



# **U-10 & U-12 ACADEMY/SELECT COACHING MANUAL PART II**

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**Second Edition**

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# **U-10 & U-12 ACADEMY/SELECT COACHING MANUAL PART II**

This manual is one component of a comprehensive set of guidelines for player development created by the Georgia Soccer Coaching Program. The guidelines are presented via five manuals and deal with players in the U-5 to U-19 ages. Most of the emphasis in the first four manuals is on covering the player development continuum from U-5 to U-12, the important formative years and the stage related to small-sided soccer. The fifth manual focuses on teaching elite players the concepts of possession soccer in the 11v11 environments. The five manuals are:

1. **CLUB PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MANUAL.** This is an operational manual for clubs. It provides guidelines on clubs' coaching infrastructure and addresses the club's Mission Statement, coaching organizational structure, roles of the Club DOC, implementing curriculums, evaluating the club's programs, parent education and recommendations for the clubs' recreational and select programs (can be found in [www.gasoccer.org](http://www.gasoccer.org) click on COACHES and then click on COACHING RESOURCES and scroll to find it).
2. **KINS IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL.** The coaching manual for U-5 through U-8 players that emphasizes the skill of dribbling and lays the foundation for individual creativity (can be found in [www.gasoccer.org](http://www.gasoccer.org) same place as above).
3. **U-10/U-12 ACADEMY/SELECT COACHING MANUAL.** The coaching manual for U-9 through U-12 players. This is the 'Golden Age' of player development, the stage of technical foundation and the dawn of tactics (can be found in [www.gasoccer.org](http://www.gasoccer.org) same place as above).
4. **U-10/U-12 ACADEMY/SELECT COACHING MANUAL PART II.** This manual is the sequel to the one shown in item 3 above. This manual covers the same academy age groups but with a more tactical focus on the concepts of possession soccer and on laying the foundation for possession soccer to prepare for the 11v11 environment (can be found in [www.gasoccer.org](http://www.gasoccer.org) same place as above).
5. **ODP COACHING MANUAL.** This manual is used by US Youth Soccer ODP coaches at the region and state level. It provides coaches standards for the training of elite players in the ODP program thus improving their opportunities to move into the U.S. Soccer national player pools, professional teams or collegiate play. Club coaches are encouraged to use this manual to teach their team possession soccer. This is a unique and excellent manual for coaching 'playing out of the back' (can be found in [www.gasoccer.org](http://www.gasoccer.org) same place as above).

# **U-10/U-12 ACADEMY/SELECT COACHING MANUAL PART II**

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## **A. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES**

The first U-10/U-12 ACADEMY/SELECT COACHING MANUAL was created in 2005. It focused on understanding the characteristics of 9-12 year old players and how to design effective practice and game format that enhance their technical and tactical development.

Twelve years later, not only are we seeing significant improvements in our players' technical ability, our game is also attracting ever more children, many of whom are seriously committed to the sport. Whereas ten years ago, most players' ambition did not extend beyond playing college soccer, nowadays, many players dream of playing professionally in Europe and the MLS. Even girls are beginning to look beyond college soccer and some aspire to play in the burgeoning women's professional leagues that are sprouting all over Europe and the USA. And, of course, everyone dreams of playing for the National Team.

Our game is attracting better athletes who might have shunted soccer in the past. And this new generation of athletically and technically superior players is evolving into soccer junkies. They watch the game on TV and acquiring soccer heroes they dream of emulating. In fact, the TV Satellite dish has arguably done more for soccer development than any federation or state association program. Nowadays, every household has access to Messi and Ronaldo on TV 24/7. Our players watch, dream, and go out to kick a ball much more often. Their exposure to high level soccer ignites an appreciation of the nuances of the game. They are now able to grasp more sophisticated tactics and solve more complex soccer problems.

The improvement in our players has inspired us to create this manual and continue where the first Academy Coaching Manual left off. The technical improvements of our players can now be wedded to a concurrent improvement of our teams' playing style. Our players are now quite capable of playing a more sophisticated game, based on possession and playing through the lines, similar to the way it is played in all the top soccer playing countries.

The good news is that more coaches are spending time in practices on possession oriented activities and are trying to teach players the sound principles of play. The bad news is that when the game on Saturday arrives, a lot of the possession practice goes out the window and the games become helter-skelter. Game results are still hard to ignore. The dichotomy between practices and games inhibits our players' opportunity to transfer what they learn in practice to the game. The pressure to get results in games does not allow our players to go through the process of trial and error. Hence, they cannot develop the comfort level of playing possession soccer and it never gets ingrained into their repertoire.

The possession playing style is very fragile in our youth game. One can see the occasional glimpses of it. Every now and then, a good game of soccer breaks out. But more often than not, games degenerate to a kick and chase contest, especially when teams press each other or when a team is losing and everyone panics, including the coach. And if teams cannot get a hold of the game and play with more possession and patience at the U10/U12 academy, they will certainly not be able to do that once they play 11-a-side in competitive leagues with everything on the line.

The bottom line is that most of our youth clubs' U10/U12 academies have not reached their full potential. Much more can be done to prepare our players for a possession oriented game and get them ready for the 11-a-side game as they transition from Academy to Select. The original objective of the U10/U12 academy was to take away the pressure of game results and focus on player development without the

anxiety of State Cup and promotion/relegation battles. That objective has been lost somewhat, blurred by the perceived need to win games even at the academy level. Although game results are not published, bragging rights and positioning for U13 highest possible division create their own pressure and influence academy coaches to focus on preparing the team for the next game rather than for the long term.

Another challenge confronting our Academy coaches is to get the balance right between allowing players' individual creativity to flourish and emphasizing the team concepts. It is not an easy marriage. Players of these ages are still individualistically inclined and are reluctant to give up the ball. They want to hold on to the ball and do tricks because it's fun. They do not worry as much as the adults about consequences. The U10/U12 academy stage should still be the period of exploration and individual expression. But it is also the right time to start teaching the players the safety/risk calculation. It means that dribbling should be encouraged in the attacking half and especially on the wings but discouraged in front of one's goal. It means that turning into pressure when double-marked or dribbling into a congested area should be discouraged, but turning and beating opponents near the opponents' goal should be applauded.

Whatever coaching style is used, coaches should be very careful not to coach individual creativity out of the players. Having said that, as players get technically better, coaches should demand that they execute whatever they think is the right maneuver at a faster tempo. Taking players on is great, as long as it is allied to quick thinking. But if players hold on to the ball because they are taking too long to figure out what to do, intervention by the coach might be required.

The scope of this manual revolves around the team concepts that lead to high level possession soccer. The objective is to help coaches develop smarter players. More attention should be paid by coaches towards teaching players to look around them and become aware of the field. This by itself will help players make better decisions.

This manual attempts to provide academy coaches with the tools to turn the U9 through U12 program into a more effective and productive phase. Our Academy program needs to take the game to another level of sophistication. The goal is to start exposing our 9-12 year olds to new concepts and a higher level of problem solving. The game is still too much about the physical contest and not enough of a cerebral and technical contest. Our young players are now ready to put their foot on the ball and change the tempo of the game. They are ready to play it quickly in the head rather than run a lot and fight a lot. They are ready to learn to make smart runs rather than hard runs. Our young players are now ready for more.

## B. DEFINING POSSESSION SOCCER

### CAN POSSESSION SOCCER BE DEFINED?

Before we can discuss how to teach possession soccer, we need to make sure the reader understands what we mean by 'possession soccer'. After all, every coach has his/her own vision of possession soccer. Youth coaches come from a variety of soccer cultures and their coaching philosophies are shaped by their own specific background and experiences.

This begs the question: is there only one way to play possession soccer? Many would argue that it is pointless to craft a definition of possession soccer since there are many ways to play the game. Since most decisions on the field are intuitive, based on the moment, and no two moments are exactly alike, any attempt at a definition runs the risk of 'coaching in absolutes' and will likely narrow the possibilities and create robotic coaches which would lead to robotic players.

The answer comes in two parts. Firstly, all teams who are proficient at keeping the ball have some similarities. Possession oriented teams exhibit common tendencies in the manner they execute their ball circulation. Certain elements of their team shape, movement off the ball and decisions on the ball are similar. Different teams might use different strategies to maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses but could still be considered as possession oriented teams. Take Real Madrid and Barcelona as an example. Both teams can play possession very comfortably. One of the differences between Real Madrid and Barcelona is that the former usually employs a clearly defined center forward while the latter looks like it is playing without an outright center forward. Another difference is that Real Madrid often uses slashing runs with speed and precision to penetrate while Barcelona uses more intricate short passing combinations. Yet, both teams are very adept at keeping the ball for long periods and exhibit many similarities in the way they circulate the ball. It's these similarities that we will explore and define and use as the basis for teaching possession soccer.

Secondly, when a team has the ball, the passing sequence and/or dribbling moves are based on the possession versus penetration calculation. The objective of every action on the ball is to either penetrate to create goal chances or maintain possession. The better the opposition, the more difficult it is to penetrate. Hence, more patience and more possession are required. One can view possession as the spring board to penetration. A counterattacking game can sometimes get results but, at some point, every team will need to string a few passes together. Possession is the preparation stage for penetration. In other words, every team, no matter what strategy or playing style it uses, at some point will be required to execute passing sequences that emphasize possession until the right moment to attack presents itself.

Coaching courses all over the world teach the same basic 'principles of attack', such as **depth**, **width**, **movement** and **penetration**. These principles are universal, transcending playing style or formation and forming the foundation of good soccer. Teams will always need **movement** and **penetration** if they want to create goal scoring chances, and this truism, or principle, applies in China just as it does in Brazil. This manual takes these principles one step further by reconstructing them into principles that are more specific to possession soccer. Observing teams who are adept at controlling the game through ball possession, one can detect key principles that influence player decisions and behavior. We identified ten such principles that can be applied to help teams become better at ball possession. We call these the Ten Principles of Possession Soccer and they will be explained in a later section.

## **POSSESSION SOCCER DEFINED**

Most coaches observing youth soccer played at different ages and levels would notice the process in which players and teams mature gradually from a primitive playing style of 'kick and chase' to a more controlled style with more thought and precision as they get older and technically more polished. The 5 stages of playing style described below can provide a useful measure of how far a team is from the ultimate goal of 'possession soccer', which is defined in Stage V.

### **STAGE I: KICK AND CHASE**

This is the most basic, primitive playing style where players simply run up to the ball and kick it hard towards the other teams' goal and chase it. Whoever gets to the ball first kicks it again towards the other teams' goal. There is no possession or rhythm to the game, just helter-skelter kicking and running and charging about. There is a high level of randomness to the game since all the misplaced kicks make it hard to predict where the ball will end up next. This is the type of play most commonly seen in 'Recreational' soccer at young ages U-6 through U-10.

### **STAGE II: DROP, KICK AND CHASE**

As players get more experience playing 'kick and chase', they start to figure out that sometimes it's better to pass the ball to someone else who is better positioned to kick the ball forward. Examples of that are players who are facing their own goal, or players who are under aggressive pressure from opponents. This playing style is slightly more thoughtful than just kick and chase, but the overall flow of play is still the same frantic kicking and running, with the occasional 'drop' pass, followed immediately by a long kick up the field.

### **STAGE III: THE DAWN OF PASSING**

As players improve technically and watch more professional soccer, they start to try and play a more controlled soccer and attempt passing the ball. Whenever a player has the ball, he/she looks to pass to teammates. But at this stage, the choice of passing is still mostly forward, and the quality of passing and control is still poor. This results in frequent losses of possession as players play inaccurate passes or pass to the wrong player. Also, players have not learned yet how to support each other and the player with the ball is often without any easy close support since teammates still tend to run away from the ball calling for and expecting a long pass. At this stage, one can detect a few moments of possession but still little rhythm to the play, still frantic soccer, with loss of possession every second or third pass.

### **STAGE IV: DROP, SWITCH AND GO FORWARD**

As players become smarter and technically stronger, they start to realize that sometimes it's better to switch the point of attack to an area of the field less congested. At this stage, players have the awareness of space and the ability to pass the ball accurately over medium and long distance and start to play more back passes and lateral passes in order to switch to the other side. Players now develop the habit of playing it back when under pressure and the player receiving the drop pass will either play it forward or look to switch to the other side with a lateral pass. But the tendency to go forward is still dominant and players will play the ball forward even if it's not the best option. This stage starts to look like sophisticated soccer but the youthful eagerness to go forward is still the prevailing instinct and the rhythm of possession is still not mature. Play is still executed at a constantly high speed and few players are able to slow down and put their foot on the ball and vary the tempo. Deception and creativity is still missing for the most part.

## **STAGE V: POSSESSION SOCCER**

This is the most advanced stage of play and the ultimate objective. At this stage, the players have the composure on the ball, the vision, and the ability to slow the play down, to pass the ball around with one and two touch tempo and maintain a rhythm of possession. Many possessions involve a sequence of probing passes, back passes and lateral passes, as the ball is switched from flank to flank in search of space through patient build up. Ball possession is valued and the players' technique is of sufficient caliber that teams can keep the ball for long periods with sequences of 5-20 passes on a regular basis and multiple switches in the same possession. Passes are now made in every direction over 360 degrees. Angled passes, building up from the back, and throw-ins played to feet rather than 'down the line', are all featured prominently at this stage. This is the style of play of the top teams in the world, not just at senior level, but also at the youth level. Teams that apply the Ten Principles of Possession Soccer, which we will explain at a later chapter, will automatically be playing the sophisticated brand of possession soccer described in this Stage.

The U10/U12 academy phase can be used to prepare the foundation for advancing towards Stage V. The smaller numbers on the field associated with small-sided games present a much less complex environment than the 11-a-side game hence provide a great opportunity to introduce the Principles of Possession Soccer. If the U9 through U12 phase is used to ingrain the principles, the transition to 11-a-side at U13 will be smoother and our teams will be comfortable maintaining possession even when game results become more important.



## C. TEAM FORMATION AT THE U9/U10/U11/U12 AGES

The current game format legislated by US Soccer is 7v7 at U9/U10 and 9v9 at U11/U12. Therefore, we are basing our manual on these game formats.

Since the ultimate objective is to prepare our players for the 11-a-side game and the US Soccer recommended formation for 11v11 is the 4-3-3 formation, we are recommending a 2-3-1 formation in the 7v7 game and a 3-1-1-3 formation in the 9v9 version.

We chose 2-3-1 and 3-1-1-3 because these formations allow us to start teaching some of the positions specific to the 4-3-3. It is critical to connect the learning in the small-sided stage to the 11-a-side stage. The connection is illustrated in the diagrams below. Diagram C1 shows the 4-3-3 formation and its associated player numbers as recommended by US Soccer. In Diagram C1 below, the back line is denoted as players 2-4-5-3, with 2 being the right back and 3 being the left back. The midfield has the defensive midfielder denoted as player 6, and the two attacking midfielders are players 8 and 10. The forwards are right winger 7, left winger 11 and center forward 9. The keeper is of course player 1.

We use the same roles and numbering system in 9v9 in order to facilitate a smooth transition into 11v11 and play out of a 3-1-1-3 formation as shown in diagram C2. Note in diagram C2 that players 4 and 5 are combined into one position and the same is done with players 10 and 8. Also notice that the 3-1-1-3 formation in 9v9 looks a lot like the 4-3-3 minus 2 players. By doing this, we can teach the players in the 9v9 environment the same behavior, movement, and decisions that they would be expected to know in the 11v11 environment.

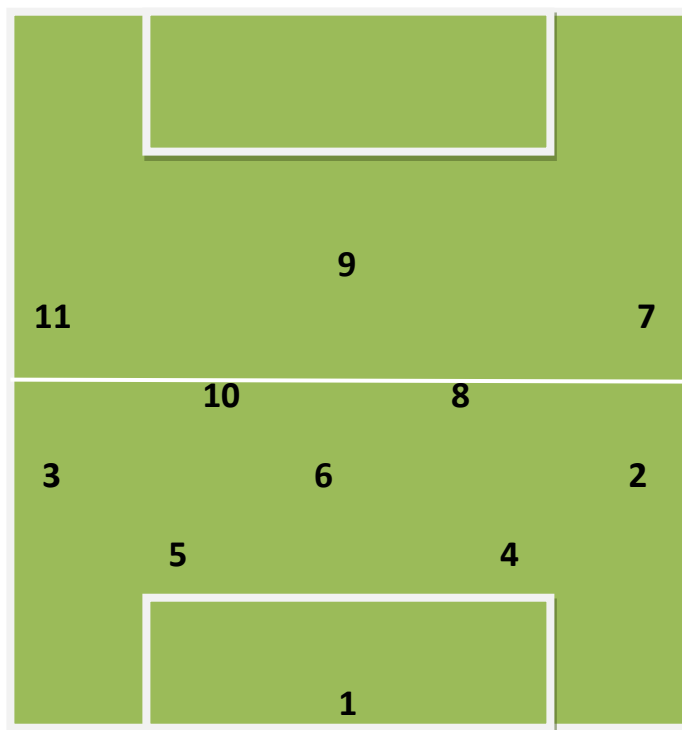


Diagram C1 11V11

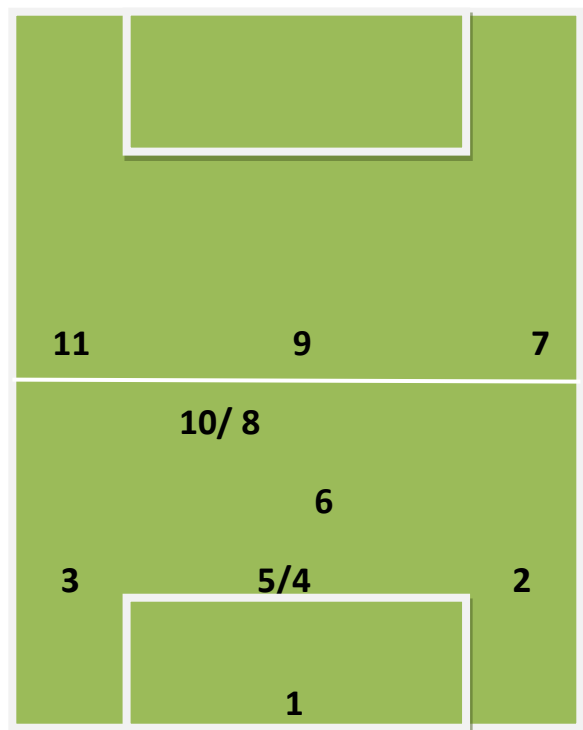
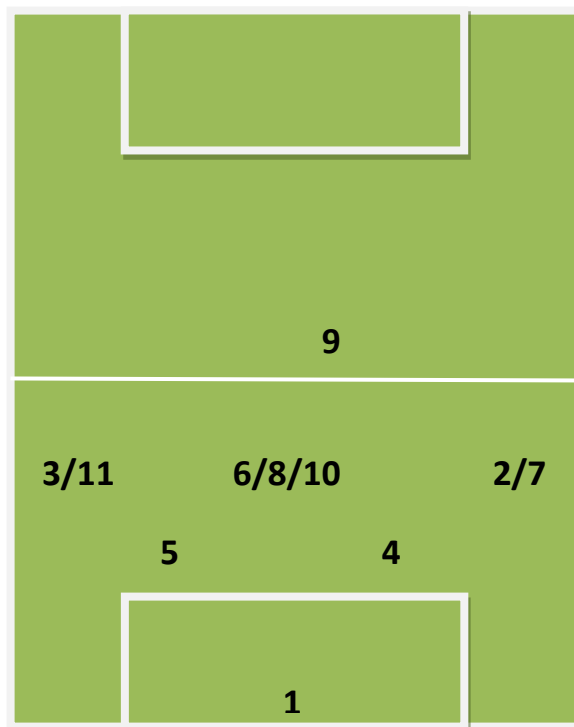


Diagram C2 9v9



**Diagram C3 7v7**

The same rationale is used in selecting a 2-3-1 formation for the 7v7 game. Diagram C3 shows how the players are lined to replicate the roles of the 4-3-3 game. We can start to teach them the roles of the center back (4 & 5), wide back and wingers (2/7 and 3/11), defensive or attacking midfielder (6/8/10) and center forward (9).

Another advantage of the 2-3-1 is that players 2,4,5,3 are positioned similar to the back four in the 4-3-3 formation and can learn to play out of the back. In this formation, the keeper has more options to distribute and it is easier to play out of the back. The wide backs double up as wingers. So, when the ball is with the keeper or the central defenders, the wide players behave like wide backs and as the attack progresses into the attacking half, the wide players move up and behave like wingers.

We should point out that the principles of possession remain the same regardless of team formation or playing numbers. If your club chooses to use a different formation, it is not a problem. For example, in the 7v7 format, you could play 3-1-2 or 3-2-1 and still use the principles to guide your players' decisions. We chose 2-3-1 and 3-1-1-3 for reasons of continuity mentioned above. The 3-1-1-3 allows us to teach the role of the defensive midfielder, which is a difficult position to learn and which is very crucial for the build-up possession game. Both the 2-3-1 and the 3-1-1-3 provide opportunities to teach the relationship between the attacking midfielder and the center forward, which is another aspect of the 4-3-3 that is paramount for success.

In this manual, we will use the US Soccer numbering system within the 4-3-3 formation to denote the player positions. This is shown in diagrams C1, C2, and C3. For example, we will refer to the defensive midfielder as 'Player 6' and we will refer to the attacking midfielder as 'Player 8/10'. The reader should familiarize himself/herself with the 4-3-3 numbering system in order to fully understand our diagrams and explanations.

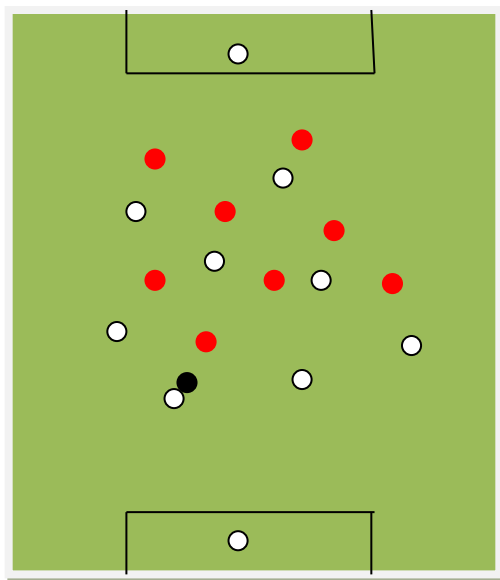
## D. THE 10 PRINCIPLES OF POSSESSION SOCCER

As mentioned before, the term 'Possession Soccer' is vague and open to interpretation. Our playing philosophy is based on a version of possession soccer that is played in the top soccer countries. Such a possession game features key principles that help guide the players in their decision making. These principles are the 'constants' that give the game a rhythm and a flow and a set of patterns that keep repeating themselves. It's the DNA of possession soccer. Once the players learn how to apply the principles, their movement and decisions become automatic and coordinated. Once a possession playing base is ingrained, it is relatively easy to add variety, improve penetration, and allow individual expression to flourish.

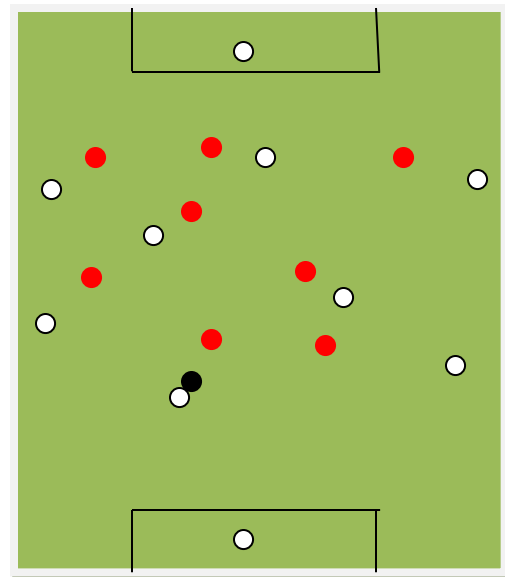
So what are these principles? these 'constants'? If you watch top level teams play possession soccer, you will notice the following players' behavior patterns repeat themselves time and again:

### **PRINCIPLE 1: TEAM SHAPE – MAKE FIELD BIG**

Every time a team has the ball, players should spread out to make the field as big as possible. Forwards push up as high as possible, wide players get wide and defenders drop off. Spreading out in such a manner opens up passing lanes and makes it difficult for opponents to mark tight. When the ball carrier is under pressure, the back line needs to drop back so that the ball can be played to them to relieve pressure and give the team time to adopt an attacking shape and make the field big.



**Diagram E1**

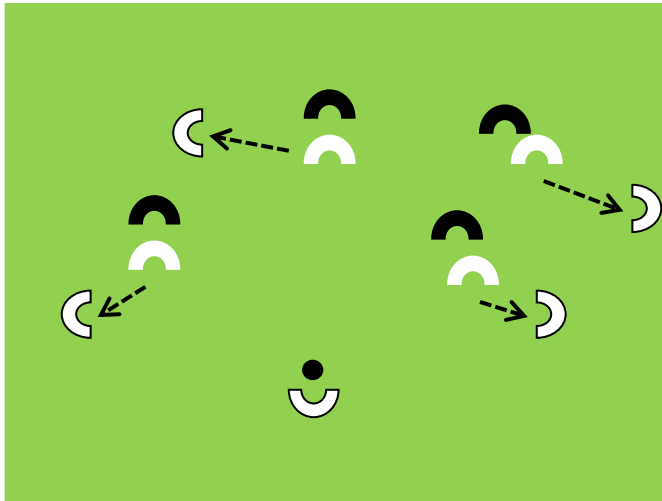


**Diagram E2**

Diagram E1 shows a typical team shape in the 9v9 game, with all the players bunched up in the middle of the field, making the game very congested. Our players are drawn like magnet to the ball because they all want it and they get caught ball watching. Diagram E2 shows a better team shape where the players make the field as big as possible.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: PEEL OFF AND OPEN BODY TO THE FIELD**

All the players ahead of the ball should peel off their opponent and open their body so they can receive the ball facing up field. Players should avoid receiving the ball with back to goal if there is pressure on them. Move away from pressure and open body to at least a sideways-on posture. This is demonstrated in diagram E3.



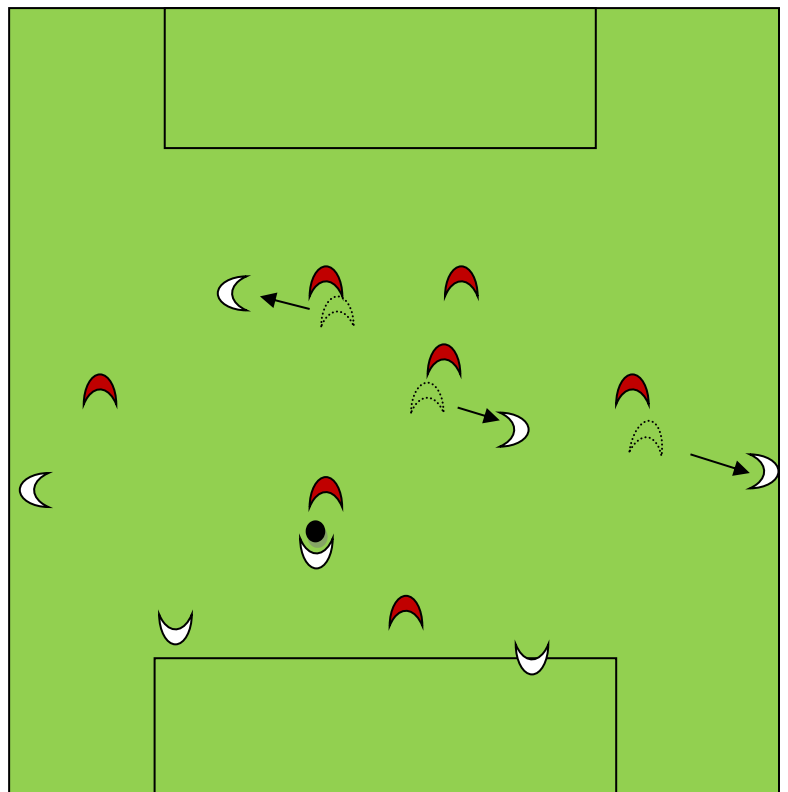
**Diagram E3**

Diagrams E4 and E5 below illustrate two scenarios and the recommended peeling off movement of all the players ahead of the ball.

### **Diagram E4:**

Player 6 has the ball.

Note how players 2, 8, and 9 peel off  
By moving laterally and opening their  
body to see more of the field.

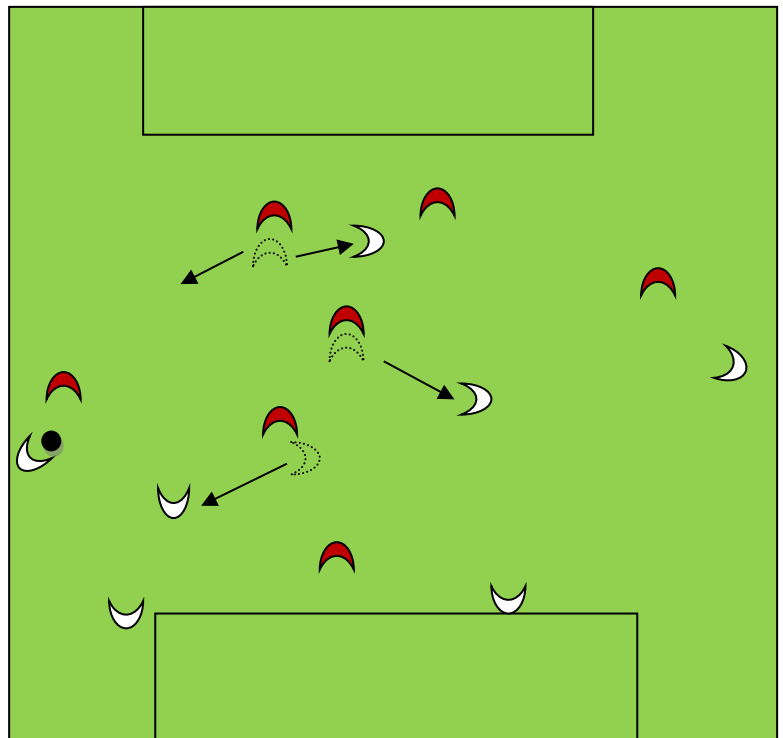


**Diagram E5:**

Player 3 has the ball.

Player 9 can either peel off or check towards ball.

Note player 6 peeling off to provide support under the ball and player 8 peels off towards blind side to offer the option to switch play to right flank. Make sure player 8 doesn't check towards the ball since this will congest the area in front of the ball and will block passing lanes to the forward.

**PRINCIPLE 3: BENDING RUNS**

Whenever a player makes a forward run on the flanks, he/she should bend the run towards the outside to create width and separate from opponent. Whenever a player makes a forward run in the middle of the field, he/she should bend the run to give the passer enough time to judge the pass, to open up a passing lane for a through ball, and to avoid running into off-side.

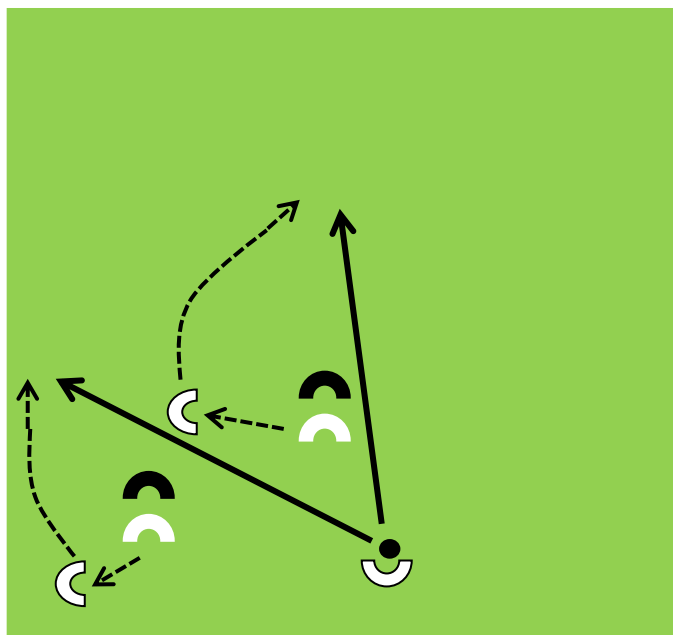
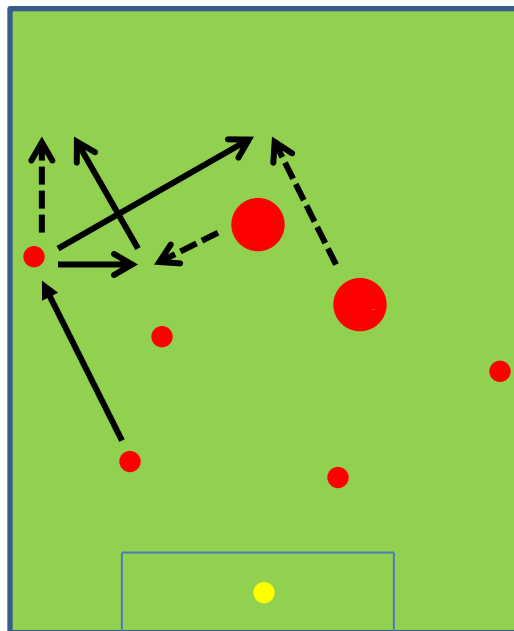


Diagram E6

Diagram E6 shows how the player on the left flank bends his/her run to get even wider. This spreads out the opponents and creates a passing lane into the flank. Also, notice how the player in the middle who is standing with his/her back to goal starts with a flat run and opens his/her body and then bends his/her run to get onto a through ball. This flat run gives the passer time to see how the opponents react to the run, allows him/her to judge his pass, gives the passer more options and avoids the off-side.

## PRINCIPLE 4: RUNS TRIGGER RUNS – AWARENESS OF SURROUNDING

Players need to look around them all the time to see where their teammates and opponents are. This will help players make the correct runs and will avoid them running into the same area. For example, if the attacking midfielder sees that the center forward is making a checking run towards the ball, he might decide to use the space created by the forward and run onto a through ball behind the other team's defense. Another example is when a winger runs inside to make room for the fullback to overlap. Runs trigger other runs but for that to happen players must be constantly looking around to assess their position in relation to teammates' positions.



### Diagram E7

Diagram E7 shows an example of a run that is triggered by another run. In diagram E7, player 11 receives the ball from player 5. Player 9 checks towards the ball and player 8 sees the field and makes a run behind the back line for a through ball into the space created by player 9's run. You can see how the winger 11 has a couple of options: to combine with 9 or to play a through ball for 8.

## PRINCIPLE 5: DIAGONAL PASSES

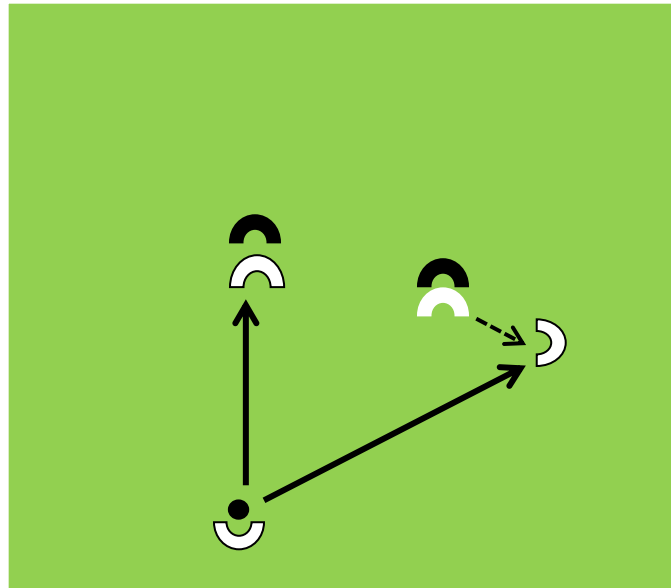
Diagonal passes are better than vertical passes when the receivers are marked. A diagonal pass allows the receiver to open his/her body and receive the pass facing up field. A diagonal pass accomplishes both penetration and switching all in one pass. A vertical pass is played into a player who is likely to be facing

his/her own goal and have limited vision. If he/she is marked, a vertical pass is difficult to control. Avoid vertical passes and look for the diagonal ball as often as possible.

#### Diagram E8:

The vertical pass is played to a player who has his/her back to goal and is limited in what he/she can do. The diagonal pass is easier to control because the receiver is in a sideways-on posture and can see the whole field.

Note: if player is checking towards the ball with back to goal, he should already know what he will do with the ball before he gets it. Most likely he should make a first time pass to a teammate rather than hold the ball.



### **PRINCIPLE 6: EVERY BACK PASS IS FOLLOWED BY A SWITCH**

When a player makes a back pass, he/she is likely doing it because he/she does not see an option to play forward. It usually means that the area in front of the ball is too congested or his/her team is outnumbered in this area. For this reason, it is usually best to switch the ball into another area of the field. Another reason for a switch following a back pass is to sustain a rhythm of possession and increase the speed of play.

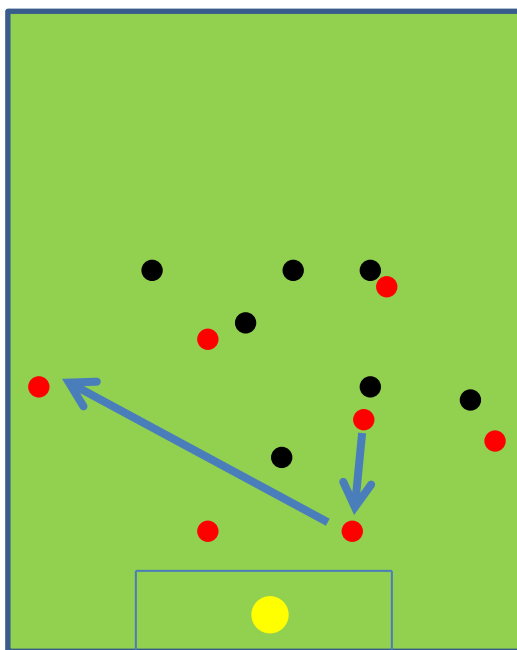


Diagram E9 (9v9)

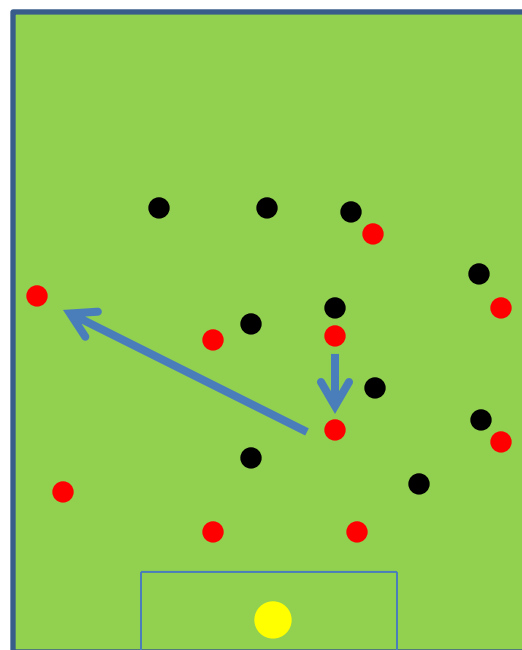


Diagram E10 (11v11)

Of course, there are exceptions to this principle. For example, if the back pass is part of a combination play like a wall pass or a back-through passing sequence to penetrate, it is of course ok.

Diagrams E9 and E10 demonstrate the typical scenarios where a back pass should be followed by a switch. The switch can be a square ball or a diagonal ball. Either way, the key is to send the ball into another area of the field where the team has a better chance of penetration.

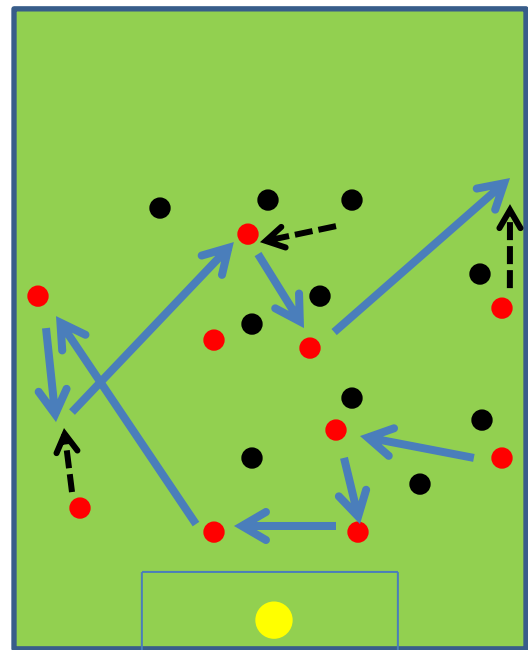
### **PRINCIPLE 7: THE BALL DOESN'T STAY IN AN AREA FOR LONG**

To maintain possession and not allow the other team to press and win the ball, team in possession should circulate the ball and move it constantly around the field. This makes it less predictable and makes it harder for the other team to pin down and press with lots of players. As a rule of thumb, after a couple of short passes in one area, the next pass should be played out of the area.

Diagram E11 illustrates how the ball is circulated with a string of mostly diagonal passes from side to side and from back to front, never staying in the same area for too long.

#### **Diagram E11 (11v11 example):**

Here the ball starts with right back 2 and by the fourth pass it is with the left winger 11 and by the eighth pass it is back on the right flank for winger 7. The ball doesn't stay in the same place for long, making it hard for the other team to press with numbers. The same principle applies to 6v6 and 8v8 and with the smaller numbers, it is advisable to start teaching it at the U9 to U12 groups.



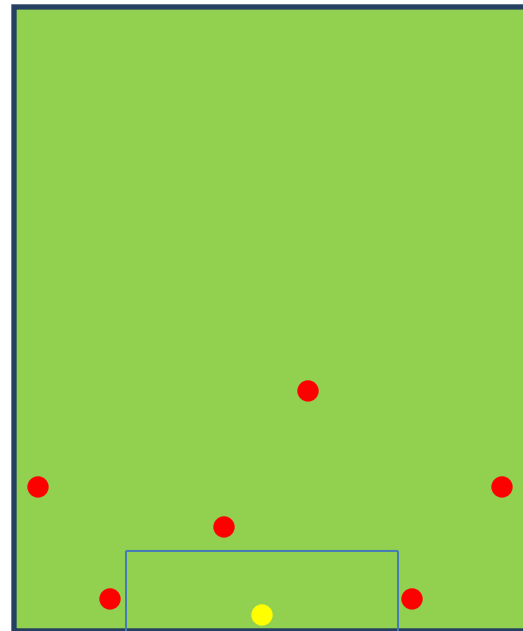
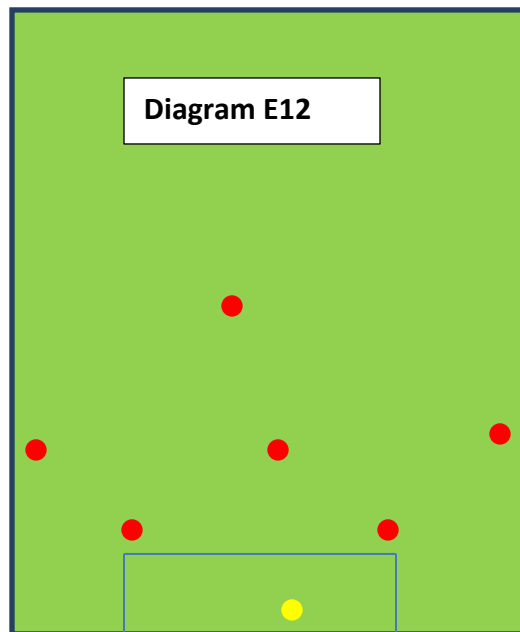
### **PRINCIPLE 8: KEEPERS DISTRIBUTE BALLS, AVOID THE LONG PUNT**

Since the emphasis is to learn to play possession, it is important for the keeper and the back line to become comfortable at playing out of the back. When the keeper catches a cross or a shot, the team should spread out quickly so the keeper can throw the ball to a free player. On goal kicks, the keeper should look to play the ball to feet rather than send everyone up and take a long high kick.

Diagrams E12 and E13 show how the team should be positioned on a goal kick to make the field big and give the keeper some options for a pass. Diagram E12 is the preferred shape in the 7v7 formation, with defenders 4 and 5 spread to the corners of the penalty area and the wide players 2 and 3 pushed up and



wide and the rest of the team pushed up. Diagram E13 shows how in the 7v7 formation, defenders 4 and 5 can drop down to receive the ball if the other team is pressing them.



### **PRINCIPLE 9: USE THROW-INS TO SWITCH THE POINT OF ATTACK**

Teams should use the throw in to switch the point of attack since the opposing team has most of their players squeezed into the area near the throw-in. This means that there is lots of space on the other side of the field. Avoid throwing the ball down the line into a crowd since it usually results in loss of possession.

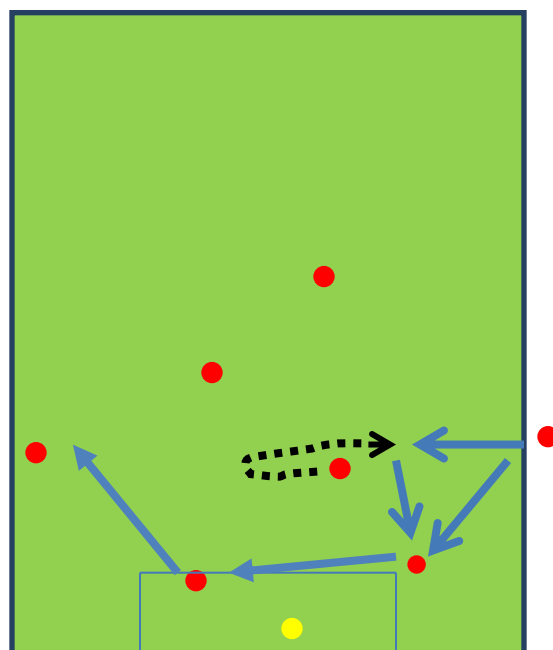


Diagram E14

Diagram E14 shows how the back line can drop deep to receive the ball and switch it, or the midfielders can check away to create space and then check to the ball to receive it and switch.

### **PRINCIPLE 10: SPEED OF PLAY**

Players must learn to play quickly and keep the ball moving. This requires a lot of one-touch and two-touch play. This results in a high tempo of possession and makes it difficult for opponents to keep up with the play. There are some moments when dribbling is appropriate, but, in most times, quick one-touch or two-touch passing is the best way. If you watch high level soccer on TV, you will see how rapidly the ball is passed from one player to the next, with a minimum of fuss and with speedy ball movement. **LET'S KEEP THE BALL MOVING!!!!**

### **COACHING POINTS VERSUS PRINCIPLES**

We want to make an important distinction between Principles and Coaching Points. Many coaches do not understand the difference and think coaching points and principles are one and the same. They are indeed closely related but Principles are on a higher plateau of importance. When information or correction given to the players is deemed very important or is meant to correct a recurring issue, it should be elevated to a level of a principle. So, for example, telling a player to keep his body over the ball to keep the shot down is a **coaching point**. Telling a player to press the ball quicker is a **coaching point**. But telling a winger to get wide is a **principle** since team shape and width is a key aspect of attacking play and lack of width cannot be ignored. Good coaches understand that principles must be taught first and coaching points come after, otherwise, play will lack cohesion.

## **E. THE METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING POSSESSION**

Now that we know and understand the Principles of Possession Soccer, we need to turn our attention to the methodology of coaching these principles. The process of teaching our players the 'language of possession' must be methodical and progressive. Learning objectives should be established for each age group starting at U9 and this is where the Ten Principles of Possession Soccer can prove useful, as they are taught in a progressive manner, one principle at a time. The coaching philosophy and the methodology should be documented and reviewed periodically to make sure the approach is kept modern and fresh. The science of player development doesn't stand still. But some guidelines will always stand the test of time and are likely to remain part of the core philosophies and principles over the long term.

No matter how you slice it, to play possession soccer our players need to improve in four basic areas:

1. Technical
2. Team Shape
3. Tactical Movement
4. Decisions on the ball.

### **Technical**

The relationship of Technique to Tactics is the same as that of Vocabulary to Grammar. For one to write well, one must acquire a large vocabulary base before he/she can use grammar rules to put words

together and form sentences. The same applies to playing soccer. To play smartly and effectively, players must acquire a solid technical base so they are comfortable dealing with the ball in any situation and make the right tactical decision.

Our players' technique is constantly improving but, by global standards, we are still behind. Technical improvement is something both the players and their club coaches should be responsible for. Coaches should inspire their players to invest time in self-practice to hone their technical ability, to augment what they do at team practices.

Clubs, for their part, should design a long-term plan to improve technique, with targets set for each age group. Clubs should create a library of activities that address technical topics. Guidelines for designing a library of activities and examples of such activities can be found in a later section.

### **Team Shape**

This is an area that needs to be improved substantially. Quite frankly, team shape will determine success or failure in games. At the highest level, coaches who are interviewed at post-game press conferences often cite "losing our shape" as the main reason for losing the game. A lot is riding on adopting the correct shape but many coaches do not appreciate this concept. Coaches are guilty of ball watching as they are caught up with the flow and emotion of the game and, hence, cannot tell when team shape is 'lost'.

What we mean by 'team shape' is the way the players are spread over the field, and especially the physical distances and angles between them. As players move around the field and adopt new positions, a tactically optimum team shape should still be maintained. That is the sign of a well-coached team. The team shape when defending is based on different principles to those when attacking. This manual is only concerned with discussing the team shape when in possession. Defending principles and defending team shape is left for another time and manual.

We should focus on teaching our players the importance of a good team shape for many reasons. A good shape makes it hard for opponents to press the ball and helps in creating quality penetration. Even a team as technically accomplished as Barcelona works a lot in practice on the right team shape and exhibits a great attacking shape when in possession. Barcelona players like Messi and Iniesta probably don't need their team to maintain a good shape since they could receive the ball in congested areas without fear and could wiggle their way out of any tight marking. Still, the Barcelona coaches insist on spending an inordinate amount of time on team shape. That's how important it is.

Furthermore, our teams need a good shape because a good team shape will compensate for our players' technical deficiencies by giving them more time and space to control and pass the ball. Our players make life difficult for themselves by not spreading out when in possession and playing too narrow and vertically. This limits the space and time available to our players and compounds their technical limitations.

### **Tactical Movement**

Intelligent off-the-ball movement is another key component that is lacking in our players' arsenal. Our players need to get into the habit of looking around them and making smart runs that either create space for themselves or create space for teammates. Possession soccer requires players to move away from tight marking and open their bodies to see the field and receive the ball facing up field.

**Inexperienced players put themselves in difficult situations with their runs. For example, running too fast towards the ball, or running towards the sidelines with limited space and vision to do much with**

**the ball, or checking too close to the ball or running into off-side. We need to teach players to run smart and receive the ball in a manner that reduces the risk of turnovers.**

The passing patterns associated with high level possession soccer avoid passes to players who are checking hard toward the ball with their back to the field. Most of the passes are played into players who are facing goal. This is made possible through intelligent movement off the ball to separate oneself from tight marking, open body to see the field, see spaces and, if needed, interchange positions. Our players tend to ball watch, have no idea where their teammates are and don't coordinate their movement with teammates. This is another area that, if improved, can compensate for technical issues. When our players check toward the ball into crowded areas while tightly marked, they cannot handle the technical demands of such a maneuver and often lose the ball. We can start addressing this lack of sophistication in movement at the U9 through U12 stage when numbers are smaller and the pictures are simpler.

### **Decisions on the Ball**

The last issue that can be improved is the decision making on the ball. This can only be done after we teach our players to adopt the right team shape and how to move off the ball. Once that is accomplished, we can focus on the ball carrier and help him/her become a problem solver. **The ultimate aim is for our players to make their passing decisions based not only on the movement of teammates, but also on the movement of opponents. The more often we can pass the ball against the opponents' momentum, the better. In other words, passing the ball in a direction opposite to the movement of the opponents and catching them wrong footed.**

## **CONNECTING THE PRINCIPLES OF POSSESSION TO THE METHODOLOGY**

In order to stay on task when coaching possession and maximize the effectiveness of instructions, coaches should use the following approach when making corrections:

### **FIX THE TEAM SHAPE FIRST**

First, look at the team shape when in possession and fix it if the shape is wrong. The team shape when in possession in our own defensive third or middle third should be similar to that shown in Diagrams C1, C2, and C3. The correct shape makes the field big, with width and depth. The wide players are very wide on the sidelines and the forward is as high as possible. The midfielders are spread and staggered. The back line is detached from the midfield by dropping off and separating themselves from opponents. This team shape is even more crucial for our players due to their technical deficiencies. Our players need more time and space to control the ball and a good team shape that makes the field big can only help them maintain possession. In the absence of a good team shape, it is a moot point to correct the decisions on the ball. Fix the team shape first. Fixing the team shape is actually the first principle of possession soccer, as you will see below.

### **FIX OFF-THE-BALL MOVEMENTS**

Once the team shape is right, observe and fix the movements off the ball and the players' body position. Our players must learn to peel off the opponent marking them and this peeling off movement needs to become automatic. Coaches should note how players are making space for themselves. Who is moving toward the ball? Who is checking away? Who is running into the spaces created by teammates' runs? Runs trigger other runs! Our players need to move based on teammates' runs and positions. Our players

tend to duplicate runs and either all run toward the ball or all run away from the ball, which destroys team shape. They duplicate runs because they ball watch and don't open their body to see the field, hence, they don't know where their teammates are or what's going on around them. Are the movements correct for the situation? Fix these off-the-ball movements as needed.

### **FIX DECISIONS ON THE BALL**

Finally, observe and fix the decisions on the ball. Was the correct pass chosen? Did the passer just pass the ball to the first player who went on a run or did he look at all options and choose the best one? We want to avoid passing the ball to players who are checking at speed with back to goal and an opponent breathing down their neck. Our players need to make better decisions on the ball, but only after we get them to adopt the right shape and peel off their opponents and open their bodies.

This methodical approach helps coaches avoid going on tangents and fix minor things. If team shape is wrong, it must be fixed first. Everything else depends on it and cannot be addressed properly without a good team shape.

So, the methodology for teaching a tactical topic such as possession involves a progression from fixing team shape to fixing off-the-ball movement to finally fixing decisions on the ball. As you can see from the table below, the Ten Principles of Possession Soccer follow the same sequence. The table also shows the relationship between the ***Principles of Possession*** and the generic ***Principles of Attack*** taught at most coaching courses:

<b>PRINCIPLE NUMBER</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF PRINCIPLE OF POSSESSION SOCCER</b>	<b>RELATION TO METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>TRADITIONAL PRINCIPLES OF ATTACK</b>
<b>1</b>	Team shape – make field big	Fix team shape	Depth, Width
<b>2</b>	Peel off and open body	Fix off-the-ball movement	Support
<b>3</b>	Bending runs	Fix off-the-ball movement	Movement
<b>4</b>	Runs trigger runs	Fix off-the-ball movement	Movement
<b>5</b>	Diagonal balls	Fix decisions on the ball	Support angle, penetration
<b>6</b>	Back pass followed by switch	Fix decisions on the ball	Penetration
<b>7</b>	Ball doesn't stay in same area	Fix decisions on the ball	
<b>8</b>	Keeper avoids long punting	Fix decisions on the ball	
<b>9</b>	Throw ins to switch pt of attack	Fix decisions on the ball	
<b>10</b>	Speed of play	Fix decisions on the ball	

We believe that deriving a new set of principles from the traditional principles, which are specific to possession soccer, increases the effectiveness of the process. If the whole coaching staff at a club uses the same principles and talks the same language, ***the language of possession***, the players will respond and learning will be accelerated.

## **F. IMPLEMENTING A LONG-TERM PLAN & A CURRICULUM AT THE U10/U12 ACADEMY LEVEL**

The academy program, as structured at most clubs in Georgia, encompasses at least 4 age groups from U9 to U12 while many clubs even include the U8's into the fray. The luxury of having 4-5 years without the pressure to win championships or State Cup presents a golden opportunity to implement a long-term development program.

It should be patently clear that an integrated, club-wide playing style is the key for optimum player development. There must be a line that connects U-6 to U-19, a line that everyone in the club understands and follows. Without a playing style and a long-term plan, the player development process becomes disjointed, is difficult to monitor and evaluate, and players graduate with skill gaps. A deficit in one stage of the development process will tend to inhibit acquisition of more complex skills at a later stage.

How do we implement a long-term development plan? Below are six basic steps a club can take to accomplish this. This approach can be applied throughout the club, not just at the academy ages. The main objective is to get everyone on staff on the same page. Consistency of message, using the same terminology and playing the same way will all lead to a successful implementation and raise the level of play.

### **STEP ONE: DECIDE ON A CLUB-WIDE PHILOSOPHY AND PLAYING STYLE**

The club's philosophy should be connected to the club's mission and vision statement and everyone should be familiarized with it and buy into it. One of our other manuals, the Club Development Manual (posted on our web site under the COACHES tab), has a section on how to create a club's mission and vision statements, as well as how to design a curriculum. We recommend that readers of this manual should also read the Club Development Manual, especially the section on implementing a curriculum.

The club philosophy refers to the beliefs and values espoused by the club. These values govern the policies, direction, structure and actions of the club. The philosophy should acknowledge the club's responsibility for the overall growth of young athletes, developing character, self-confidence, creating a positive environment for learning, and helping each player reach his/her potential. The philosophy will likely emphasize that sport is a vehicle for teaching life lessons and that it should be fun and fulfilling. The philosophy should remind everyone the value of hard work. The philosophy could allude to the need to develop versatile players and prepare them for the next level.

The club's playing style should also be well articulated to make sure the staff and the parents are all in harmony with the ultimate aims. The playing philosophy and formations for each age group should be spelled out clearly, with the rationale. Examples of playing style are shown below as they might relate to possession soccer:

#### ***Playing Philosophy***

Our club believes in playing open, creative, attacking soccer, where players are encouraged to express themselves. Ball possession is emphasized, with attacks built up from the back and players interchanging their positions, as dictated by the game. Aimless kicking, kick-and-chase, and over reliance on physical

play are discouraged. Our teams will exhibit good support play around the ball and patience and composure on the ball.

### ***Playing Formation***

In order to generate a smooth transition from academy to select soccer and prepare the players for the 4-3-3 game, we will play the following formations in the academy ages:

- U9's will play keeper plus 2-3-1
- U10's will play keeper plus 2-3-1
- U11's will play keeper plus 3-1-1-3
- U12's will play keeper plus 3-1-1-3
- U13's and older will play keeper plus 4-3-3

These formations use positional roles that translate well into the 4-3-3 roles. This approach will facilitate the transition into 4-3-3 and create a pool of players who are all comfortable playing possession soccer.

## **STEP TWO: DECIDE ON THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF PLAY**

The core principles are like the club's DNA. These are the constants throughout the club which are taught and applied by all the coaches at all the ages. Everyone should be familiar with the core principles. All the top international youth academies in the world adopt their own set of principles. These are timeless principles that the club's staff feel best define the way they play. The Ten Principles of Possession Soccer described earlier should be part of the core principles, in addition to other principles that deal with various aspects of play. Other examples, in no particular order, are described below:

1. ***There should always be a supporting player behind the ball.*** The rationale behind this principle is that if the ball carrier cannot go forward, he can pass the ball back to the supporting player who can switch the point of attack. The second reason is if the ball carrier is dispossessed, the supporting player can apply immediate pressure to prevent a counterattack.
2. ***Always try to create numerical advantage around the ball.*** This principle is self-explanatory. It helps maintain possession and win the ball back if turned over.
3. ***Whenever possible, create a 2v1 situation with a dribble.*** This principle refers to the ball carrier. If there is space in front and all teammates are marked, the ball carrier can dribble forward to draw an opponent away from his mark and thus create a 2v1 situation.
4. ***Whenever the team loses possession, players should immediately apply pressure to win the ball within 5 seconds.*** Again, self-explanatory. This principle speaks of the commitment to immediate transition to defend. A team that just won possession is vulnerable to losing it until they spread out into an attacking shape. Hence, immediate pressure can help regain possession.
5. ***Wide defenders should overlap and create 2v1 on the flanks.*** Teams that play 4 in the back (in 11v11) or 3 at the back (in 9v9) can use the wide backs to create numerical superiority in midfield and on the wings.

As mentioned above, the core principles are constantly taught to every team in the club, in addition to the specific needs of each team.

### **STEP THREE: DEFINE THE DEVELOPMENTAL PHASES**

The complete player development continuum extends from 4 year olds to 18. This long process needs to be broken down into more manageable segments or phases since each phase requires different developmental priorities. An example of that is shown below:

1. **Motor skill phase.** 4-7 year olds (1v0, 1v1)
2. **Technical phase.** 8-11 year olds (1v1, 2v2, 3v3)
3. **Growth phase.** 12-15 year olds (4v4 to 11v11)
4. **Elite phase.** 16-18 year olds (7v7 to 11v11)

In the example above, the numbers in brackets denote the core activity types for that phase. For example, the Technical Phase will emphasize technical development and should include a lot of 1v1, 2v2, and 3v3 type of activities. Each club can create its own breakdown and definitions. The most important thing is to have a clearly defined sequence of phases. Ideally, there should be a Technical Director for each phase, a person who will become the bona fide expert on that phase and who will oversee the training of coaches and players and curriculum implementation at that phase. The Technical Director will align the training volume and training priorities of his phase to the overall long term plan and will design the seasonal and weekly plans for the teams.

### **STEP FOUR: CODIFY THE TECHNICAL SKILLS AND THEIR KEY COACHING POINTS**

Technical development should be considered a top priority at any youth club. Every club's curriculum should outline in a progressive manner all the techniques that should be taught at each age group and their respective key coaching points. The U10/U12 Academy age group is an especially vital phase for technical development.

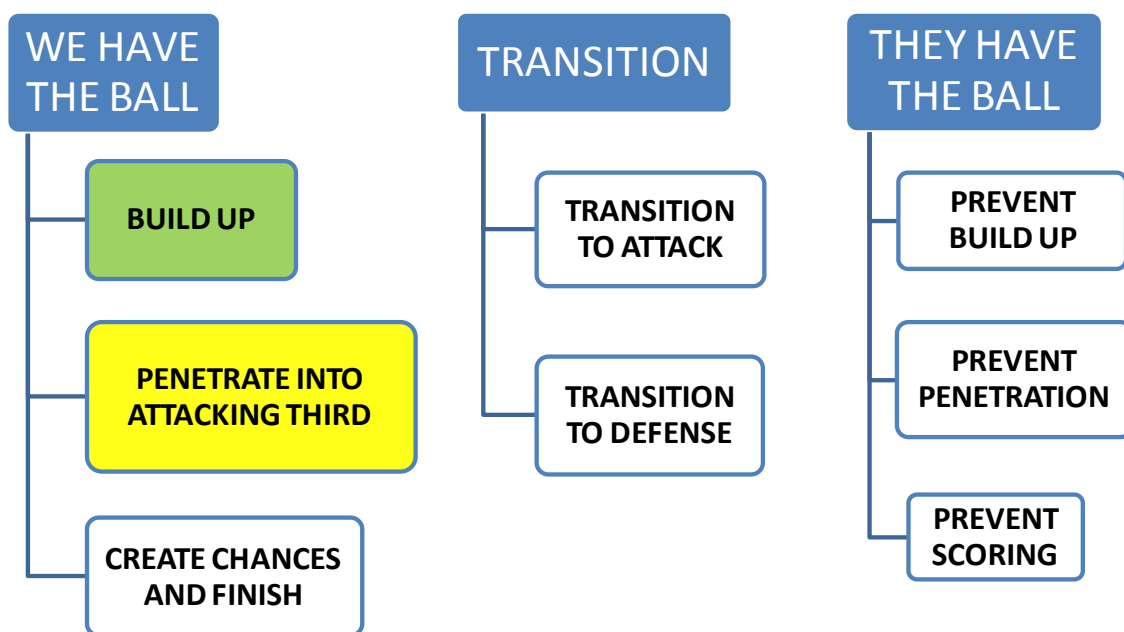
Techniques such as dribbling, passing, receiving, crossing, finishing, and heading should be addressed, in a progressive approach from simple to complex, from basic execution to more advanced quicker execution, from short range to long range, etc.

General techniques such as receiving could be divided into sub groups such as receiving with the outside of the foot, or receiving air balls, with each group allocated specific training volume within the seasonal plan. This will eliminate technical gaps and result in a more complete and rounded player production.

### **STEP FIVE: DIVIDE THE GAME INTO TACTICAL PHASES OF PLAY**

This is an important step in creating a set of tactical topics. Dividing the game into tactical phases will facilitate long term planning and ensure that all topics are covered in a sequential way and nothing is neglected or left to chance. All professional youth academies do this as it helps bring focus to each phase and each training objective. A typical example is shown below:





Training objectives within the micro (weekly) plan can address both the pre-set seasonal goals and the immediate needs based on game analysis.

### **STEP SIX: CREATE A LIBRARY OF ACTIVITIES FOR ALL THE AGE GROUPS TO ADDRESS ALL THE TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL TRAINING TOPICS**

This step helps a club safeguard the quality, consistency and standards throughout the age groups and teams. Coaches will have access to a library of activities and will use it to construct their practice plans. Coaches will be required to use these approved activities which will lead to uniformity and efficiency.

Furthermore, the activities should be grouped into categories that reflect the scope and purpose of the activity. An example of such grouping is shown below. The activities are grouped based on the topic and the organization of the activity. The term 'Basic technique' and 'Basic tactics' mean that these activities are not position specific and that all the players will do the same thing. The term 'Functional' refers to position specific activities where each player performs the aspects of the topics related to his/her positional role.

<p><b>BASIC TECHNIQUE</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. WITHOUT GOALS</li> <li>2. WITH GOALS</li> </ol>	<p><b>FUNCTIONAL TECHNIQUE</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. WITHOUT GOALS</li> <li>2. WITH GOALS</li> </ol>
<p><b>BASIC TACTICS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. WITHOUT GOALS</li> <li>2. WITH SMALL GOALS</li> <li>3. WITH LARGE GOALS</li> </ol>	<p><b>FUNCTIONAL TACTICS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SMALL GROUPS/PHASES OF PLAY</li> <li>2. SCRIMMAGE WITH FORMATION</li> </ol>

Some of the activities utilize goals and some do not. One could argue that our players need as much finishing practice as possible and the more often we can incorporate goals into our activities the better. But sometimes, a goal is not necessary or is not practical.

By grouping activities as shown above, coaches can evaluate the effectiveness of the activities at the end of the season and gauge whether they got the right mix. If the end-of-season review identifies finishing scoring chances as an issue, the coach can adjust the next plan by adding more activities with goals.

Observations of club practices reveal that many coaches rely mostly on basic generic activities such as 4v4 possession in a grid, or 5v5+1(neutral) to targets, or 6v6 four goal game, etc. Not enough practice time is allocated to functional activities, where players get to practice playing in their proper positions. At least half the activities, including the warm ups, should be position-specific and all the scrimmages should be in specific formation. For example, when playing a scrimmage of 5v5, it is more effective to make it a formation based scrimmage of, say, 3-1-1 versus 3-1-1 or 2-1-2 versus 2-1-2. This way, the players are asked to solve the same soccer problems they will encounter in the upcoming game. Instead of playing 4v4 without assigning any positions, better to play a defensive midfielder-plus-two-attacking midfielders-plus-a-center forward (1-2-1) versus a central defender-plus-two-defensive midfielders-plus an-attacking midfielder (1-2-1), thus creating the same match-ups as in the game.

A weekly training cycle could utilize generic activities in the beginning of the week and switch to more functional activities at the end of the week so that players learn their positional roles before the weekend's game.

Examples of Generic Technical, Functional Technical and Functional Tactical activities can be found in Appendix 'A' and a sample weekly practice plan can be found in Appendix 'B'.

## **G. POSITIONAL ROLES BASED ON THE 10 PRINCIPLES OF POSSESSION**

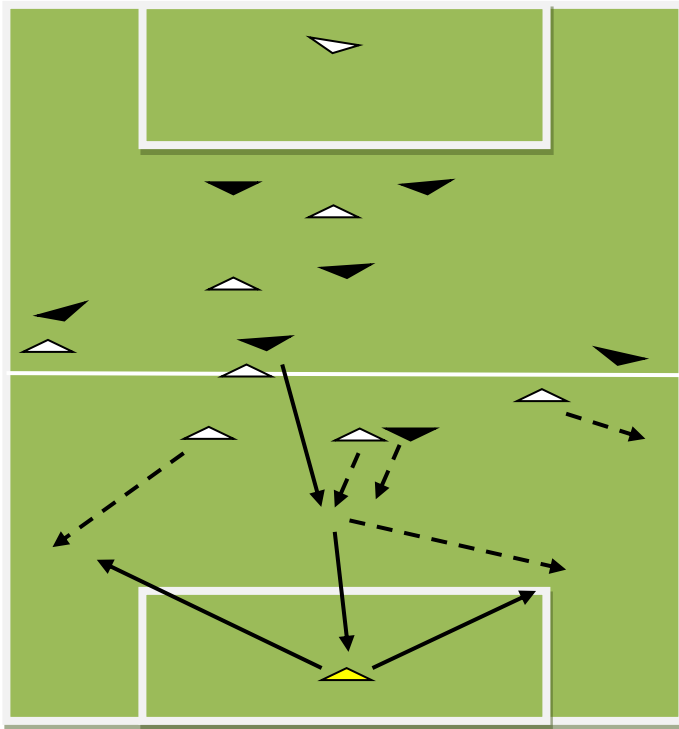
### **BUILD UP PHASE**

The following are the positional roles for the Build-up Phase most crucial for playing out of the back:

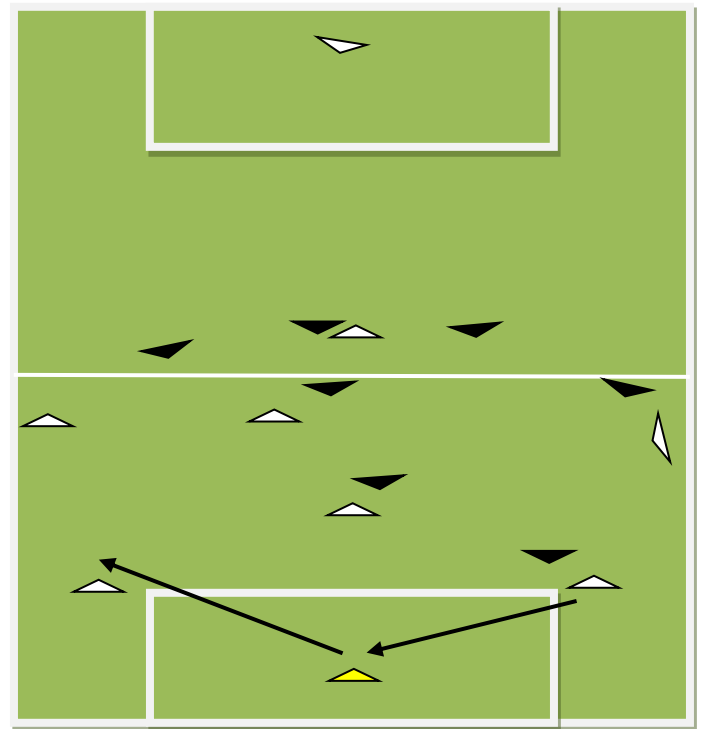
1. **Peeling off and facing up-field:** All players ahead of the ball need to learn to peel off their opponent and open their body position to be able to see the field and receive the ball facing up-field. This is covered in Chapter E, the Ten Principles of Possession Soccer.
2. **Role of the Keeper:** keepers should learn how to support the back line in possession, how to distribute and be the first line of attack instead of just punt the ball long. Keepers should be discouraged from punting goal kicks.
3. **Role of the Back Line:** The back line plays a vital role in possession. The defenders need to learn how to support the midfield in possession, how to make the field big and how to help relieve pressure. The defense also plays a crucial role in switching the point of attack.
4. **Role of the Defensive Midfield:** the number 6 player dictates the rhythm of possession. He needs to learn how to support the attack from behind the ball.
5. **Role of the Attacking Midfielder:** The vital link between the back line and the forward. The number 8/10 player needs to learn to maintain the right team shape in midfield and be available for passes from the back.
6. **Role of the Wide players:** Players 2/7 and 3/11 provide width and penetration. They need to learn to stay wide and open body to the field and provide support to the midfielders.
7. **Role of the Center Forward:** Player 9 provides depth and an outlet from high pressing opponents. He needs to learn to stretch the field and stay high and central and be available for the long pass option from the back.
8. **Goal Kicks:** Start the build-up. Keepers need to learn to pass the ball on goal kicks rather than just kick it long.
9. **Throw-ins:** Players need to learn to use the throw-ins to switch the point of attack rather than throw it down the line.

The following pages provide more details on each of these key positions and scenarios.

## ROLE OF THE KEEPER



(1)



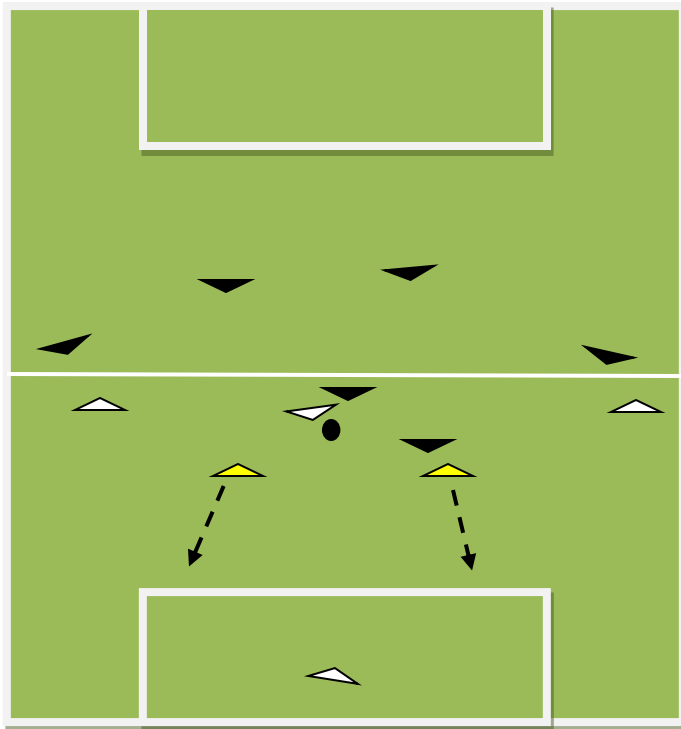
(2)

The keeper's role in building up from the back is to work with the back line in possession. **The keeper should help the back line maintain possession and switch the point of attack when the team is under pressure.** Diagram (1) shows a typical through ball being chased by the central defender who should be encouraged to play the ball back to the keeper. The keeper can then play the ball wide to maintain possession and give the team some breathing time to open up into an attacking shape. In diagram (2), the black team is applying high pressure and the central defender should have the option to play the ball to the keeper who can then switch the point of attack.

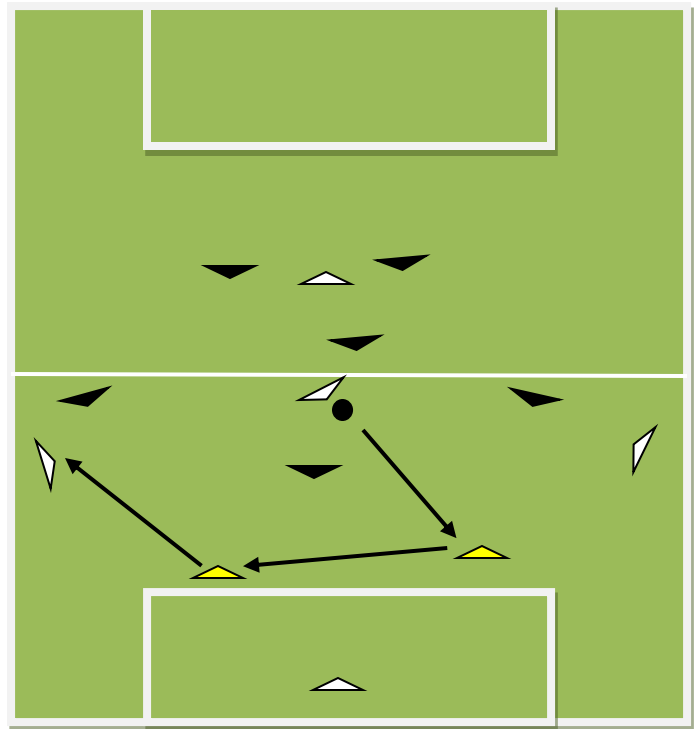
The keeper should always be available for a back pass and should move laterally to give a safe passing option and communicate his availability. **The keeper can pass the ball to midfielders or even forwards if he has the passing range.** It doesn't have to be limited to just finding defenders.

When the keeper catches a cross or stops a shot, he needs to quickly assess his passing options and pass it to someone who has time/space to control the ball and maintain possession or start a counterattack. **Punting the ball is not recommended since our players need to learn to play out of the back and the keeper must learn to pass the ball rather than launch it high and long.** The keeper's role on goal kicks is addressed later in this section of the manual.

## ROLE OF THE BACK LINE (PLAYERS NUMBER 4 & 5 IN 7V7)



(1)



(2)

**The role of the back line in possession is to support the ball and always be available for a back pass.** The back line needs to work as a unit. When one defender gets the ball, the other defender needs to open up and spread out far enough from opponents to be safe in possession. In diagram (1) the defensive midfielder is under pressure and that is the visual cue for the defenders to back pedal and spread out so they can receive the ball a safe distance from opponents.

Once the back line receives a back pass, they should keep the ball by passing it among themselves as shown in diagram (2). This sequence allows the rest of the team the time to spread out and regain an attacking shape.

In diagram (2), the pass from central defender 5 to the wide player 3/11 also acts as a baiting pass that invites the opposing team to shift over to the left, which creates space on the right. Player 3 can then initiate a quick switch to the right, either through the back line or via the midfield.

One tendency for the two central defenders is to pass the ball back and forth to each other. This plays into the hands of the opponents who don't have to adjust their position at all. The central defenders need to continue the sequence and pass it to the wide players to force the opponents to adjust. It also triggers a rhythm of possession with the ball moving from sideline to sideline until it is appropriate to go forward. The back line can also play probing balls into midfield and get the ball back and re-circulate around the back to maintain the possession rhythm.

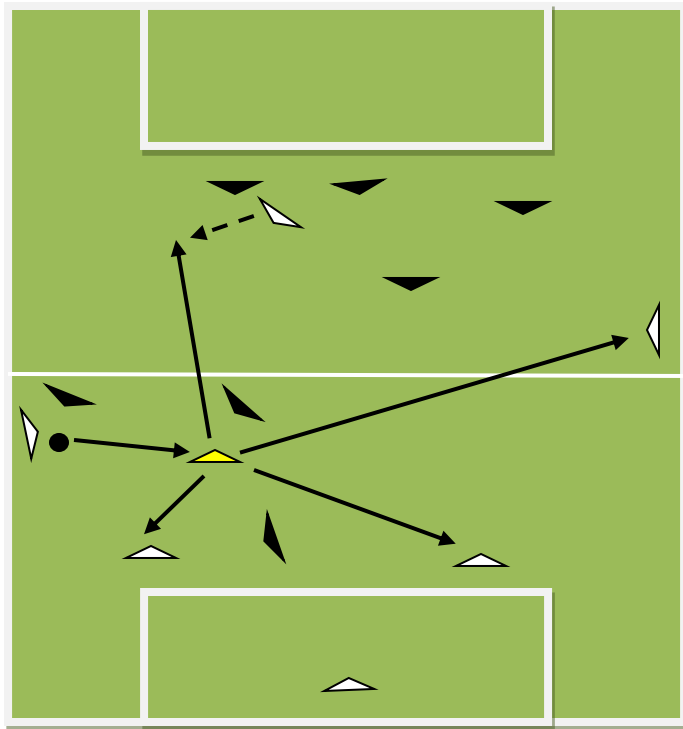
Another tendency for our defenders is to kick hopeful balls towards the forwards. A typical sequence in our youth game is a back pass from a midfielder to a defender who then kicks the ball forward with his first touch. **As a general rule, most back passes should be followed by a square or diagonal ball that initiates a switch.**

The pace of the passes needs to be at a high tempo, otherwise opponents have time to adjust. Our players pass the ball too timidly and the ball travels too slowly. The high speed of play needs to be maintained with one touch control and second touch to pass a crisp accurate pass. If one of the central defenders in the chain can be bypassed with a longer pass, even better.

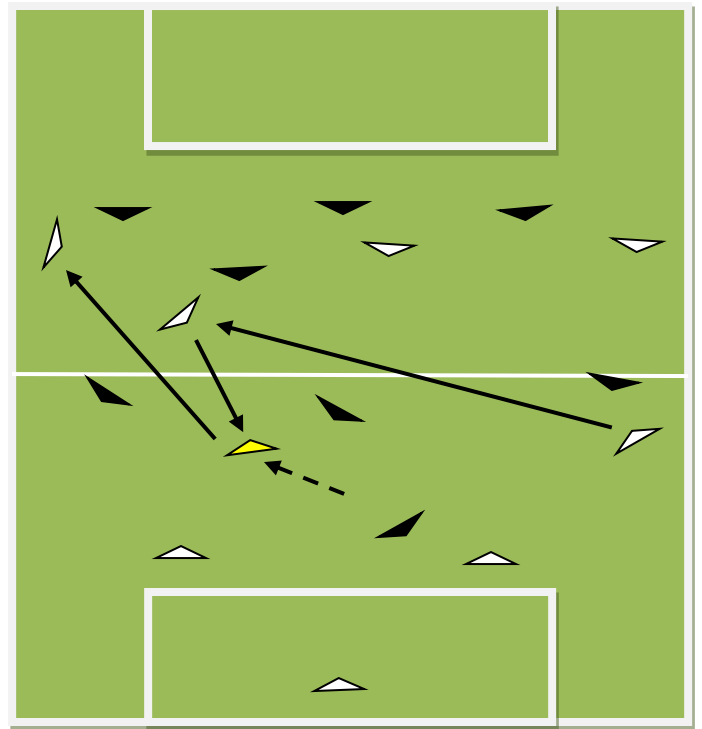
It is impossible to maintain possession for long periods without the help of the back line. **The back line's role in possession is to make the field as big as possible by dropping back and keeping the ball long enough for the rest of the team to transition to an attacking shape.** Our players tend to ball watch and our defenders forget to drop back to receive a back pass. Or they drop back but not far enough to be a safe passing option. They need to be reminded constantly. If executed properly, the back line will see a lot of the ball and will play a crucial role in relieving pressure and switching the point of attack.

Since in the 2-3-1 formation there are only 2 defenders, they must be disciplined and stay home and not venture too far up the field. Their role is strictly support from behind the ball. If one of them does step into midfield, defensive midfielder 6 must drop and cover for the defender.

## ROLE OF THE DEFENSIVE MIDFIELD (PLAYER NUMBER 6)



(1)



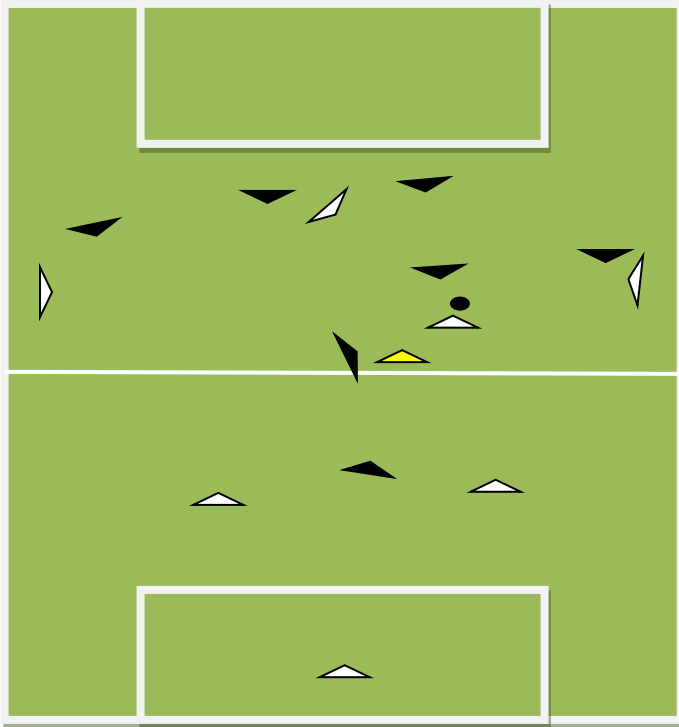
(2)

**The role of the defensive midfielder is to always be available for a pass no matter who has the ball.** When the back line has the ball, the 6 moves laterally, looking for support angles. As it is passed from defender to defender, the 6 follows the ball with his movement. **When the ball is played to wide players or to attacking midfielders (number 8/10), the 6 is supporting from behind.** He rarely goes ahead of the ball and is always available underneath the ball.

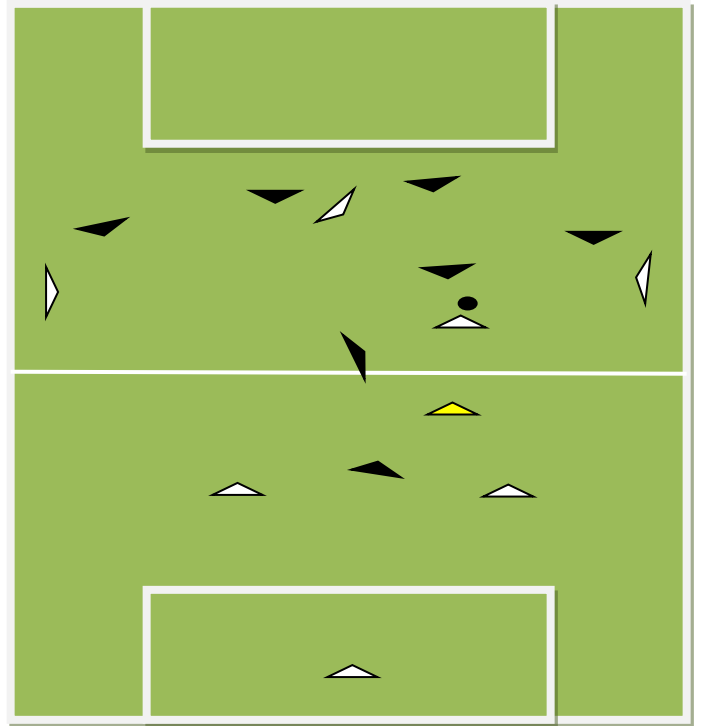
The defensive midfielder will execute a lot of ball switching from flank to flank and will play a crucial role in creating a rhythm of possession. **He will be the focal point of the build up from the back and will dictate the tempo of the ball circulation.**

In diagram (1), the number 6 supports the left wide 3/11 in a 7v7. Note his position square to 3/11 and facing up field. If he gets the ball from 3/11, he can switch the point of attack if given the space, or play it back to a central defender if under pressure. **After switching the ball, he should quickly shift over and follow the ball and be available to receive it again if the need arises.** So, lots of lateral movement is required by the number 6.

In diagram (2) the number 6 supports the attacking midfielder 8/10 in a 9v9, in case he cannot play the ball forward. Note the number 6's position underneath the ball, at an angle inside, with his body open to the field. He is not too close to the ball so, if he gets the ball, he has the space and time to quickly switch it to the left flank.



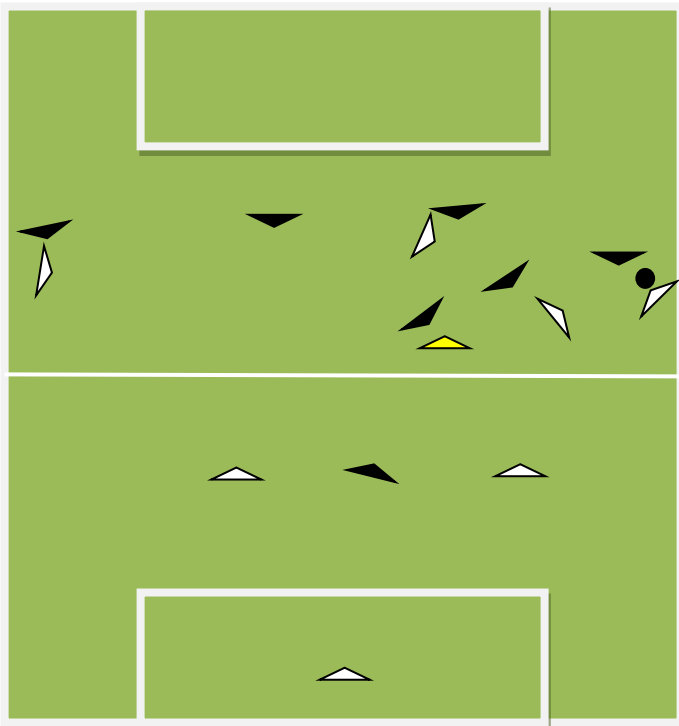
**Wrong**



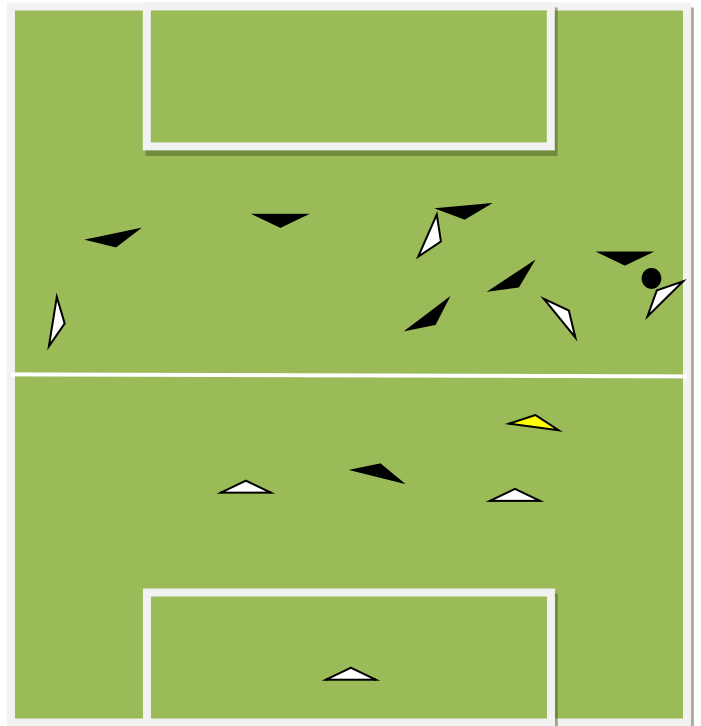
**Right**

Quite often, the defensive midfielder gets too close to the ball and is not detached enough to be a safe option. The 6 needs to stay in the space in front of the back line, away from the crowded area near the ball so that when he gets the ball, he is not under immediate pressure and can switch the point of attack. The four diagrams in this page show number 6 positioned too close to the ball (**Wrong**) and the correct position (**Right**) where he is detached and has more space and time to control the ball.

**Wrong**

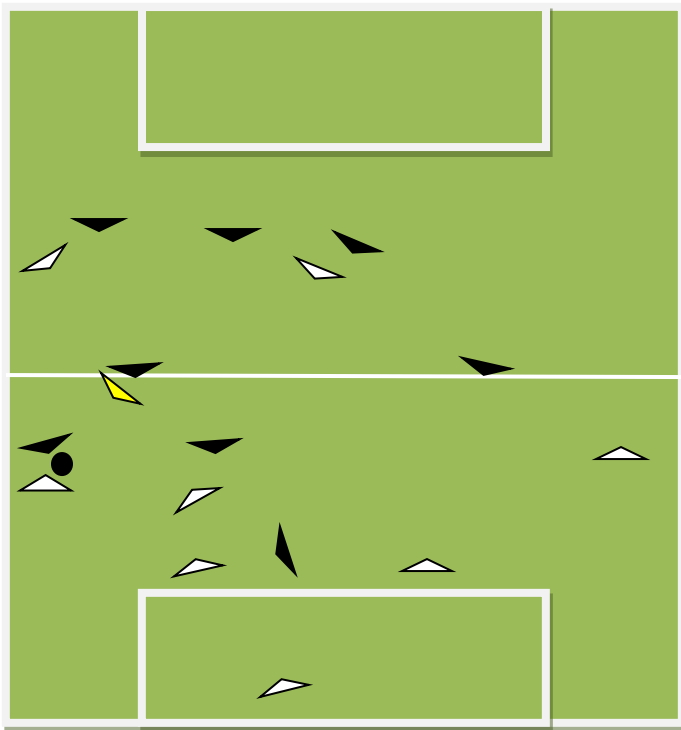


**Right**

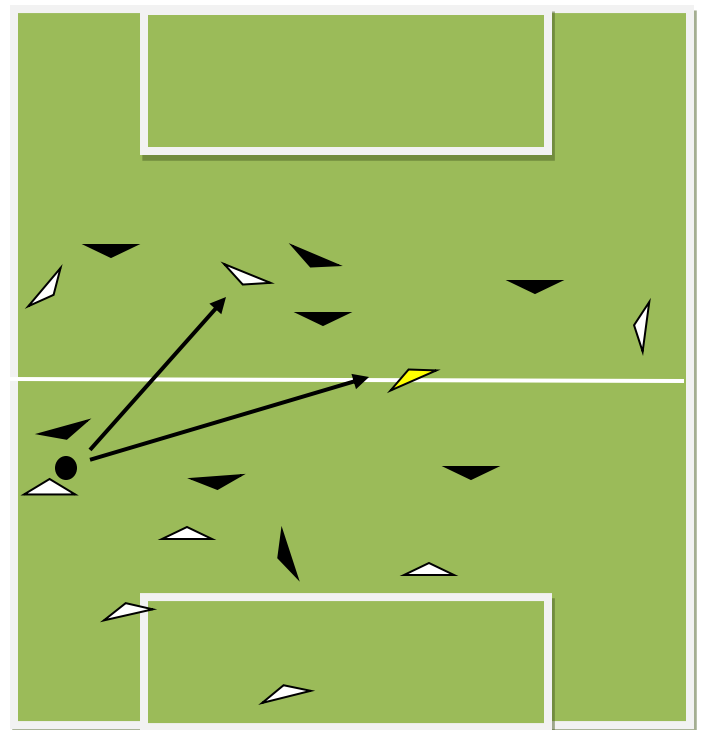




## ROLE OF THE ATTACKING MIDFIELDER (PLAYER NUMBER 8/10)



(1)

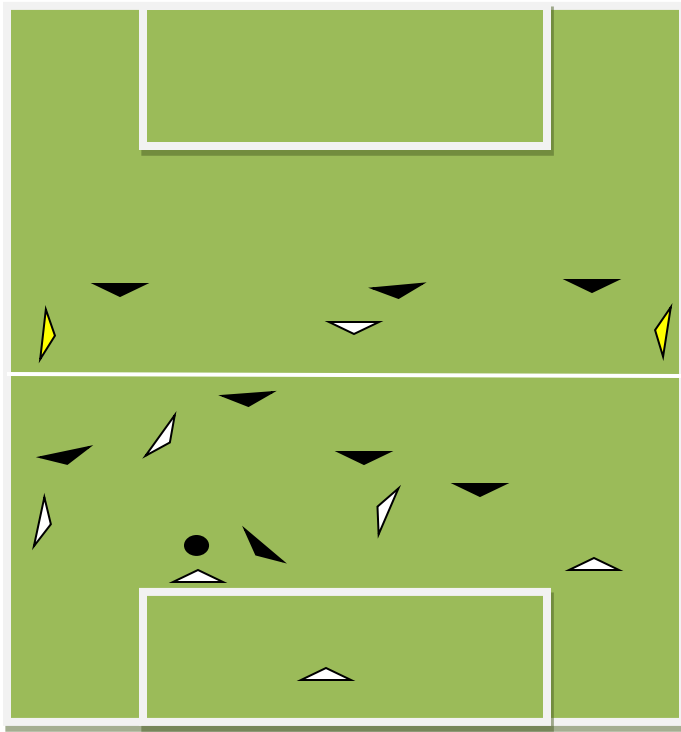


(2)

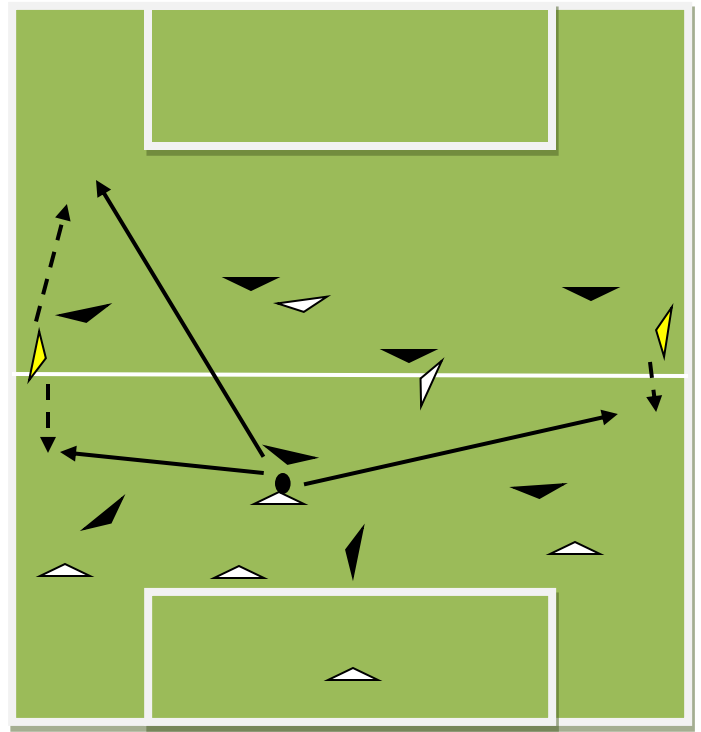
**The attacking midfielder's main role in the possession build up is to offer the back line and the defensive midfielder passing options for penetration into the middle third.** Player 8/10 should be available as high up the field as possible so that a pass to him penetrates behind the other team's midfield. The positioning of the number 8/10 is crucial for maintaining the correct team shape and control of midfield. The center forward and attacking midfielder's movement need to complement each other and maintain the right balance between possession and penetration in their spacing and support angles. For this to happen, player 8/10 and player 9 need to be aware of each other's movement. If player 9 moves towards the ball, player 8/10 should move away from the ball to the blind side of the field, as shown in diagram (2) above.

In diagram (1) above, the number 8/10 came too close to the ball, making it too crowded and hard to break pressure. His position also makes it difficult to pass the ball to the center forward. In diagram (2), number 8/10's position is much better. Midfielder 8/10 is also facing up field giving him better vision. The wide 3 is now able to find him as well as number 9 with a pass and open up the game. The pass from 3 to 8/10 is a diagonal pass that can unbalance the other team and create a 2v1 on the right flank.

## ROLE OF THE WINGERS (PLAYERS 7 AND 11)



(1)



(2)

**The role of the wingers in building out from the back is to stretch the field and make it as big as possible by pushing as far up as possible and staying wide against the sidelines.** By doing that, it gives the midfielders more space to control and pass the ball. Also, when the wide players stay wide, the opponents' back line is stretched across the width of the field, leaving gaps for penetration.

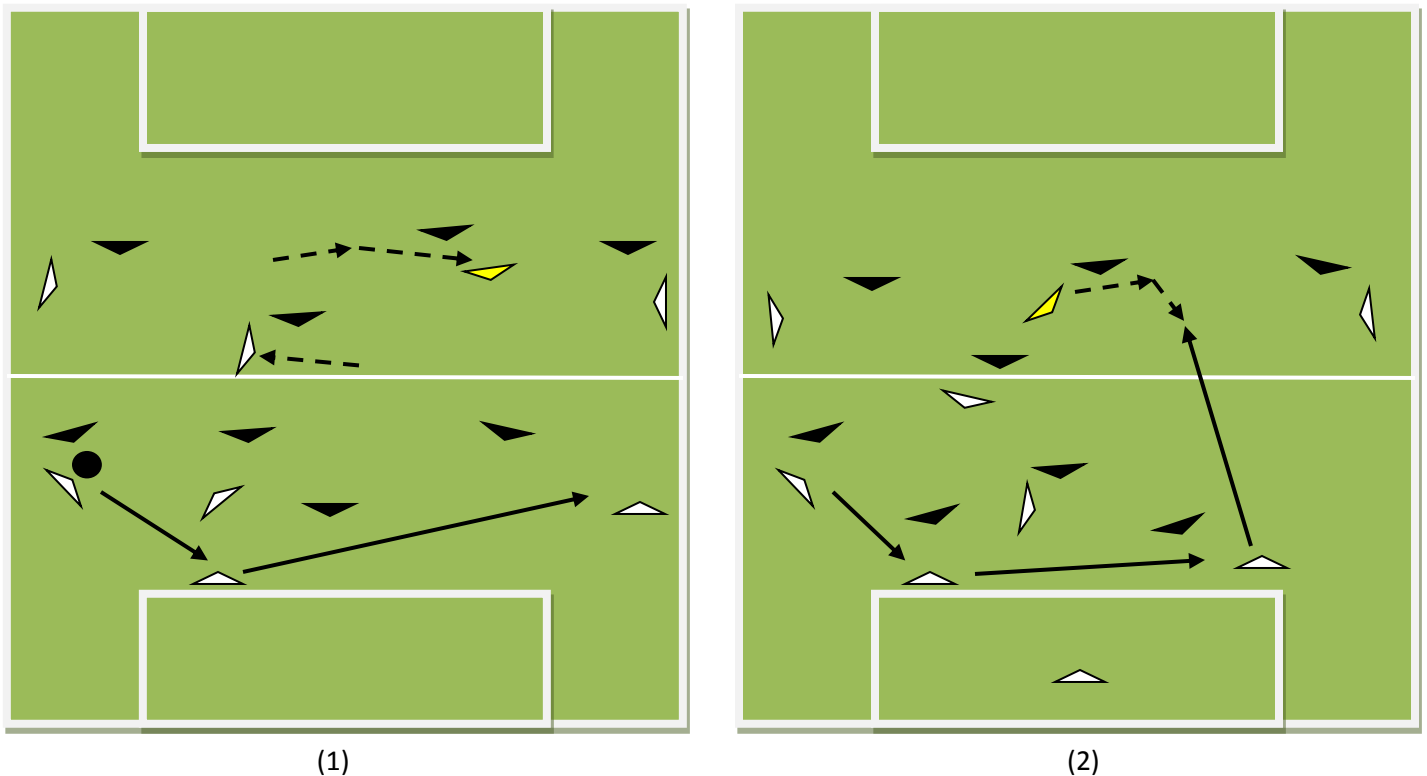
Diagram (1) shows the desired positioning of the wide players when the defenders have the ball. The wide players are wide and high. Note the body position of the wide players, open to the field, with the ability to see the whole field. This open body vantage point allows them to decide whether they should run forward or drop back. It also tells them how high they can push without running into off-side.

Once the wide players get wide, they need to read the visual cues as to how they can help maintain possession. **They need to read the pressure on the ball to decide how to adjust their positioning.** In diagram (2), defensive midfielder 6 has the ball and is under pressure. The wide players need to decide whether they should drop down the line to offer wide support angles and be available for a pass to feet, or whether they should run behind opposing back line for a pass into space.

One tendency of our wide players is to play too narrow. They tend to move inside towards the ball when the ball is on the other side or when the ball is in their half. This helps the other team defend more compactly and makes it harder to switch the point of attack. This is a habit that will take some time to

eradicate. Our wide players need to stay wide, stretch the other team, open their body and be ready to make penetrating runs or receive the ball to feet.

### **ROLE OF THE CENTER FORWARD (PLAYER NUMBER 9)**



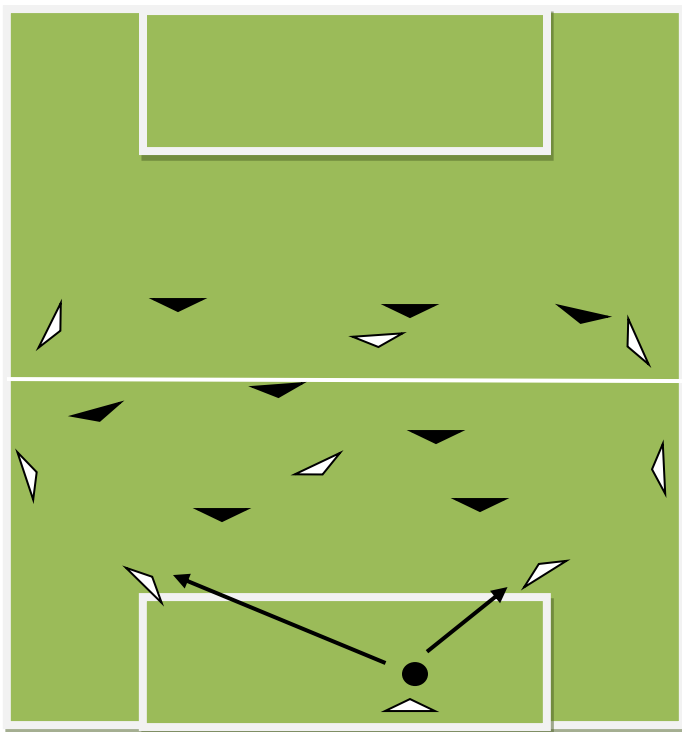
**The role of the center forward when the team is building from the back is to stretch the field, give the team depth and be available as a target.** The number 9 can do that by posting himself against the last defender, as high as possible, and being ready to check for a penetration pass from the back line or the midfield.

Diagram (1) shows the movement of the number 9 as the back line circulates the ball. The number 9 should keep his movement within the central area and leave the flanks for the wide players.

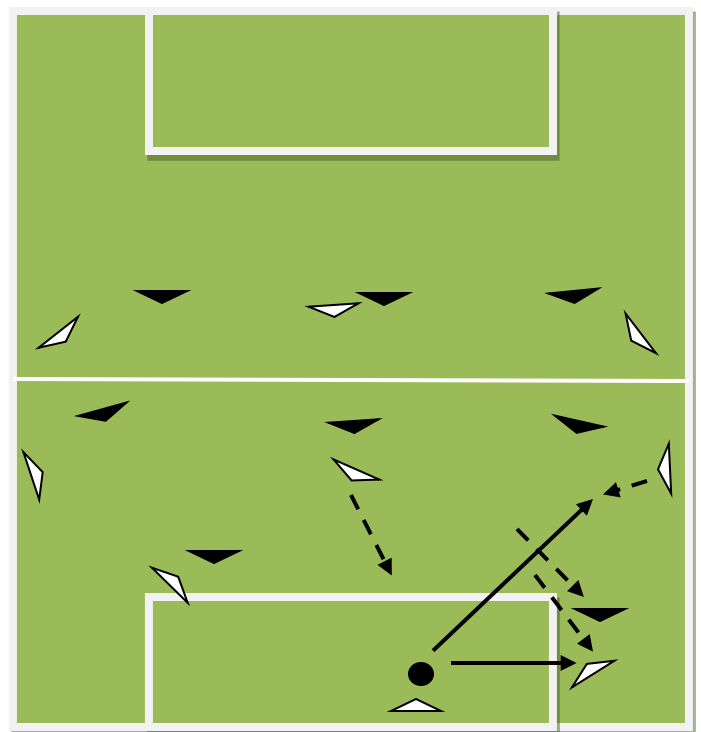
In the initial stages of the build-up, when the ball is still with the back line, the number 9 should hold his high position patiently. By staying high, he helps make the field big and gives the midfield more space in which to operate. If needed, he can serve as an outlet pass when the opponents are trying to press the ball. Diagram (2) shows such a moment, when the other team is pressing high, which opens up space behind their midfield, making a pass to the feet of the number 9 a good option to break pressure.

**The number 9 should resist the temptation to check towards the ball too early and too far into midfield. This will destroy the depth and crowd the midfield. The ideal scenario is for the number 9 to get the ball behind the other team's midfield.**

## **BUILD UP FROM GOAL KICKS**



(1)



(2)

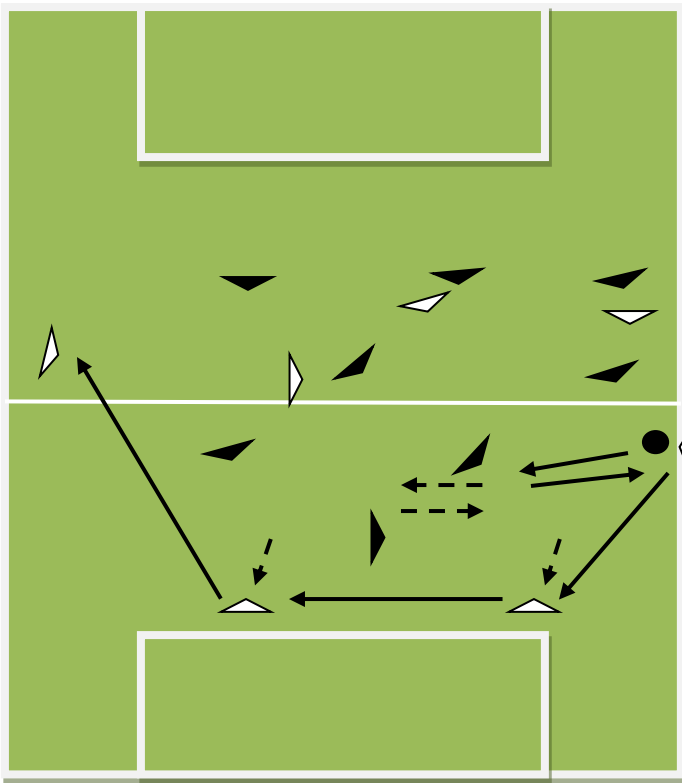
**The keeper should be discouraged from punting the ball on goal kicks.** Our players must learn to play out of the back and punting the ball turns the situation into a 50/50 ball at best. Instead, we need to work with the academy teams on safe ways for the keeper to pass the ball out of the back.

Diagram (1) shows the ideal scenario, with the back line spread out as shown and the keeper simply finds either the central defender number 4/5 or the 6 who drops back. Note how high the wide players are located. This situation is possible and desirable if the other team drops back and allows the keeper to pass to players 4 or 6.

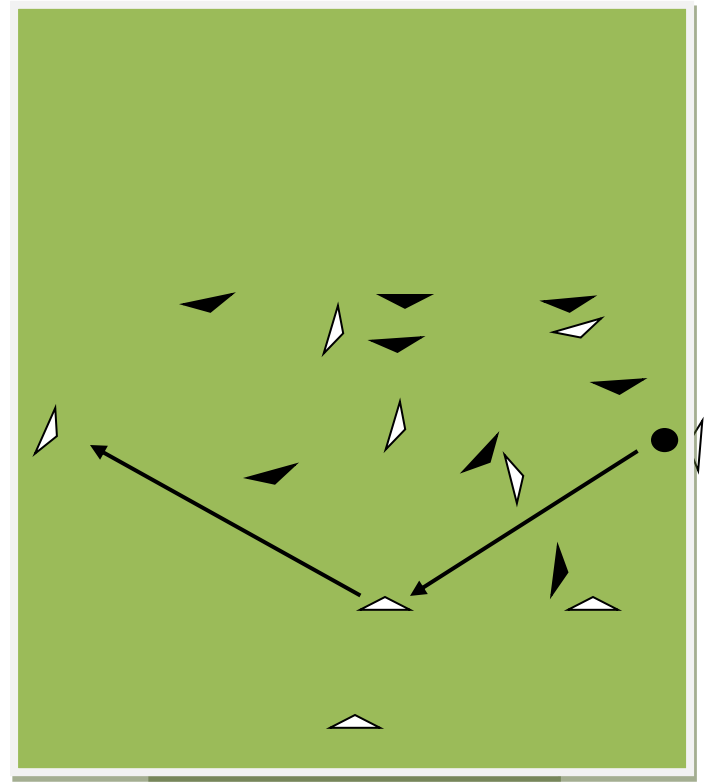
But often, the opponents will decide to press and not allow the keeper an easy pass to a defender. In Diagram (2), the other team is marking the defenders. A simple way to give the keeper passing options is for the central defender to drop into the flank. Diagram (2) shows defender number 4 dropping into the right flank. If the opponent does not follow him, the keeper can pass it to number 4. If the opponent follows him, this opens up a passing lane to wide player 2. Another option is for the attacking midfielder 8/10 to drop into the space between number 4 and 6 to get a pass if he is not followed.

If the 4 and 6 decide to drop deep to receive the ball, they should stay as close to the penalty area as possible, as shown in diagram (2), so that they can receive the ball from the keeper quickly and still have a passing angle to the wide player. If players 4 or 6 receive the ball close to the sideline, they will have less outlet options and could be cornered by a quick thinking pressing team.

## THROW-INS



(1)



(2)

**Our teams need to learn to use the throw-in to switch the point of attack.** Most of the time the opposing team will shift many players to defend against the throw-in and this creates a lot of space on the opposite side. Rather than throw the ball down the line into a melee of players, much better to maintain possession by using the back line to switch the point of attack.

Diagram (1) shows what can be done on a throw-in. The defenders 4 and 3 drop back a safe distance from opponents and can receive a quick throw-in and switch. Another option is for player 6 to check away to create space and check back to receive a throw and play it back to the thrower who can then switch the point of attack using the back line.

Diagram (2) shows another option. If opposing forward marks our player 4, the thrower can throw to player 3 who can then switch play.

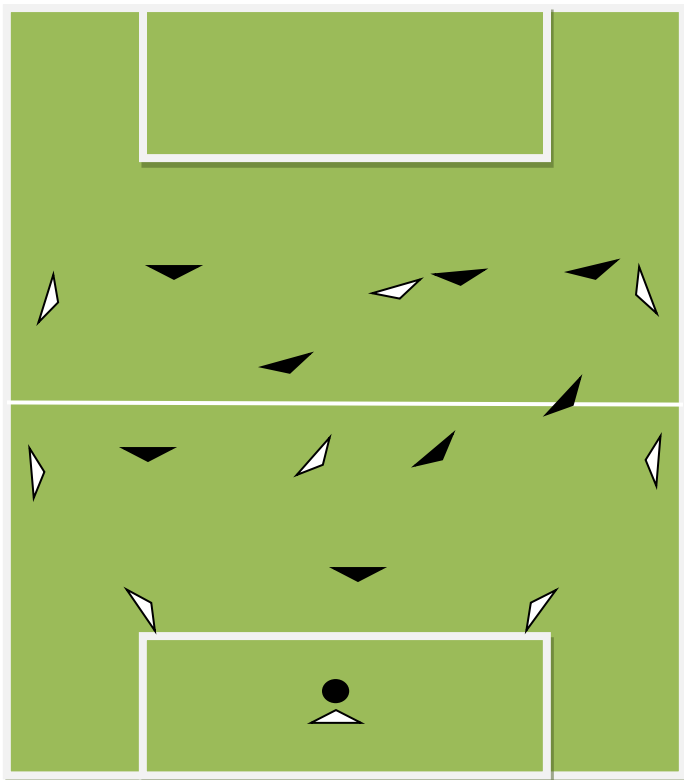
Either way, every time we have a throw-in, the defenders should automatically drop back to create space for themselves as well as space for the midfielders and from that action alone, it should be easier to find a safe option.

## **GENERAL NOTES ON THE BUILD UP PHASE**

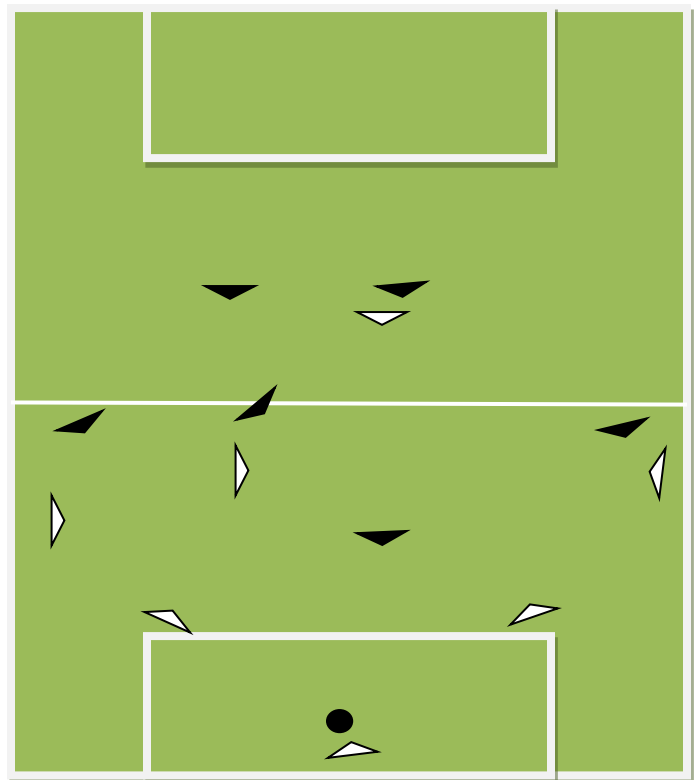
### **Re-Set into Team Shape**

One way to help our teams develop a rhythm of possession is to play the ball to our backline every time we win it in midfield and get them to keep it in the back until the rest of the team can get into the optimum team shape. It doesn't mean that we never counterattack quickly. If the quick counterattack is on then we should take advantage. But most times, when our teams win the ball, the players are not in a good attacking shape and we invariably give the ball away needlessly, trying to force a counterattack without proper support. We work hard to win the ball and give it away hastily with our first pass.

When we win the ball, or if we run into an organized defense with little chance of penetration, we need to keep it, play it back, make the field big and spread out into the 2-3-1 (U10) or 3-1-1-3 (U12) shape with the wide players out wide and high, center forward central and high, back line dropped deep and the two midfielders staggered and spread to form many triangles. From this shape, we can start to circulate the ball at high tempo and find the right time to penetrate. The diagrams below show a good team shape when the keeper has the ball, in the 2-3-1 and 3-1-1-3 formations.



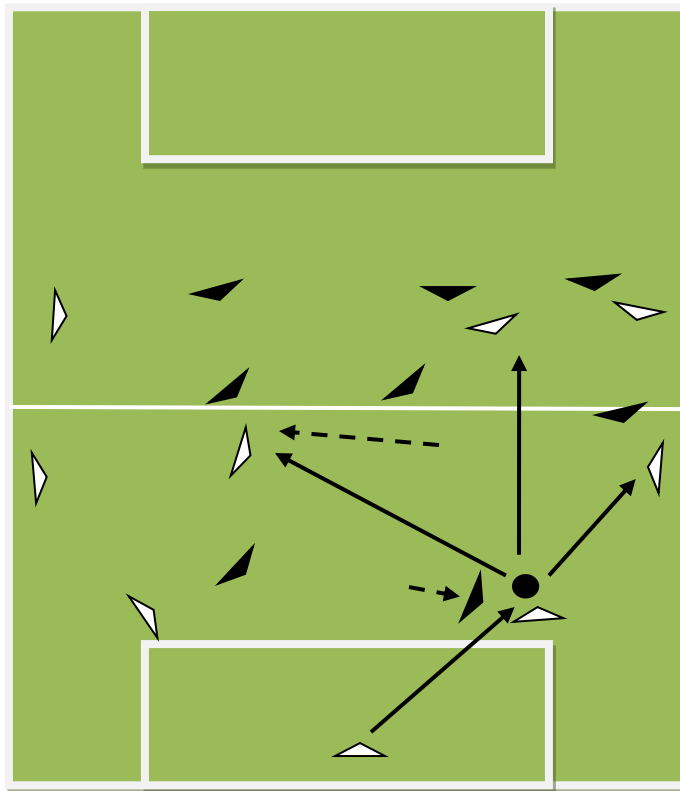
Team shape in 3-1-1-3



Team shape in 2-3-1

### Player 8 movement to open up passing lanes from the back

When defender 4 or midfielder 6 have the ball, attacking midfielder 8 should open a passing lane to the center forward 9 with a peeling off movement that takes him away from the ball. Diagram below shows how player 8 moves to the left when 4 has the ball to open up a passing lane to 9. If player 8 is not marked, he doesn't have to move and can receive the ball from the back and continue the build-up. The diagram shows the ideal team shape with player 9 on the ball side of the field and player 8 on the blind side, giving player 4 many options. The pass option to player 2 is the most predictable one and could trigger a pressing strategy by the other team. The pass to 8 is the least expected, hence the most desirable, as it allows the team to attack on the left flank which is the most open.



## **PENETRATION INTO ATTACKING THIRD PHASE**

The following are the positional roles for the Penetration into attacking third phase:

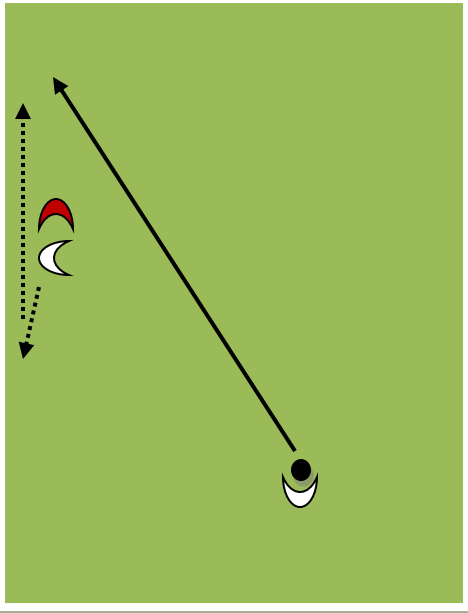
1. **Peeling off and facing up-field:** All players ahead of the ball need to learn to peel off their opponent and open their body position to be able to see the field and receive the ball facing up-field. This is covered in Chapter D, the Ten Principles of Possession Soccer.
2. **Bending runs and dummy runs:** Our attacking players (player 9, 8/10, 2/7 and 3/11) need to learn to bend their runs to create better passing lanes. A lateral start to the run will also prevent off-side. Also, dummy runs that pull defenders away and quick sprints behind them need to become part of the repertoire. Bending runs are covered in Chapter D.
3. **Interchanging runs – center forward and attacking midfielder:** The center forward and attacking midfielder need to learn how to interchange and create space for each other to make penetration runs.

The following pages provide more details on some of these positional roles.

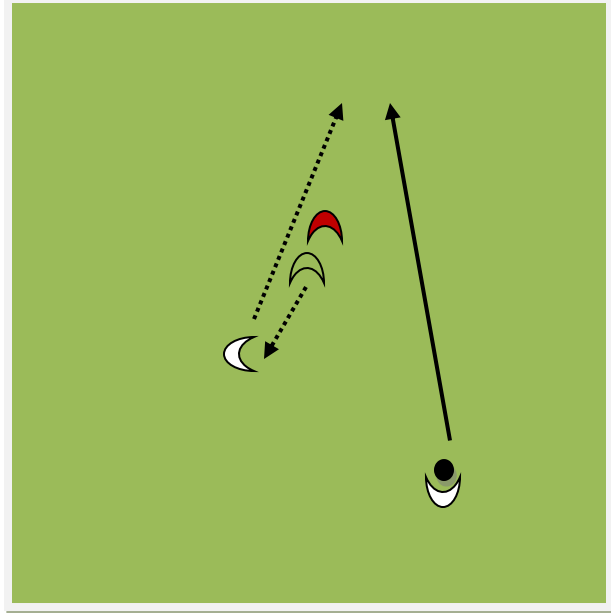


## **DUMMY RUNS TO BAIT DEFENDERS**

The peeling off run can also be used as bait to pull the defender in one direction and sprint into space behind him for a through ball. In the left diagram below, the wide player peels off and if the defender follows him/her, the wide player sprints behind him/her to receive an angled pass. In the right diagram, the center forward peels off and if the defender follows him/her, he/she sprints for a through ball. In both of these examples, the attackers will avoid being off-side since their penetration run starts from a deep position.



**WIDE PLAYER DROPS OFF TO BAIT DEFENDER**



**CENTER FORWARD DROPS OFF TO BAIT DEFENDER**

## **INTERCHANGING RUNS**

Our players must learn when, where, and how to move off-the-ball. Most of our players 'ball watch' and are not aware of their surroundings. Players should get into the habit of looking around and base their movement to complement their teammates' actions. One of the most important relationships for interchanging runs to achieve penetration is the one between the center forward and the attacking midfielder. The 2-3-1 formation of 7v7 and the 3-1-1-3 formation of the 9v9 provide the scope for working on this relationship during the academy years.

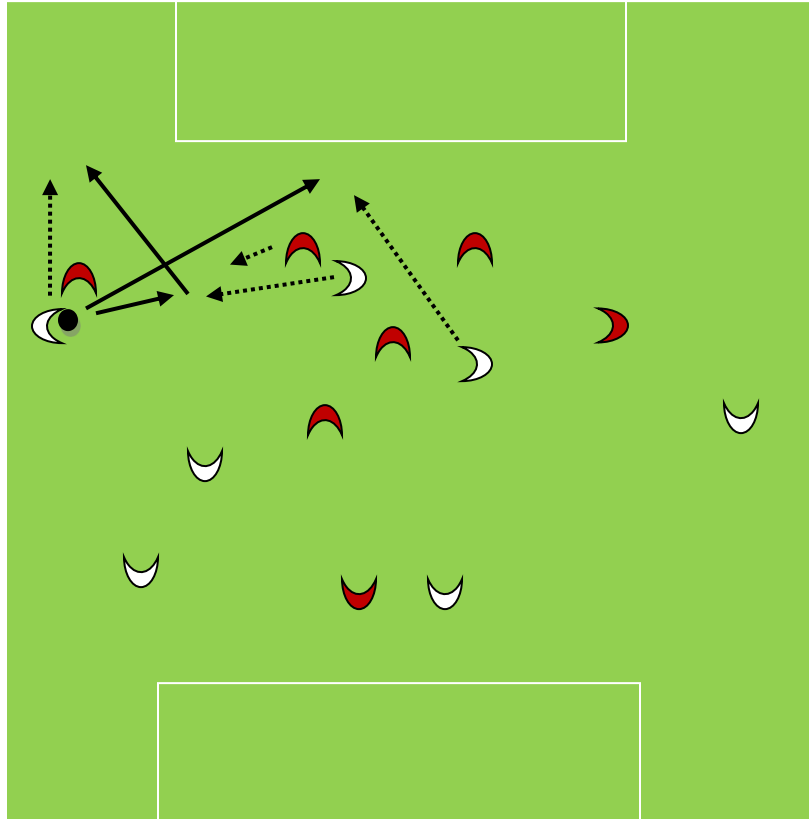
### **INTERCHANGING BETWEEN CENTER FORWARD AND ATTACKING MIDFIELDER**

As the ball is circulated, the attacking midfielder should be aware of the movement of player 9 and be high enough so that if the forward receives a pass, he/she can have immediate support from the midfielder. Also, if center forward 9 makes a run and drags a defender with him/her, the attacking midfielder can make a penetration run into the space created by the forward.

In these examples of interchanging runs between player 8/10 and 9, the run into space behind the back line needs to be timed to avoid off-side. If the through ball is not on, the forward and midfielder can either switch positions for a while or return to their normal positions as the ball is circulated.

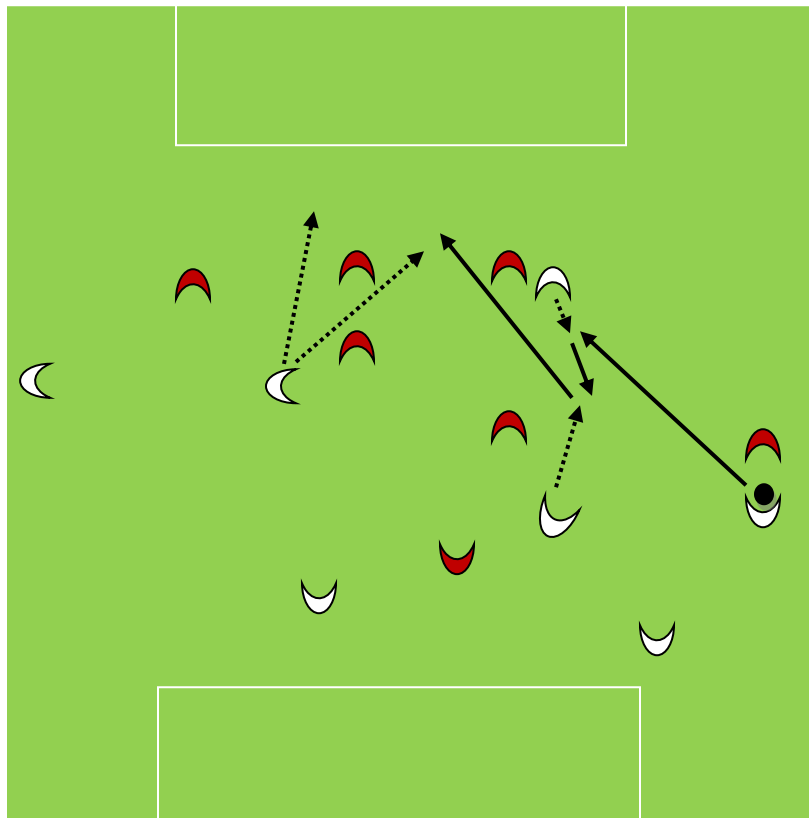
**DIAGRAM 2:**

WIDE PLAYER 3/11 HAS BALL  
FORWARD 9 CHECKS TO BALL  
MIDFIELD 8/10 RUNS INTO SPACE  
WIDE PLAYER CAN WALL PASS WITH 9  
OR PLAY THROUGH BALL FOR 8/10



**DIAGRAM 3:**

WIDE PLAYER 2/7 HAS THE BALL  
FORWARD 9 CHECKS TO AND  
PLAYS IT BACK TO SUPPORTING  
MIDFIELDER 6.  
MIDFIELDER 8/10 MAKES RUN  
MIDFIELDER 6 PLAYS THROUGH  
BALL FOR 8/10.



## **GENERAL NOTES ON THE PENETRATION PHASE**

### **CENTER FORWARD' RUNS**

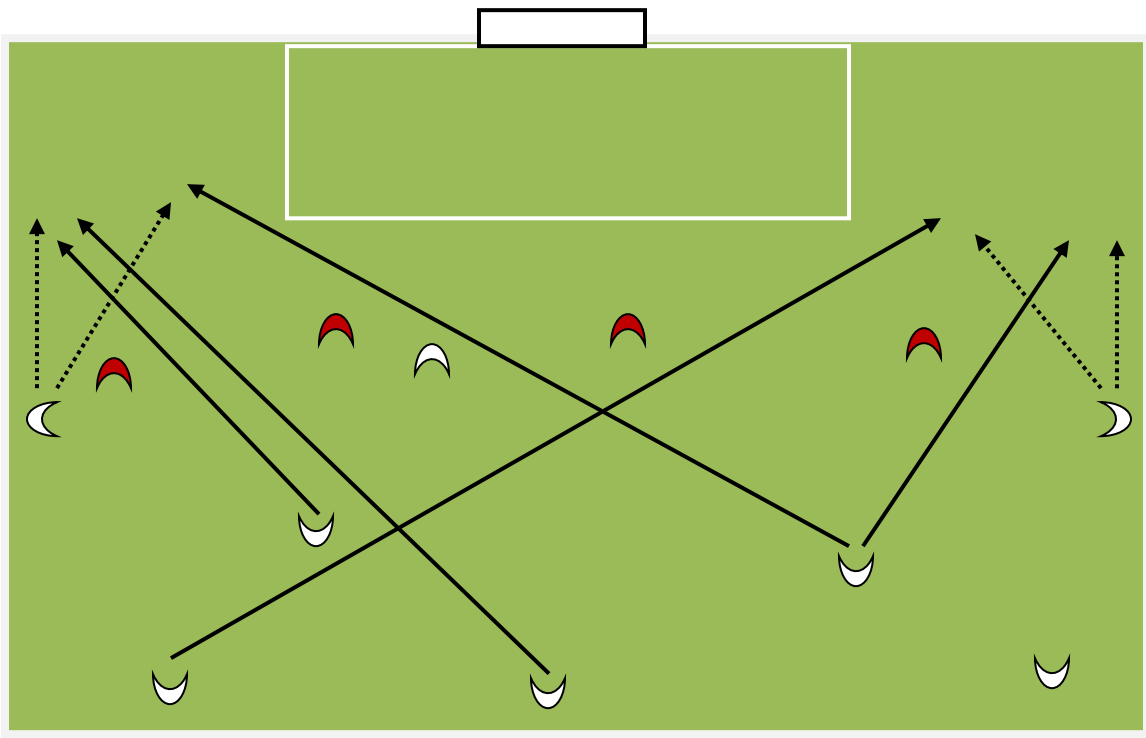
The center forward should learn when to make penetrating runs behind the back line and when to check inside and create space for the attacking midfielder to run into. Too often, our forwards make predictable vertical runs that puts them off-side, or diagonal runs toward the corner flags where they receive the ball with their back to the field, facing the outside and under pressure. The center forward should stay as much as possible within the central corridor defined by the width of the penalty area and leave the flanks for the wide players. The center forward should only make diagonal runs from central areas to the flanks if he/she senses that his/her team is under pressure and needs such an outlet pass.

### **WIDE PLAYERS ATTACKING CROSSES**

While it is important that the wide players stay wide during the build-up and penetration phases, once the ball is about to be crossed, the blind side wide player should run into the penalty area to attack the cross.

### **ANGLED BALLS INTO FLANK RUNS**

As mentioned before, the advantage of playing with wide players is that it can stretch the opponents across the field and open passing lanes for angled passes into the flanks behind the defense. The longer the passing range of the players, the more dangerous wide players can be. This is another reason why we need our wide players to stay wide during the build-up and stretch the opponents' back line.

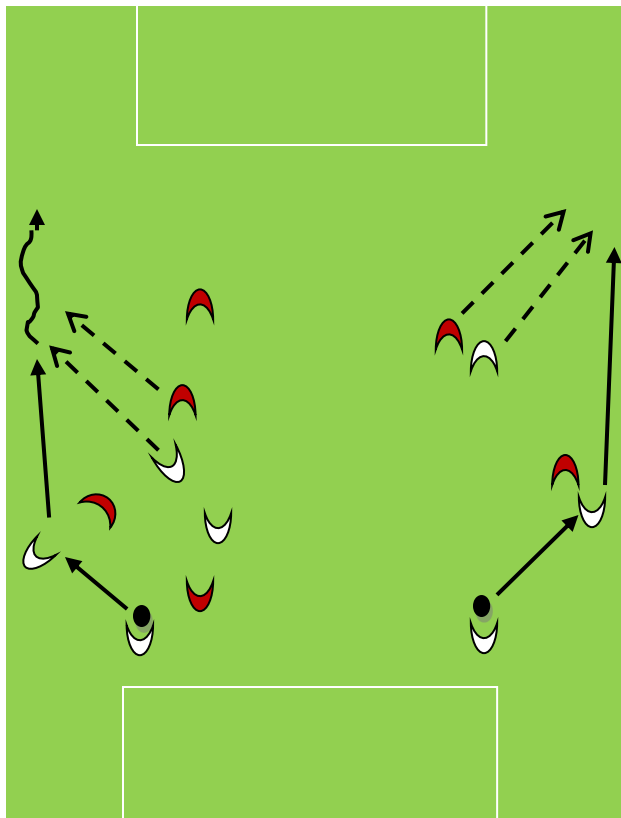


## ANGLED PASSES MORE EFFECTIVE THEN VERTICAL PASSES

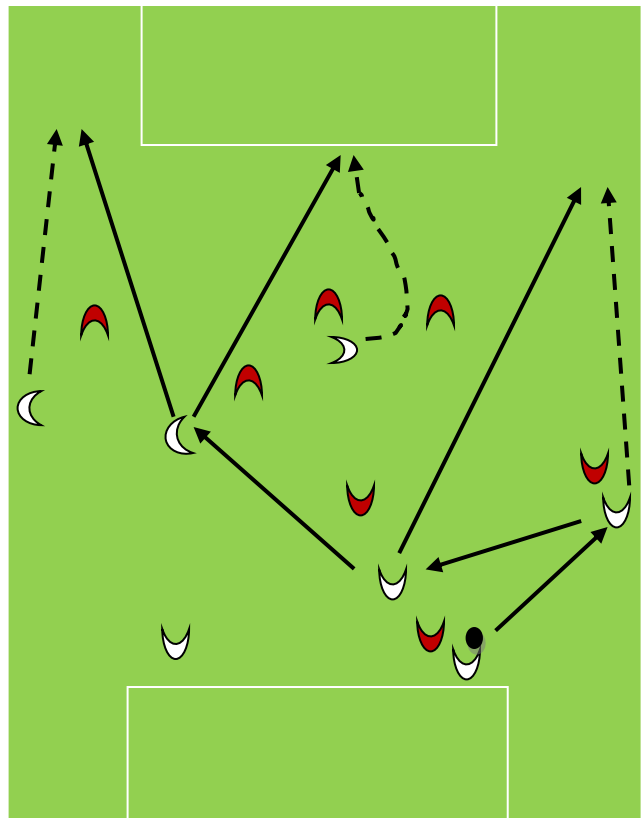
Our players' tendency is to go forward quickly and vertically, often trying to 'ram their way through a brick wall' instead of going around the 'brick wall'. The diagram on the left shows a couple of examples of how our players use vertical passes to penetrate down the flank in a naïve and predictable way. In one example, player 3 gets the ball and passes vertically to player 8/10 who makes a run towards the sideline and tries to turn and dribble down the flank. Another example shows player 7 getting the ball and playing to player 9 down the line. It is easy for opponents to squeeze space and outnumber our players when there is no element of surprise and no variations.

The diagram on the right shows better attempt at penetration, using angled passes, switching the point of attack to go around the crowded areas, and taking advantage of our wingers' width. Here, the ball doesn't stay long in the same zone, making it difficult for opponents to swarm the area around the ball. Also, the wide players are facing the field when receiving the ball.

Another good use of diagonal passes is when they are made against the momentum of the other team. For example, if the other team's players are sliding towards the right flank where the ball is located, a diagonal pass to the left side will catch opponents going the wrong way and allow penetration on the blind side of the opponent.



**Too predictable**



**Better ball circulation**

## H. DEVELOPING A COACHING STYLE

A discussion on player development is not complete without addressing the coaching philosophy and coaching styles that are conducive to optimum player development.

There is currently a surge of interest in coaching education. US Soccer is investing a lot of resources and funds to revamp their coaching education programs. There is among the coaching community a healthy respect for coaching education and the notion that one has to educate oneself to acquire expertise and gain credibility. As a result of this, our coaches are getting better at the fundamentals of coaching. But attending coaching courses is only one piece of the growth mosaic. Just as important is the need for coaches to get exposed to international trends and methods, to explore horizons beyond the American landscape. One can do this by traveling and spending time at a foreign clubs academy, by watching international soccer on TV, by attending coaching events featuring foreign coaches, or by taking their team on a trip abroad. This expansion of perspective is especially important for coaches who are sincerely committed to teaching their team to play possession soccer. It is crucial for coaches to understand how possession soccer is taught and played in the rest of the world. Our coaches need to become students of the international game, not just the local game.

### THE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CYCLE

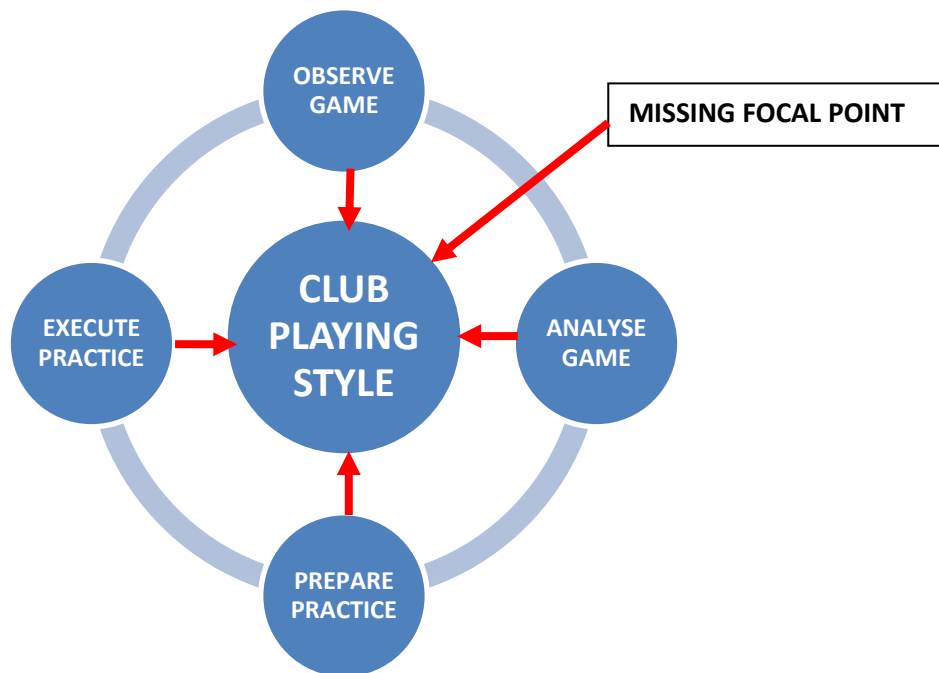
Most coaching courses devote significant time to the process of observing a game and planning and executing a practice session to address weaknesses identified. Some call this process the 'Player Development Cycle' and it is depicted in diagram F1 shown below:



**Diagram F1**

The Player Development Cycle is a sound approach to designing and running training sessions. But what is missing in the cycle shown in Diagram F1 is a point of reference that an established club-wide playing style and philosophy would provide. The cycle shown above implies a short-term approach to training, where the focus is on preparing the team for the next game on Saturday. This approach doesn't take into consideration the long term objectives and doesn't offer the coach a benchmark, such as a standard playing style, against which to compare his team's performance. This means that the game analysis is done in a vacuum, with the consequences that each coach in the club is left to decide for his/her team what needs correcting. This leads to inconsistent coaching, going on tangents, uneven coverage of all relevant topics, and knowledge gaps.

The missing piece that would complete the schematic is a club playing style and curriculum against which the team's performance is measured. Diagram F2 illustrates this point. Now, the match analysis is done based on overall seasonal objectives that are, in turn, anchored to a playing style. So, for example, if the seasonal goals are to improve playing out of the back, the match analysis assesses the team's success at playing out of the back, and the issues the coach ponders are related to the topic, such as: was the back line shape in possession correct? Did the midfield offer correct support positions? Did the back line choose the right passes? Was the quality of the passes out of the back adequate?, etc.



**Diagram F2**

## **THE THREE COACHING STYLES**

The overriding role of the coach is to influence his/her players and impact their behavior in a way that improves their performance. Hence, the information provided by the coach in terms of feedback, guidance and instructions to his/her players is crucial.

There are as many coaching styles as there are coaches. But we can group them into three general types: The ***Proactive coaching style***, the ***Reactive coaching style***, and the ***Game Management coaching style***.

## **THE PROACTIVE COACHING STYLE**

The proactive coach has a clear vision of the playing style he/she wants his/her team to learn. His/her approach is very deliberate. He focuses deeply on ways he can articulate his vision and ideas to the players, giving them clear pictures and scenarios. The proactive coach will often use the following intros when talking to his players:

“This is how we are going to play....”

“These are your options in this situation....”

“Now that we are comfortable with this, let’s move to the next stage/level/challenge...”

The proactive coach teaches concepts and principles that the players can apply throughout the game. He gives them the tools to solve a variety of soccer problems rather than narrowly focusing on one specific moment at a time.

The proactive coach can anticipate what her players are likely to do and proactively fixes the problems in a systematic and deliberate approach before they happen. His/her game analysis is always connected to his/her vision of the playing style. The proactive coach doesn’t get distracted or carried away by game results. Even if the team doesn’t lose the ball, if his players make bad decisions, he will correct by saying: “I know you didn’t lose the ball here, but against a good team this maneuver will not work”.

The proactive coach prioritizes and fixes the most important deficiencies first. By doing this, many of the subsequent level deficiencies are automatically fixed or eliminated. For example, fixing the team shape first causes players to make better decisions on the ball without the need for more coaching intervention.

The systematic and comprehensive approach of the proactive coach ensures there are no knowledge gaps and that the correct players’ behavior is ingrained. By eliminating bad habits before they happen, the learning is accelerated.

## **THE REACTIVE COACHING STYLE**

The reactive coach reacts to the games and corrects whatever he/she deems necessary to correct. The reactive coach is likely to fix issues in a random fashion. One moment she might jump on a defensive relapse and the next moment she might shout instructions on an attacking issue.

Even if the information relayed by the coach is technically sound, the randomness makes it difficult to ingrain the correct habits. For example, correcting a players’ support angle at a specific moment might not have any residual benefit since every moment in soccer is different and most players will not be sure how the correction applies in a different moment.

Imagine a scenario where the player with the ball was pressed by two opponents, did not have good support and lost possession. A reactive coach might tell a teammate that he should have provided support behind the ball. The problem with this approach is that only one player received the helpful tip and there is no way to know if the player will be able to apply this tip to another similar scenario. A proactive coach



will endeavor to ingrain the correct support behavior with the whole team by turning this scenario into a principle that “every time a player has possession, there must be a support player behind the ball”. Now the chances that there will automatically be a player providing support under the ball are much increased and it becomes an instinctive behavior.

Reactive coaching is coaching off the cuff. It’s like giving a player an instruction manual and telling her to first read page 5, then read page 43, then read page 19...etc. Even if the player reads all the pages, the random reading order is ineffective as less information is absorbed or retained.

One way to describe the differences between a Reactive style and a proactive style is that the reactive coach follows the game wherever it takes him while the proactive coach leads the game in the direction he wants it to go.

## **THE GAME MANAGEMENT COACHING STYLE**

The game management coach takes it one game at a time and is only concerned with the game result. He/she will do whatever is required to win the game without any long term vision or plan. If dumping the ball near the corner flag and pressing the other team is perceived as the right strategy to get a result, then so be it.

The game management coach will likely use any means at his disposal such as time wasting, not letting the other team play, attempts to influence the referee’s decisions from the sidelines, using gamesmanship, encouraging physical aggression, etc.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE COACHING STYLES**

Now that we defined the three coaching styles, which one do we recommend? At the youth level, where player development should take priority, the **proactive coaching style** should be both the initial approach and the predominant style. The first objective in each pre-season is to articulate the playing style and positional roles. Once the players are clear on the big picture playing style and applicable principles, coaches can start to combine the proactive and reactive styles for optimum learning.

The proactive style is most conducive for long term development. But it doesn’t mean that the reactive and game management styles should never be used. These other two coaching styles can still be applied in appropriate doses at the right moments. For example, the game management style might be needed in an important one-off game such as a cup final where your team is trying to protect a lead against a superior team. Needless to say, on occasions when the game management style is used, we hope any unsavory gamesmanship will not be involved.

## **APPENDIX ‘A’**

### **PRACTICE ACTIVITIES**

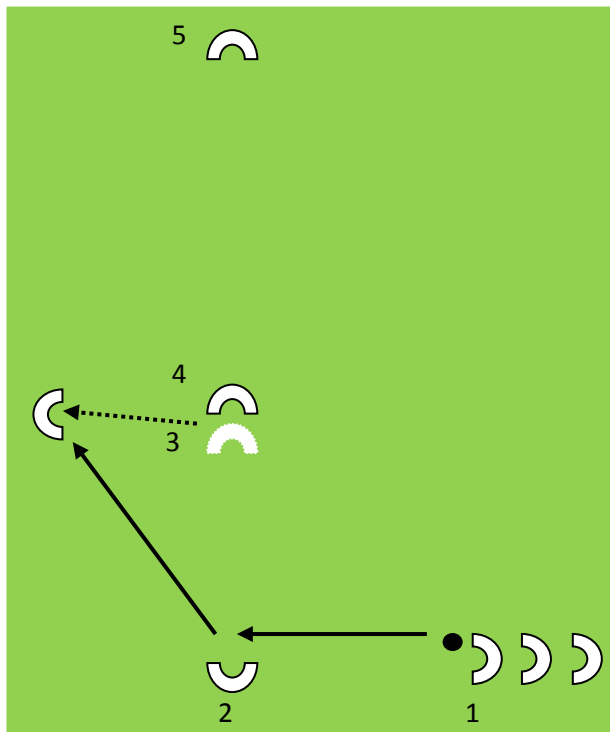
This section includes, for the most part, examples of Functional activities that can be used to teach the Ten Principles of Possession Soccer and address positional roles. The criteria for including an activity here is that it is either ideal for teaching one or more principles of possession or ideal for coaching positional roles, or both. The key consideration is to find activities that are optimum for ingraining the right habits. If it is a warm up activity, it should also provide the technical repetition necessary for preparing the players for the rest of the session.

Readers are reminded that this is the ‘Part II’ manual for coaching U10/U12 Academy and that the first manual also includes an array of activities. The activities in the first manual are mostly generic type and complement well the functional activities shown in this manual. Between the two manuals, coaches can find enough material to plan a variety of practices. But these manuals do not claim to contain the complete or definitive library of activities. There are a myriad of manuals and DVD’s and web sites containing hundreds of activities that could be used. We have just included a small sample to demonstrate the philosophy and methodology we recommend.

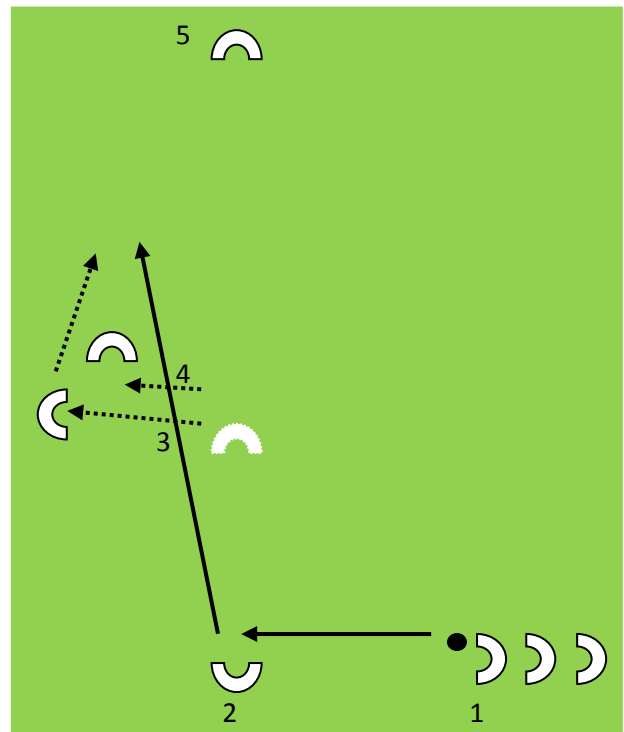
When planning a weekly cycle of practices, our recommendation is to start with generic activities early in the week and shift to functional activities towards the end of the week to prepare for the weekend’s game.

## WARM UP 1: PEELING OFF PASSIVE DEFENDER

In the example of a warm up below, divide the squad into groups of 6-7 players and arrange each group as shown. Distance between points 1, 2, and 3 is 10-15 yards and between 3 and 5 is 20-25 yards. Player 1 passes to 2 and takes 2's place. As the ball travels to player 2, attacker 3 peels off defender 4 to either side as shown below. Defender 4 is instructed to be a passive defender, but must do either one of the following: defender 4 either stays put or follows player 3. If the defender stays put, then player 2 passes to attacker 3's feet. If the defender follows the attacker, then player 2 passes into space behind the defender for attacker 3 to chase (these outcomes are shown below). Attacker 3 passes to player 5 and takes his/her place. Player 5 dribbles to starting point 1. Player 2, after making a pass, becomes defender 4 and defender 4 becomes attacker 3.



**Defender 4 stays put**

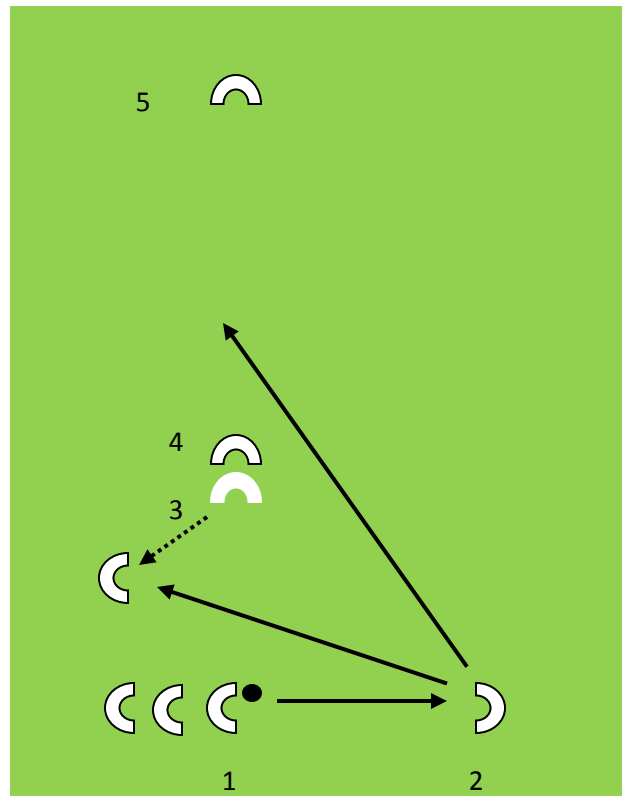
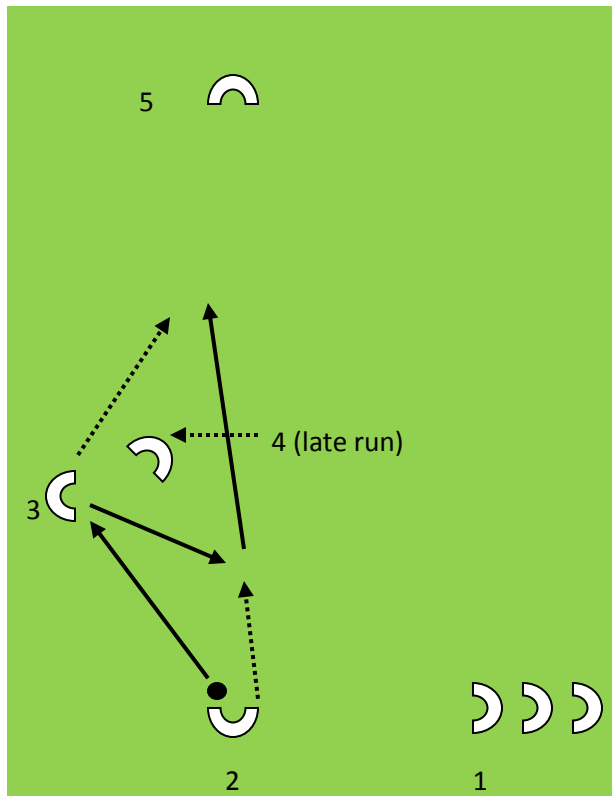


**Defender 4 follows attacker 3**

Remember to keep the defender 4 passive. He shouldn't try to intercept or tackle the ball. This is the warm up stage and the aim is to teach the mechanics of peeling off and its related decisions on the ball.

Although this is not a functional activity, it is ideal for teaching the principle of **Peeling off** and opening body to receive the ball facing up, hence meeting the criteria set above for qualifying an activity.

**Key coaching points:** Crisp accurate passing. Attacker 3 should open body and look over his shoulder towards player 5 before receiving the ball. Attacker 3's first touch should take him forward. Attacker 3 should stay on-side in relation to defender 4 when he peels off. If pass is into space as shown in diagram on the right, attacker 3 should delay his run until pass is made to avoid running off-side and his run should be on the outside of defender, not on the inside.



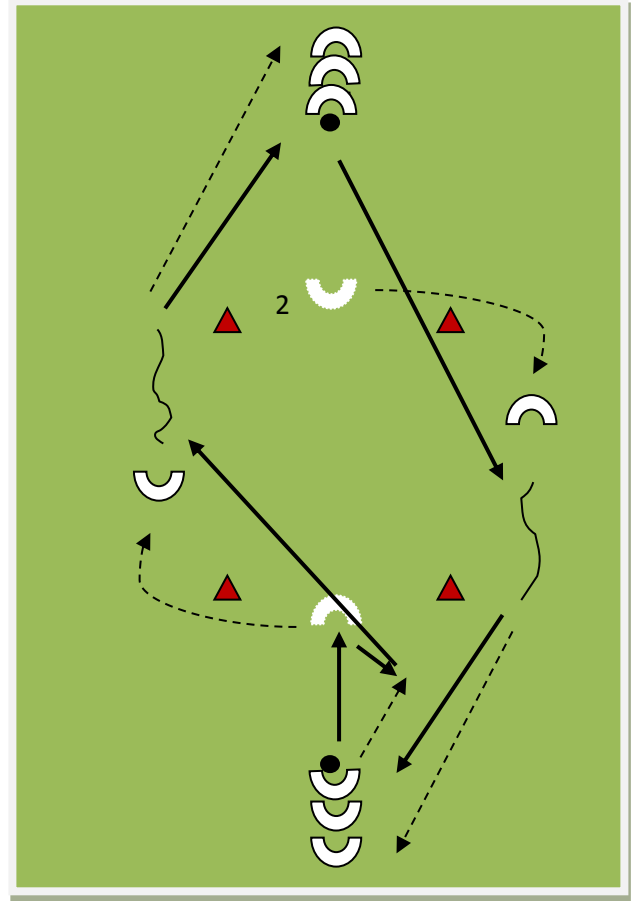
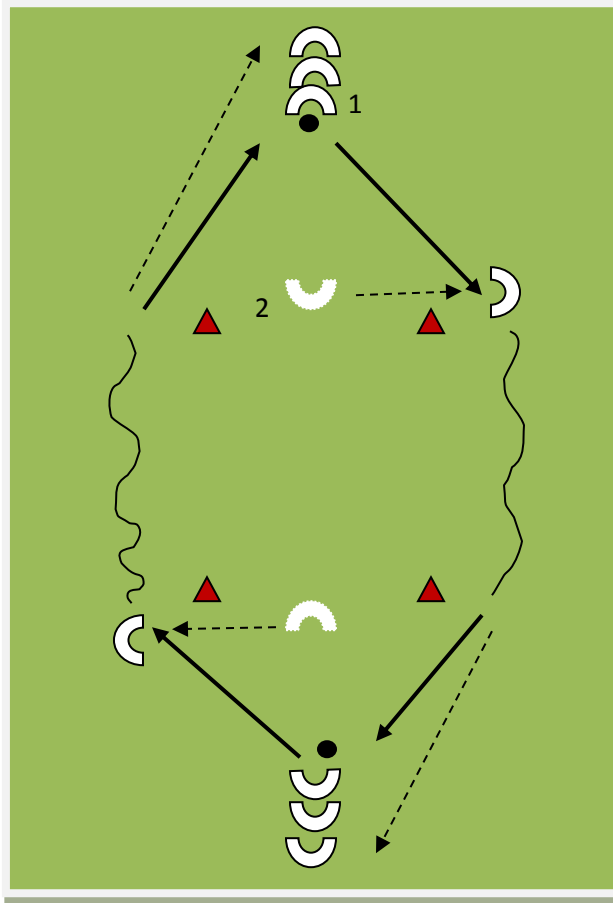
Progress the warm up session by giving defender 4 a third option: to follow attacker 3 after the ball is played to his/her feet by player 2. In other words, the three options are: stay put, follow the attacker early, or follow the attacker late as ball is traveling to him/her. Ask defender 4 to vary his/her reaction randomly between the three options. Whenever defender 4 follows the attacker with a late run, attacker 3 plays the ball back to player 2 who plays it through behind defender 4 as shown in the diagram above on the left.

Another progression is shown above on the right. This time the sequence starts from the opposite side and attacker 3 peels off at an angle as ball is traveling from player 1 to 2. Peeling off at an angle is necessary here to prevent defender 4 from intercepting the pass. It also makes it difficult for defender 4 to see both the ball and attacker 3 when attacker 3 peels away from the ball. As before, defender 4 will have the three options: stay put, follow early, or follow late. Player 2 will pass the ball to attacker 3's feet or to space, depending on the reaction of defender 4.

Variations include adding a goal and a keeper beyond player 5. Now, player 5 will also peel off from an imaginary defender (a cone) and receive the ball facing up and shoot on goal. Attacker 5 will peel off towards the opposite side of attacker 3 on the blind side of the imaginary defender.

Also, attacker 2 can be instructed to peel off a cone at different angles and coach attacker 3 to peel off in opposite direction so as to be on the blind side of defender 4.

## WARM UP 2: PEELING OFF AND BENDING RUNS



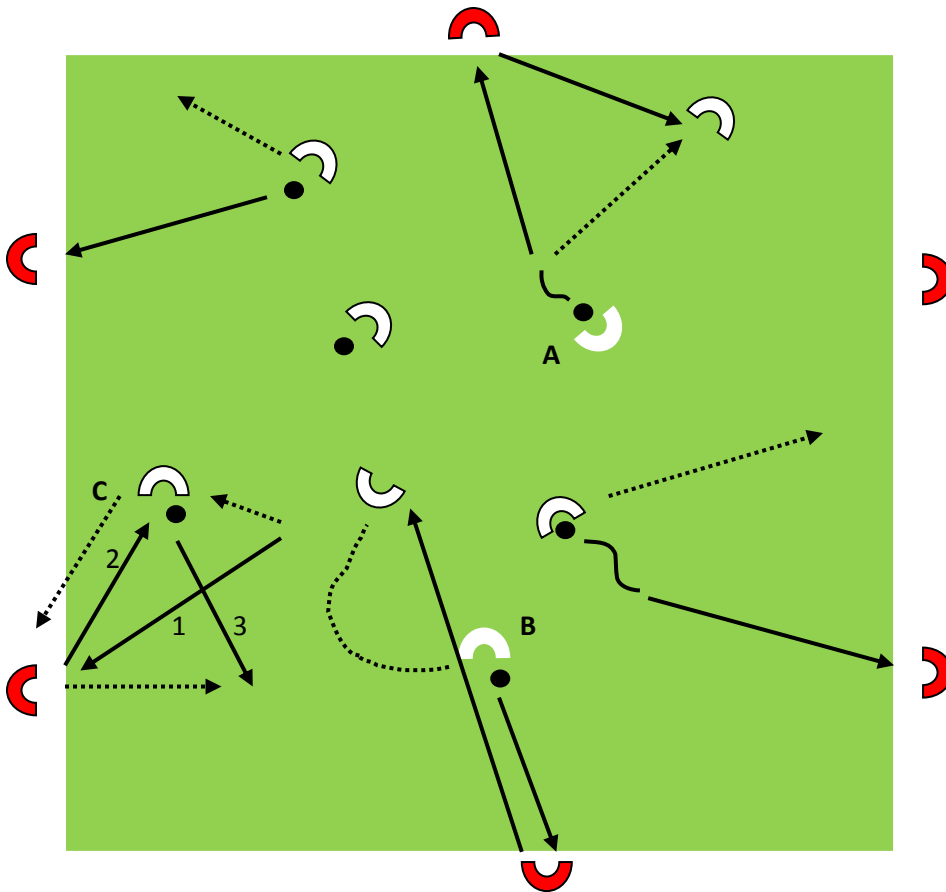
Groups of 8-10. Grid size 8 yards wide by 10-15 long. Distance from player 1 to 2 around 10-15 yds. Player 1 starts with a dribbling touch forward which is the cue for player 2 to make a peeling off run as shown in the diagram on the left above. As soon as player 2 gets wide with his/her body sideways on, player 1 passes the ball to him/her. Player 2 controls the ball forward with his/her first touch using his/her front foot and dribbles to the other end of the grid and passes to the first in line and goes to the back of the line. Both ends are going at the same time in a clockwise direction. Switch to counter clockwise direction after a while.

The progressions are shown on the diagram on the right. The top half shows the first progression, where player 2 makes a bending run for a through ball. The bottom half shows the second progression, where the two players do a combination of in-to-feet, back-and-through into a bending run.

This is another non-functional activity that is included since it is conducive for working on the principles of **Peeling off** and **Bending runs**.

**Key coaching points:** time runs to stay onside (cones are 'last defender'). Open body to see forward and look over shoulder before getting ball. Peel off far enough away from cone to receive a pass to feet that cone 'defender' cannot intercept.

### WARM UP 3: PEELING OFF AND DIAGONAL BALLS



Groups of 8 to 16 players per grid. Half the players in the grid with a ball each and half the players outside the grid, as shown. Players in the grid dribble ball and combine with outside players in three variations:

Variation A: inside player pass to outside and quickly peel off and open body to receive a return pass.

Variation B: inside player pass to outside and makes a bending run and receives a pass to space.

Variation C: wall pass. Inside player pass to outside and peels off. Outside player plays a first time pass and runs inside to receive the return wall pass. Inside player takes the spot on the outside.

Progress by asking the players to decide for themselves which variation to do, using communication and visual cues. They should vary their plays between the three options.

Progress by placing the balls with the outside players. Now the inside players peel off and open their body to receive passes from the outside and they pass the ball to an outside player on the opposite side and then look for another pass from a different outside player to repeat sequence. All passes should be diagonal.

This is another generic activity that is ideal for teaching peeling off and bending runs while the players warm up and work on their passing and receiving technique.

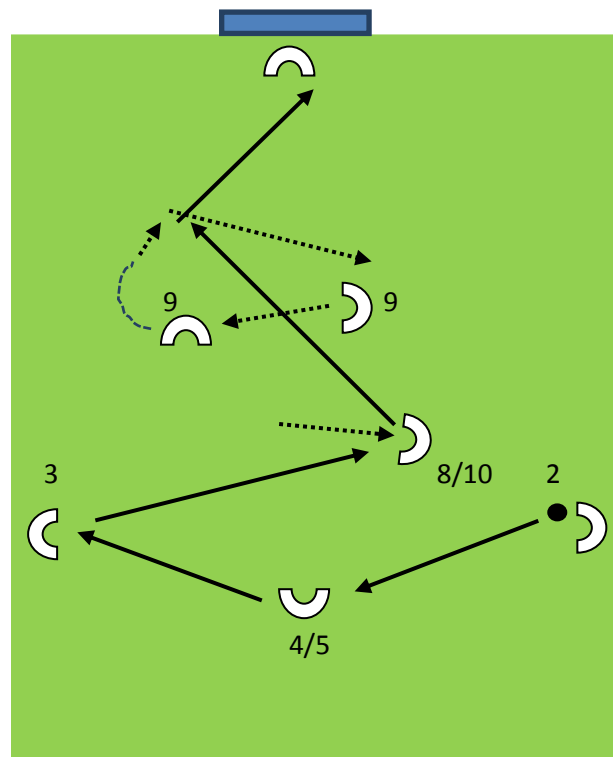
#### WARM UP 4: POSITION SPECIFIC PEELING OFF AND DIAGONAL BALLS FOR 3-1-1-3

Two groups of 7 (6 plus keeper) spread out in each half of the 6V6 field as shown below. This is a warm up that incorporates passing patterns that are based on the principles of possession. The set up includes two center forwards alternating. There are two ways to do this activity: 1) players can maintain their positions or, 2) players can pass and follow the pass to the next position. If option (2) is used, players 2, 4/5, 3, 8/10 can rotate and the two center forwards 9 can stay as forwards but alternate. The emphasis is on peeling off and playing diagonal balls. Another emphasis is on players 8/10 and 9 complementing their runs so as not to duplicate each other.

The passing sequence is: player 2 to 4/5 who continues to 3. As ball travels to 3, player 9 checks to the ball, while player 8/10 checks away and peels off to open body. Player 3 passes to 8/10 which triggers a bending run from 9 and a through ball followed by a shot on goal. Alternate sequence has player 8/10 receiving and passing to overlapping 2 on the right flank who crosses for player 9 to finish. Player 9 who just finished jogs back to starting point while the next 9 has his turn.

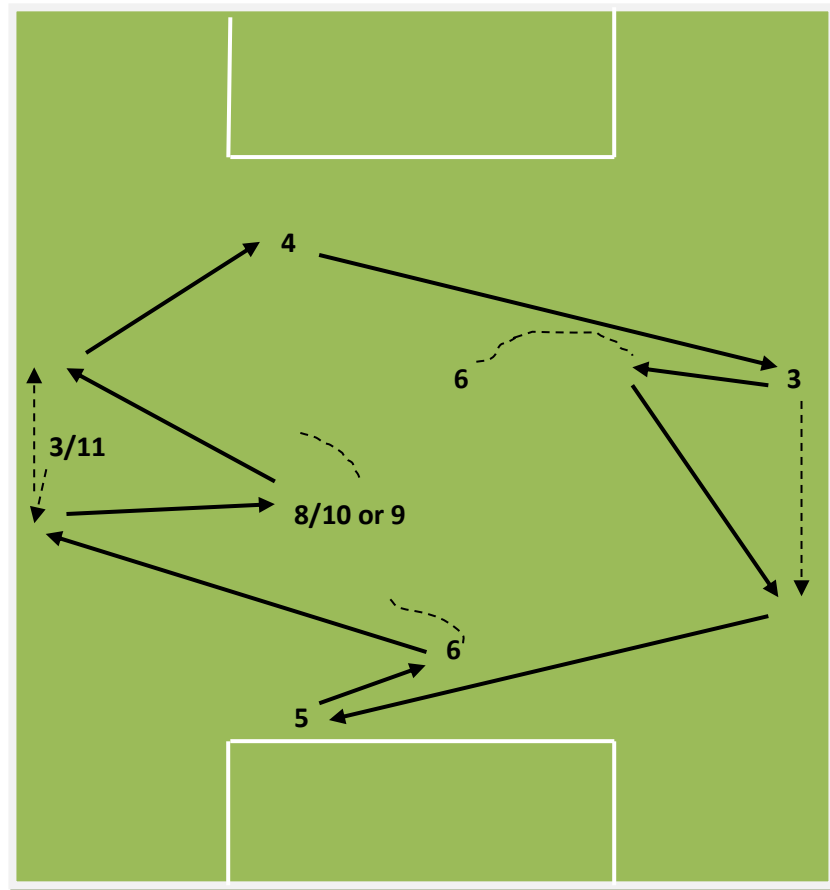
The diagonal pass from 3 to 8/10 is a key pass that unbalances the other team as it is the unpredictable pass and allows for penetration on the right flank. Groups can repeat the same sequence by going the other way, starting at 3.

The key is for player 9 and 8/10 to move in opposite directions and for player 8/10 to open his body. Time the run of player 9 to avoid off-side by using a bending run and initiating the run the same time as the through pass.



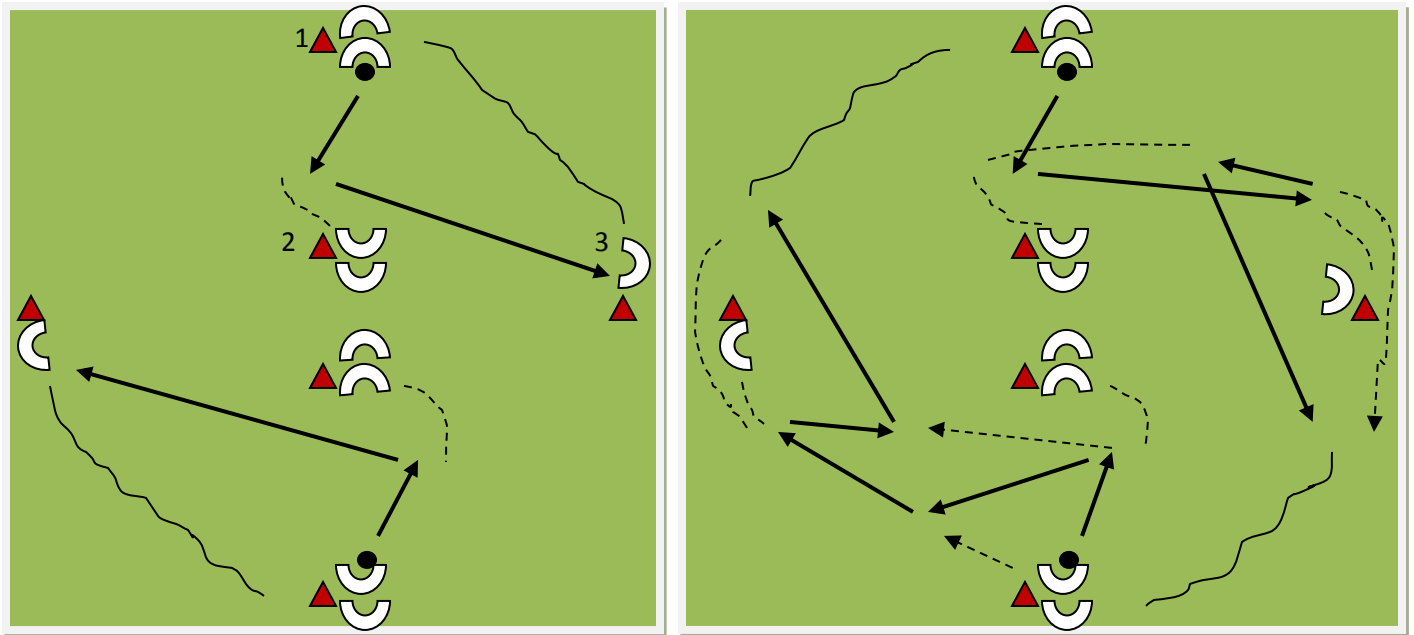
## WARM UP 5: POSITION SPECIFIC PEELING OFF AND DIAGONAL BALLS FOR 7v7 or 9v9

Groups of 7 spread out in the middle third of the 9v9 field as shown below. Numbering system indicate the player positions in the 3-1-1-3. Use two balls to increase repetitions and keep all players more active. There are two ways to do this activity: 1) players can maintain their positions or, 2) players can pass and follow the pass to the next position. If option (2) is used, the central players (6, 8, 9, and 10) can retain their position and only the outside players can move. If option (2) is used, you can increase the group size to 9 by adding a second player to some of the positions. Another group can do the same but using positions 2/7 (right back/right winger) and going the opposite way. The emphasis is on playing diagonal balls, which is one of the principles of possession. Other coaching points: player 6 peels off and faces up field. Player 8/9/10 peel off and adopt a sideways-on stance. Player 3/11 makes a checking run first and then sprints up the flank for a through ball.





## WARM UP 6: PEELING OFF AND COMBINATION PLAYS

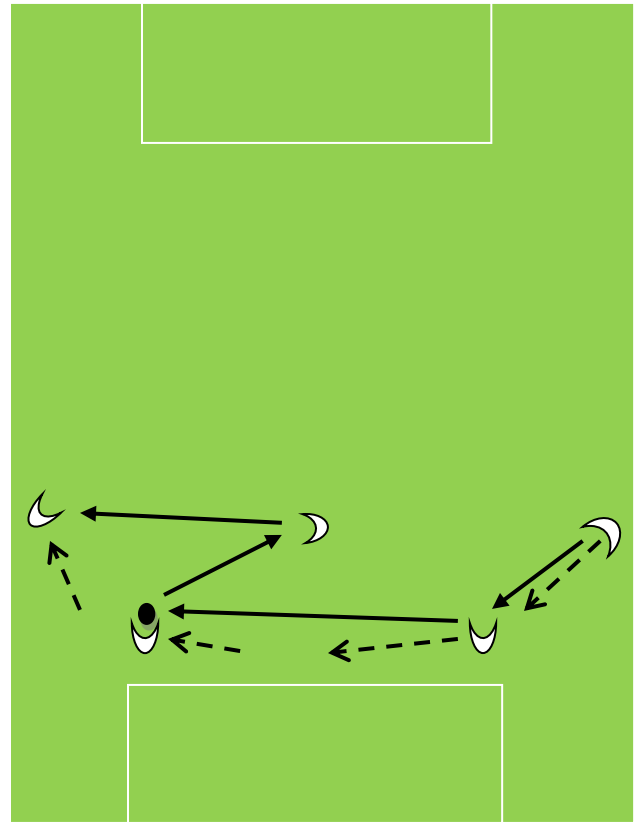
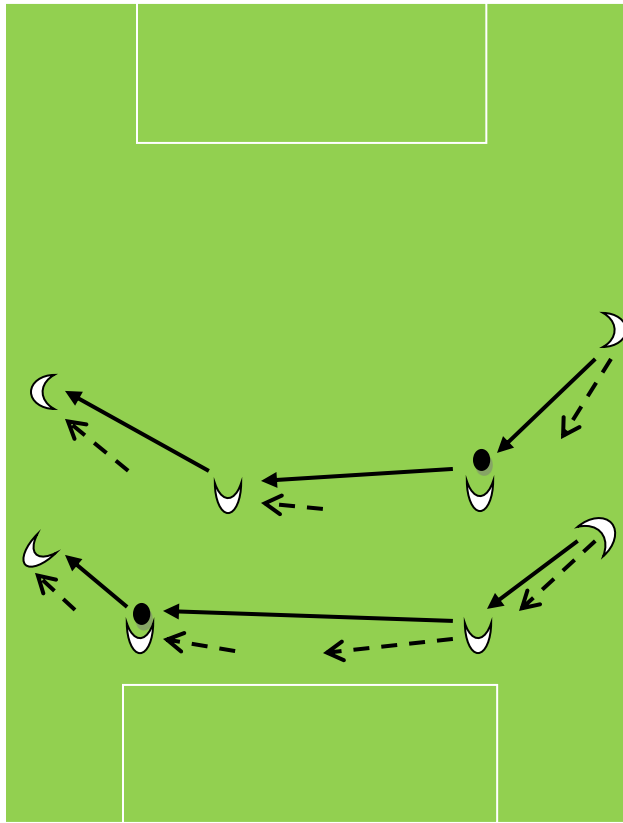


Set groups of 10. In the diagram above on the left, player 2 peels off and receives a pass from player 1. Player 2 passes to player 3. Player 3 dribbles to back of line 1. Everyone follows their pass. Both ends go at the same time. Crisp passes to feet. Player 2 uses first touch to control and second touch to pass. Distance between player 1 and 2 and between 2 and 3 is approx. 15-20 yards.

Diagram on the right shows progressions. The top half shows the next progression where player 2 follows pass to combine with player 3 and player 3 dribbles to the back of the other end. The bottom half shows another progression where players 1 and 2 combine and then players 2 and 3 combine. Coaching points: crisp quick passes; one touch passes when doing combinations in the progressions on the right; players 2 and 3 peel off before receiving the ball.

This is another activity that is not functional but very useful at ingraining the **Peeling off** movement.

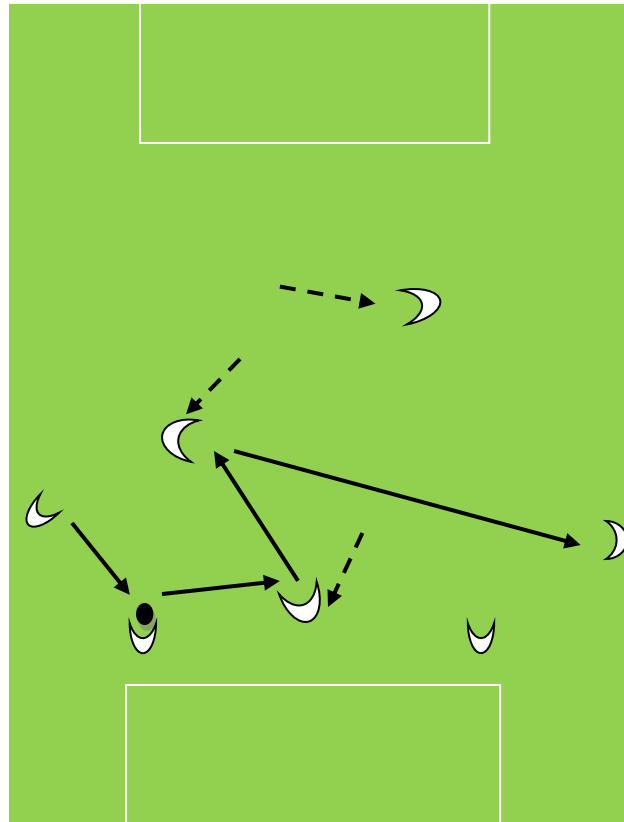
## WARM UP 7: BACK LINE POSSESSION AND SWITCHING THE POINT OF ATTACK



Set groups of 4 players. Each group arranged across the field like the two central defenders and two wide players would in the 2-3-1 formation. Ball is switched from side to side and when it gets to wide players 2/7 or 3/11, he takes a quick 3-5 step forward dribble, stops and turns and plays the ball back to central defender and the ball is switched again to the other side. When the wide player dribbles up, the rest of the back line stays connected by moving up as a unit. As soon as the wide back stops and turns, the back line quickly back pedals, ready to receive the back pass and switch the ball to the other side.

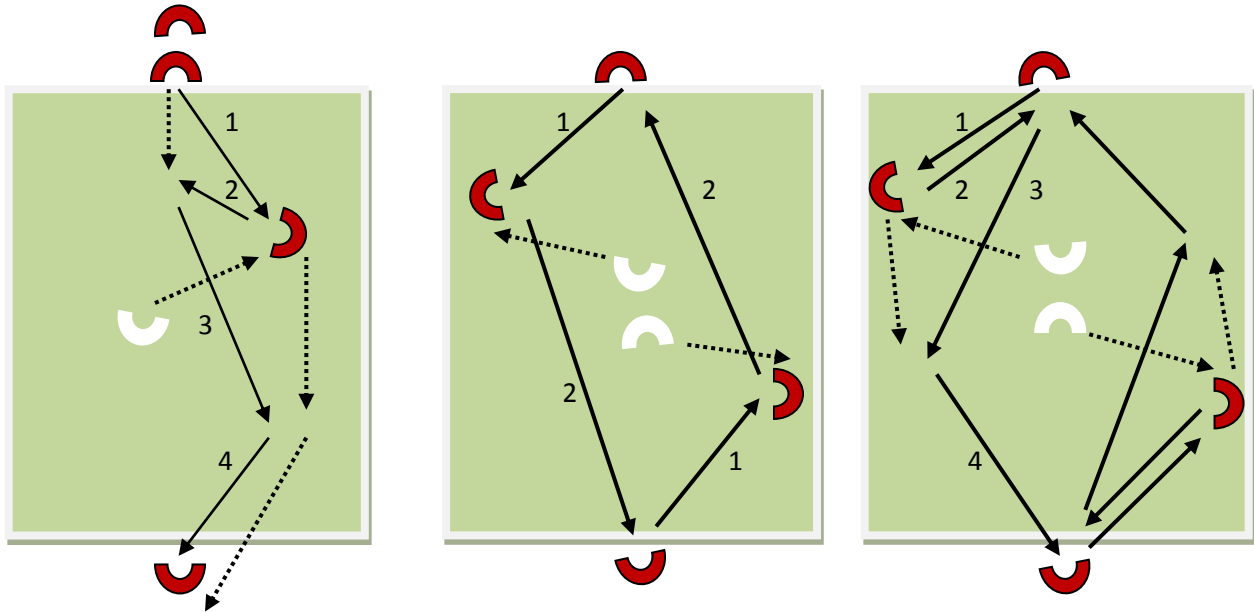
The diagram on the right shows a progression by adding defensive midfielder player 6. Now player 6 is integrated into the sequences. Add variations to the switch. Examples: 3 to 6 to 5 to 4 to 2, or 3 to 5 to 6 directly to 2. Player 6 should always be sideways on so he/she can see the field. In the right diagram above, player 6 is facing the left flank since player 5 has the ball. If player 5 passes to player 4, player 6 should turn and face the right flank.

The principles covered in this functional warm up are Team Shape, Diagonal Passes, Peeling off, Ball never stays in the same area for long, Every back pass followed by a switch.



Progress by adding the attacking midfield and center forward (players 8/10 and 9), as shown in the diagram above. Now the two midfielders and center forward peel off and open their bodies to the field as they are integrated into the passing sequences to switch the ball from side to side.

## WARM UP 8: TWO PLAYER COMBINATIONS AND PEELING OFF



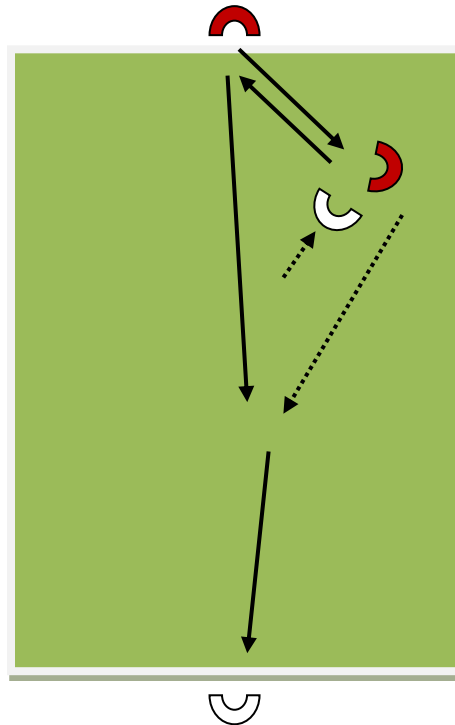
Groups of 4 in grids 15 wide by 25 yards long. Three variations are shown above. In the left grid, one ball is used. Inside player starting position is in the middle and from there he peels off to the side and receives a ball to feet, returns the pass and sprints for a through ball. He plays the ball to the other end and jogs behind. Meanwhile, the player who made the first pass and entered the grid takes up the middle starting position and sequence is repeated the other way.

In the middle grid, we use two balls, one at each end line. Inside players starting positions in the middle and at the same time they both peel off to the side and receive a pass, control it with first touch and play it to the opposite end line with second touch and return to the middle of the grid facing a new end line.

In the right grid, use two balls, one at each end line. Again, the two inside players start in the middle and peel off and play an 'in-back-through' passing combination with the end line players and play it to the other end line and return to the middle to start again facing the new end line.

Progress to playing 2v1 to target in the grid, as shown in diagram below. It's actually 1v1 inside the grid plus using the end line player as support to make it 2v1. The end line player cannot enter grid and is used for possession support and for playing through balls. Each inside player defends one end line and attacks the other end line and scores by passing the ball to the end line target. Only inside player can score.

All the passing combination and peeling off movement practiced in the warm up variations above should now come in handy to beat the defender in the grid.



In the diagram above, the red attacker combines with his end line player to get behind defender and score by playing to the target at the other end. Now the roles are reversed and the red player defends and the white player is attacking towards the other target. Give the inside players 3-5 seconds to catch their breath and get into new positions to transition going the other way.

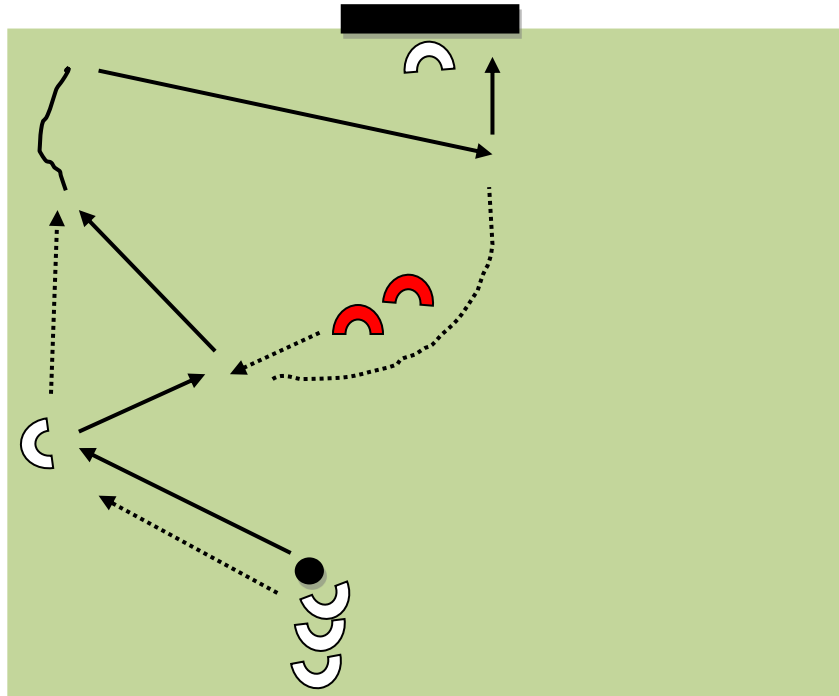
### WARM UP 9: FUNCTIONAL FLANK PLAY

Groups of 6 plus keeper. Inside player passes to flank player and follows pass to take the wide position. Wide player does wall pass with center forward and dribbles to end line and crosses. Center forward makes a bending run to meet the cross and finish. The two red players take turns as center forwards. The wide player goes to the end of the inside line after crossing. The first passer becomes the new wide player.

This warm up activity can be functional by putting the wide players 2/7, 3/11, and attacking midfielder 8/10 in the white line and players 9 in the red line.

Can put additional groups with similar organization in the other flank and in the other half for a total of 4 groups.

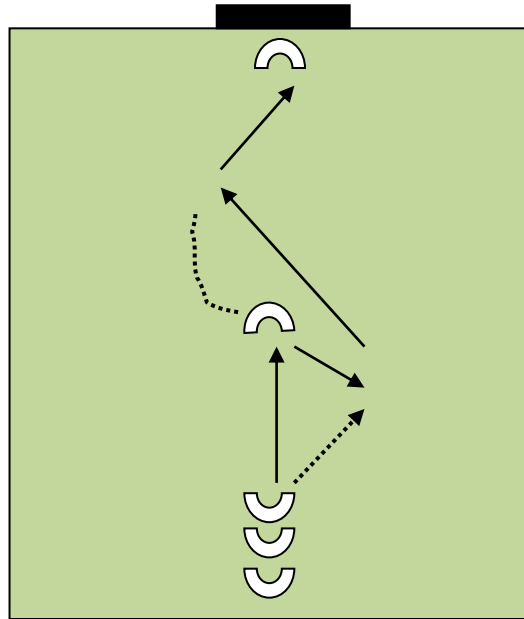
**Key coaching points:** since this is for small sided soccer, crosses should be on the ground. Wall pass should be one touch quick play. Forwards should bend their run to attack cross by getting on the blind side of the keeper. Wide player should open body to field and use his first touch to go positive and second touch to play the wall pass. Forward should peel off imaginary defender and get into a sideways-on posture.



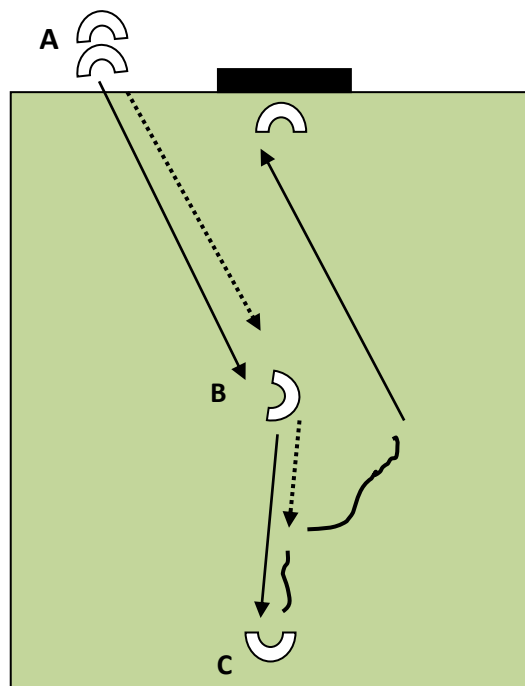
### WARM UP 10: TWO PLAYER COMBINATION GOING TO GOAL

Groups of 4-5 players. Set up as shown in diagram below. First player in line passes to forward and moves to support him at an angle. Forward returns pass and bends his run for a through pass and finishes on goal. Forward goes to back of the line and passer becomes the next forward.

**Key coaching points:** sharp quick one touch passes. Forward should bend his run to create more width and a better angle for the through ball. Timing: Forward can check away first, but keeping his eyes on the ball, and then check to the ball to receive the pass. The checking-to run is the cue for the passer to pass.

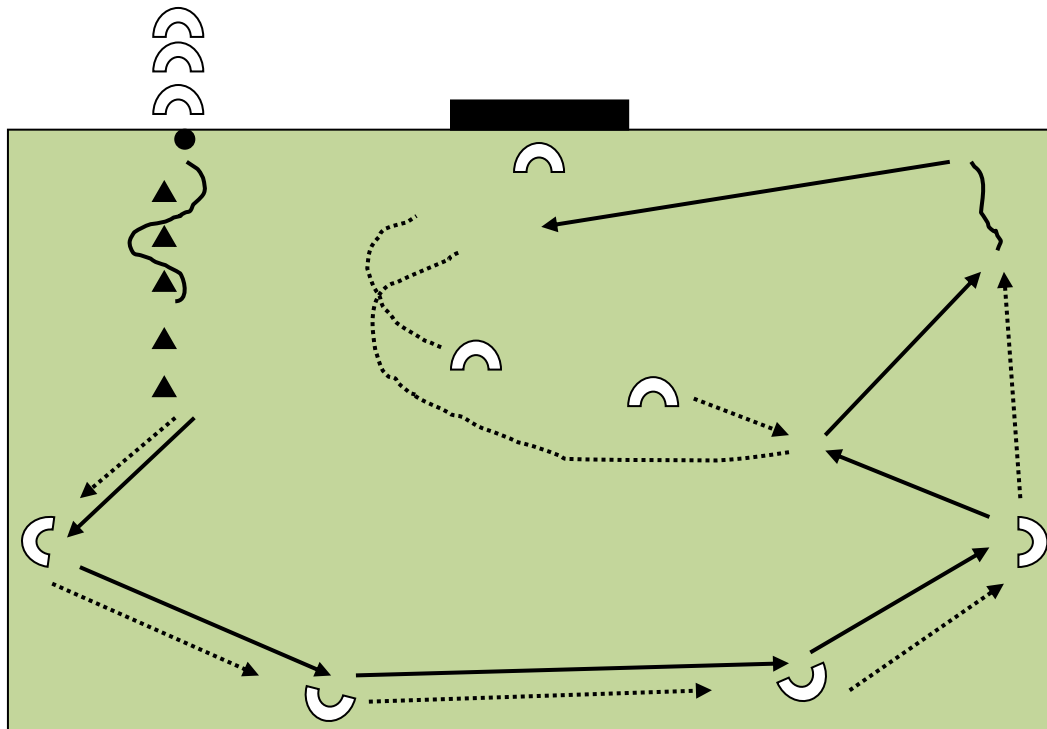


# **WARM UP 11: BASIC TECHNIQUE PASS-DRIBBLE-GO TO GOAL**



Groups of 4=5 players. A passes to B and takes his place. B passes to C and closes him down to defend. C takes B on and beats him 1v1 and shoots on goal. C goes to back of line A. Start with a passive B defender and progress to where defender B is live.

## WARM UP 12: BASIC TECHNIQUE DRIBBLE-PASS-WALL-PASS-CROSS



Groups of 8-12. In the diagram above, we are using 10 players but coaches can use less or more by reducing or adding more stations to the exercise. Players pass and follow pass so they all experience the different technical tasks of dribbling, passing, executing wall pass, and crossing. The only players who stay in their area are the two forwards in front of goal and the keeper. Coach can insert new forwards every 10-15 minutes if needed. The sequence starts with a dribble through the cones and a pass to the wide player from whence it is switched across the midfield to the other flank where one of the forwards checks to the ball to do a wall pass and returns to the goal mouth to meet the cross. Forwards can alternate checking for the wall pass. The crosser jogs to the back of the dribbling line to start again. Use multiple balls simultaneously. With 10 players, at least 2 balls and maybe 3 balls can be in circulation at the same time. A new dribbler starts as soon as the previous dribbler reaches the last cone and is about to pass.

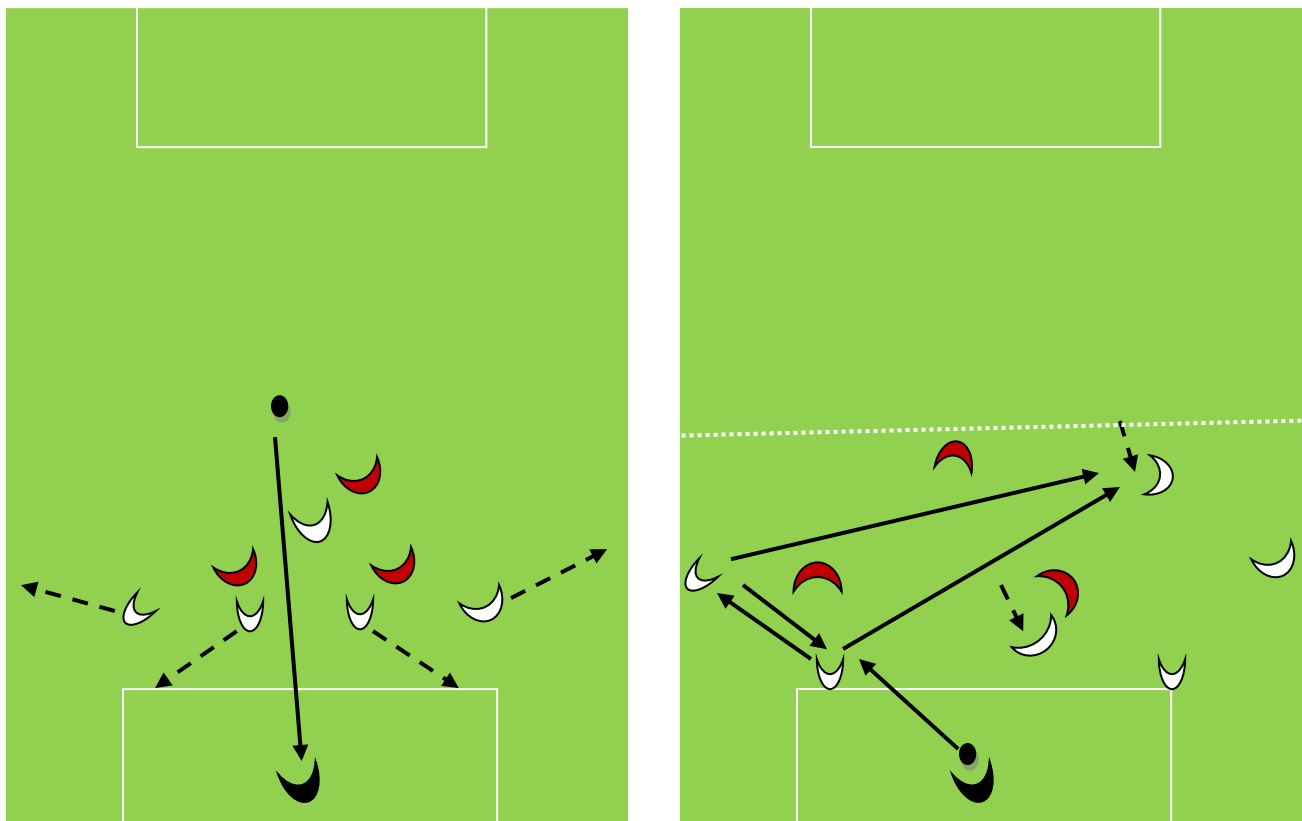
The benefit of this activity is that everyone works on the combination of dribbling and passing in a game like scenario and at game speed as opposed to working on just one technique in isolation. This activity is more realistic to the flow of the game. The sequence can be altered in an infinite number of ways to accommodate the number of players and the targeted techniques



## FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 1: PLAYING OUT OF DEFENSIVE THIRD IN THE 2-3-1 FORMATION

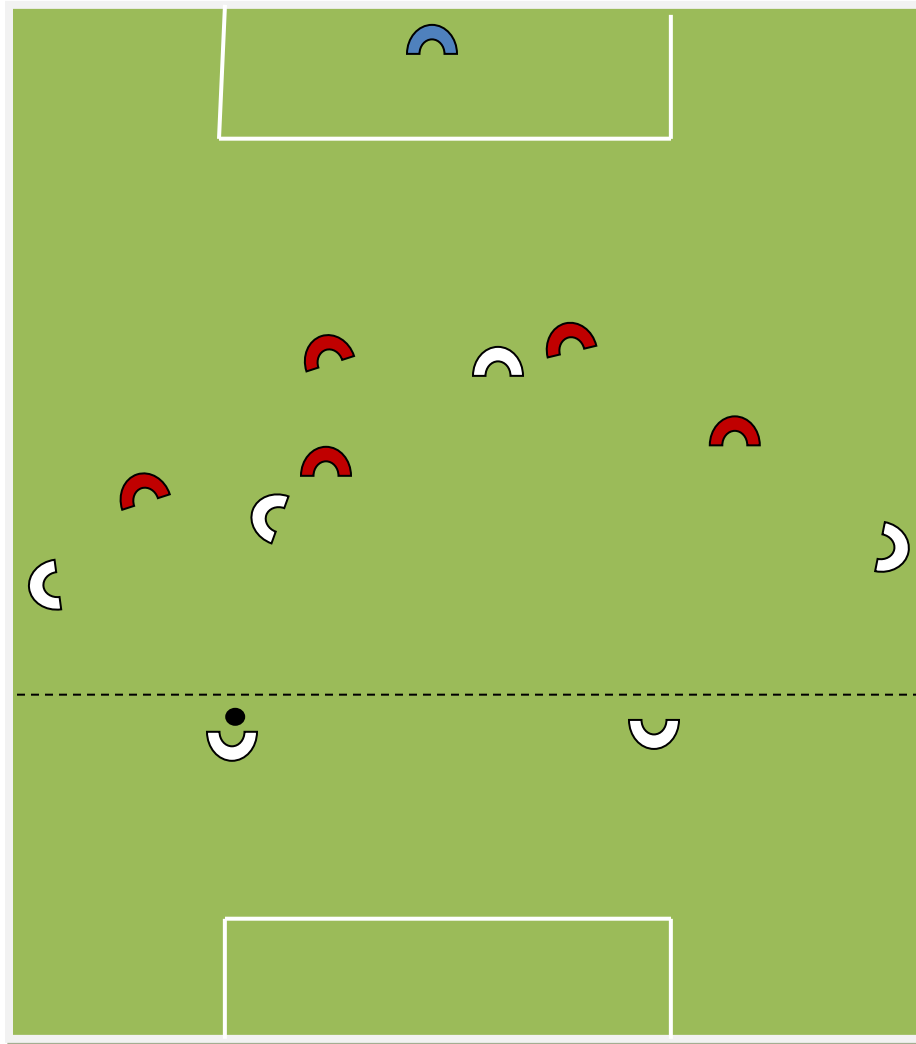
The goalkeeper, plus the two central defenders, the two wide players, plus the defensive midfielder, play against three opponents. The objective is to play the ball from flank to flank. The initial starting position is as if the team is defending, as shown in the diagram on the left in the next page. The coach starts the activity by playing a 'through' pass that the keeper gathers. As soon as the keeper collects the ball, the back line spreads out to receive the ball from the keeper and possess. Team scores a point each time the ball is switched from one wide player to the other. Opponents try to win the ball and if they win it, they can go to goal.

Progress the activity by adding another player, who is acting as a center forward and whose starting position is behind the dotted line (as shown in the diagram on the right in the next page). He can receive the ball by 'peeling off' the dotted line and playing to a teammate to continue the sequence and return to their starting position behind the dotted line. He is allowed a two touch maximum. Add more opponents to increase pressure. Players can also use the keeper to relieve pressure and switch the point of attack.



The principles covered here are Team Shape, Diagonal Passes, Peeling off, Ball never stays in the same area for long, Every back pass followed by a switch, Keeper distribution/no punt, and Speed of play.

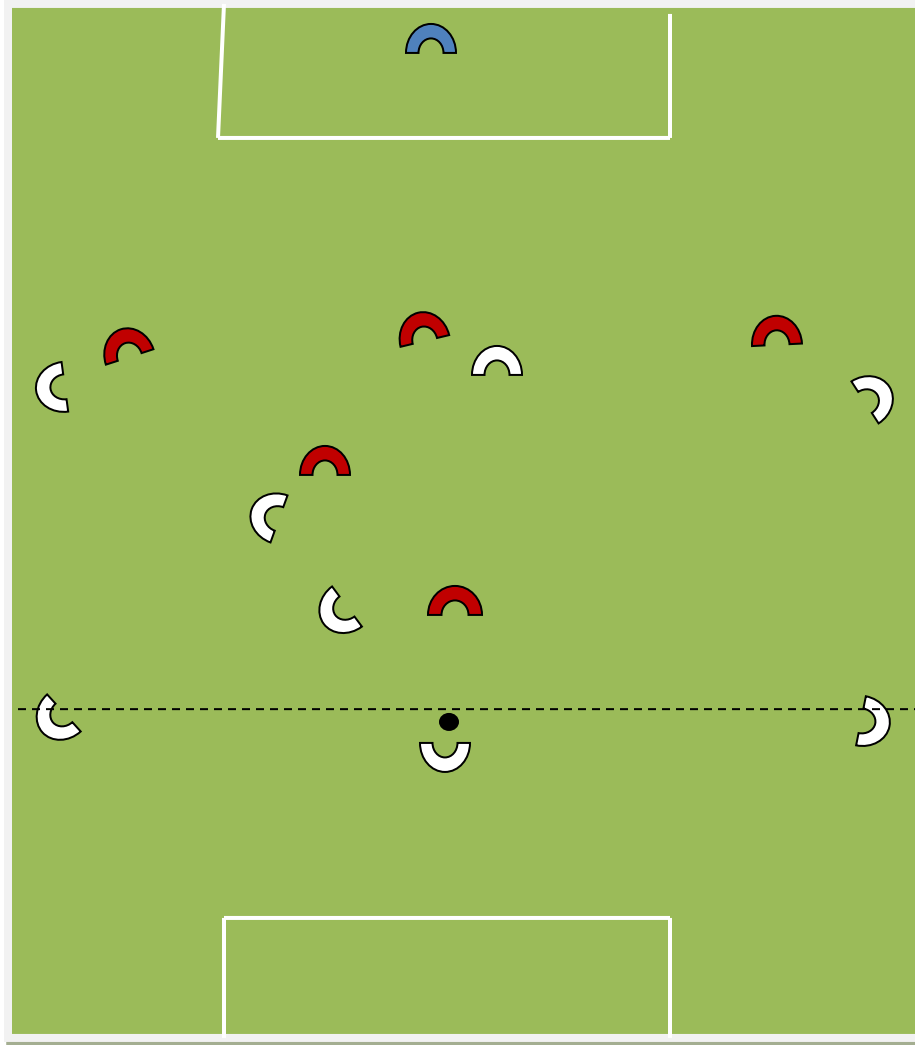
## FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 2: PENETRATION INTO ATTACKING THIRD IN THE 2-3-1 FORMATION



Play 6 attackers versus 5 defenders plus keeper. Central defenders 4 and 5 start play by playing into any of the white team. Players 4/5 cannot venture too far up and operates around the dotted line (representing the middle third) and is mainly a server to be used to switch the point of attack and feed players. When the defending team wins the ball they counter by playing to players 4/5. Focus on team shape, spreading out to make field big, peeling off, receiving the ball in a sideways/half turned posture, being aware of team mates' positions, interchanging positions to achieve penetration, overlapping wide players, bending runs, diagonal balls from the back line to blind side midfielders, and combination play.

Progress the activity by adding one more opponent who will close down the center backs when they get the ball. The added opponent can be placed around the dotted line in front of the central defenders as a starting point and he becomes activated when players 4/5 plays the first pass.

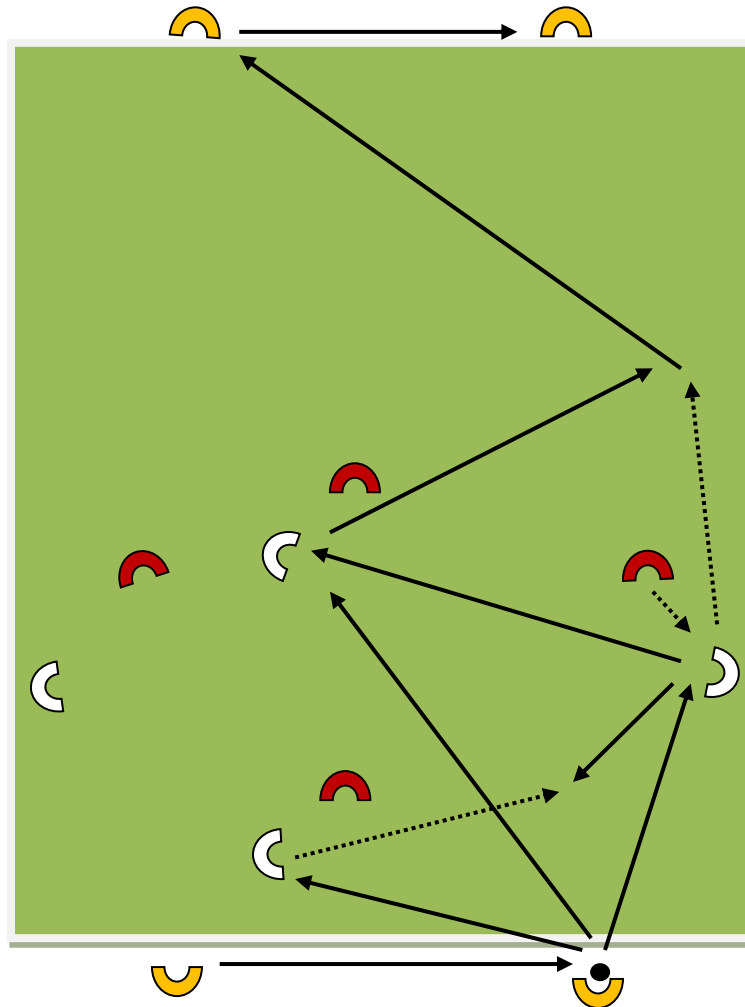
### FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 3: PENETRATION INTO ATTACKING THIRD IN THE 3-1-1-3 FORMATION



Play 8 attackers versus 5 defenders plus keeper. Central defender 4/5 starts play by playing into any of the white team. Players 4/5, 2, and 3 cannot venture too far up and operate around the dotted line (representing the middle third) and are mainly servers to be used to switch the point of attack and feed players. When the defending team wins the ball they counter by playing to player 4/5. Focus on team shape, spreading out to make field big, peeling off, receiving the ball in a sideways/half turned posture, being aware of team mates' positions, interchanging positions to achieve penetration, overlapping wide players, bending runs, diagonal balls from the back line to blind side midfielders, and combination play.

Progress the activity by adding one more opponent who will close down the defenders when they get the ball. The added opponent can be placed around the dotted line in front of the central defender as a starting point and he becomes activated when player 4/5 plays the first pass.

#### FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 4: POSSESSION/PENETRATION GAME TO TARGETS

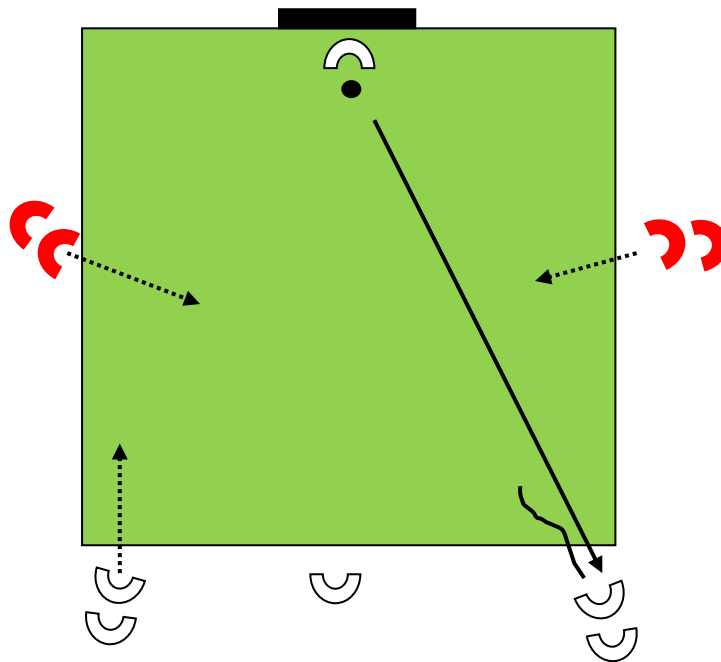


Game of 4v4 or 5v5 plus four target players. Each team defends one end and scores by playing the ball to a target player at the other end. Every time a team scores, the target player who received the ball must first make a square pass to the other target player before they can play it inside. This gives the teams a chance to transition their team shape. If defending team wins the ball they can counterattack by finding the target players or they can play it back to their own end and restart attack. Inside players can play it back to their target players to switch the point of attack.

The game should be position specific. The diagram above shows a 4v4 game involving player 6, 2/7, 3/11, and 9. If you play 5v5, you will add player 8/10. It's important to teach the players to adopt a team shape and move according to their positional roles and the principles of possession. The diagram above shows some variations of passing patterns that should come up, depending on visual cues. The diagram shows that the target player on the bottom right can play it wide to 2/7 or deep to 9 or to 6. If player 2/7 gets it, player 6 quickly gets closer to him to provide support underneath the ball. Player 2/7 and 9 can combine to penetrate as shown and score with a pass to the opposite target player.

Most of the principles of possession can be taught in this game. Diagonal balls should be played as often as possible and all inside players should peel off and open body and receive the ball facing up or sideways-on. Grid size can be adjusted to the level of the players and should be within the range of 30-40 yards wide by 40-60 yards long.

### FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 5: 3v2 TO GOAL



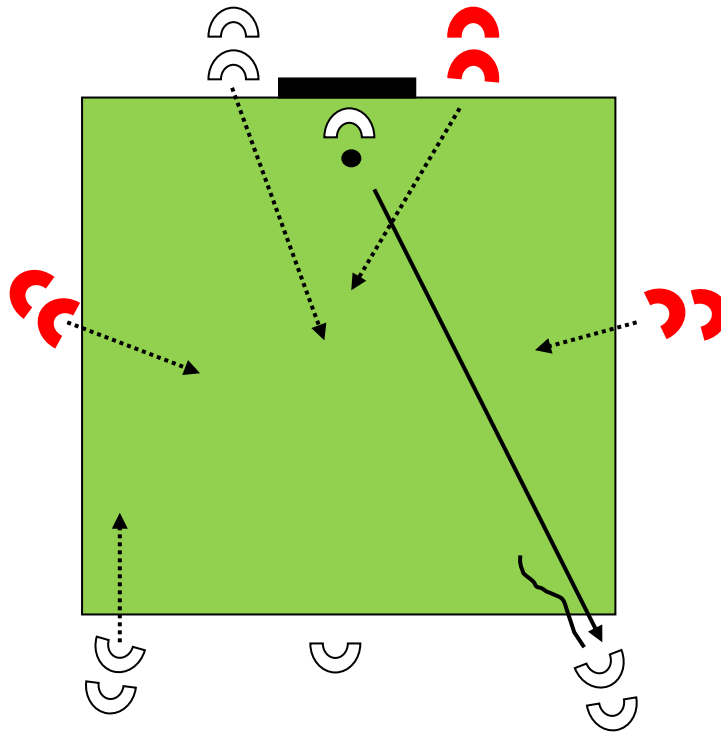
Play 3v2 to one goal. Can use 2-3 players at each line. Grid size 30 yards wide by 25-30 yards long. Play starts with the keeper passing to any of the white attackers. One wide attacker from each corner steps into the grid and one red defender from each side step into grid to create 2v2. The central white attacker is the attacking midfielder 8/10 and he is restricted to serving the ball like a play-maker from behind the line. He cannot step into the grid but he can move laterally to provide good support angles. If defenders win the ball they counterattack immediately and attempt to dribble across the end line. After every turn, players rotate.

The wide attackers are players 2/7 and 3/11. The principles of possession taught here are: team shape - make the field big by staying wide, peel off after passing to 8/10, diagonal balls into the flank. Keep the ball moving – speed of play. Play maker 8/10 open body to see both flanks.

Key coaching points: attackers stay wide. Player 8/10 must read visual cues as to when to play to feet and when to play into space behind defenders. Wide attackers read visual cues as to when to do quick wall pass with 8/10 or with other attacker.

Progress to allowing 8/10 to make a run inside but he must do it without the ball and one of the two attackers must take his place so there are always only two attackers inside grid.

## FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 6: 4v3 TO GOAL



Play 4v3 to one goal. Can use 2-3 players at each line. Grid size 40 yards wide by 35-40 yards long. Play starts with the keeper passing to any of the white attackers on the opposite end. Three attackers and three defender step into the grid to create 3v3. The central white attacker is the attacking midfielder 8/10 and he is restricted to serving the ball like a play-maker from behind the line. He cannot step into the grid. If defenders win the ball they counterattack immediately and attempt to dribble across the end line. After every turn, players rotate.

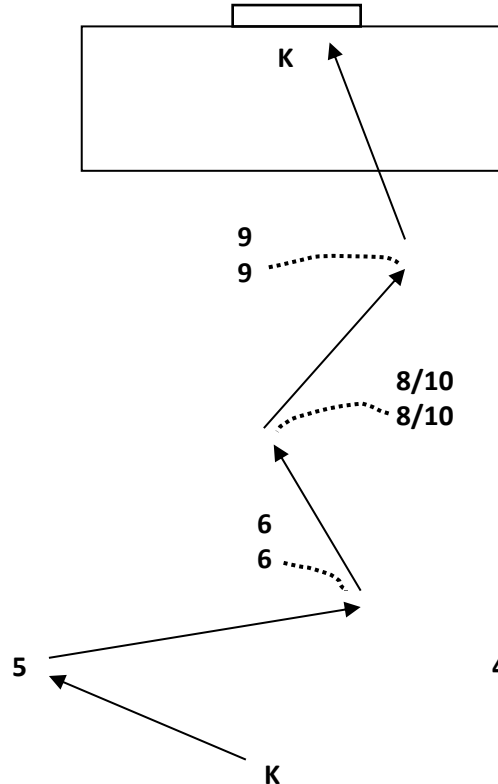
The wide attackers are players 2/7 and 3/11. The central attacker that enters grid from beside the goal is player 9.

The principles of possession taught here are: team shape - make the field big by staying wide, peel off after passing to 8/10, diagonal balls into the flank. Keep the ball moving – speed of play. Play maker 8/10 open body to see both flanks.

Key coaching points: attackers stay wide. Player 8/10 must read visual cues as to when to play to feet and when to play into space behind defenders. Wide attackers read visual cues as to when to do quick wall pass with 8/10 or with player 9.

Progress to allowing 8/10 to make a run inside but he must do it without the ball and one of the two wide attackers must take his place so there are always only three attackers inside grid.

## FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 7: PEELING OFF IN 9v9



**Organization of activity:** defenders 5 and 4 plus a pair of 6's, 8/10's and 9's positioned as shown and a keeper is placed in the goal. Activity starts as a shadow play passing sequence. Keeper serves the ball to either 5 or 4. Player 6 peels off away from ball and opens body and receives a pass from 5 or 4. Player 8/10 peels off opposite to the ball side and receives a pass facing up. Player 9 peels off and receives ball and finishes on goal. All players return to their original positions and round is repeated with keeper serving to 5 or 4. The pairs alternate, with one engaged in the sequence and the other is resting/acting as passive defender.

Progress to where the passive defender alternates by either staying put or following the peeling player. If passive defender follows the peeling player, the passer bypasses that peeling player and passes to the next higher player. So, for example, if player 6 peels off and the other 6 (passive defender) follows him, then player 5 will skip 6 and pass to 8/10 instead. This means that 8/10 needs to be aware of what's happening with 6 and peel off sooner if 5 is about to pass to him. If player 6 has the ball and looks to pass to 8/10 but passive defender 8/10 follows peeling move, then player 6 skips him and passes straight to player 9. If player 9 peels off and his passive defender follows him, the passer plays a through ball into space for player 9 to chase and score.

Progress by making it a live game that always starts with a serve from the bottom keeper and then one set of attackers goes to goal and the other set defends. If defending team wins the ball, they score by passing to 5 or 4. Players 5 and 4 cannot dribble or score. They just act as servers behind player 6 and can receive back passes and change the point of attack. Progress by adding two wide players and two opponents to mark them and this essentially becomes similar to functional activity 3.

# **APPENDIX ‘B’**

## **SAMPLE OF A WEEKLY PRACTICE PLAN**

This appendix contains a sample weekly plan for a U12 team. The following parameters are used to construct the plan:

U12 Team playing 3-1-1-3 formation in the 9v9 format.

Team trains 3 times per week.

Squad size is 12 players.

The week’s tactical goal is to improve playing out of the back.

The week’s technical goals are to improve medium and long range passing, both ground passes and air passes.

Each practice includes 4 activities: a technical warm up, a small-sided activity, an expanded small-sided activity and a scrimmage. The technical warm up needs to provide sufficient repetition to effect technical development. The middle activities address the weekly goal and the scrimmage is functional, with formation and deals with the weekly goal in an environment as close as possible to the game condition.

Notice that the first practice includes generic activities while the subsequent practices shift attention to more position-specific functional activities. This is done to facilitate transfer of learning from practices to games. Notice also that the technical and tactical goals of the week are related. Playing out of the back requires quality passes of varying lengths.



## WEEKLY PLAN

### MONDAY PRACTICE

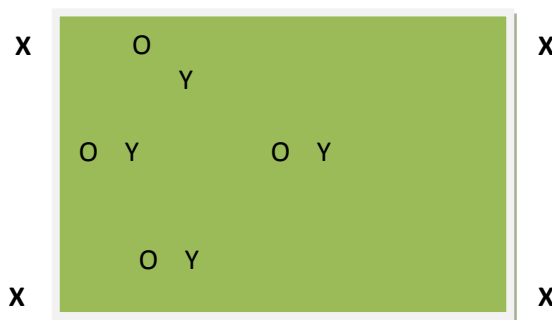
**Generic Warm Up** (25 minutes): three groups of 4 players working on passing, using line drills, pass and follow pass, and short-short-long passing sequences.



**Generic Small-sided Activity** (15 minutes): Team split into 3 groups of 4. Each group plays a game of 1v1 to target. Two players play 1v1 in grid and score by playing the ball to the target on the end line. Each player defends own end line and attacks the other end line. Target players act as target for one player and servers for the other player.



**Generic Expanded Small-sided Activity** (20 minutes): Game to targets with 4v4 in grid and two targets at each end line. Each team attacks one end and scores by hitting the target players. Target players act as targets for one team and servers for the other team.



**Functional Scrimmage** (30 minutes): Game of 6v6 with small goals and each team has a 2-3-1 formation with no keepers. Keepers play as field players.

### **WEDNESDAY PRACTICE**

**Generic Warm Up** (25 minutes): Warm up 12 from Appendix 'A' (Basic technique dribble-pass-wall-pass-cross).

**Generic Small-sided Activity** (15 minutes): Two groups of 6. Each group plays 4v2 possession in a grid 10 X 20 yards. Start unlimited touches and progress to two touch max.

**Functional Expanded Small-sided Activity** (30 minutes): Functional Activity 1 from Appendix 'A' (playing out of defensive third).

**Functional Scrimmage** (30 minutes): Game of 6v6 with large goals and keepers and a 1-3-1 formation. The lone defender represents players 4/5 and the 3 players above him represent players 6, 2/7 and 3/11 and the highest player is forward 9 or attacking midfielder 8/10.

### **THURSDAY PRACTICE**

**Functional Warm Up** (30 minutes): Three groups of 4 do Warm up 7 from appendix 'A' (back line possession and switching point of attack).

**Functional Main activity** (30 minutes): Play 8v4 in defensive half, with the team of 8 playing 3-1-3 plus a keeper against 4 opponents. Team of 8 attack two small goals on the half way line and the team of 4 attack big goal with keeper. Play starts with keeper distributing ball to the back line. The team of 8 has a two-touch restriction. (Note that this practice has only 3 activities in order to spend more time in the functional position specific environment as this is the last session before the game)

**Functional Scrimmage** (30 minutes): Game of 6v6 with large goals and a keeper and 1-3-1 formation for each team.