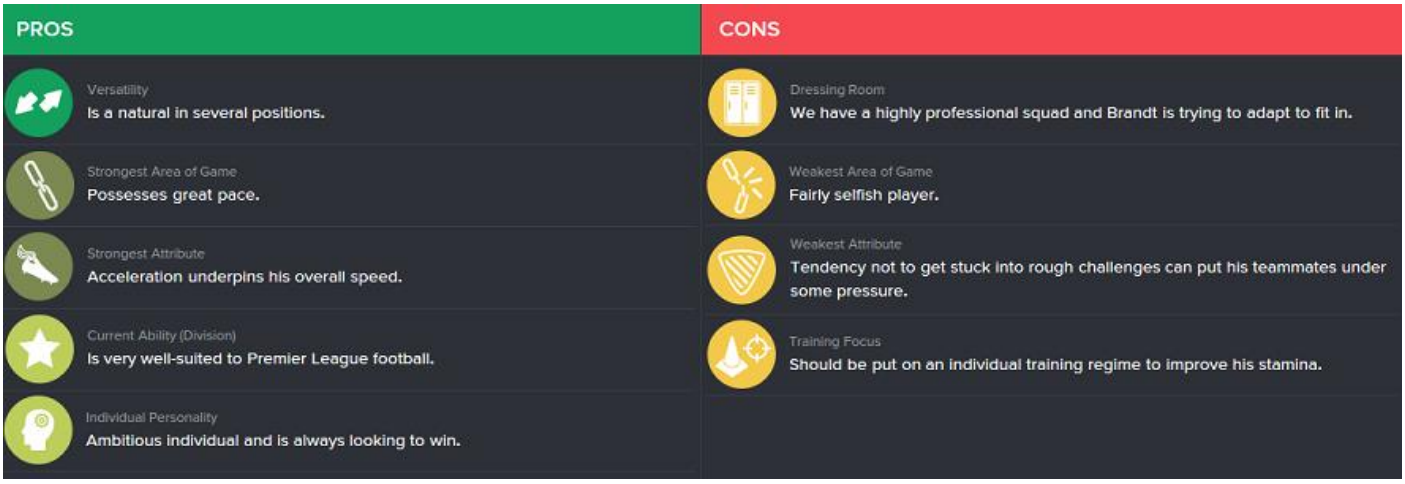
Andrija Zivkovic will slot straight into the first team as my replacement for Lanzini. Superstar in the making and can play in a variety of positions and roles. An absolute bargain of a free signing and £12.5k a week is nothing. He doesn't need Tutoring and fully matches up to my DNA needs.



Rulli I've already detailed above.

Vincent Aboubakar is someone I've long admired in the game, but never had at my club. My original intention here was to bring in a hot prospect young player who already has decent attributes as backup to Klaassen, but either clubs wanted huge transfer fees or players would fail work permits. My only "Key Player" by squad status (Payet) had left, so I decided to splash out for a marquee signing. This may give me management issues down the road with Klaassen and game time, but so long as I am aware of that possibility and am prepared to deal with it (one way or another), I'll manage that down the road. Aboubakar wasn't cheap (£15m to Porto plus the same again to buy out the third party ownership) and at £90k a week stays just within my wage structure. He can also be used as a Tutor straight away, and play a number of different striker roles.

Julian Brandt is a little bit of a punt. I was in need of a couple of wide men and he was transfer listed by Leverkusen for £15m (I paid £10m up front + £5m over 12 months). He needs a lot of work, but has bags of potential. His personality is letting him down a bit so needs immediate Tutoring (Aboubakar ftw) but if we can get over that hurdle he'll develop into a world class IF / Raumdeuter. I also like his PPMs.



And finally, my right wing solution, ***Petar Stojanovic***. (And no he isn't one of the two nameless wingers I detailed in post #136, when looking at scout reports). Another raw talent that I'll need to shape, but his starting attributes are already well developed and a good match up to DNA requirements. He needs Tutoring, but will slot straight into the first team. You'll probably notice he's actually a natural fullback, but I'll be playing him at MR / AMR as a Winger or Wide Midfielder. Fullbacks can make great wingers.

Hopefully you can see that I've primarily targeted younger players who can slot straight into the first team; are DNA inclusive; can be tutored (if needed); and fit well within my wage structure. With luck I can enhance my club's reputation over the next couple of seasons sufficiently to be able to fend off attraction from other clubs, but even if their heads do get turned, I should be able to realise a healthy profit.

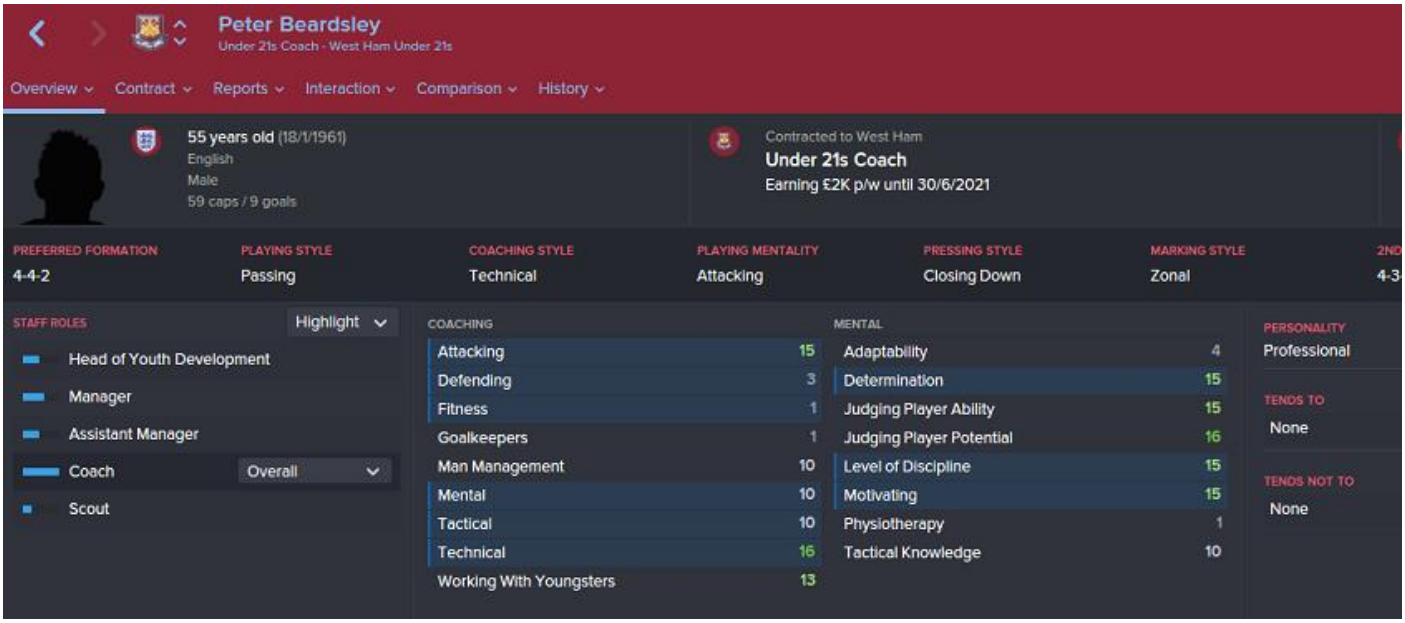
Staff Changes

I've brought in a few new faces so that all coaching areas for all squads are now covered by at least 4 star coaches, which is fine. I'll be adding a few more scouts soon as well as apparently I am now allowed up to 20(!).

I'll only mention 2 staff signings for now, as one is very important while the other shows a little creativity:

New Assistant Manager - Giuseppe Baresi. I had to change my AM as he just wasn't up to scratch. Baresi has everything I look for in an AM - great coaching skills, good judgement of ability & potential and a fantastic personality.

I was in need of an Attacking Coach for both my U18s and my Senior Squad. I had originally planned to sign ***Peter Beardsley*** for my Seniors, but when I started negotiating with him, his initial offer was for U21s coach. As my U21s staff will coach both my seniors and U18s (and U21s of course), I signed him as an U21s coach, thus saving me the bother of finding 2 new coaches. Two coaches for the price of one ☺. A great personality as well.



Joe Powell

Joe is coming along ok. His second bout of Tutoring is finally paying off and he's developed a Professional personality.

He's stil developing a bit slowly for my liking, but he's spent most of the first year with low professionalism, being coached in decent (but not great) facilities by decent (but not great) coaches and without any first team experience.

He now has high professionalism, facilities are being improved, better coaches have been employed and I plan to give him a few games in the senior team this season. I'm hoping his development will start to take off, although his Aggression remains stubbornly low - and I'm concerned it won't see sufficient improvement to my standards. We'll see.

Future Tactical Development

I've started thinking about how I can evolve my tactical style now that I am improving my squad.

Here's the thing - I don't like the 4-2-3-1 formation. There's nothing wrong with it, and it's giving me decent results when I use it, I'm just not a fan of that particular chalkboard formation. Personal preference, that's all.

I like the 4-1-2-3DM, so I'm thinking about changing the 4-2-3-1. If/when I do, it won't be to anything radically different, perhaps a simple change to a 4-4-1-1 which is essentially still a 4-2-3-1 with the two wingers slightly repositioned. Tactical settings will be changed as well - my wife likes Borussia Dortmund (as do I) so I quite like the idea of not exactly recreating their style, but at least taking some inspiration from it.

I don't have anything to show just yet, but will update when I'm happy with it.

Really Back to Basics

Haven't updated for a little while (sorry!), so lots to get through.

Joe Powell

As a reminder, here's Joe at the start of the game:

And here he is after two full seasons of development and tutoring:

Coming along pretty nicely, and he made his first team debut last season. However, Aggression hasn't budged an inch and I'm not convinced it'll ever move sufficiently. I'll keep plugging away with him, giving him some first team matches and U21 matches when he isn't involved with the first team, so we'll see.

You'll also notice some PPMs. I'll cover this for all positions next, as PPMs are now forming a very important part of where I am heading tactically (which I'll cover after PPMs).

Player Preferred Moves (PPMs)

PPMs are player traits or "tendencies". They are not a stone cold guarantee of how a player will always behave, but rather how a player may decide to act given a certain set of circumstances. So for example, a player with the PPM "Cuts Inside" may decide to make that move slightly more frequently than a similar player who doesn't have that PPM. Equally, setting a role with a similar set PI (such as an Inside Forward) that instructs the player to "Cut Inside", the player with the PPM may again make that move on a more regular basis than the player without the PPM.

PPMs can therefore be quite a powerful tool in a player's armoury. However PPMs, especially when combined with both your team tactical settings and your set player roles, duties and PIs, can lead to unwanted player actions. The Inside Forward above is probably ok to have the PPM as that's what you want an IF to be doing, especially if you have taken the time to set the rest of your team up to give him the space to exploit.

But how about (for example) a Fullback (or Wingback) with the PPM "Gets Forward Whenever Possible" in combination with a high risk mentality, an attack duty and the default set PI of "Get Further Forward"? That's going to give you a *very* forward thinking fullback which could leave your flank dangerously exposed, especially to quick counter attacks (which the AI can be very good at).

When setting up a tactical system, it's very important to read through and understand these player traits and default set PIs for positional roles / duties, and how they'll combine with your other tactical settings.

Now, before I get onto the PPMs I've chosen for my players, it's important to understand where I am headed with my tactical system. In a nutshell, and as an experiment, I've decided to ditch (as far as possible) tactical settings and rely instead on my players' own intelligence to decide when to do things. I'll go into this in detail below, but essentially I'm looking to set up my team with neutral tactical settings and so let my players take the lead in deciding how to play without me telling them what to do.

Obviously I have to pick mentality, team shape, roles and duties, but that's pretty much all I'm doing - and keeping those settings I have to pick as neutral as possible. To my mind, I've spent an awful lot of time, effort and (virtual) money developing my squad into my chosen DNA, so lets see how that DNA can perform.

As I said, it's an experiment. I've never played this way before, so I'm interested to see how it goes (I started towards the end of the second season).

Anyway, PPMs:

Goalkeeper - Very limited options here, and not something I've yet bothered with. There is one interesting PPM - "Uses Long Throw to Start Counter Attacks" which I'll start Rulli training on once he's finished his current Tutoring session (you can't tutor and learn a PPM at the same time). Interestingly I can only find one other Goalie in my database with this PPM, which is Manuel Neuer. So if it's good enough for him...

Note - always make sure the player you train a PPM into actually has relevant attributes in order to successfully use the PPM. It's pretty pointless asking some to "Dribble More" (for example) if their Dribbling attribute is poor or (as in this PPM) my GK has low Throwing ability (Rulli has 15 so he's fine).

Central Defenders - Nothing. All I want from my CDs are to do a basic job and not just hoof the ball long all the time. If I wanted one to try some longer passes, I could set him as a Ball Playing Defender or, perhaps use the PPM to Try Long Range Passes which is actually an interesting thought as one of my players (Mammana) is capable of this. Perhaps one for the future. IN terms of defensive PPMs such as Mark Tighter or Tackle harder, I 'd rather my player decides when to do this rather than me telling him to.

Fullbacks - I'm using the generic term here to cover any player in the "fullback" position, not just the role. "Gets Forward Whenever Possible" is the PPM I want here, as I may not use a role with that trait as a set PI. To illustrate - the Wingback (support) role/duty does have that as a set PI, whereas the Fullback (support) role does not.

Defending Midfielder - This is a midfield destroyer, not a playmaker. I prioritise defensive attributes here so the PPM "Plays Short Simple Passes" ties in nicely. ie., I want him to win the ball and lay it off to someone close by. His attributes will take care of his defensive work, so no need to overload him with more defensive PPMs.

Supporting Midfielder - I want this player fulfilling multiple roles. At times he'll be a playmaker, other times he'll get forward to support the attack, others he'll be back helping out with defensive duties. So I'm not going to give him a PPM to help him get forward more often as he needs to balance defending, supporting and attacking. But I will give him some traits to help with his playmaking "role". I could simply define him as a Playmaker (perhaps a DLP) but this goes against my neutral role selection. "Dictates Tempo", "Comes Deep to Get Ball", "Looks for Pass Rather than Attempting to Score" can all be useful here.

Attacking Midfielder - This player needs to get forward to directly influence the attack, both in terms of a goal threat and as a technical passer. Zivkovic is my main man here, so I'll just link his current PPMs:

6 is quite a lot, and he came with 4 when I signed him. I've added "Gets Forward" and "Plays One-Twos". "Cuts Inside" is now largely irrelevant as I don't play him on the wing.

That leaves three positions to account for (AML/R and Striker) which is where things get a little more complex, as none of those positions come with "neutral" player roles. All roles have several default PIs, so I either need to move players back to the ML/R positions (which I don't want to do) to take advantage of the neutral Wide Midfielder role, or carefully balance role selection with PPMs.

Thus:

AML: Inside Forward / Raumdeuter - Very different roles and I want my player here (Julian Brandt) to be able to play both. Brandt arrived with Cuts Inside and Plays One-Twos which is fine. Adding in additional PPMs such as Dribble More or Move Into Channels may cause conflicting traits in either role, so default PIs can take the lead.

AMR: Winger - Again, default PIs can take the lead and no need for additional PPMs. "Switch Ball to Opposite Flank" could be an interesting one.

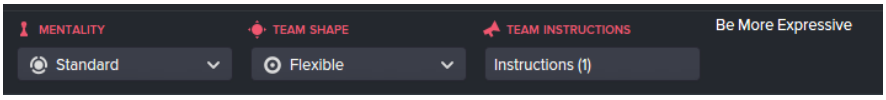
Striker - "Moves Into Channels" is good to help create space. "Plays One-Twos" can also help the interaction with the AML and Attacking Midfielder. Again, there is no "neutral" role for this position, so everything needs to be carefully balanced with the defined role.

Tactical System - Really Back to Basics

I'm using a play on the thread title here just to show what I'm up to. As I said above, this is something I am experimenting with (so far successfully) to see how far I can push my Club (and Positional) DNA.

This is where I'm currently at:

As far as possible, I've aimed for "neutral" tactical settings and so rely on (or put more emphasis on) my player's own intelligence to decide when to do things. This is why I say I'm *really* back to basics as I'm trying to use as few tactical settings as possible.

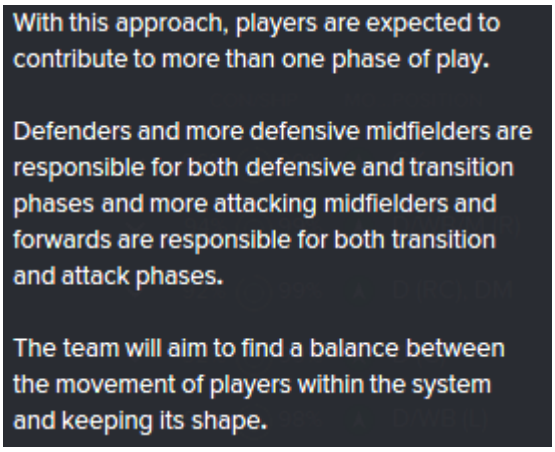


So:

Standard Mentality - "Carefully balances risk and reward". Good, I'm not forcing my players to make risky decisions. They can decide for themselves if they want to make fast or slow passes, or press more, or spread the play wider etc rather than me telling them to. Of course as Manager I can always influence this if I feel I need to as matches unfold, but that's an exception, not the rule. All I'll do is manage the risk during matches.

Flexible Team Shape -

"The team will aim to find a balance" pretty much says it all for what I am trying to achieve.



Team Instructions **-** Just the one: "Be More Expressive". This is my "pizazz" as I put it earlier. Helps my players use their intelligence and adds some creative freedom.

Player Roles and Duties

Remember to read these in conjunction with PPMs.

GK / Central Defenders - Not much to say.

Fullback (support) - If i notice my crossing is particularly poor, I'll tell these players to cross less.

Defensive Midfielder (defend) - Nothing fancy, just provides a shield in front of the defence and Aggression helps close down the opposition.

Central Midfielder (support) - No set PIs for this position, so total reliance on player intelligence and PPMs. I could have used a playmaker role here, but that would force players to look to pass to him and that isn't what I'm after here. So with his PPMs and attributes, he becomes a pseudo-playmaker as well as helping out defensively and offensively. A real jack of all trades.

Central Midfielder (attack) - A creative goal threat and runner from deep. Placed on the same side as the Winger (support) to take advantage of the stretched play (and thus space) created by the Winger when in possession.

Winger (support) - Stretches play on his side of the pitch and provides a different attacking option.

Inside Forward (support) / Raumdeuter - Both roles work well and offer different options. The IF role tends to be my starting option, but I'll change this if I think I need either a more potent goal threat and/or dribbling isn't working.

Complete Forward (support) - Again a kind of jack of all trades role. He'll drop deep, run with the ball, hold the ball up, make passes and of course score.

That's it. I'm pleased with how this has been playing (I'm current European and Premier League champion) and just beat Barcelona 3-1 in the Super Cup. The only tactical tweaks I make during matches tend to be the occasional mentality change to manage risk, the odd defensive line move or the IF to Raumdeuter switch. Oh and Cresswell at left back doesn't have the PPM to get forward often, so when I play him I change to the wingback (support) role to take advantage of the similar set PI.