

**Tactical Thinking
&
10 Practical
Coaching Examples**

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POSSESSION PHASE

The characteristics of the possession phase should be based on the **consolidation** (i.e., not looking for verticality at all costs, only when necessary or possible) or the possession maintenance, on the drive (i.e., conquering meters down the pitch when possible, “provoking” the opponent), the search for the weak side (the pitch zone where the opponent gives us numerical superiority or wide areas to play). All this with plenty of courage during interpretation.

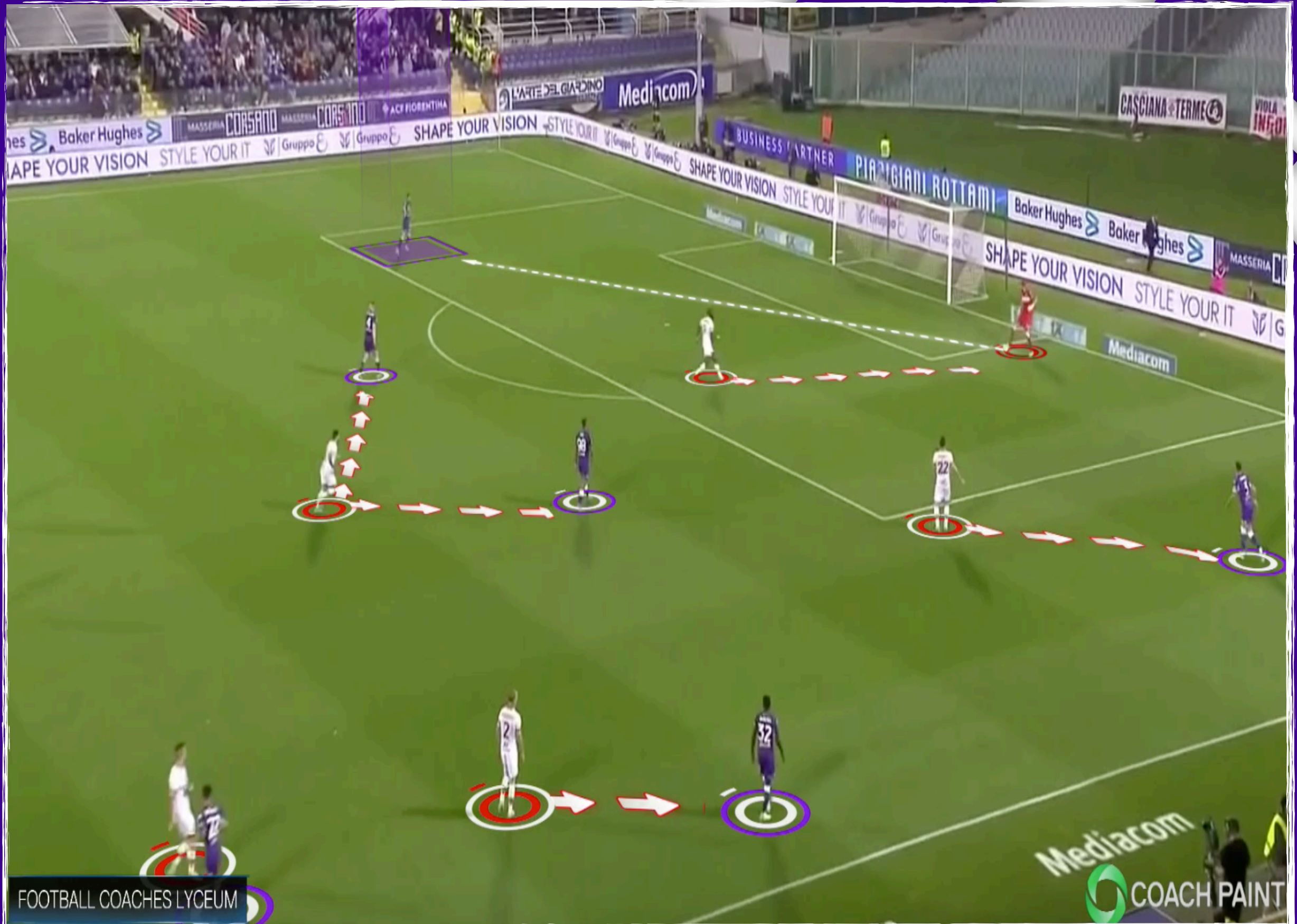
POSSESSION PHASE

- Without impacting the concept of **consolidation**, we should take advantage of the direct attack when possible (for instance in certain pitch zones or based on spaces granted by the opponent): this is a principle of the organized attacking phase. As a starting point, we must say that the purpose of attacking is to score a goal.
- When the right distances are established between the team components, and when the ball is recovered, the team's first collective thought is attacking the opponent's goal as fast as possible, with conviction and aggressiveness, objectively approaching the build-up, creation and the finishing phase.

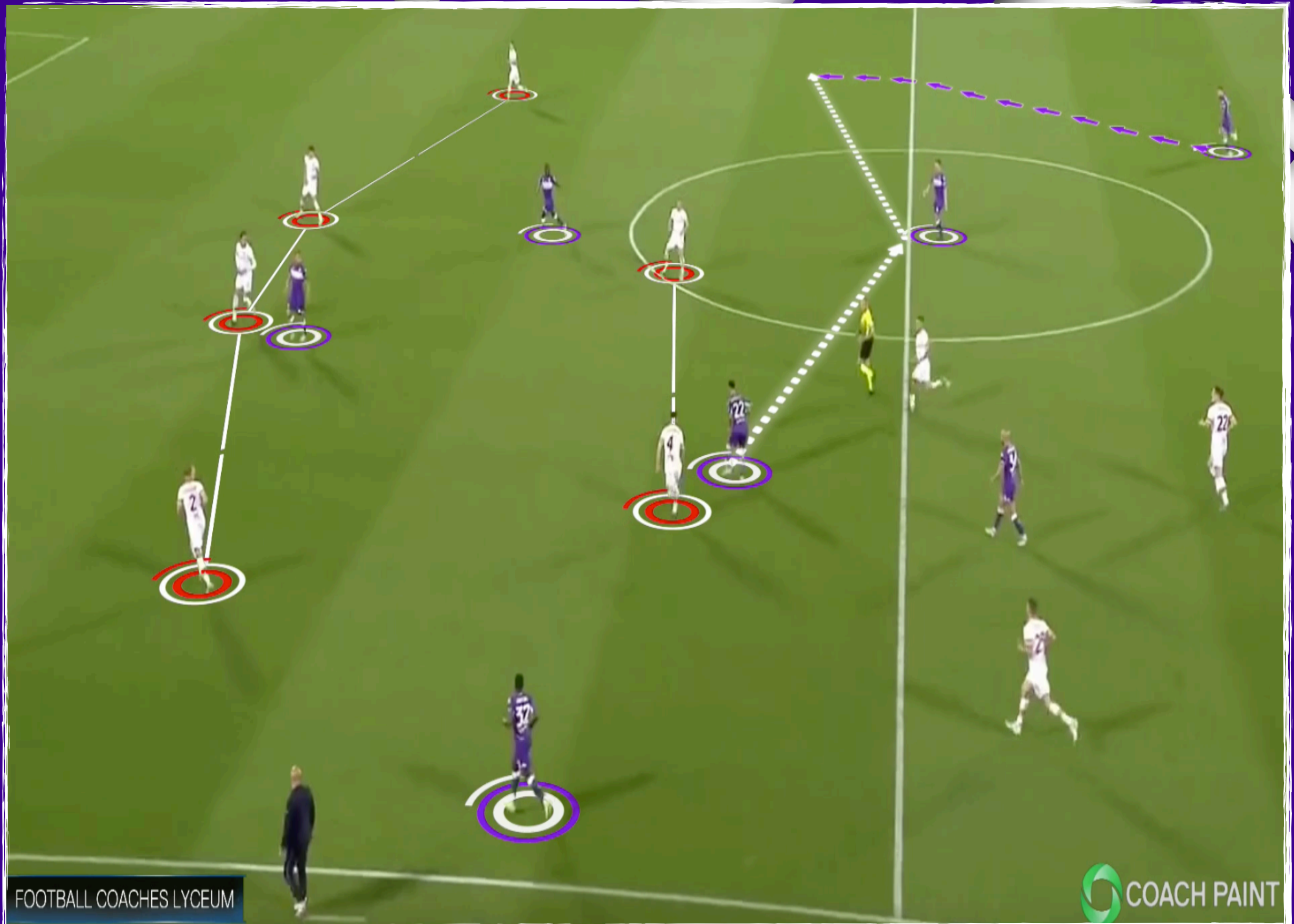
POSSESSION PHASE

- Direct attack means to guide each action towards the opponent's goal, in width or depth; this reduces the build-up time to allow the team to move directly to the opponent's half to create and finish the action.
- A direct attack encourages the risk-taking culture: play to win and not to avoid losing. This is not conditioned by the obsession of losing the ball.

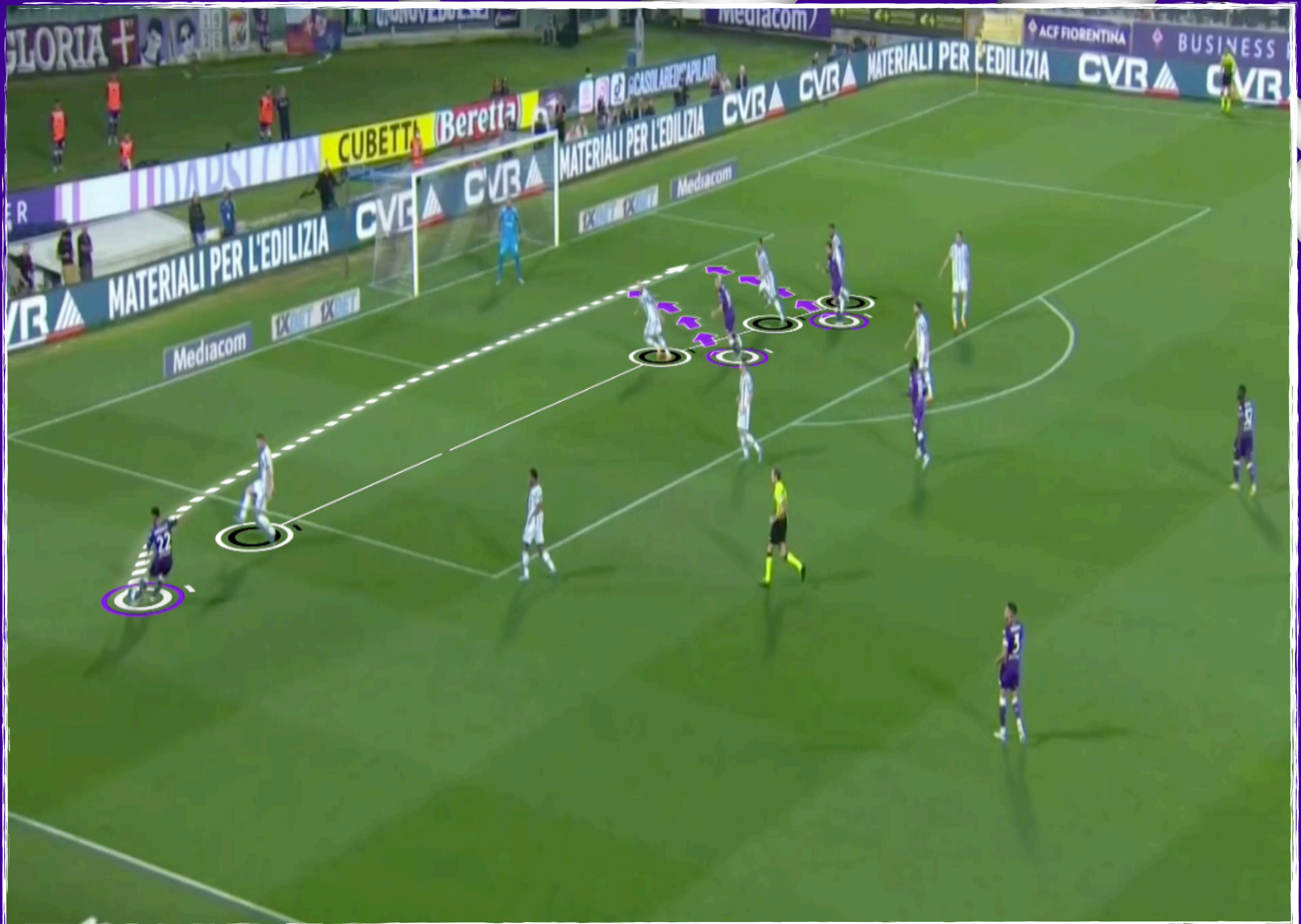
Build-up Phase



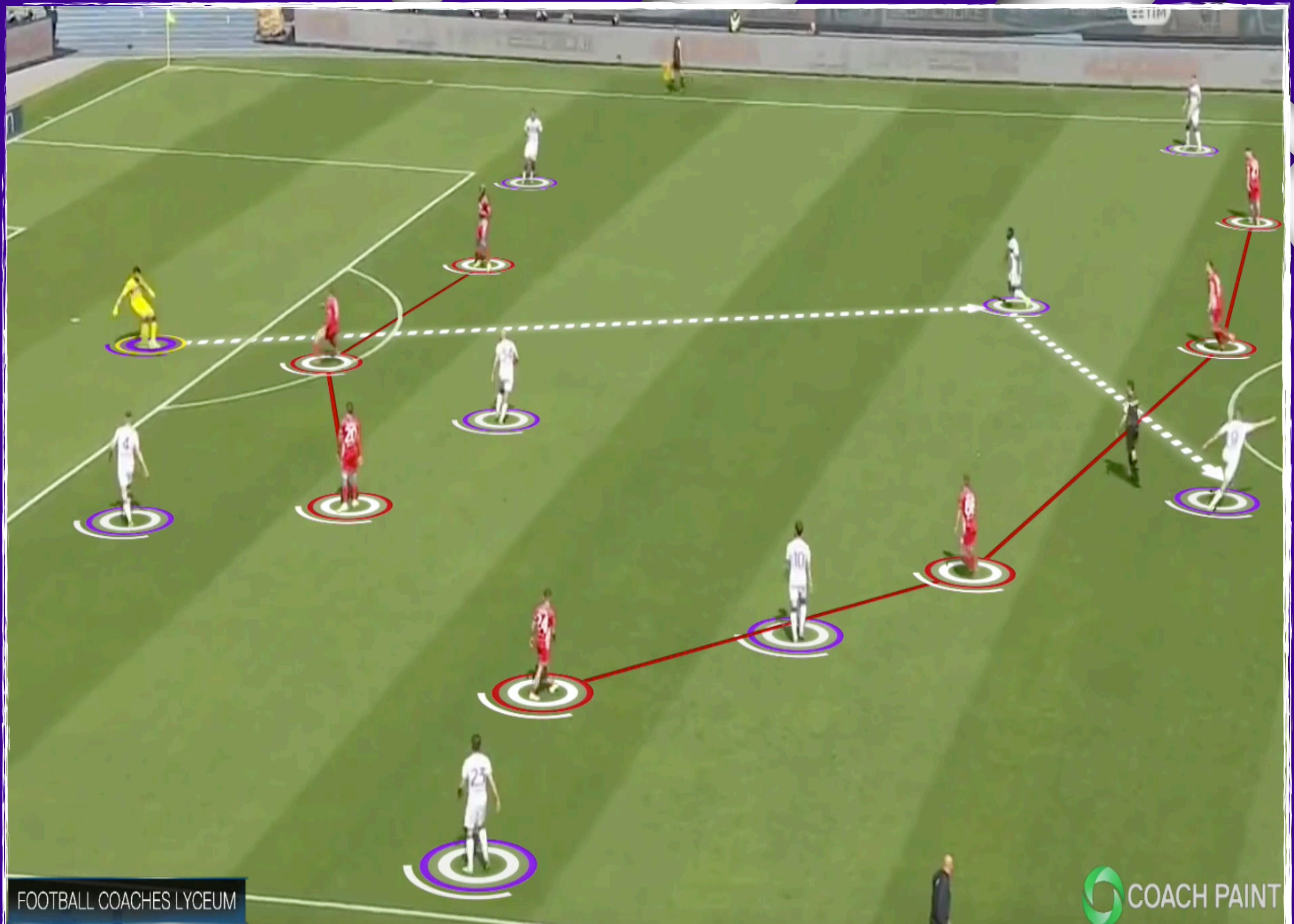
Creation Phase



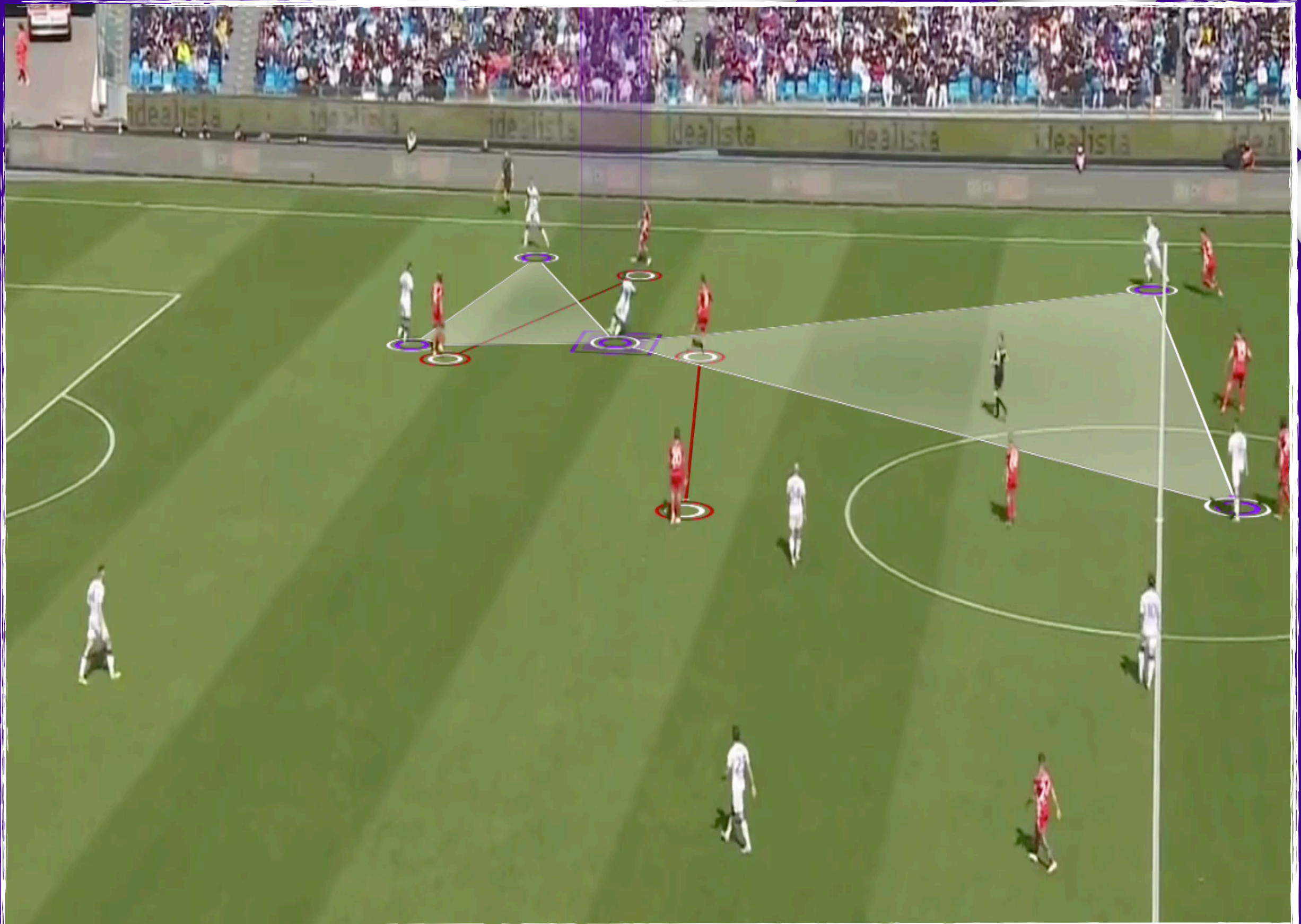
Finishing Phase



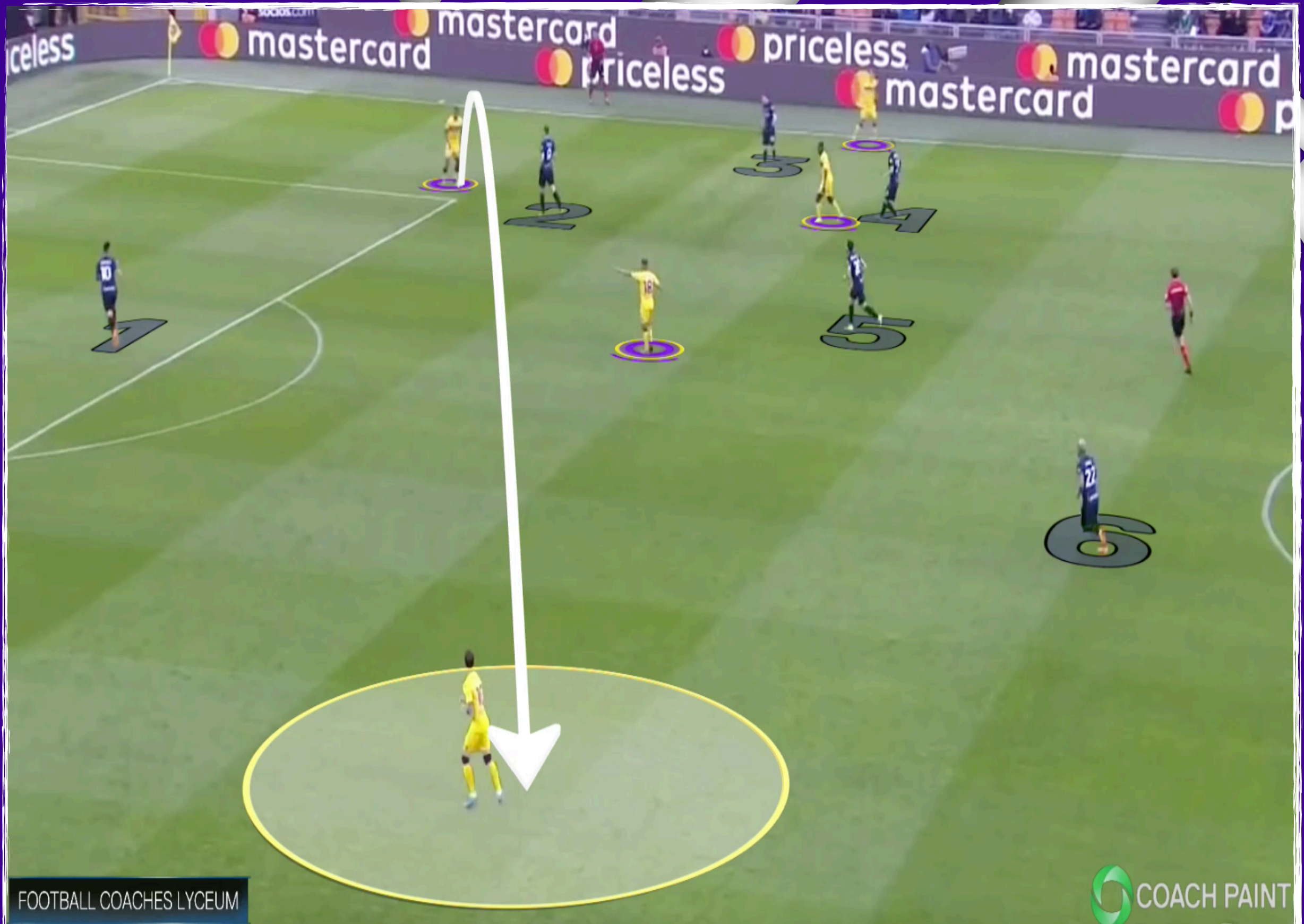
Consolidation ('adjusted verticality')



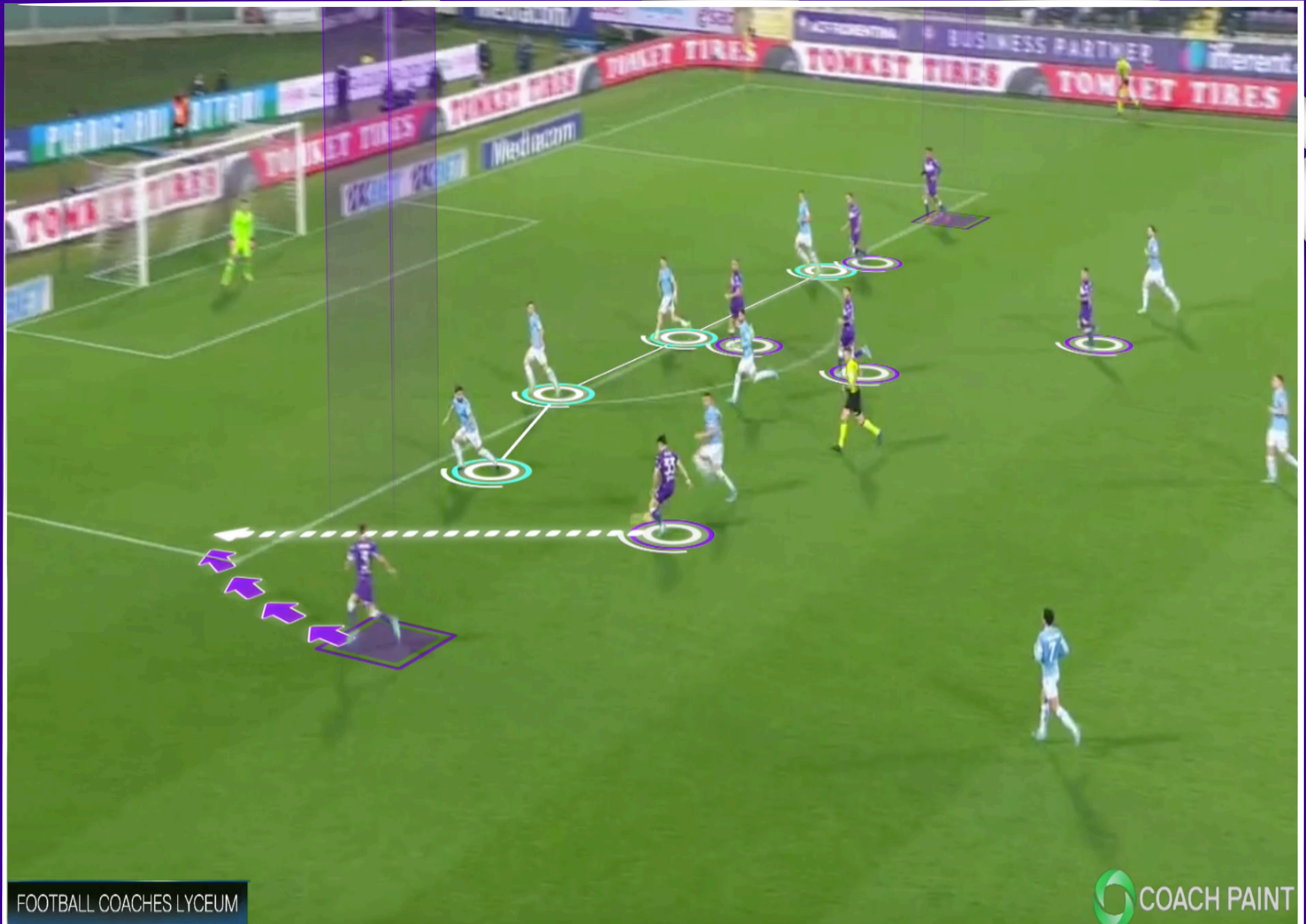
Possession Maintenance



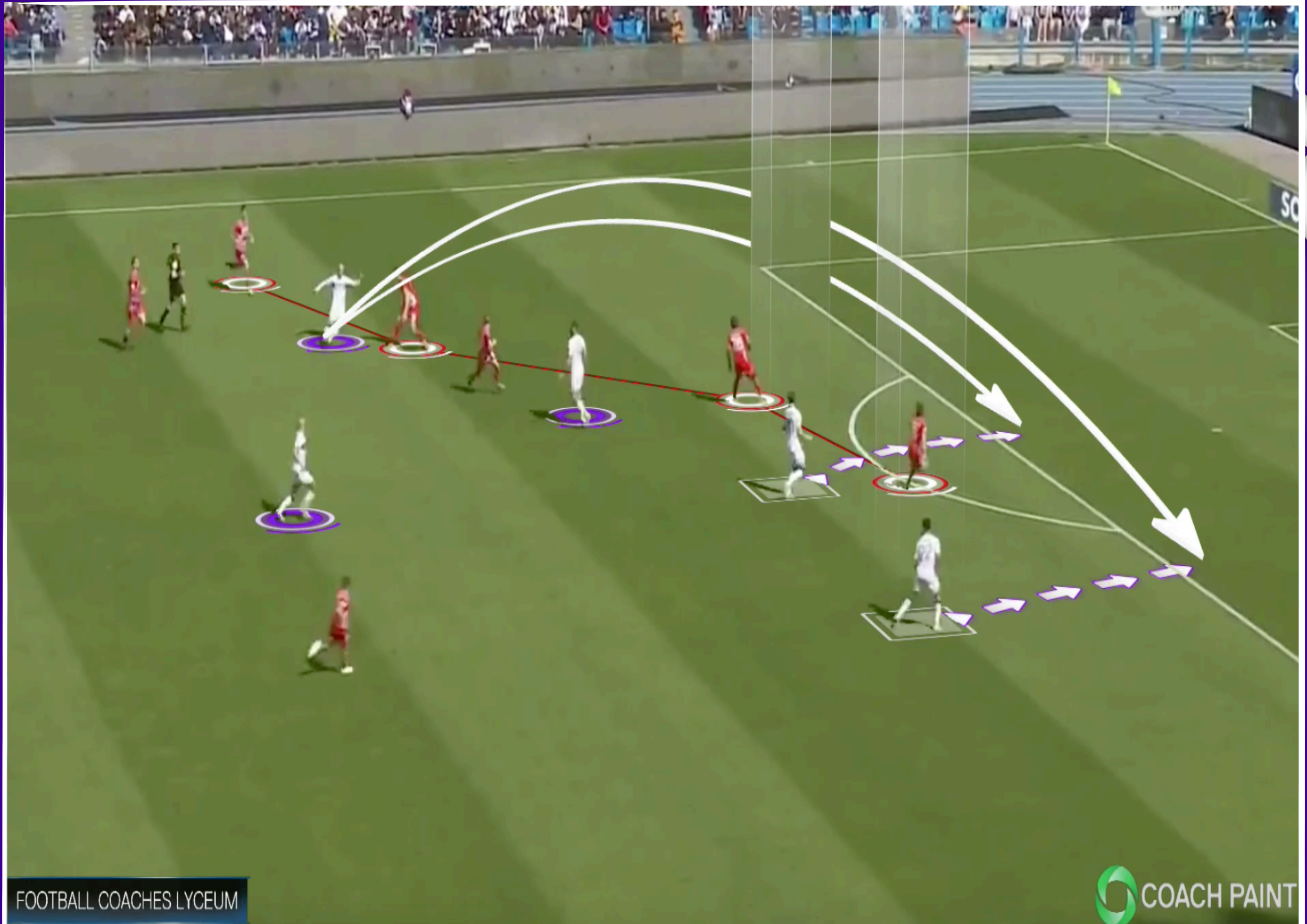
Search for the Weak Side



Direct Attack (width)



Direct Attack (depth)



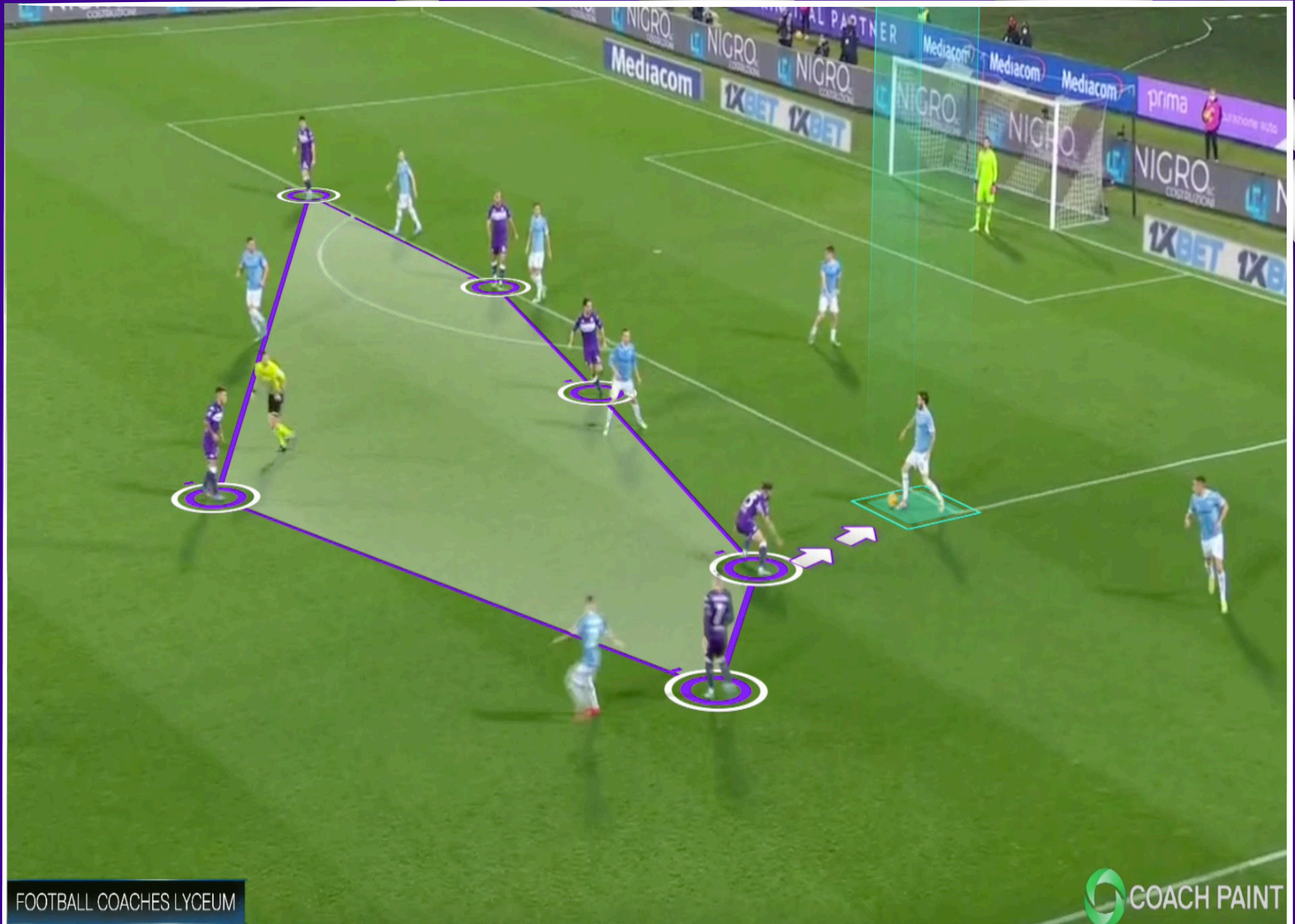
NON POSSESSION PHASE

During negative transition, the objective is to recover the ball as soon as possible after its loss. Or the team reorganizes itself and recovers the ball, forcing the opponent to make difficult or poorly thought or prepared choices. We should not be an expectant team with a dropped position on the pitch. We must avoid being repeatedly dominated by the opponent in possession.

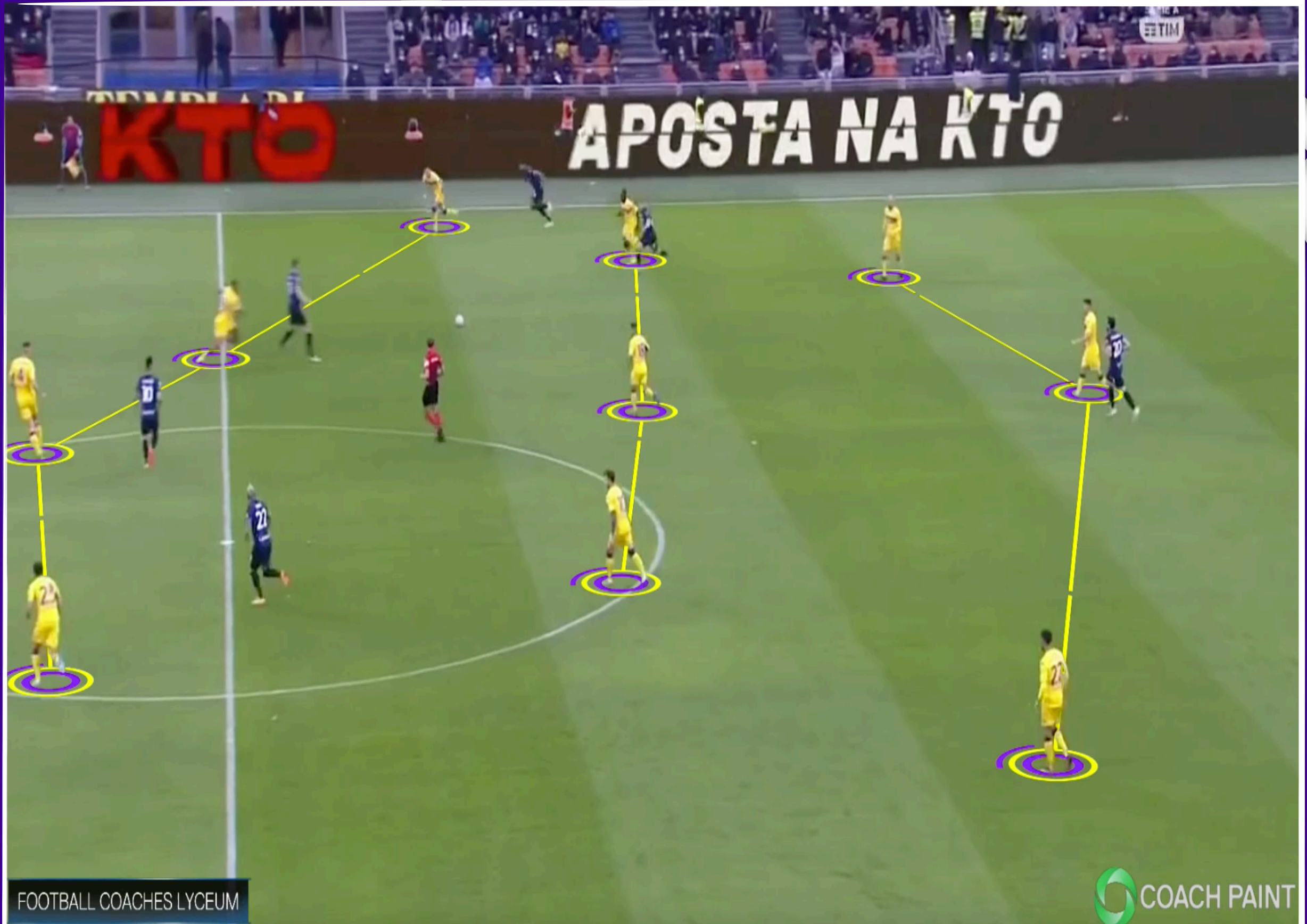
NON POSSESSION PHASE

- This requires a great spirit of sacrifice from the players, courage (not fear). For example, the Defensive Line has to be advanced, which will lead the team to play higher on the pitch; Midfielders and Forwards must be aggressive in front but, at the same time, be ready to retreat when needed.
- Pressure (sometimes ultra-offensive) – forcing the opposing team to kick the ball forward or off the pitch, or recover the ball near the opponent's box.

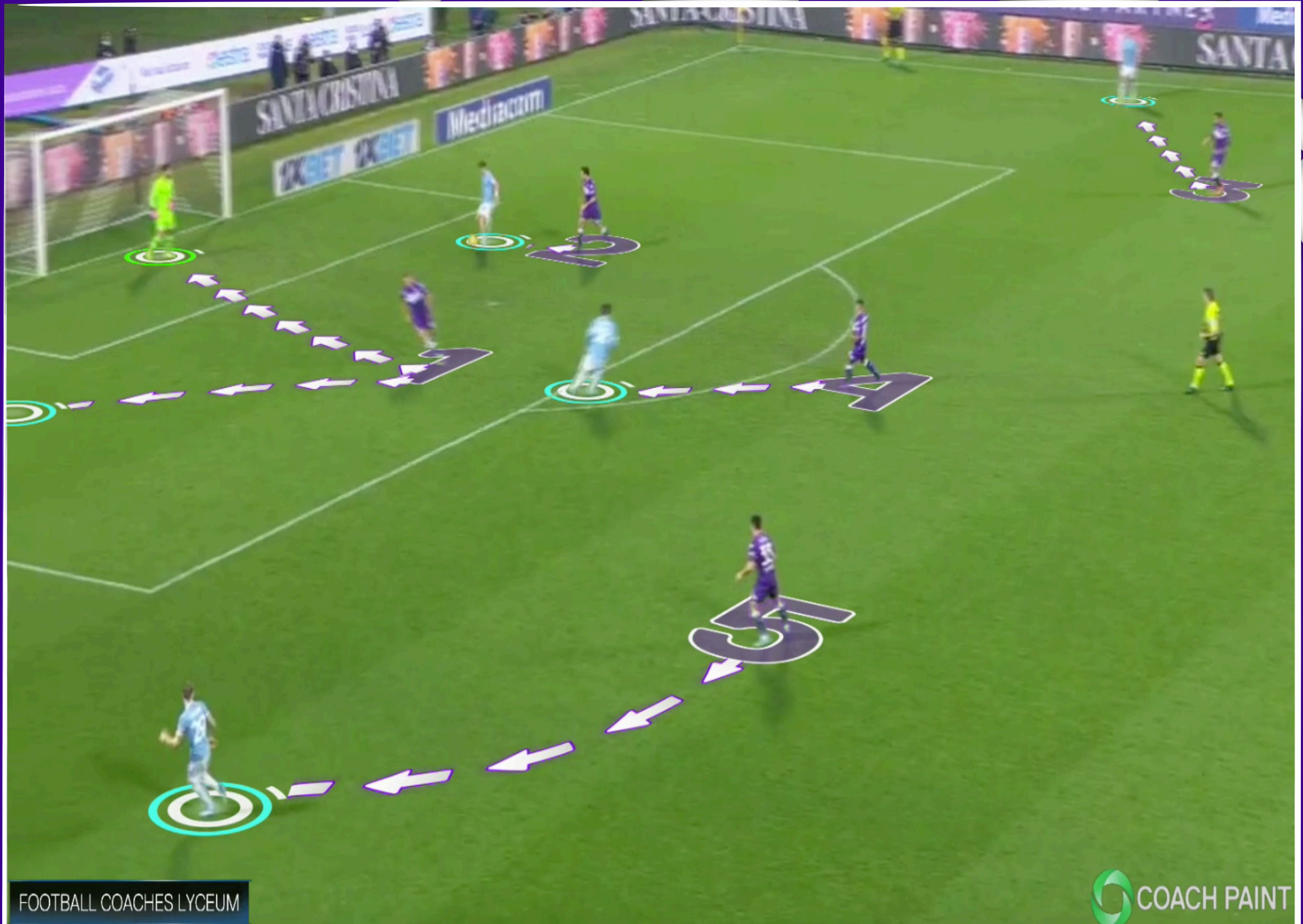
Recover the ball as soon as possible



High Defensive Line



Pressure



ADAPTABILITY PRINCIPLE

- In his journey as a coach, Vincenzo Italiano has adapted himself to the human material he has been given. This has generated different situations among the teams he coached.
- Players with certain characteristics: aggressive, serious, fearless, timid, highly technical, good when attacking the open space, more static, etc.
- But the adaptability principle did not distort in the slightest his technical-tactical ideas, which united the path of all the teams he has coached. He daily underlines the game idea to become a single and common thought, bulletproof and unassailable.

ADAPTABILITY PRINCIPLE

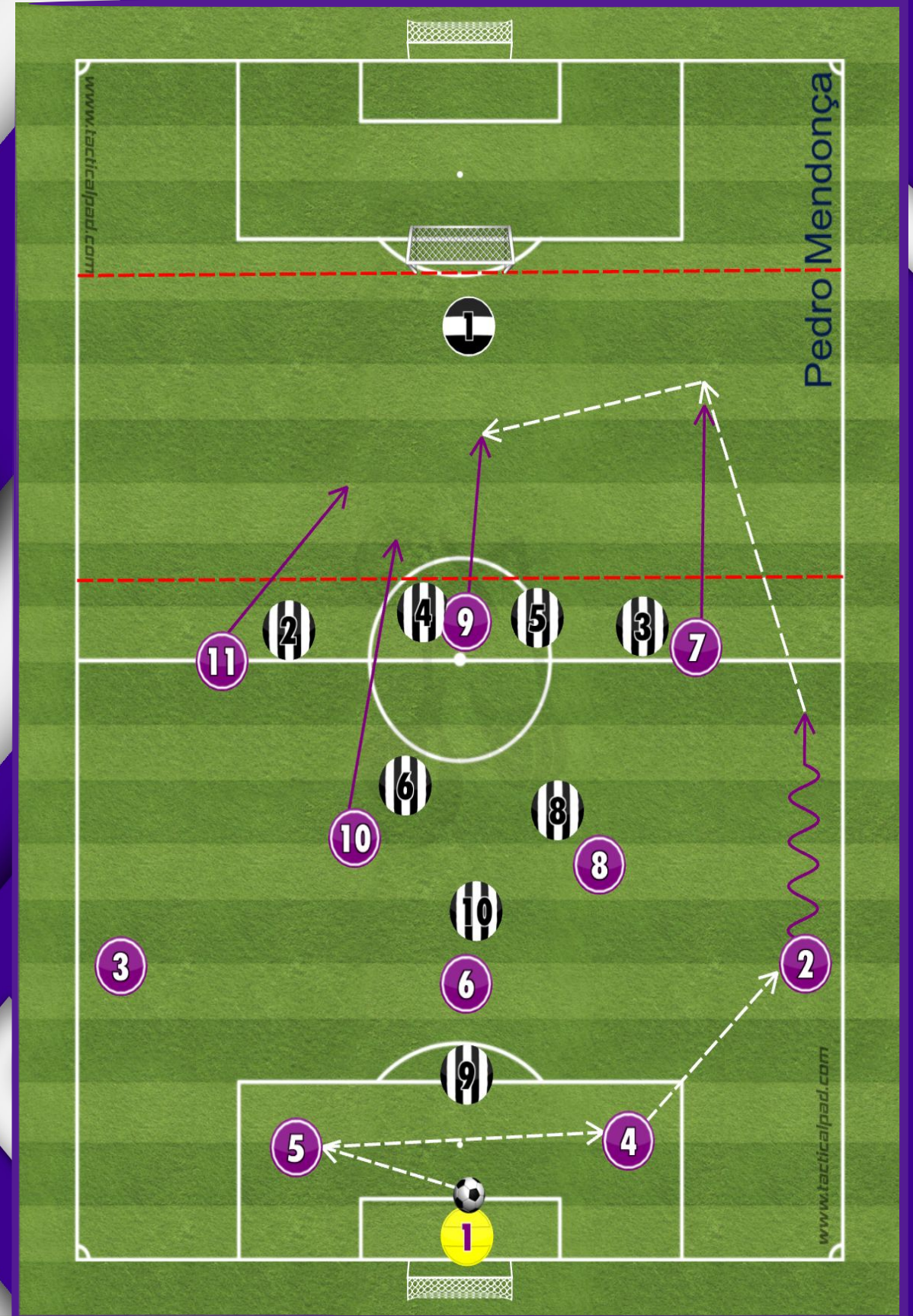
- Principles like adaptability could be (same game system, different interpretations) know the moment when to attack or manage the ball possession, understand when you need to “speed up” or “slow down” the game pace, understand the areas that the opponent grants and how to take advantage of them (hence the continuous movement to generate unmarking movements), principles like counter pressure, and understand when, how and where it is possible to put them into practice, among so many others.
- All principles that cannot be removed from the daily training to create habits. That is, to put the players in conditions to face and be able to continuously compete in a diverse and unpredictable way, as required by the game of football. But, at the same time, obey the coach's tactical principles.

10 Practical Coaching Examples

Vincenzo Italiano's idea tries to get as close as possible to real match situations: depth, width, numerical superiority, inferiority or equality, without ignoring (in some moments of the week or season) some more analytical work. For example, during the defensive or offensive phase.

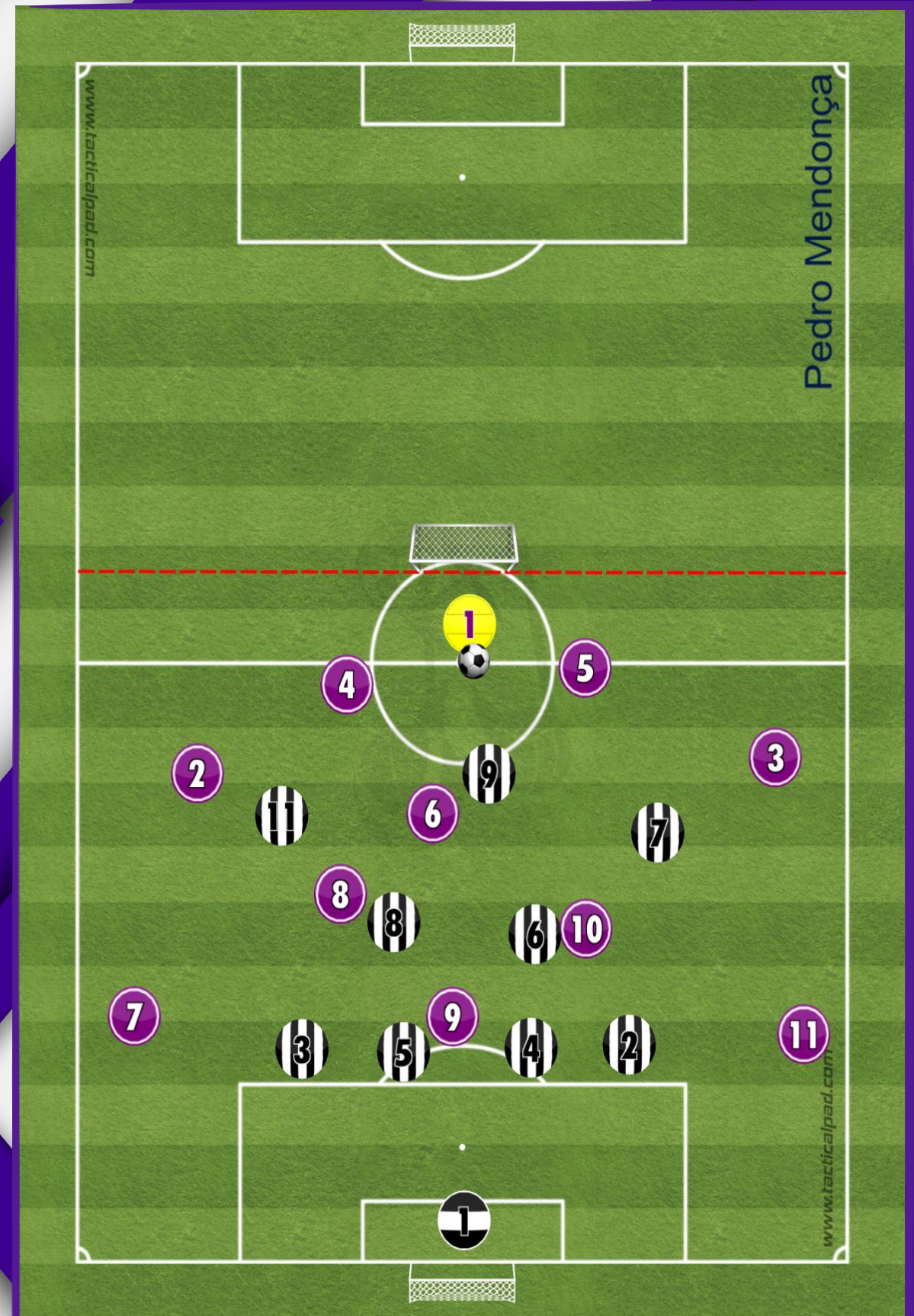
1. Build-up from the back + Attacking the 'Free Zone'

- Exercises repeated many times since pre-season to get the team used to building up from the back, with an essential contribution from the goalkeeper, who becomes an “extra player”.
- In this case, this is an 11v9 (GK+10v8+GK), where the action is always initiated from the Goalkeeper; through the possible solutions, which vary according to the opponent’s game system on the next match, the goal is to reach the “Free Zone”, where the opponents can’t enter, trying to finish the action with a goal.
- The same exercise can be done decreasing (easier competition) or increasing the number of opponents, until reaching numerical equality.
- Vincenzo Italiano usually uses it on Thursday or Friday, with match on Sunday.
- Dimensions: 60m x full pitch width + “Free Zone” (16,5m).



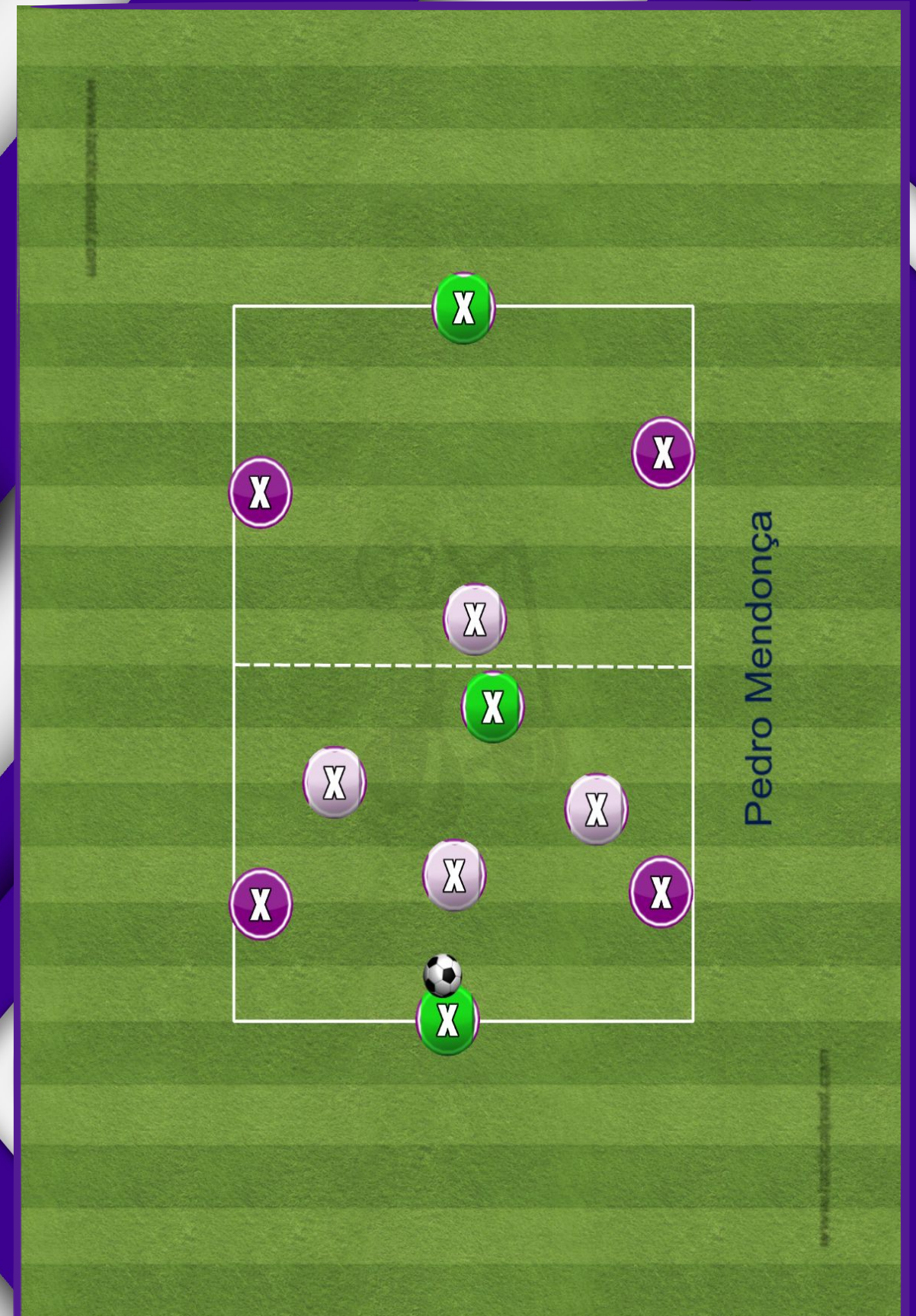
2. 11v10 (GK+10v9+GK) in the opponent's half

- Contrary to the previous one, Vincenzo Italiano often uses this exercise to get the team used to play in the opponent's half, create offensive solutions based on the system to be played in the next match, stimulate aggressive and immediate recovering in case of ball loss.
- The action always starts from the goalkeeper (of the team with numerical superiority).
- The same exercise can be done decreasing (easier competition) or increasing the number of opponents, until reaching numerical equality.
- Vincenzo Italiano usually uses it on Wednesday or Friday, with match on Sunday.
- Dimensions: 60m x full width.



3. Ball Possession '4v4 + 3 neutral players'

- Ball possession that Vincenzo Italiano uses during the initial phase of a training session and in the pre-match warm-up. The aim is to make as many consecutive passes as possible. In his opinion, this gets the players used to looking for and finding the right passing lines, unmarking themselves sensibly and in the right way, playing in numerical superiority and defending in numerical inferiority.
- Vincenzo Italiano almost always uses 'neutral players', one or two goalkeepers.
- Dimensions: 24x12m.



4. Ball Possession '4v4 + 3 neutral players (variation)'

- Variation of the previous exercise, with four mini goals (two on each short side of the pitch). The goal is only valid after making 8 consecutive passes, looking for one of the neutral players who act as "assistant" players.
- Dimensions: 24x12m.



5. Ball Possession '7v7 + 3 neutral players' (Full-Backs and Striker)

- Ball possession between two teams with 7 players (each one in his role), plus 3 neutral players. In this case, it is the two Full-Backs and the Striker, depending on the opponent's game system to be faced in the next match.
- According to Vincenzo Italiano, this is a useful exercise to get the players used to look for the right pass lines, unmarking movements with meaning and correctness, playing in numerical superiority and defending in numerical inferiority. Also, the team with the ball gets used to the likely scenario of the upcoming match.
- Exercise usually used on Tuesday or Wednesday, when the match is on Sunday.
- Variation: add a "free zone" (16.5 x 40m penalty box), where it's possible to score without opponents only after 10 consecutive passes.
- Dimensions: 35x40m.



6. Ball Possession '7v7 + 3 neutral players' (Centre Back + Center Midfielder + Striker)

- Ball possession between two teams of 7 players (each one in his role), plus 3 neutral players. In this case they are the Centre Back, Center Midfielder and Striker, depending on the opponent's game system to be faced in the next match.
- According to Vincenzo Italiano, it's a useful exercise to get the players used to look for the right pass lines, unmarking movements with meaning and correctness, playing in numerical superiority and defending in numerical inferiority. Besides, the team with ball gets used to the likely scenario of the next match.
- Exercise usually used on Tuesday or Wednesday when the match is on Sunday.
- Variation: add a 'free zone' (16.5 x 40m penalty box), where it's possible to score without opponents only after 10 consecutive passes.
- Dimensions: 35x40m.



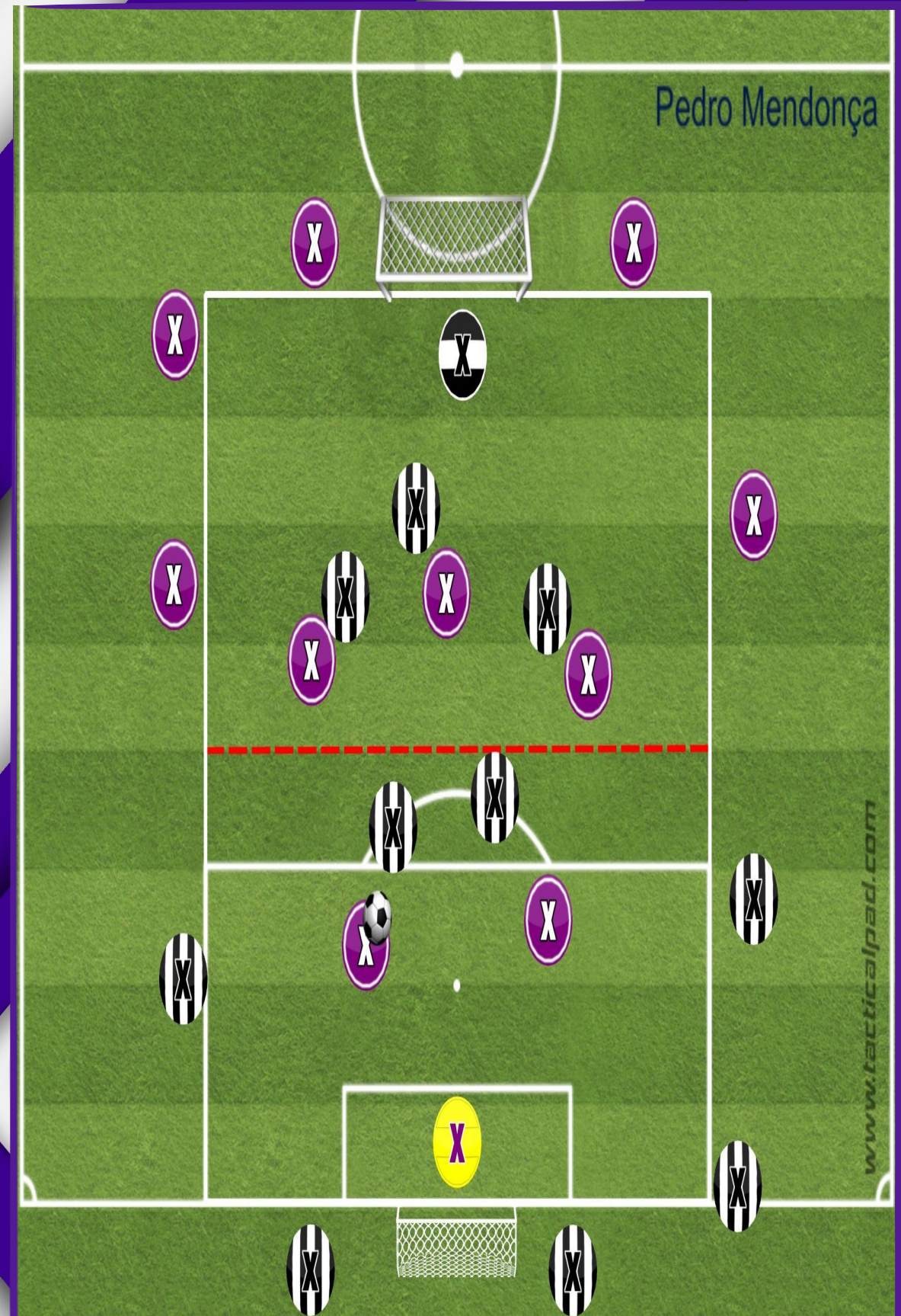
7. Attack v Defence '(5+2) v 4+GK'

- Exercise on both halves of the pitch, with 5+2 neutral players against 4 defenders + Goalkeeper.
- The game develops with 7 forwards looking to score a goal; if the defence recovers the ball, the objective is to find the offensive players or teammates on the other half of the pitch to start another 7v4+GK situation and so on. Everything to suggest continuous transitions from one side to the other.
- This exercise is normally used on Wednesdays when the game is played on Sundays.
- Variation: add a Center Midfielder in front of the defence (7v5+GK).
- Dimensions: two halves of a 35x60m pitch.



8. Game 'GK+(5+5)v(5+5)+GK'

- Two 5v5 (plus Goalkeepers) teams in a "free" match, with the help of 5 neutral players per team, positioned only in the opponent's half. The neutral players can only touch the ball once.
- According to Vincenzo Italiano, besides getting the players used to the possession phase concepts, this exercise, without the ball, stimulates the defenders to work on their positioning in the penalty box.
- Dimensions: two halves of 20 x 40m.



9. Possession Match (two pitch halves)

- Two 7+GK teams fight for the ball. The team that initiates the action (always starting with the goalkeeper) must make 10 consecutive passes to score a goal in the opponent's goal. If the opponent team regains the ball in the opponent's half, it can score a goal without having to make 10 consecutive passes; otherwise, if it recovers the ball in its half, it will have to make 10 consecutive passes.
- This exercise is normally done on Tuesdays, when the match is played on Sundays.
- Dimensions: two halves of 30 x 50m.



10. Tactical Match (all pitch)

- Exercise that Vincenzo Italiano uses weekly, often on Thursday and/or Friday (with match on Sunday), to try to recreate as much as possible the possible situations of the upcoming match, mainly considering the real dimensions of the pitch.
- Naturally, the opponents game system varies depending on the opponent on the next match, with related offensive developments starting from the Goalkeeper or directly on the opponent's half and, obviously, on the non-possession phase.



REFERENCE



Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio

FIORENTINA