3 Midfielder

Background

This unit could potentially pose a number of problems for a teacher who is not a football fan. There are many different types of midfielder and it can be a little confusing. However, the one thing that doesn’t change is the part of the pitch that these players occupy: the area between the defenders and the strikers.

Different midfielders have different strengths. Some midfielders are better at defending so they often stay just in front of the defenders. Other midfielders like to go forward and are good at scoring and creating goals.

Amongst midfielders, most of the glory tends to go to the creative, goal-scoring variety. The great French player, Eric Cantona, once described his countryman, defensive midfielder Didier Deschamps, as a “water carrier.” Many people interpreted this as an insult, with the implication being that Deschamps was incapable of creativity and could only perform routine tasks on the pitch. But the truth is that, without these “water carriers”, most successful teams would not have achieved their success.

In 1998, a year after Cantona retired having played 45 times for France, Didier Deschamps captained France to the World Cup title. He retired in 2001, having represented France 103 times and having also captained France to victory in the 2000 European Championships. Not bad for a water carrier!

Jargon buster

**additional time** *n* time allowed by the referee (the official timekeeper of the match) outside the full 90 minutes; this time may be allowed for substitutions, injured players requiring attention, and other stoppages (also **added time** *n*, **injury time** *n* or **stoppage time** *n*)

**attacking midfielder** *n* player deployed in an offensive position (usually behind the striker/s), often involved in passing moves leading to goal-scoring opportunities; examples of such players include Juan Mata of Spain and Chelsea, and Mario Götze of Germany and Borussia Dortmund

**central midfielder** *n* often the creative or playmaking position, alternating between attacking and spreading the ball around the midfield. These players often exert the
most control over a match, largely because much of the play takes place in their area of the pitch; examples of players in this role include Paul Scholes and Xavi

**chance n** opportunity to score a goal (also **create a chance v**)

**cut inside v** when a winger, or wide player, leaves the wing to run inside during an attack

**defensive midfielder n** primarily a defensive role, the defensive midfielder is usually stationed in front of the defence; his role is largely to break up the opposing team’s attacks, as well as to serve as a buffer; some defensive midfielders are ‘end to end’ players, energetically linking defence and attack as Patrick Vieira used to do for France and Arsenal; Sergio Busquets of Spain and Barcelona is a good example of a defensive midfielder today

**drop deep v** to return from attack to a more defensive position inside your own half of the pitch

**far post n** the goalpost that is furthest away from an attacking player at the time of attempting to score a goal

**formation n** how the players of a team are positioned on the pitch, depending on how ambitious the team’s attacking intentions are; typical formations include 4-4-2, 4-2-3-1, and 4-3-3; these formations refer to the **outfield players n** (that is to say the ten players of a team excluding the goalkeeper)

**long ball n** attempt to send the ball a long way down the pitch in the hope of creating a goal-scoring opportunity; this often means a high ball to the head of a tall striker, rather than an attempt to play the ball to a player’s feet; many people associate this tactic with teams from the north of Europe

**near post n** the goalpost that is nearest to the attacking player at the time of attempting to score a goal

**number 10 n** essentially a position (as opposed to a shirt number) between the midfielders and striker/s; number 10s don’t necessarily score many goals, but they traditionally have a playmaking role; famous number 10s include Zinedine Zidane, Roberto Baggio and Juan Riquelme

**la roulette n** trick by which a player turns often whilst moving and dragging the ball from one foot to another (also **360 turn n** or **the Maradona n**); famously associated with Diego Maradona and Zinedine Zidane

**through ball n** type of pass played either across the ground or in the air which cuts through a defence for a team-mate to run onto

**track back v** to run back in order to help your defence, or to follow your marker back into your own half of the pitch; often this is when a winger, or wide midfielder, runs back to help a full back
winger *n* wide player who plays near the sideline; in many countries wingers are considered forward players whilst in England they are traditionally classed as part of the midfield; not all teams deploy wingers, and some successful teams such as Milan have opted for a midfield diamond or ‘Christmas tree’ formation instead; famous wingers today include Pedro of Spain and Barcelona, Frank Ribery of France and Bayern Munich, and Arjen Robben of the Netherlands and Bayern Munich

**Activity assistant**

1) Ask the students about the importance of having creative players in a team. Find out who their favourite creative players are and ask what attributes these players have.

2) Present continuous practice: Use football magazines or images of football matches taken from the computer. Give one or two of these images to each student and then ask the question: What is happening in this picture?

3) Find upcoming football fixtures on the Internet or in the newspaper. Give the students a copy of the fixture list. Practise questions and answers using the present continuous tense: *Who are Inter Milan playing against on the 25th of April? Inter Milan are playing against Sampdoria.*