

Pick your best formation on which to build a fabulous faith XI

FAITH IN SPORT

Fr Vladimir Felzmann

Great football managers have, in spades, initiative: the ability to assess and initiate things independently. They do not fear failure. They know that failures can be very effective teachers.

If we are to fulfil our God-given vocation, we Christians need initiative. As captain of our boat, we need to dare to be different and follow our own path through life. Occasionally, good can come out of evil. Thanks to their Covid experience, many on my Christmas card list admit that their lockdowns gave them time to recalibrate their aims in life, changing their priorities.

A global opinion poll for the BBC in 2013 and 2014 saw the UK ranked the third most positively viewed nation in the world (behind Germany and Canada). However, with its secular, materialistic and self-centred culture, our initiative is a *sine-qua-non* virtue for Catholic Christians who want, and need, to fulfil their vocation and find meaning in life.

As a starter for eleven – with Jesus Christ as manager – how about having a formation with prayer up front, friends on the wings, Mass and Holy Communion midfield, the Gospels at the back and, to stop sins losing you the match of life, confession/reconciliation in goal.

Preoccupation with material objects, comforts, and considerations, as opposed to spiritual or intellectual values, blunts focus on what really matters if we are to become *Capax Dei* – capable of life with God – by the time we die and are born into divine eternity.

Of course, for life on earth, material things are essential. However, they need to be seen as a means and not as the top priority in life.

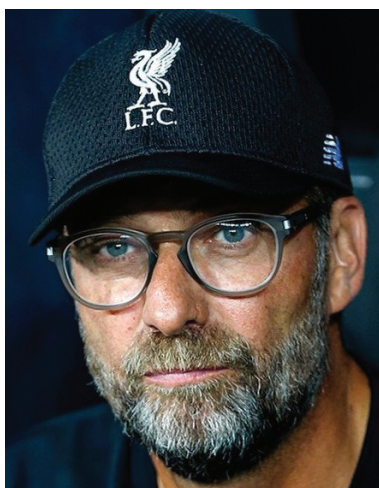
Pep Guardiola, of Manchester City, prefers his team to defend with a 4-1-4-1 defensive block that becomes a 4-4-2 when they are defending for lengthy periods. That 4-4-2 can evolve into a 4-2-4 when Raheem Sterling and Mahrez or Silva break forwards to attack.

The favorite formation used by Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp – widely regarded as currently one of the best managers in the world – is 4-3-3.

Mikel Arteta of Arsenal, after switching from a lacklustre 3-4-2-1 to a more dynamic 4-2-3-1 formation, found his form with Arsenal just before the start of December last year. This formation has remained the Spaniard's system



Football in the shadow of St Peter's Below, Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp: a fan of 4-3-3



of choice ever since.

Sir Alex Ferguson, who managed Manchester United from 1986 to 2013, and having won more trophies than any other manager in the history of football, is widely regarded as the greatest football manager of all time. Rio Ferdinand revealed that Alex Ferguson never considered utilising a three-man defensive line during his spell in charge.

The 4-2-2-2 is a formation that uses a traditional four-player defensive line and a midfield split

into two pairs. The first – a double pivot – protects the central spaces ahead of the defence, and the second – a more advanced pair – primarily operates between the lines, in support of two centre-forwards.

The 4-2-2-2 formation, sometimes referred to as the “magic box”, “magic rectangle”, or “magic square”, is thought to have first been used in 1950s Brazil, where Flávio Costa focused on free, fluid and improvised attacking play.

Your spiritual formation for a delightful life is worth a thought. Perhaps even a discussion around a Sunday lunch – or an evening pint.

French manager Albert Batteux used the 4-2-2-2 structure in winning eight Ligue 1 titles, the most by any manager, in the 1950s with Reims and the 1960s with Saint-Étienne.

The 4-2-2-2 system was then used



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most prominently in South America. Using it, the French national side won Euro 1984.

In the John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport “Aim High for all Virtues Programme” (AVP), based on eight Gospel values – made visible through 24 virtues – we used to ask the students to shape their virtues team formation.

I remember – because I wrote it down – the first.

Up front

Curiosity, Ambition, Zest and Moral Courage

Midfield

Generosity, Honesty

Defence

Determination, Resilience, Perseverance and Responsibility

In goal

Teamwork.

On the bench

Worthiness, Self-Awareness, Solidarity, Nobility, Sense of Humour, Loyalty and Self-direction

Resting:

Appreciation, Courtesy, Gratitude, Magnanimity, Optimism, Politeness.

You can shape your own side; when playing at home or away, at work or on holiday. Why not take it to your prayer as you sit on a train, tube or standing at a bus stop?

Whenever people admit to me that they are afraid of using their initiative in case they make a mistake,

I always state that mistakes are life's best teachers. You rarely learn anything from success.

Occasionally, to butter me up and make me feel good, they say: “Oh, Father, how wise you are!” I reply: “If I am, it is thanks to all the mistakes I have made these past 82 years. They were great teachers.”