

Case for the defence: Big Four striking fear into "small 16"

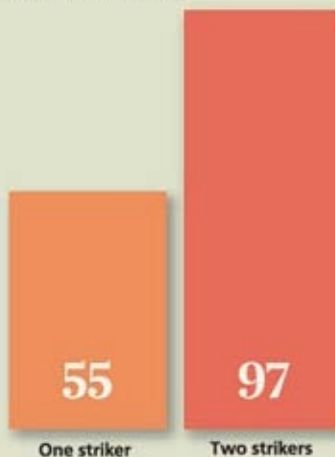
While line-ups featuring one striker rather than two are not always more defensive, they give a good indication of how positively teams are playing. This season teams appear to have taken a far more defensive approach when facing the Barclays Premier League's Big Four than they would normally. The "small 16", as they might be called, have used a single striker more often than two centre forwards against Chelsea, Liverpool, Arsenal and Manchester United. In their other games, however, they have opted for two strikers almost twice as often as one, although Everton fielded Louis Saha, right, up front alone away to West Ham United last weekend



Formations used this season by the "small 16" against Big Four



Formations used by the "small 16" against each other



The gap between top, middle and bottom in the Premier League is unusually tight this season, with only nine points separating the relegation zone from the Champions League places

Now

Top	Chelsea	29pts
5th	Aston Villa	20pts
17th	Wigan	12pts
Bottom	West Brom	11pts
Top to bottom difference		18pts

This week a year ago

Top	Man Utd	30pts
5th	Liverpool	24pts
17th	Middlesbrough	10pts
Bottom	Derby	6pts
Top to bottom difference		24pts

This week two years ago

Top	Man Utd	31pts
5th	Portsmouth	20pts
17th	Sheffield Utd	10pts
Bottom	Charlton	8pts
Top to bottom difference		23pts

This week three years ago

Top	Chelsea	31pts
5th	Tottenham	20pts
17th	Aston Villa	9pts
Bottom	Sunderland	5pts
Top to bottom difference		26pts

Words: Bill Edgar and Tom Dart