The Art Of Xperteleven (Or How To Be An Immortal Online Football Coach)

by Sir Intentionally Leftblank
of the AMSTERDAM BRUTEZ
7/17/2008
Preface: The Art Of Xpert Eleven

(Or How Sun Tzu & Others Helped A Mere Mortal)

Brainwash.

Dutch football is the best in the world. Johan Cruijff, not Pele, not Ronaldo, not Maradona, not Zidane, is the best player ever. Ajax Amsterdam is the greatest club on earth, but terribly unlucky every year. Repeat these sentences until you believe it. Then, read on.

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Two different versions exist about how this Xperteleven strategy guide came into existence.

The long and incredibly romantic version tells us that more than two thousand years ago, a mysterious warrior-philosopher in China, a certain Sun Tzu (a role played by Silvester Stallone) wrote cookbooks, sold vacuum cleaners and worked in advertisement.

He invented great slogans like “Smart. Beautiful. Cleaning”, and “Things Happen After A Clean”, to mention a few poetical ones. He also wrote a book about war but war is boring and his wife forbid him to say one word about it.

According to that story, Tzu was a great football player. His collected philosophical insights, in itself a compilation of the writings of other Chinese masters, hung for centuries on a wall in a Chinese restaurant in Whangzu, Shanghai, where they were found by the great Dutch toilet cleaner and humanist Sir Intentionally Leftblank. “I visited all the Chinese restaurants in Shanghai to find this legendary document”, Leftblank said, afterwards. “Took me a lot of time.” He translated the document, learned life lessons, and shared them. There the legend ends. What happened with Leftblank is unknown. Maybe he still cleans toilets.

The concise version tells us that Leftblank studied the forums and the game and arranged what he found. He collected and edited forum advice and game clarifications from Iwe, Dr Flugel, Mentarman, Rps78, and Nobego, amongst others, and tried to understand the noble art of coaching an online football team.
Because writing is fun and Sun Tzu long dead, and because of his own hidden guru ambitions, Leftblank wrote a nonsensical preface, the concise version adds.

The truth of both versions is still under police investigation. In the meantime, according to both versions, Sir Intentionally Leftblank wishes you luck and success in that nice coaching game called Xpereteleven....

PS: in case you’re a newbie and want His Personal Advice: don’t! Standard answer: RTFM.

“I hire assassins to kill everybody who mails me stupid questions”, Leftblank admitted, to the police, that is.

THIS IS THE FOURTH EDITION (SINCE JULY 2007). IN THIS EDITION: LATEST MARKET PRICES, LATEST RULE UPDATES, CONVEYOR BELT TACTICS, USING THE RANKING SYSTEM TO YOUR ADVANTAGE, PRESS RELEASE GUIDE
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Master Sun says: “A good father has a 10 year old son to clean his car; a 9 year old son to clean his shoes; and a 8 year old daughter to clean the dishes.”

Small is beautiful

Think about a balanced buying-training strategy

Develop 4/5 skilled teenagers

but don’t forget the average age rule

No! No! No! Don’t believe the “maximum training strategy”!

A conveyor belt leads to nowhere

You need freekick and cool in your team

You need a surplus of runners, headers and hard shooters

Find that three-legged or two-headed goal monster!!

A moody keeper or defender can spoil your team

Know the ‘bad’ and ‘really bad’ qualities

Search allrounders

**PART IV: THE WAY OF THE SKILL**

Master Sun says: “The way of the skill is the skill of the way.”

Skill bars are only an estimation of skill

Pure skill is more important than special qualities

but possibly, special qualities accumulate

Get at least a 4 bars skill increase per 6 seasons


Master Sun says: “All good tactics fail if detected too early.”

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Part I: The Way of the Bookkeeper

Master Sun says: "Great generals are great bookkeepers."

Assess your agents
Iwe wrote: "Be aware of that the agents that offer you to buy players are not equally skilled at estimating the players' skill. The most skilled agents will always give you a player with the same skill as the agent stated. But the most unskilled agents can give you a player that is not as good as the agent said the player was going to be (...) There are currently 3 agents that are "reliable" and always gives you a player with the skill the agent stated." The others are "of differing percentages of accuracy, in those cases it's best to evaluate the player", Dr Flugel added.

During the first seasons evaluation fees were high and some agents were very unreliable. But things changed, and currently, "based on stats on the market transfer system, where the average form of players on sale already counts, we can see that about 10% of the players are overestimated by the agents and also about 10% of the players are underestimated by the agents", Iwe wrote.

This means that 90% of the players on sale have the same or higher stats than the agent estimates. That appears safe.

If agent reliability in gameplay really matters, nowadays, is a mystery. Maybe the whole mystery is not relevant anymore, in particular because evaluation has become lots cheaper. See below.

Evaluate expensive buys
Djwelldone, who identified most unreliable agents, wrote: "I still always evaluate anyway. Because you can still get screwed with the negative qualities. I bought a player from a reliable agent without evaluating and he turned out to be fragile. So it's still worth evaluating anyway especially if you’re spending a lot of money. The benefit of knowing who the reliable agents are, is that it saves you the hassle of wasting an evaluation fee on a player who has a good chance of not being as they are listed."

Never buy near the end of the season
Mentarman wrote: “Skill increases are based on average form for the season”: TeamPortman, in this aspect, advised a average (team) form of 15. A player needs enough match experience to develop. The number of necessary matches differs per player. The Xpertcrew wants "realism". Iwe explained in the forum that older/skillful players get relatively few match experience compared to youngsters/low-skilled players: “In a league like
the Xpert Leagues where there are 14 league matches during the season a player will need to play at least 3 full matches and at most 9 full matches to reach 100% (...) Basically I think you can say that if a player plays 2/3 of all matches then he will reach 100% no matter how old or skillful the player is."

This rule effectively means that if you buy a good or older player near the end of the season, season update skill improvements will be minimal. Xterminator: "But he will age one year, which you might find annoying." Xterminator pointed at the risk: “If the player gets injured or by any chance lowers his form, you will probably find that his skill will decrease. Having said all this, my suggestion is: avoid buying players just before the season update.” DrFlugel advised: “Personally I try never to buy anyone after about half way through the season. Players come in with different form and I think you need a good period of time to get it up to around the 15 mark for the update.”

**Understand the bidding system**

Remember that the asking price is not the highest of all bids, but the second highest bid plus a bidding step as explained in the rules.

**Example** (from the rules): The asking price of striker Ducko Donaldo is **1 million**.

- Coach Pele bids 1 million.
- Coach Ferguson makes a bid for 2,5 million.
- Coach Beckenbauer bids 4 million.

The new asking price after Ferguson steps in will rise first to (Pele’s bid = 1 million) + (bidding step = 200 000) = **1,2 million**. When Beckenbauer bids his 4 million, the asking price will rise to (Ferguson’s bid = 2,5 million) + (bidding step=200 000), which is 2,7 million econ.

Let’s say that you want Donaldo. You bid 3 million. As you see, Beckenbauer still outbids you. The new asking price will rise to 3,2 million. You’ll get a message that your bid was not enough to take the lead. Beckenbauers maximum is higher.

Iwe said: “What one must try to understand regarding the bidding on the transfer market is that you are supposed to enter how far you are willing to go in the bidding. If you are willing to pay 10 million for a player then you should enter 10 million and not a lower bid. You never pay more than the next highest bid plus a bidstep. And if no one else bids on the player you will get the player for the asking price no matter how far you were willing to go.”
If you fail to take the lead in the bidding then you will not get a second chance on that player, the rules say. The player is no longer interested. You can’t make bids on that player anymore. In other words: you have only one chance to make a bid at a player.

So: let’s say you bid 4,5 million. Then the asking price will rise to 4,2 million. Beckenbauer, who previously had the lead, will get a second chance. If he bids 4,3 million then, it’s over and out for him.

That’s why Sun Tzu says: think hard about your maximum bid. Because you have only one good shot.

**Think before you bid, sell before you buy**
As a general bidding guideline, Nunosa added: “Offering as much as you’re willing to pay to get that player as soon as possible is one way of approaching the market. The other is wait until the end and then bid. This one makes the base price of the player lower and in some cases you will pay less in the end.”

Offer what you think the player is worth. Not more. Stay rational and never gamble. Think about his future price before you bid.

Because: if you buy a player and sell him after a couple of years for more, the player will yield a profit. Always keep in mind if you’ll break even or will make a profit on a player in the long run.

So:

1) Estimate for how long you’ll keep him in your squad
2) Estimate his future skill. A 19 year old 5 skilled might stay 10 years in your squad and become a 29 year old 10 or 11-skilled star. Or 9 in case of injuries
3) Estimate training. Ten seasons means ten seasons of training, is about 4 million. Add his projected training cost to the current price.
4) Finally, estimate his future price and compare. 29-yr old 9 skilled can be sold for 9 mil econ, and 10-11 skillers for 10 mil or more, on the average.

If you can buy the player for 4,5 and sell him for 9, you’ll break even. And if he costs less or can be sold for more, you might earn a profit. But if the player costs more than say 6 million, he’s hardly profitable and thus not to be bought. Capitalist swine logic, but true.

That’s the ABBA rule. Yes, those moaning Swedes in funny glitter suits who became millionaires. “Money, money, money/ Must be funny/ In the rich man’s world”, they sung. “Even Swedes sometimes can be right”, Master Sun says.
Know the market price and sell your 30-plus players

A research of age/maximum skill for that age/price shows the general price tendency of players (July, 2008). The lower the age and the higher the skill is, the higher is the price. See below.

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<tr>
<th>Age/skill</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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And now some clarifications.

- I imported the prices per age class (asking prices for today and tomorrow) in an Excel table. Prices (in million econ) were averaged and rounded off. If a table cell is empty, this means the system had no data or the data were unreliable. In other words: few players with that age and skill are on the market or have been sold.
- As you see when you study the players and their development, above average players are:
  - **16**, skill 4-6 skilled;
  - **17-19**, skill 5 - 7;
  - **20-22**, skill 6-8;
  - **23-25**, skill 8-10
  - **26-29**, skill 9-12;
  - **30 and older**: 9 – 11
- Top talents reach 13 or sometimes 14 skill bars over the years (with the current rules: under the old rules skill could inflate to 16-21 bars). Players make the biggest skill jumps between 16 and 21.
Top coaches are able to buy and develop the above average players and develop them until they reach a top skill.

- Young above average talents can be sold and 20-plus players with skill 7-8 are saleable, too. But that 4 skilled 20-year old forward? He’s hard, if not impossible, to sell. The 9-12-skilled players are very difficult to get. Maybe a cheap 30-plus veteran, as lucky buy. But you’d better spent your savings on a great talent.

- Defenders appear to be cheaper than strikers.

- Some types of player are incredibly expensive. Talented intelligent young midfielders for example are sold for 14 - 19 mil. Young good strikers who combine heading qualities with quickness? Expect a price of 11 or more millions. If you don’t have that sum, don’t evaluate. You’ll lose the bidding.

- Watch the development of your player closely. When he reaches skill 7, decide: will he stay or will he go? Keep the players with a future, in your team. Sell the leftovers, the surplus players. It’s difficult to say when a player is useless, however. A quick defender, although only 7 skilled, might be essential when he’s the only quick player in your defence or worse, in your team.

- 30-odd players can better be sold asap, except when they have the ‘works hard in training’ skill or positively influence your average age.

- 11-skilled players only slowly lose value.

- The best value for money is a home grown talent, of course. 30 000 only. I always immediately sell surplus talents. Net profit often 2-7 million.

- But whom to buy? Based on my research, the second best value for money is a 17-4 player, market price 1,4 mil. If you sell him when he’s 28-29 at skill 10-11 (6 skill bars in 12 seasons), he’s worth 10-15 mil. Net profit: 13,6 mil.

- A 16-4 player might reach a higher peak (11-13) but his final value is (often) about 17 mil. Net profit: 10 mil.

- An 18-4 player is really cheap, but his football qualities are a full bar lower than the 17-4 talent. I have seldom bought them; I sometimes bought an 18-4 because he had useful SQ combinations I really needed.

- The general price levels have increased since July 2007 with about 5 mil per age class. The Xperteleven crew complains about inflation, which is true, for skilled middle aged players. However, 16-4 or 17-5 old teenagers are still between 6-9 mil. The Xpert crew hopes to halt inflation with rule changes and thus decrease the general price level, but I don’t see much effect in my stats, yet.
Make a financial plan
If you do some maths (I hate maths) this is the result. It’s a template, based on estimates.

Financial plan FC Bookkeepers United, 9 weeks’ season (incl. silly season): 18 players

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Income (€)</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Expenses (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor Activity</td>
<td>9000 (9*1000)</td>
<td>Match Reports</td>
<td>420 (14*30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Bonus</td>
<td>1800 (9*200)</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>8392 (basic training is about 7400 per player per day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor Contract</td>
<td>500 (2*250)</td>
<td>Juniors</td>
<td>15 (1 junior per two seasons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of 5+ Juniors/Seniors</td>
<td>200 (1*400 per two seasons)</td>
<td>Reinforcements (skill 4+)</td>
<td>3500 (1 player per season)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of 7+ Veterans</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16500</td>
<td></td>
<td>12327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Netto Profit                  | 4.173.000   |          |              |

Some clarifications:

- Don’t neglect the press releases. As you see, 1.8 million econ is a substantial part of your budget. See the press release addendum, for inspiration
- The sponsor contract is renewed every month
- After rule changes, training expenses have increased. Training eats up your budget.
- You can calculate the training costs of one player per day. Check for yourself. Open your financial report page. The formula is: \( ((\text{number of training sessions last month} \times 130.000) / \text{(squad size)}) \) divided by number of days (see financial report). My average cost appears to be 7400 per player per day. I don’t have recent data of others but I expect the same expenses.
- A 16-player squad costs 7.459.200 econ in 63 days. Profits would be about 5,1 mil econ, then. Every extra player reduces the profit with an extra 0,47 mil.
- Training expenses fluctuate for some reason per team and per season, although my training strategy has always been the same. Lowest value was 6400, highest about 11000 econ per player per day. I can only guess what the reason of the fluctuation is. Subtle changes in the game engine? Less slight injuries? A younger team? More or less hard trainers?
- The system offers a junior every month. My first estimate is that 75% are just average or below average (4 or less). I never buy such juniors. Which means that I buy only 1 out of 4 players, 1 per two seasons. I also buy 1 relatively young reinforcement per season via the transfer market. So every two seasons I buy three players on the average.
I sell one 30+ veteran per season. The 7+ veterans generally can be sold for 5 million. I try to sell one ‘surplus’ player per two seasons. So every season I sell three players on the average.

Fourteen match reports (two per opponent) is a minimum. I buy more reports in the beginning of the season and less at the end. At least two players need training per week – red arrows. But again, this is a minimum. See below.

After a season update, the form of your ‘grown’ players lowers drastically. I first spent lots of money to retrain them, but friendlies are a cheaper way to increase form. After the first friendly, I train the two players with the lowest form: after the second, I train two more.

My team is after 8 seasons more balanced than when I started. In the beginning I frantically looked for bargains and sold and sacked all my old and worthless players. Big cleanup. I bought cheaper and I sold cheaper. My team value was about 12 million. Now it's near 75 million. A starting manager lives on a tighter transfer budget than the values mentioned above, and might start buying 17-4 youngsters with just one relevant skill. They cost 2-5 mil only.

The downside of cleaning up is, that you have a relatively young team the first seasons, and you’ll lose some matches because of the average age rule, although you're the better manager.

**Spend your money wisely**

As you see, if your aim is long term development of your players, you’re a poor man. What are your spending options?

- regular small win bonuses: 14x50.000 (see win bonuses, below) and a few big ones.
- extra training sessions.
- a more expensive young player (7,7 million instead of 3,5)

In my very humble opinion, the small win bonus gives you the best value for money in most cases.

Remember: the financial plan is only a guideline. Change your plan according to your position. You might cut down on training costs (for instance: no rehab for older players) so that you can buy a more expensive player. Or you can buy a very cheap 3 skilled 17-year old and hope to sell him as an expensive sixer after 3 seasons. If you stop buying talents but rely on juniors for a couple of seasons, you save 3,5 mil per season. Be flexible and try to think ahead. Try to save surplus money, so that you have sunshine when the rain falls, Sun Tzu would say.

I currently have a 15 million war chest for special bids & extra training.
Part II: The Way of the Desktop Trainer

*Master Sun says: “Always keep a good form.”*

**Train to develop**
Training is important for long term development. The rules say: “For players to raise their skill level from one season to the next they must be in good form throughout the season. The skill update is based on a player's form during the season. The higher average form the better”.

The average form of a player is based on his form notations: the form notations are basically, his form scores at the season update and after each competitive match.

**Reach for the stars: 15 if you can**
A form of 10 is the bottom line. Iwe: "If the player's average form is over 10 form bars his skill will increase. If the player's average form is below 10 form bars his skill will decrease. Young players has more potential to increase their skill than old players and old players has more potential to decrease their skill than young players.”

TeamPortman added: “Firstly, ensure your team is of similar skill as the opposition in your league, and then ensure your team is at least average form of 15. After that, it's all about tactics and respecting your opposition. Understand what the opposition will do and ensure they cannot predict what you will do.”

**Train when the arrows are red or below 10**
Train your players at least when their form is below 10 or when the form trend is negative. Iwe wrote: "If the player already has a positive hidden form tendency it's quite unnecessary to give the player a form training (unless the player has a very lousy form or if you want to strengthen the players average form)."

Triggsy remarked: “Training is a toughy and it’s probably still the one part of the game I struggle with the most. I tend to get them into it when I start seeing red arrows but that does make saving quite hard. Its tough because its such an important aspect of the game, if you can keep your players in good form during the season the updates tastes all the more sweeter”.

RDFCHarry wrote that he trained when:
- A player has low form compared to his age (age <20: anything below 18: age 21-25: anything below 16: age 26-29: anything below 14)
- A player has high form but low average form
- A player has a red arrow
- A player has even the slightest dip in form, even without a red arrow
- A player has just recovered from injury
- A player is a brilliant prospect and I just feel like boosting his average form

Doomonyouall agreed with Harry. Remember, however, that training is not an independent factor of the game. Training costs money. Your training investments have to be balanced and in line with your overall budget – see earlier (the RDFCHarry/ Doomonyouall guidelines might lead to enormous training costs, because of the very high form they demand).

**Forget overtraining**

Overtraining means: a form setback of 10 to 25 %. For a player with a below-10 form, the risk at overtraining is zero. From then it slowly increases to 7% at 15 form bars, still not much. From then it’s (estimated) about +3,6 % per form bar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Overtraining risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>10,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>14,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>17,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>21,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you overtrain, you (only) lose 1-4 form bars and your money. Anyway, your form stays above the magic 10 bars. This means that even if your form is higher than 15, training is advisable. Personally, I train players with 17-18 form only when I see a red arrow.

**Train immediately just before and after the season update**

Matches give notations. That’s why Descultzz wrote: “It would be vital to begin the season in good form.” Uncle Wilf added: “If you start to train players so that their first form training ends the day after the season update, you can give players up to two more form trainings before they get their first notation.”

**3 or 4 form bars equal 1 skill bar**

MaxwellT was in doubt about two players: a 6 skill 10 form or 8 skill 3 form. Jonneh answered: “Depends on special qualities, but I generally assume that 3 form are as good as 1 skill bar so I’d go for the 6 skill.”
Dynamite Davis told the Xpert Community: “As for this game please take my word for it that the 6 skill player is more likely to put in a better performance... your manager rating will definitely rise if you take that advice. This game is about picking the best player on the day....(...) sometimes its best to play a slightly lower skilled player who is in great form. Remember 10 form means he will be more or less performing to his skill level (so 3 form means he might as well play sunday league football)”

MaxwellT wrote, later: "Skill and form roughly work out in the ratio 4:1 therefore in this instance: 6 Skill 13 Form = 37: 7 Skill 3 Form = 31

**The higher the form, the smaller the gains**
Iwe: "The form does not depend on the player's performances in a match or at least very little. To fully a get on the form you must understand that the form works like if it was a rubber band fixed at normal form (10 form bars) (...) Form increases are always percentage of the form the player doesn't have and form reductions are always percentage of the form the player has (...) The player's form is valid for the next match and just because the player had a great match that doesn't mean he will be even better the next match. It doesn't work that way. Your player may have been at his peak at the match where he had a great performance. Just because a high-jumper jumps 2.40 at one event it doesn't mean he will jump even better at the next event.”

**Juniors first, veterans later**
Think ahead about the players you want to develop in your team. Not the top skilled veterans need your attention, but the low skilled juniors.

As explained earlier, players need enough match experience. Not all players earn match experience at the same speed. Youngsters need about 3 and veterans about 9. UncleWilf wrote, about development: “You don't need to worry about your first choice XI. Unless they have an injury crisis, they should play enough games to qualify for the 100% increase, or as near as makes no difference. If they do have an injury crisis, then they are unlikely to have an average form much above 10 anyway.

A team’s youth players are likely to need the fewest games. These are the players that you really want to get the 100%, and it will be nice for them to need less than 5 games. That leaves any veteran reserve players you may have. These are likely to have the most problem getting the 100% increase. But they are reserves. They are probably those players whom you are least likely to be concerned about, and most likely to be looking to replace. So while it may be more difficult to get every player in your squad 100% increase, it shouldn't be difficult to get the important players 100%.”
My added thoughts: I frequently use cup matches as youth training matches. Promotion and development are my most important long term goals. Cup successes come later. Other youth reserve strategies: use juniors in matches you expect to lose anyway; gain enough points to avoid relegation and use the juniors the rest of the season.

**Play friendlies to improve form, teamwork and experience**

Iwe wrote: “There is a minor positive effect on the form for the players that play in the friendlies (...) There is one gain with playing friendlies though. You can use the friendlies to get your player's team work values to synchronize better. For each match the players play together their team work values will converge towards each other. Each player has a team work value and for the players to work best together their team work values should be as close to each other as possible. If you for example play Shearer on top with Owen he will work better together with Owen for each match they play together, but if your play Shearer together with another striker he will converge to that player instead. (...) By playing friendlies you may get the players to work better together and the team parts to work better together.”

DaveStone explained: “If you play the new player but not the one he will be playing with for the next season, the new player's teamwork value will move closer to the rest of the team he is playing with.”

And Patyp said: “To simplify I think you should add new players to your squad one or two at a time so they are adjusting to your team not your team adjusting to them.”

Friendlies give match experience as well, but only 10% of a regular match, thus 1-4% at most.

**Exit the cup early**

You need a couple of cup rounds to give your juniors extra experience. But in the long run, cup matches are like smoking: bad for your health. Cup matches can result in injuries – bad for your players – and red arrows.

**Only play friendlies during silly season**

Friendly matches positively affect some teamwork values and negative/low form tendencies. But a friendly doesn’t give you a form notation (anymore). Grassbandits wrote: “IMO the only benefit in friendlies now is to improve teamwork, but this doesn't compensate for the random form tendancies you get.” He warned that if you first train players to get form average form to 16/17, and then play a friendly which your team wins comfortably, ”red arrows reduce average from to 12/14. A million plus econ well spent...? I think not.” Dr. Flugel added: “Essentially they do very little except give you the chance to injure a player.”
Essentially playing a friendly now is like eating cow dung for supper; completely pointless.”
Part III: The Way of the Team Collector

**Master Sun says:** "A good father has a 10 year old son to clean his car; a 9 year old son to clean his shoes; and a 8 year old daughter to clean the dishes."

**Small is beautiful**
The smaller your team is, the more matches your players play, the easier they get their 100% experience and the smaller your total form training costs are. So, in the old days, top coaches had only 14 or 15 players in their team, the bare minimum. Injury risks were smaller, then.

Today 17-18 players appears to be the optimum size. Nobego has 18 players (2 goalies, 7 defenders, 5 midfielders, 4 forwards, and 4 youngsters). All time hero rps78 has 17 players (2g-5d-6m-4f, while 3 are lower skilled teenagers). Mentarman wrote recently: "I like 18 (2-6-6-4) as sort of an optimum'.

Experienced coach Triggsy thought 16 or 17 “an ideal squad size, it’s too hard to keep them in form with any more. As for type of players, I look for qualities over skill and it’s good to remember that all bar one or two of the negative qualities do have upsides as well.”

Sun Tzu, when talking about the girls he liked AND about the optimum team size (he could handle two subjects at the same time), said: "16-18 is ok". Personal thoughts: develop a team with 1 goalkeeper and a low skilled junior reserve goalie; 5 defenders, 5 midfielders, 3 forwards: plus one allrounder.

Preferably, the allrounder is a midfielder or defender. A 7 skilled allrounder will play as a 5,6 skilled player in any other position. Total: 16. Add 2 or 3 juniors to your squad.

By the way: some managers take an extra risk and play with one keeper only. Thus, they save 0,47 mil on training cost, per season.

When you start building your 7th division team, save money and maintain a 16-player squad. After a few promotions and season updates you’ll win more cup matches so you need to increase your squad to 18. Coaches with 20 players spend 0,47 to 0,9 million more on form training than coaches with 18-player-squads.
Think about a balanced buying-training strategy
TeamPortman told the Xpert Daily about his first season: “(...) the team were given no hope (...) having no midfield (...). After some quick purchases of 6 skill mid-age players, the team started to play better”. He describes his strategy as “just relying on the kids to come through and keeping faith in the senior players (...). In answer to the question that he seems to rely more on quality juniors and the occasional purchase of a high quality junior, he says: “There is a balance. As stated earlier, I purchased many players in season 1 as the players I had were too old and unskilled. My players are of similar skill to the opposition, so there is no need to buy older players of similar quality - I will rely on the form of my players and tactics. If I have any money left over from training, I will purchase an emerging player to take over when the older players retire.”

Bosterosoy told the Xpert Daily: “The types of players I look for vary from team to team; however, overall I try my best to get a balance between the young players and the veterans. Before it would be fine to just have all young players, but I’ve seen many teams that have average ages of 22 or 23 underachieve tremendously. Usually I try to avoid splashing out lots of money for players that are older. When I buy veteran players, they are usually bargains and usually no more than 2 million.”

Nobego advised: “Sell all your old players and buy only young players. Then try to keep their form as high as possible and eventually you'll have a decent team.”

Develop 4/5 skilled teenagers –
AndyM2033 advised: “Youth players have to be 5 skilled plus or very young 4s otherwise its a waste of time and I’d rather cash in and get a decent player who will be in my first team. Buckfast67uk added: “yeah I know what you mean. With prices nowadays though I’ve started keeping 18yr old 4 skilled. Give ’em their 100 % experience and cross my fingers for a 1.8 bar increase in the form update.”

Dr Flugel wrote: “I think if you look at all the strongest teams, i.e. the Swedish teams, what most had done was to buy 7-8 skilled 17-18 year olds, invest heavily in training, sell them at 28 years old at a massive profit, then continue the cycle. The new changes makes this impossible to do. So now you have to balance up whether or not it's worth investing heavily in the youths that you receive in hope that they will improve upon season, or simply buy a young 20 year old 7-8 skilled player which will now in many cases work out to be cheaper. So the team building aspect isn't quite as clear cut as it was before IMHO.”

Uncle Wilf advised: “Play the long game. Look to get a youth in each position from your youth program this season. Nothing special; an 18/4 will do. Don't fret if you can't get all positions done this season.”
Then, I'd sit on the money. When you have the complement of a youth in each position, set your youth talents to the position of the weakest youth and see if you get offered a better one. If you get offered a better youth in the position, promote him and sell the one you have. If you get offered a worse youth who is saleable, promote and sell him. If one of your youths becomes better than one of your non-youths in a position. Get another youth in that position and sell the worst player. Build up your warchest.

**but don’t forget the average age rule**

Remember, however: a junior-only team will underperform. You’ll need some veterans in your team, due to the '26+' or average age rule. Iwe wrote: “Note that it is the performance of the team/team part that is affected if the average age is less than 26 years (...) How big the performance reduction will be depends on how much lower the average age is in the team/team part. For example if the average age is 22 years then the team/team part will perform about 85% of its capacity. If the average age is 20 years then the team/team part will perform about 76% of its capacity. If one team part has an average age higher than the other the one with the less average age will gain a little age and the other will lose some age. This means that if you have a team part, for example the defence with an average age over 26 years it will compensate the lack of age in the other team part to some extension but there will still be some reduction on the "young" team part's performance.”

DrFlugel and Aedoo002 discussed the maths behind the rule. Aedoo theorized that the overall team performance = players performance + teamwork. Anyway, the rule affects TWENTY percent of the final result.

So: try to spread the age in your team and keep the average age around 26 or 26-plus.

Muskateer questioned the impact of the rule, and wanted to know for sure if “the most successful managers are the ones who ruthlessly stick to an average age of around 26? Does a kick-ass team of 21 year olds actually not do as well as a less good team whose average age is higher? Does anyone buy older players when they could afford long-term prospects, juts to get the average up towards the golden figure of 26 (or whatever it is?)”

DrFlugel answer was VERY short. YES, on all three questions...

**No! No! No! Don’t believe the “maximum training strategy”!**

Several players have proposed to buy mediocre young players (4-skilled) and train them to the max, to get a maximum skill update. They think a max training strategy will quickly breed high skilled players, who will reinforce a team or can be sold for a big profit. €cons! They see €cons! Millions!
Well, IMHO, it’s a persistent delusion. This strategy works in real football, but not in xpereteleven. I did the maths and the rewards are simply too small. Just don’t buy mediocrity, Sun Tzu would say. Just buy 1 great talent every season.

Forget real life football, by the way. Theories about this game are often based on real life situations and tactics. “We can relate to real life but this game does come down to probability maths, surely?”, Spookiecookie said.

**A conveyor belt leads to nowhere**

Some managers try a ‘conveyor belt’ team building strategy (term was minted by Jimbo_204). The idea behind the conveyor belt is that you buy 20 cheap juniors of the same age: all 16, or 17, skill 3 or 4. Every season your team gains skill. After 10-12 seasons, the conveyor belt brings you a 10-12 skilled team aged 26-28 years old. Looks great – on paper.

Rosscoe wrote: “Not only do you have to be very patient for a long time before you get results, but then you will only have a small window for success. As your team comes of age (let’s say you’ve turned all your 17/4’s into 26/10’s you will be very hard to beat. However, you will also be somewhere near the bottom of the league. At this point you will have to start thinking about rebuilding, bringing in younger players (albeit with even more potential). You then lose your teamwork values, your average age (again) etc. IMO it makes more sense to use whatever older assets you have to develop some youngsters alongside them.”

Pangea added: “If successful (with the conveyor belt strategy) you’ll have a great side 6+ seasons down the road. But you may never get there”. His advice: gradual development, keep an average age of at least 24. “Then you can have some success and move up the leagues, while you develop your team. Stay competitive all the time.”

**You need freekick and cool in your team**

Mentarman thought: “I would say skill is more important in general. The special qualities don’t have a huge impact, and in some cases they are specializations that mean the player has a corresponding weakness in another area. Skill and form are the most important when selecting your lineup.”

But OneMoreSolo added: “For some reason, when it comes to free kicks, my 8 star players couldn’t hit a barn door with a banjo, but my six skill with the free kick special ability slots them home frequently. So, for free kicks I think it makes a noticeable difference. As does the ‘cool’ one, as it makes players 50% better at penalties. The others I’m not sure about.”
Cool is useful for keepers, too. Rules say: “a goalkeeper with this quality will be somewhat better at saving penalties compared to a goalkeeper without this special quality”.

Also, every player with the cool quality will perform somewhat better during the last part of the games and also in extra time.

Bosterosoy thought: “A key characteristic that I always make sure one of my top players has is the free kick symbol. The game is very unrealistic when it comes to free kicks. I’ve seen various players who have scored hat tricks just on free kicks. When the player has a hard shot quality as well, the results are incredible.”

Freekick adds according to some coaches +2 to a player’s skill when taking a freekick (the 6 skilled taking freekicks like a 8 skilled) but according to the Swedish rules multiplies the player’s skill with 100% (the 6-er takes the freekick like a 12-skilled).

**You need a surplus of runners, headers and hard shooters**

Bosterosoy observed: “I try to strike a balance and make sure to have some defenders and strikers with quickness and others with heading ability.”

In general, the last line ups of the top players in 2007 indicated the supposed importance of heading and quickness:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nobego</td>
<td>1D (h), 2MF (1h+q, 1q), 1F (q)</td>
<td>2h, 3q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rps78</td>
<td>1D (q), 1MF (h), 2F (1h, 1h+q)</td>
<td>3h, 2q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forza ACJ</td>
<td>3 D(2h, 1h+q), 1MF (q), 1F (h)</td>
<td>4h, 2q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olofsson</td>
<td>1D(h+q), 2MF(2q), 2F(1h,1q)</td>
<td>2h, 4q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeamPortman</td>
<td>3D (2h, 1q), 2MF (2h, 1q)</td>
<td>4h, 2q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GotNothing</td>
<td>3D(3h, 1q), 2MF (q), 2F(q)</td>
<td>3h, 4q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarremarre</td>
<td>1D(h), 2D (h+q), 1MF (h), 1MF (q), 1F(h+q)</td>
<td>5h, 3q</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2008 summer top 5 last line ups were less clear, but still indicate the importance of quickness:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>angst</em></td>
<td>1D (q), 1MF (q), 1FW (h)</td>
<td>2q, 1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contraduck</td>
<td>No headers/runners (although after a recent team change)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gildar</td>
<td>1D (h)</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogman</td>
<td>2MF (q)</td>
<td>2q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacheleten</td>
<td>2D (q), 1MF (q), 1FW (h)</td>
<td>3q, 1h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many top players have **3 or 4 hard shooters** in their team. With their surplus of heading, quick and shooting qualities, their teams are very versatile. They can successfully play a specialized tactic (wing play, through play, long shots) or use a varied offense. The individual skills add up.

Hard shooters can be useful if your freekicker is injured (or dead, or sold, or just lousy). The rules say: “A player with this quality is also reasonably good at taking freekicks (...) His/her capacity in taking freekicks is however 20% below that of a specialist and he/she is no good at freekick variations. A player with this quality can however be a good alternative to take freekicks if you have not got a specialist in your team.”

**Find that three-legged or two-headed goal monster!!**

Nobego observed: “Then there are some combinations of qualities that I’ve found effective. One of those is an attacker with the Quick and Goal Instincts combination. If you get your hands on a skilled player that matches that description you can consider yourself lucky because you have got yourself a natural born scorer.” Same is true about the combination of heading and goal instinct, Peterkroes added.

**A moody keeper or defender can spoil your team**

Bosterosoy said: “As for the qualities, it all depends on the position. I find it strange that some people avoid moody players. I have found that they can be very great players but to avoid them in certain positions. In one of my teams, I have a moody midfielder who is consistently my team’s best player. This being said, I would never keep a goalkeeper or defender who is moody because an off day could cost you the game.”

My added thoughts: if you keep a moody midfielder or attacker consistently at a very high form, you’ll soften his “bad days”, while on his good days, he’ll shoot the stars out of heaven.

**Know the ‘bad’ and ‘really bad’ qualities**

The diva bad quality wears off after some time. Diva players “take longer for the player's team work value to adjust to the other players team work values (...). Eventually all players in a team will have about the same team work value but it will take a little longer for the diva to adjust to the others or in the case with the diva it will be more like the others adjusting to the diva (...). Divas are very demanding and should be given their favorite shirt number if possible or else their performance will suffer a bit”, rules say.

Davestone explained the ‘bad’ qualities tough and fragile. “Tough: tackles hard, not nice to play against, gets more yellow/red cards, performs slightly better in bruising matches. Fragile: double the injury risk of a
normal player. The qualities don’t contradict: a tough player is NOT ‘harder to injure’ but ‘more aggressive’.

Bosterosoy said about the tough quality: “Although it gets the player a few more cards, it is worth it considering that they play slightly better.”

But really bad, in the meaning of really, really bad, is probably fragile, and maybe loud-mouth. Uncle Wilf wrote about those two: “Fragile and loud-mouth are the only two that I think have no up-side. Of those two, fragile can have a more significant effect, but loud-mouth a more constant one.” But fragile is the worst. “Some qualities are even worse than my wife”, Sun Tzu filosofied.

**Search allrounders**

A combination of allround and intelligence, heading or quick would make any player an ideal substitute in every line. Search such players. The more allrounders you have, the smaller your team can be.
Part IV: The Way of the Skill

Master Sun says: “The way of the skill is the skill of the way.”

**Skill bars are only an estimation of skill**

Iwe wrote: “The skill you see on a player is NOT the player's exact skill. It's only an approximation of the player's exact skill. This means that if a player has a visual skill of 6 skill bars his exact skill is somewhere in the interval between 5.50 and 6.50. This also means that a player can increase his skill quite significantly at the season update without changing his visual skill”.

Besides, each player has a hidden bonus skill. Iwe wrote: "We've decided to design the game so the difference between a team with 10 skill-bars and 5 skill-bars isn't very big is something completely different and doesn't have to do with the Cup. It’s a general rule of the game. A team with 10 skill bars isn't twice as good as a team with 5 skill bars which one could easily think. This is because we've given each player has a base-strength which is a hidden trait. This is something that can explain why there are several unexpected results in the games.”

What it means? Contraduck added his interpretation: “The hidden strength thing just means that there's a baseline amount of skill that all players have no matter how many skill bars you see. Think of it as meaning that each player has a few extra skill bars than what you can see in the game. This value is the same for every player. Say, for example, that base level of skill is 4 bars worth. Now that means a player with 5 visible skill bars is actually a 9 internally, and a player with 10 visible bars is actually a 14 internally. While it may seem that the 10 bar player should be twice as good as the 5 bar, the actual skill difference isn't quite that large.”

Problem is that no player has figured out a way to estimate the 'hidden skill value' so far. Anyway, it means that the skill is not as hard a value as you might think. It's an indication. Useful, but only as a 'soft' value.

**Pure skill is more important than special qualities...**

In answer to Jakemu, who had a 19 yr old 7 qualities 3 skilled junior he might sell, Dr Flugel wrote: “It was borderline at 3 skill - I would have kept him - but at 2 he goes on the transfer list for sure. He 'might' get to 6 in three seasons, but that's only if you keep him in tip-top form, which is pretty expensive, and have him play three games a season, which means having a 2-skill player on the field. (...) I think you're letting those special qualities get the better of your judgment. Sure, they're nice, but
remember that they are less important than pure skill, and they won't matter at all if his skill is 2.”

Mentarman added: “The only special quality you can gain is the "heart in the club" special quality. All others the player has from the beginning.”

**but possibly, special qualities accumulate**

Iwe explained the special qualities somewhat: “For example if a player is good at shooting then he will be better at shooting but worse in heading if he doesn't have the heading quality. The special qualities makes the player more specialized. The special quality does not make the player a better player.”

But to make things difficult, he added: “Special qualities like good header, goal instinct, fast runner, power shots etc that affects the way a player plays on the field never makes the player a worse player than a player without the special qualities. The player is not generally better than a player without the special qualities. The player is just more specialized than another player. The accumulated skill is the same for a player with special qualities compared to a player without the special qualities. For example: if I would have to select between 2 players with equal skill where one have special qualities and the other haven't but they have the same price I would go for the player with special qualities. The difference with special qualities are generally marginal but increases with the skill of the player. The players are not one-dimensional and are not easy to explain.”

About defenders with goal instinct Iwe said: “even though they are defender some of them might have goal instincts when they are in the opponent’s box. That doesn't mean they will be a top scorer as they rarely find themself in the opponent's box. But for example at corners the defender may be in the opponent's box and then their special quality might be in handy.”

Uncle Wilf said, about the cheating skill: “I believe that it increases the advantage you gain by using cheat. I have one team with five players with that quality, and when they all play together and I select "cheat" with a dodgy ref, the amount of free kicks I get is phenomenal... All I need for that team is a free-kick specialist.”

My thoughts: Possibly, the more goal instinct players you have, the more you score in the penalty area; the more freekickers you have, the more you score with freekicks; the more cheaters you have, the more freekicks you get, etc. Thus you could specialize your team in a playing style. Quick and heading skill, however, appear to be relatively important: see above.
According to rps78, special qualities and style of play should ‘fit’. A manager should exploit the qualities his players have. Rps78 wrote: "If the player for example is good at shooting then he will be better at shooting but worse in heading if he doesn't have the heading quality. The special qualities just makes the player more specialized. The special quality does not make the player a better player. And I think if you will play long range shots and your forward is good at shooting he will play better. I don’t know about how much but if he is 8-skilled I would say he will play like he is 10-skilled. And in the other if you plays the though plays then the player will play like he`d be 7-skilled.”

**Get at least a 4 bars skill increase per 6 seasons**

Players who play five matches per season and have a high form, increase their skill every season. Question is: how much and what is the difference between the good, the bad and the ugly coaches?

Hard data is unavailable. But an average skill increase appears to be about 4 skill bars per 6 seasons (0.67 points per update). Players with ‘works hard in training’ quality gain more: one bar per season. 26+ players gain less: 1 bar per 2 seasons (0.5 per update). This rule of thumb was confirmed by Seastream in the forum.

Thus, under favourable circumstances, an average 18-5 player could be 9-skilled when he’s 24, and 12-skilled at age 30.

More once was possible, but after rule changes regarding form notations, the 4/6 rule appears realistic.
Part V: The Way of the Rock, the Paper & the Scissors

*Master Sun says: "All good tactics fail if detected too early."*

**Basic tactics and countertactics**

**General:** The basic tactical idea of Xpert11 is the rock-paper-scissors-game. Rock beats scissors, scissors beat paper, paper beats rock.

That's why Iwe wrote: "You have to understand that everything is about probability. If you choose wing plays as offensive strategy it means that you will attack on the wings more than through the middle. If your opponent tighten the wings the odds for you getting a goal opportunity through the wings is reduced, but the chances of you getting a goal opportunity through the middle is increased." And that's why he says: "Look at your opponent's last matches and buy tactics reports from them. If you know how he played before you can assume that he will play almost the same against you”.

Nobego said to the Xpert Daily: “Now for the coaching part of the game. Try not to play the same tactics over an over because then your play is too predictable and your opponent will have an easy job countering it.”

So against a varied offense, a varied defense is the best response. Against a varied defense, a specialized offense tactic is the smartest countertactic.

**Varied defense: offensive countertactics**

Rps78 wrote: "if they’re playing varied def., I wouldn’t ever play varied off”. Dr. Flugel said he in general uses a tactic (i.e wing plays, long shots, through plays), even if his forwards have no special skills.” And Cigol added: “I try to anticipate what my opponent will play defensively (tighten wings or tighten center or varied) and set it accordingly.”

My thoughts: specialize! Use wing, long shot or through ball offensive tactics if you see that your opponent often plays a varied defense. What you choose depends on your team skills and his.

**Varied offense countertactics**

*What is varied offense?* “The team plays as it usually does and will try to attack on the wings, with through balls and long range shots”, Iwe wrote. Good if your midfield & attackers have no or just a few skills, but easily countered.

**Varied offense countertactics: different opinions.** 1) DrFlugel wrote: “There are 3 types of tactics, long range shots, wing plays and through
plays. so if they play varied which is a combination of all three, tightening the centre cancels out two of those. So I would do this unless perhaps they had good headers of the ball where I would play varied.”

But 2) Rps78 disagreed. “I think varied offensive strategy might be good if you’re sure that opponent will play tighten the centre or tighten the wings (not a ‘normal’ defense!!!). And on the other hand if opponents are playing varied offense just play varied defensive. I have mailed many mails with DrFlugel and just cant believe what the hell he’s thinking there!!”

My added thoughts: Rps78 has the highest ranking so in this aspect I’d follow his advice, not Dr.Flugel. About formation and tactics: if you have a quick defender, a defender with heading skill and a keeper with the positioning skill, you counter all three tactics. If you have a quick forward and a header as forward, you probably increase the chance for a breakaway/header goal.

**Through plays: tactics & countertactics**

*Through plays.* Breakaway tactic. “This can be a good tactic if you have fast attackers and your opponent’s defenders are not so fast and their goalkeeper is not very good against a lone attacker who has broken away from the defence”, Iwe wrote. Success depends on the skills of your team and your opponent. Might work in away games, against an offensive opponent. Intelligent and/or skilled midfield needed. Rps78 added “a fast defender/fast forward will be more important than a good header/intelligent midfielder”

Best countertactics, according to Iwe: “If you think your opponent will use through plays or go for long shots it can be a good idea to concentrate on defending the centre. This means your defence will be weaker on the wings and you will be more vulnerable against a team attacking down the wings.” So if you tighten the centre, be sure to have a good header in your defense, I think.

**Wing plays: tactics & countertactics**

*Wing plays.* Heading tactic. “If you use this strategy your team will try playing down the wings and cross the ball in towards the penalty area. This tactic can be good if your attackers are good headers of the ball and your opponent’s goalkeeper is no good at catching high balls”, Iwe wrote. Success depends on the skills of your team and your opponent. Might work good in combination with a long balls tactic, but I’m not sure: Rps78 disagreed.

Best countertactic: Tighten the wings. But: “This means that your central defence will be weaker and make you more vulnerable against through balls and breakaways”, Iwe wrote. You need a good header in your
defense, to head the incoming balls away. “Again a good header defender/forward is better than a quick”, Rps78 thought. But because you’re more vulnerable against through balls and breakaways, don’t forget the quick defender in your team, I think.

*Long shots.* Bring in the artillery. Iwe: “This can be a good tactic if you have players who are good at shooting from outside the penalty area and the opponent's goalkeeper does not position him/herself well.” Might be a good defensive tactic, to be used in combination with 541/442 or 451. But your midfield has to be as strong or stronger than your opponent.

Best countertactic: tighten the centre and pressure.

Iwe wrote, about tighten the centre: “If you think your opponent will (...) go for long shots it can be a good idea to concentrate on defending the centre. This means your defence will be weaker on the wings and you will be more vulnerable against a team attacking down the wings”. General formation advice: if you tighten the centre, strengthen your defense with a header.

SambaSven wrote about long range shots: “Against pressure you should not set you offensive tactic to long range shot.” Rps78 added: “I agree with SambaSven with this. If you’re SURE that opponent will use pressure don’t play long range shots. And at the other hand if you’re sure that opponent will play long balls and not tighten the centre, then long range shot could be the perfect against them, especially if you have good shooters and opponent goalie is not good at positioning. And if the opponent will play long range shots..naturally you should play against them pressure+tighten the centre and I would also recommend playing against them with 5 midfielders (never with only 2 or 3 mids!!!!!!)”

My added thoughts: the combination of pressure and long range shots might work. If both teams play pressure, but you win the midfield battle and have more ball possession, you still have more opportunities to score from a distance.

**Bluffing, counterbluffing and counter-counterbluffing**

If you check your opponent, you might observe he often uses a tighten the centre-defense. If you’re sure that’s his play, you MUST use a wing play offense – because a centered defense is more vulnerable on the wings. If he uses tighten the wings often, you MUST play through plays or tighten the centre.

However; what will he do? If he checks you out, he might find out you’re a wing player and play tighten the wings, contrary to his usual style of play. If you suspect he’s a flexible player, be as flexible as him and
change your usual style. Being unusual and unpredictable helps (ask Ozzy Osbourne).

This is the counterbluffing/ rock-paper-scissors aspect of Xpert11.

**Playmakers**
The rules say: “If you have a good midfielder it might be a good idea to choose him/her as a playmaker and let most of the play go through him/her. His/her skill will then carry more weight than that of the other midfielders and give the team more attacking power. There is though a risk that the opponents choose to mark him/her closely and in that case the playmaker’s skill will carry less weight than that of the other midfielders.”

Pad205 advised: “When you choose a playmaker it means more of the attacks will go through that player. If you have 4 or 5 midfielders who are all around the same skill level there’s no need to have a playmaker as you never know which ones will have a good game and if you choose one as a playmaker and he has a bad game it’s detrimental to your team.”

My added thoughts: 1) change your playmaker choice regularly. Be unpredictable 2) A moody player may not be the best choice as playmaker. He might play badly 3) Intelligent midfielders are good playmakers 4) Some doubt if playmakers and long ball tactics go along. Personally, I don’t see a problem. Different parameters in the game.

**Referees**
*How’s the ref?* Iwe wrote: “The referees has 2 values. The S-value which show you how skilled the referee is. And the H-value that shows you how hard (strict) the referee is. The values are on a scale of 1 to 9 where 1 is a low value and 9 is the highest value.”

*Offsides and cheating*: Clear cases are the skilled and hard ref (S7+, H7+) and the bad & lenient ref (S-4, H-3). Good refs: play offside trap, avoid cheating, play carefully. Bad refs: Cheat, use as many cheaters in your team as possible, and avoid offsides. Iwe wrote: “When the referee is not very skilled (low S-value) he is not very good at judging offsides and if he is not very hard (low H-value) he might allow some offsides you think are obvious (…) A low skilled (low S-value) referee has difficulty in judging what is cheating and what is not and if he/she is hard as well you can get freekicks and even penalties by cheating or perhaps get one of your opponent's players sent off.”

*The 3-6-9 rule*: Rps78 commented: “I separated those referees into three different categories depending on their skill value 1-3; 4-6; and 7-9.” If one only judges the h-value, it’s simple, Rps78 said: “Use cheat when the
referee has S-value 1-3 and offside traps when the referee has S-value 7-9."

Skilled and soft and unskilled/hard referees: Rps78 said: "(...) referees have H-values too and then I tried to think about how much that H-value is affecting for the S-value. And I asked for myself: are there situations where I should use both cheat & offside trap? Or are there any situations where the referees values mean that you should use cheat/offside trap at home but not at away? What if a team has two players with the special quality ‘cheat’? Are there then more referees in matches where you should use cheat? And then I tried those cheat/offside traps in private league matches as long as I was satisfied with the result.” (Notice he keeps the answer to his question to himself 😊). In reply to Rurikbird, about a 1-skil 9-hardness ref, Charliev1992 said: "This is ideal to cheat mate", and Duffster added: "You can play careful to lower the risk of your team given away free-kicks etc". Rps78 remarked, in general: “I wouldn’t ever play offside traps if the referee’s S-value is 1-4”.

My thoughts: The skilled ref who is lenient (S7+, H-4) is good at judging offsides. His low H-value means he will not easily give a card, a freekick or a penalty. So, use offside, in this case, maybe in combination with normal play. This means that I take more risks than Peterkroes, who wrote: “The S6H4 referee is evil though. Go careful when you face him or you’ll end up with 10 players.”. Well – decide for yourself where you draw the line.

Cheating might by an option (cheaters will not easily sent away), although Rps78 remarked: “I wouldnt ever play cheat if the referee`s S-value is 6+”

The bad, hard referee (S-4, H7+) has difficulties to recognize cheating, but he will punish cheaters hardly. Avoid offside traps. Cheat, however. Agression: careful.

Substitution and injuries
Be aware of your overall injury risk. The game distinguishes between ‘injuries’ and ‘slight injuries’. Injuries ruin form and last for several weeks. Slight injuries last only for a couple of days and slightly affect form. Wayne and Rps78 did a statistical analysis. Bases on their stats my rule of thumb is that you risk 2 slight injuries per 5 matches, and 1 serious injury per 5 matches.

The injury risk depends also on the aggression level of the match. Rps78 wrote:

- Both teams plays careful: 95% any of your players will not be injured.
- Both teams play normal: 80% any of your players will not be injured.
- Both teams play bruise: 40% any of your players will not be injured.
- Your team plays carefully, opponent bruise: 85% any of your players will not be injured.
- Your team plays bruise, opponent plays carefully: 80% any of your players will not be injured.

Note: Rps didn’t mention the option ‘your team plays bruise, opponent normal’ but the chance your player gets an injury must be estimated at about 60%

*Be aware of your ‘slight injury’ risk:* Iwe wrote about slight injuries in general: (…) A light injury is NOT a real injury (…) A light injury will have a marginal effect on the player’s form (…)

About injuries and training, Iwe wrote: “If a player is hurt when the training is going to be finished it will be dis-continued.” However: “the light injured players with an ongoing form training will still profit from the training although the effect of the form training will only be half compared to if the player was completely fit.”

About the injury period Iwe said: “The average injury period based on the statistics since we made the changes are 4.3 days. And that is actually about half of the average injury period before.”

About the number of injuries, he wrote: “Sure a team can get 3 light injuries which will mean that they will make 3 substitutions due to this if they have chosen to do so. But a team getting 3 players hurt is a very rare situation. How many players hurt a team get during a match depends on how aggressive the teams are. The risk is of course higher if the teams are very aggressive but lower if the teams are not aggressive. But according to our statistics the average is less than 1 player hurt per team and match. But of course in some very aggressive leagues it can be higher. (…).

A slightly injured player can play, but he risks being injured a second time. This means he’s heavily injured and can’t play for a prolonged period. His risk to be heavily injured is double that of a fit player.

Anyway, for reasons of injuries and experience, my advice is substitution, at least when you both play normal or bruise. Sometimes, the risk is smaller and could be taken, however. This is the case 1) when you play carefully, and expect your opponent to play careful/normal too 2) if you play normal and your opponent plays carefully.
Formations and match preparation

General advice: Rps78 wrote: “In my opinion ANY formation will be good against any other formation. Just put the best players in the line-up and use it. Although, there are bogey factors and against the great managers I wouldn’t ever play with the same formation again!”

Preparation: Xperteleven offers the possibility to prepare your team for how your opponent will play. “If you think your opponent will play 4-4-2 you will be able to choose to prepare your team for that by selecting that formation in a dropdown list on the tactics page. The tactical option will also be possible to save within the default tactics.”

Lots can be said about preparation, see the rules if you’re in doubt. Underlying principle again is: rock-paper-scissors. If both teams prepare correctly: no effect. If only one of the teams outguesses the other, the right guessing coach has a big advantage and the wrong a disadvantage. If both coaches guess wrong, neither has more advantage than the other. Possible advantages/disadvantages are levelled. See below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MY PREPARATION</th>
<th># HIS SAME FORMATIONS</th>
<th>HIS ADVANTAGE/DISADVANTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>correct</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Maximal disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correct</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medium disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correct</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Minimal disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correct</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td>No effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incorrect</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Slight advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incorrect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minimal advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incorrect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Medium advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incorrect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maximal advantage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you see, the best guess is rewarded. If you, skilled in clairvoyancy, correctly prepared to a formation your opponent never used past three matches, his disadvantage is maximal. If you played blindly, and didn’t react at all to his standard formation, his advantage is maximal.

Advantage means: you create extra chances. The probability that you score is higher. It doesn’t mean you win.

It’s a two-way system. If I correctly prepare to the formation that my opponent used twice, my opponent suffers a minimal disadvantage to his scoring chances. If he incorrectly prepares to a 541 formation I used twice, but I play the 433 I used one time earlier, I have a minimal advantage.

Example: Germany and Holland play a final. Van Basten, coach of the Orange Lions, has used the same 433-formation three times in a row and sticks to it. His opponent, Beckenbauer, is however totally mistaken about
Van Basten’s preferred formation and prepares his team at a 442-formation.

Van Basten himself correctly outguessed the frightened defensive 541-formation Beckenbauer used the 3 earlier lost matches against Malta, Cyprus and Iceland.

Instead of the normal 8 chances the Orange Lions now have 16 chances. Instead of their normal 4 chances, the Germans, hindered by their disadvantage, now only have only 2.

If Van Basten tries a surprise formation (a formation he hasn’t used the last 3 matches) he has a maximal disadvantage if Beckenbauer expected the surprise (however, impossible with Germans) and a slight advantage if Beckenbauer didn’t.

So far, so good. Want to know the outcome of the match? 2-1 for Germany, thanks to a penalty. Preparation isn’t that important, you see. And, to quote Gary Lineker, "football is a simple game; 22 men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans win."

Enough quotes and examples – back to basics. What are the Sun Tzu tips about preparation?

a. First and most important: don’t overestimate the weight of the ‘prep factor’. Many other factors (playmaker, midfield, average skill, special qualities, form etc) have more and bigger consequences on the result than your ‘preparation’. Mentarman wrote that this factor only "will have a small effect on outcomes of matches (...) this is something you can not take a lot of risk on and not worry about much, or put a little more effort into if you wish for a small possible reward that may or may not be worth it to you. The key is small reward.” So, easiest is just not to care. Get a life!

b. However, if you don’t want a life, but prefer a small but sometimes decisive edge now and then: average (lazy) players often blindly select 442 as default formation. More often than not, 442 will be their default prep formation as well (if they prepare at all). If you want to play this game as simple and effective as possible, select a different default formation (433, 451) and a default 442 prep. Thus, more often than not, you will outguess an average player while he has not outguessed you.

c. If you like rock-paper-scissors, quickly check your opponent’s last three matches. Always prepare yourself at the formation he used twice. Thus, any possible disadvantage will be small. Think about re-using a formation you used at least two out of the last three matches. Thus, your possible advantage will increase.
Doing this has a weak side. If your opponent correctly predicts your formation, your advantage is zero. If your own preparation is wrong, you’ll suffer a relative disadvantage. However, because preparation is only a small factor, let earlier choices not control your definitive formation.

d. If you hate life, love spying and want to be a pro, buy the tactic report of at least three of his matches. Fathom his tactics. See the pattern. What’s his home and away formation? Is he adaptive to his opponents? Does he analyse your team? Think about your own formation. The same old 4 midfielder or a surprise striker instead? Bluff, win or lose and feel yourself like James Bond playing poker in Casino Royale. Two pair or a full house? Your turn.

e. The rules give the option not to prepare, too. Necria uses the no-option “when an opponent has played 3 different formations in his last three games and looking at them and others seems to be simply plucking formations out of the sky to confuse people. I’d still probably guess though.” Others agree. Baron84: “If I couldn’t be sure of the formation they would play its best to leave it blank.” SleepingBear added: "If it’s quite clear which type of formation I definitely don’t want them to play, I will prepare for that. (Like the opposition has 3 outstanding defenders and 5 incredible midfielders, with the rest of the team being mediocre, I will prepare for 3-5-2 because that will be the least favourite formation he could play from my behalf.) Then if the team is a good allround team, I’ll prepare for none...”

Win bonuses
Bossebong wrote about how win bonuses fuel performance increases. His figures:

- 50k = 5%
- 100k = 7% (+2.0)
- 150k = 8.5% (+1.5)
- 200k = 9.5% (+1.0)
- 250k = 10% (+0.5)
- 300k = 10.4% (+0.4)
- 1 mil = 15%

Patyp added: “If these figures are true then 50k for 5% is without doubt the best value and for me an automatic choice for any game where you don’t anticipate an easy win.”

Norton Antivirus pointed at the weak side of these figures, however. Only the 5% and the 15% are confirmed, he said. “Bossebong doesn’t know the exact figures however after reading the rules which states the 5%-
15% he worked it out himself, which may not be true, however do give a rough idea.”

So use these figures carefully, every Chinese guru would say.

Rps78 takes the relative home/away factors in account: “I always check the opponent home/away stats and decide how much the win bonus will be. Orange Mooses is an excellent example, the Mooses have an huge home factor and if they have an away match against the team which has also a big home factor I will pay a big winbonus.” But if Bossebong’s figures are true, he thinks he wouldn’t pay “more than 250k.”

Systemize asked if win bonuses cancel out the average age use. “Say the average age of your team is 24 years old. And in rules it says they perform at 85%? -whatever it is. Now if you use a win bonus of 250k, which improves your play by 10% or so. Wouldn't that make your team play around 100% with the 2 combined?”

Duffster pointed out that “win bonus is more for individuals, and average age for team on a whole”. Malduk added that “yes, those two are canceling each other out, but you don’t know how exactly (percentages).”. And Greyhound217 wrote “if the average age is low, therefore performance is hindered to 90%, and a win bonus brings it back up to 100%, if the average age was 26, then the win bonus would increase the performance to 110%??? So yes it may cancel the effect out but if the average age was 26, then you would still get a better performance.”

Peterkroes (my favourite Dutch coach, apart from myself) thinks win bonuses are important for both match performance and manager ranking, as well. He pays 300 / 350 per match. The player’s match performance is much better. He assumes that the higher the relative player’s performances are, the more ranking points a coach gets. He has been “coach of the week” and saw his ranking skyrocketed, although he was totally mistaken about his opponent’s tactics, that week.

My thoughts: if you consistently pay out win bonuses only and mainly to counter your low age, you might consistently soften the average age rule, however, you lose a lot of money in the long run. You’d better spread the age of your players, buy/sell with brains and slowly build that mean machine instead, than pour money through the toilet (as every Dutch toilet cleaner knows).

**Playing offensive, normal or defensive**

Rules say that if you play defensive “the team will take few risks and will try to keep hold of the ball when they get it. Defensive play has the disadvantage of not creating so many scoring opportunities but hopefully neither will your opponents. If you choose to play offensive the whole
team will go forward and you will probably create a fair number of scoring opportunities but the disadvantage is that your defence will not be so tight which will give your opponents more scoring opportunities also.”

Besides, the rules say that every team has an (invisible) home advantage factor, which is for every team different. “If, for example, you often win at home but rarely win away games chances are your team has a fairly large "home advantage factor" and this should be taken into consideration when selecting your team and planning your tactics.” However, ”all teams, regardless of the "home advantage factor", do however have a small advantage when playing at home.”

This means you can safely attack at home and better play (more or less) defensively away, Master Sun says. At home you can risk more.

Remember that if you play defensive with a lot of defenders, defending is the only thing your team does. Thus, some players advise to maintain a balance between formation and style of play. AndyM2033 (himself a top-100-player) wrote: “If I have a defence formation like 5-4-1, I would play offensive; 4-5-1 normal; 4-4-2 cautious.”

Managers should play offensive with a defensive formation and defensive with an offensive formation, he thought.

**Remember how relative (un)important tactics are**
Former number one manager Rps78 wrote, shortly before he left: “I’ve been bored of x11 about 15 months already. This game should be a coaching based game but today it isn’t. It looks like the most important thing is the team skill, form is the second important, then LUCK and the least important is the tactics!! If you have a skilled team with an excellent freekick taker and train your players your team will win the leagues - no matter how bad a coach you are”.

Iwe gave some indications, although confusing. He wrote: “It’s easy to get an idea of that you have set the perfect tactics if you only look at the most obvious choices as Off.Strategy, Def.Strategy, Playmaker and Defence against (...) However, these choices represents maybe 10-15% out of the tactical space. Because of this it could be that the match wasn’t played perfectly despite the most obvious choices were set perfectly. You could ask yourself the question if you should be guaranteed a victory if you have set have the perfect tactical settings for 10-15% out of the whole tactical space. I'll leave that question unanswered.”

But tactical space, in Iwes definition, includes: “for example the line-up which contains a larger number of tactical choices as team composition, special qualities, average age, teamwork etc”. In the same article Iwe wrote that tactical choices represent 25%-40% of the ‘tactical space’. And
he wanted to maintain “a good balance between the influence of the tactical settings in relation to the strength of the teams. Also, we have to keep some room for unexpected results to keep the excitements.”

My thoughts: Iwe’s text is confusing and contradictory. But if tactical settings affect 15 percent of the game, which might be 40 percent of the ‘tactical space’, a mathematical guess indicates based on Iwe’s labyrinthic Holy Words tell me that the proportion between the stats might be: 15 % tactical settings: 25% hidden values like teamwork, form, qualities, win bonus etc: and 60% skill and luck (combined). The luck factor is unknown, probably smaller than the skill factor. 40-20? 50-10? 55-5? We don’t know.

Besides, Iwe mentioned “variations” and “the percentages I mention is far from a fact. It’s just my own estimations”. And as a real God, he added he will ”never reveal the most inner secrets of how the game engine work as the game of Xpert Eleven is supposed to be hard to master.”

So what we have is mist. But even in mist we must navigate. That’s why Sun Tzu estimated: “The match result is for 15 percent affected by tactics, 25 percent by formation/teamwork/age parameters and 60 percent by skill and luck.”

Iwe’s revelation (if interpreted correctly) undermine somehow the importance of tactics. How important is it, really, if the visual tactics only affect 15 percent of a hidden figure? Being a tactics aficionado, I was disappointed.

I can only say that tactics appear to make a difference, regarding a certain correlation between ranking and league. The worst manager in the XCL was ranked 717, last time I checked.

In the future, tactical settings might become more important. Iwe announced that “we will (...) restore the importance of some of the more obvious tactical settings if needed. These changes will be done gradually and it isn't likely you will notice anything on the short term but you might do it in the long term.” Keep track of the forums and official news.
Part VI: The Way of the Play

*Master Sun says: “Keep expert tips until the last chapter”*

**Read the club stats**
If you’re a VIP and check a team, you’ll find club stats. They can help you to find the strengths and weaknesses of a team.

First you got to know what the ‘average stats’ for a general team are. See below (stats based on club stats of 16 teams)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>%how goals are scored</th>
<th>%how goals are conceded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Penalty</td>
<td>5,4</td>
<td>5,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct free kick</td>
<td>7,5</td>
<td>10,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set piece free kick</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>3,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long shot</td>
<td>12,9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shot penalty area</td>
<td>19,5</td>
<td>16,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Header from a cross</td>
<td>18,3</td>
<td>20,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Header after a corner</td>
<td>8,5</td>
<td>10,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shot after a corner</td>
<td>12,3</td>
<td>12,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakaway</td>
<td>11,3</td>
<td>7,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own goal</td>
<td>1,1</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compare your opponent’s team stats to the stats above. You’ll quickly see his team’s good and bad side. Then, check his latest line ups. If he’s good in defending against heading, wing play is often not a good idea. And if he seldom scores a breakaway goal, you might not need that quick defender. You can see your own weaknesses, too.

Take some care. Club stats are based on 27 or less matches (depending on the league). If a team scores 2 goals per match, the stats are based on about 55 goals. As a rule of thumb, I take a goal stat only as indicative if it differs at least 10% with the above averages. Check if the matches include a lot of cup matches as well, because cup matches are not included in the statistics. If a team has played a lot of cup matches the last 6 weeks, the stats are probably based on 10 or 15 league matches only = 20-30 goals. Statistics are less relevant, in that case.

NB: Club stats are somewhat mystical aspect of the game. Players have no common opinion yet about their meaning.

**An example, nevertheless:** Costadelkop gave an example of his personal club stats logic. He wrote about outguessing his next opponent: “First of all I check where they are in the league table (I do this to see if they are a good team,a bad team or somewhere in between)”. He checks their preferred formation and sees his opponent play 4-4-2 for 77% of matches. He buys tactics for their last three matches.
The match reports show that his opponent played varied, which is less easily countered than a specialist tactic like wing play, Costadelkop thinks. He checks the stats. ‘Shot in the penalty area’ is high. He chooses (NB in this very specific example, others disagree) *tighten the centre*. The opponent concedes 33% of goals from a cross, “so my attack play will be wing play. He scored 33% of goals in minutes 75-90 so I won’t be playing pressure, this will mean he will find it harder to score during those minutes.”

**Estimate you opponent’s home/away advantage/ disadvantage**

Wayne and Rps78 analysed 2016 matches. “In the 2016 matches counted there was a total of a 1000 home wins, (49.6%) whilst there were only 587 away wins, (29.1 %). There was a total of 429 draws, (21.3%). In total there were 6265 goals scored which averages at 3.11 each game.”

So, remember: the standard is 50/30/20. If your opponent’s stats differ significantly (more than 5%), his home or away advantage might be higher or lower than the average. Which means that you might need to adjust your win bonus.

A bit confusing are, however, their findings about the different leagues.

- The League of Champs, the Golden League and the Master League had between 70-80% home wins.
- The Hattrick league, the Major League, Xpert international, Ultimate League, Pro League, Dream League and Power League where all between 60% and 70% home wins
- Other leagues were near 50-54%.

This could mean that the game engine deliberately gives a different home advantage per league. I say: *could* mean. Nobody knows for sure, yet. “For Swedes, calculators are easy to play with, but hard to master”, Sun Tzu said.

**Match reports are decisive, club stats only add extra depth.**

Costadelkop wrote that although the stats are useful, latest match reports are decisive. Why? 1. The dubious statistical relevance, see above; 2. recent change of play style is not reflected in the stats; 3. the stats don’t show win bonus use.

Rps78 thought that although a coach should always use the team strengths as much as possible, tactics turn the scale: “If they play wing play, play tighten the wings; if they play a varied offense, play a normal defense etc. Adapt to their tactics no matter what the stats are”. And DrFlugel added: “I also find that good managers try to find patterns in your playing styles”. He warns that if a player grounds his tactics on stats only, his coaching might become too robotical and predictable.
Club stats indicate certain qualities or preferred styles of play

- If scored freekicks% is low, the team lacks or has lacked a freekicker. Hard shooters and skilled freekickers fire more direct kicks on goal. If both direct & setpiece freekick stats are low, the team has no designated freekicker. Freekick scoring risk is marginal. Indication of bad coaching, as well.
- But if the freekicks stats are high AND the ref is skilled/hard, think harder about playing careful (or cheating if it's your own team)
- High 'long shots' stats are clearly influenced by the number or shooters and preferred team tactics.
- A high 'shots in the penalty area’ probably shows that the coach prefers a ‘varied’ attack and/or has a goal instinct striker and/or general strikers. Data is lacking. But if through play affects the breakaway % and wing play the heading %, then varied affects the 'shots in the penalty area’, logically. Goal instinct make a striker shoot in the penalty area. The rules are not very clear about tactics/ style of play that create more or less shots in the box than any other, I add. Anyway, think at least about marking their goal instinct player. Rps78 said: "And naturally a normal defence against them is the best tactics.”
- High “header from a cross” stats suggest wing play, CostadelKop thought, and so did Richardfenn. The rules are unclear if any style of play influences ‘corners’, and players have different views. But as the stat is mentioned together with heading, relative high values might indicate a surplus of good headers in a team as well.

Forget finding the 'best' formation

Lots could be said about tactics. At tactics questions in the forums, nobody answers the same. Truth has many faces, and only twisted roads lead to wisdom. Master Sun collected some general hints, tips and idea's, however.

- **442. Allround formation.** Countertactics: 442 if your skill and form is better, or 451. Check if your opponent favors pressure.
- **451. Strong defense and midfield, weak attack.** More offensive than 541, see below. 352 could be a good answer to 451. Three defenders beat his lone attacker. Other options: 424 long balls ('hoof tactics’) or 523/ 433 long balls. Evade the midfield battle and shoot every intercepted ball from the defense to your strikers.
- **433. Allround offensive formation.** Good if your midfield is strong. Countertactics: 442.
- **541. Very defensive formation.** 343 might be a good countertactic. AndyM2033 prefers 541-normal (541-offensive occasionally). “Depends on the strength of the team I am playing as well. There’s
a lot that goes into to be honest. (...) If you play 5-4-1 defensive I doubt you would create many chances. If you play 4-3-3 offensive then the other team will create a lot. I think its just something I use from experience”, he wrote.

CosmicRichie (a top-1000-player) compared 541 with 451: “The 5-4-1 would have slightly more emphasis on defence and so you wouldn't concede as many goals as a 4-5-1, but the 4-5-1 means you control the midfield more so you could create more chances.”

- **352. Very offensive midfield formation.** Possible countertactics are: 451/pressure (try to beat his midfield), the 424 long balls ‘hoof tactics’ or 523/long balls (try to evade his midfield); or 433/long balls. (in my personal experience, 433-long balls had disappointing results, however: much depends on the relative strength of your midfielders and forwards)

- **424. Defensive counterfootball formation.** No midfield. Often in combination with long balls. To counter: 523/pressure with headers in your team might work.

- **343. Very offensive formation, strong midfield, very strong attack.** 442 might be a good countertactic.

- **5-3-2. Defensive.** CosmicRichie wrote: “Personally I prefer 5-3-2 when trying a defensive formation.”

**Against a strong midfield, use long balls**

Rps78 wrote: “(...) if you’re facing a team which have extremely good midfield(the better than you have) then I would recommended playing 4-3-3, 5-3-2, 4-2-4.. with long balls.”

**Against long balls, evade or win the midfield battle**

Xterminator asked what activating the 'long balls' tactic exactly do? ChelseaNick answered: “Basically all it does is miss out yours and his midfield when you attack, it has no bearing on him attacking”. Mentarman noted: "Long balls doesn't mean the midfield is entirely bypassed. No tactic is going to get rid of the effect of an entire part of the formation of either team. It just means that your defenders will try to shoot the ball all the way up to the forwards when they can (...) Long balls should be used to minimize the impact of the midfield (...) fully eliminate the impact of the midfield, (...) isn't possible. Basically I would never personally use fewer than 3 midfielders.”

SambaSven wrote, as general advice: “One possible counter-tactic against a long ball-playing team is to play with fewer midfielders than they are. For example you could play 5-2-3 against 4-3-3. In this scenario you might use the long balls yourself. You could also try to play with the same
number of midfielders if you have a stronger midfield than your opponent. If they, for example play with 3 midfielders and long ball+pressure you can also use 3 midfielders without neither long balls or pressure. You could also, in some occasions with this settings, use 4 players, if you think that you need one more player to "win" the midfield.”

ChelseaNick suggested: “In one of my private leagues it was common knowledge that to beat me, all you had to do was long ball. It took me a while but I realised the answer was 5 at the back, normally in a 532. After I thwarted them a couple of times the effect wore off and I could play my natural way again.”

**Against long balls, use defenders with heading quality**

SambaSven wrote: “Against long balls you should use defenders that are good in heading the ball.”

**Pressure and long balls can (sometimes) go along**

The idea that pressure and long balls are opposites, is a common misconception. The combination is possible, although hard core players view it as a rare option. In reply to Muskateer, Necria wrote: “Long balls partially bypasses the midfield. Pressure strengthens your midfield at the cost of conceding late goals etc. So if you were playing someone with an extremely strong midfield you could go long balls to reduce the effect of the midfield whilst also going pressure to narrow the gap which would still exist. I’ll admit though, I very, very rarely use both.”

Blocpartyrule thought: “I always imagined playing pressure increased your ball possession...therefore I don’t see why I would want to increase the time on the ball only to punt it long. I wouldn’t play them together but why not, worth a shot.”

**Pressure beats the long range shot**

Against pressure, evade the midfield battle, or win the midfield battle. The rules are clear: “By putting pressure on the holder of the ball you will strengthen your midfield which should increase your possession of the ball. Your opponent will also have difficulty in finding opportunities to shoot from outside the penalty area. In other word this tactic can be good if you think your opponent will try a lot of shots from outside the penalty area but the disadvantage is that your players will get tired towards the end of each half especially in the second half because they will be chasing the player with the ball.”

SambaSven wrote: “Against pressure, try to play with a even stronger midfield yourself. If you can't, use a less number of midfielders and long balls”. Richardfenn agreed: “I’d use pressure if my midfield was evenly matched against my opponent's and I needed an edge, or when I'm facing a side playing long range shots.” With a weaker midfield, “(...) I'd play
fewer in midfield and the long ball. No point knackering my players when I can avoid fighting the losing battle”, he added.

**Pressure: defensive and offensive use**
Maxwell T wrote: “Offensive = your team will play at a high tempo going forward and overload the box with players whenever they get the ball. However, something like cautious means that the defence will close out all the long range shots and strengthen the midfield etc. however going forward I’d still expect the forwards to be relatively cautious and apply a small amount of pressure. Basically, it depends on playing style”.

Dr Flugel said “this is one of those uncertain areas. I have in the past spoken to some of the top managers about this, and even they weren't 100% sure when to use it or not. Personally thinking about it, I probably use it more often than not. But that's just me.” Jj1989 added, as general advice: "Never play pressure with bruise, you are asking for 90+ minute concedes.”

**Be careful with “very offensive“ in most cases**
Curtis_mufc wrote: “I always use offensive and have only used very offensive when I really need a good result. I was also thinking that if you were to play very offensive, isn’t there going to be more chance of getting caught on the counter attack.”

**Play careful or normal, seldom brutal**
Rps78 wrote: “I never play brutally. I just try to avoid injuries as much as possible”. Recently, rules changed. The style of play now affects more the number of cards and freekicks and less the injury rate. Playing brutal now can be a good strategy sometimes (if the ref has a low H-value), but still the injury risk is higher.

**Don’t expect to be invincible**
In reply to Lux_Par, who complained about a home match he didn’t win despite outclassing his opponent, Mentarman said: “Well there has to be a certain amount of randomness or otherwise what's even the point of playing the games? Plus there could be tactics differences. Finally, if you look at the results, you'll see one of your players with an own goal, a mistake that resulted in the draw.”

**Aim at top 500**
You want to know if you’re learning this game? Well: check if you’re manager of the round, and closely watch your manager skill ranking. If you move higher up, you’re getting better all the time (lalala) - as Lennon-McCartney once wrote. Be aware of the flaws, however.

Basic idea of ranking and being manager of the week is that everybody is given “a grade in each competitive match. This grade takes into
consideration how a manager set up his/her team and the tactics he/she used. It helps a little if the team wins or draws especially if the team is weaker than the opponent on paper. It is however the tactical assessment that is most important regardless of whether the team won, drew or lost”, Iwe wrote. The ranking is based on the scores of the last 6 months.

You get points for outguessing your opponent. Uthman explained: “for things like if you successfully mark their playmaker, if they are tightening the centre and you attack via the wings etc. Offensive/defensive orders and your formation also come into play”. Relative strength appears to play a role, too: weaker teams get more points than stronger teams. Cup matches count in the formula. The more cup matches you win, the more points you get, the higher your ranking is.

What the formula specifically takes into account is in the dark, however and the system has flaws. Dr Flugel: “the previous 3 months I received something like 13/14 manager of the rounds. But so far the latter 3 months I haven't got one at all and my tactical nose seems to have disappeared.” And Sommers noticed that although he won the cup semi final his ranking went down by about 70.

Dr Flugel: “If you look at a lot of the managers who have actually won things, especially the xpert leagues they normally have a rubbish manager ranking. The other flaw in the ranking system is that it doesn't take into account how good your opponents are.” It’s easier for an active div 8 manager (with newbie and inactive opponents) to become manager of the week than for a div 2 manager, who has to beat decent rivals. Besides, some tactics (like playing careful in some situations) reward you with lots of points, but you you risk losing matches.

Regarding the flaws, a top 100 ranking tells little about your actual skill. So aim at top 500. Many xpert Champions League players are top 500 players. According to Dr Flugel (currently top 200, ranked 8 in the past), “there isn't much difference from 800-60 odd if you go on a roll.”

Remember: your xpert ranking (second bar in your profile) is not a skill indicator: “Your Xpert rating is based on the number of logins and press reports”, Duffster wrote.

Know the quick road to success
The biggest problem nowadays with Xperteleven is the very, very, very, very, very, very slow team development. One match per week. One season every two months. Well – calculate.

If you take over an 8th division team and want to finish with this same team in the upper division of your league, you need to promote 8 successive times. That’s 8 x 9 weeks = 72 weeks. One year and seven
months - without any misfortune. No third places. No lost qualifiers. Only promotion, season after season. It's a long and winding road. "It takes too long to create a good team", a frustrated DrFlugel wrote. “This is a game, not a lifelong project.”

If you really really want, you can use the backdoor. Use a trick. “If you can’t beat them, cheat them”, Sun Tzu says.

Age tricksters “get teams [in lower divisions of the Xpert Leagues] sell all the young players, and buy lots of old skilled players, as doing so makes it easier to get your ranking up, and these people do not intend to stick around when the team crumbles (...) When they reach top 100, they jump to a team in a much higher division”, Doomonyouall discovered. Jimbo_204 hates this strategy: “the problem I have with old team builders is their utter selfishness. its just a case of short term victory with no eye to the long term stability”.

So what? It’s not against the rules. “The greatest warriors prefer the long road”, Sun Tzu wrote. “But smaller warriors often have more women.”

**Visit Amsterdam (& hate Sweden)**

Greatest city in the world. If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. Streets are paved with gold. All men are beautiful, all women intelligent & charming. The best & the brightest live there. Dutch is easier than Esperanto. We have tasty beer. Amsterdam is the land of the free, and the home of the Brutez. And Ajax.

Sun Tzu wanted to move to Amsterdam, but his wife didn't like the sea climate. “Although it’s much, much better than Sweden, or Scandinavia in general”, she admitted.
Addendum: The Art Of The Press Release

*Master Sun says:* "In war, truth is the first casualty"

Every two months a newbie starts a “Why was my press release not published in the Daily?”-thread. The answer is often simple. They wrote a long and tedious essay, and forgot some basic rules:

- paragraphs.
- a captivating title.
- to use a spelling checker.

Keep your press release short. Remember that lower division clubs get less airplay than the top clubs, no matter how good their PRs are (or how mediocre the PRs of the top clubs are). Humorous press releases are not really appreciated by the current XpertDaily staff, at least not by some of them. Besides, humor is a matter of taste. Other tips are:

**Publish standard match reports**
Check Everton1977ace, top publisher. His standard format is:
- what happened in the first half
- what happened in the second half
- what's the opinion of the manager.

*Example:* "The match itself got off to a slow and nervy start with both sides missing chances, but with the half-time whistle fast approaching Riot City Blues got the break through that they were looking for when they took a surprise 1-0 lead in the 40th minute (...) To their credit though in the second-half Real Betis X11 never gave in as they pushed forward in search of a leveller and they didn’t have to wait long before there efforts were to pay off and they were to get it!, so it was to be in the 58th minute that Swedish starlet Henrik Singsaas was to pull the Spanish side level at 1-1 (...) I caught with the an upbeat looking Real Betis X11 manager Aaron Rowlands at the final whistle and he had this to say to us, "Not the result we was actually looking for!, but in the end i suppose that i,ve got to be happy (...)" (a recent Real Betis PR)

**Publish about manager plans or ideas about the club**
Example: "Jardel6 has defended his signing by saying this: "I know many people believe this to be a stupid amount of money to spend but i felt a new big signing was needed in defence to bolster us up at the back and make sure we get the results we need. I know we could have brought many players for cheaper prices to build up the whole team but i feel the
only place that needed some work was the defence as they are getting on a bit and as I said earlier, they need to make sure they keep out the goals." (Azurri United)

**Use fictional quotes from fictional players**

It’s a nice way to make your press release more vivid.

Example: "We also spoke to new signing Strut about his price tag and feelings on signing for the club and he had this to add: "I know many of you feel that my price tag is highly overvalued but I feel that in the forthcoming games I can prove you all wrong and make it worth every penny of the chairman’s money." (Azurri United)

**Hit the ceiling with your arrogance**

The NakedChef for instance, is good at it.

Example (in a press release tastily titled 'TheNakedChef - Xpert 11’s Greatest ‘): ""Critics are calling this "the greatest picture of our time." Time Magazine is calling it: "An absolute masterpiece. It’s an absolute stroke of genius. Never has there been such a compelling performance since Mel Gibson in Braveheart or Daniel Day Lewis in There Will Be Blood." We are of course talking about the latest movie to hit the big screen, "TheNakedChef - The greatest X11 Manager ever," directed by the Coen brothers.

Last night, the red carpet was rolled out as Hollywood welcomed the stars from the football world and movie stars from all around the world for the world premier. The razzle dazzle, the glitz and glamour, everything was there to set for a magical evening. Stars attending the premier ranged from Football maestro Zinedane Zidane, Hugh Heffner and his three girlfriends, The Queen and none other then the Spy who Shagged me, Austin Powers (...)

**Witty trash talk is fun to read**

Example: Chrille wrote:
"Duffster isn't man enough to do a Chrille", Chrille said furiously. "There are a few reasons why this is", Chrille explained.

1. I am a very cool person, I skate a lot in the park and steal money from elderly handicapped people. Duffster doesn't do that. He helps small bitches over the street. Not very manly.

2. I like to fart, shove my two fingers up my bum and smell it. Duffster doesn't do that. Not very manly.

3. I like to watch porn. Duffster doesn't do that. He thinks it's "degrading to all women". What's degrading with taking a shower after a hard day's work? Not very manly.
Duffster isn't man enough to do a Chrille. It's like me doing a Simon Cowell. How do I get overpaid for doing nothing? Doesn't make any sense."

King of trash talk, by the way, was Muhammed Ali, who said things like:

"If you even dream of beating me you'd better wake up and apologize" and: "Frazier is so ugly he should donate his face to the US Bureau of Wild Life."

Think about satire and nonsense, but only if you’re good at it
I don't see it often here (most coaches stick to football and club issues). For inspiration/examples, check the news satire site http://www.thebluebrick.net/ .

In one of my private leagues, Peterkroes wrote:

"The Grand Mufti of Groenlo has issued a fatwa against referee Hans Gruber who led the match Club de Sewell - Grolsch Best last night: "Mr. Gruber offended our faith gravely. We're known to seek the dialogue with people who do not understand our ways, but radical actions require a radical response!"

Coach Kroes: "This is an outrage! I was away on business so I asked my dear friend Allah whether he was willing to implement the tactics for the first match of the season. Allah, not a great football God himself, well not as great as Maradona's God, owed me a favour, so he couldn't refuse. As a result, all the tactics were spot on and we, the weakest team of the league, should have drawn the secondd strongest team on their home ground. But Hans Gruber thought differently. He disallowed a perfectly fine goal in the first half. If you know where to find him, call 0800-ALLAHLAKBAR."

Inspired oneliners add colour to your press releases
"the lad's as cool as a cucumber. Unlike myself - I've just been doing my gardening, and I'm sweating like a paedophile in Toys R Us!" (from FC Brest)

"Scientists have been scrambling to gather samples of Shredded Wheat, with fears it may lead to a lack of brain power so bad that individuals act at the mental capacity of Jade Goody." (from Cosmic Richie)