

Open or crowded forward line?

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a) Traditionally, open forward lines create high scoring and crowded forward lines reduce scoring opportunities. Open forward lines create time and space for individually talented forwards.

b) Problems with an open forward line

i) If the forward set-up is aimed at feeding only one or two forwards with the ball and these players are high conversion rate, their efforts will not be good enough for the team to kick a winning score on a regular basis. Often teams who do not make the finals have one forward for whom they create space. Even though the key forward kicks big individual scores, this still does not result in a team score large enough over the season to enable the club to make the finals.

ii) If the team can reach the finals, the opposition concentrate on limiting this forward's effectiveness, knowing that most attacks come towards him.

c) Why can a crowded forward line be successful?

i) An open forward line usually implies that many players position themselves out wide in order to create space for key forwards to lead into. Therefore, a typical forward move would see only one or two forwards initially involved at the fall of the ball.

ii) However, in most circumstances forwards are outnumbered by back men, ruckmen and rovers dropping back into defence.

iii) This contradicts the accepted theory in football that a team should equal or outnumber the opposition at the fall of the ball at any position on the ground - including the forward line.

iv) Even in a one on one situation the game favours back men. Defenders have the advantage of normally facing the way they wish to run, i.e. unlike forwards they do not have to turn. Back men have many options of where to dispose of the ball -they have the whole ground in front of them and even a simple push of the ball over the boundary line may be excellent play. On the other hand, a forward not only has to turn, but has only a narrow range of options, usually to put the ball through 6.4 metres of goal space.

d) An example of a crowded forward line working successfully:

i) In 2000 Essendon was the highest scoring team in the AFL in kicking 503 goals.

ii) Essendon usually played man on man all over the ground and if the opposition positioned extra players in defence, their Essendon opponents would follow them. This meant that Essendon now had additional forwards -often another two or three.

iii) By equalling or outnumbering the opposition defenders Essendon was able to hold the ball in the forward line longer and there were more players available to kick goals.

iv) This style is best suited to a team which has a number of fast, tough players who can gain ground possessions under pressure and then kick snap goals. Essendon had ten forwards who kicked twenty goals or more for the 1989 season. Why? Because they had numbers at the fall of the ball who were good enough to kick many goals. (Essendon had nine players who scored twenty goals and over.)

e) An example of a successful open forward line

i) The Kangaroos were Premiers in 1999 using an open forward line.

ii) The Kangaroos tend to make most of their forward thrusts through their champion centre half-forward Wayne Carey for whom they create a great deal of space into which he can lead. The Kangaroos were first on the points for list with 2463.

iii) Dunstall kicked 76 goals for the 1999 season and only seven other Roos players kicked over twenty goals.

iv) The Roos system works because Carey gains many possessions, kicks a large number of goals himself and assists team mates to score goals as well.

v) In 1990 the Premiers, Collingwood created space for Peter Daicos and Gavin Grown who could both beat most opponents. Daicos kicked 97 goals and Brown scored 49 goals.

N.B. Both an open and a crowded forward line can be successful!