

Olympic Development Program | Coaching Manual



THE MANUAL IS TO BE USED BY US YOUTH SOCCER ODP COACHES AT THE REGION AND STATE LEVELS. THE INTENT IS TO PROVIDE THOSE COACHES WITH A STANDARD FOR THE TRAINING OF PLAYERS IN THE OLYMPIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM THUS IMPROVING THEIR OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE UP INTO U. S. SOCCER NATIONAL PLAYER POOLS. THE TRAINING AND STYLE OF PLAY OBJECTIVES IN THE MANUAL ARE DERIVED FROM THE INPUT OF THE YOUTH NATIONAL TEAM COACHES OF THE U.S. A.

Fifth Edition

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US Youth Soccer

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The US Youth Soccer ODP Philosophy

To identify players of the highest caliber on a continuing and consistent basis, which will lead to increased success for the U.S. National Teams in the international arena.

Purpose

The US Youth Soccer Olympic Development Program was formed in 1977 to identify a pool of players in each age group from which a National Team will be selected for international competition; to provide high-level training to benefit and enhance the development of players at all levels; and, through the use of carefully selected and licensed coaches, develop a mechanism for the exchange of ideas and curriculum to improve all levels of coaching.

INTRODUCTION

THE US YOUTH SOCCER ODP INTEGRATION PROJECT

US Soccer is currently investing significant resources in their quest to define and entrench an American playing style that can be successful on the international stage. The US Youth Soccer Olympic Development Program (US Youth Soccer ODP) at the state and region levels is well positioned to help accomplish this lofty aim.

US Soccer is promoting a possession playing style and a 1-4-3-3 formation at the youth level. Therefore, the US Youth Soccer ODP playing style will be a patient possession game, building from the back and using a possession rhythm similar to high-level international play, within the 1-4-3-3 formation.

Our players are generally not comfortable playing a possession game. The only way US Youth Soccer ODP can realistically affect the players to change their playing behavior is if we integrate a continuous program with a consistent methodology at both the state and region levels.

Improving our players and coaches is the purpose of the Program. Talent of players and coaches is a continuous construction process. Our approach must be long-term development of coaches and players.

One of the main goals of US Youth Soccer ODP is to improve player development throughout the country, not just the region team players. US Youth Soccer Region ODP is an ideal vehicle for reaching and influencing all the states in each region. By integrating development methods at the state association and region levels, US Youth Soccer ODP becomes a connected, continuous, long-term player development program with a clearly articulated playing philosophy, a curriculum and benchmarks.

US Youth Soccer ODP events throughout the year can be used to train coaches and players. Although player contact time in the Program does not compare to contact volume at club level, there are enough US Youth Soccer ODP activities each year to accomplish the goal of improving our players. We have contact time with our players via Region Trials, Inter-Regional events, international trips, holdover camps, state level training, sub-regional events, etc. Moreover, many of the staff coaches at the state and regional level are also club coaches. Hence, the residual benefits of US Youth Soccer ODP will filter down to the club level and influence many non-ODP players as well.

The short time periods of Olympic Development Program training are not conducive to deeply improving technique, but those sessions do teach the players how to best use what they have. What we can do is help our players become smarter. We can do this by showing them the right team shape, the best movement off-the-ball, and to make better decisions on the ball.

The US Youth Soccer ODP Coaching Manual will eventually cover all the phases of the game and recommended activities. The first edition focused on the Build-Up Phase. The second edition added the Penetration into the Attacking Third Phase. This third edition expands on the themes of possession and penetration and has more insight and sample activities, based on analysis of performance in recent events. All the US Youth Soccer ODP state and region staff must use this manual as their main reference point for training sessions.

THE US YOUTH SOCCER ODP COACHING AND PLAYING PHILOSOPHIES

The American youth player is continuously improving, both technically and tactically. Our players' strengths have always been their attitude and hard work ethic. As we attract better athletes to our sport, another emerging important strength is our players' athleticism. Our athleticism is the envy of many, and the physicality of our players gives us an advantage when competing against various opponents.

However, physicality can also be a curse. Our youth game relies too much on athleticism, at the expense of skill and cunning. One of the core objectives of the US Youth Soccer ODP integration project is to focus on the game as a 'cerebral contest'. While we should always encourage and demand effort and intensity from our players, we have to open their eyes to the tactical solutions of the game. The motto of US Youth Soccer ODP is **Work Hard – Play Smart**.

The international tours that our Region Teams take are what separates our program from virtually all others offered in this country. These tournaments expose our players and coaches to a variety of high level, sophisticated teams full of future professionals from all over the world. We compete against teams who train year round so our challenge is greater than most. However, in virtually every event our teams go through a learning curve where they figure out pace, gamesmanship and collective defending all of which allows our strengths to come out and forces the lesser qualities to quickly improve. The days of these trips are an *invaluable* part of the elite player's development in any given year.

Our players' club environment depends a lot on the quality of coaches and competition and is not uniformly consistent. In addition, the term 'possession soccer' can mean different things to different coaches. When comparing the style of soccer we play to that used abroad, it is clearly a completely different style. The possession soccer played abroad is based on much more patience, multiple switching of the point of attack and much more sophisticated movement off-the-ball. Even as our players are gradually closing the technical gap, their tactical naivety is their Achilles heel. Our teams spend an inordinate amount of time defending and when we win the ball, we give it away too quickly with our naïve, predictable counterattacks. When our teams try to play out of the back, our sophisticated opponents know to wait until the ball is played to a defender, then quickly pounce, and press us into turning over the ball.

For our players, learning to play the international style of possession soccer is like learning a new language. The international teams really do 'speak another language' with their soccer. Moreover,

our players are sometimes behaving like a 'deer in the headlights' when coming up against foreign teams.

It is relatively easy for our state select teams to play a decent level of possession soccer at region trials since there is not much pressing being applied and state teams do not spend much time learning to press and defend and often the weather is too hot to press. Nevertheless, the intensity and quality of opponents at the inter-regional events is a step higher and that is often the first time our players have to deal with playing out of the back against pressure. In addition, when they travel abroad, their ability to possess is really tested. Foreign teams are used to playing possession and know how to defend against it. They speak well the language of possession, making it difficult for us to 'beat them at their own game'.

The process of teaching our players the language of possession must start at state association training and continue at region trials and additional US Youth Soccer ODP events. If we wait until we touch down in a foreign land before we start to address our possession needs, we have no chance of making meaningful progress.

Our players need to improve in four basic areas:

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

The world-class style of play: keep possession, control the game, create more chances and run less.

Our style to be taught: offensive minded, quick transitions and position specific.

Technical

US Youth Soccer ODP cannot help our players improve in the technical area due to limited contact time. That is something to which the players and their club coaches must dedicate their efforts. It is up to the individual players to invest the time to practice and hone their technical ability.

Team Shape

This area can be improved substantially via the US Youth Soccer ODP integration process. We should focus on teaching our players the importance of a good team shape. 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

Off-the-ball movement is another key component of the player's arsenal that our program can help improve. 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. 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 the 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 do not 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. US Youth Soccer ODP should address this lack of sophistication in movement.

Decisions on the Ball

The last issue that can be improved in US Youth Soccer ODP is 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 Principles of Possession Soccer

Our initial focus should be on team shape and movement off-the-ball. This is where US Youth Soccer ODP can have the most impact. However, it will not be easy. Many players come to the program with bad habits. The team shape and movement associated with possession soccer are often counter-intuitive to our players who are used to making straight vertical runs and go forward every chance.

It will take a lot more than a pre-game talk or a half-time adjustment to eradicate the bad habits and establish the right habits. It will require the concentrated and coordinated efforts of everyone in the US Youth Soccer ODP process, from the state level to the region level. It will require everyone to buy into the process and follow it vigorously and avoid the temptation of going on arbitrary tangents to deal with other issues. We need to start with the issues outlined above and elaborated further in this manual.

As mentioned before, the term 'Possession Soccer' is vague and open to interpretation. The US Youth Soccer ODP 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 is the DNA of possession soccer. Once the players learn and embrace the principles, their movement and decisions become automatic and coordinated.

What are these principles, these 'constants'? If you watch top-level teams play possession soccer, you will notice the following player behavior patterns repeat themselves:

When a team has the ball, it spreads out and makes the field as big as possible, with the players spread to create many triangles. In a 1-4-3-3 formation, it is paramount for the two wingers to get wide and stay wide to stretch the other team's back line and open up gaps for through balls.

Players on the back line drop off to a safe distance from opponents and offer support behind the ball. The back line needs to sense when a teammate with the ball is about to be pressured and they need to offer him/her a safe outlet by backpedaling and communicating to him/her.

When a team wins the ball, they immediately play the ball into another area of the field. By 'another area', we mean either a back pass to relieve pressure, or a switch, or a counterattack. Most of the time, it will be a back pass or a switch. A counter attack is hard to succeed, requires precision and superior speed of play and often results in a quick turnover and should only be used when the other team is clearly off balance.

Playing the ball into 'another area' immediately after winning the ball gives the rest of the team the time to open up and transition into an attacking shape that makes the field as big as possible.

A lateral or diagonal pass to switch the point of attack usually follows every back pass. This creates the possession rhythm and flow thus forcing opponents to adjust and chase. Players should not hesitate to switch the point of attack multiple times in the same possession if opponents are well organized defensively.

The ball does not stay in one area for long. After two or three passes within an area, the ball is usually switched into another area. Ball circulation should be quick and involve a lot of one and two touch play.

Players open their body to the field and have as much of the field as possible within their line of vision. Players should look around and always know where their teammates and opponents are.

By opening their body, players always try to receive the ball facing up field or at least being sideways on. This helps them make good decisions on where to move and what to do with their first touch. By knowing what is around them, players learn to anticipate 'trouble' and release the ball quickly or play a one-touch pass into another area.

Players should peel off tight marking by moving to the blind side of their opponent where he/she cannot see both the player and the ball at the same time.

Very few passes are made to a player who is checking hard toward the ball with his/her back to goal and being tightly marked. In the case when a player does need to check toward the ball with tight marking and receives the ball, that player should be prepared to play a one-touch pass either to another player or back to the original player. Hence, the importance of knowing what is around you at all times.

Most passes are diagonal passes into players who are open to the field or with a sideways on stance.

Goalkeepers rarely punt the ball. Goal kicks are played out of the back. Throw-ins are used to switch the point of attack rather than just thrown down the line.

The principles listed above do not produce robots. They create the foundation for possession soccer. Once these principles are deep-seated, the game has a better flow, the players know what is around them, and this knowledge gives them the confidence to use individual creativity and cunning.

US Youth Soccer ODP has created the ***Ten Principles of Possession Soccer***, which form the foundation of our teaching. When these ten principles are applied, the result is a playing style with the rhythm and sophistication of top international level soccer. Training sessions in the Olympic Development Program should be used to teach our players how to apply these ten principles.

Appendix B has a more detailed explanation and diagrams illustrating the Ten Principles of Possession Soccer. Every coach and player in the US Youth Soccer ODP system should familiarize himself/herself with these principles.

METHODOLOGY

Each year, the Region Trials have a training theme, which is related to a Phase of Play. The ultimate objective is to improve the performance of ALL the camp participants as it relates to the theme. The training theme will drive the focus for all the state level training leading up to region trials. **This means that the learning process should actually start at the state US Youth Soccer ODP tryouts/training prior to trials.** After region trials, the Region Staff will use the Inter-Regional events and international trips to complete the implementation of the theme and embedding it into our players' behavior.

The theme might be different for certain age groups, depending on how much progress an age group demonstrates. Typically, the theme for the youngest age group attending camp will be "Building Out from the Back" and the theme for the older age groups will be "Penetration into the Attacking Third". As our players become more sophisticated and more comfortable in possession, the themes will evolve to reflect the progress made.

The roles of the players in the 1-4-3-3 system in each Phase of Play are explained in the manual. **We recommend that all the state US Youth Soccer ODP teams follow suit and teach their teams to play 1-4-3-3 while playing a possession style. This way, the transition for players from a state team to a region team will be much easier.**

Our staff at the state and region levels has limited contact time with the players. Hence, our training needs to be focused and time-effective. From our experience working with elite players, we have a good idea of the tendencies and behavior of our players and their tactical shortcomings. Knowing these tendencies, we can go straight to the core issues and not waste time on tangents. To assist you, both the 'desirable' behavior of the players and the likely 'wrong' behavior are described so you can anticipate what needs fixing.

Within each Phase of Play, the most crucial learning objectives are identified. These are related to the recurring scenarios and key principles of our playing style. **These learning objectives, when reinforced collectively by everyone at the state and region level, will produce the quickest results.** When left to each coach to decide what to teach, the result is a fragmented program with knowledge gaps. However, when everyone follows the same script, the program becomes much more effective.

With the limited training sessions in our program, most of the activities should be position-specific and functional. US Youth Soccer ODP coaches should not waste time doing generic grid based activities such as possession games in grids where no one has a specific position. Even the warm up activities should be functional as much as possible. All scrimmages should be with formations based on the 1-4-3-3 environment. This will speed up the transfer of learning from training to matches. The manual has some examples of functional activities that are recommended for US Youth Soccer ODP training.

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

1. FIX TEAM SHAPE

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 on page 10. The correct shape makes the field big, with width and depth. The wingers are wide on the sidelines and the forward is as high as possible. The three midfielders are spread and not bunched up. 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!

2. FIX OFF-THE-BALL MOVEMENTS

If the team shape is right, observe and fix the movements off-the-ball and the players' body position. Our players have to 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 do not open their body to see the field, hence, they do not know where their teammates are or what is going on around them. Are the movements correct for the situation? Fix these off-the-ball movements if need be.

3. 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/she look at all options and choose the best one? We want to avoid passing the ball to players who are checking at speed with their back to the 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 approach is helpful, especially when dealing with large groups and a fast speed of play. The fluidity of the session can cause coaches to go on tangents and fix minor things while the key learning objectives are not properly addressed.

The diagrams in this manual use player notations that not only show the player positions, but also their body orientation/the way they are facing. The correct body position is also an important teaching point.

Lastly, the appendix at the back of the manual has all the recommended activities, which should become the bread and butter of Olympic Development Program training sessions. All state and region staff should use these activities to instill the right team shape, the right movement off the ball and the right decisions on the ball.

STANDARD FORMATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

Under the present elite youth environment there are many competitors to US Youth Soccer ODP. In particular, a male players' US Youth Soccer ODP career is often cut short due to the US Soccer Development Academy program. Inevitably, every US Youth Soccer ODP region event will have many new players replacing those who are no longer eligible. Hence, a standard playing style throughout the whole system will help players adjust to the region team's higher level of play and accelerate the learning process.

All of the US Youth Soccer ODP Region teams will play 1-4-3-3 (D. 1) with a dedicated defensive midfielder in front of the back four. The back four will play zone defense. The two attacking midfielders can be both attacking minded or one of them can be a half-and-half, meaning he/she has both defending and attacking strengths. The three forwards will line up as a center forward and **two VERY wide wingers**. For consistency throughout the US Youth Soccer ODP system, we will use the US Soccer numbering system as shown below so that everyone refers to the same position when using these numbers. For example, the defensive midfielder is always referred to as number 6 and the left fullback is number 3.



Diagram 1 Standard Formation

THE PHASES OF THE GAME

The US Youth Soccer ODP long-term player development plan is divided into the Phases of the Game (Fig. 2) in order to implement the playing style in a methodical and structured manner, one-step at a time. As explained before, each year the youngest, entry-level age group will start with the Build-up Phase and learn how to possess and build up the attack from the defending third. Once the Build-up Phase is ingrained, the focus will shift to the next Phase of Play.

As the process gets refined and the integration between the state and region level is fully functional, the learning of each phase should be accelerated. The more that can be accomplished at the state level, the faster we can get to our objective of covering all the phases and ingraining the right playing style in an enduring way.

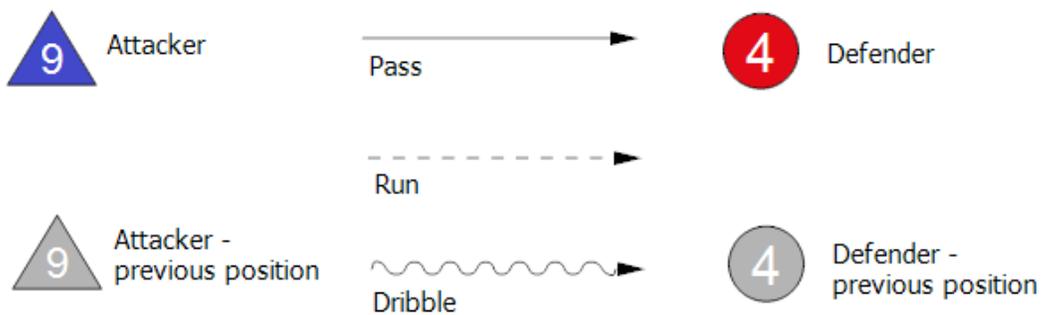


Figure 1 Key to Diagrams

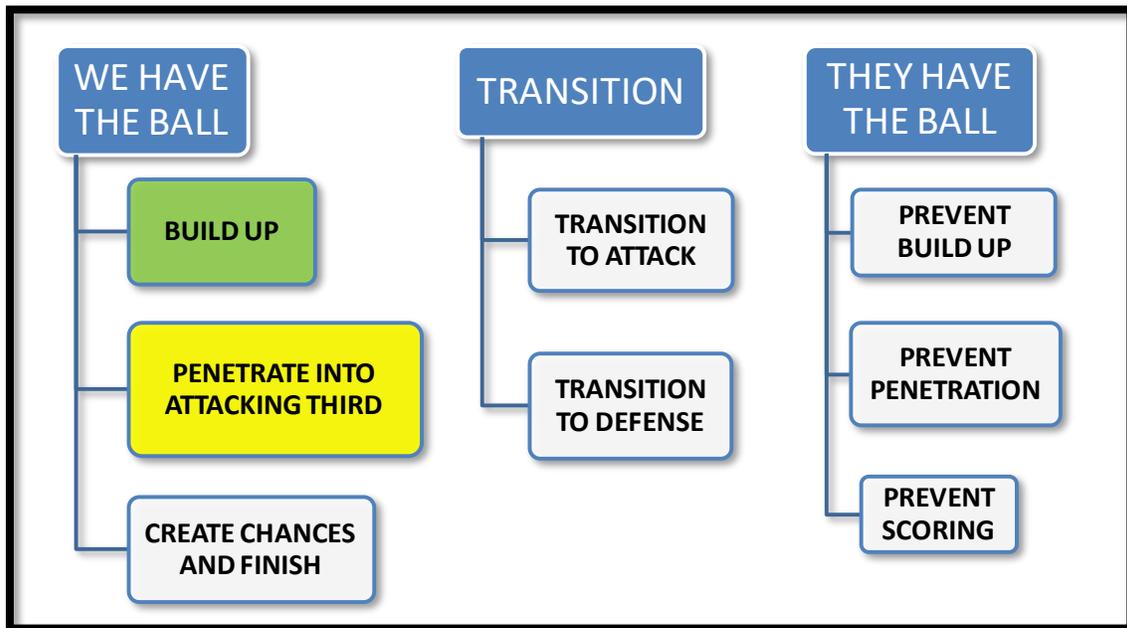


Figure 2 Phases of the Game

BUILD UP PHASE

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The following nine Key Learning Objectives for the Build-up Phase have been identified as most crucial for US Youth Soccer ODP state and region training:

1. **Peeling off opponents:** Absolutely the first thing our players need to be taught. How to step away from a defender and create space for oneself to receive the ball facing up field.
2. **Role of the goalkeeper:** Keepers should learn how to support the back line in possession, how to distribute and be the first line of attack instead of just punting the ball long. Goalkeepers should be discouraged from kicking long aimless balls on goal kicks and should learn instead to play the ball to teammates in order to maintain possession.
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 midfielder:** Player 6 dictates the rhythm of possession. He/she needs to learn how to support the attack from behind the ball and how to open up passing lanes.
5. **Role of the attacking midfielders:** The vital link between the back line and the forwards. Players 8 and 10 need to learn to maintain the right team shape in midfield and be available for passes from the back.
6. **Role of the wingers:** Players 7 and 11 provide width and penetration. They need to learn to stay wide, open the 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/she needs to learn to stretch the field, stay high and central, and be available for the long pass option from the back.
8. **Goal kicks:** Start of the build-up. Hence, 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-in to switch the point of attack rather than throw it down the line every time.

The following pages provide more details on each of these nine Key Learning Objectives.

PEELING OFF OPPONENTS

Once the team shape is correct, we can address player movements. **However, before we deal with the actual runs, we need to teach our players how to peel off opponents and make space for themselves.** When a team is in possession of the ball, most of its players ahead of the ball are usually tightly marked. Our youth players, when tightly marked, often do not move, which makes it difficult to pass to them. In addition, when they do move, they either check toward the ball or sprint away from the ball in the manner shown below (D. 2 & D. 3), which is too vertical, too narrow and too predictable. The runs shown below give the passer only one passing option: pass to feet (D. 2) or pass to space (D. 3).



Our players need to learn how to peel off opponents in a way that keeps both options (pass to feet or pass to space) open until the marking defender reacts. In other words, ***our players first need to learn how to make space for themselves so they can receive the ball while facing up field.***

The preferred peeling off movement to make space for themselves is shown in diagram 4 on the next page. The marked attacker moves laterally and opens his/her body to a side-on posture. From this side-on position, he/she can see the field better; he/she can see the ball, the defender, and the space behind the defender. If the defender does not follow him/her, the ball can be played to his/her feet (D. 4). If the defender follows him/her, the ball can be played into space behind the defender (D. 5).

Diagram 2 Pass to Feet – Wrong

This peeling off movement can and should be used by all the players who are marked. This applies to the three forwards, the attacking midfielders, and even the defensive midfielder. **It needs to become automatic and should be the first habit instilled into our US Youth Soccer ODP players, regardless of the phase of play. This is important for playing out of the back as well as for penetration and creating scoring chances.**

The peeling off also makes it difficult for the defender to see both the ball and the attacker. If this involves a forward, such lateral movement prevents the forward from being offside and creates space for him/her to receive the ball facing up field. If the defender follows him/her, the attacker can run onto a through ball with a distinct head start over his/her marker.

This movement habit, once ingrained, will also help develop smarter passers since the players making the pass learn to read the visual cues and make better decisions on when to pass to feet and when to pass to space.



Diagram 3 Pass to Space – Wrong

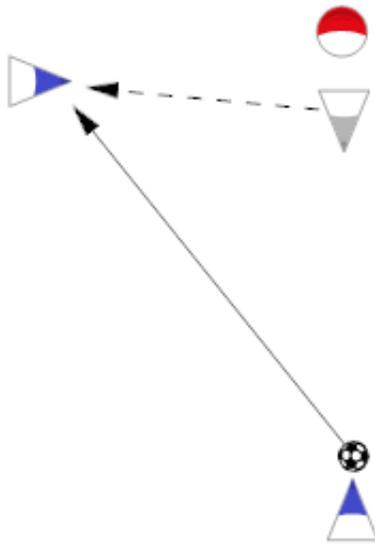


Diagram 4 Pass to Feet – Correct

The following three diagrams (D. 6-8) illustrate how the peeling off movement is applied in the game. It must be stressed that these are short, three to eight step movements and body re-orientation used to open the body to see the field and create space for one-self to receive the ball. It is only necessary to do if a player is marked or if an opponent can intercept a pass to feet. Once the initial peeling movement is done to create space, the actual runs/pass can be made, depending on the opponents' reaction and adjustments.

As explained above, the peeling off movement is only the first step, and can be viewed as the preparation steps prior to penetration. The actual passing and movement combination that follows will be based on the opponents' reaction and will be addressed in later pages. Nevertheless, this initial peeling off movement is crucial and necessary and must be ingrained first before we can proceed with teaching the runs off the ball and decisions on the ball. **We cannot possess if players do not peel off!**

If opponents adjust intelligently to the peeling off movement and stay compact and penetration is not possible, then the ball should continue to be circulated and passed around the field. Moreover, with each pass, our players who are ahead of the ball need to peel off opponents repeatedly, until penetration is possible.

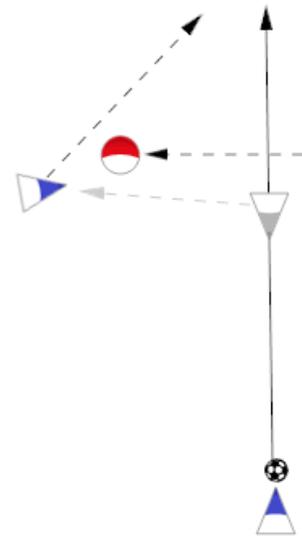


Diagram 5 Pass to Space – Correct

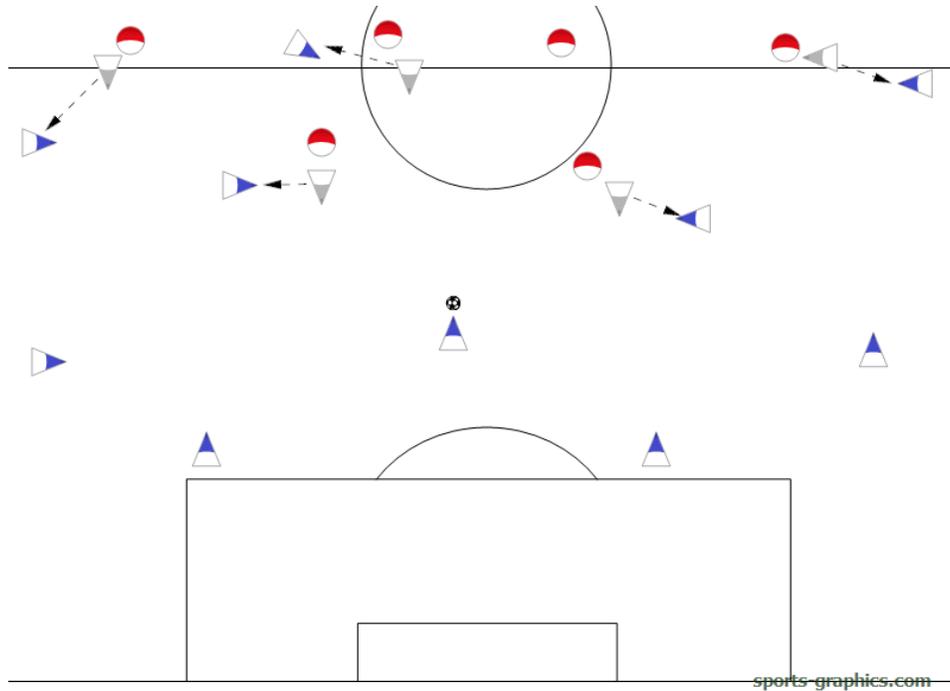


Diagram 6 Defensive Midfielder with Ball

NOTICE THAT EVERY PLAYER CAN SEE THE WHOLE FIELD. NOTICE HOW THE PEELING OFF OPENS UP THE GAME.

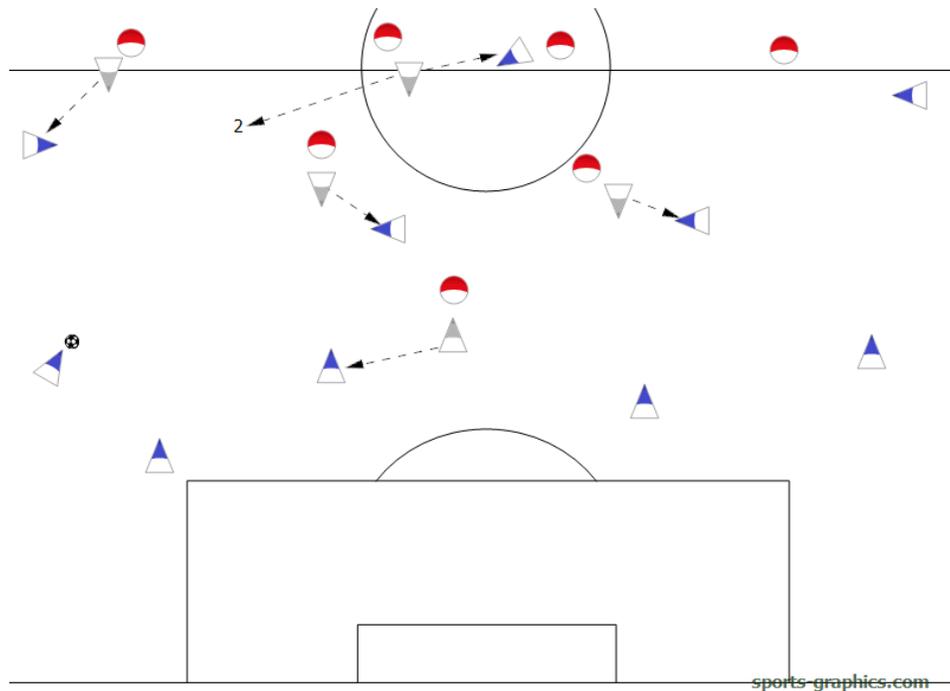


Diagram 7 Left Defender has the Ball

NOTE THAT THE CENTER FORWARD CAN ALSO CHECK TOWARD THE BALL, AS SHOWN BY ARROW 2 (D. 7).

THIS CHECKING RUN WILL BE ADDRESSED LATER ON IN THIS SECTION.

NOTE THAT PLAYER 6'S PEELING OFF OPENS UP SPACE FOR PLAYERS 8 AND 10 TO PEEL OFF (D. 7).

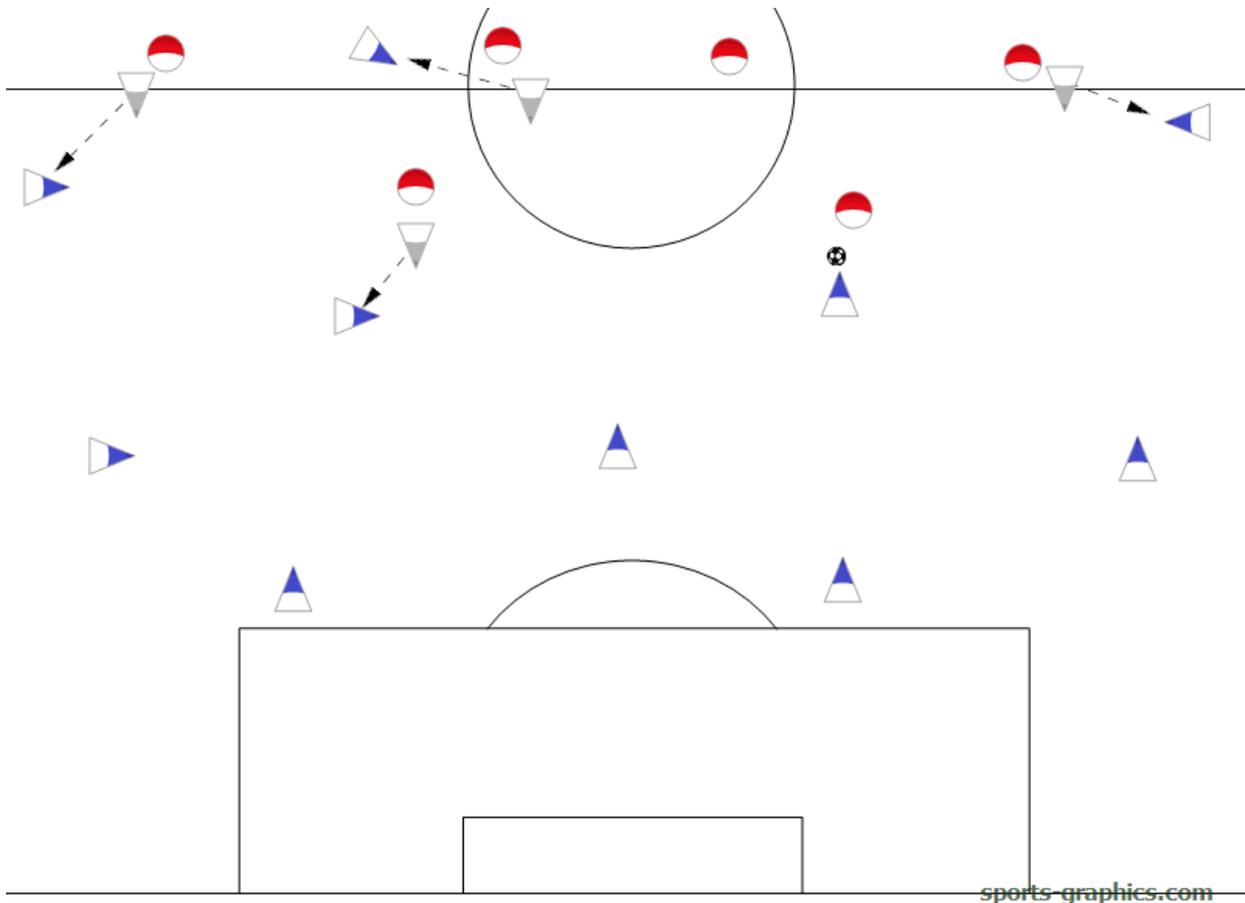


Diagram 8 Attacking Midfielder has Possession

Notice in all the diagrams above (D. 6-8) that the peeling off movement is toward the blind side of opponent, making it difficult for him/her to see both the ball and the attacker. Our players need to learn how to peel off to get outside of their opponent's vision. This is another advantage of peeling off at an angle rather than making a straight checking run with one's back to goal.

The peeling off movement is counter intuitive for our players. Our players are used to checking toward the ball, which clogs up the space. The peeling off movement opens up the space in midfield and allows our back line to play the ball into the middle third with less risk of losing possession.

The section on Goal Kicks has additional information regarding the peeling off movement and its importance in the build-up phase.

ROLE OF THE GOALKEEPER

The goalkeeper'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 9 shows a typical through ball being chased by the central defender who should be encouraged to play the ball back to the keeper. The goalkeeper 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 10, the black team is applying high pressure and the right fullback should have the option to play the ball to the keeper who can then switch the point of attack.

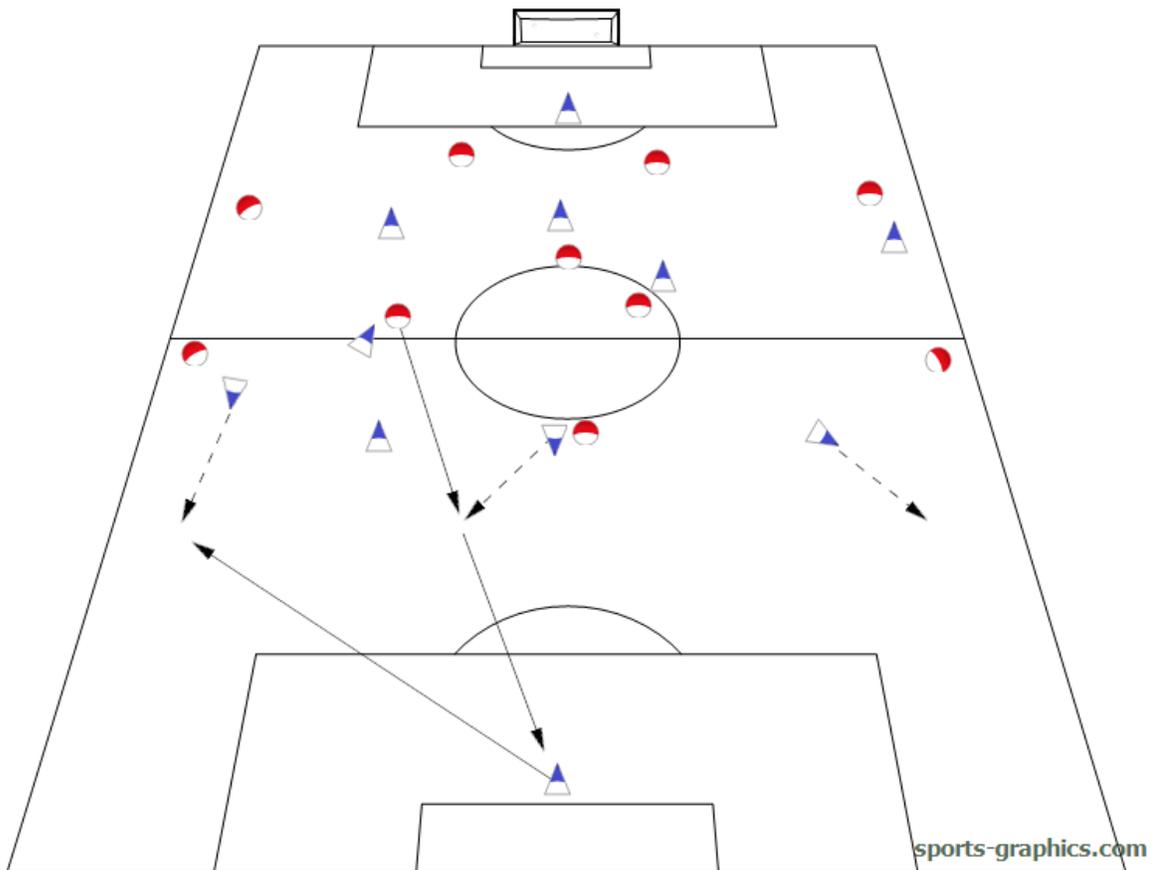


Diagram 9 Passes to and from the Goalkeeper

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

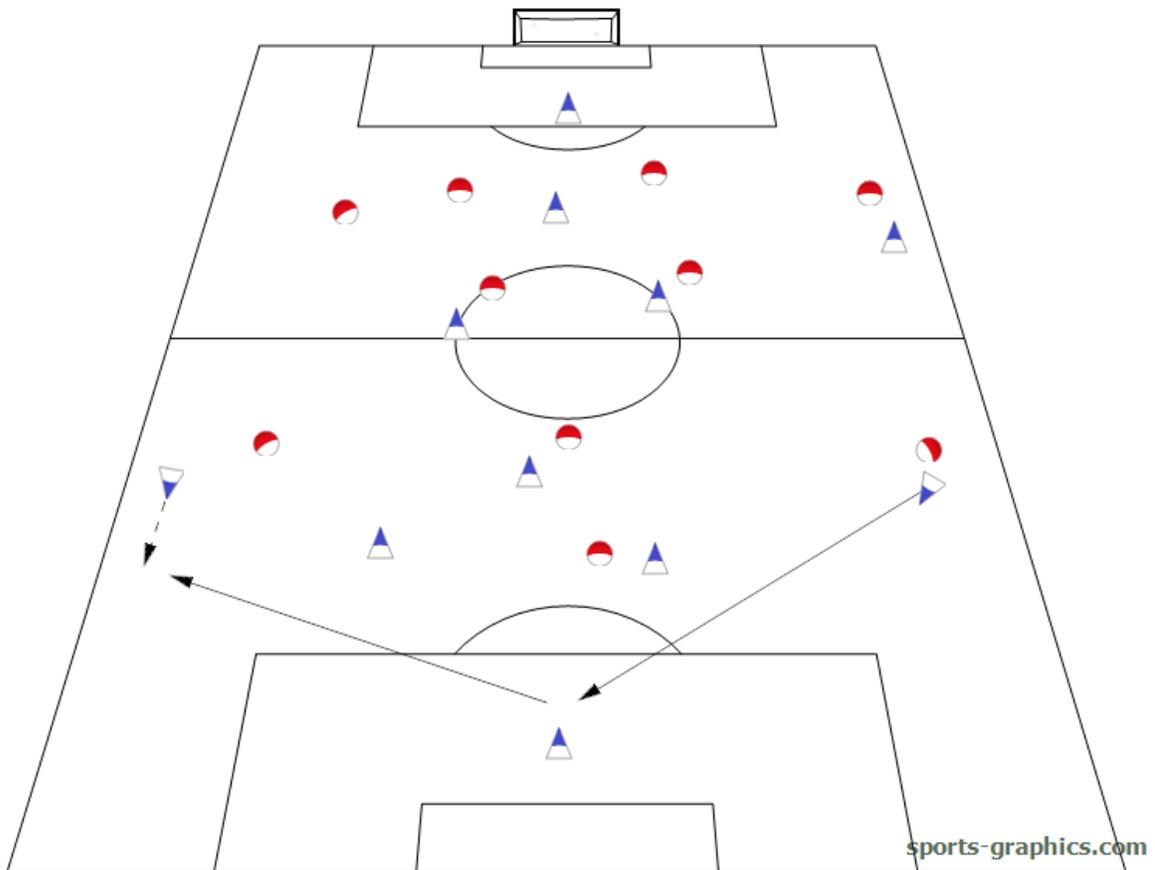


Diagram 10 Support the Attack

When the keeper catches a cross or stops a shot, he/she needs to quickly assess the 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 goalkeeper must learn to pass the ball rather than launch it high and long.** The keeper's role on goal kicks is addressed later in the manual.

ROLE OF THE BACK LINE (PLAYERS NUMBER 2-4-5-3)

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 three defenders need to open up and spread out and form a bowl shape that is far away enough from opponents to be safe in possession. In diagram 11, 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.



Diagram 11 Drop Off

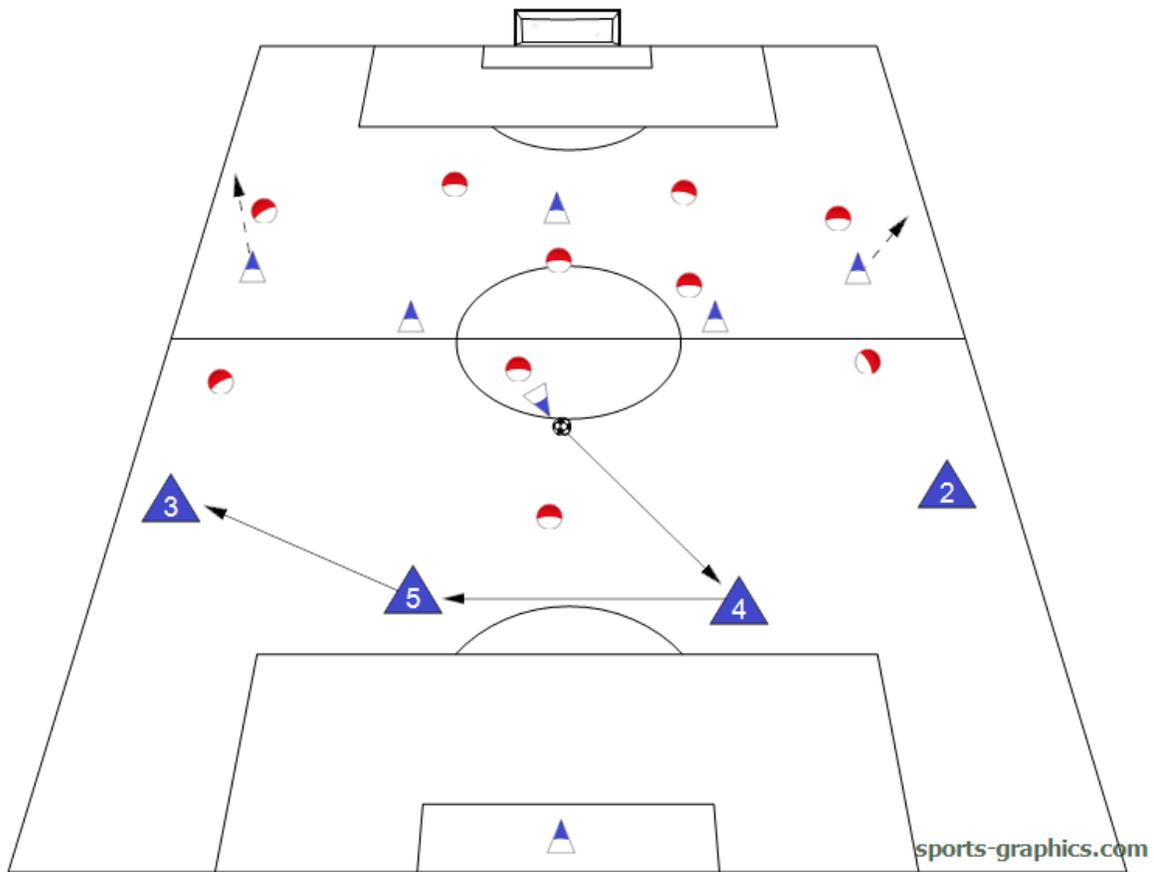


Diagram 12 Pass across the Back

Once the back line receives a back pass, they should keep the ball by passing it among themselves as shown in diagram 12. This sequence allows the rest of the team the time to spread out and regain an attacking shape.

In diagram 12, the pass from central defender 5 to the left fullback 3 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 do not have to adjust their position at all. The central defenders need to continue the sequence and pass it to the outside fullback 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, 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 toward 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/her first touch. **As a rule, a square or diagonal ball that initiates a switch should follow every back pass.**

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.

The central defenders should learn to anticipate when opponents are likely to press the ball. For example, a pass from 5 to 3 could trigger a press by the opponents. Players 4 and 5 should get into the habit of immediately dropping deep after passing to player 2 or 3. This is shown in diagram 13 below. Player 3 can then play a first time ball back to player 5 if he/she anticipates a press rather than risk losing it.

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. Alternatively, they drop back although 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.

The role of the fullbacks 2 and 3 in penetration into the attacking third through overlapping is covered in a later section.

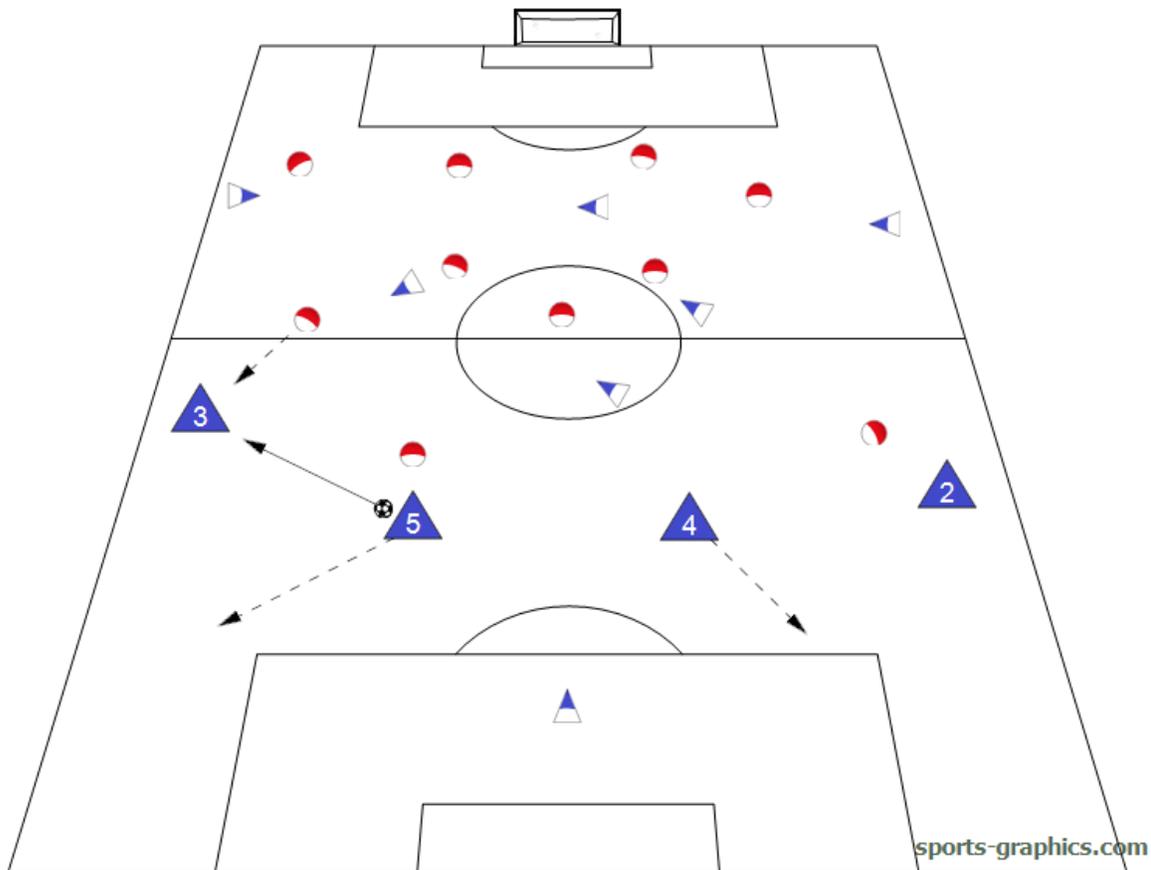


Diagram 13 Center Backs Drop Off

ROLE OF THE DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER (PLAYER NUMBER 6)

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

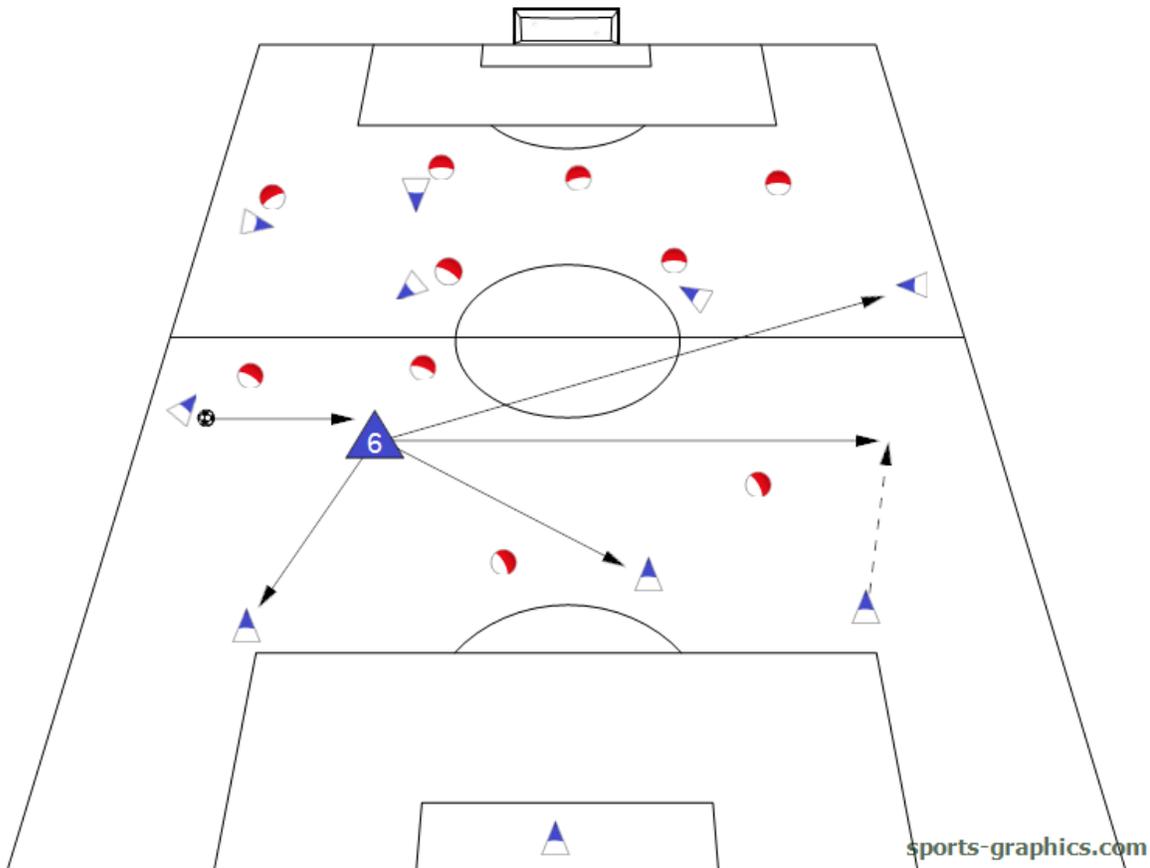


Diagram 14 Move Laterally to Support

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/she will be the focal point of the build up from the back and will dictate the tempo of the ball circulation.**

In diagram 14, the number 6 supports the left defender. **Note his/her position square to the left fullback facing up field.** If he/she gets the ball from the left defender, he/she 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/she should quickly shift over, follow the ball, and be available to receive it again if the need arises.** Therefore, the number 6 position requires lots of lateral movement.

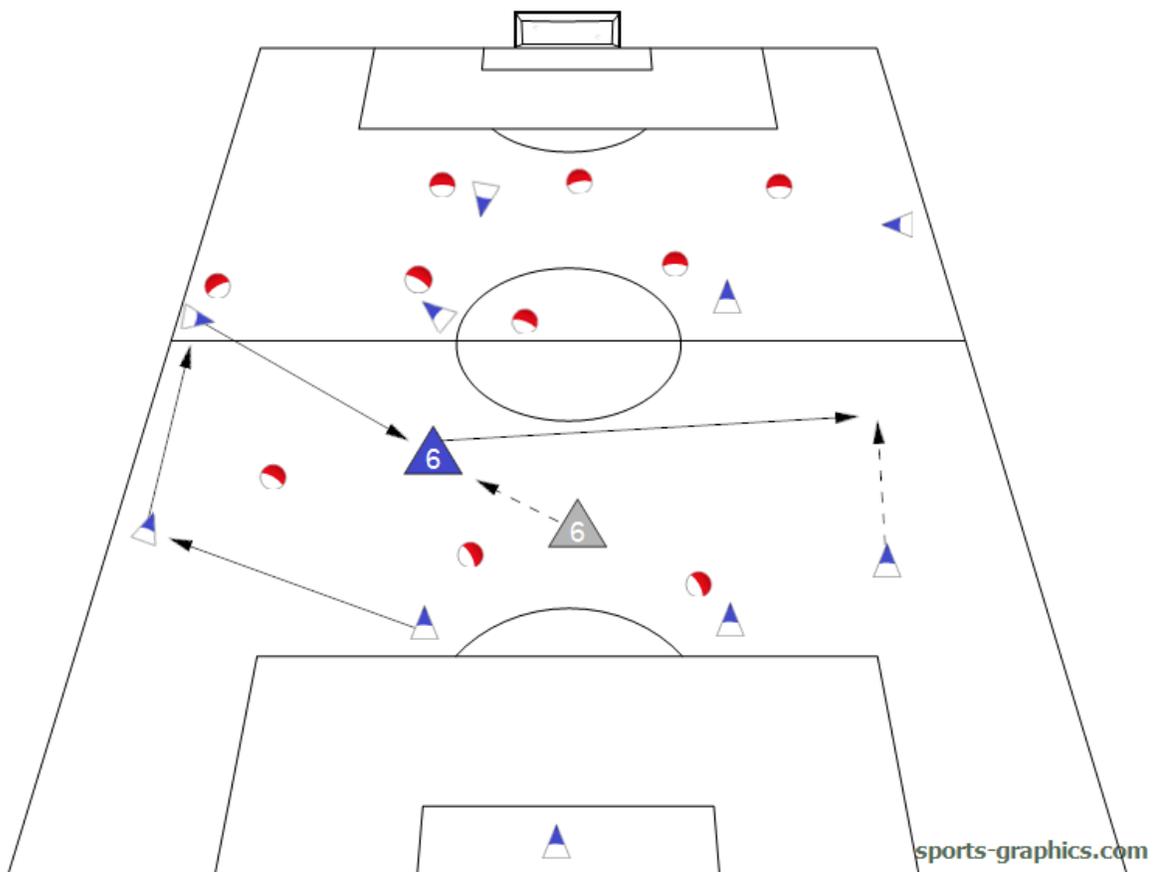


Diagram 15 Switch the Point of Attack

In diagram 15, the number 6 supports the left winger number 11 in case he/she cannot play the ball forward. Note the number 6's position underneath the ball, at an angle inside, **with his/her body open to the field**. He/she is not too close to the ball so, if he/she gets the ball, he/she has the space and time to switch it quickly to the right flank.

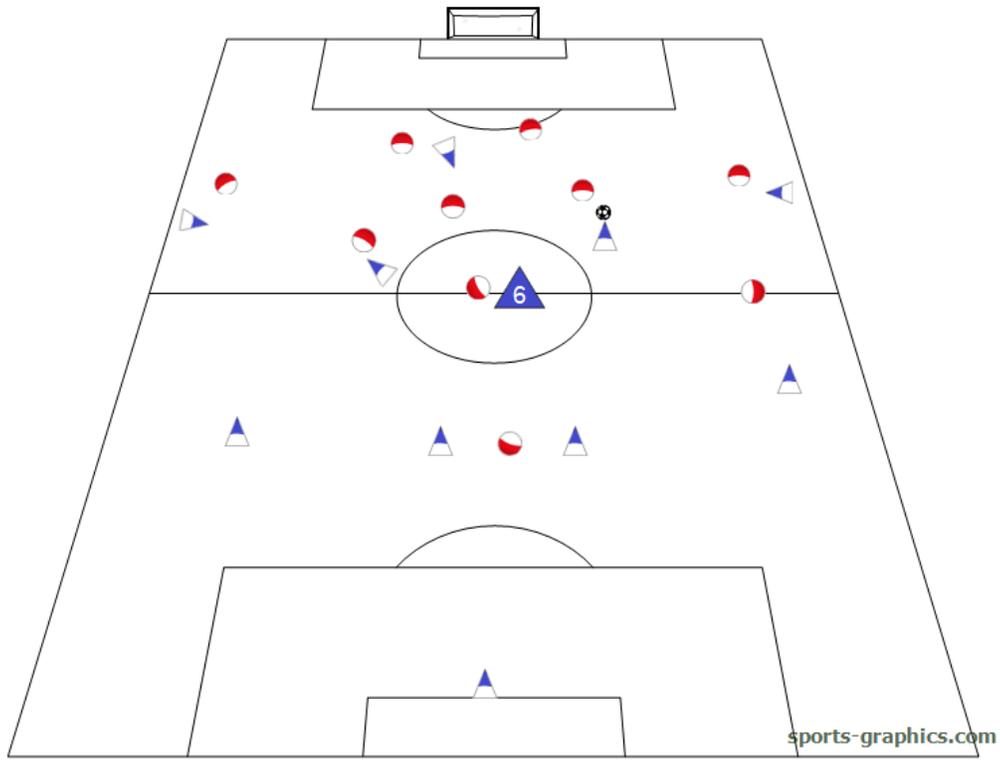


Diagram 16 Wrong - distance of support is too close

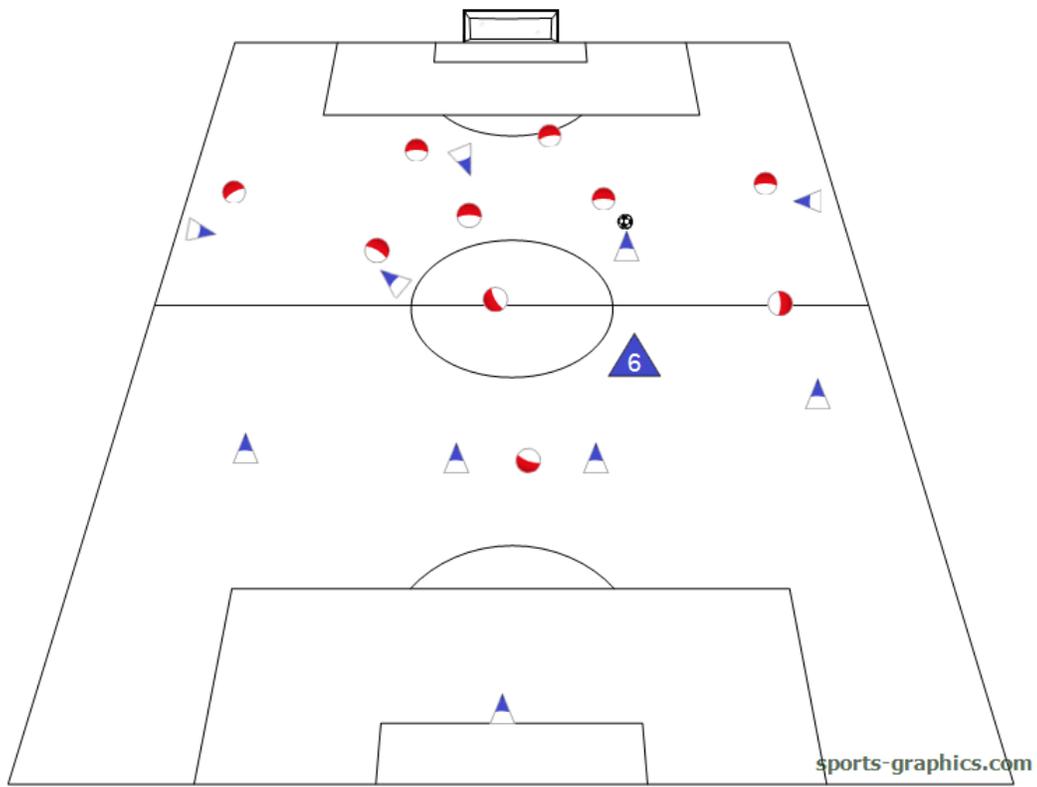


Diagram 17 Right - distance of support is optimal

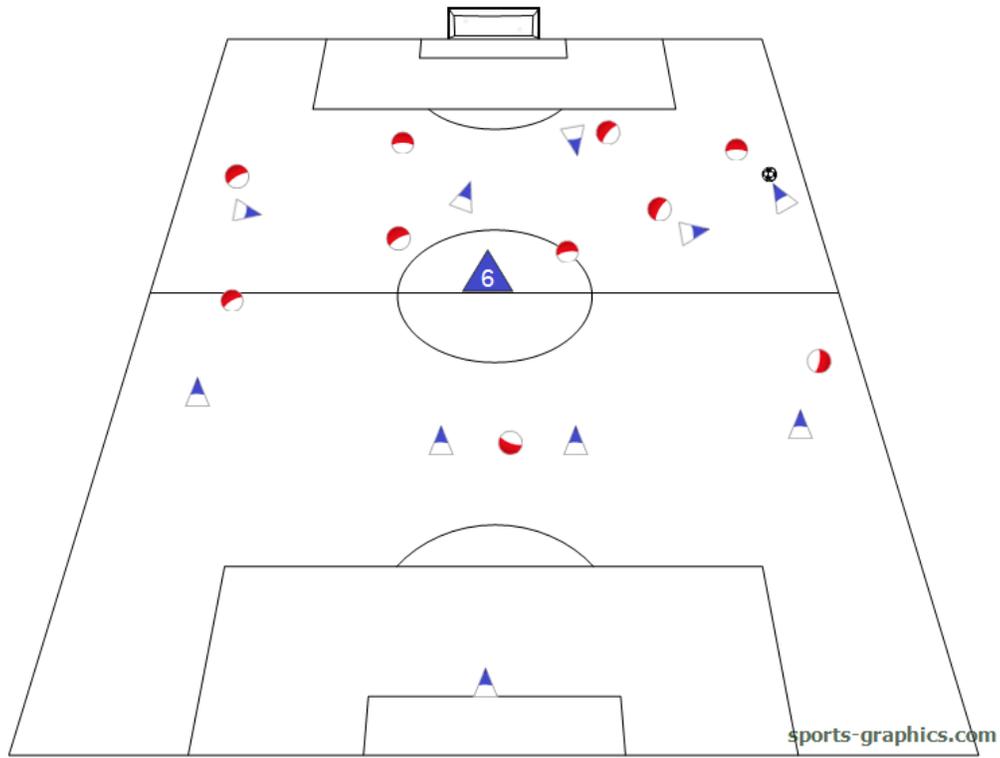


Diagram 18 Wrong - incorrect angle of support



Diagram 19 Right - good angle of support

Quite often, the defensive midfielder gets too close to the ball and is not detached enough to be a safe option. He/she needs to stay in the space in front of the back line, away from the crowded area near the ball, so that when he/she gets the ball, he/she is not under immediate pressure and can switch the point of attack. Diagrams 16, 17, 18 and 19 on the previous pages show number 6 positioned too close (D. 16 & D. 18) to the ball (**Wrong**) and the correct position (**Right**) where he/she is detached and has space and time to control the ball (D. 17 & D. 19).

ROLE OF THE ATTACKING MIDFIELDERS (PLAYERS NUMBER 8 AND 10)

The attacking midfielders' 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. Players 8 and 10 should make themselves available as high up the field as possible so that a pass to them penetrates behind the other team's midfield. The positioning of players 8 and 10 is crucial for maintaining the correct team shape and control of midfield. The three midfielders' (6, 8 and 10) movements need to complement each other and maintain the right balance between possession and penetration in their spacing and support angles.

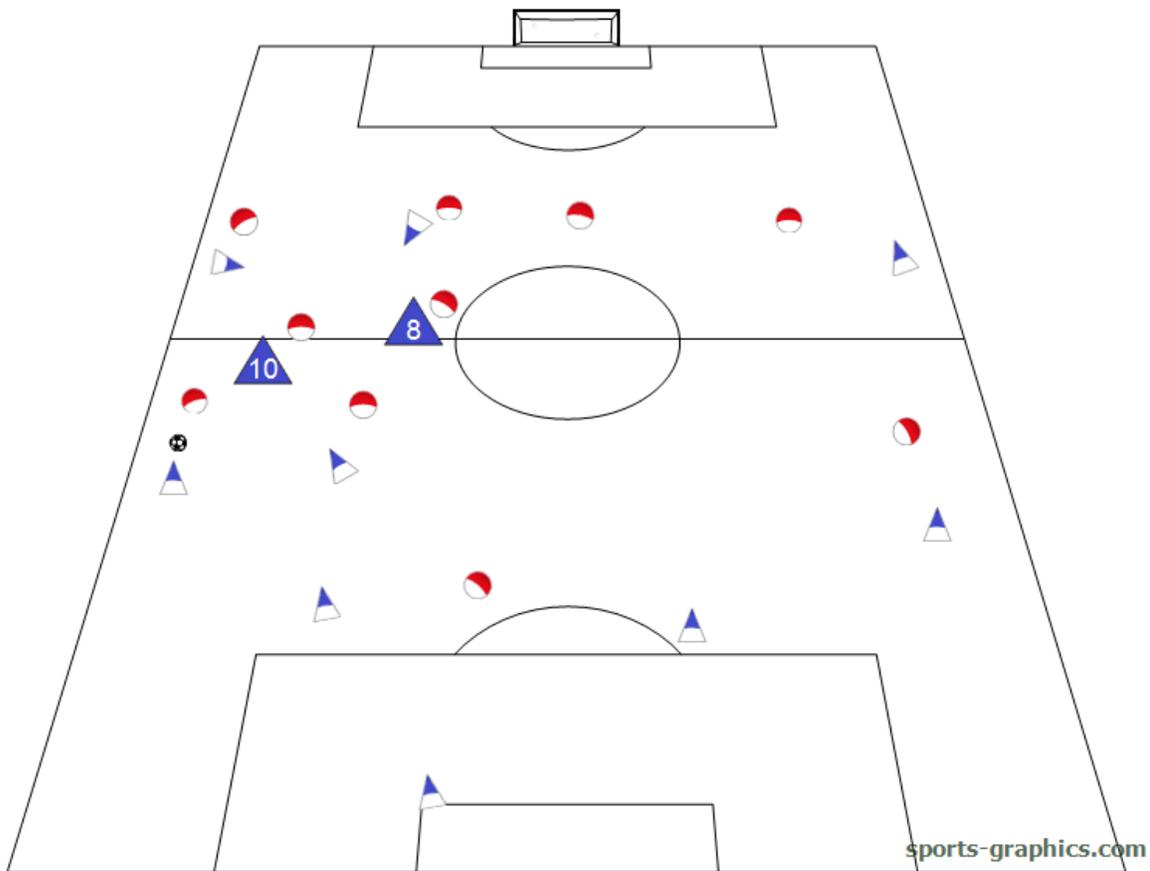


Diagram 20 Attacking Midfielders are crowding the space

In diagram 20, players 8 and 10 came too close to the ball, making it too crowded and hard to break pressure. They have their back to goal and they do not see the field. Their position also makes it difficult to pass the ball to the center forward. In diagram 21 on page 28, number 8 and 10's positions are much better. Midfielder 10 is sideways on and can see his/her forward and winger. Midfielder 8 is also facing up field by peeling off, giving him/her better vision. The left defender is now able to find both players as well as number 9 with a pass that opens up the game.

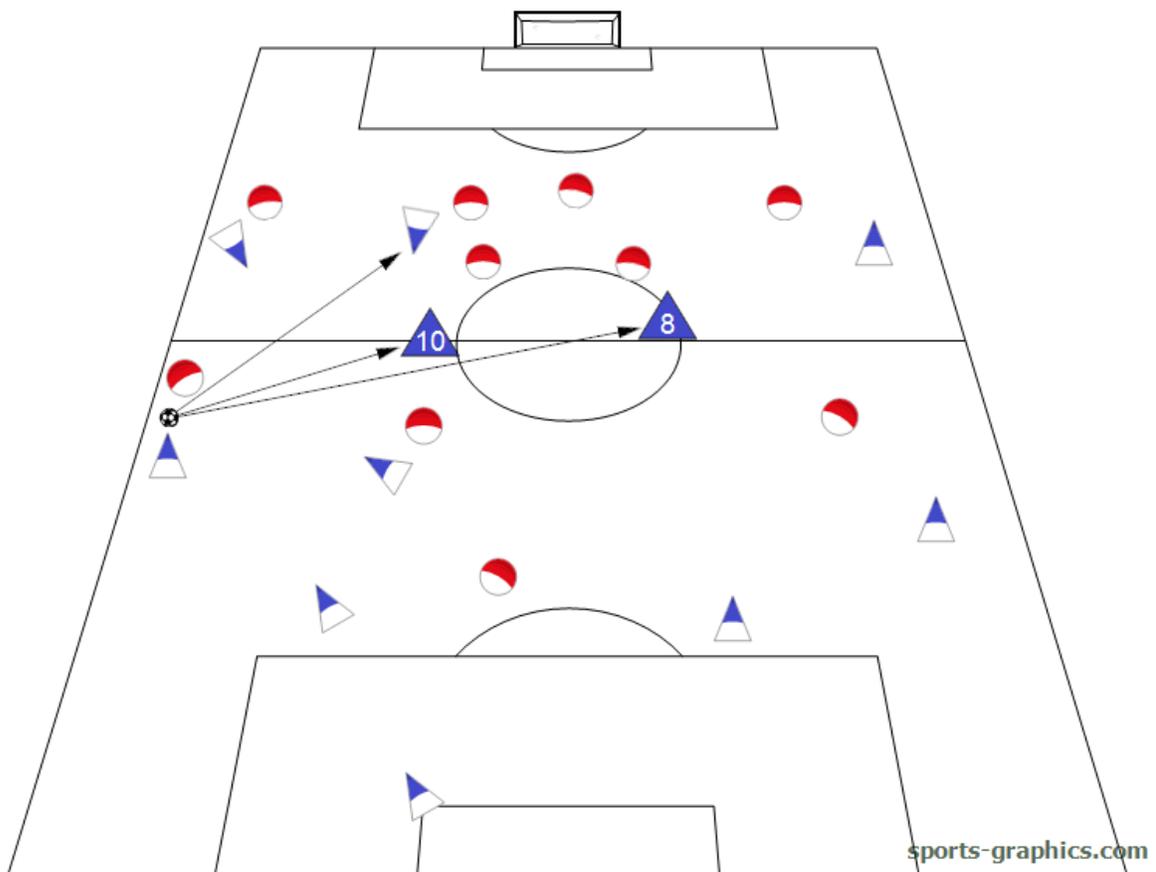


Diagram 21 Attacking Midfielders sideways on with good distance and angles of support

The other important role for players 8 and 10 is to support the wingers and the center forward whenever they receive balls. Players 7, 9 and 11 will invariably be under pressure when controlling passes and will need immediate support. Players 8 and 10 must offer this support by constantly moving laterally across the field so that one of them can be available for a short pass.

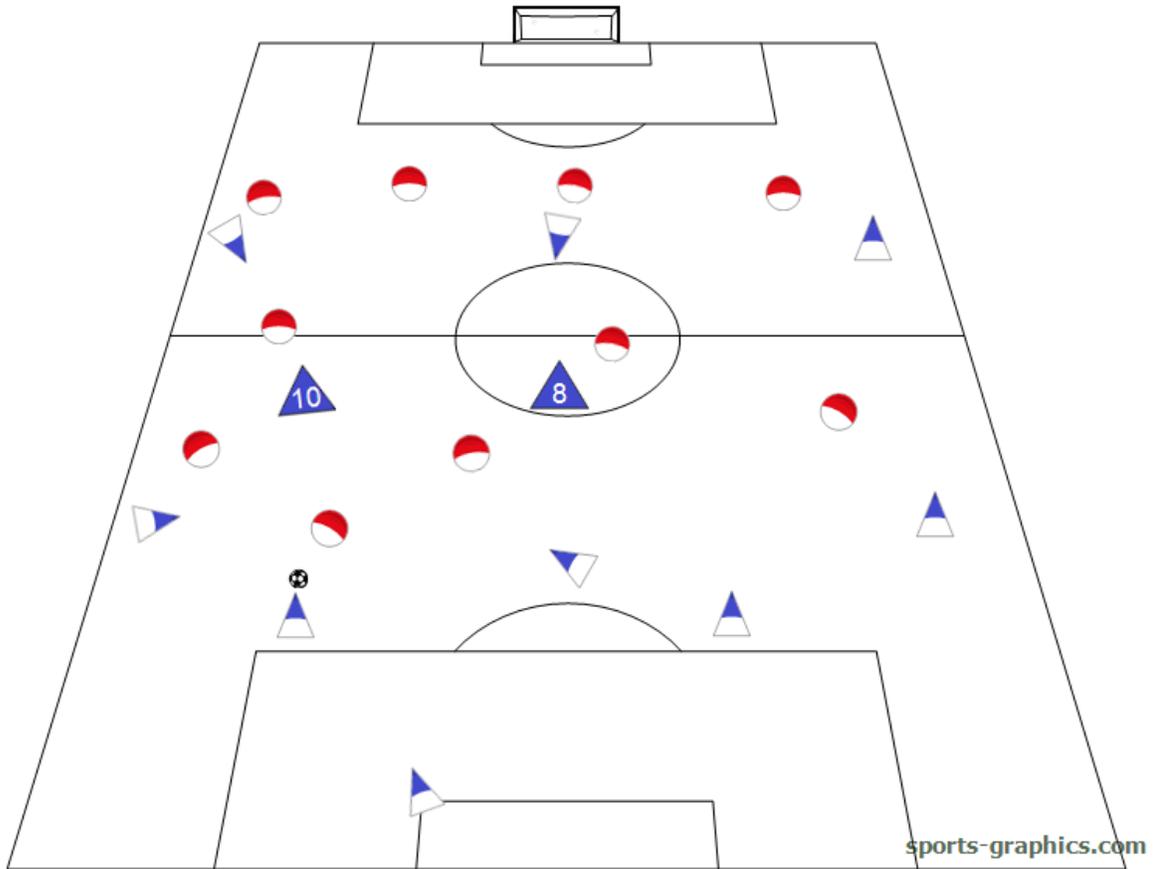


Diagram 22 Attacking Midfielders with backs to goal and crowding the space

As mentioned before, our midfielders tend to crowd around the ball and destroy the open team shape necessary to circulate the ball. They tend to 'ball watch' and do not have a good awareness of what is around them. **We need to teach them that their position and movement should be dictated by the positioning of their teammates.** When one player checks toward the ball, the other player should check away from the ball, otherwise, everyone duplicates the same runs and team shape is lost.

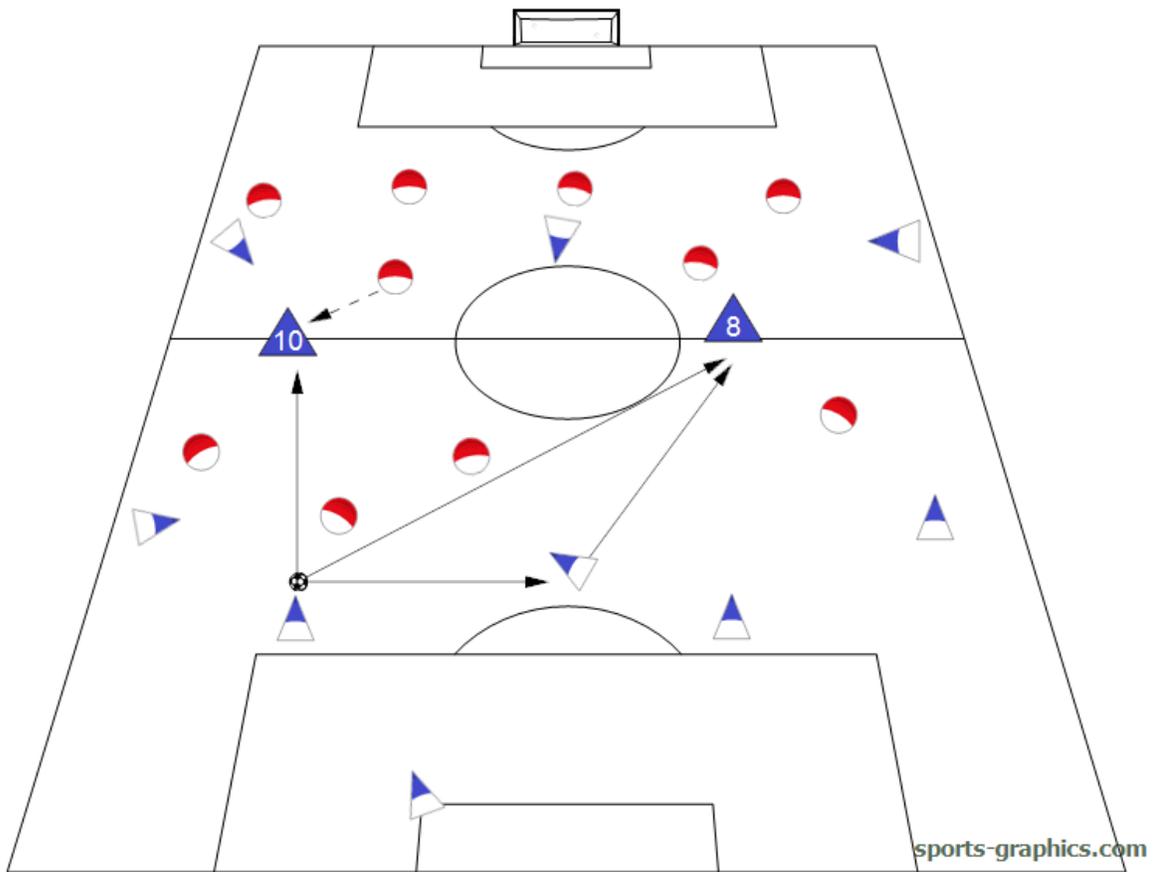


Diagram 23 Attacking Midfielders open to the field and support is high

Diagram 22 on page 29 shows another example of poor positioning by players 8 and 10, with them being too close to the ball and with their backs to goal. Diagram 23 shows a better balance in midfield, with number 10 and 8 holding a higher position, but peeling off and opening the body to the field. Note also the staggered positions of the attacking midfielders in relation to forwards 7, 9, and 11. All five of them can be reached with a pass.

Note that if a situation like that in diagram 22 occurs, either due to players 8 and 10 checking too hard toward the ball or due to opponents high pressing, the best option for defender 5 is to bypass the midfield and pass directly to the center forward 9 since that is where the space is. Defender 5 could drop the ball into the space behind the opponents' midfield for forward 9 to check into and receive.

The attacking midfielders can use intelligent positioning to help their team break out of high pressing opponents. In diagrams 23 and 24, the red team is pressing the ball and the black team uses the attacking midfielders to switch the point of attack against high pressure.

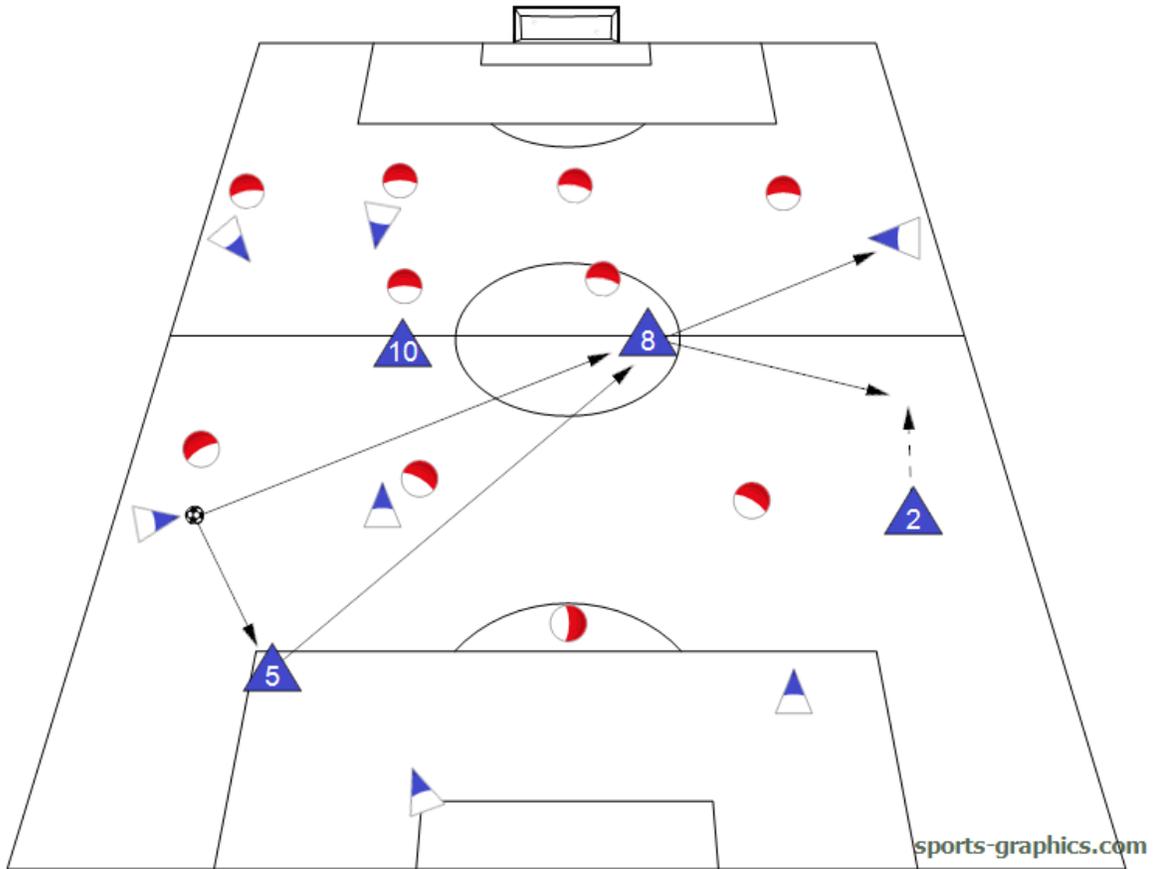


Diagram 24 Breaking out of pressure using the # 8 or a central defender

In diagram 24, the black team breaks pressure by finding the attacking midfielder, either directly or through the central defender 5. Even if the attacking midfielder is marked and did not peel off, he/she can be used like a 'rebounding wall' that re-directs the ball to the overlapping defender 2. In diagram 25, the same idea is used with the supporting help of midfielder 6 who plays the ball to winger 7 while defender 2 overlaps to create penetration. Most times, the diagonal ball to the blind side attacking midfielder can be effectively used to break pressure, provided the midfield shape is similar to that shown above.

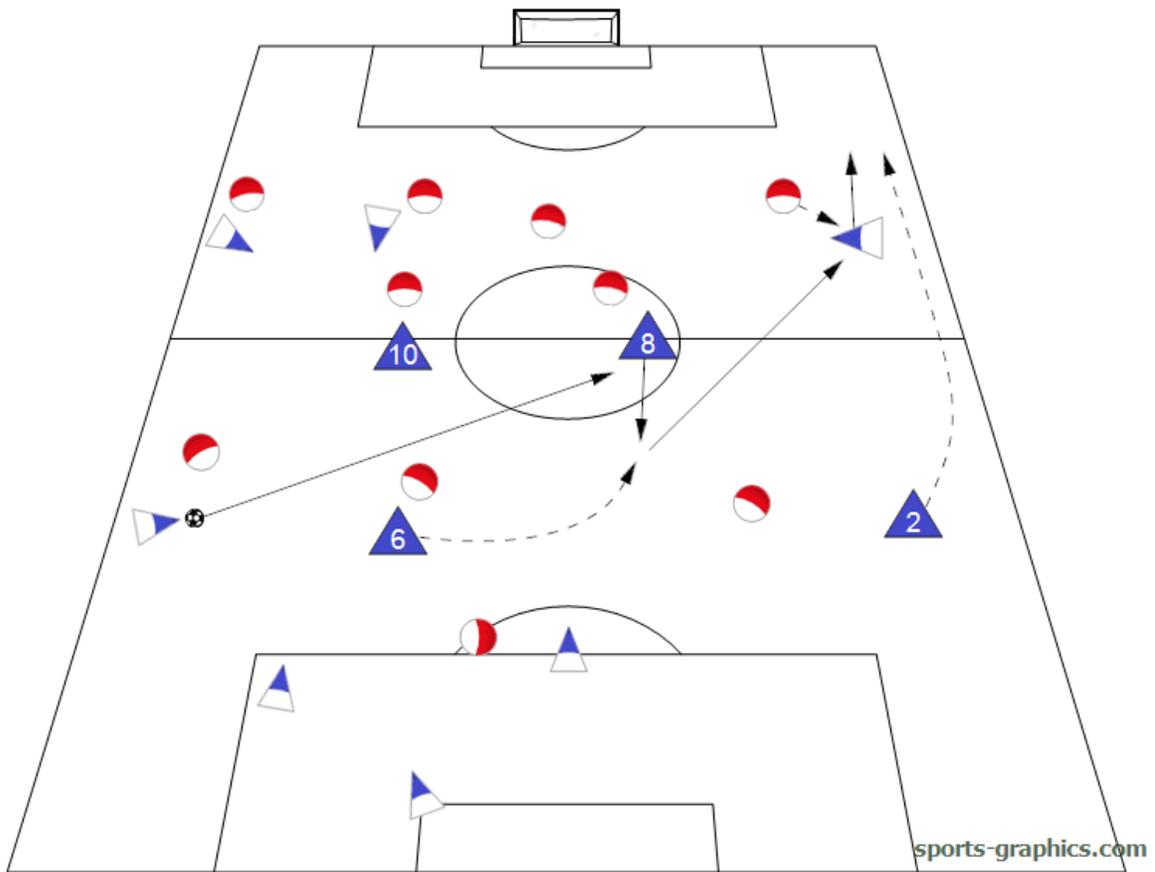


Diagram 25 Breaking out of pressure using the #8 and the defensive midfielder

The key point for the attacking midfielders is to spread out instead of being sucked in toward the ball and open their body by peeling off so they can see everyone. Only then will they be able to make good decisions about where to move and what to do with their first touch when receiving the ball.

The role of the attacking midfielders in penetration into the attacking third is covered in a later section of the manual.

ROLE OF THE WINGERS (PLAYERS 7 AND 11)

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 peel off, control and pass the ball. In addition, when the wingers stay wide, the opponents' back line is stretched across the width of the field, leaving gaps for penetration.

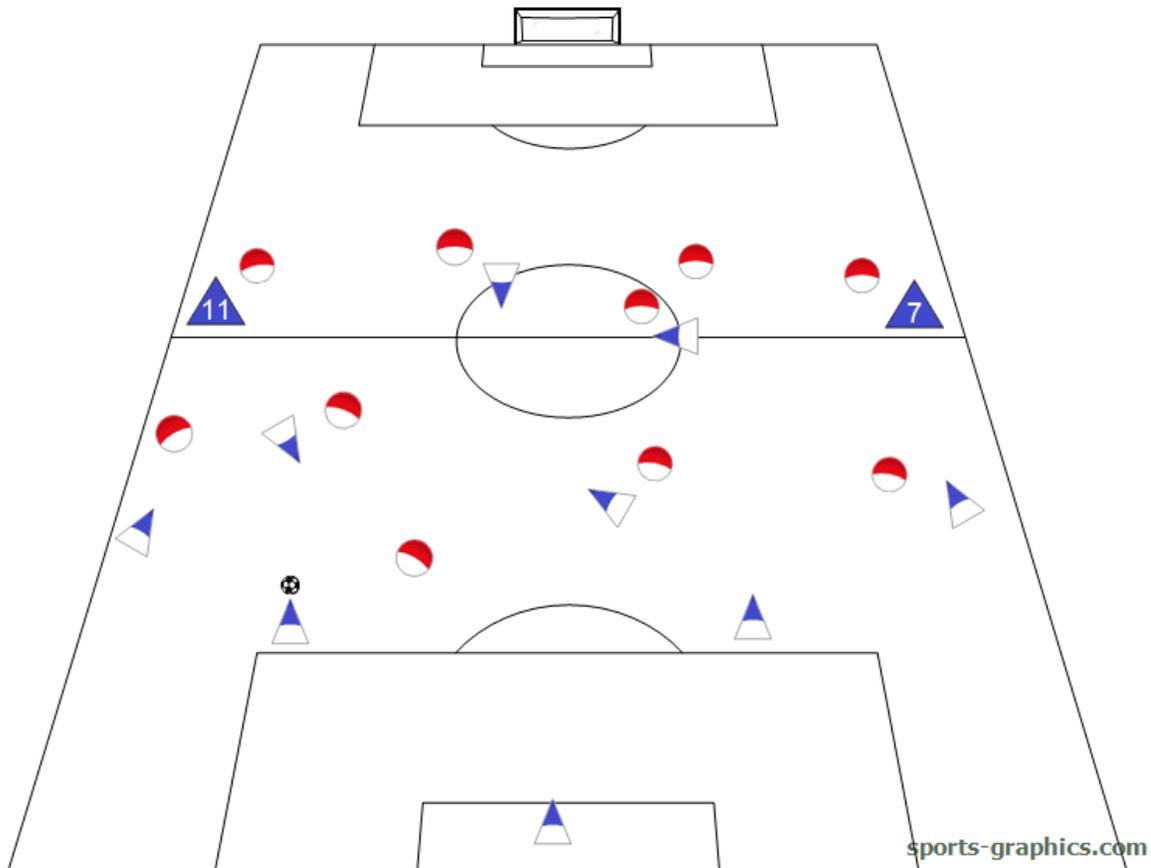


Diagram 26 Desired Positioning of the Wingers

Diagram 26 shows the desired positioning of the wingers when our defenders have the ball. The wingers are wide and high. Note the body position of the wingers, 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 offside.

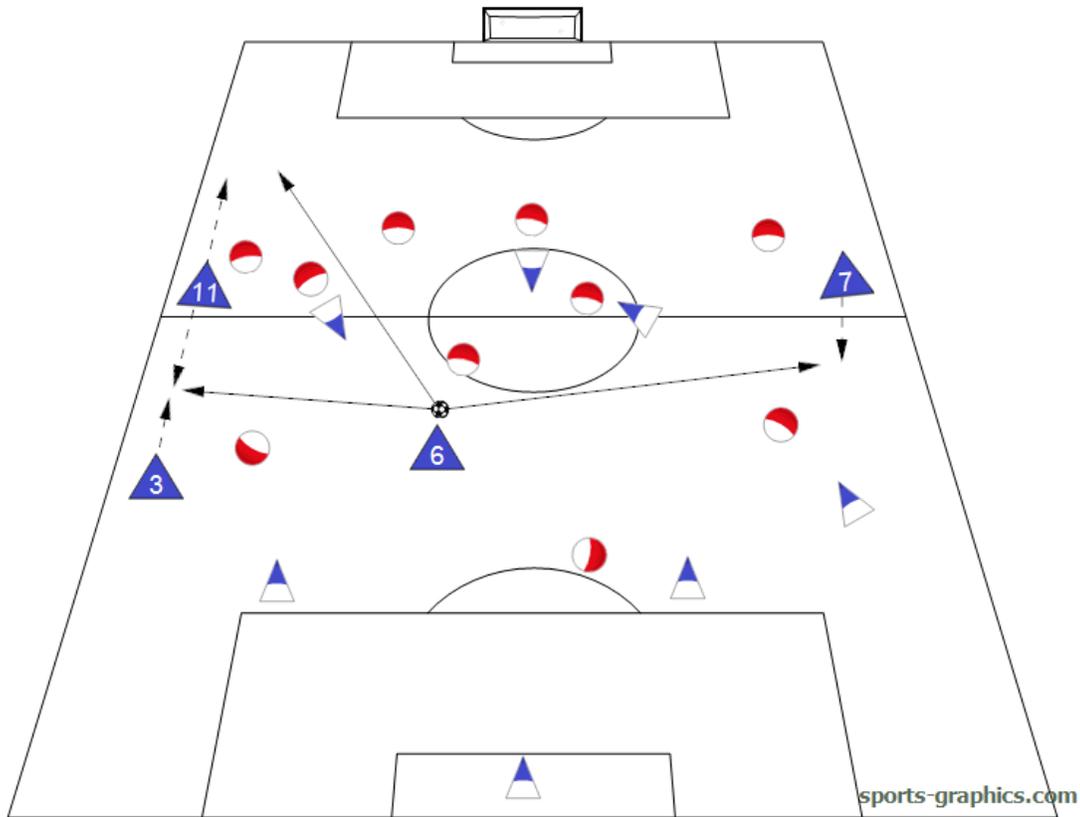


Diagram 27 Movement of the Wingers to give the # 6 Options

Once the wingers 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 (27), defensive midfielder 6 has the ball and is under pressure. The wingers 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 the opposing back line for a pass into space. It also depends on what the fullback does since often the fullbacks can step up into midfield to offer a wide support option. In fact, it is usually more desirable for the fullback to step up than for the winger to drop back. If the wingers drop back, the team shape becomes more like 1-4-5-1 and it becomes harder to get out of the half. Either way, someone needs to get into the flank spaces and be available for an easy outlet pass to relieve pressure.

One tendency of our wingers is to play too narrow (D. 28 & 29). They tend to move inside toward the center forward when the ball is on the other side (D. 29) or when the ball is in their half (D. 28). This helps the other team defend more compactly and makes it harder to switch the point of attack. It also means that all three forwards offer exactly the same passing option, namely, a pass to a player with his/her back to goal. The two diagrams on page 35 show the wrong positioning that our wingers often take. This habit will take some time to eradicate. Our wingers need to stay wide, stretch the other team, open their body and be ready to make penetrating runs or receive the ball to feet. Of course, there will be situations where the winger can choose to run inside to create space for the overlapping fullback, but such a run must still start from an initial wide position. Therefore, the starting position should always be wide and from there, based on the run of play and what the fullback does, the winger can decide the best move.

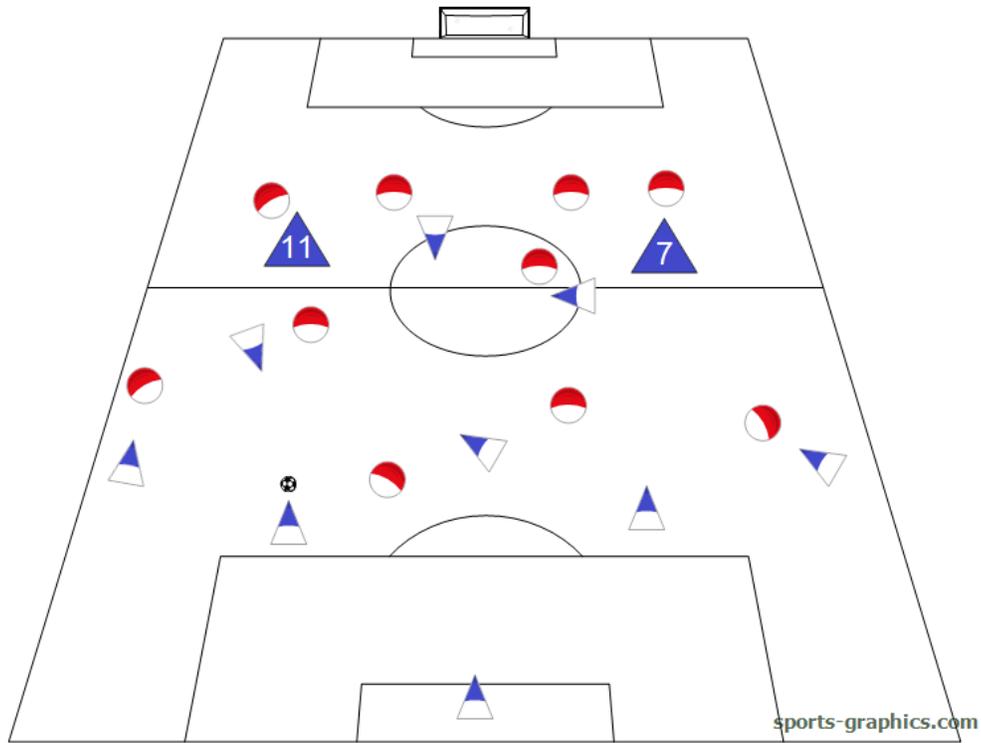


Diagram 28 Wingers Positioned Too Narrow in the Central Channel



Diagram 29 Wingers Positioned Too Narrow to one Flank and the Central Channel

The role of the wingers in penetration into the attacking third is addressed in a later section.

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 staying as high as possible, in line with the last defender, and being ready to check for a penetration pass from the back line or the midfield.

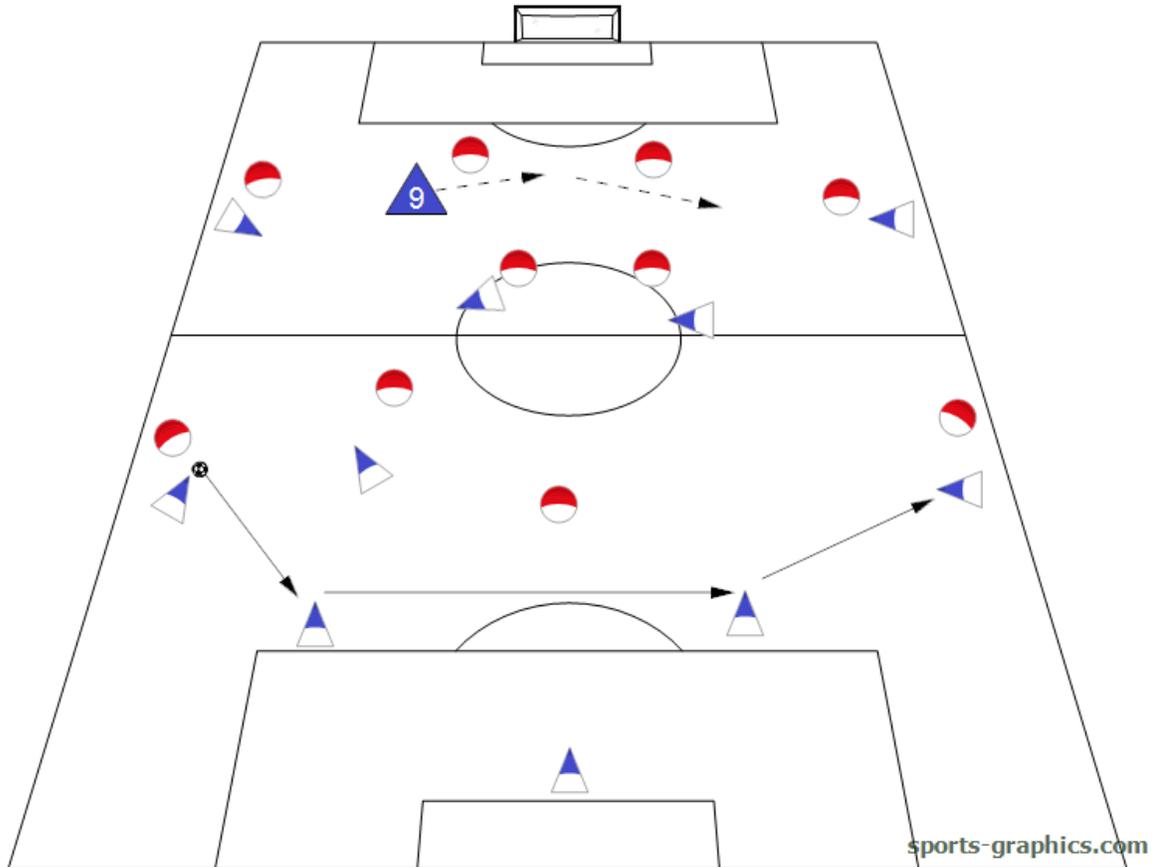


Diagram 30 Movement of # 9 as the Back Line Plays the Ball

Diagram 30 shows the movement of the number 9 as the back line circulates the ball. The number 9 should keep his/her movement within the central area and leave the flanks for the wingers.

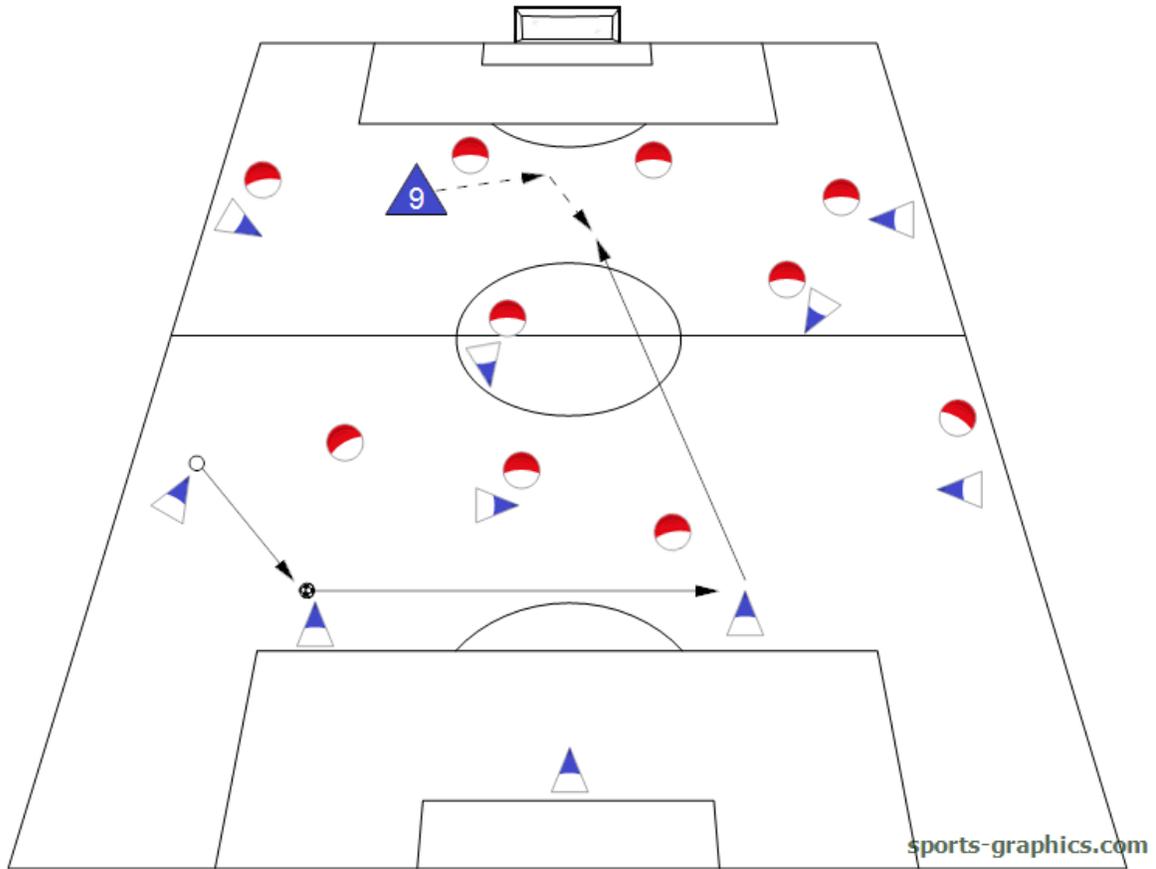


Diagram 31 Center Forward Showing for an Outlet Pass

In the initial stages of the build-up, when the ball is still with the back line, the number 9 should hold his/her high position patiently and not get involved with the build-up. By staying high, he/she helps make the field big and gives the midfield more space in which to operate. If needed, he/she can serve as an outlet pass when the opponents are trying to press the ball. Diagram 31 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 toward the ball too early and too deep 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.

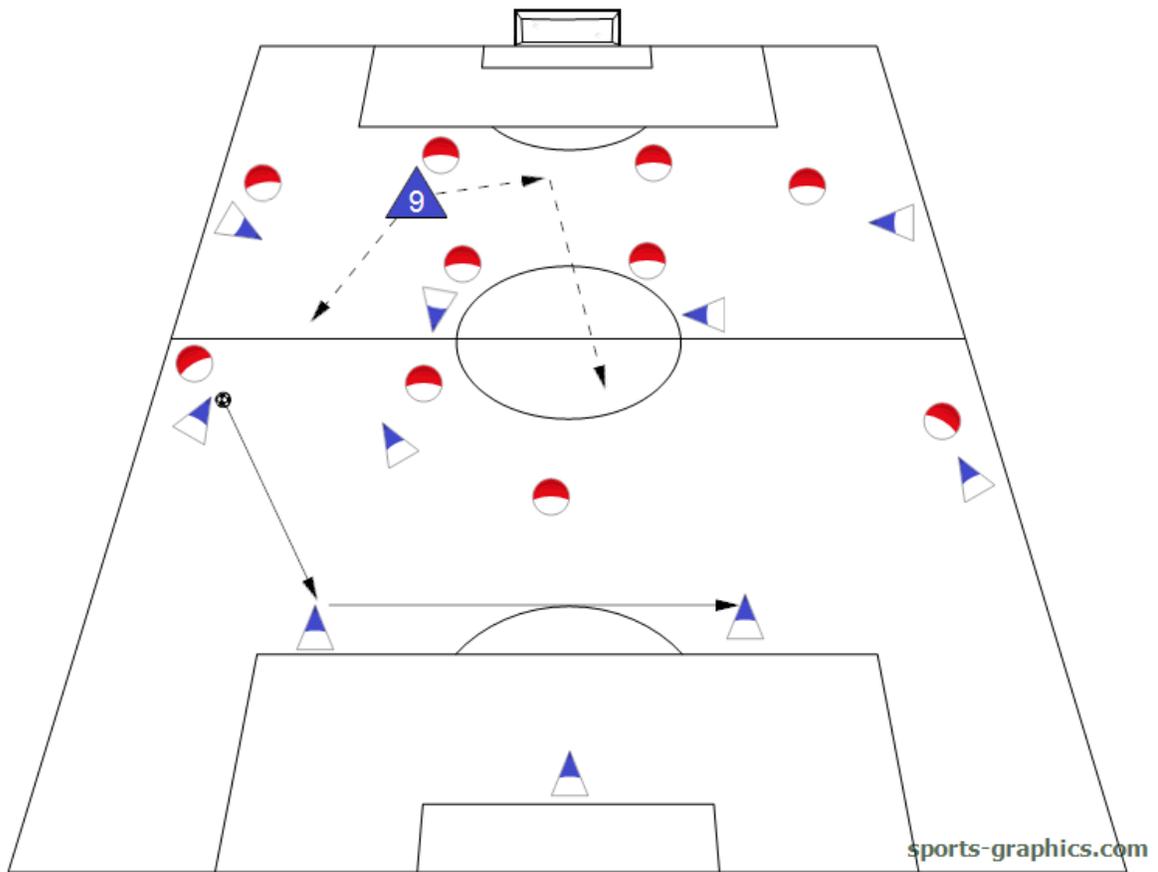


Diagram 32 Checking Run - Wrong

Diagram 32 on this page shows the wrong way to check for the ball. The checking run is too deep into midfield. A pass to the forward does not achieve any penetration.

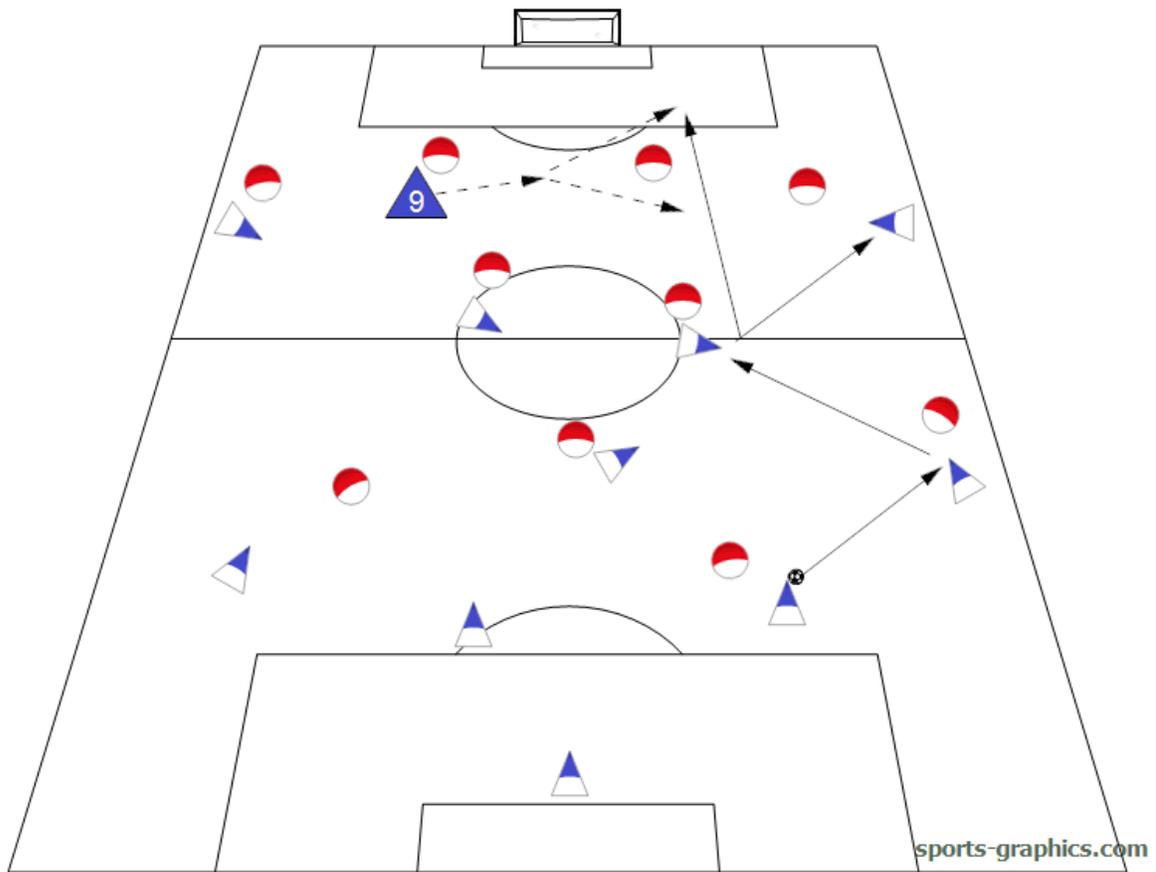


Diagram 33 Checking Run – Right

Here diagram 33 shows the more intelligent movement and patience. Once the ball is worked into the middle third, the number 9 can make runs toward the ball or into space behind the opponents for a through ball. The forward needs to time his/her run and start with a flat run to avoid being offside.

BUILD UP FROM GOAL KICKS

The goalkeeper should be discouraged from launching the ball on goal kicks. Our players have to learn to play out of the back and booting the ball turns the situation into a 50/50 ball at best. Instead, we need to work with US Youth Soccer ODP teams on safe ways for the keeper to pass the ball out of the back.

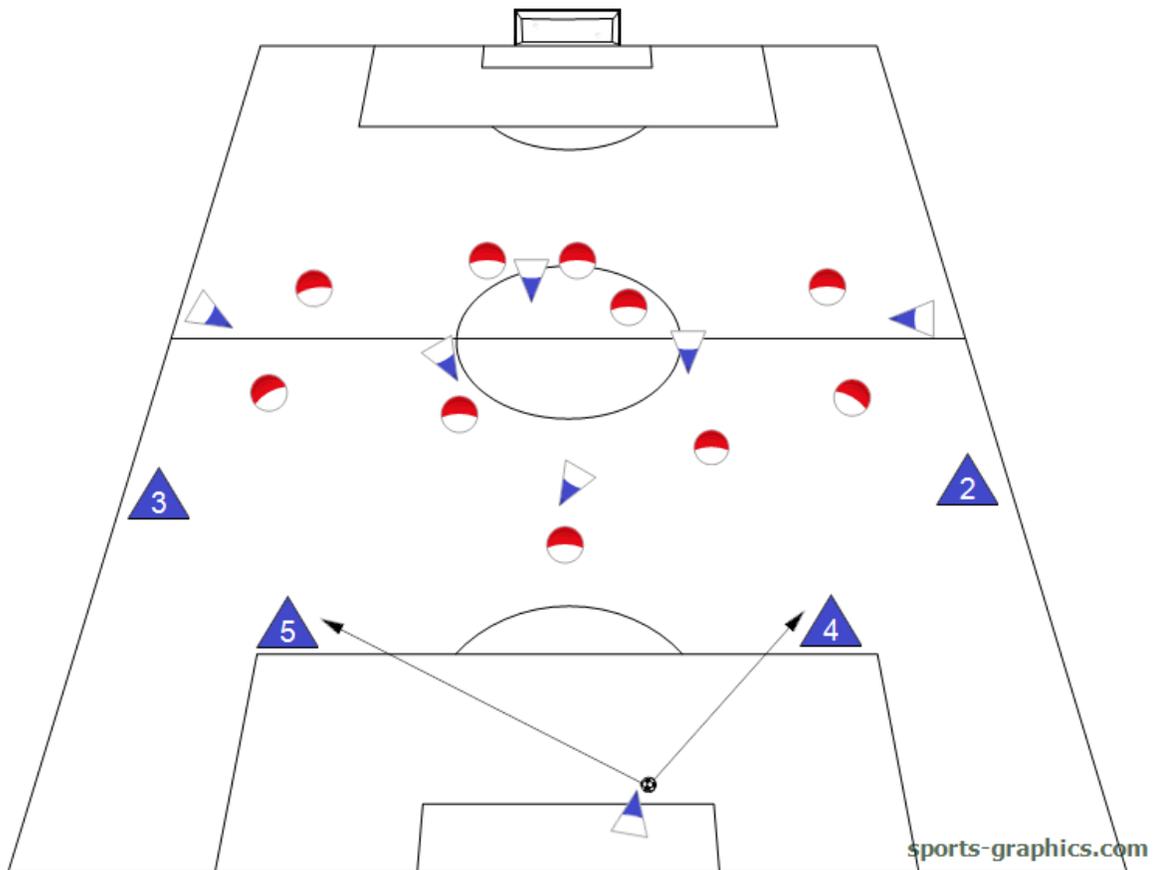


Diagram 34 Ideal Goal Kick Scenario

Diagram 34 shows the ideal scenario, with the back line spread out as shown and the goalkeeper simply finds one of the central defenders number 4 or 5. Note how high the fullbacks 2 and 3 are located. This situation is possible and desirable if the other team drops back and allows the keeper to pass to number 4 or 5.

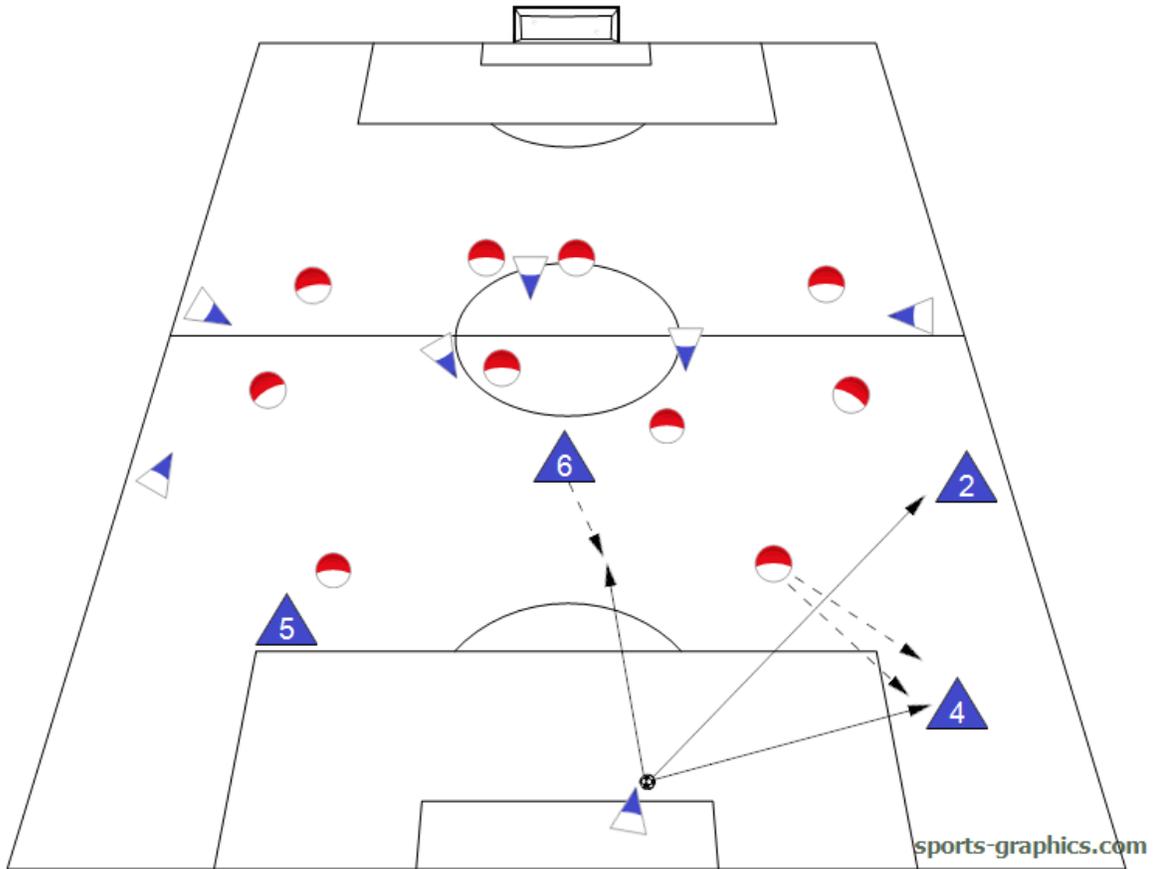


Diagram 35 Central Defender Drops Off

However, opponents often will decide to press and not allow the keeper an easy pass to a defender. In diagram 35, the red team is marking the defenders. A simple way to give the goalkeeper passing options is for the central defender to drop into the flank. Diagram 35 shows defender number 4 dropping into the right flank. If the opponent does not follow him/her, the keeper can pass it to number 4. If the opponent follows him/her, this opens up a passing lane to wide defender 2. Another option is for the defensive midfielder 6 to drop into the space between 4 and 5 to get a pass if he/she is not followed.

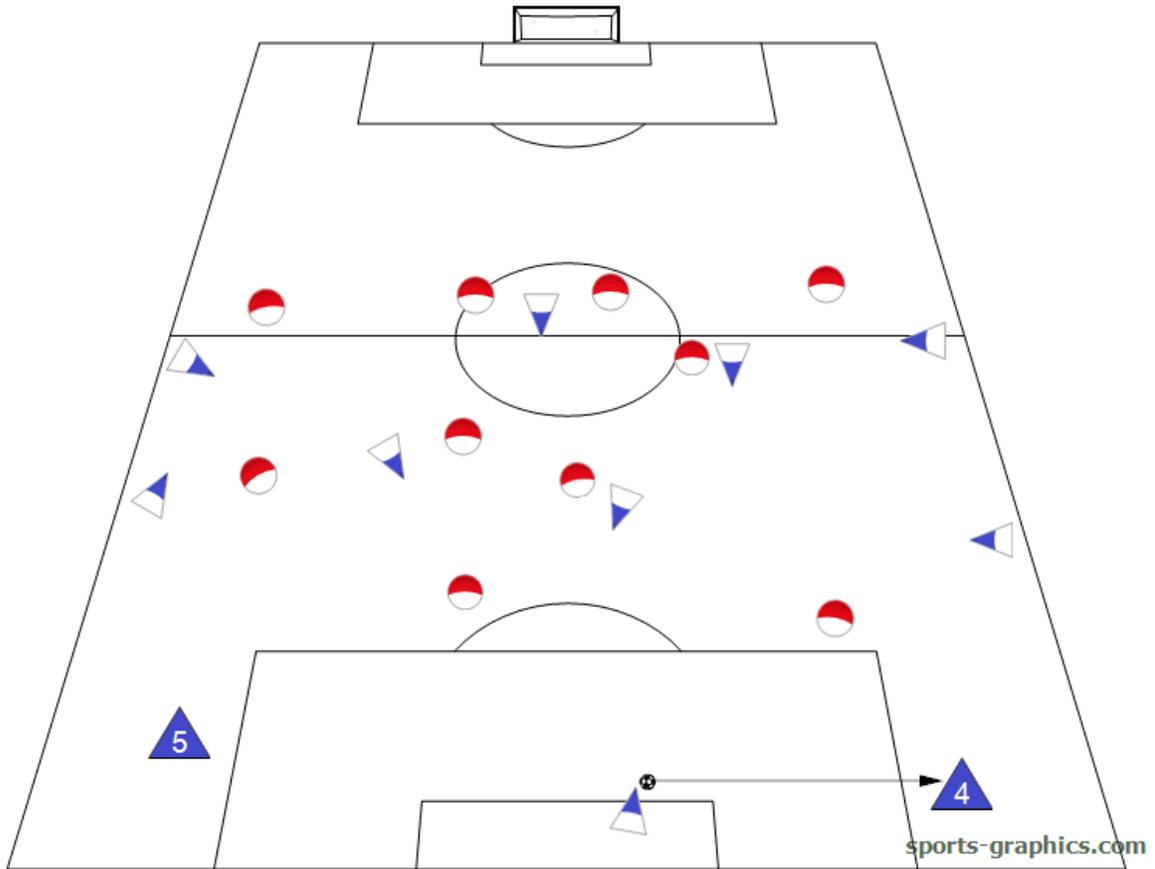


Diagram 36 Central Defenders in Deep Positions

A less desirable but still acceptable team shape on goal kicks is shown here in diagram 36. Here, central defenders 4 and 5 take up deeper positions on the flank to escape pressure and receive an easy ball from the goalkeeper. This option can also help the keepers in the younger age groups who might have a limited passing range. If the opposing winger follows defender 4 as shown in diagram 37, this will open up passing lanes to player 2 or 7 or to defensive midfielder 6.

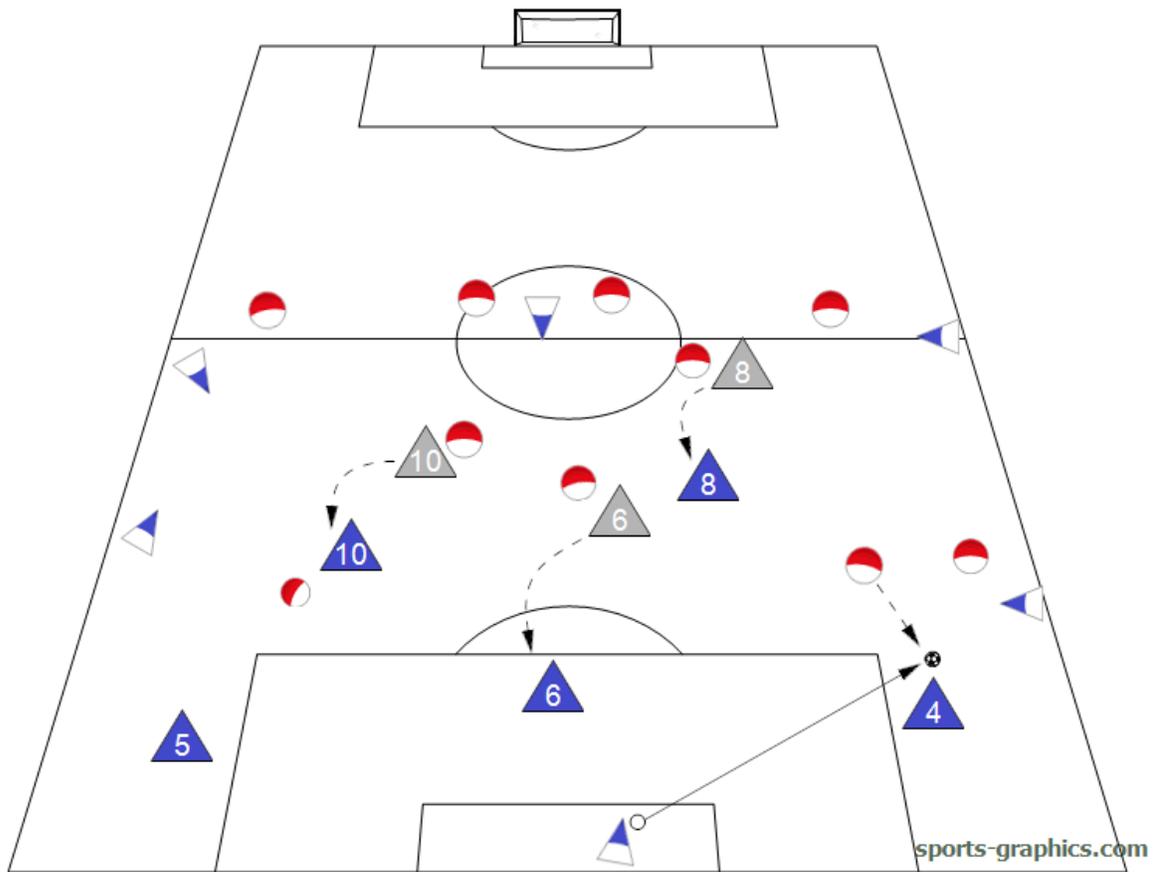


Diagram 38 Good Movement to Support the Goal Kick

When our defenders receive the ball from the keeper, the midfielders need to spread out and peel off opponents and open their bodies to the field. Defensive midfielder 6 has a crucial role to play in such moments. Diagram 38 shows what should happen when defender 4 gets the ball from the goalkeeper. Note how the defensive midfielder (player 6) peels off by moving away from his/her opponent and supporting the ball from a deep position between the two center backs. His/her body is open to the field so he/she can see everything. Note also that defender 5 stays on the left side and leaves the space between him/her and the defender 4 open, that player 6 can exploit. At the same time, the attacking midfielders 8 and 10 also peel off their opponents and adopt a sideways stance that allows them to see the field. It is crucial for the midfielders to spread and open their body so they can see each other and all the options open to them, should they get the ball.

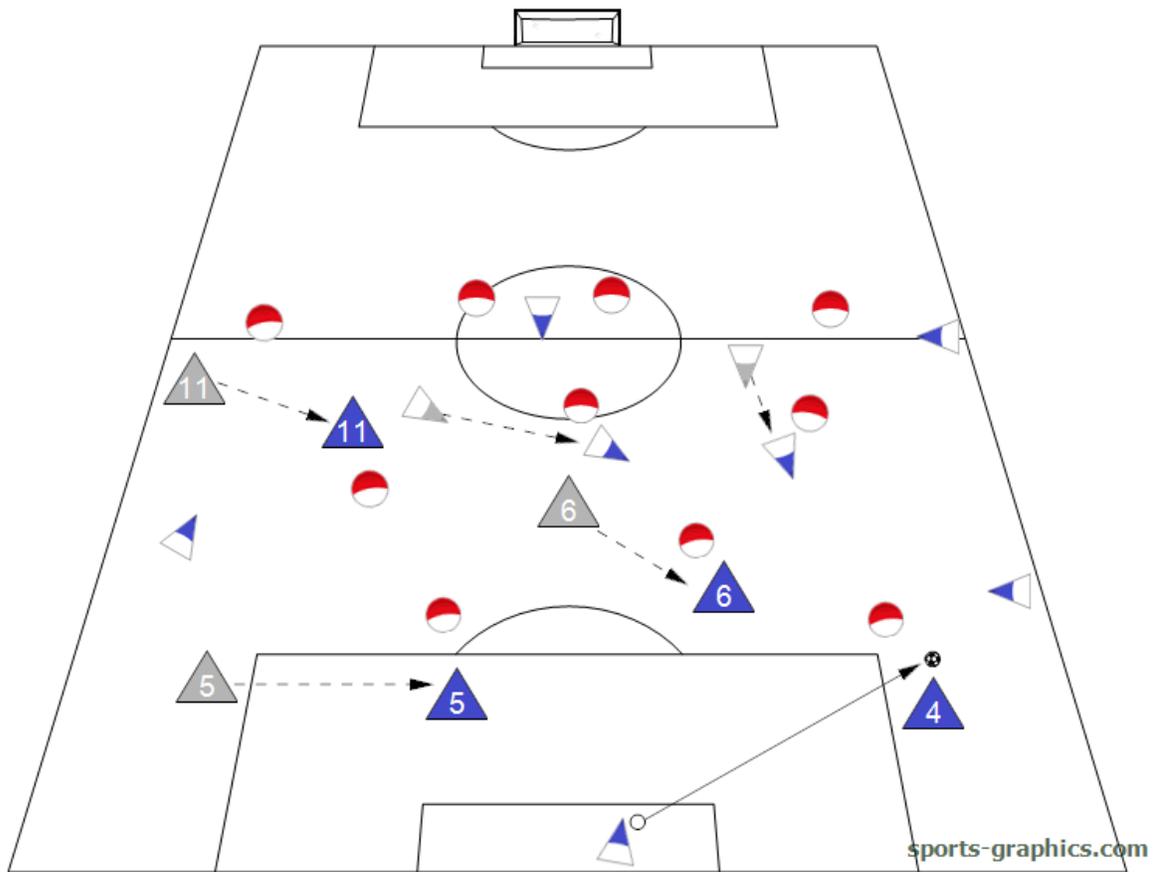


Diagram 39 Incorrect Movement to Support the Goal Kick

Diagram 39 shows what our players tend to do in such cases, namely ball watch and check toward the ball and congest the area and have no vision of the field. If the midfielders in diagram 39 get the ball, they will likely lose it because there is no space to control the ball and they do not know where their teammates are. Note also that defender 5 tends to move toward defender 4, thus closing the space between them and not leaving midfielder 6 any room to drop. Also, note how winger 11 moves inside toward the ball. All these movements condense the field and make it even more difficult for our players to pass the ball out of pressure.

It is important to note the difference between the movement in diagram 38 and diagram 39. In diagram 38, the peeling off movement of player 6 opens up the game and opens up the possibilities. In diagram 39, the checking runs of all the players toward the ball clogs up the game and closes the door to penetration.

Another trick our teams can use to build out from the back on goal kicks is to pretend that the goalkeeper is going to kick it long, have the back line push up in anticipation of a long punt, at the last minute have player 4 or 5 drop quickly, and receive a short pass from the keeper. At that moment, the rest of the team will have to immediately open up, spread, peel off opponents so the defender can find support easily, and build up.

THROW-INS

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.

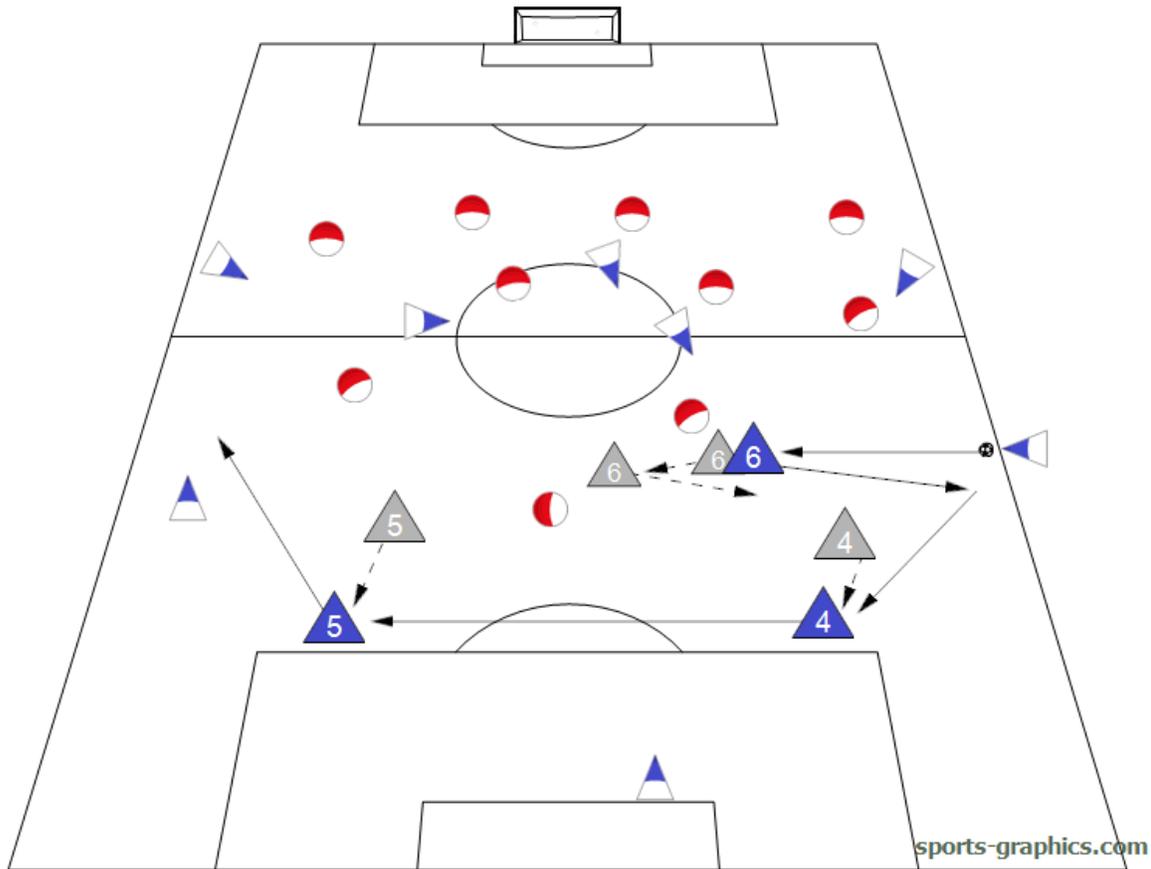


Diagram 40 Square Throw-In to set up a play across the Back

Diagram 40 shows what can be done on a throw-in. The defenders 4 and 5 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.

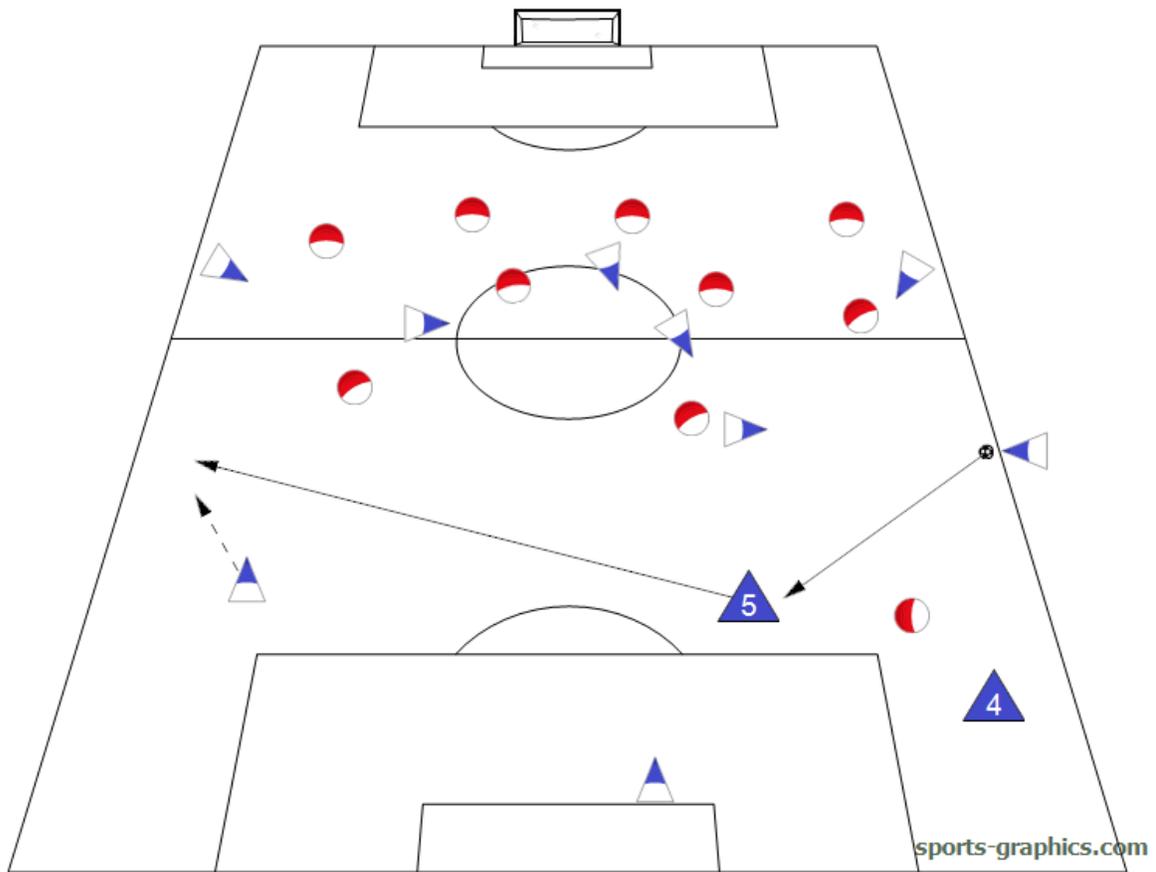


Diagram 41 Throw Back Deep to Switch the Point of Attack

Diagram 41 shows another option. If the opposing forward marks our player 4, the thrower can throw to player 5 who can then switch play.

Either way, every time we have a throw-in, the defenders should automatically drop back deep 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. The problem often is that our defenders do not drop enough and it is not safe to throw the ball to them. They need to develop a 'feel' for how deep to drop in order to receive a throw-in without coming under immediate pressure.

GENERAL NOTES ON THE BUILD UP PHASE

Avoid Deep and Flat Backline Playing Square Balls

One of the tendencies of our players, when asked to play out from the back, is to drop deep into their own half and make it difficult for themselves. Often, the entire back line is deep and flat and they start to play a sequence of square balls that eventually are pressured and turned over. The wingers try to help by dropping into the midfield, but that does not always help since tight marking opponents follow them and it is still difficult to get out. Diagram 42 shows what tends to happen when the back line is too deep and flat.

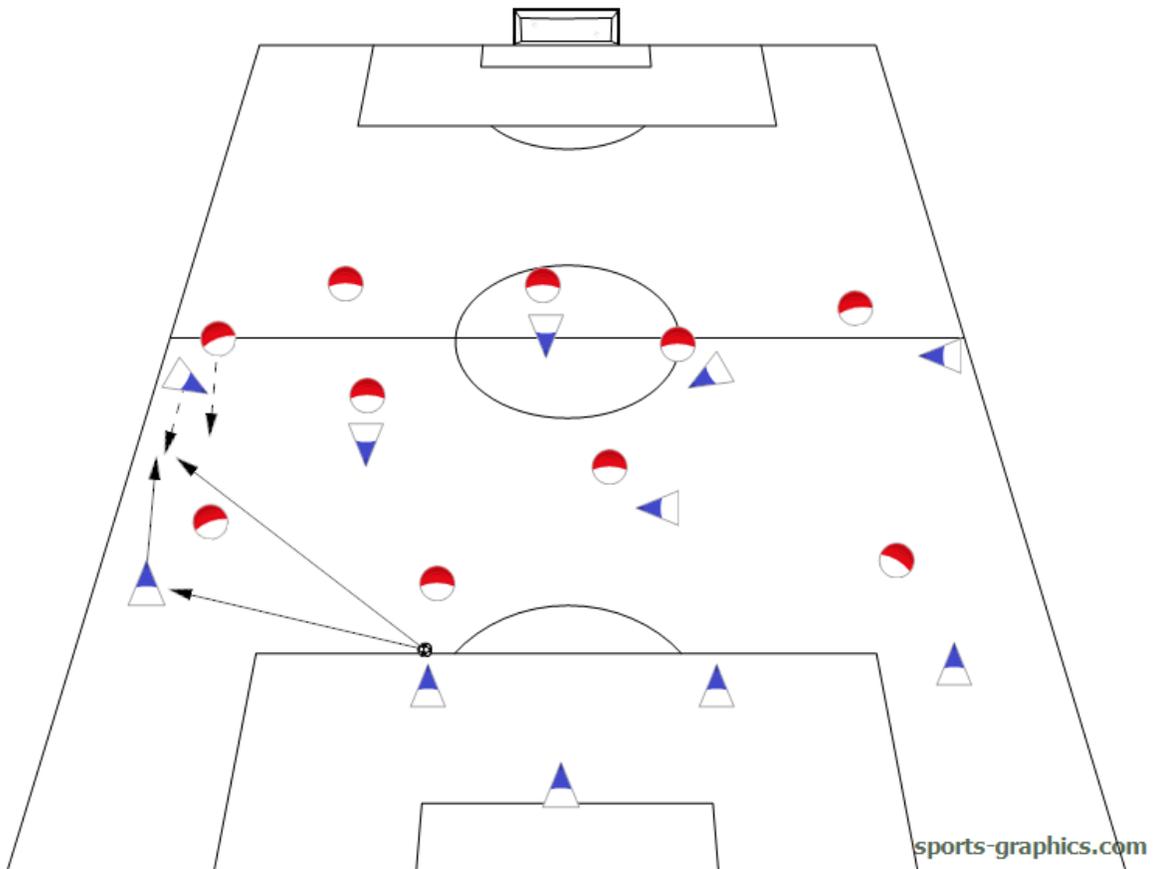


Diagram 42 Back Line is too Deep and Flat

Diagram 43 on the next page shows a better way to break pressure by finding a central midfielder who can then play a pass wide to an overlapping defender, while the winger pushes up to create space for the overlapping number 3. Now defender 3 has the ball higher up the field closer to the front line and can combine with the forwards to continue the penetration.

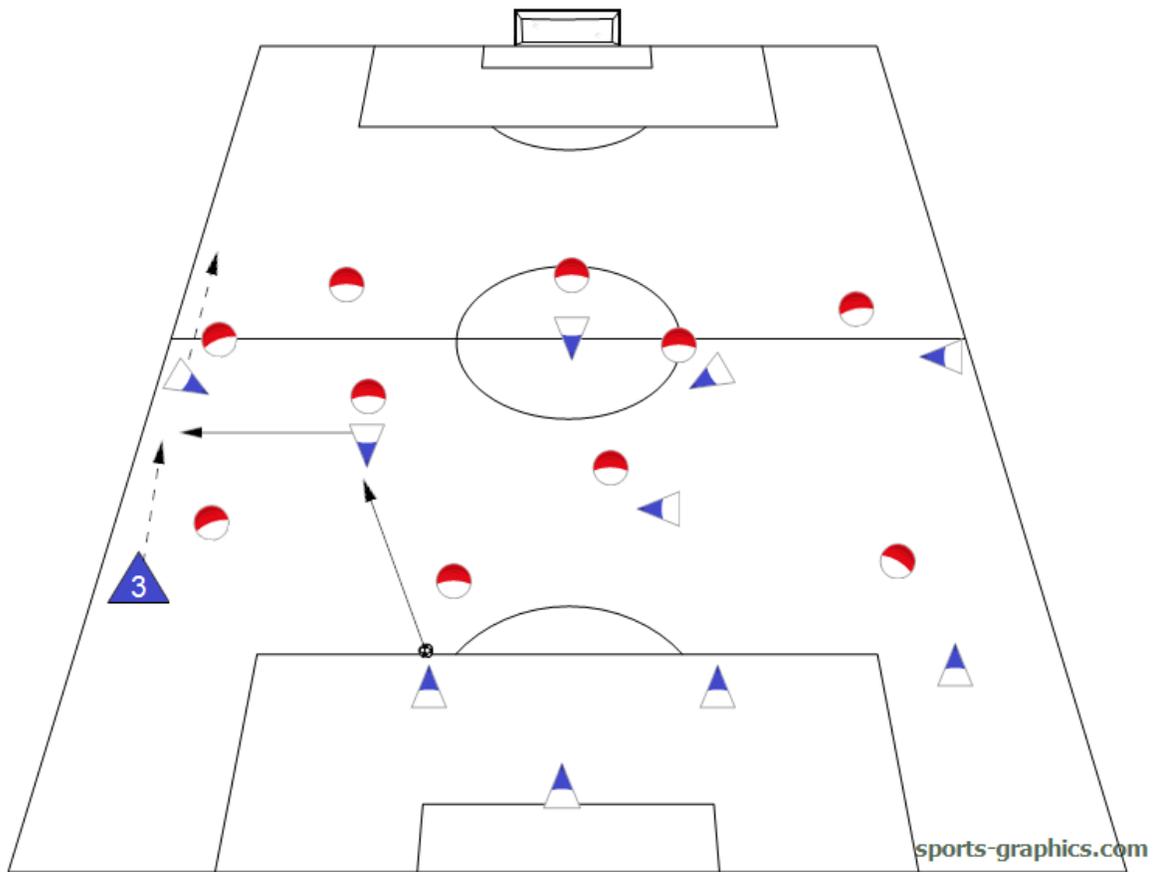


Diagram 43 Draw Inside - Play Outside

We need to avoid playing too many square balls across the back line in front of our own goal. The best way to do that is by pushing up when our keeper has the ball or on our goal kicks. This also creates space behind our back line that they can use to drop into when our midfielders are under pressure. If our back line's starting point is too deep, they have no more space to drop into and play is now taking place in or around our own penalty area.

Numbers in Midfield

Another potential problem is the numbers game in midfield. If we play with 3 midfielders and the other team plays 1-4-4-2 and their four midfielders are smothering our three, we need our wide backs 2 and 3 to step into midfield to provide the extra player and redress the balance in our favor. In addition, there are times when our central defender 4 or 5 has the ball without any pressure. If our midfielders are all marked, defender 4 or 5 can dribble into midfield to create numbers up or 2v1 situations in our favor.

One way or another, we have to create enough numbers in midfield to maintain possession and build through the midfield or else our players will revert to the dangerous square balls across the back line that we are trying to avoid. The way to create numbers up in midfield is through players 2 and 3

overlapping (most desirable option), defenders 4 or 5 dribbling into midfield (if safe to do), or wingers 7 and 11 dropping into wide midfield areas (least desirable but acceptable in certain situations).

Avoid a Predictable Counter-attack and 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 does not mean that we never counterattack quickly. If the quick counterattack is on then we should take advantage of the moment. However, 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.

Our players are guilty of attacking naïvely when winning the ball by playing long balls to a center forward who is running into space behind the opponent's back line. Such runs and passes are vertical and predictable and are usually intercepted. Even if our forward wins the ball, he/she is isolated in a one versus three or four and eventually loses it.

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 1-4-3-3 shape with the wingers out wide and high, center forward central and high, back line spread deep and the three 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.

PENETRATION PHASE

MIDDLE THIRD - THE LAUNCHING PAD FOR PENETRATION

Our players rely too much on achieving penetration into the attacking third with long passes directly from the back line. Although there are times when this direct method makes sense, such as when the other team is off-balance or when the other team is pressing high, **the State Select and Region Teams need to focus on improving the weak part of our game, namely penetrating by playing through the lines.** Our players need to learn how to attack with patience, using the whole width of the field and being less predictable. Our players need to be comfortable switching the point of attack multiple times in the same possession. Our players must become comfortable possessing the ball in the middle third and using the middle third as a launching pad for penetration into the attacking third.

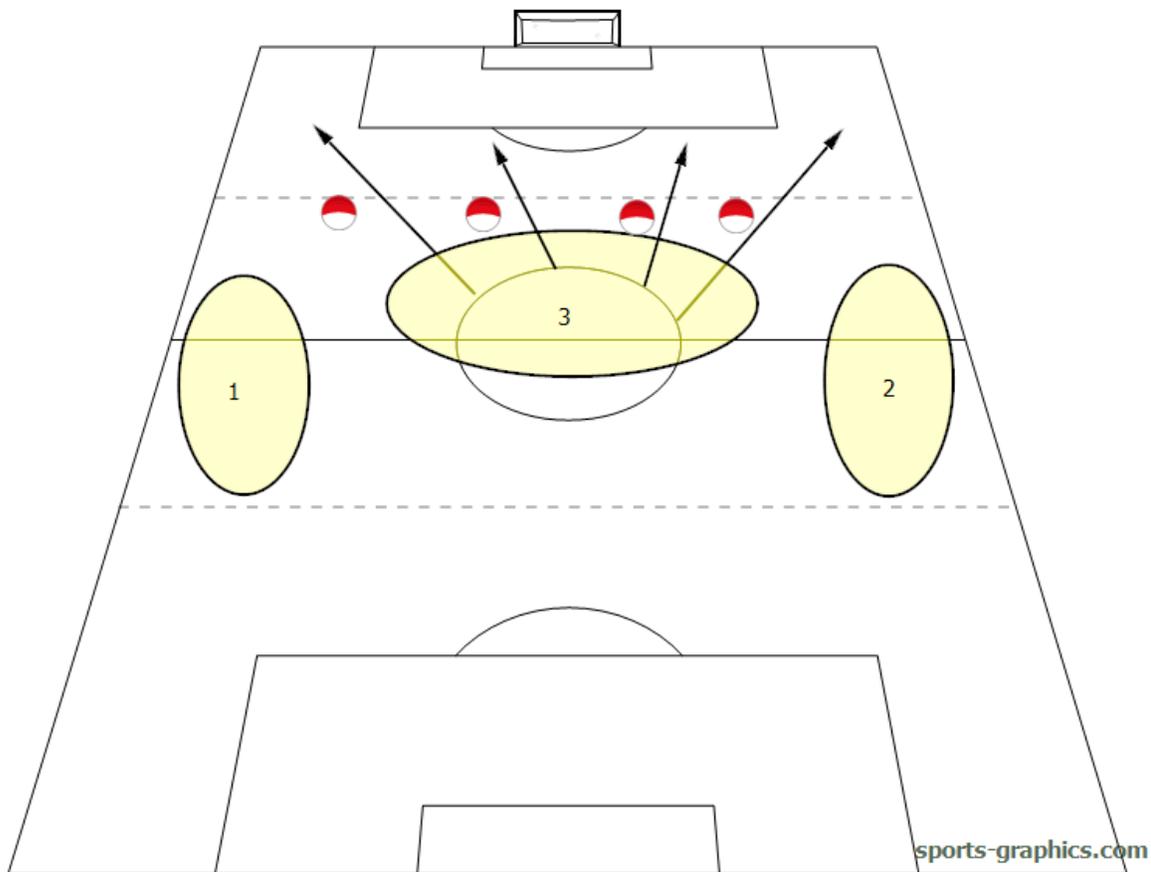


Diagram 44 Launching Pads for Penetration

Teams that are able to work consistently the ball into the central area, denoted as area 3 above in diagram 44, where the attacking midfielders and center forward are usually operating, can be very dangerous. From area 3, an attacker can thread a quick through ball into space behind the back line or combine with teammates to penetrate and shoot. **The advantage of a formation with three forwards is that the wingers are stretching the back line, making it easier to deliver a 'killer pass' from area 3 into space behind the defense.**

Good teams work hard to deny penetration into area 3 and mark players tightly in this area. Quite often, the attacking team will be forced to relieve pressure by playing the ball into the wide areas denoted as 1 and 2 in diagram 44.

Since there is typically more time and space to hold the ball in areas 1 and 2, the ball does tend to find its way into these wide areas frequently, where a team can hold it long enough to regroup and launch another attack. This means that possession in the middle third often involves areas 1 and 2, with many attacks originating from these flank areas. **Therefore, the implication for US Youth Soccer ODP coaches is that it is worthwhile to rehearse attacking patterns that originate from areas 1 and 2 and to create functional activities in areas 1, 2 and 3.**

METHODOLOGY

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

1. FIX TEAM SHAPE

First, look at the team shape when in possession and fix it if the shape is wrong. The team shape when in possession in the middle third should make the field big, with width and depth. The wingers are wide on the sidelines and the forward is as high as possible. The three midfielders are spread apart and not bunched up. 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.

2. FIX OFF-THE-BALL MOVEMENTS

If the team shape is right, observe and fix the movements off-the-ball. Who is making space for himself/herself? 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. Are the movements correct for the situation? Fix these off-the-ball movements if need be.

3. FIX DECISIONS ON THE BALL

Lastly, 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/she look at all options and choose the best one?

This approach is helpful, especially when dealing with large groups and the speed of play is high. The fluidity of the session can cause coaches to go on tangents and fix minor things while the big picture issues are not properly addressed.

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The following four Key Learning Objectives for the Penetration into the Attacking Third phase have been identified as most crucial for US Youth Soccer ODP state and region training:

10. Peeling off opponents: Absolutely the first thing our players need to be taught is how to step away from a defender and create space for oneself to receive the ball and face up.

11. Bending runs and dummy runs: Our players need to learn to bend their runs to create better passing lanes. A lateral start to the run will also prevent offside. In addition, dummy runs that pull defenders away and quick sprints behind them need to become part of the repertoire.

12. Interchanging runs – center forward and attacking midfielders: The center forward and attacking midfielders need to learn how to interchange and create space for each other to make penetration runs.

13. Interchanging runs – wingers and overlapping full backs: The fullbacks need to learn how and when to overlap and the wingers need to learn how to create space for the overlapping fullbacks.

The following pages provide more details on each of these 4 Key Learning Objectives.

PEELING OFF OPPONENTS

Once the team shape is correct, we can address player movements. **However, before we deal with the actual runs, we need to teach our players how to peel off opponents and make space for themselves.** This is explained more thoroughly in the previous chapter (please refer to pages 13-14). **Peeling off and opening the body to see the field and receive the ball facing up field should be the first thing we teach our players before anything else.**

BENDING RUNS

Sometimes, the peeling off movement described above can be the start of a bending run. Center forwards are the most likely to use bending runs. It starts with a lateral peeling off run combined with pivoting the body into a sideways stance (D. 45). If the flat peeling off run creates the angle or space for a through ball, it can be immediately turned into a forward sprint onto a through ball. It needs to be timed to avoid offside. A couple of examples are shown below. The center forward is tightly marked with his/her back to goal and starts a flat peeling off run away from the ball and turns his/her body sideways, pulling a defender with him/her and opening up a passing lane for a through ball (D. 46). The through ball can be straight or bent, depending on the positioning of players and amount of space behind the defender.

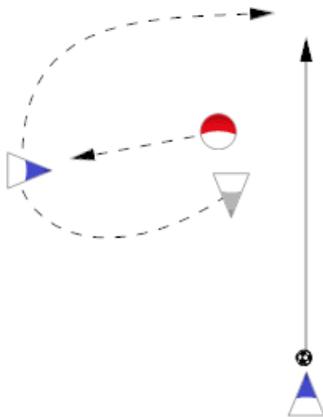


Diagram 45 Passer is a Midfielder

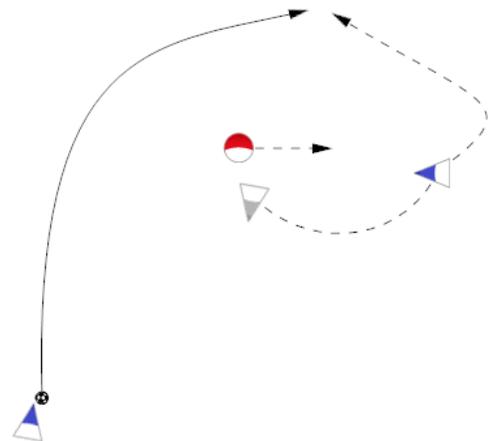


Diagram 46 Passer is a Midfielder, a Winger or a Wide Back

Another scenario that requires bending runs is the transition from defense to attack. When our players win the ball, their tendency is to counterattack immediately, using vertical, narrow and predictable runs. Our attackers need to learn to bend their counterattacking runs in order to spread the opponents' defense and create more gaps for a forward pass.

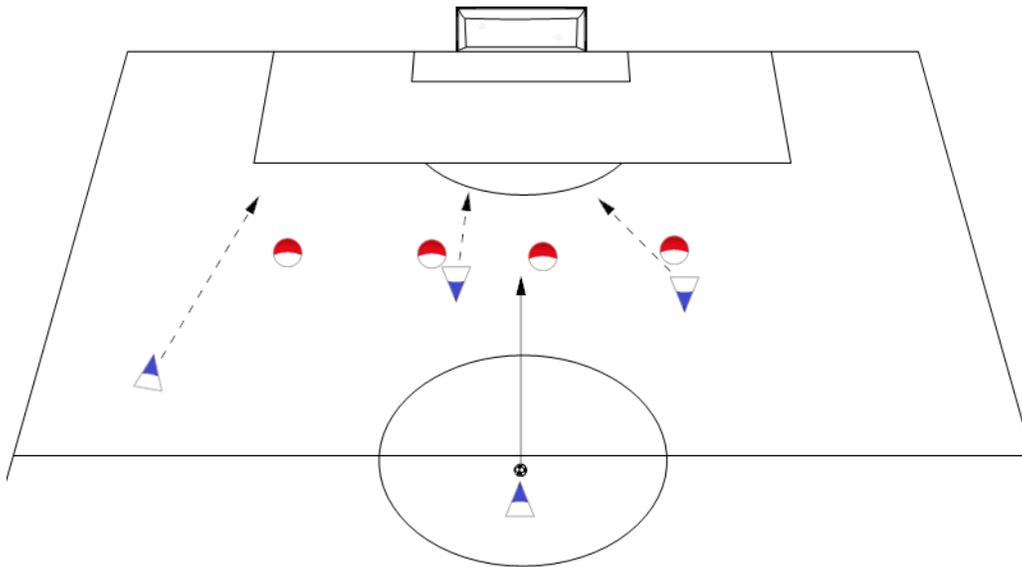


Diagram 47 Off to the Races – Wrong

Diagram 47 above shows what our forwards tend to do: run away from the ball in a straight line, expecting a pass into space. This type of movement is easy to defend against and invariably the opponents intercept the ball. Diagram 48 shows how bending their run makes our forwards more difficult to mark, widens the game, opens up passing lanes, and gives our attackers a better chance for penetration on the counter. Note the center forward peeling off and opening the body while the wingers bend their run to provide width and spread the opponents' defense.

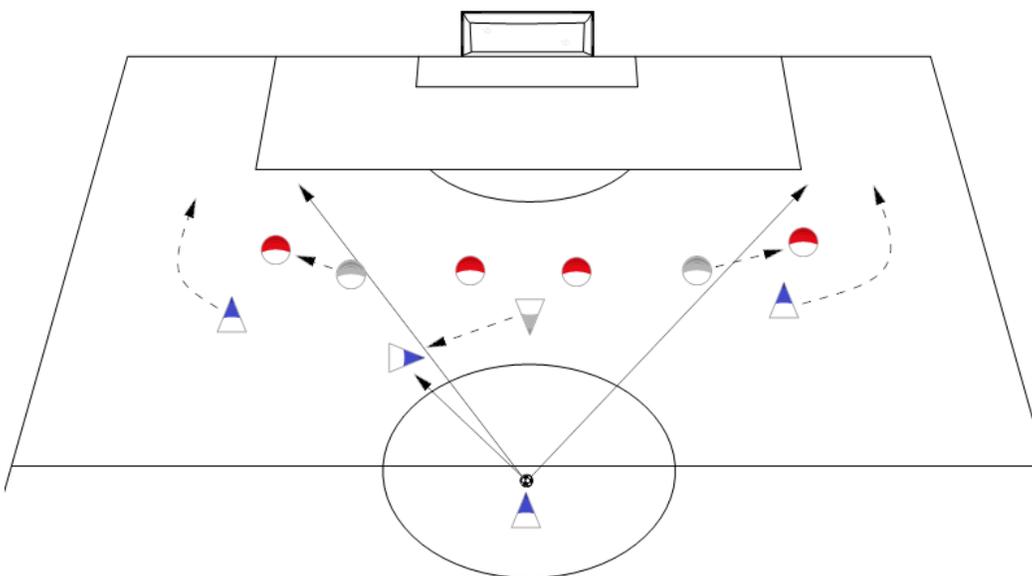


Diagram 48 Bending Runs Open up the Game – Right

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/her for a through ball. In diagram 49 below, the winger peels off and if the defender follows him/her, the winger sprints behind him/her to receive an angled pass. In diagram 50, 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 offside since their penetration run starts from a deep position.

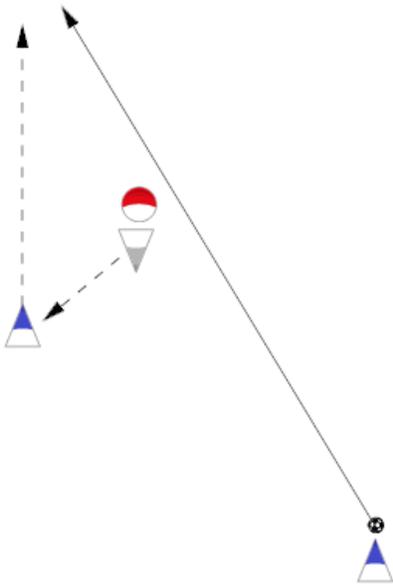


Diagram 50 Winger Drops Off to Bait Defender

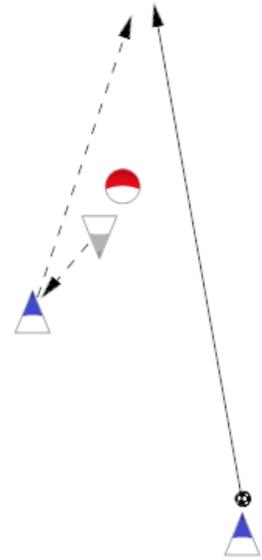


Diagram 49 Center Forward Drops Off to Bait Defender

INTERCHANGING RUNS

Our players have to 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. Two of the most important relationships for interchanging runs to achieve penetration are: 1) those between the center forward and the attacking midfielders; and 2) between the winger and the wide back.

INTERCHANGING BETWEEN CENTER FORWARD AND ATTACKING MIDFIELDERS

The two key features of the relationship between the attacking midfielders and the forward are:

1. Relationship between the two attacking midfielders: The two attacking midfielders 8 and 10 should stagger and distance themselves from each other in a way that one of them is higher and the other is lower. At the same time, one of them should be more to the left while the other one more to the right. This relationship prevents them from getting too close to each other or duplicating each other's positions and movement. They need to constantly look at each other's location and adjust accordingly but in a way, that keeps them both available for a pass. If one checks toward the ball, the other one moves away. If one moves away, the other one moves closer to the ball.

2. Relationship between the attacking midfielders and the center forward: At least one of the attacking midfielders should be close enough to the center forward 9 so that if the forward receives a pass, he/she can have immediate support from the midfielder. In addition, 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 diagrams 51, 52, and 53 on the following pages, different scenarios highlight the way the attacking midfielders and center forward (players 8, 10, and 9) can interchange positions to create penetration.

In all these scenarios, the key point is that players 8 and 10 have peeled off and opened their bodies to see the whole field. This allows them to see when and where they can make penetration runs.

In these examples of interchanging runs between players 8, 10, and 9, the run into space behind the back line needs to be timed to avoid offside. 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.

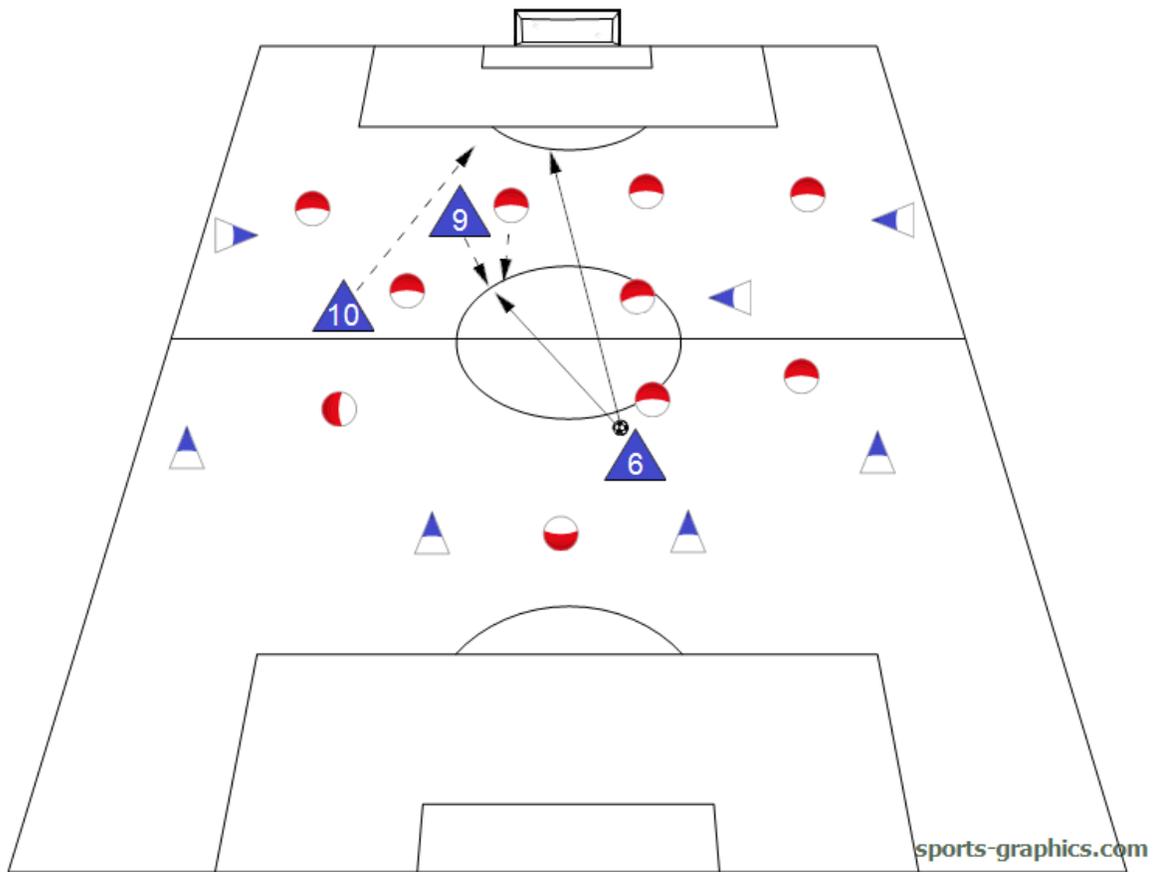


Diagram 51 Interchanging Run Creates Space for Penetration – Central Attacking Third

DIAGRAM 51:

THE DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDER HAS THE BALL, PLAYERS 9 AND 10 INTERCHANGE POSITIONS SO THAT MIDFIELDER 6 CAN PLAY TO 9 OR PLAY A THROUGH BALL FOR 10.

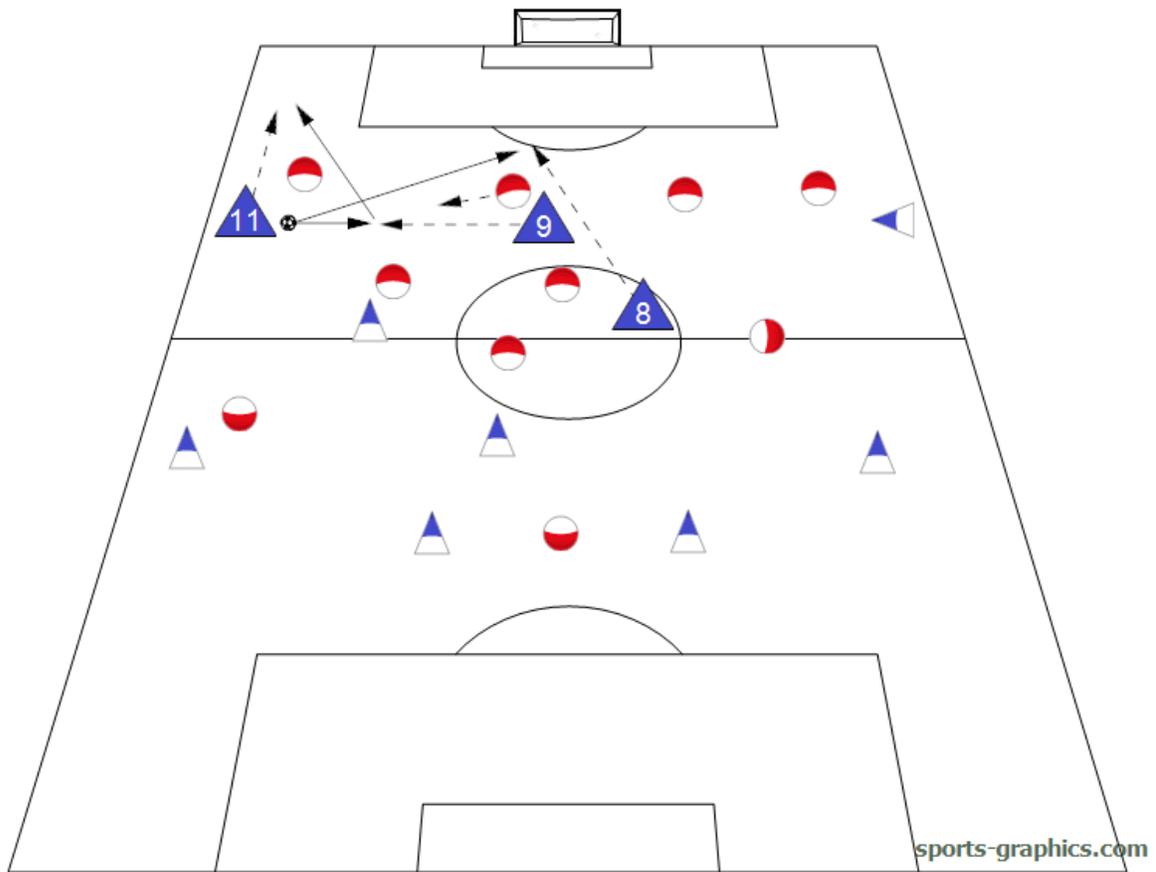


Diagram 52 Interchanging Run Creates Space for Penetration – Flank Attacking Third

DIAGRAM 52:

WINGER 11 HAS THE BALL; FORWARD 9 CHECKS TO THE BALL, MIDFIELDER 8 RUNS INTO SPACE, NOW THE WINGER CAN WALL PASS WITH 9 OR PLAY A THROUGH BALL FOR 8.

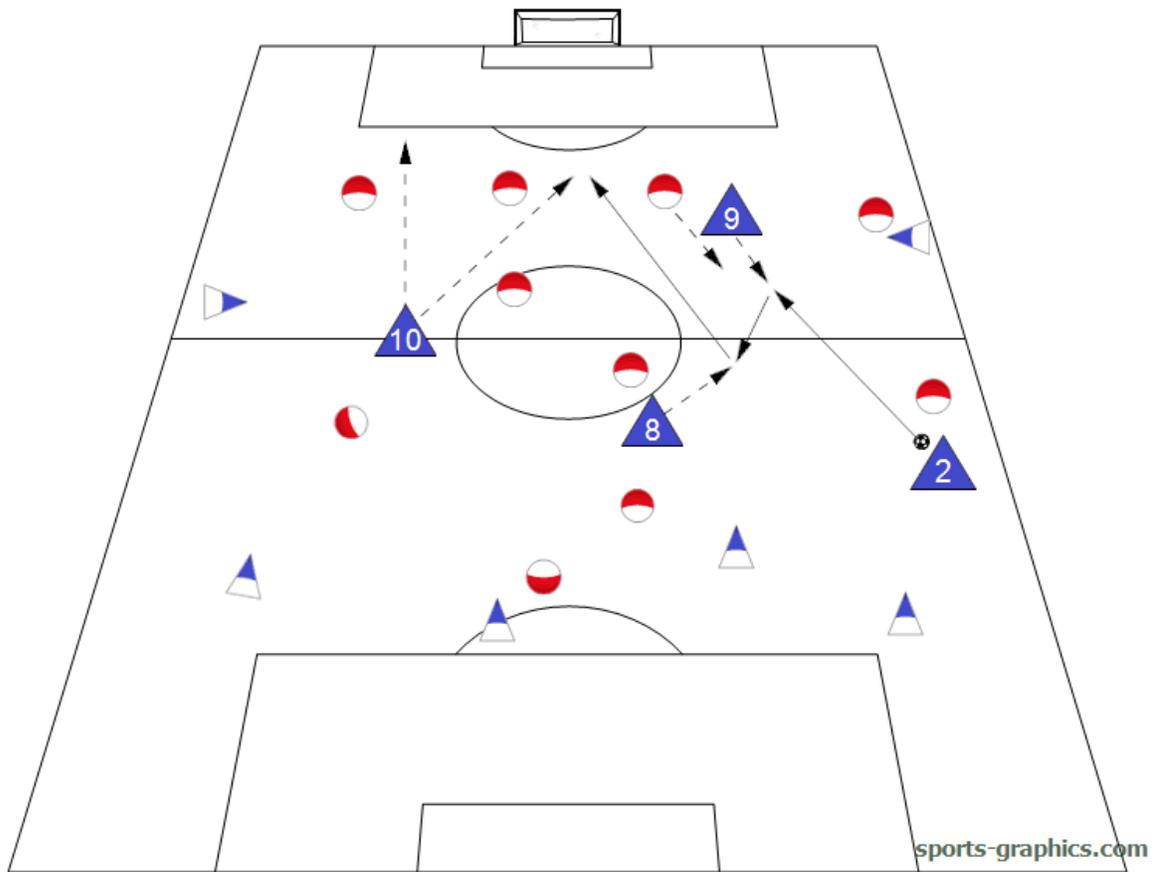


Diagram 53 Interchanging Run Creates Space for Penetration - Flank Midfield Third

DIAGRAM 53:

FULLBACK 2 HAS THE BALL, FORWARD 9 CHECKS TO AND PLAYS IT BACK TO SUPPORTING MIDFIELDER 8. MIDFIELDER 10 MAKES A RUN AND THEN MIDFIELDER 8 PLAYS THROUGH BALL FOR 10.

INTERCHANGING BETWEEN WINGER AND OVERLAPPING FULLBACK

For fullbacks 2 and 3 to make overlapping runs on the flanks, they need to be close enough to the winger to maintain the element of surprise. The overlapping run should start from a distance of no more than 25 yards behind the winger.

There are two scenarios that need to be considered: 1) when the winger has possession of the ball; and 2) when the winger does not have the ball.

Winger Has the Ball

Diagram 54 below shows that winger 7 has possession and starts a dribbling run inside, dragging his/her opponent inside. Fullback 2 overlaps on the flank. Winger 7 stops his/her dribble and makes a reverse pass to fullback 2 to achieve penetration down the flank. The winger can also pass the ball to the center forward or a midfielder who in turn will pass the ball to the overlapping fullback.

Winger Does Not Have the Ball

Diagram 55 shows that attacking midfielder 8 has the ball and winger 7 runs inside to create space for the fullback to overlap and receive a pass. This interchange can be done when any of the midfielders has the ball or even if a defender has the ball and the ability to play a long accurate pass to an overlapping fullback.

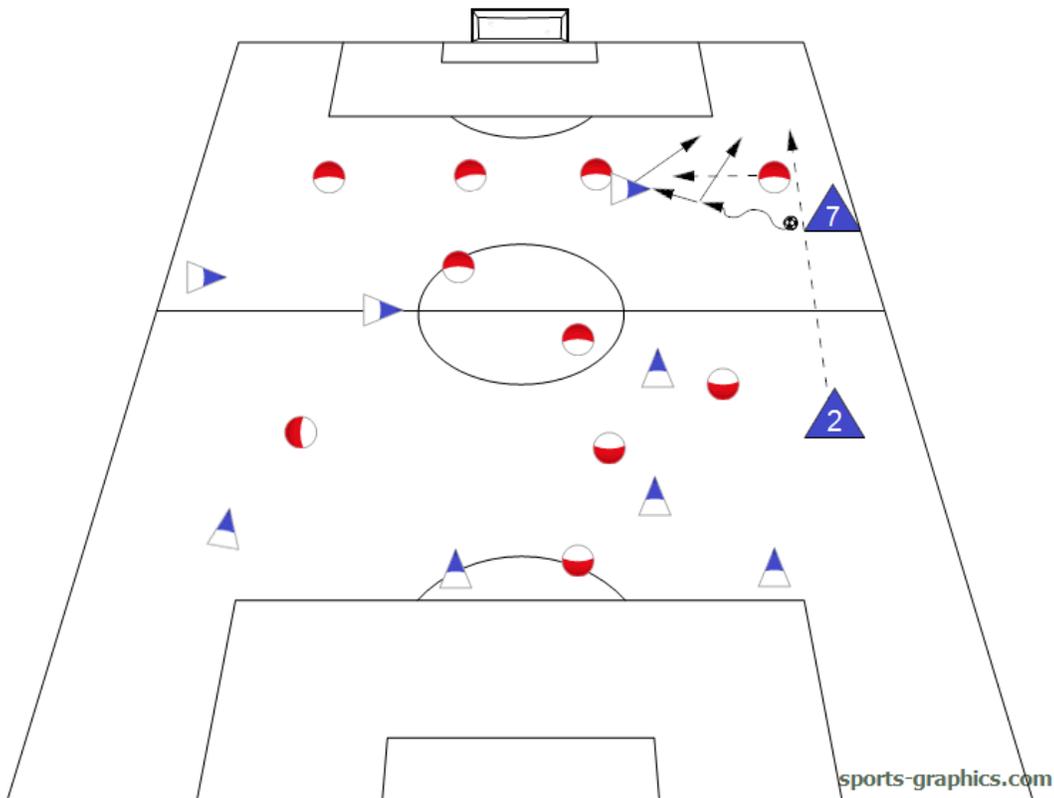


Diagram 54 Interchanging Run Creates Space for Penetration on the Wing

DIAGRAM 54:

WINGER DRIBBLES INSIDE.
FULLBACK OVERLAPS AND GETS THE PASS FOR PENETRATION.

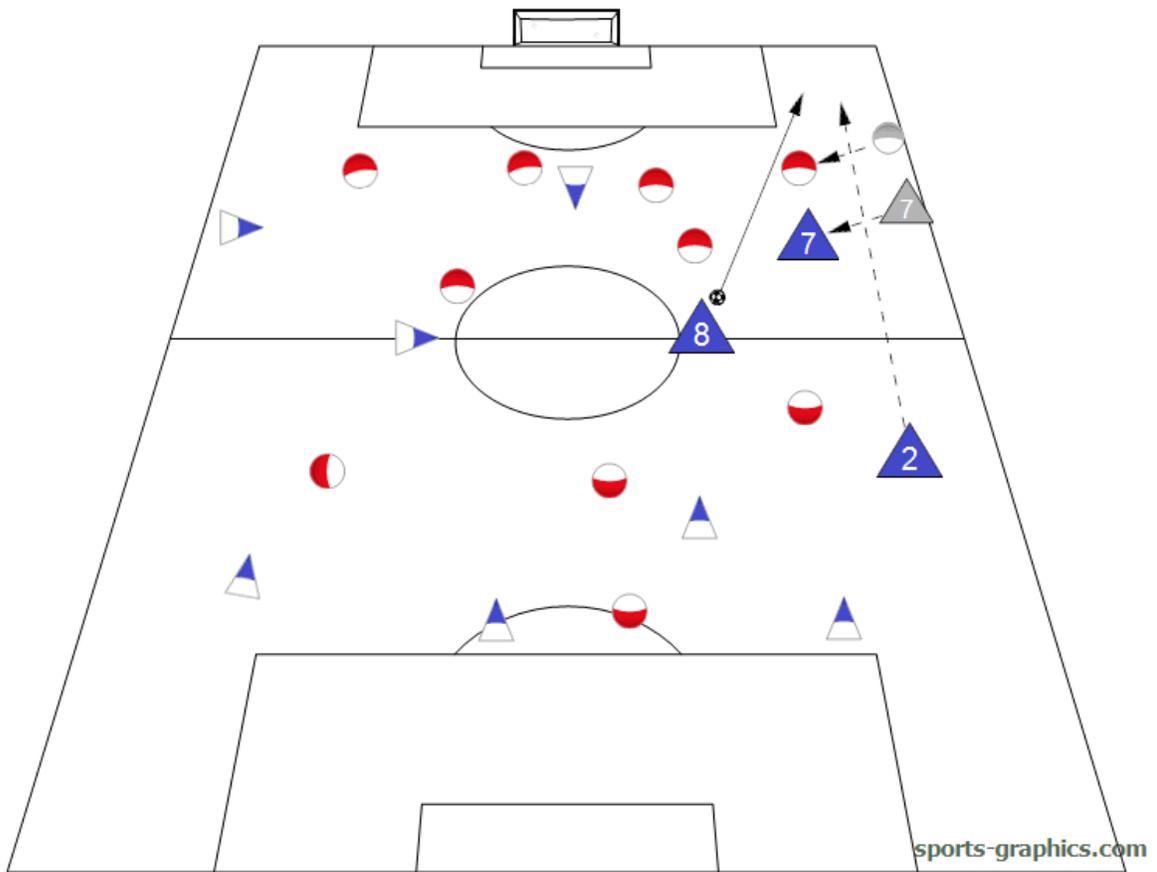


Diagram 55 Interchanging Run Creates Space for Penetration via an Overlap

DIAGRAM 55:

ATTACKING MIDFIELDER 8 HAS POSSESSION.
 WINGER RUNS INSIDE TO CREATE SPACE AND FULLBACK OVERLAPS AND GETS THE THROUGH
 PASS.

GENERAL NOTES ON THE PENETRATION PHASE

CENTER FORWARD RUNS

The center forward will have to 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 put them offside, 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 channel defined by the width of the penalty area and leave the flanks for the wingers and overlapping fullbacks. 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.

WINGERS ATTACKING CROSSES

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

ANGLED BALLS INTO FLANK RUNS

As mentioned before, the advantage of playing with true wingers is that the three front players 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 wingers can be. This is another reason why we need our wingers to stay wide during the build-up and stretch the opponents' back line.

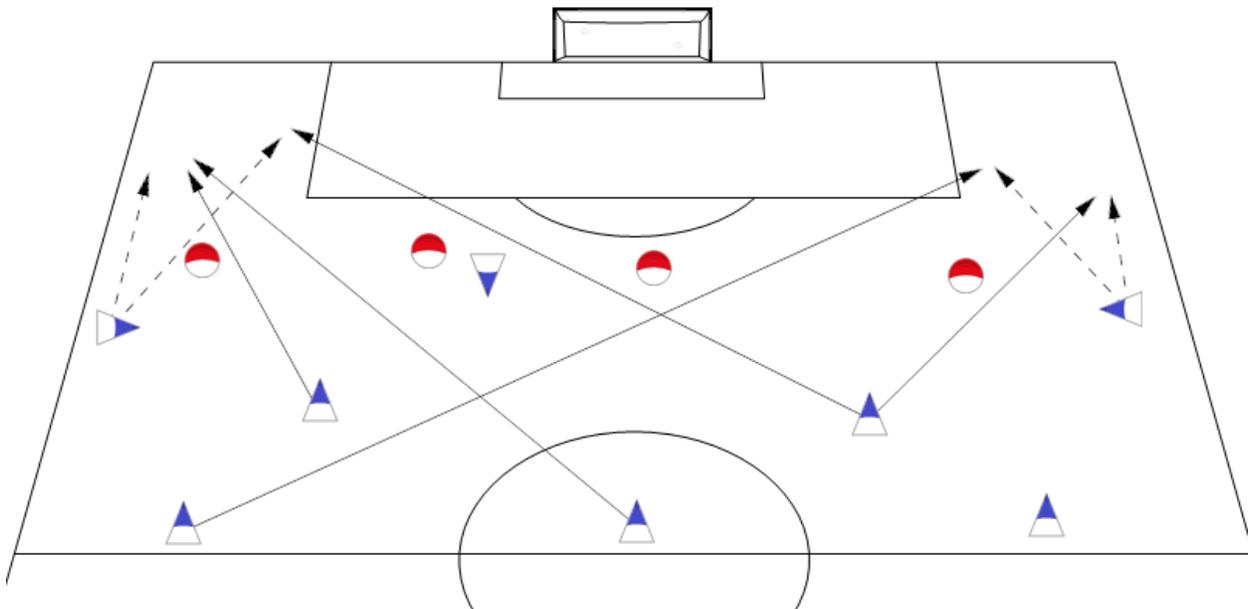


Diagram 56 Angled Passes into the Attacking Third offer Options

ANGLED PASSES ARE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN 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'. Diagram 57 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 11 who tries to turn and dribble down the flank. Another example shows player 2 getting the ball and playing to player 7 who plays to 9 down the line. It is easy for opponents to squeeze space and outnumber our players when there is no element of surprise nor any variations.

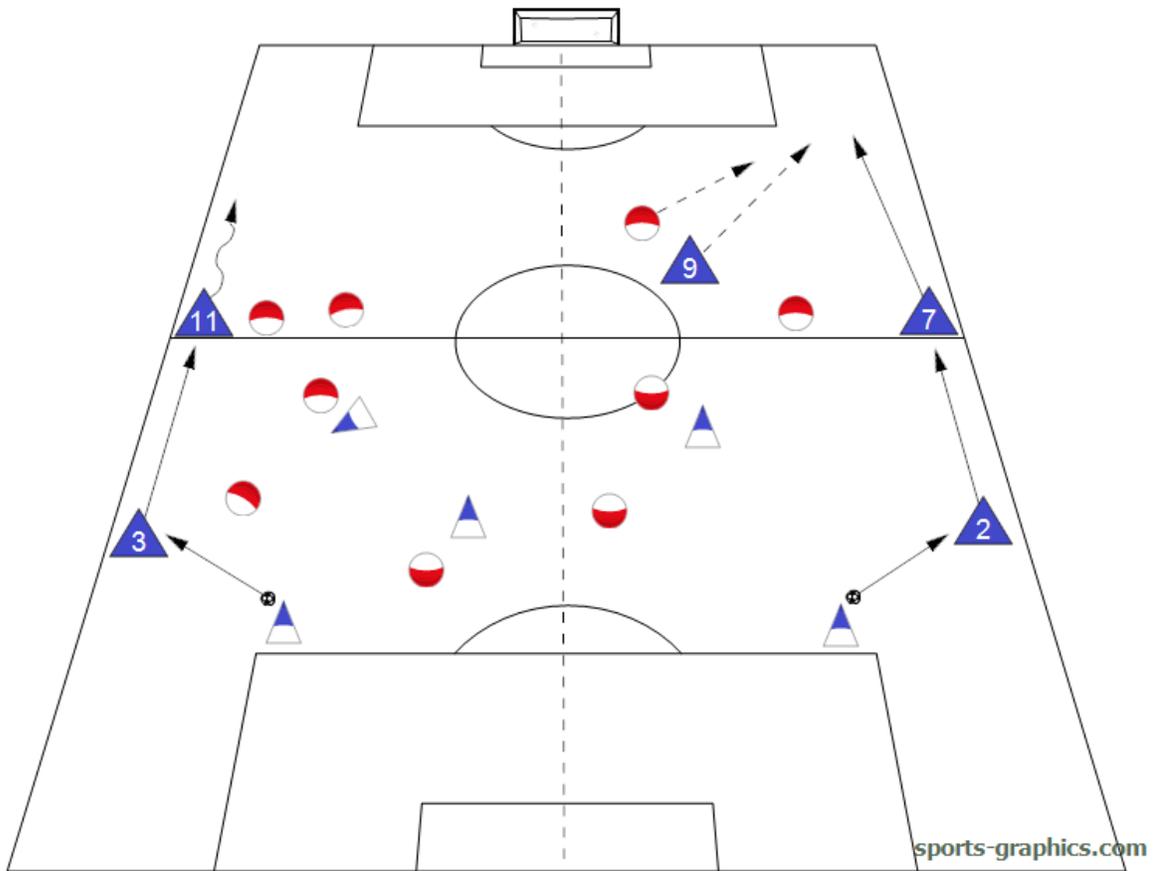


Diagram 57 Too Predictable

Diagram 58 on the next page shows a 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 does not stay long in the same zone, making it difficult for opponents to swarm the area around the ball. In addition, the wingers are receiving the ball with their bodies open to the field.

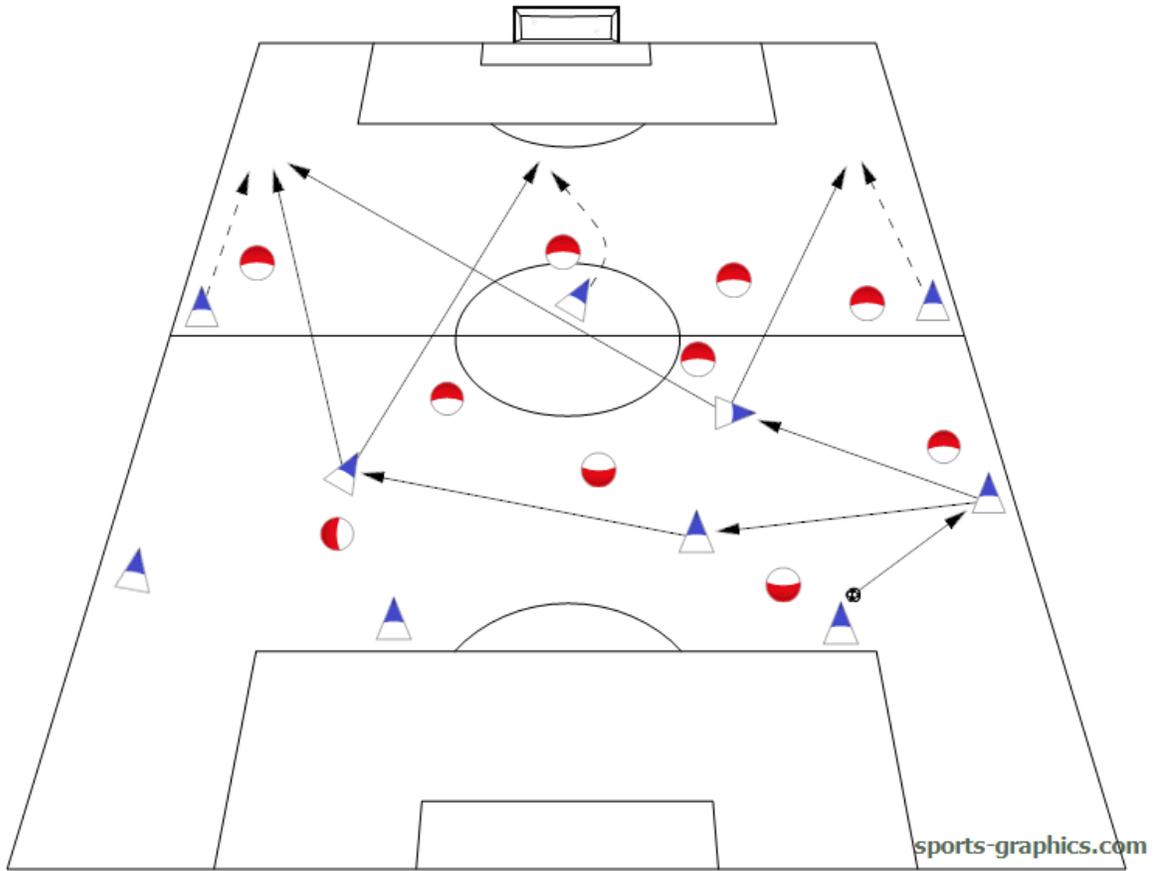


Diagram 58 Better Ball Circulation

APPENDIX A

PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

This appendix contains the recommended activities to be used by state and region staff at US Youth Soccer ODP training and events. It must be emphasized that the process should start at the state level in order to ingrain the right habits into our players. The activities shown here should be applied at State Select Team training as well as at Region Trials, the hold over camp and Region Teams events. The appendix is continuously revised to add activities as we monitor the progress made and analyze the effectiveness of the curriculum.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: PEELING OFF DEFENDER

USING WARM UP ACTIVITIES TO INGRAIN THE PEELING OFF MOVEMENT

As emphasized earlier in the manual, US Youth Soccer ODP sessions have to be efficient. It means utilizing the warm-up to ingrain good habits and addressing the Key Learning Objectives (P. 12 & P. 53) in addition to technical preparation.

WARM UP 1: PEELING OFF PASSIVE DEFENDER

In the example of a warm-up below (D. 59), divide the pool 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 in Diagrams 4 and 5 on page 14). 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.

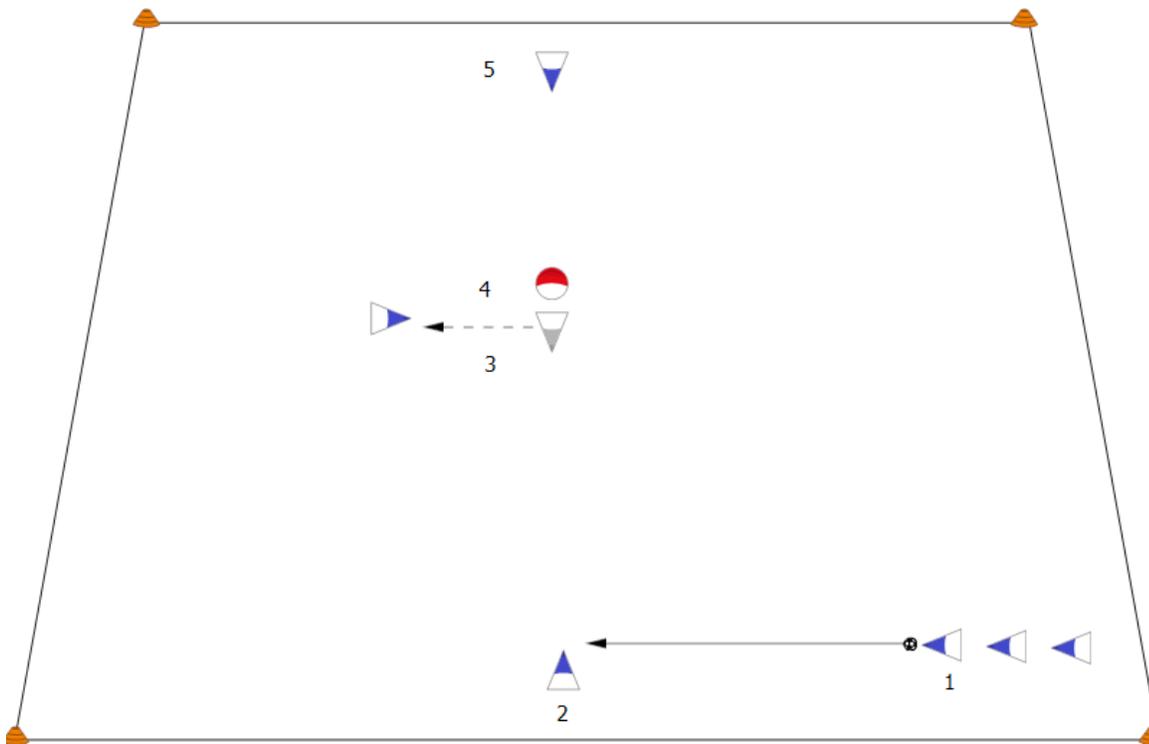


Diagram 59 Peeling off Passive Defender

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 the 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 diagram 60.

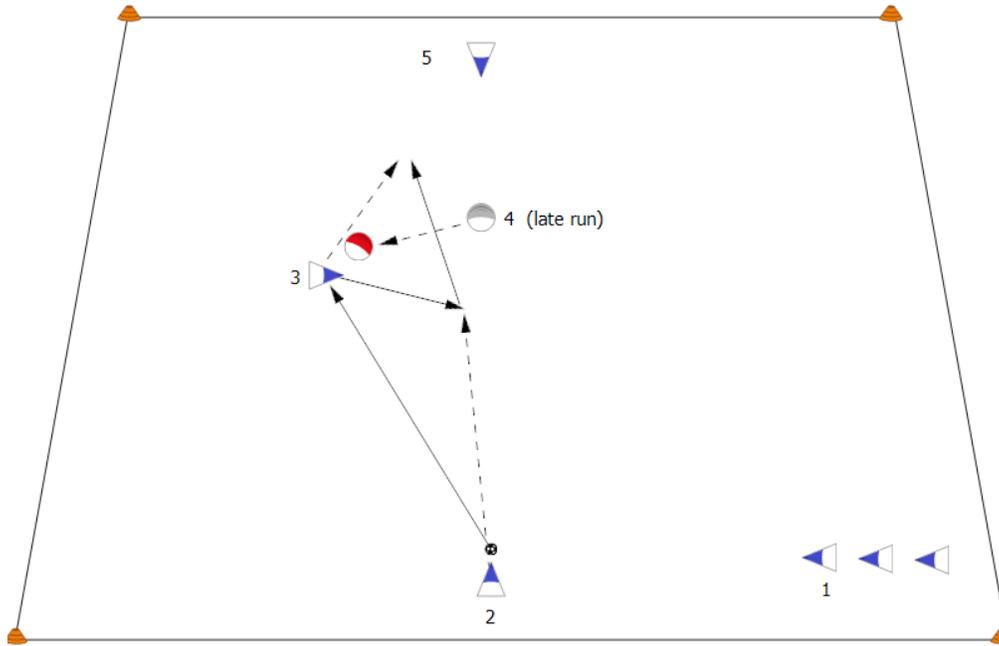


Diagram 60 Peeling off Passive Defender – Combo

Another progression is shown on page 69 in diagram 61. 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.

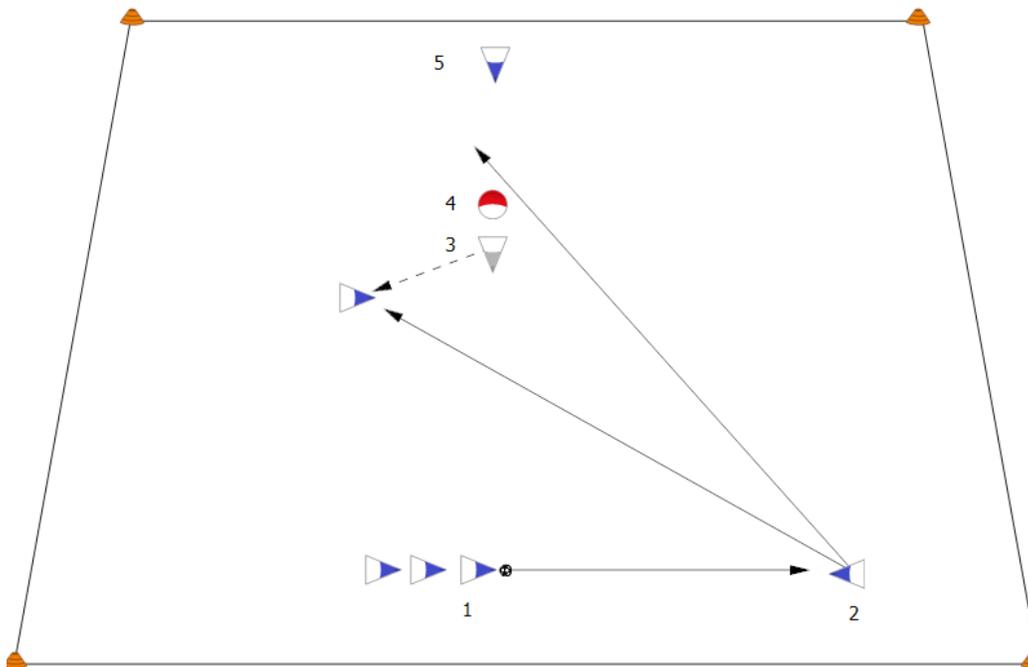


Diagram 61 Peeling off Passive Defender – Reverse

WARM UP 2: PEELING OFF AND BENDING RUNS

Arrange groups of 8-10 players. The grid size 8 yards wide by 10-15 long. The distance from player 1 to 2 is around 10-15 yards. Player 1 starts with a dribbling touch forward which is the cue for player 2 to make a peeling off run as shown in diagram 62. 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 front foot, dribbles to the other end of the grid, 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 a counter clockwise direction after a while.

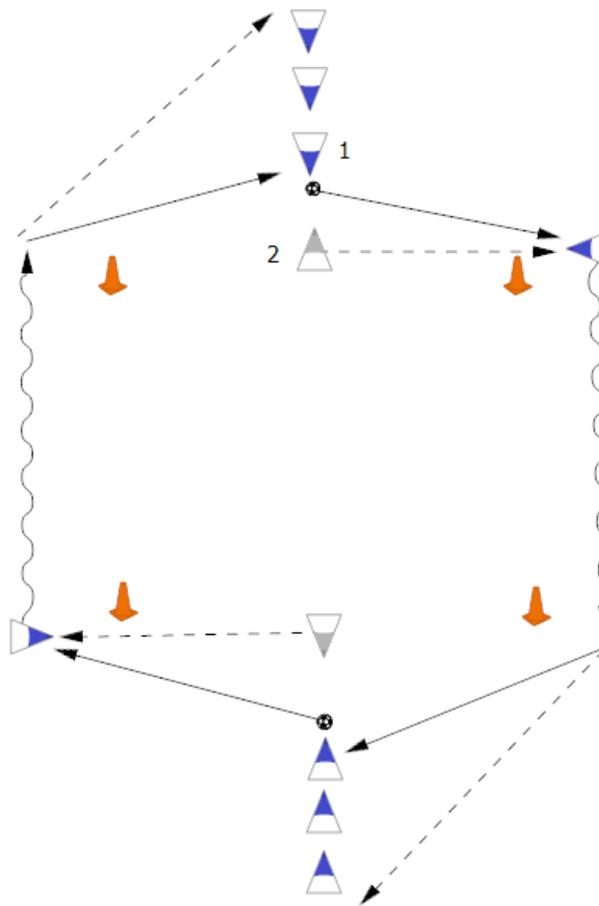


Diagram 62 Peel off and Dribble

The progressions are shown in diagram 63. 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.

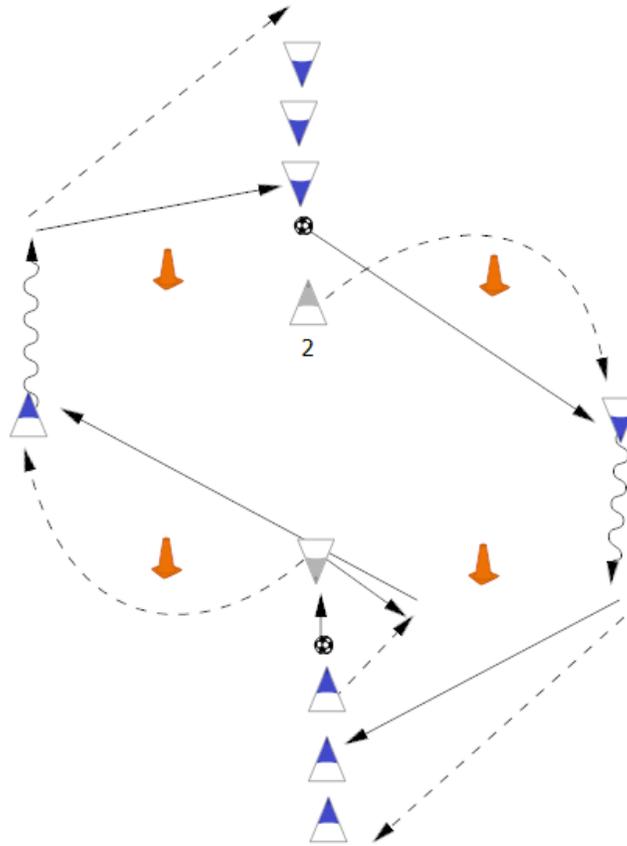


Diagram 63 Peel off with a Bending Run

WARM UP 3: POSITION SPECIFIC PEELING OFF AND DIAGONAL BALLS

Groups of 9 spread out in the middle third of a full size field as shown below. The numbering system indicates the player positions in the 1-4-3-3. 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 11 by adding a second player to some of the positions. Another group can do the same, but using positions 2 and 7 (right back and right winger) and going the opposite way. The emphasis is on playing diagonal balls. Other coaching points: player 6 peels off and faces up field. Player 8/9/10 peel off and adopt a sideways-on stance. Player 11 makes a checking run first and then sprints up the flank for a through ball. The diagonal ball from fullback 3 to peeling off 8/9/10 is one of the key passes in the game to break pressure (D. 64).

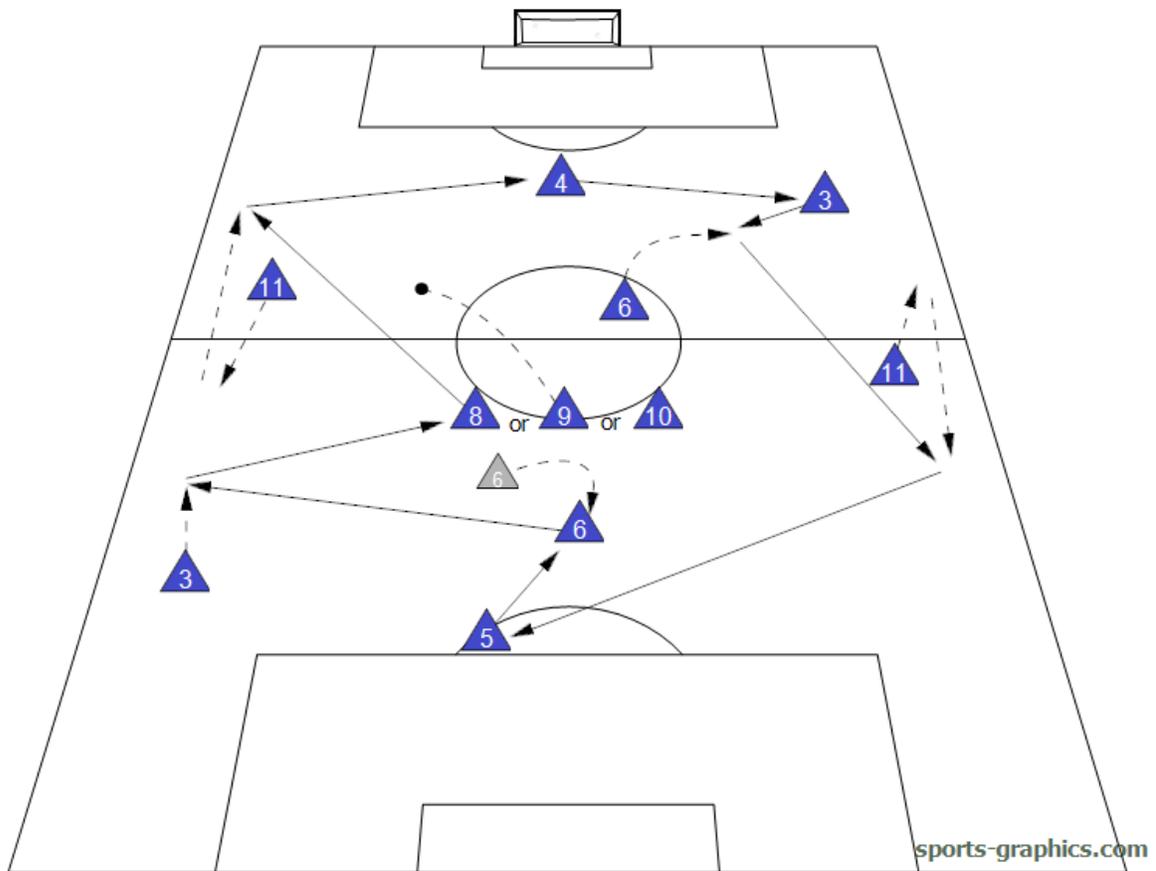


Diagram 64 Peeling off and Diagonal Balls

WARM UP 4: PEELING OFF AND COMBINATION PLAYS

Set up groups of 10. In diagram 65, player 2 peels off and receives a pass from player 1. Player 2 passes to player 3. Player 3 dribbles to the back of line 1. Everyone follows his or her pass. Both ends go at the same time. Crisp passes to feet. Player 2 uses the first touch to control and a second touch to pass. Distance between player 1 and 2 and between 2 and 3 is approximately 15-20 yards.

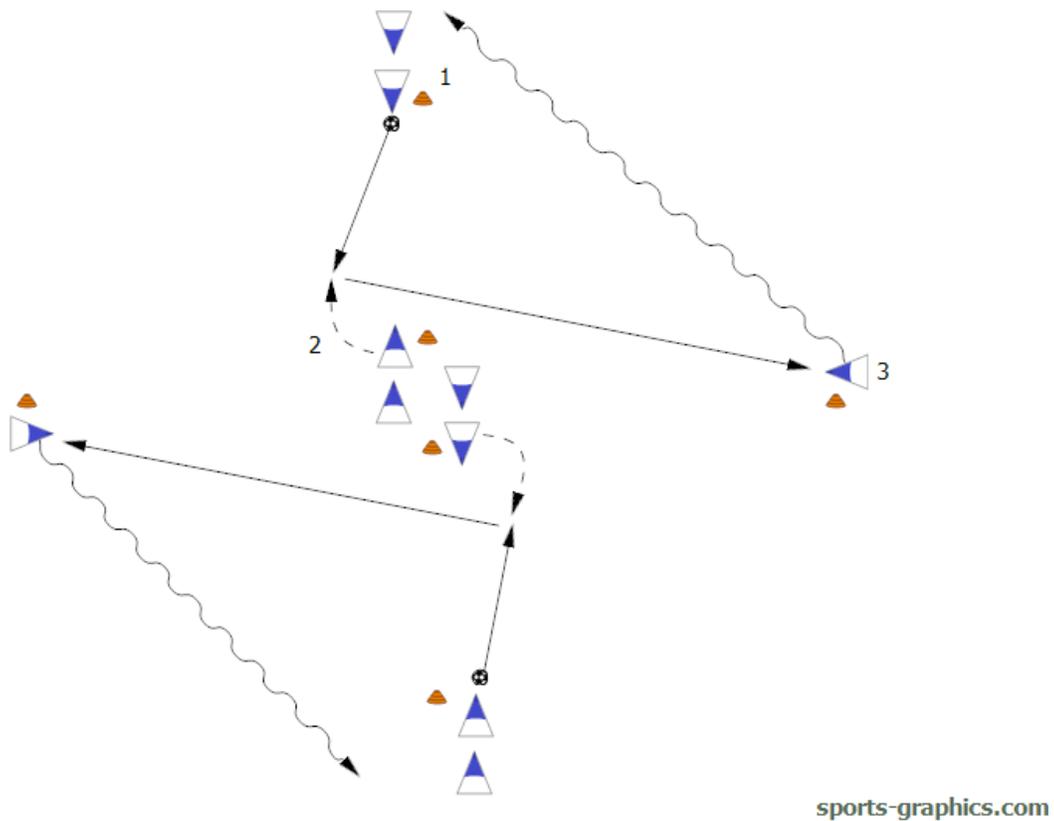


Diagram 65 Open Up for Combo Plays

Diagram 66 shows progressions. The top half shows the next progression where player 2 follows the 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.

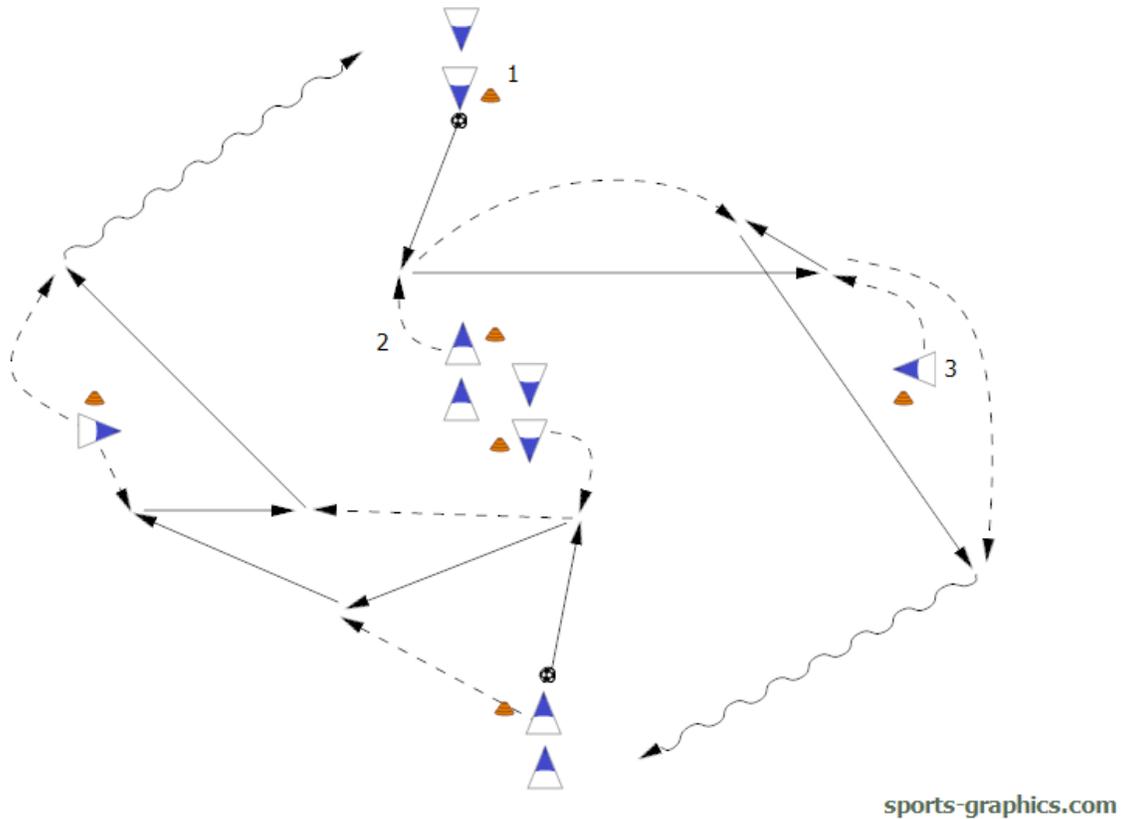


Diagram 66 Peeling off to set up the Combo

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: PLAYING OUT OF THE BACK

Set up groups of four players. Each group arranged across the field like a back four as shown in diagram 67. The ball is switched from side to side and when it gets to wide backs 2 or 3, the wide back takes a quick 3-5 step forward dribble, stops and turns to play the ball back to central defender and the ball is switched again to the other side. When the wide back 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.

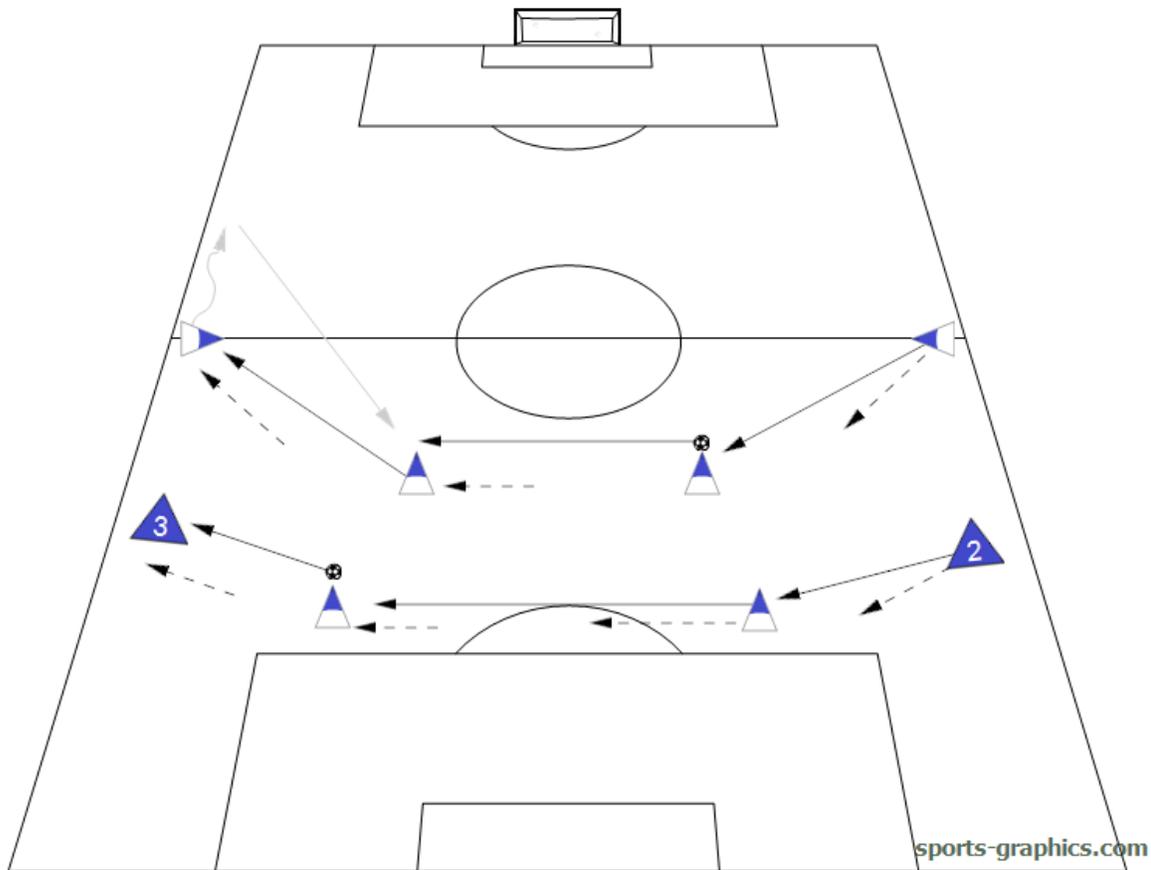


Diagram 67 Back Line Possession

Diagram 68 shows a progression by adding defensive midfield 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.

FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 1: PLAYING OUT OF DEFENSIVE THIRD

The goalkeeper, plus the back four, 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 goalkeeper 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 back to the other. Opponents try to win the ball and if they win it, they can go to goal.

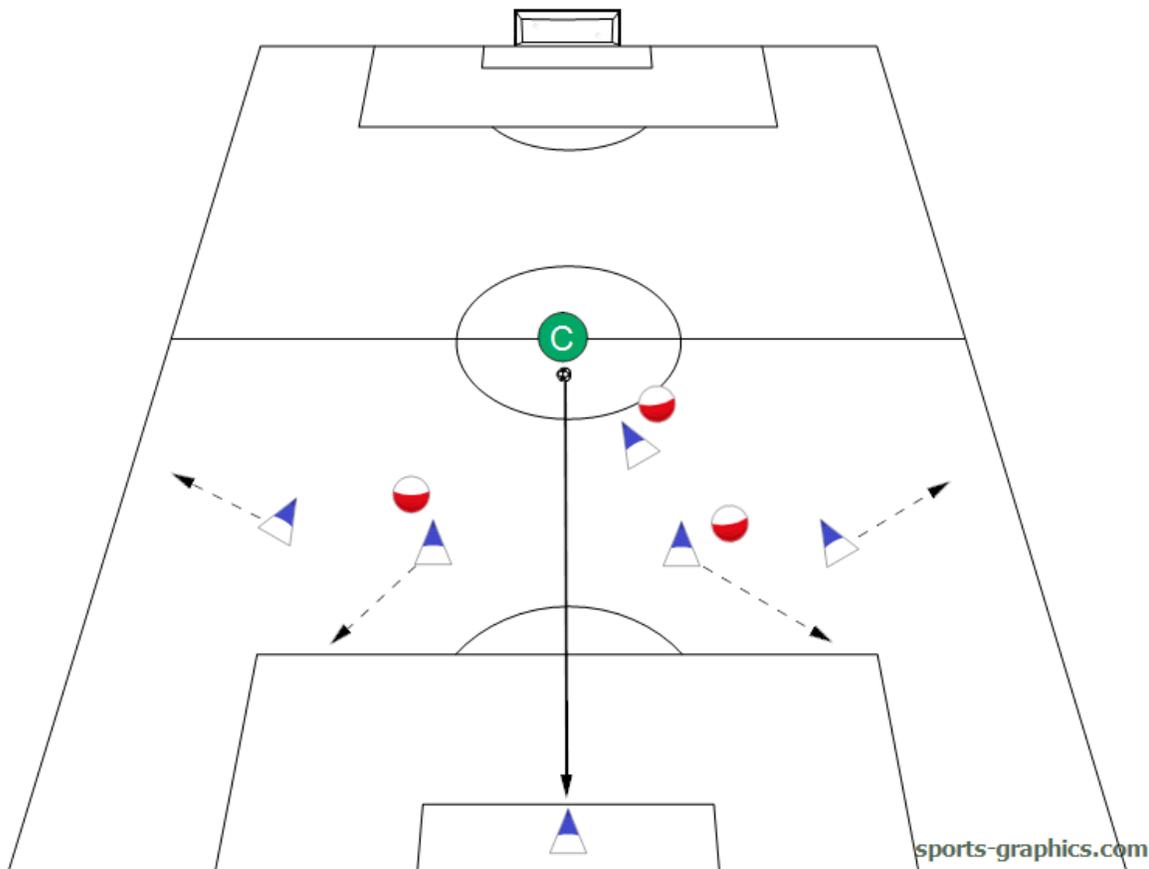


Diagram 70 Reset after the Through Ball

Progress the activity by adding two players, who are acting as attacking midfielders and whose starting positions are behind the dotted line as shown in diagram 71. They 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. They are 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.

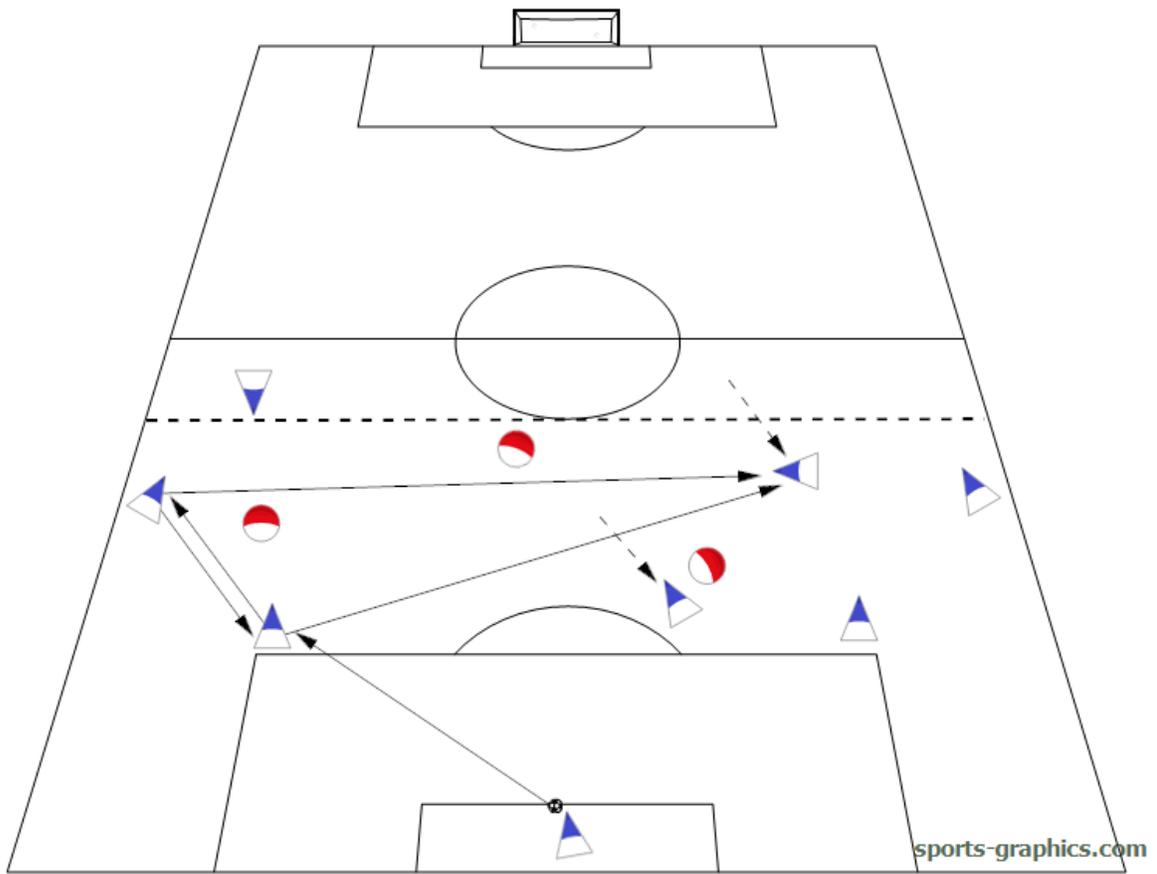


Diagram 71 Use the Midfielders to Break Pressure

WARM UP 7: SHADOW PLAY: INTERCHANGING RUNS AND OVERLAPPING

The following two diagrams show examples of shadow play warm ups. On the top right of diagram 73, the sequence is (using the US Soccer numbering) 6 or 4 to 2 to 7 who does wall pass with 9 and crosses while 9 and 10 attack cross. On the bottom right of diagram 73 the sequence is 6 or 5 to 11 back to 3 and 3 plays through ball to 8.

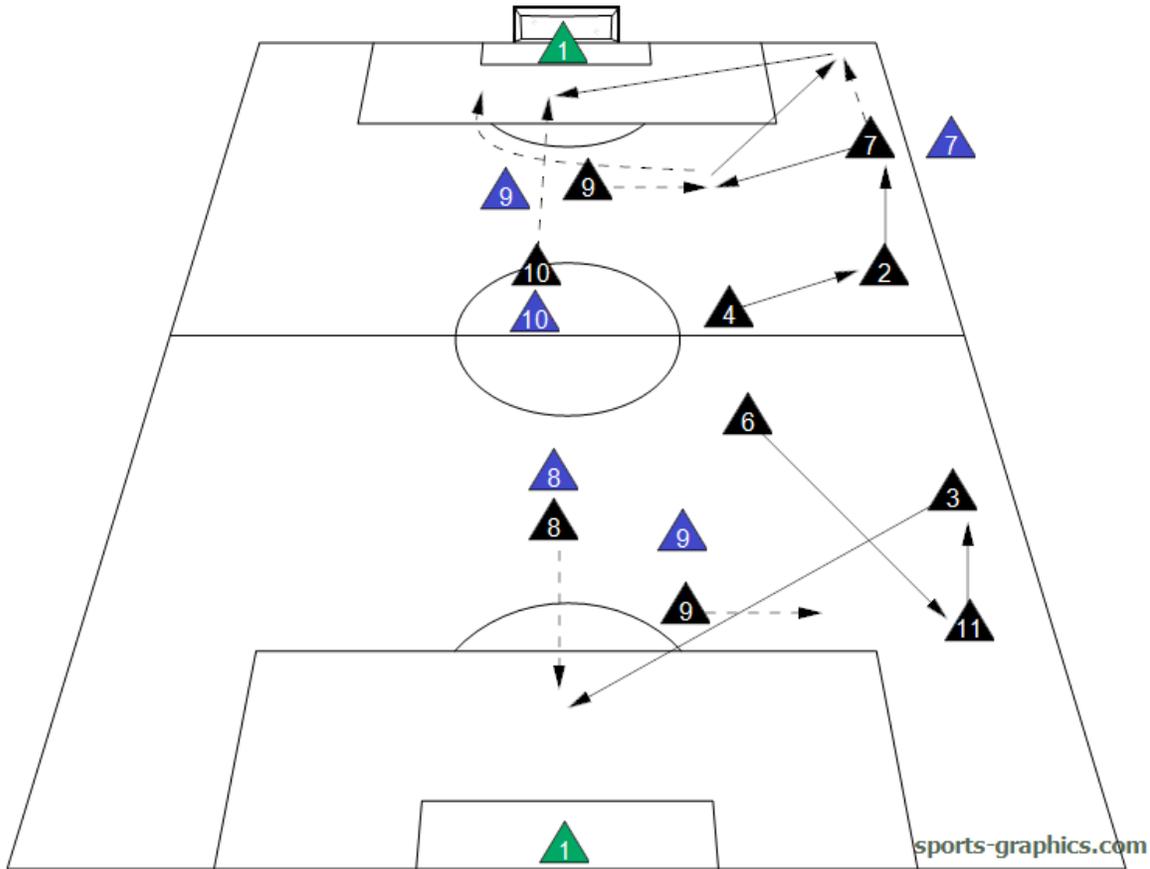


Diagram 73 Shadow Play - Overlap

On the top of diagram 74, the sequence is 6 to 8 who does a give and go with 9 and then plays a through ball to 10. On the bottom right of the diagram, the sequence is 6 to a deep 11 who plays to 9 and follows inside to get it back and play a through ball to 8. The blue players are waiting for their turn and do the same thing when the reds are returning to the starting positions.

FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 2: ATTACK VS DEFENSE

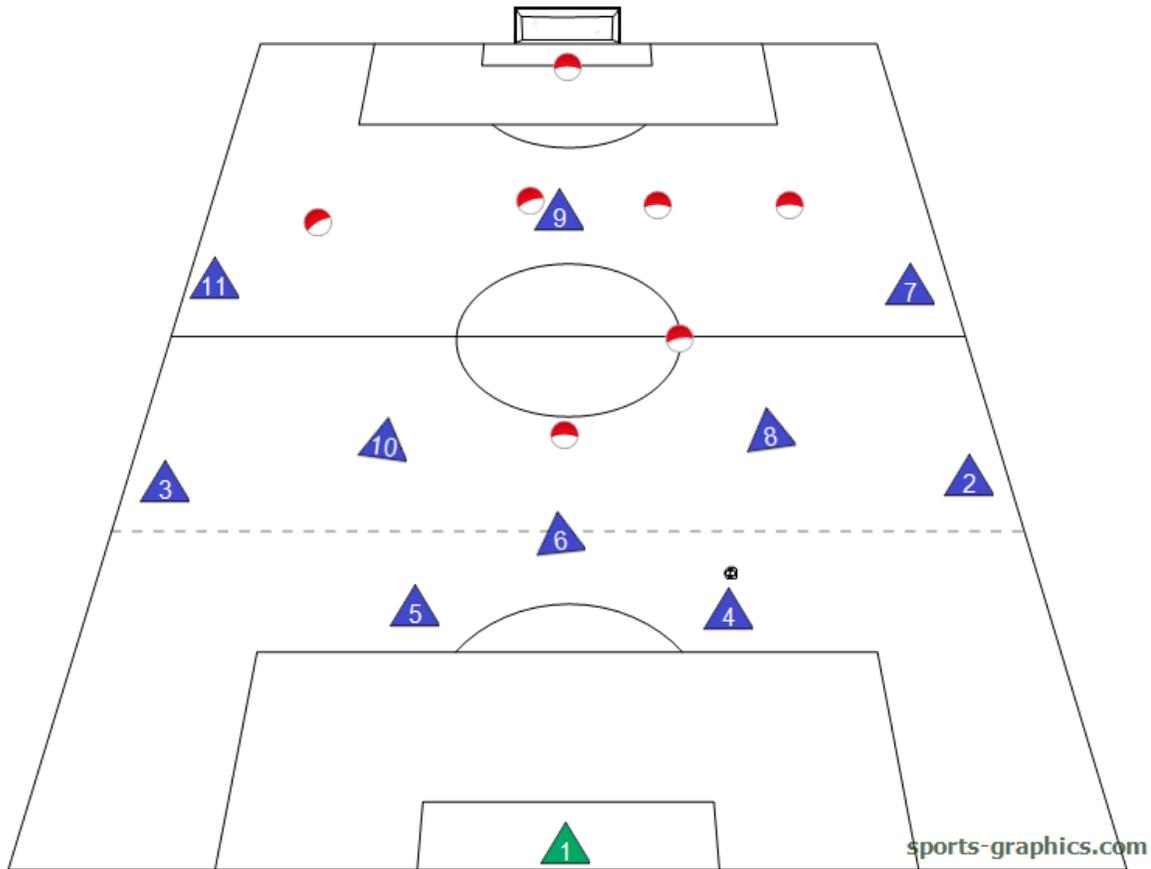
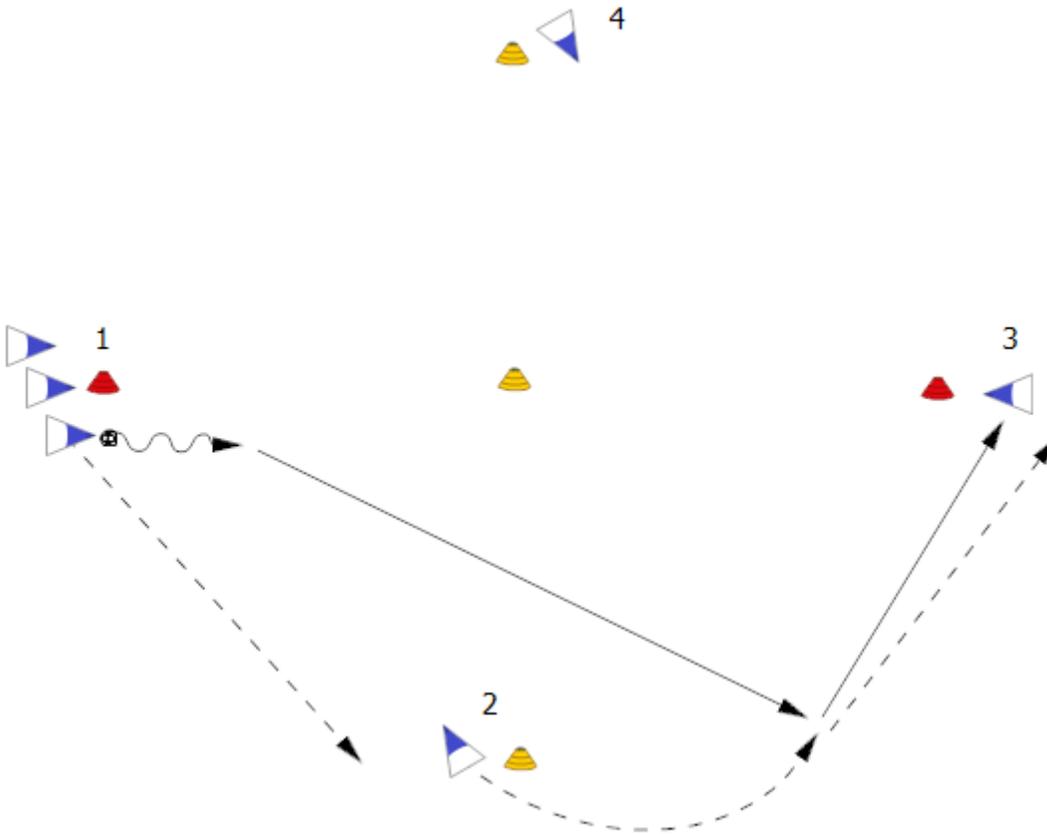


Diagram 74 Large Group Functional Training

Play 10 attackers vs. 7 defenders plus a goalkeeper. Central defenders 4 or 5 start play by playing into any of the black team. Player 4 and 5 cannot cross the dotted line (representing the middle third) and are mainly servers to be used to switch the point of attack and feed players. Fullbacks 2 and 3 can only play two-touch until they enter the attacking third. When the defending team wins the ball, they counter by playing to players 4 or 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 teammates' positions, interchanging positions to achieve penetration, overlapping defenders, bending runs, diagonal balls from the back line to blind side midfielders, and combination play.

Progress the activity by adding two more opponents who will close down the wide backs when they get the ball. The added opponents can be placed on the dotted line in front of the central defenders as a starting point and they become activated when player 4 or 5 plays their first pass.

WARM UP 8: THROUGH BALLS INTO FORWARDS' RUNS*Diagram 75 Penetrating Pass – Bent Run*

Groups of 6-7 players arranged as shown in diagram 76. Distance between yellow cones around 10-15 yards. Distance between red and yellow cones around 15-20 yards. Players pass and follow pass. Players 2 and 4 play the role of forwards or wingers. The yellow cones represent the back line. Sequence starts with player 1 dribbling forward 2-3 yards. This triggers player 2 to start a peeling off, bending run that keeps him outside. Player 1 plays a through pass for player 2 to run onto. Player 1 takes the position of player 2 and player 2 passes to player 3 and takes his position. Player 3 repeats the same sequence with player 4. Player 3 takes player 4's position and player 4 ends up in line 1. Passes and runs are timed to avoid offside.

Progress as shown in diagram 77 on page 85. This time player 2 makes a flat run when player 1 starts his dribble. Player 1 plays a through ball and player 2 changes his run's trajectory to chase the through ball. Player 2 passes to player 3 and takes his place. Player 1 takes player 2's place. Player 3 starts the same sequence with player 4. The run and pass should be timed to avoid offside. Note that the run and the pass are through different gaps between the yellow cones. Also, note that the through pass by player 1 should be bending a bit around the central yellow cone by using the outside of the foot to make the pass.

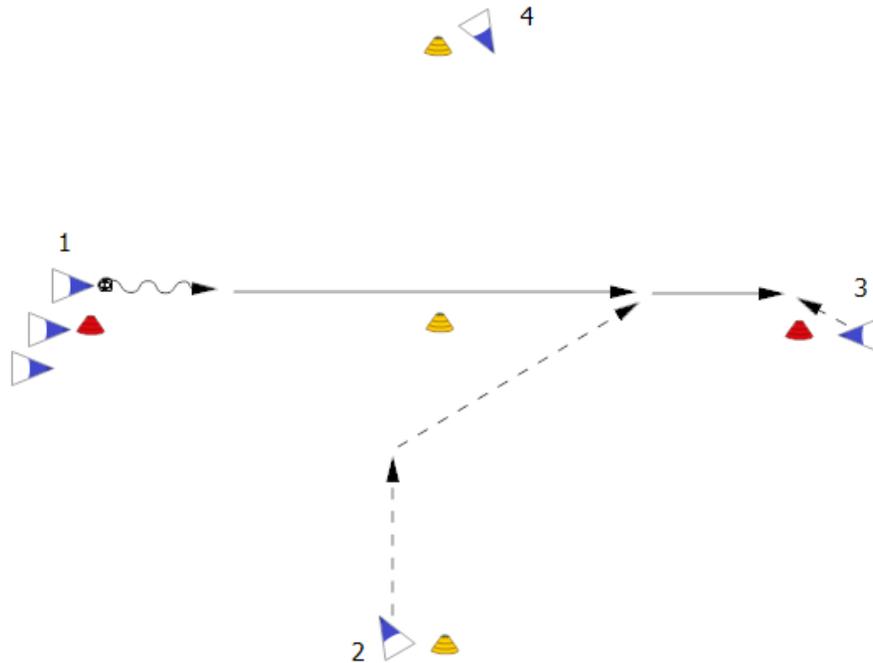


Diagram 76 Penetrating Pass – Diagonal Run

The last progression is shown in diagram 78. Here, player 1 passes to player 4 and moves towards him to support. Player 4 returns the ball to player 1 who uses one touch to control and second touch to switch with a diagonal through pass for player 2. Player 1 takes player 2's place and player 2 plays the ball to player 3 and takes his place. Player 3 repeats the sequence by playing to new player 2, get a pass back and plays a diagonal through ball to player 4 and takes his place.

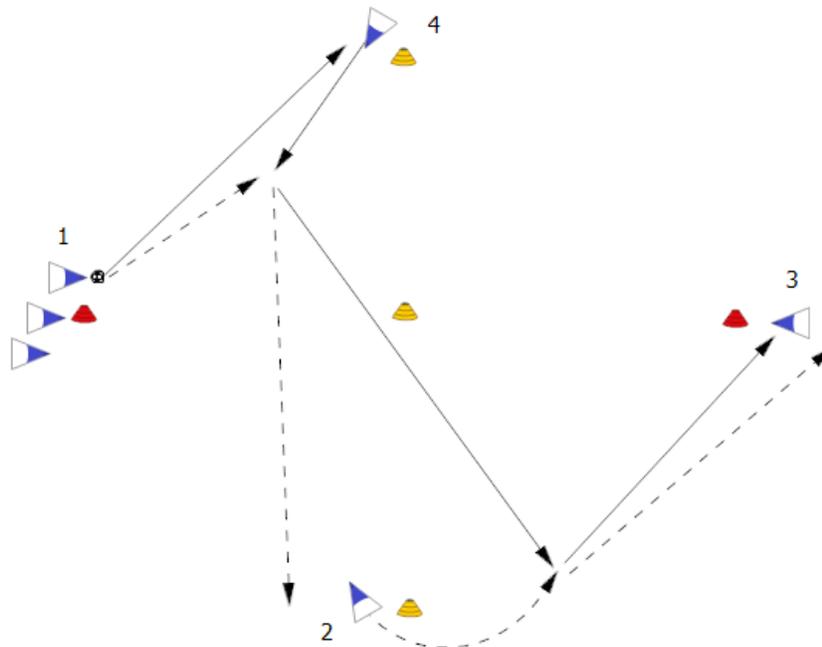
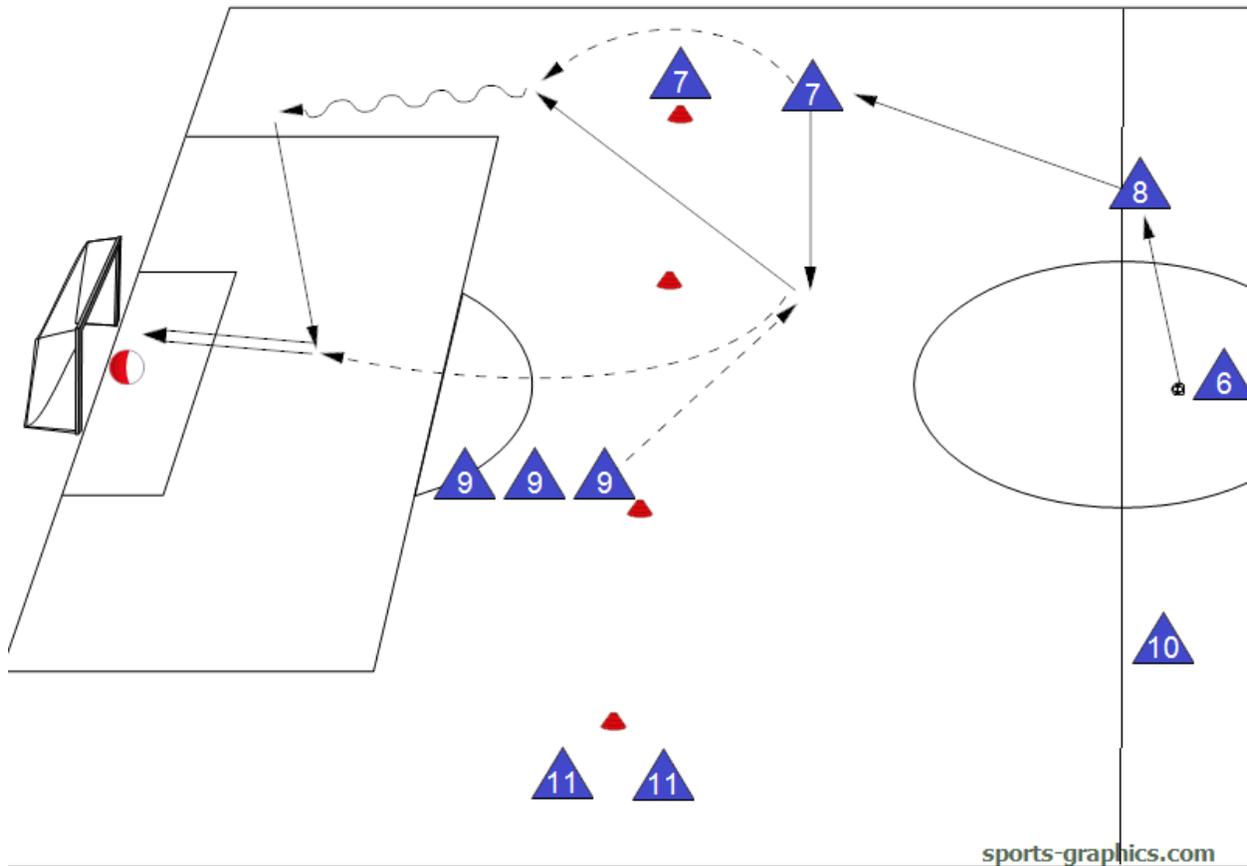


Diagram 77 Penetrating Pass – Diagonal Passing

WARM UP 9: COMBINATION PLAYS TO PENETRATE INTO ATTACKING THIRD*Diagram 78 Combination Plays - Midfield*

This is a functional warm up for the 3 midfielders and 3 attackers in a 4-3-3 formation. Players are arranged by position as shown in diagram 79. Red cones represent the opponents' back line of four defenders. In order to maintain a medium intensity work-to-rest ratio, each flank has 2 wingers taking turns and there are 3 center forwards rotating. Play starts with defensive midfielder 6 who plays to attacking midfielder 8 (player 8 peels off and receives the pass facing up field). Player 8 passes to winger 7. Forward 9 runs towards 7 and they combine to send 7 through. Player 7 dribbles quickly to end line and crosses for 9 to finish. As player 7 and 9 return to starting position, player 6 starts a similar sequence on the left flank involving players 10, 11, and a new 9. Repeat by alternating flanks. Timing of runs to avoid offside. Players peeling off and receiving the ball side-on or facing up field.

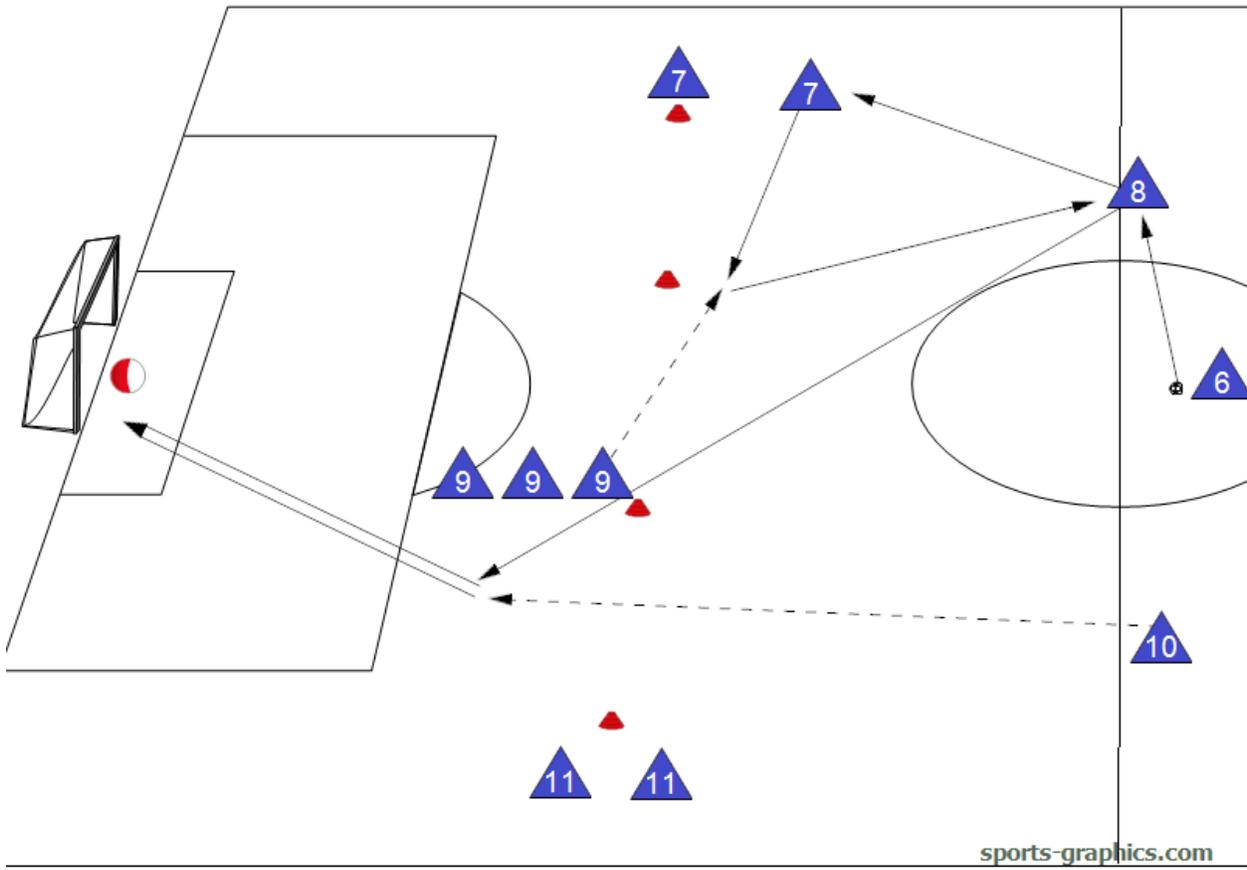


Diagram 80 Combination Plays - Diagonal Switch

FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY 3: COMBINATION PLAYS INTO ATTACKING THIRD

Play 6 attackers versus 5 defenders and a keeper going to one goal. The six attackers are the three midfielders and three forwards and the defending team has the back four plus the defensive mid and the keeper. Attack starts with the white defensive mid playing the ball to any of his teammates and that triggers the defending team to react. The white defensive mid cannot make forward runs and is limited to supporting the attack from behind the attacking midfielders. When the red defending team wins the ball, they have 5 seconds to counter and play the ball to the white defensive mid. Progress by adding another red defensive midfield.

The key coaching point is to look for through balls into space behind the red back line. Ideally, the through pass and the run should go through different gaps. Attacking midfielders should look to either overlap the wingers or make runs into space created by forward 9's movement. At any point in the attack when forward 9 gets a pass to feet, one attacking midfielder should stay under forward 9 to support him and one attacking mid should make a penetrating run. The wingers should stay wide to stretch the red back line and look to get through balls on the flanks but once the defense is breached, the wingers should look to come inside the penalty area to meet the cross.

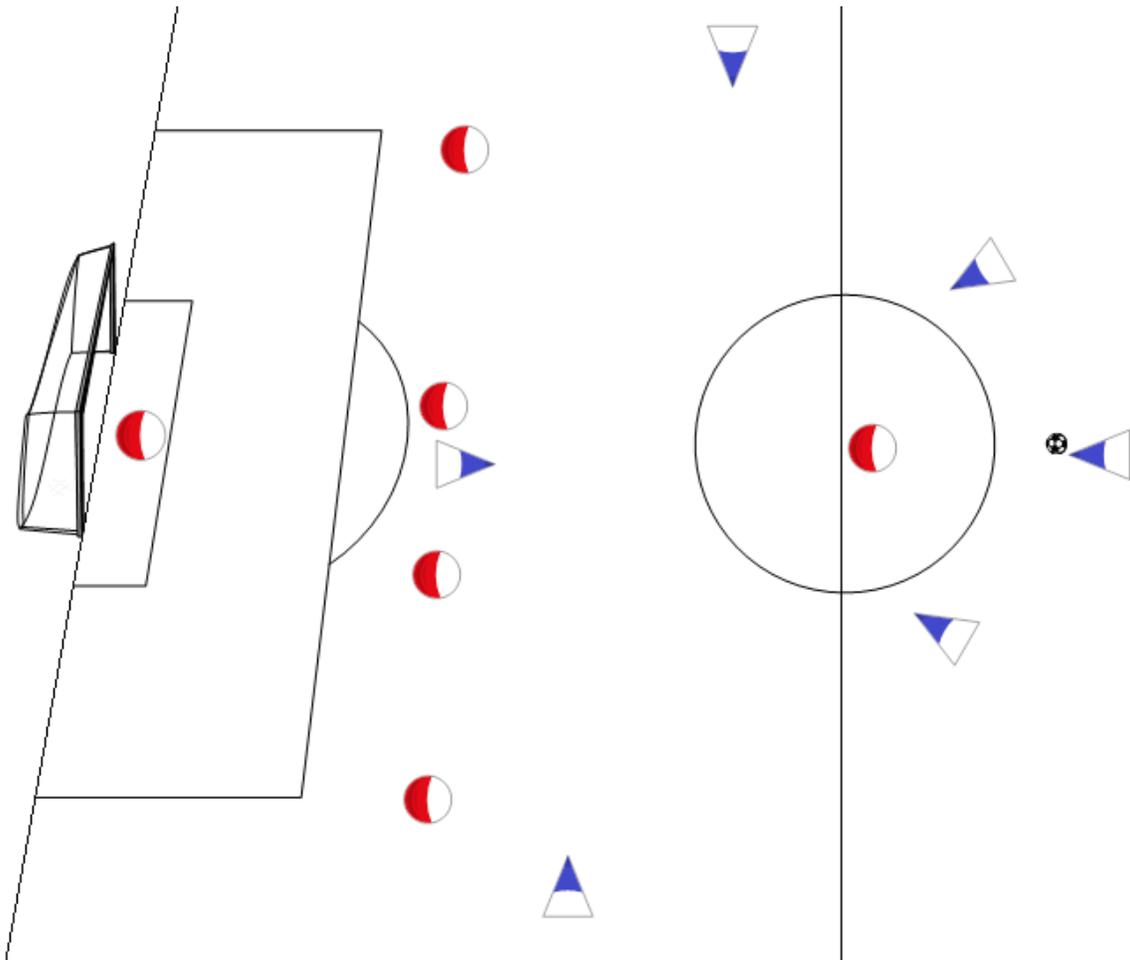


Diagram 81 Combs to get into the Attacking Third

APPENDIX B

TEN PRINCIPLES OF POSSESSION SOCCER

This appendix contains a detailed explanation of the ten principles of possession soccer.

When properly applied, these principles will define the playing style and our teams will become very comfortable in playing possession.

Every coach and player should familiarize themselves with these principles and learn how to apply them in the game.

The content in this appendix was copied from the US Youth Soccer ODP Player Manual.

THE 10 PRINCIPLES OF POSSESSION SOCCER

The State and Regional Coaching Staff focus on teaching the players the team shape, player movements and player decisions on the ball, based on the following 10 principles of possession soccer. You can think of these as the 10 Commandments of Possession Soccer. In each training session, the coaches will cover a few of these at a time, with the ultimate goal of teaching the players all 10 principles and ingraining the right habits. You are expected to know the 10 principles and use these principles to make decisions on where to move and what to do with the ball.



Diagram 82 Player Position Numbers in a 1-4-3-3 Formation

PRINCIPLE 1: TEAM SHAPE

Every time your team has the ball, you must spread out to make the field as big as possible. This is done by player 9 pushing up as high as possible, wingers 7 and 11 getting out as high and wide as possible, the back line dropping back and the midfielders spreading into the space in the middle. The team shape as shown in diagrams 1 is a good illustration of the right shape that makes the field as big as possible.

In Diagram 84, the ball is with left defender 3. Notice how the winger 7 is still wide and attacking midfielder 8 is still on the right side staying away from the ball and making the field big. Winger 7 and midfielder 8 should resist the temptation to check towards the ball since this will create a congested midfield.

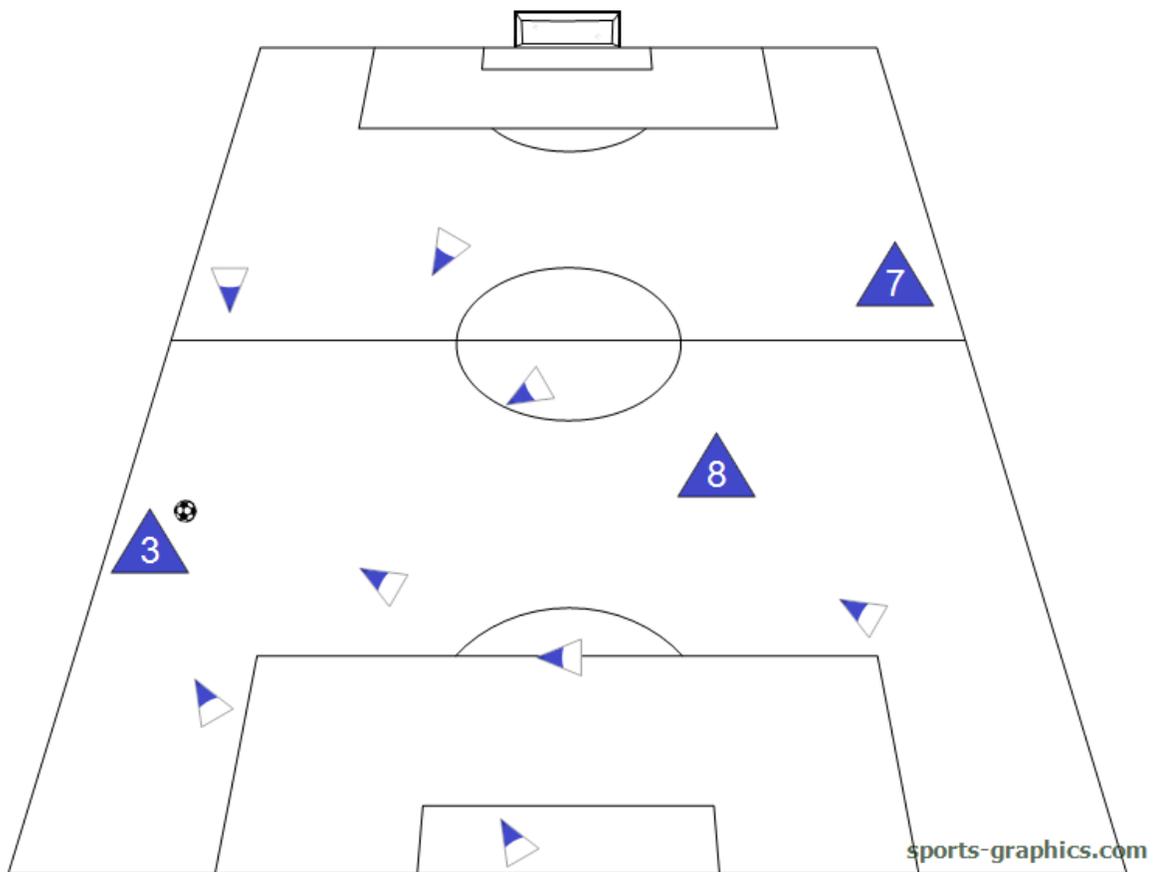


Diagram 83

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. Diagrams 85 and 86 illustrate two scenarios and the recommended peeling off movement of all the players ahead of the ball.

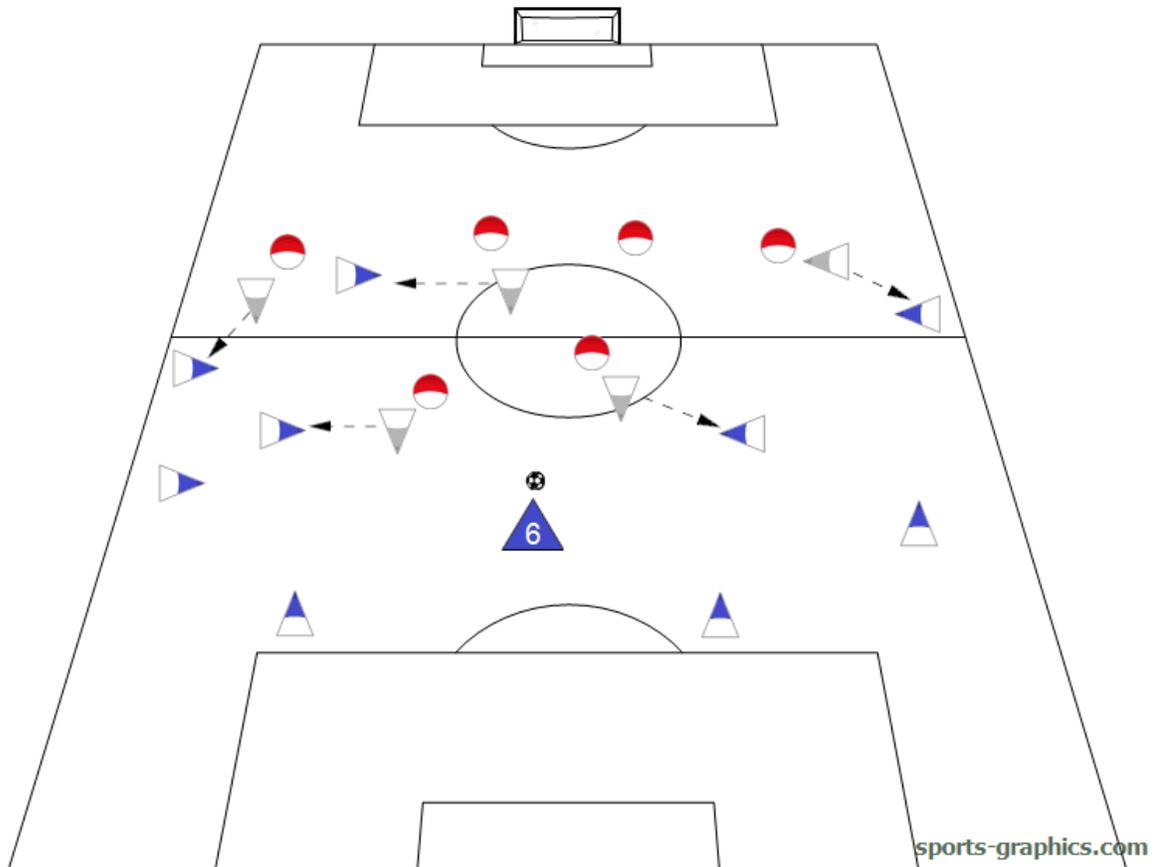


Diagram 84 Player 6 has the ball

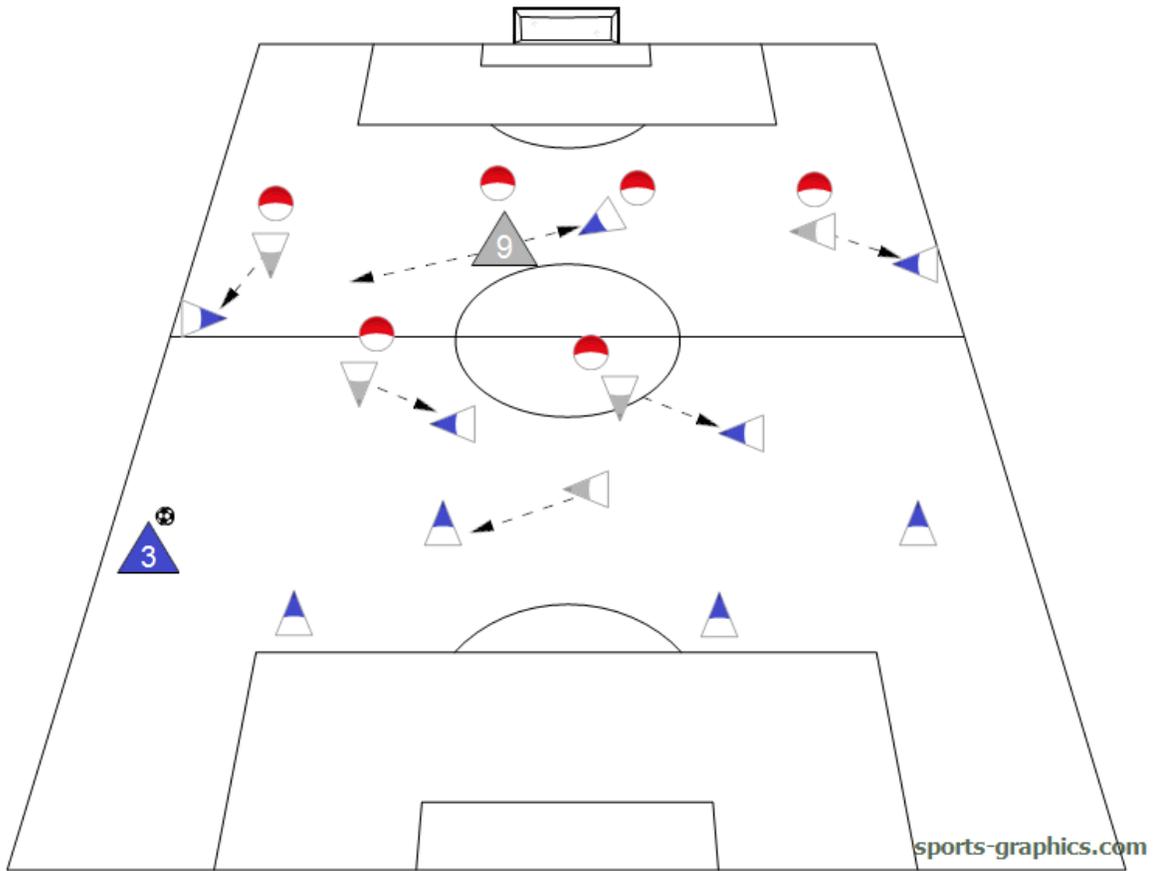


Diagram 85 Player 3 has the ball. Player 9 can either peel off or check towards the ball.

PRINCIPLE 3: BENDING RUNS

Whenever you make a forward run on the flanks, bend your run towards the outside to create width and separate yourself from your opponent. Whenever you make a forward run in the middle of the field, bend your 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 offside.

Diagram 87 below 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 offside.

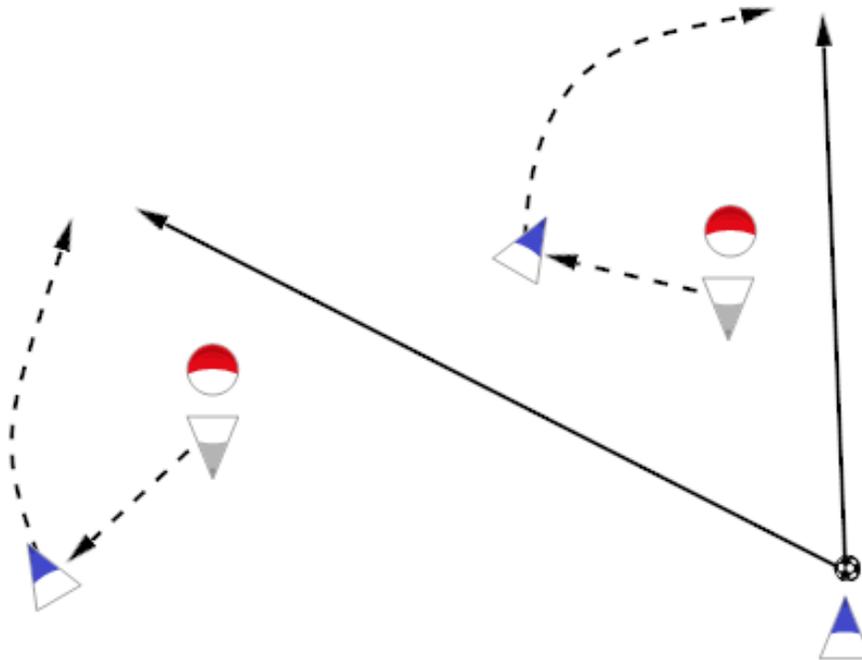


Diagram 86

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 players duplicating runs or running into the same area. For example, if you are an attacking midfielder and you see that your center forward is making a checking run towards the ball, you might decide to run into the space created by him/her 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 you must be constantly looking around you to assess your position in relation to your teammates' positions.

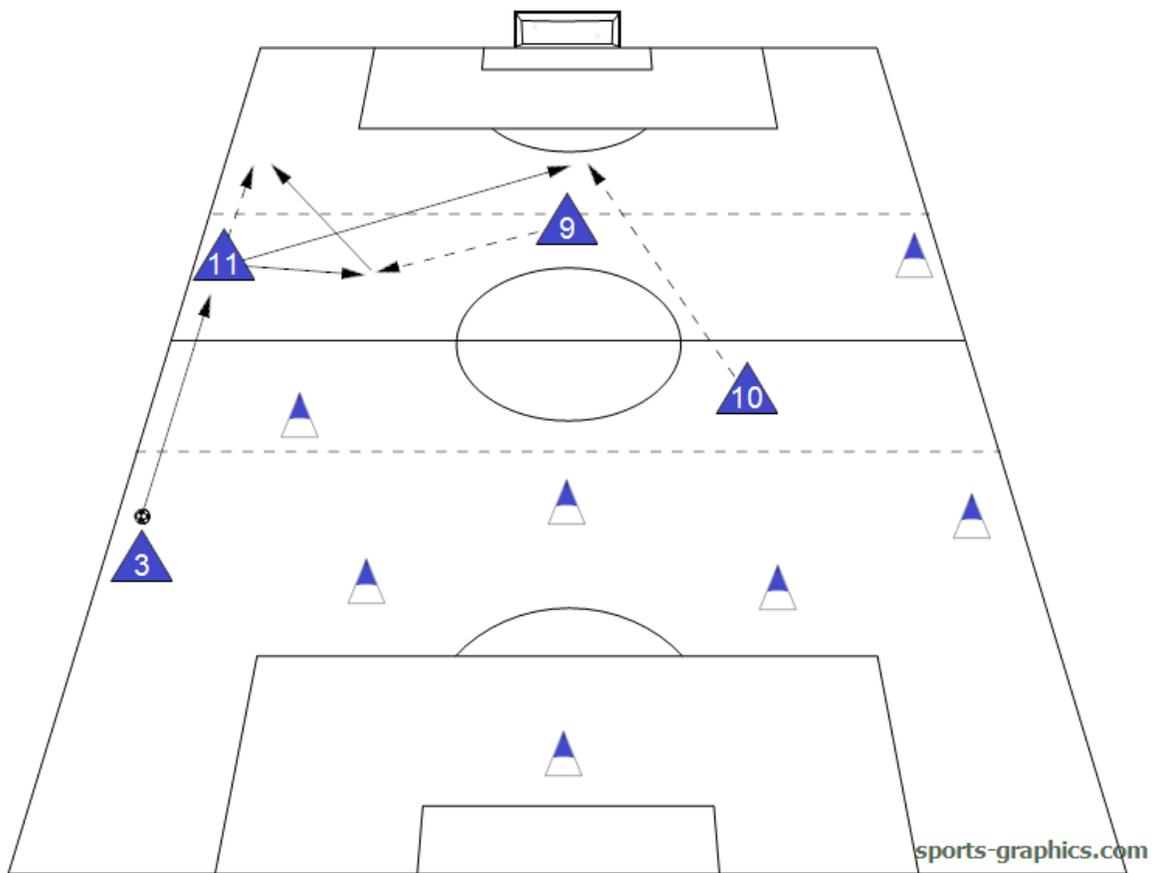


Diagram 87

Diagram 88 shows an example of a run that is triggered by another run. In diagram 4, player 11 receives the ball from player 3. Player 9 checks towards the ball and player 10 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 10.

PRINCIPLE 5: DIAGONAL PASSES

Diagonal passes are usually better than vertical passes. 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 to players who are marked tightly and look for the diagonal ball as often as possible.

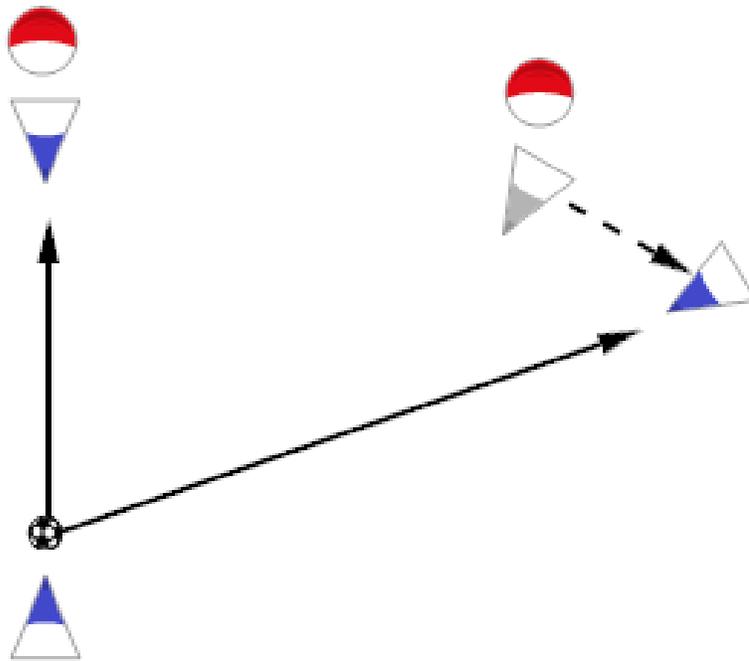


Diagram 88

In Diagram 89, 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 you are checking towards the ball with your back to goal, you should already know what you would do with the ball before you get it. Most likely, you should make a first time pass to a teammate rather than hold the ball.

PRINCIPLE 6: BACK PASSES ARE USUALLY 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 your 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.

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 90 and 91 below 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 we have a better chance of penetration.

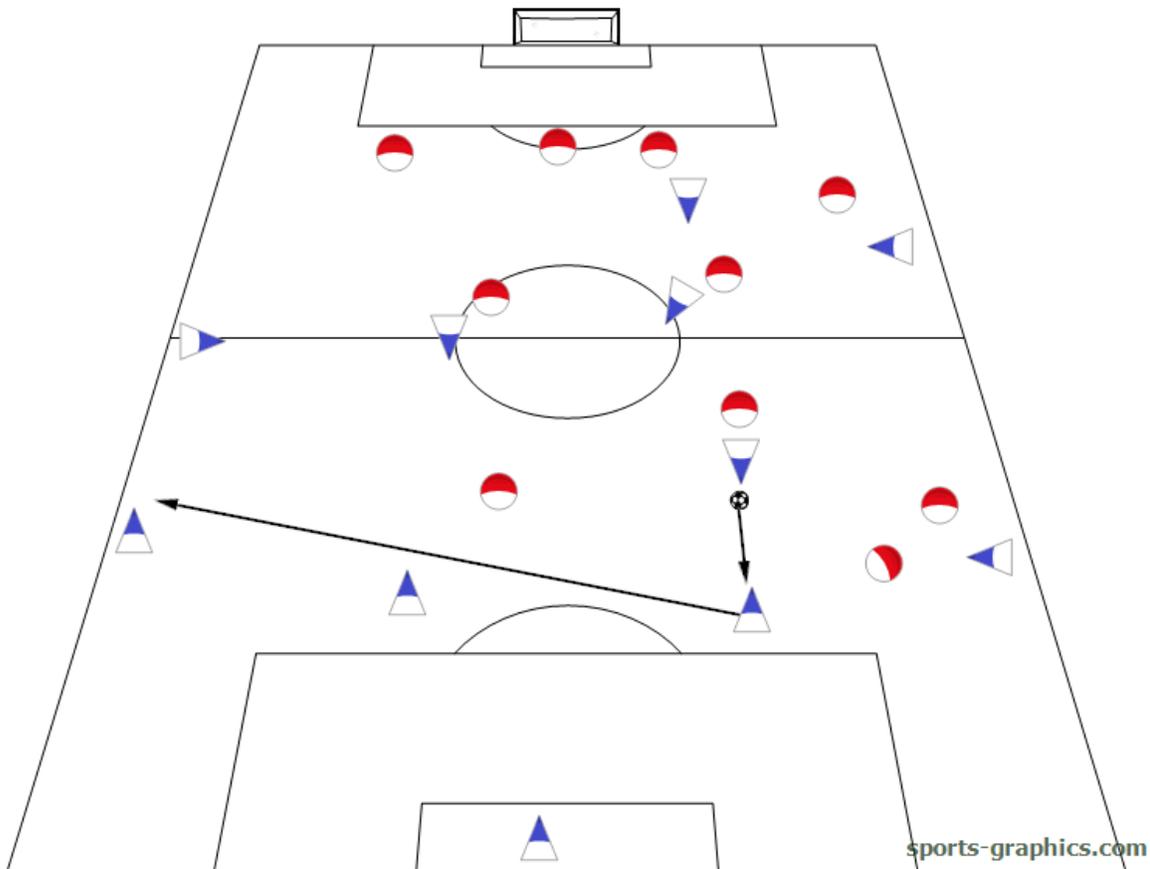


Diagram 89

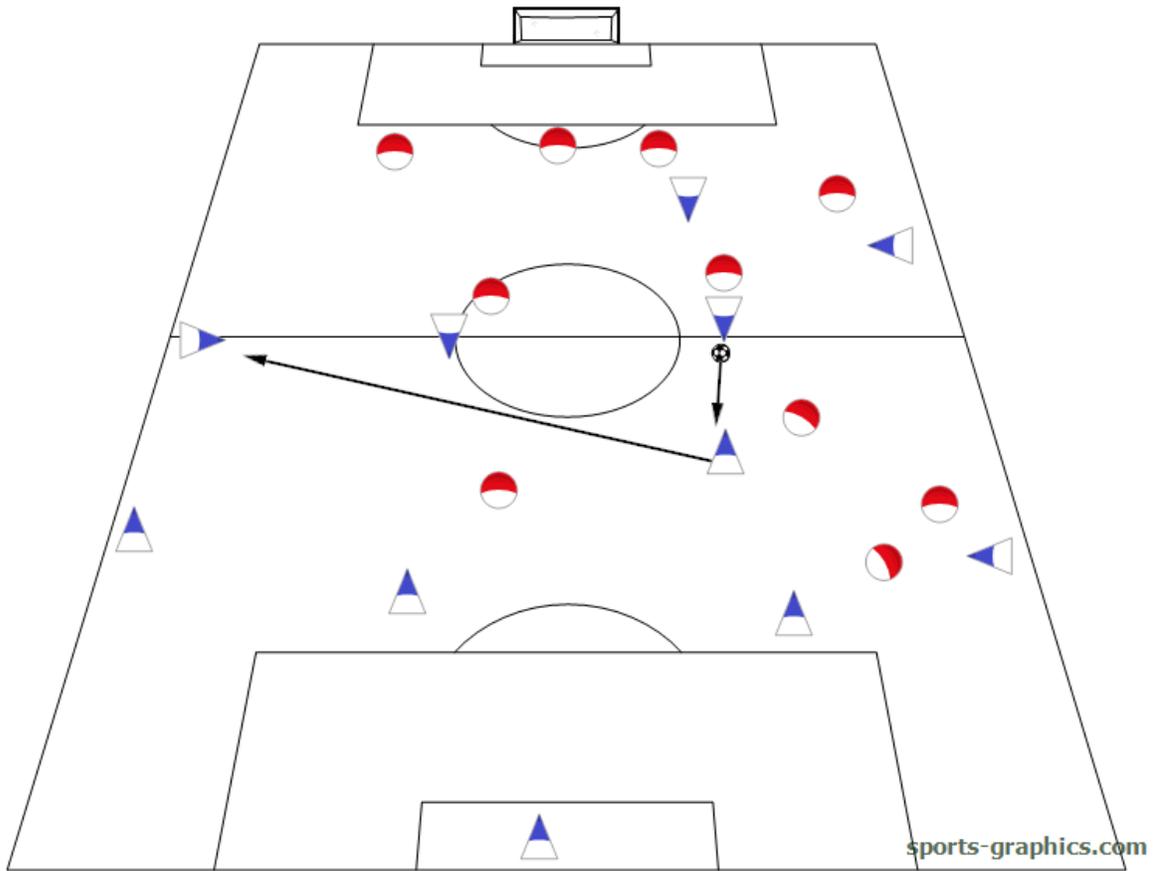


Diagram 90

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, we have to circulate the ball and move it constantly around the field. This makes us less predictable and it makes it harder for the other team to pin us down and press us 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 92 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.

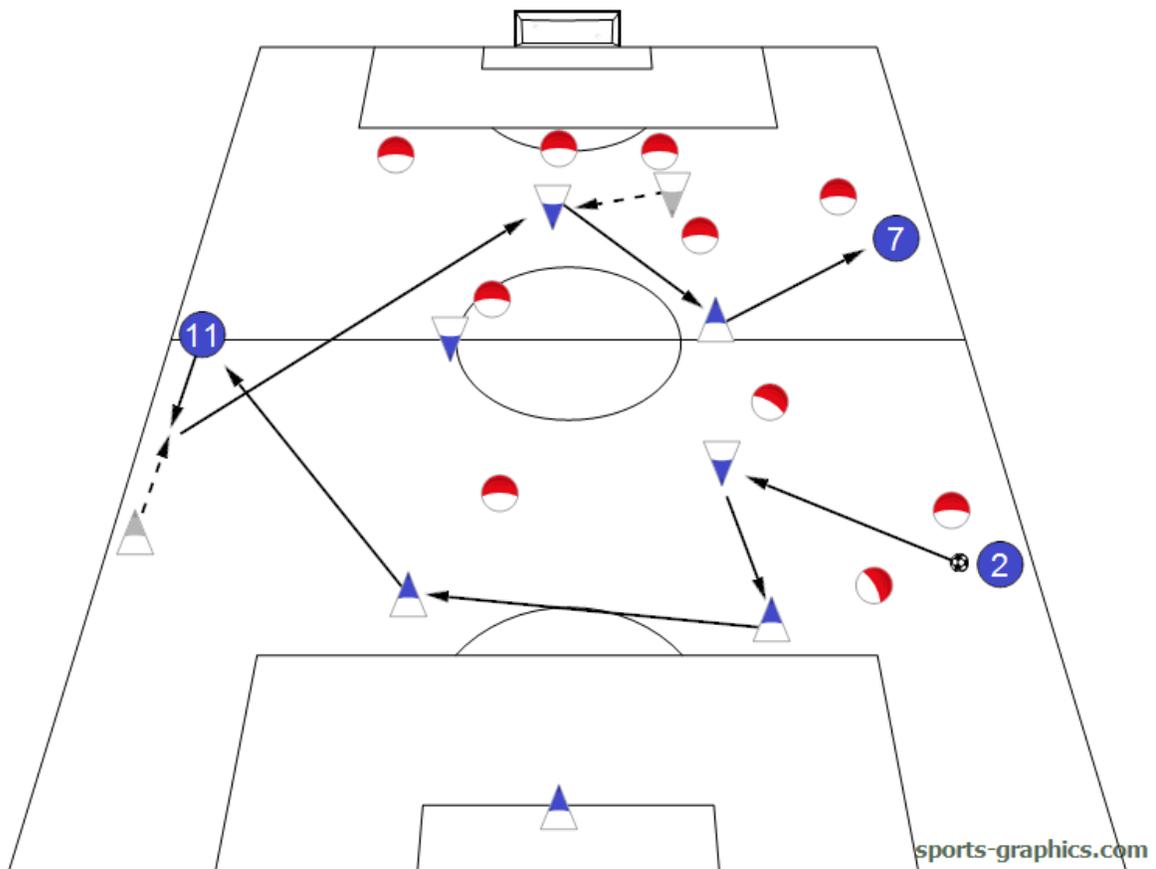


Diagram 91

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 does not stay in the same place for long, making it hard for the other team to press with numbers.

PRINCIPLE 8: KEEPERS DISTRIBUTE BALLS, AVOID THE LONG PUNT

Since the emphasis in ODP is to play out of the back, 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 93 and 94 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 93 86 is the preferred shape, with defenders 4 and 5 spread to the corners of the penalty area and the outside backs 2 and 3 pushed up and wide and the rest of the team pushed up. Diagram 94 shows how defenders 4 and 5 can drop down to receive the ball if the other team is pressing them when they are positioned like in diagram 93.

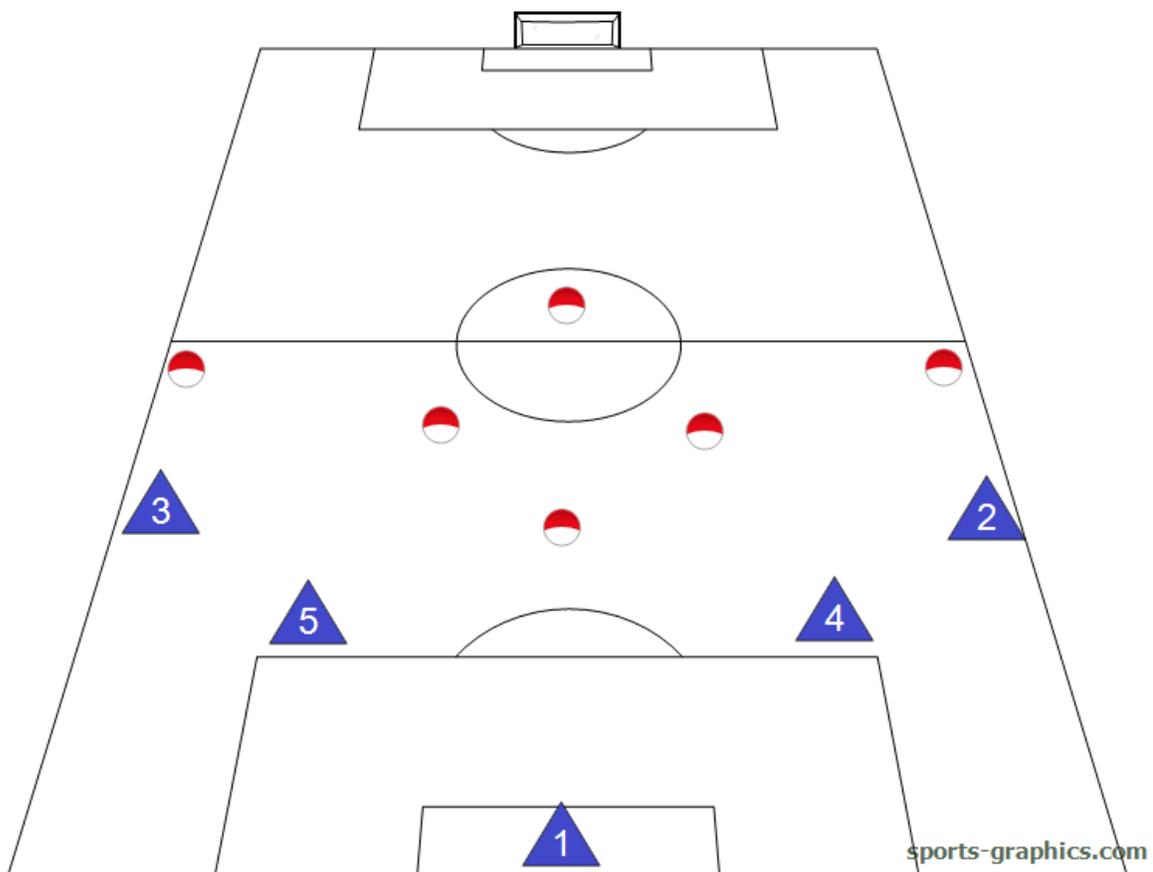


Diagram 92



Diagram 93

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

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 95 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.

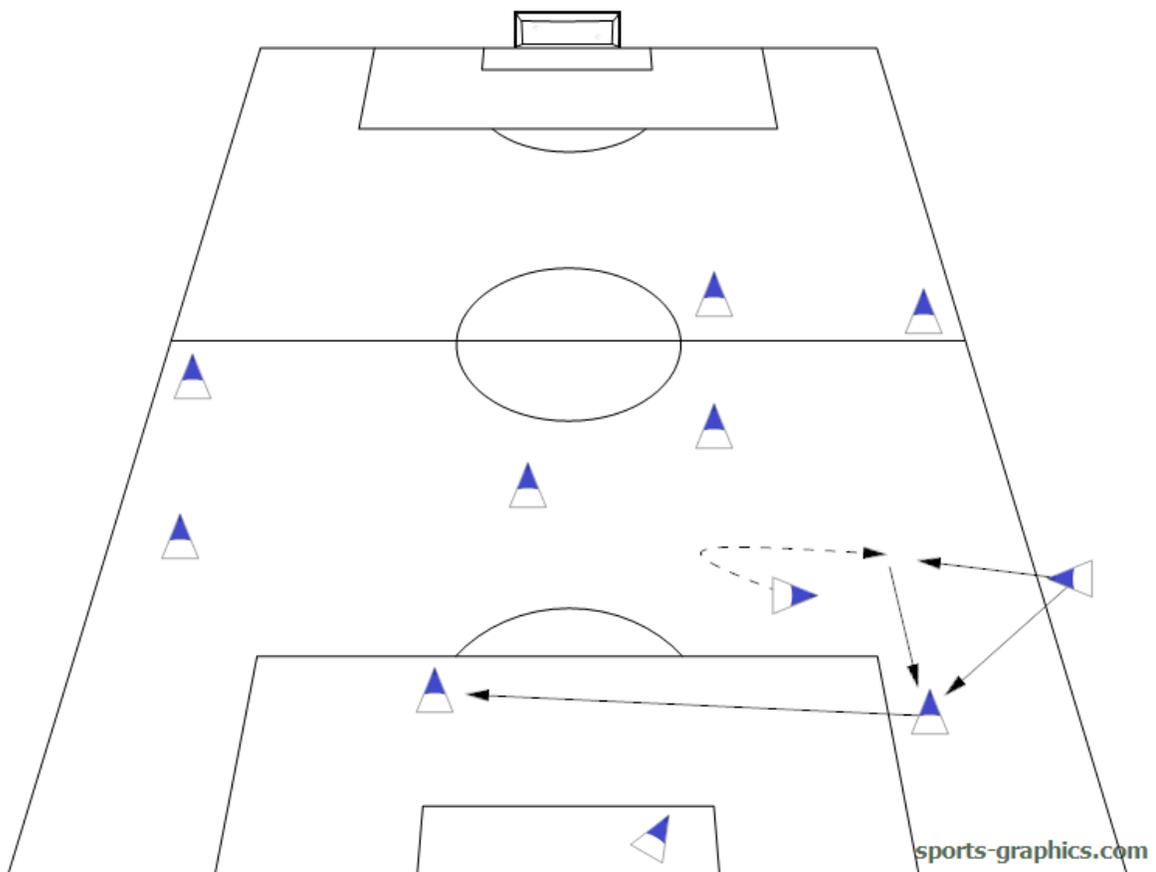


Diagram 94

PRINCIPLE 10: SPEED OF PLAY

You have to 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 the opponents to keep up with the play. There are some moments when dribbling is appropriate, but for the majority of the time, quick one touch or two-touch passing is the best way. If you watch high-level soccer on TV, you will see how quickly the ball is passed from one player to the next, with a minimum of fuss and with quick and pacey ball movement. LET'S KEEP THE BALL MOVING!

US YOUTH SOCCER ODP GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

GENERAL PLANNING CALENDAR FOR CHRONOLOGICAL AGE GROUPS

13 year olds: regional training camp with maximum participation

14 year olds: regional trials/inter-regional (national) events in November (competition) and February (training)/international event

15 year olds: regional trials/inter-regional (national) events in November (competition) and February (training)/international event

16 year olds: regional trials/inter-regional (national) event in November (competition)/international event

17 year olds: regional trials/inter-regional (national) event in December (competition)/international event

18/19 year olds: regional trials/inter-regional (national) event in December

FOREIGN TRAVEL

14 year olds: CONCACAF

15 year olds: CONCACAF + UEFA

16 year olds: CONCACAF + UEFA + CONMEBOL

17 year olds: CONCACAF + UEFA + CONMEBOL + AFC

18/19 year olds: CONCACAF + UEFA + CONMEBOL + AFC + OFC + CAF



Event for exposure to professional and college coaches/scouts.



Of key importance in travel is a growing variety of soccer experiences for the players.



State Select Team participation in the US Youth Soccer ODP Championships in March.

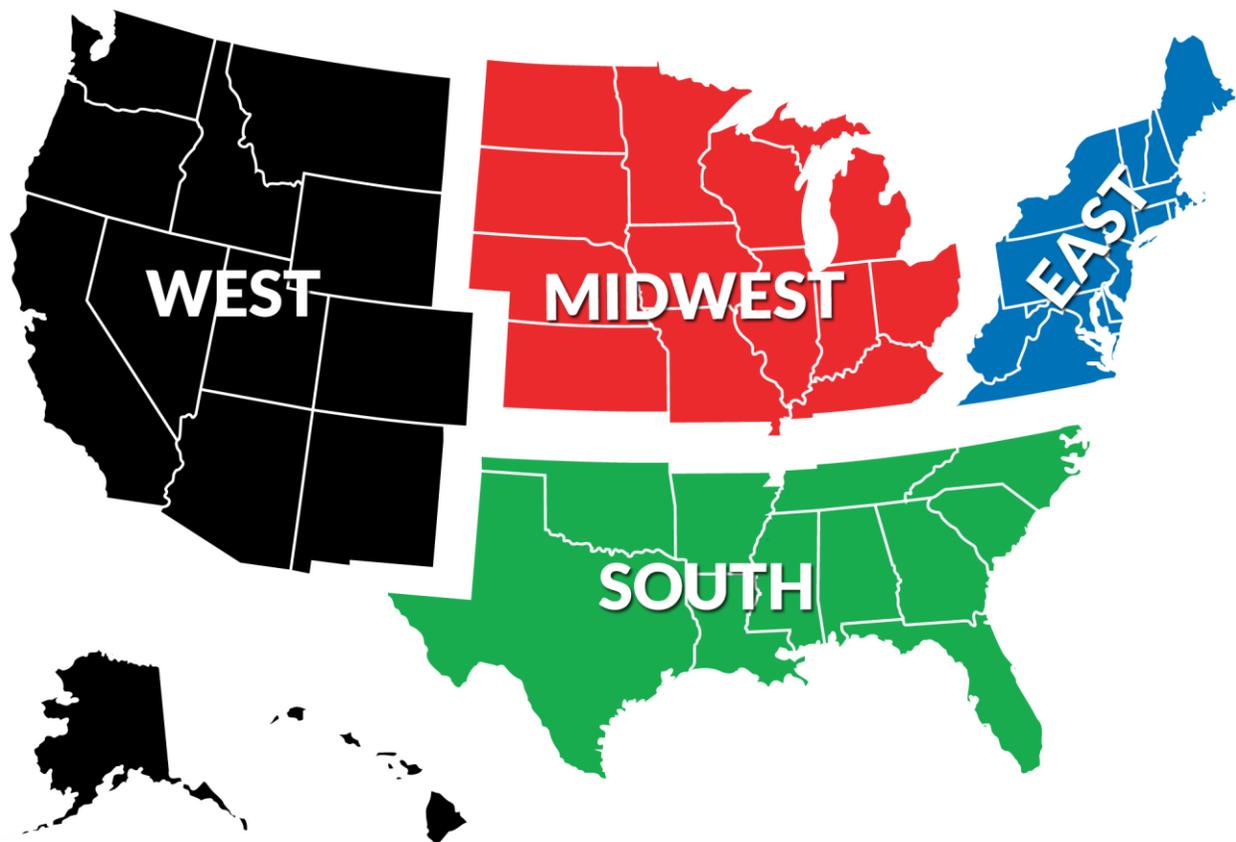
Keys to Success:

- ✓ Development over winning (while not diminishing the drive to win) – development must become cultural
- ✓ Quality training
- ✓ Age appropriate atmosphere
- ✓ Have fun and inspire your players

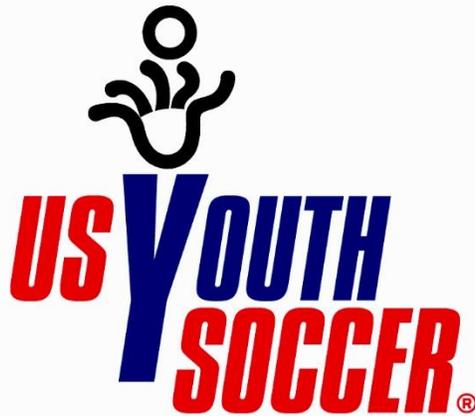
US Youth Soccer Regions and Region Team Colors

USA Style of Play ~ Mind – Ball – Body

Speed of Play, Tactical Awareness, Technical Execution, Confident Mentality, Positional Skills & Responsibility, Professional Habits, Ambitious Going Forward and Aggressive in Defense



Train to Develop – Play to Win™



Mission Statement

US Youth Soccer is a non-profit and educational organization whose mission is to foster the physical, mental and emotional growth and development of America's youth through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition.

*The Game for **All Kids!***®