

Line up in the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar (Carlsen, K.H. 2023)

This is a summary of the line up in all the 64 matches during the 2022 World cup in football. This is related to the team's formation and system, but does not necessary tells us which formation or system the teams actually used, and changes during the match. For example, Denmark switched from 1-3-5-2 to 1-3-4-3 when they came one goal behind in their first match. More, they changed their line up to 1-4-3-3 in their last group match. Brazil started the two first matches in 1-4-3-3, but played 1-4-4-2 in the last group match. Argentina did the opposite, and switched from 1-4-4-2 in the group matches to 1-4-3-3 in the round of 16, and 1-3-5-2 against the Netherlands in the quarter final. Belgium was one of the teams who lined up in 1-3-4-3 in all their matches, while Serbia lined up in 1-3-5-2 in their matches.

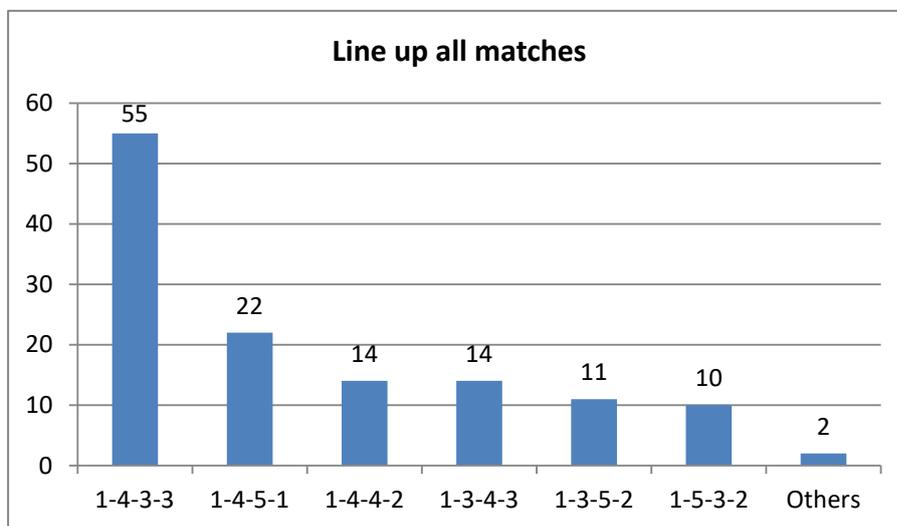


Figure nr. 1: The line up in for all teams in the 64 matches during the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar. 1-4-3-3 means one goalkeeper, four in the back line, three in the midfield and three in the front.

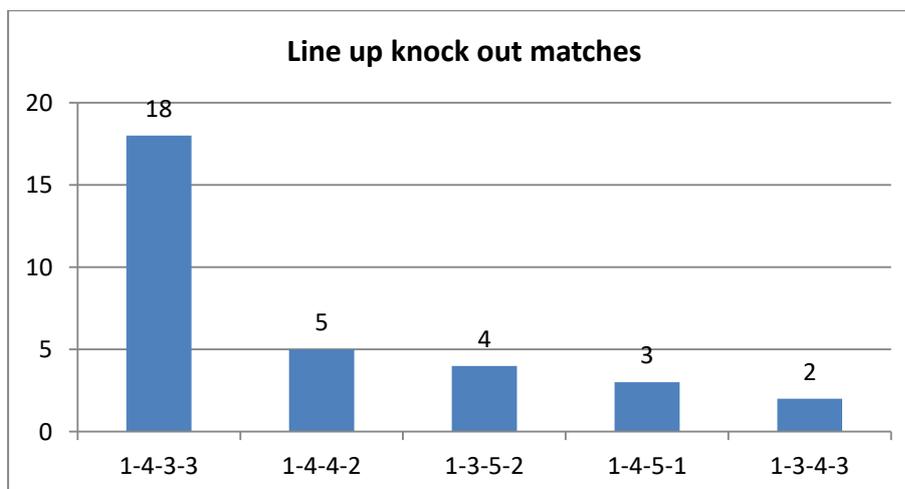


Figure nr. 2: The lines up in for all teams in the 16 knock out matches during the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar. Knock out matches are the 16 matches from the round of 16 to the final.

The results tell us that it was most common to use a 1-4-3-3 formation/system/line up in this world cup. This trend was even more apparent in the knock out matches, and both France and Argentina played 1-4-3-3 in the final. If we consider 1-4-5-1 as quite equal to 1-4-3-3, 60 % of the teams lined up in 1-4-3-3/1-4-5-1. Not many years ago 1-4-2-3-1 was a popular formation/system, but FIFA did not set up any team with this line up in the 2022 world cup.

There are possible to argue that individual skills and how the players are using their individual skills together are more important than line ups/formations/systems. However, it can reflect a trend. Before the world cup started I asked if the trend with more and more players in the back line would continue¹. Without having too much data about this topic, we can conclude that the majority of the teams in this world cup played with four players in the back line. This trend came even stronger in the knock out matches. One explanation for this can be that 1-4-3-3, 1-4-5-1 and 1-4-4-2 are simpler for the players to understand, and you might actually have better balance on turnovers against. More, it gives you better opportunity to create 2 against 1 on the flanks.

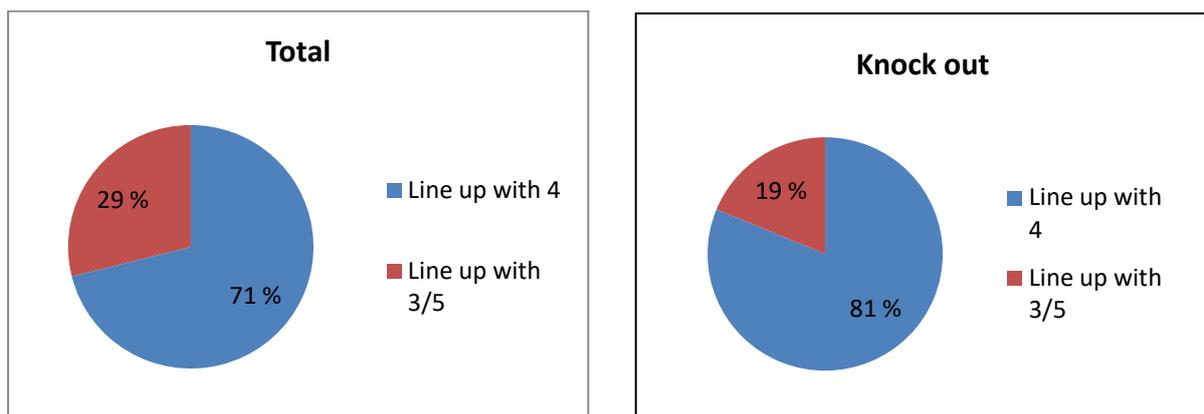


Figure nr. 3 and 4: Percentage of the teams who had a line up with four players versus three or five players in the back line. For all the 64 matches, 71 % of the teams had a line up with four players in the back line (to the left). In the 16 knock out matches, 81 % of the teams had a line up with four players in the back line (to the right).

Conclusion:

The most used line up in the 2022 world cup was 1-4-3-3. If we consider 1-4-5-1 as quite equal to 1-4-3-3, 60 % of the teams used a 1-4-3-3-/1-4-5-1 line up. In the 16 knock out matches, 18 out of 32 line ups where 1-4-3-3. It seems like the trend with more and more players in the back line have flattened out or even been reversed. Of the 128 line ups, 71 % where with four players in the back line. In the 16 knock out matches, 81 % of the line ups were with four players in the back line. One possible suggestion for this trend is that players find it easier to understand a system/formation with four players in the back line compared with five or three.

¹ <https://www.fotballforkids.no/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Betterfootballsports-World-Cup-history.pdf>