

ATTACKING WITH FULLBACKS



by Matt Carroll



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The author Matt Carroll is the current head coach at New Egypt High School, and has been with the program for the last seven years. New Egypt has been successful over the course of his time with the team reaching the Central Jersey Group 1 Sectional Finals three times and the New Jersey State Group 1 Finals once. He has worked with the local club teams and recreation programs closely to not only train athletes, but to develop systemic coaching curriculum and coaching education programs. He has his USSF D License and recently won a scholarship to seek his C License thanks to NYC Coaching Education. He previously authored the title *Creating Chaos and Street Soccer*.

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Foreword

Once considered the “right field” position for American soccer players, a dark and desperate area to throw the players who didn’t provide the technical ability of their peers, the fullback position has shown increased importance in the game over the last few years. Historically the fullbacks that have made a name for themselves have been seen as mavericks or one offs such as Roberto Carlos (if you live under a rock and have never seen his physics defying free kick please type his name into youtube before continuing), Dani Alves, Gary Neville, or Philip Lahm (who was deemed too important to play that position and was often moved through his career to midfield). Despite the contributions of these historically, and tactically, important outside backs, the use of dangerous attacking wing backs by both Manchester City and Liverpool have brought the position back into vogue in a way it never has before. The use of attacking fullbacks, or even under Pep “inverted” , attacking fullbacks has never been such a fundamental part of team tactics so universally. To a lesser, but possibly to a more creative extent, Sheffield United’s use of “overlapping center backs” has seen that club jump from the Championship to fighting to play in Europe in under a year. Those that ignore the prominent role of these positions in their systems now run the risk of falling behind in the game’s tactical evolution, so here are some ways to utilize outside backs in a variety of tactical systems.

By releasing fullbacks into the attack there is an inherent risk, an entire flank could be exposed if the fullback is caught too high, and the interchange of positions with the winger can cause confusion among teammates leading to gaps and redundancy. That being said there are also great rewards, namely creating overloads. A released fullback can combine with a winger and a midfielder to create a 3v2 against the opposition fullback and winger. What this does is create chances for the teams to attack the opposition near the corners of the 18 yard box. This means that defenders to deal with the possibility of the cross or dribble from the wide area may have their backs to strikers and midfielders in the box, allowing those attacking players to find gaps and blindspots in the box and create chances. That diagonal pass, as close to the end line as possible, heading back towards the top of the 18 has been used to devastating effect in recent years by Guardiola’s Manchester City. Using overlapping, or even underlapping fullbacks, creates scenarios where instead of having a singular winger rushing to the end line to create that opportunity, you have the possibility of two. It also increases the likelihood that one of those two players can get as close to the 18 as possible. The chance of a successful pass or cross becomes more and more unlikely the closer towards the corner flag a player gets. A single winger, against a strong opposition fullback, may be pushed towards the corner flag and be forced to play a cross off their back heel, like a quarterback throwing a hail mary under an aggressive pass rush. Just as in the NFL scenario, the pass will often be lofted and inaccurate,

giving the opposition goalkeeper and defense time to position themselves to deal with the cross. The addition of the fullback means they can underlap the winger who then has placed the opposition fullback well out of position and received the ball racing towards that side of the 18.

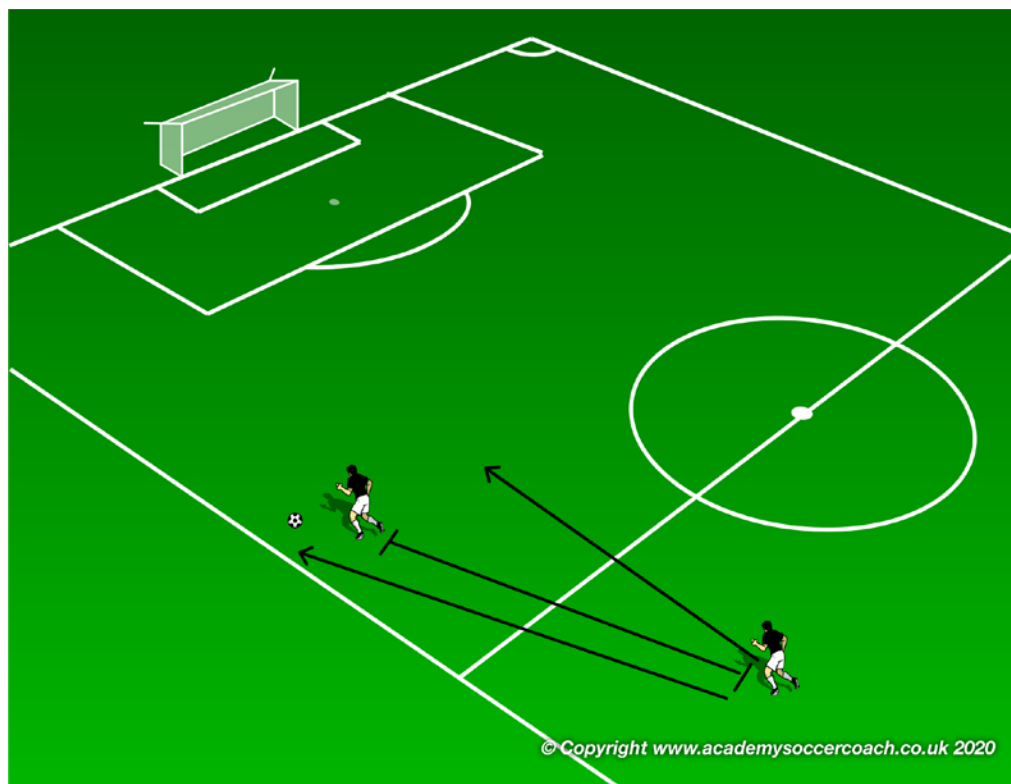
Shifting towards a more philosophical discussion, when discussing positional play with soccer players it is important to define positions more as roles and relationships rather than the traditional sense of the word. Positions in soccer are highly fluid and often are only concrete, from a tactical sense, on paper. For example a midfielder in a 3-5-2 may play the majority of game playing in the area reserved for fullbacks or a central defensive midfielder may be asked to push forwards, or backwards, into the 8 role or as another center back. The focus when instructing positional play should be focused on discussions of what that player wants to ideally accomplish on the offensive, defensive, and transitional moments of the game and how those are dependent on the players near them that form the positional relationship. For a fullback that is going to be the winger on their side and the nearest center back. What the winger does, based on their interpretation of the opposition's positioning will play a huge role in determining the actions of the fullback, and the same for the center back, who may need the fullback to cover for them in certain defensive situations, thus limiting their attacking ability. Teaching or playing these roles in isolation will create disjointed teams and a lack of coordination between teammates. Ultimately, players should be taught to understand their roles in the team dynamic as it applies across the field and told to be soccer players rather than “fullbacks” or “strikers” to create more intelligent and tactically flexible athletes.

Visual Cues for Fullbacks

The concept behind attacking with fullbacks should be very much comparable to the military concept, albeit outdated one, of cavalry. They should be held in reserve until the moment where they can be most effectively used to create numerical advantages on the field using lightning speed to attack opponents that are already engaged. If brought on too early, the opposition can bring in their reserves to even up the numbers, and leads to a thin line behind that area which the opposition can exploit. Brought on too late, the opportunity to exploit a numerical advantage may have passed, and their role can become redundant. This is why, although the technical and physical aspects of the fullback are important, their ultimate success relies on their ability to read visual cues. Without this they may go up field too much, which would result in the team basically playing with another midfielder which could disrupt the entire tactical set up. Too little and they become one dimensional traditional fullbacks. Here is a list, although not a comprehensive one, of visual cues that should guide decision making for fullbacks.

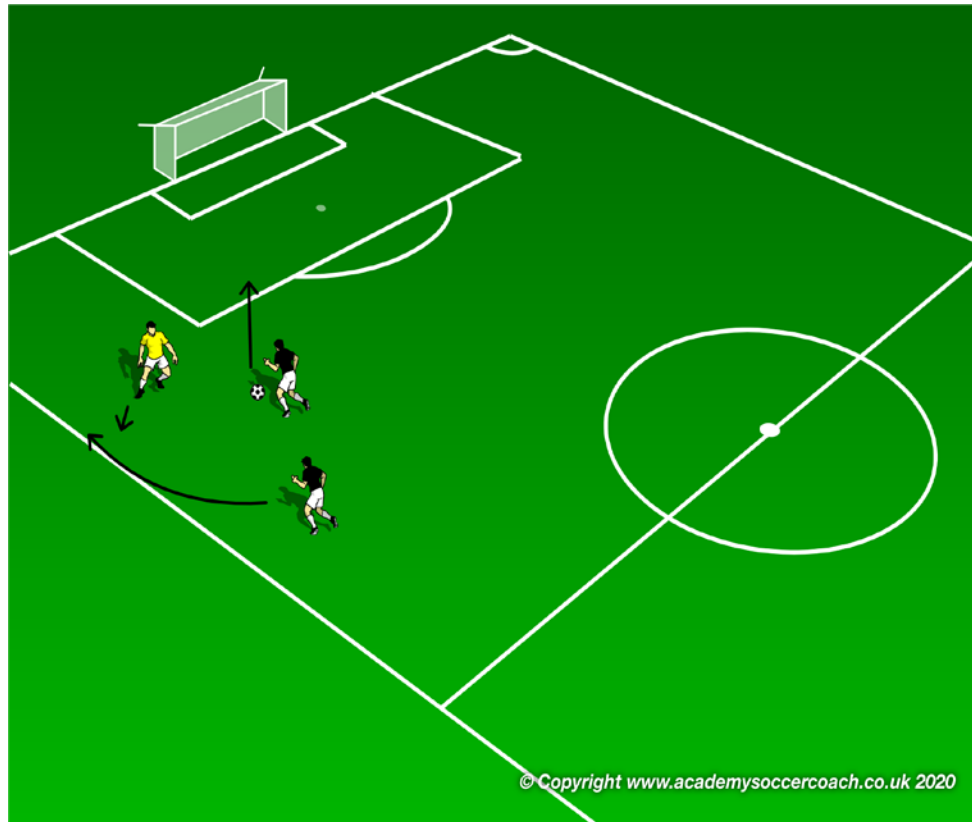
Width of and Distance From the Winger

With their own team's winger on the ball it is important for the fullback to assess the width and depth of that player. First the obvious cue is the distance from the winger. The player will need to assess if, given the situation surrounding the play and their own speed, they will be able to reach the ball in time to effect play. If they are too far they may needlessly get out of position, making their team more susceptible to counters with no added benefit to attack. Next is the width of the winger. Wingers that sit on the touch line may be difficult to overlap, and this can lead to redundancy in the attack. Overlapping the winger in tight space can make it very easy for the opposition defender to mark two players, rendering the numerical advantage useless. If the overlap is not an option, underlapping or staying behind, but in a more advanced position may be the better choice.



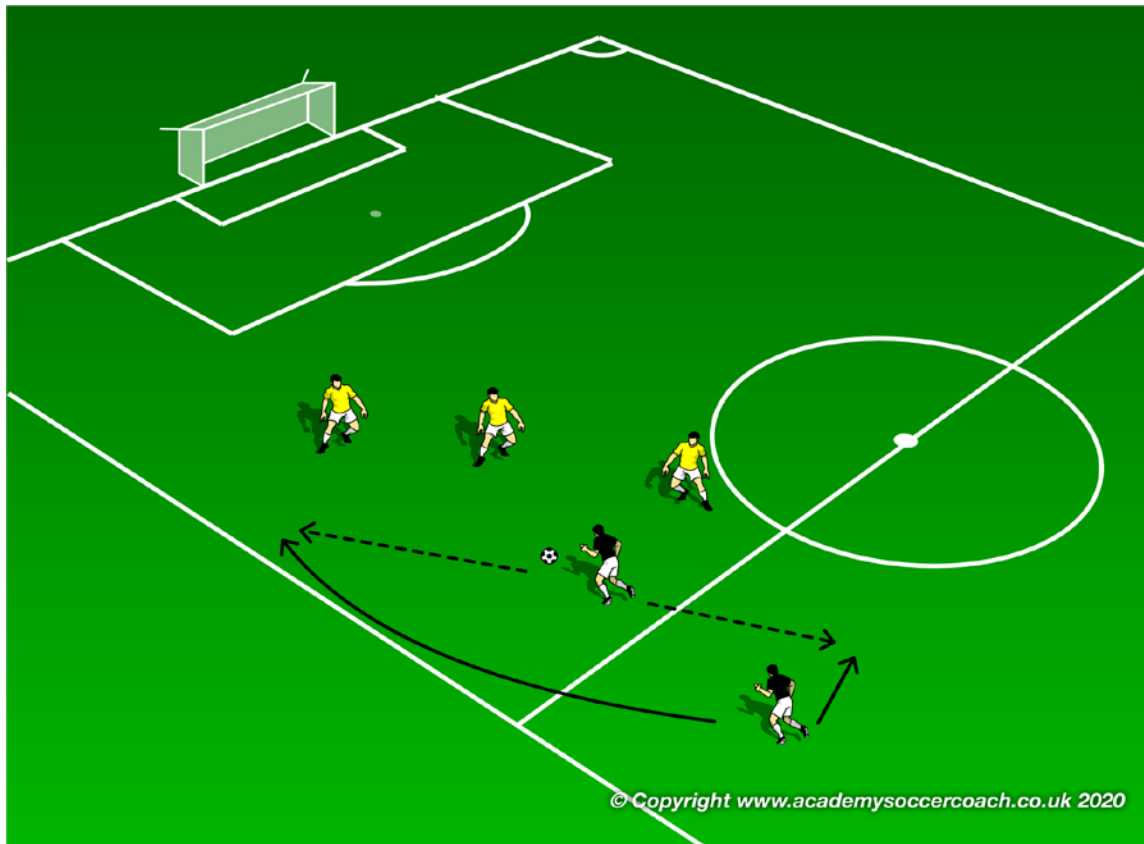
Width of the Opposition Fullback

This visual cue should occur once the fullback has already made the decision to overlap. The decision here is how far should the fullback take the overlap. The point of the overlap is to put the opposition fullback in a difficult 2v1 situation. If they cover the overlap they are leaving space inside and the winger can cut in to attack. If they do not, and stay more central, the overlap can easily get in behind them for a cross or to cut in, so if the opposition fullback stays central the attacking fullback should make the overlap and try their best to drag the defense wide. If the opposition fullback moves out wide to jump the overlap pass it may not be necessary for the attacking fullback to make the full run, since the cost of the run is moving them further from their natural position in defense. In this case a better solution may be to loop the run further towards the touchline until the point they can effectively engage the opposition fullback, which will leave space for the winger to cut in, and keep them as close as possible to a cover/recovery position as possible.



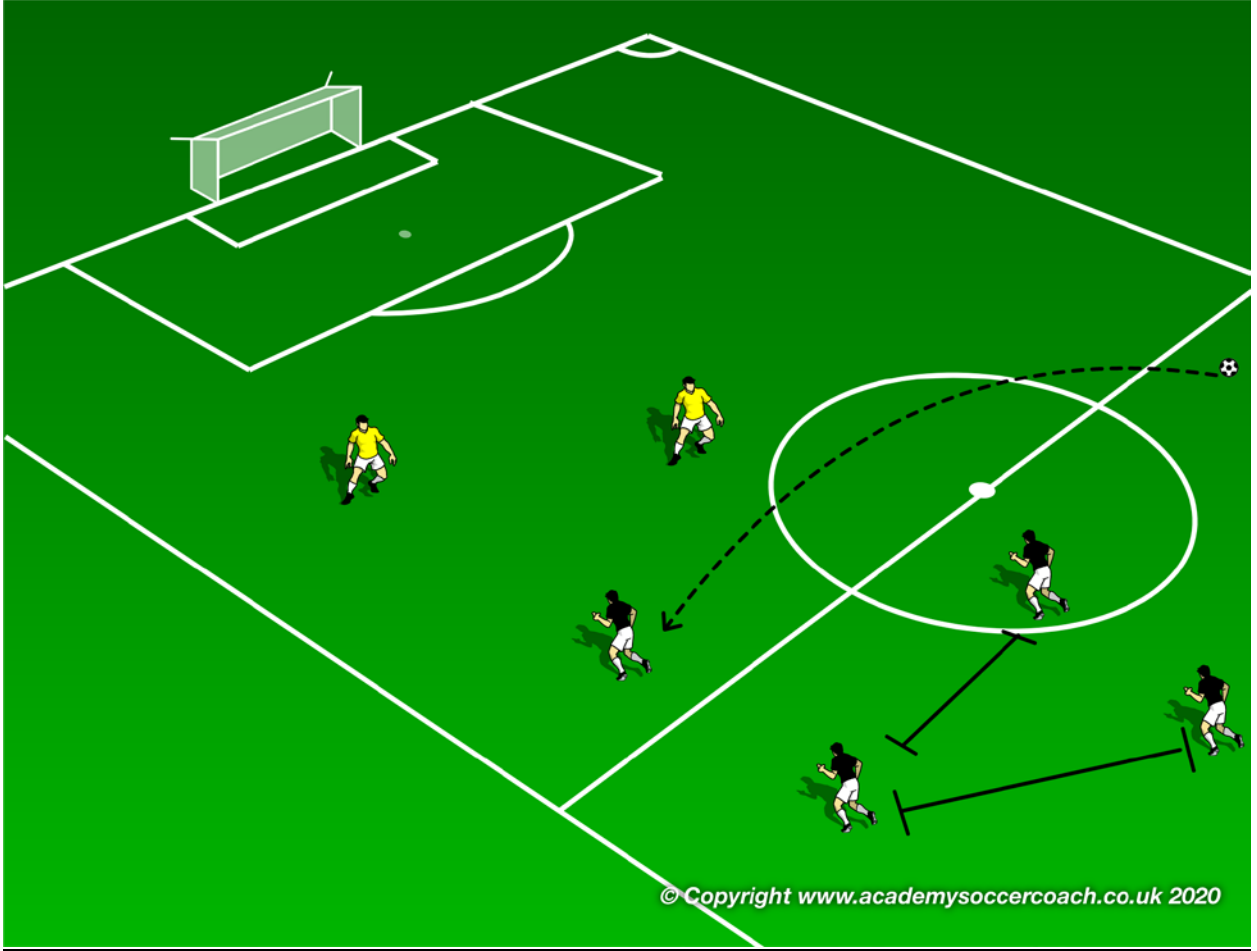
Positioning of Opposition Midfielder

This visual cue could come from observing the movement of the opposition 6, 8, or both depending on the formation the opponent is running. Here the fear is that the opposition has committed so many players wide that the overlap will not result in a numerical advantage. This means that the winger on the ball may need support for a negative pass if the fullback sees that the route down that wing may result in a defensive numerical advantage and a failed attack. The flipside is if the central midfielders engage, but leave opportunities out wide for them to be bypassed by an overlap, the run could be a risky, but effective way to break the entire opposition midfield line. The decision will come down to space and positioning, as well as if the fullback believes they can make the run before the opportunity is closed down.



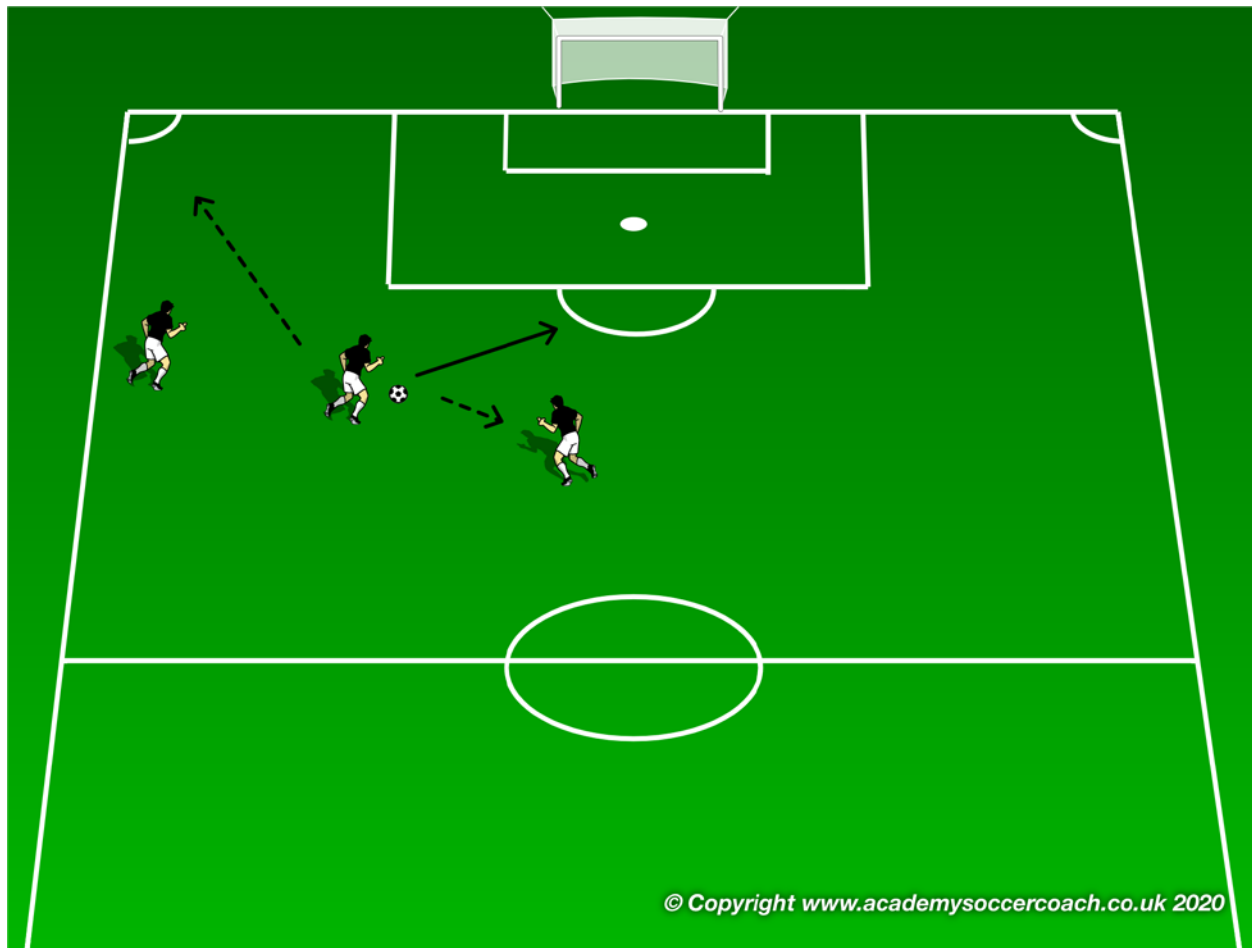
Proximity to Closest Center Back

Another important visual cue is how far the fullback is from the center back. Moving forward leaves space where the fullback was so it is a constant assessment of risk vs. reward. An example of this cue coming into play is if play is switched from one side to the other and the center back has been pulled to the opposite side of the attacking fullback. This may cause a situation where the center back is further away from the fullback than usual, so the decision becomes can the fullback go forward with the winger, but still give the center back time to recover to be in position to cover that part of the field. This can be solved by a center defensive midfielder coming over to instead of the center back, but in the end the same concept applies, the fullback needs to know that they have someone who can replace them as they move into attack.



Inverted/Traditional Wingbacks/Wingers

The first thing to consider the interactions between the outside backs and their more forward counterparts, the wingers. Traditionally left footed wingers and outside backs were on the left, and the same on the right but there is a ton of variety that can be utilized to fit whatever particular style of play a coach is looking to implement. Let's start with the base concept of sending a winger and outside back forward to attack.

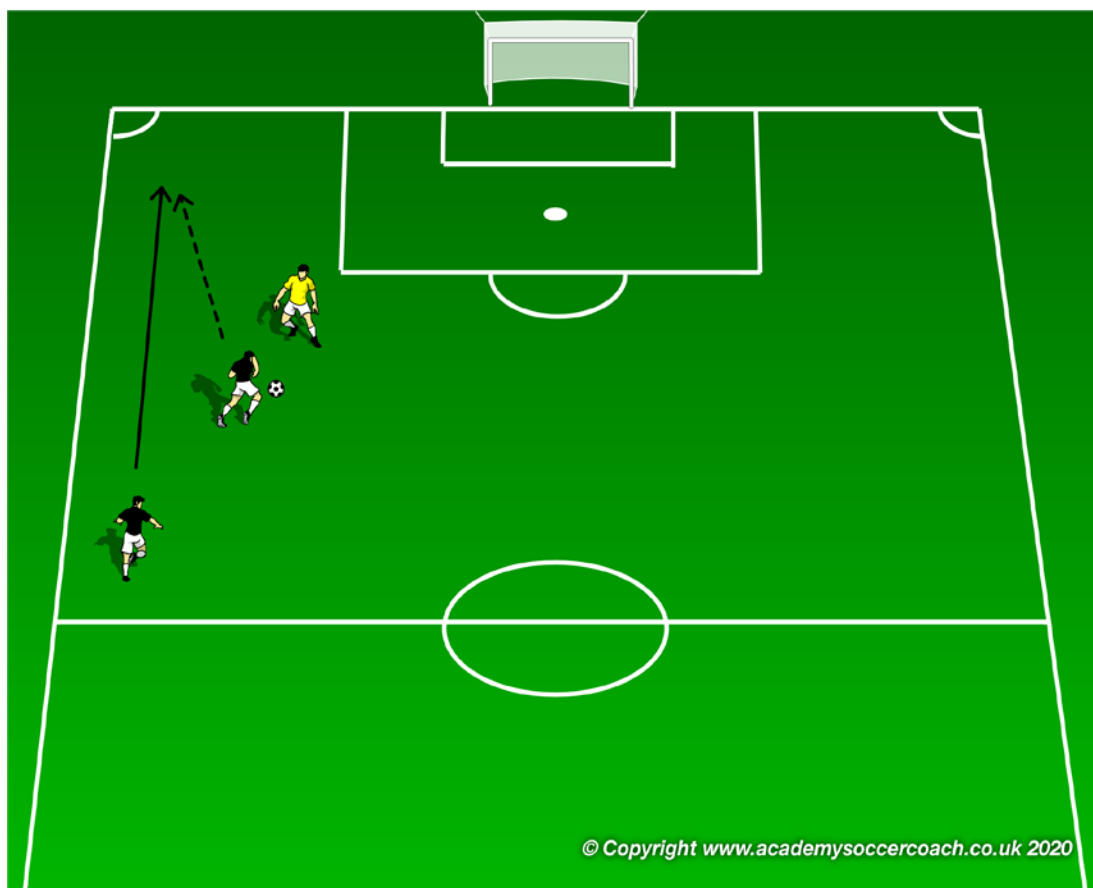


The main takeaway of the image above is that in attack you want to have the player on the ball to have three options:

1. Playing to an overlapping player looking to cut in at the endline or play a cross into the box
2. Have the player cut in to play an incisive pass or shoot
3. Play to an underlapping player for a one-two or to create a shooting/passing opportunity for the receiving player

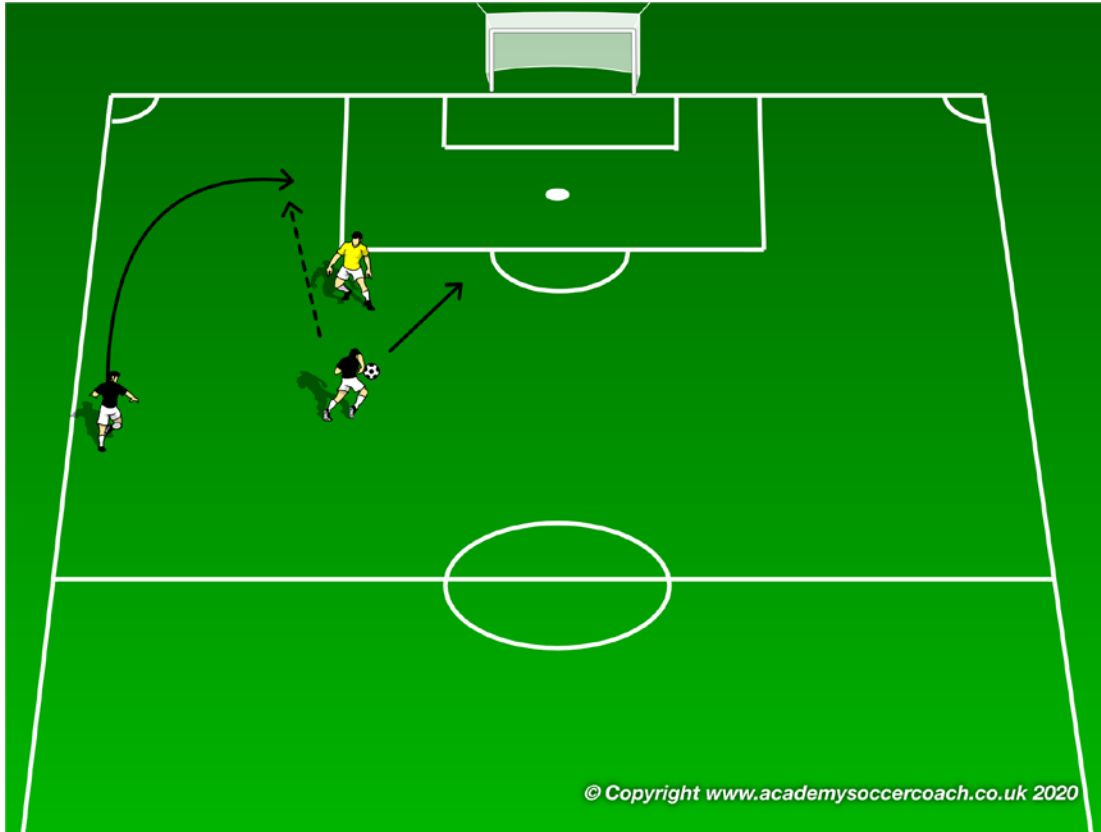
There are countless other options that are determined by the defenses positioning and the depth and width in which the attacking team is playing, but at the root of it this is the ideal result of playing both the winger and outside back forward. The determining factor in what player is represented by what position is often the dominant foot of each of those wide players.

For instance, on the left side, if both wide players are left footed the left back will be the overlapping player, but will likely start from a deep starting point further away from the opponents 18 because the left footed winger will not look to tuck in more centrally so the run from the left footed outside back will have to be delayed until oppositions defender has engaged and left room behind for the ball to be played.



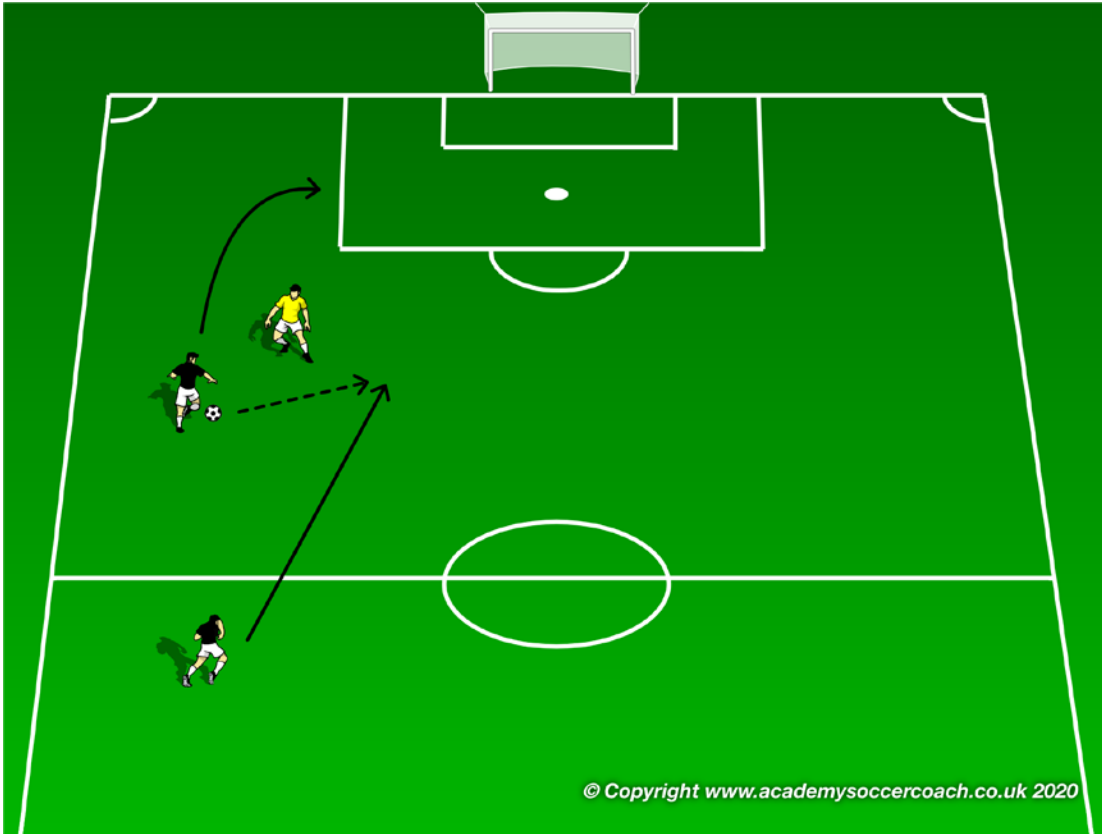
An obvious issue that can occur from this is if the winger does not have the confidence to play on their right to cut in and take the defender, the defender can easily force the pass to the overlapping wingback and jump the pass leaving. With the outside back and the winger now out of position they are vulnerable to counter attack. This can be alleviated by playing with a traditional outside back and an inverted winger. The inverted winger playing on the left side is more confident on his right so he will tend to move more centrally. This forces the opposition to play more compact, leaving more

room for the outside back to make a run closer to the touch line, reducing the likelihood that the defender can jump the pass. It also increases the chances that the overlap by the wingback can be a dummy run, forcing the defender to make a difficult decision. If he plays to the wingers left shoulder the winger can cut in and shoot, pass, or play with another central player. If he plays on the wingers right shoulder the overlap pass is there and he is quickly taken out of the play with the outside back in possession behind the opposition's back line with options to pass, cross, or shoot.

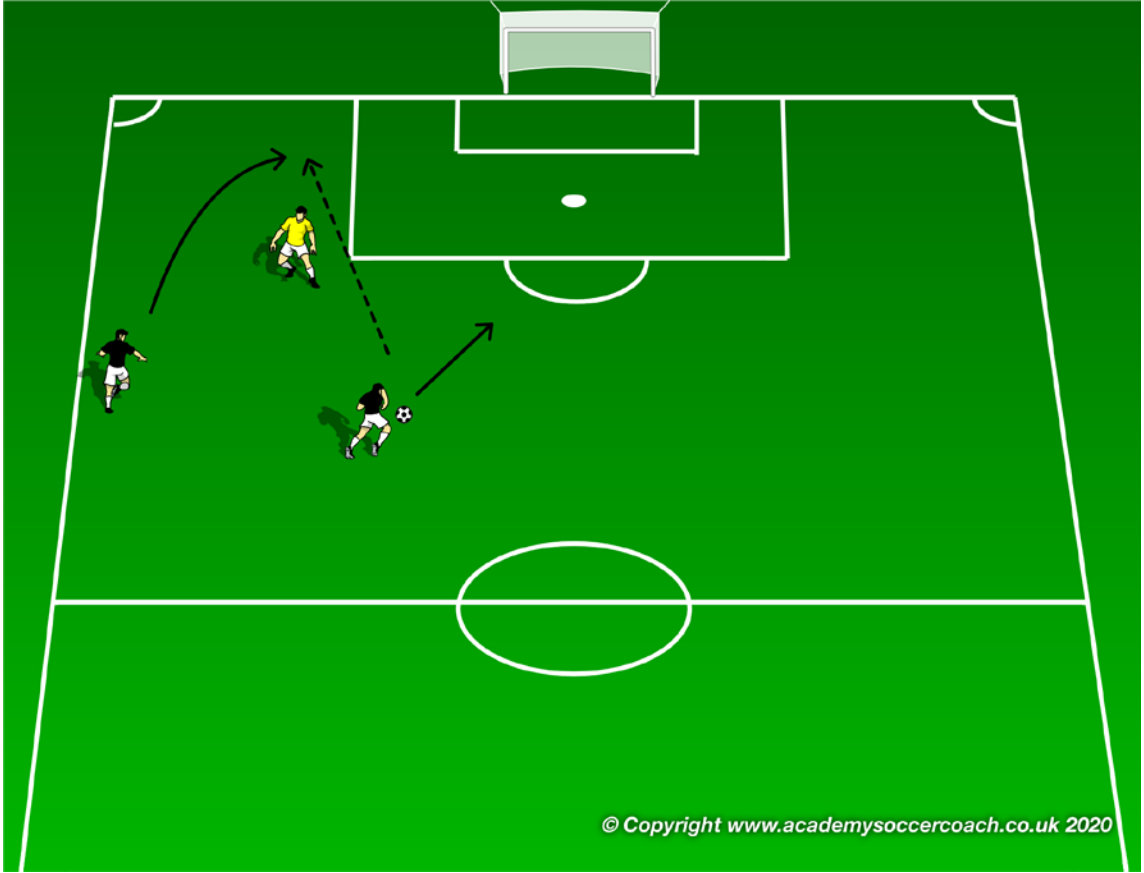


The traditional winger, if he lacks confidence on the right, really does not present a danger to cut in and makes the defender's decision a simpler one of keeping the winger in front of him and dealing with the pass to the back, or forcing a pass centrally where he has the cover of one or two center backs. The drawback, as always, is that if the ball is lost in this vulnerable position the left flank is ripe to be countered.

Another concept that can be utilized is a traditional winger with an inverted outside back. In this concept the winger naturally stays wide, seeing as they are a lefty, and the outside back, a righty, 1. underlap the winger, giving the winger the option to dribble to the left or lay the ball off with their right, and means the defender is in a more central position to recover.



Or 2. The outside back can bring the ball up with the winger providing width. This means the outside back is likely to be pulled wide by the initial movement of the winger, which leaves space for the outside back to cut in centrally. It also means the ball, if lost, is likely to be more central which means the chance of an opposition counter can be slowed by the cover of forwards and midfielders.

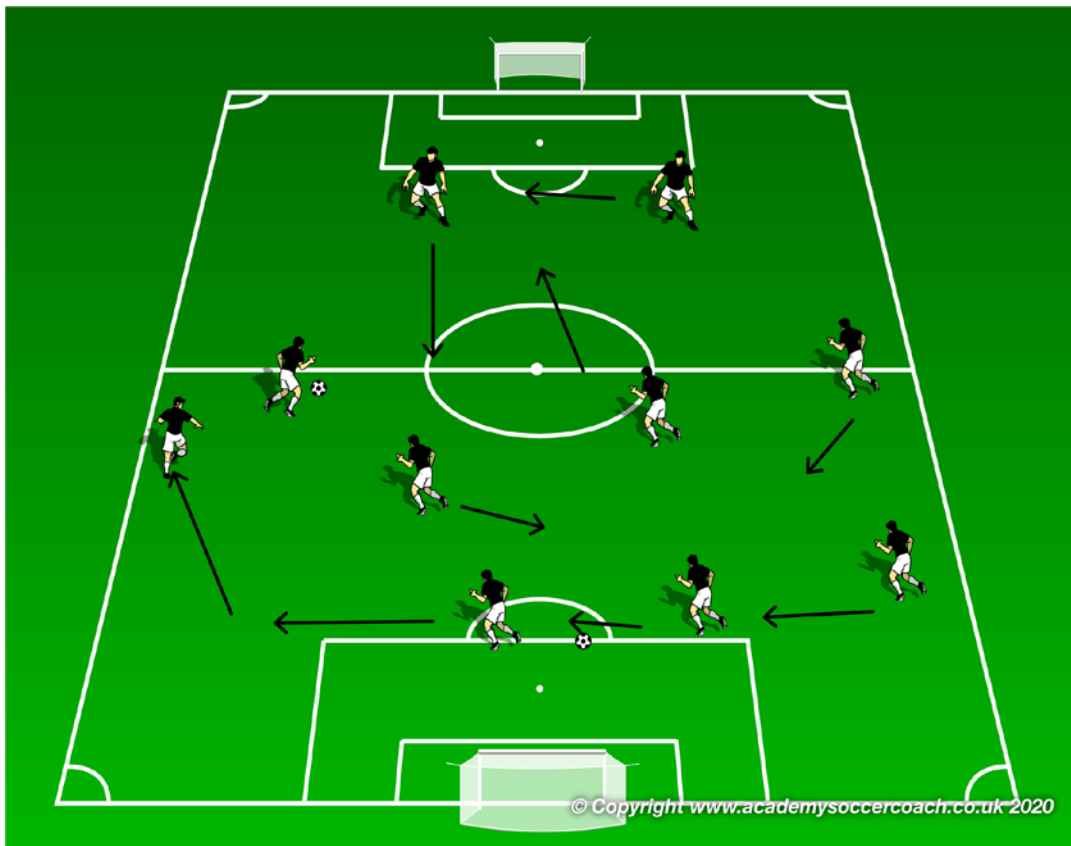


Covering for the Attacking Fullbacks

The biggest drawback, as we have seen, with utilizing the backs to attack is the space left behind that leaves teams vulnerable to counter. While this can be dangerous, there are also a number of ways coaches can get creative in order to cover the gaps left by the backs, without sacrificing their team's attacking capabilities. This requires a high level of coordination and a set number of visual cues that must be read by the back line, and it often incorporates the 6 either dropping into the back line or providing deeper coverage than normal. When making these decisions backs will need to decide on the timing of when they slide to cover for the fullback. Too early and it could tip off the opposition to what is happening, or leave them out of position if the attack doesn't develop. Too late and entire sides of the park can be left open for the opposition to exploit. It ultimately depends on the situation and the system being played so here are some general ways that coverage can be provided when both wide players join the attack.

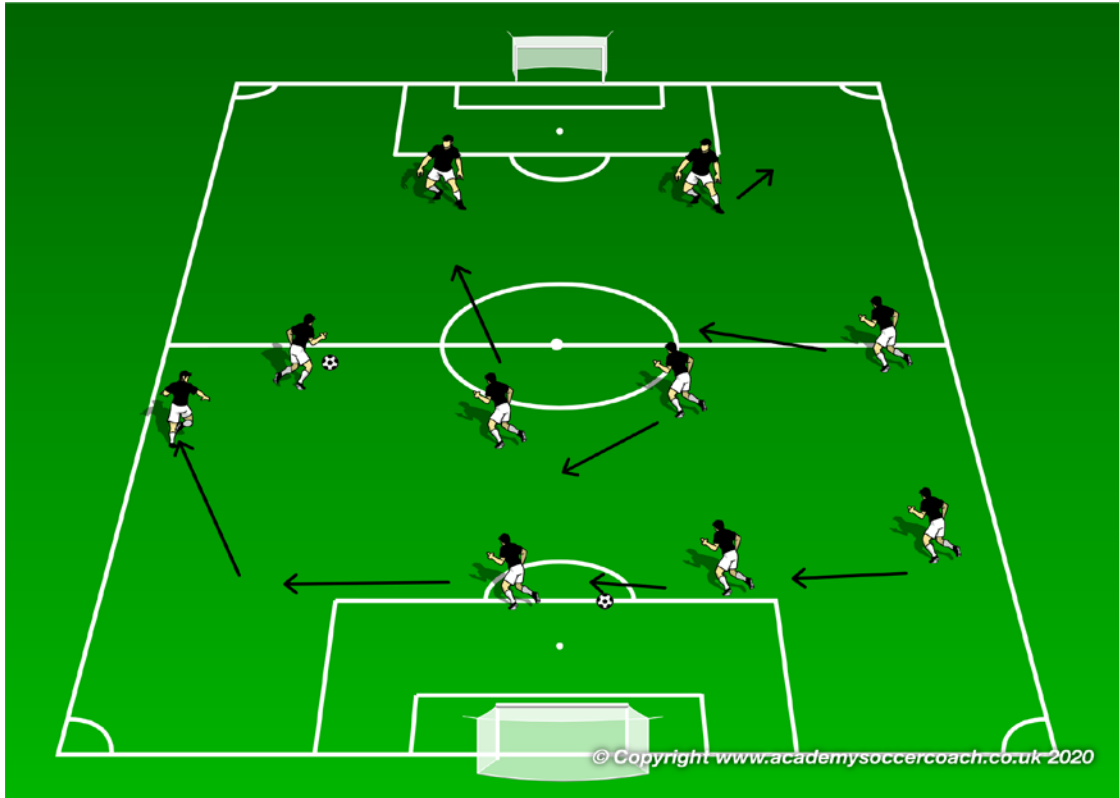
Covering the Fullbacks in a Flat 442

If you are planning on attacking the fullbacks in a standard 442 the obvious solution is to slide the left center back over to fill the left back's role and have the rest of the back line slide accordingly. The decision that arises though is which of the Center Mids now transitions to the 6 role. The left midfielder makes the most immediate sense as they are in the best position to recover if possession is lost and can quickly get back into position if play is switched. The drawback is that the wide players lose a central option that they could build with, or use to switch play. This can be relieved by having a striker drop in to provide that support, with the other striker moving central to provide the attacking option and the depth to keep the opposition backline further up the field. The depth of the 6 from the backline can vary on the situation, but it is important that they provide both support as a pivot if the attack fails as well as act as a reserve defensive force to react to where the counter is on either side of the field.



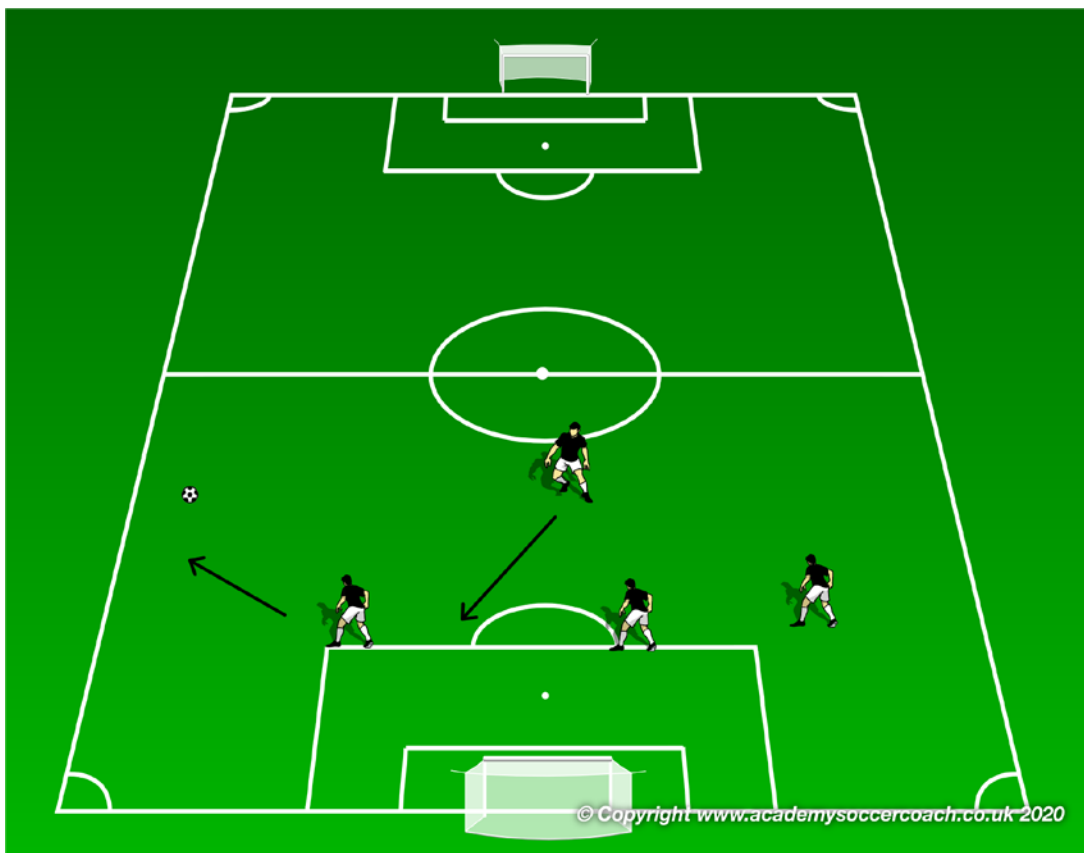
The other option is to have the far sided central midfielder drop in to become the 6. This means that the attack now has a nearby supporting midfielder and both strikers can remain forward since there is no immediate defensive gap. The far side winger can even move centrally to replace the dropping central midfielder, and the far side striker

can move wider to provide width to the attack. The drawback here is that if there is a switch of the field, the left side has become congested and the team that loses possession now is vulnerable to a counter on their right side.

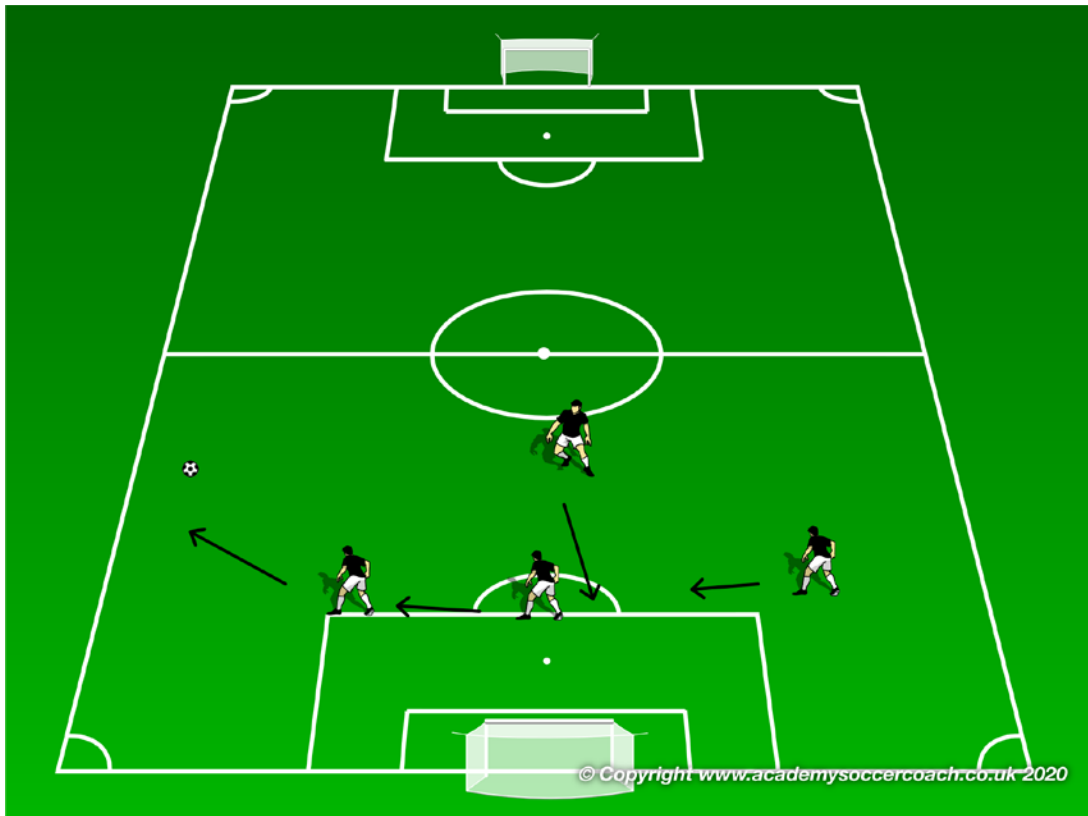


Covering the Outside Center Backs in a 3 Back System

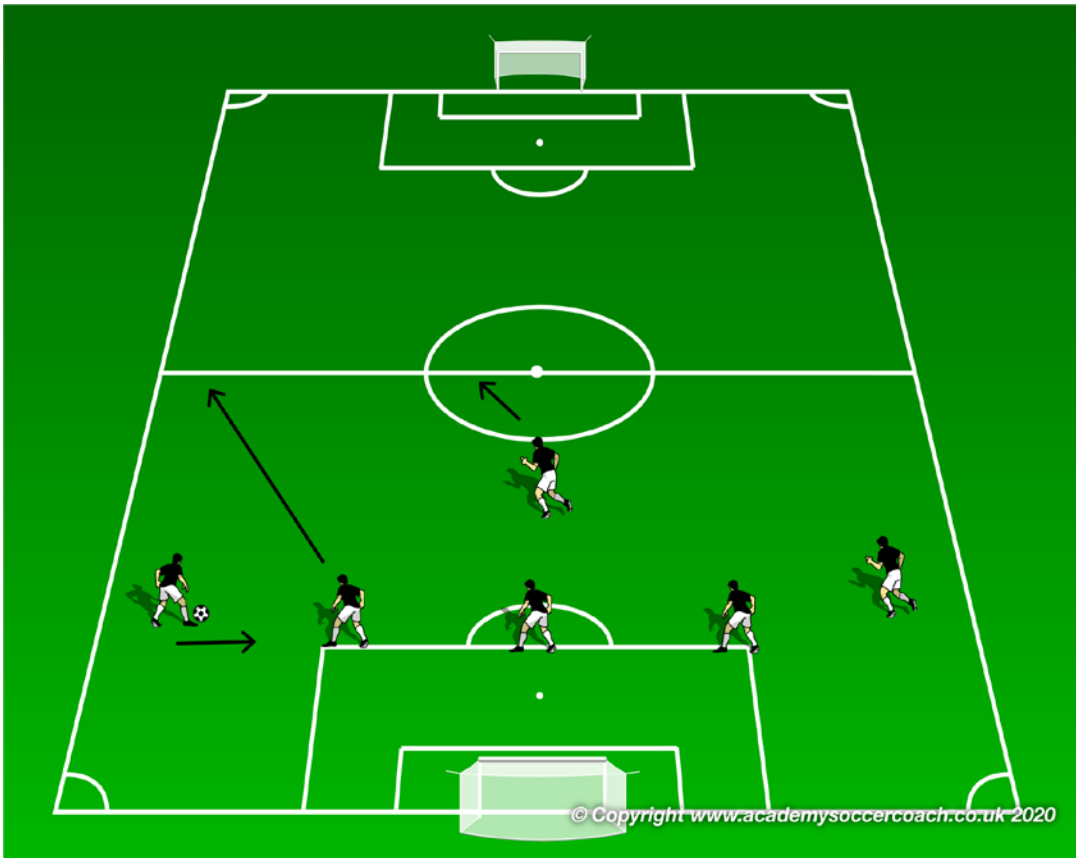
In a 3 man defensive system the defensive role of the center defensive midfielder is doubled since they will be tasked with covering any of the gaps created by shifts in the back line. For example, if a left center back gets pulled out wide the CDM may be called on to slide into the back line to provide immediate cover for them. This situation allows the fullback to confidently go forward knowing that the backline is fully staffed and there is cover behind. This is what generally occurs at Sheffield United with their use of “Overlapping Center Backs” and requires a center defensive mid who is comfortable in both roles, and is willing to sacrifice their attacking role for good of the cause.



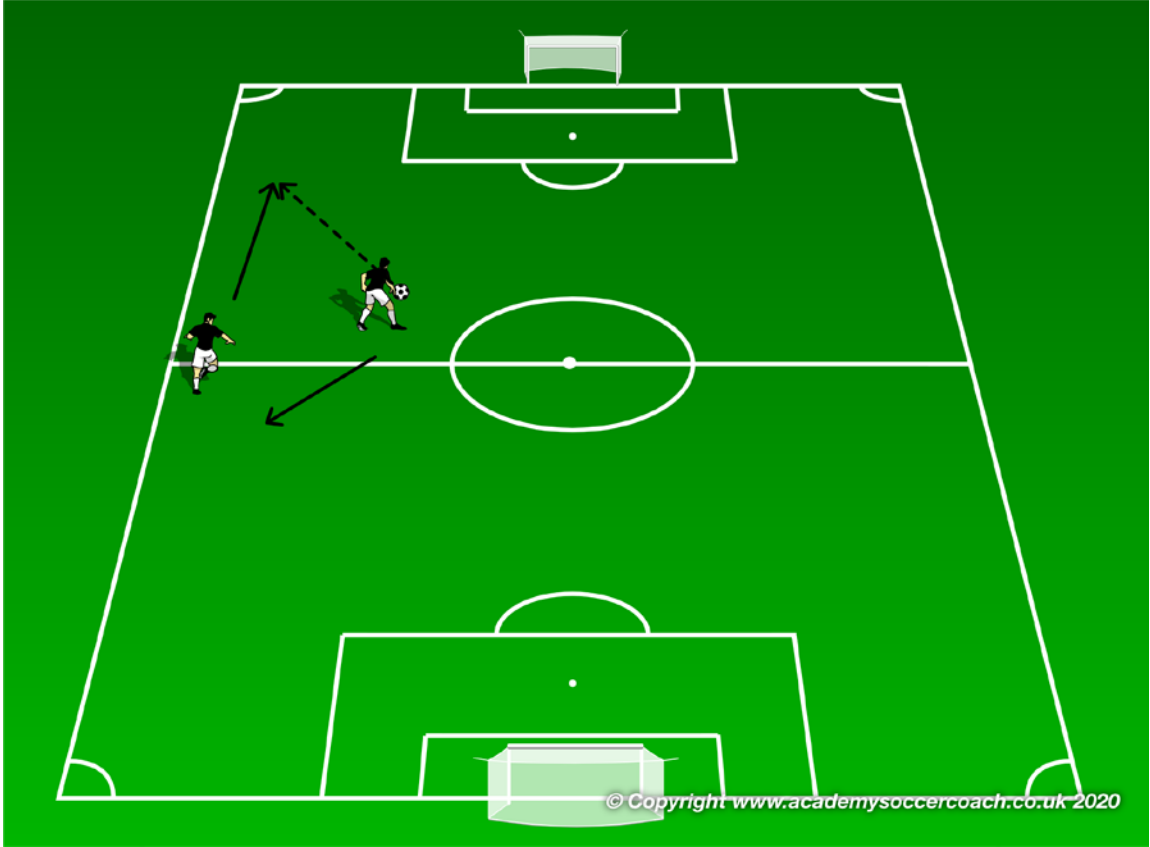
Similarly the CDM can slide in as the center back with the original center back sliding out wide to provide the cover.



This solution is simple, and oftentimes effective because it means you do not sacrifice attacking players, retain a similar defensive shape to the original, and allow the fullbacks to combine with wingers and midfielders. The drawback is that you sacrifice your pivot player and create a larger gap between your midfield and back line. This can be remedied by dropping the central midfielder deeper to take up a similar role, but again you lose a central attacking passing option. An alternative to using the CDM to cover is to drop the wingers deep to interchange positionally with the centerbacks. In most three back systems when the team is in its defensive shape the wingers drop into the back line and create a 5-4-1, which is defensively formidable and provides a lot of unique opportunities to counter out of. One of these opportunities is to have one of the fullbacks attack out of this, with that side's winger staying in their defensive role. What this does is provide more of a diagonal run, that is less likely to be picked up by the defensive amidst the chaos of the counter, than compared to the more vertical run likely from the winger moving up the field. The interchange can also challenge opposition fullbacks by challenging them to have to develop a plan to mark the winger, then change and adapt that plan to dealing with the fullback. This obviously allows for tactical fluidity as well. Maybe your left center back is a better crosser than your winger who is an inverted 1v1 expert, the interchange of these players then give you a two dimensional attack on the same side of the field.

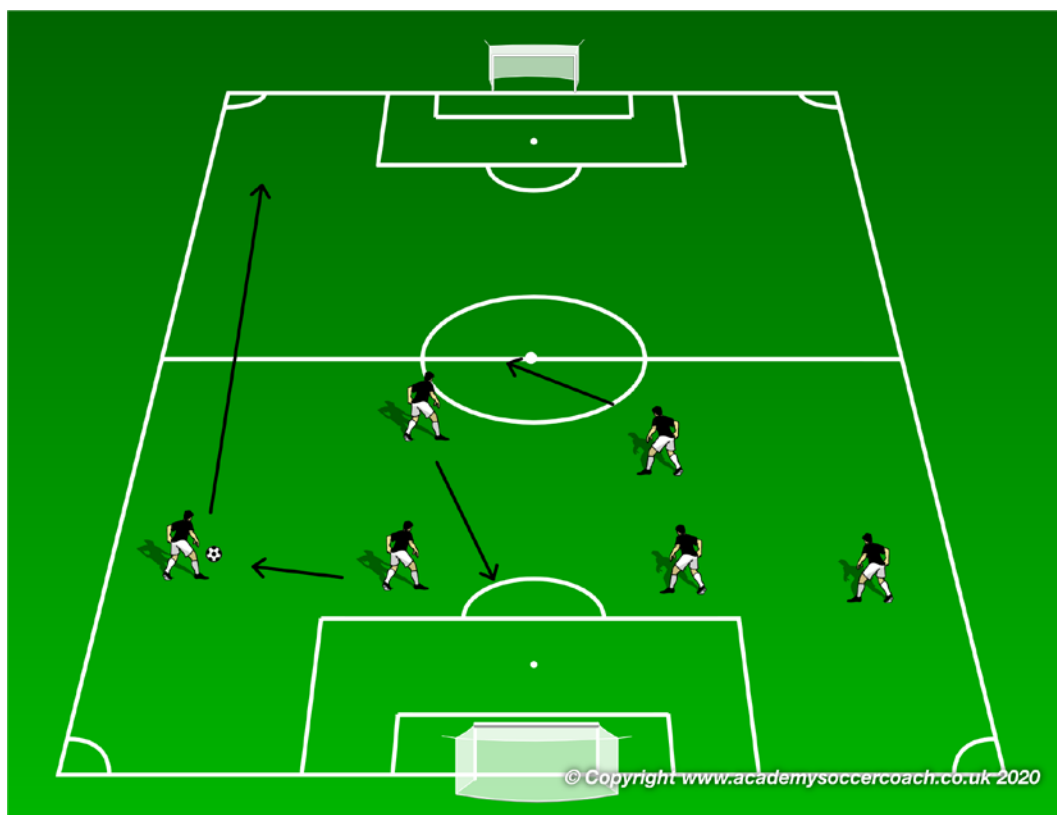


This interchange can also occur higher up on the field, as it sometimes does at Sheffield United, where the outside center back overlaps the winger, and once that ball is played the winger drops much deeper to provide both a negative outlet pass, as well as defensive cover should the ball be lost.

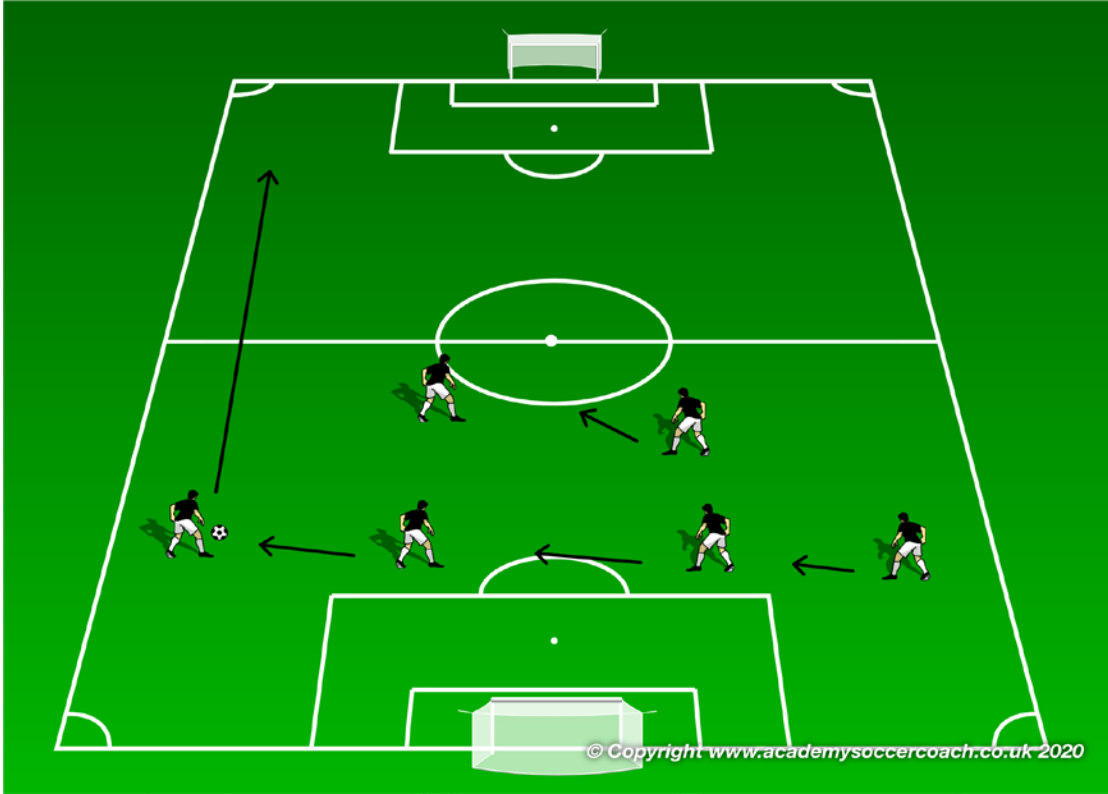


Covering the Fullbacks in a 4-2-3-1

The 4-2-3-1 is perfect for pushing fullbacks up because it provides two natural defensive midfielders, so one can drop deep to join the back line and the other still play the role of the pivot player. It is an ideal formation for countering because while you can sit a back 4 deep and have two players stopping in front of the line there is limitless opportunities to push backs and midfielders forward while balancing attacking numbers and defensive shape. The tactical decision though becomes the same as the 4-4-2, do you drop the near side CDM because they are closest to the position, but sacrifice that central passing option? Or do you drop the far side CDM, and keep the passing option but create more moving pieces, and therefore more opportunity for lapses, in your backline. That decision comes down to personal preference, personnel, and the situation presented.

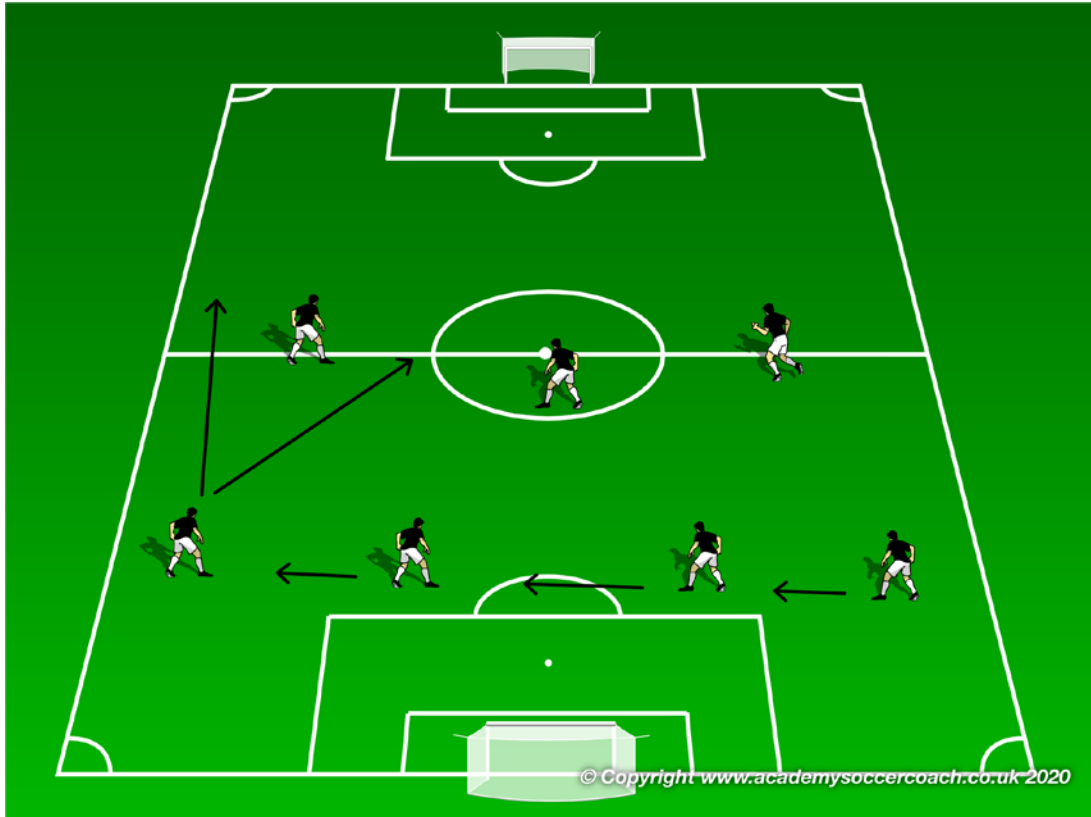


It also provides the opportunity for a switch to a three back system in which a fullback moves forward, the back line slides, and there are still two midfielders in place to provide defensive cover.

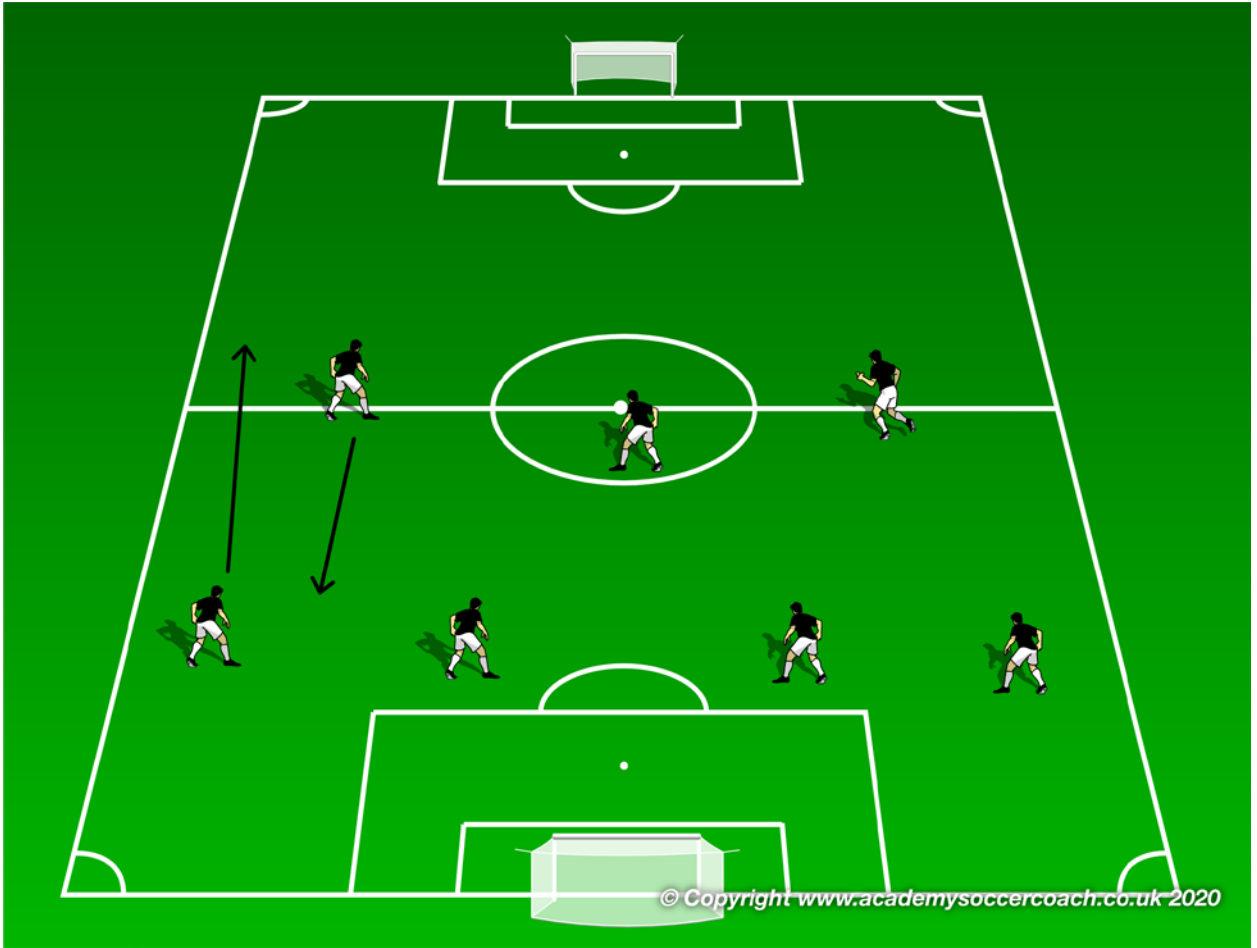


Covering the Fullbacks in a 4-3-3

The 4-3-3 demands attacking fullbacks to bolster the midfield, which will often be at a numerical disadvantage against most formations, but it also provides less cover for them in the shape of defensive center midfielders, so the most common solution is simply to shift to the three back system, with the fullback overlapping or underlapping the winger, creating a 3-4-3 formation in attack.



An alternative solution is for the winger to interchange with the attacking fullback to maintain the four back system and create confusion amongst defensive players on that side of the field. Again, this is a great opportunity to present the defensive opposition with a different look to deal with such as a traditional winger switching with an inverted fullback, or vice versa.



Drills to Train Attacking Fullbacks

The Fullback's role used to be to mark out a winger, make sure you don't dive in out by the cornerflag, and if you can play a simple neat pass to the mids, otherwise hoof it up there. At an early age you still may find players that have been taught these tendencies, and therefore cringe at the thought of having to take the ball forward or pass the ball away as if it is a live grenade whatever the situation. Even at an older age you may find players who see the halfway line as a definitive border that can never be crossed. To utilize attacking fullbacks technical work is absolutely essential. Players must learn to be comfortable on the ball, in 1v1 situations, and be proficient playing in tight spaces. These are non negotiables for any player, but training fullbacks is complicated by the duality of their role. Sure they can dribble through three defenders, but if they are bombing up the wing everytime they get the ball they can expose huge gaps in transition. Fullbacks need to be presented with training sessions that constantly force them to ask themselves the question "should I go forward?". These sessions should include a variety of visual and audible stimuli that they must receive, digest, and react to, and then assess the results of their actions. Did you push forward too early allowing the defense to adjust to your overlap? Did choosing to move forward expose the back line? Why did you overlap rather than underlap? Training sessions that invite these types of questions will create more tactically aware, intelligent, and ultimately, dangerous Fullbacks.

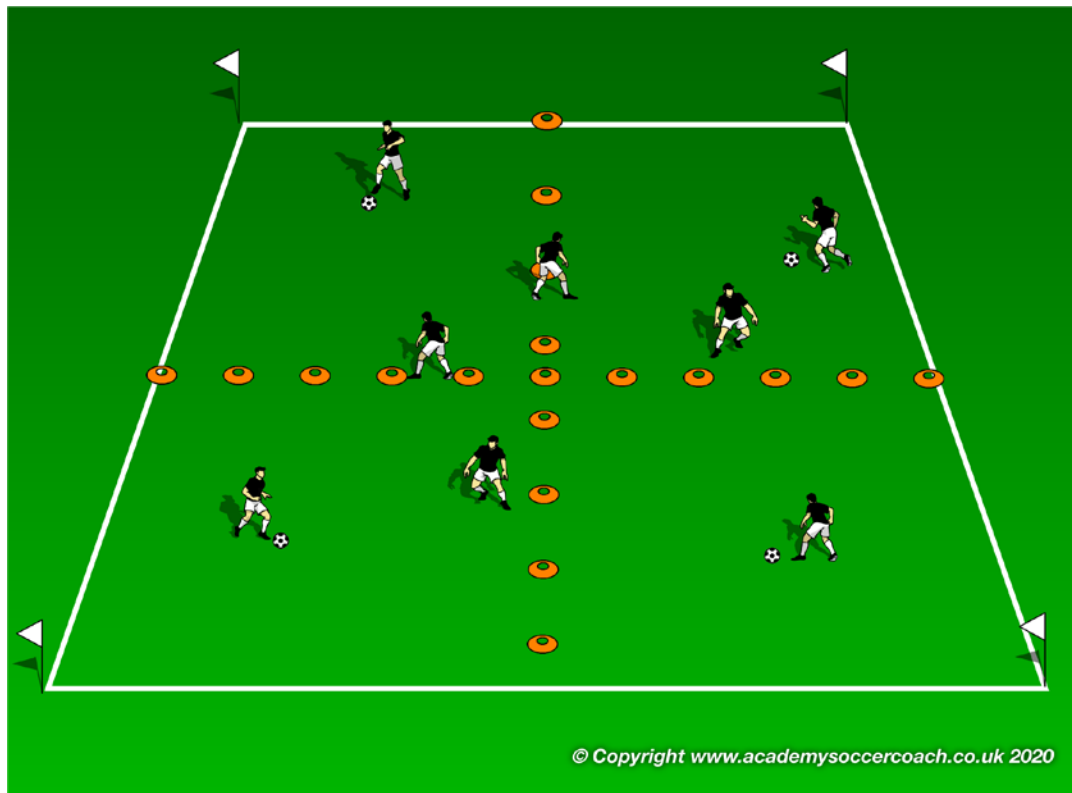
Overlap Box

Description:

The Overlap Box Drill can be used as a way of getting players used to the physical feel of over/underlapping within a constrained space, as well as developing a sense of timing for wide players. Strikers can also be used as the bumper player to simulate the wingback underlapping the winger and receiving hold up play from the striker.

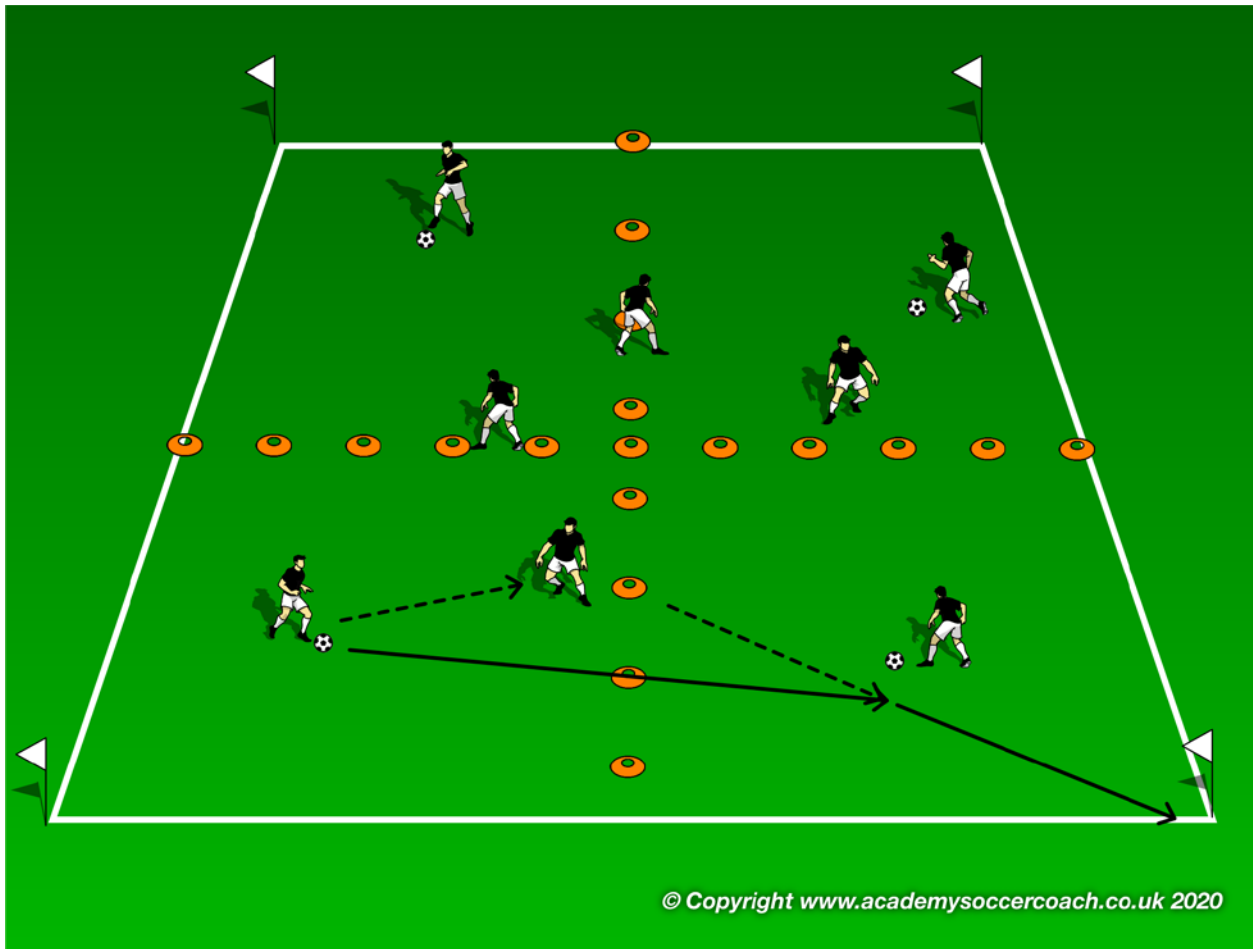
Setup:

Create a 30x30 box cut into 4 squares with coaching sticks at each corner. 4 Players fill the boxes and have a ball and 4 others stand on the 4 inner lines without a ball.



Execution:

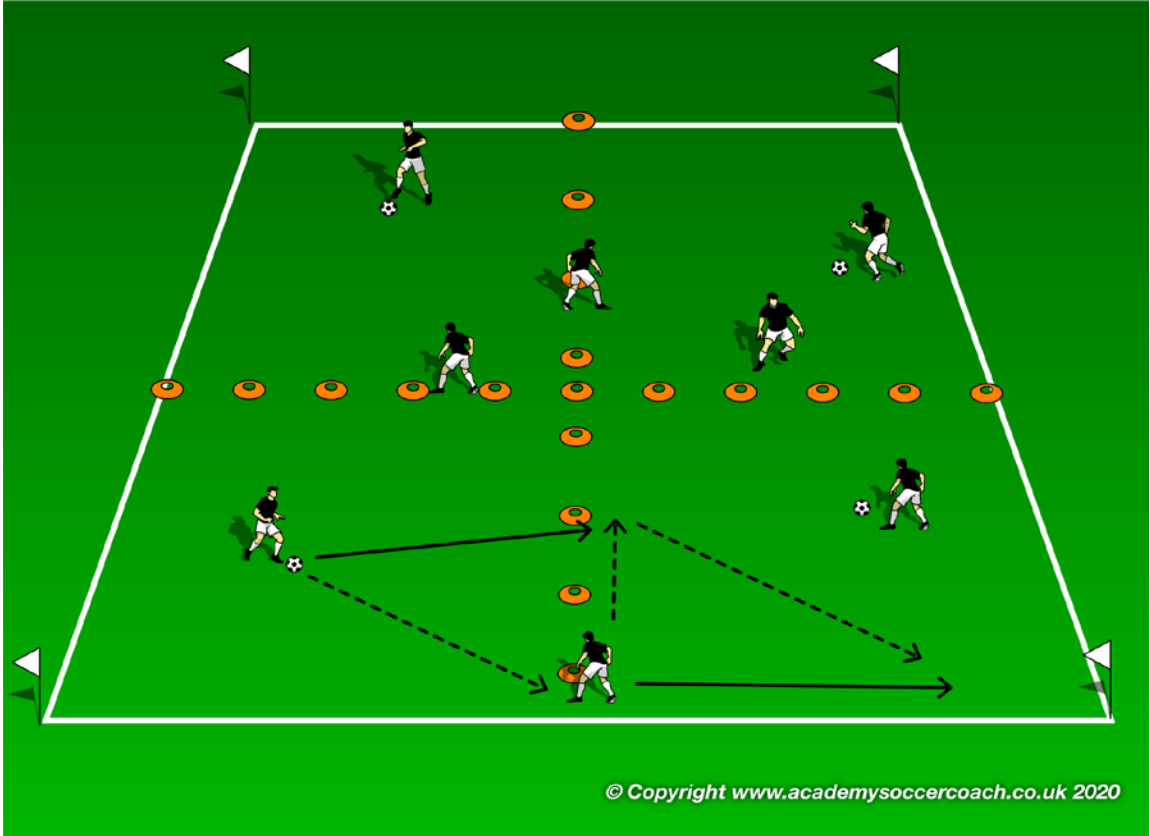
On whistle players with the ball start moving clockwise (next time go counter clockwise, rotate after each rep) and pass the ball to the player on the line. The player on the line then does some type of move requiring the player that passed the ball to overlap the line player. Once the passer has the ball back they then take three hard sprint steps to the coaching stick in the next box and then head to the next person on the line.



If the next player on the line is engaged the passer can juggle by the coaching stick and pick the appropriate time to then move forward.

Variations:

Additional boxes can be added as well as different layoffs such as a pass back, dummy, stop and go, etc. An example could be placing the bumper player towards the touch line then having the passer play to them, receive a pass from the bumper, and then play a through ball to the bumper player towards the corner flag which would simulate a wall pass from the striker to the underlapping wingback, who then plays a dangerous through ball back to the striker.



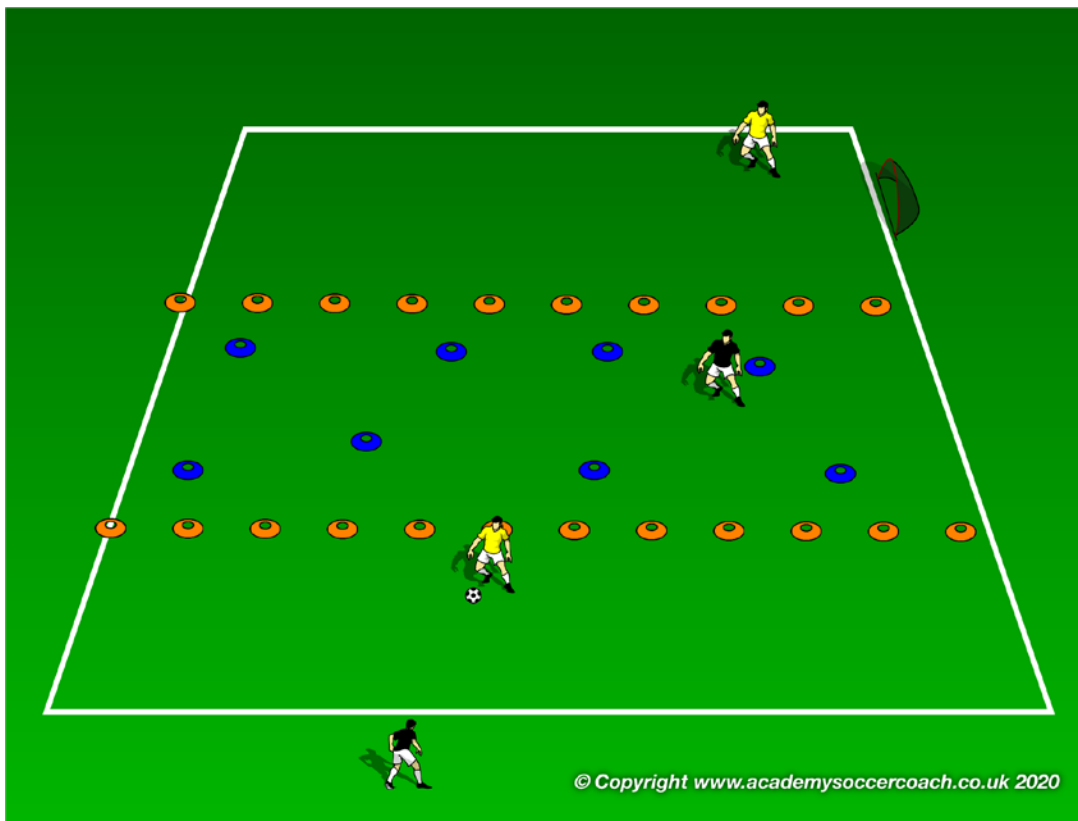
Overlaps to Attack the Box

Description:

This drill would be an activity to ramp up the difficulty of the Overlap Box, now the realism has increased with the obstacles in the box and live pressure on the wingback and the winger. From this drill you can create any of the tactical decisions players will need to make no matter the system you are in.

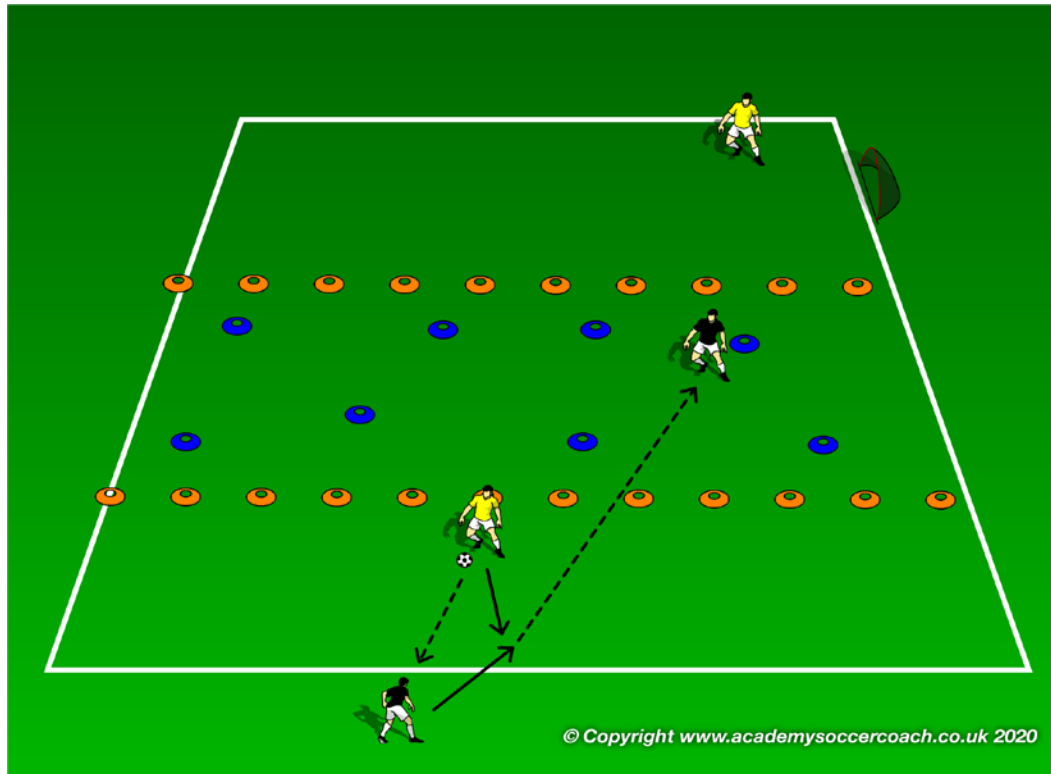
Setup:

Create a box in the middle of the grid with two extended lines coming out of the box on either end. Fill the middle box with dummies/coaching sticks/or large cones. One defender starts at the lip of the box and the other at the far end of the line. One attacking player starts with the ball (or the defender can pass it to them) and the other attacking player starts inside the box

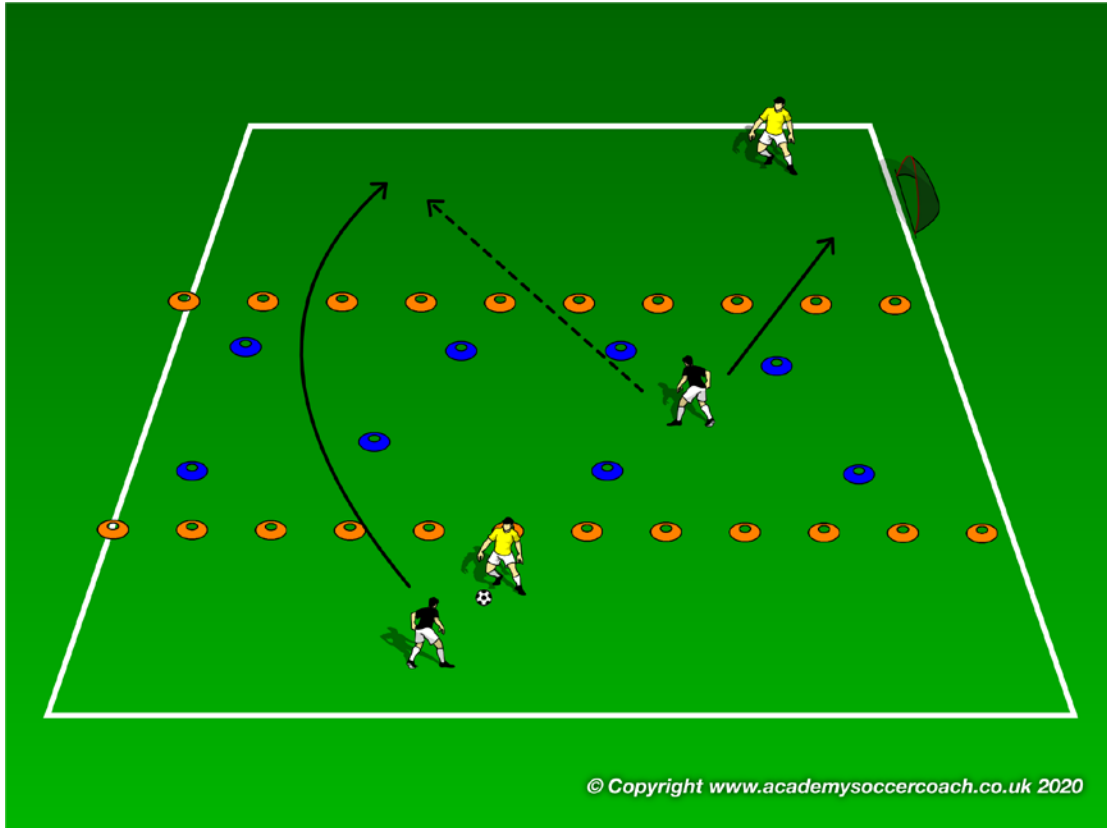


Execution:

Play starts when the first player on the ball either starts dribbling or receives a pass from the defender. The defender plays shadow defense on the attacker who needs to engage the defender close enough they can pass around them and but not give the defender time to mark their run into the box.



The player that has received in the box then has a choice. They can lay the ball off to the original passer (who represents a wingback overlapping the winger) or, if the defender in the box with the goal has moved too far from goal to mark the overlap, go directly at goal. Either way only one of the two attacking players may enter the box.



The attacker attempts to score and play resets after a goal, defensive win, or ball goes out of bounds.

Variations:

Again, depending on what situation you are looking for this drill can be adapted. -By simply flipping the side of the player in the middle box you can create an underlap situation.

-To recreate the three options the winger may have an additional player can be added to represent a central midfielder, with the winger playing more centrally. To add pressure to the pass coming from the middle the initial defender who plays the ball in can now enter the middle grid and win the ball.

-Counter attacking goals can be added to the starting side to simulate the dangers of allowing the opposition in behind if the pass is jumped or possession is lost without defensive cover.

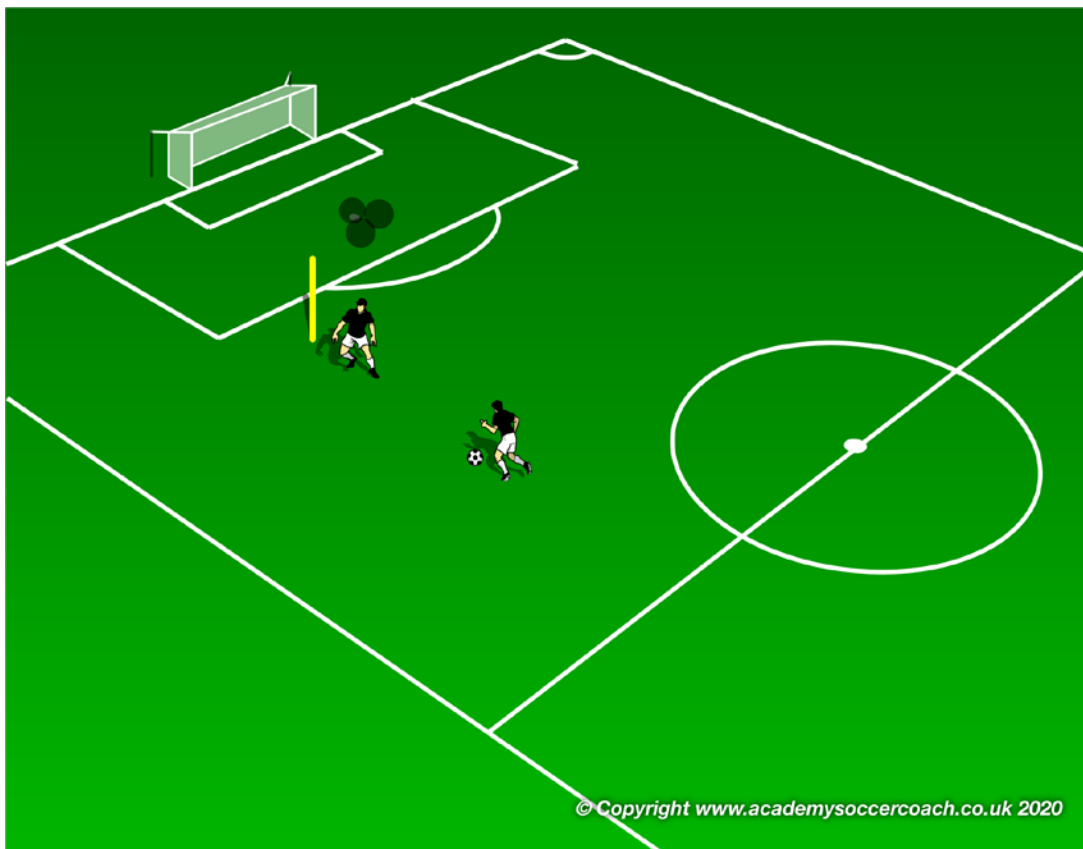
Garbage Can Target Overlaps

Description:

This game simulates the winger laying off the ball to the overlapping fullback to cross. It is more designed if you find that you are training fullbacks with little experience getting forward or who struggle to cross the ball. It can be used as a refresher though for more adept players, or to add a level of crossing competition. The focus here should be on technique and discussing the crosser playing to a specific area and picking their head up before the cross. It can be used as a quick teaching moment that gets the teaching points across before they are implemented in live games, or for players that need it, a longer drill to increase repetition.

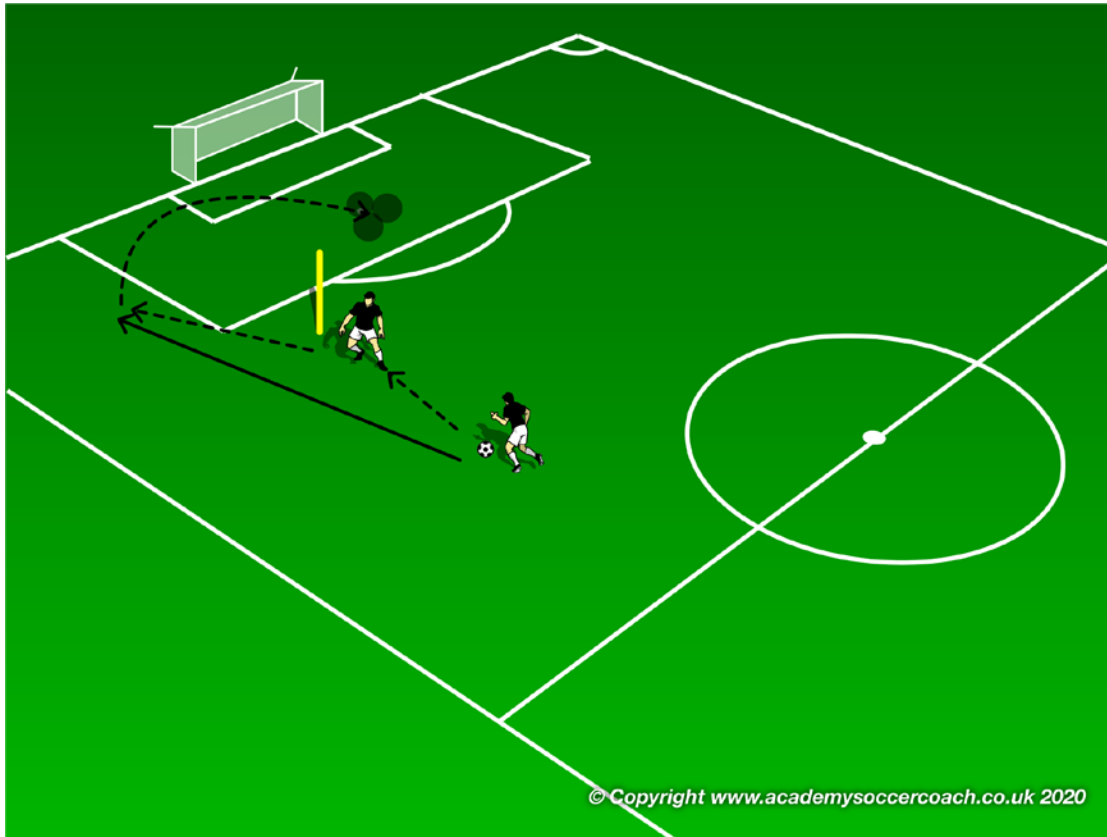
Setup:

Place a coaching stick and the target player just outside either side of the 18 and 3 yards in. Place the line of players about 10 yards back from that player. One side is one team the other is the other team, and they will alternate sides after a set time . Set up a stack of 3 garbage cans around the penalty spot.



Execution:

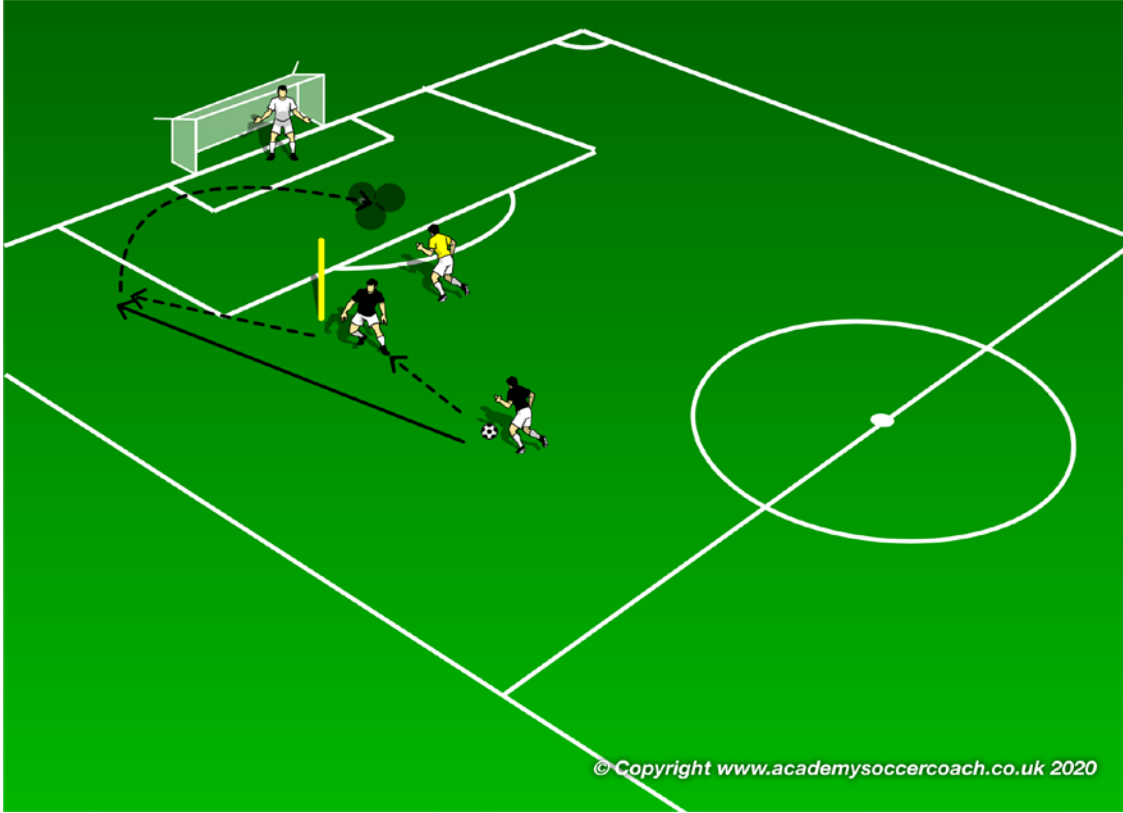
On the coaches whistle the first player in each line plays a pass to the player at the coaching stick. That player then lays the ball to the passer who overlaps the coaching stick and enters the area on the side of the 18 (the killzone). They can take up to 3 touches but are not allowed to slow down before making a cross into the box and must stay out of the 18. Players get 1 point for hitting one of the cans, 3 points if the ball lands in the can and comes out, then 5 points if the ball lands in the can. After a set amount of time the team switches sides, go again, and scores are added.



Variations:

A goalkeeper can be placed in net who can catch balls that land beyond the garbage cans, any ball that is caught in the 6 by the GK is -1 point. Goalkeeper must start on the line.

If players are taking too much time a defender can be added making the rotation player that lays ball off then moves to defender then to back of line as passer



8v6(+1) Game

Description:

This game can focus on two different concepts, depending on which team you focus on. If the coaching is focused on the team of 8 what you are looking for is to get that team forward and read the “ghost” player. The fullbacks will need to make a decision whether they can move forward and not risk the “ghost” player finding space behind them if possession is lost. An oversimplification is if he is on your side, stay, if he is on the other, support. More questions and discussion can be brought up to discuss how the six will cover these situations. If the coach’s focus is on the team of 6+1 the “ghost” player can represent the wingback looking for space to move forward. They will have the opportunity to make decisions such as overlap or underlap, stay home to support or push forward to create numerical mismatches. This takes away the fullbacks defensive responsibility and allows them just to see the game as a deep attacking player to develop that part of their game.

Setup:

Set up the field using the full width, 3/4s of the length of the field. Balls should be placed in each net to ensure that play can immediately restart and counters can be activated. Full sized goals should be placed at each end. The team defending towards the end line should field 8 plus a keeper, the team defending the opposite goal should have 6 players, plus one wearing a different color bib than any other player on the field.



Execution:

Played in 3 6 minute bursts with 4 minutes of rest in between. The team attempting to build out has 8 players and must score to get a point. The pressing team that attempts to stop that team only has 6 players and attempts to win the ball and score to get a point. The team of 6 has a 7th “ghost” player who is only active (allowed to touch the ball, pass, etc.) when the team of 6 is in possession. All restarts from the end lines come from goalkeepers, and should be played with speed to create counter chances.



Variations:

The game can be moved to full field and the number of players can be modified based on the size of the field or the “ghost” player can be forced to stay in a certain area when inactive

The team of 6 can also play with two “ghost” players, simulating both fullbacks and making their attack full sided.



Side By Side Game

Description:

While it can be used with clearly outlined tactical roles for each player, the general point of the side by side game is to train players to exploit the opposition ball watching, as well as to adapt defenders to play with their heads on a swivel. The addition of two sides and two balls means simply playing marking your man or watching a single ball a dangerous proposition. While the ball is being played on the far side the field, an intelligent and tactically aware player may be able to take a ball switched from the other side to attack the weak side of the opposition's goal, simulating the overlapping fullback taking advantage of wide space created by a winger cutting in centrally.

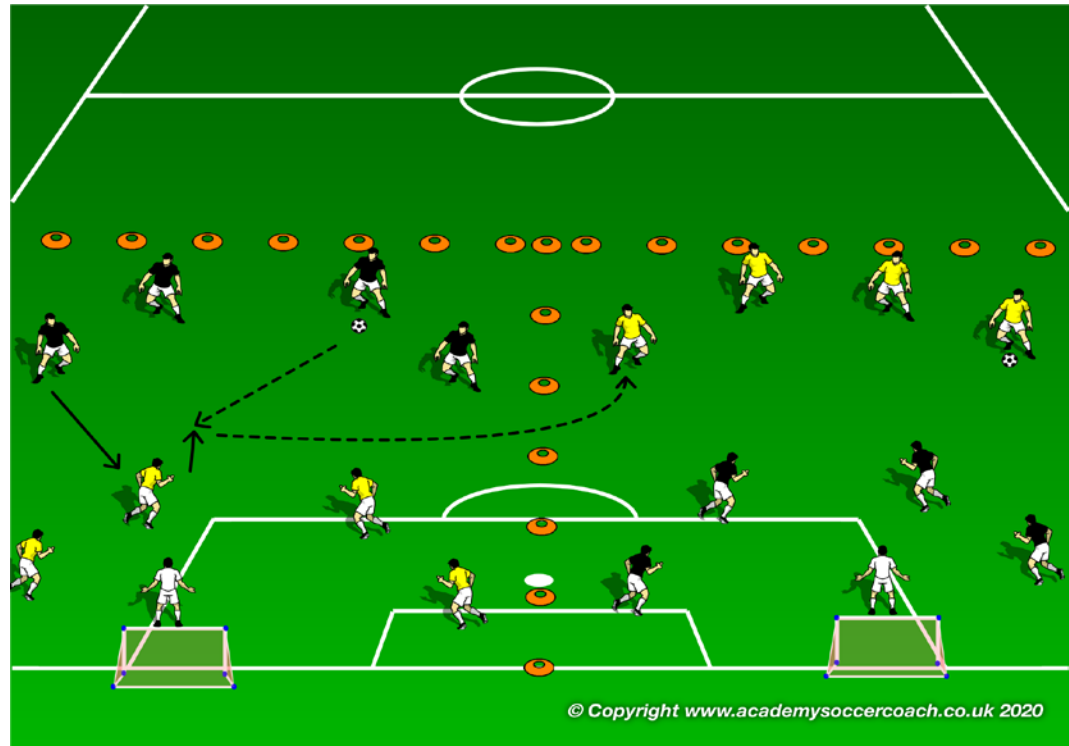
Setup:

Numbers will vary based on team and space provided, but the basic game should consist of two 4v4s plus one goalkeeper. The field should be split in two through the endline, with a goal centered in between each half. The length of each of the pitches should be from endline to 15m out from the 18. Two balls are set up at opposite ends of the goals.

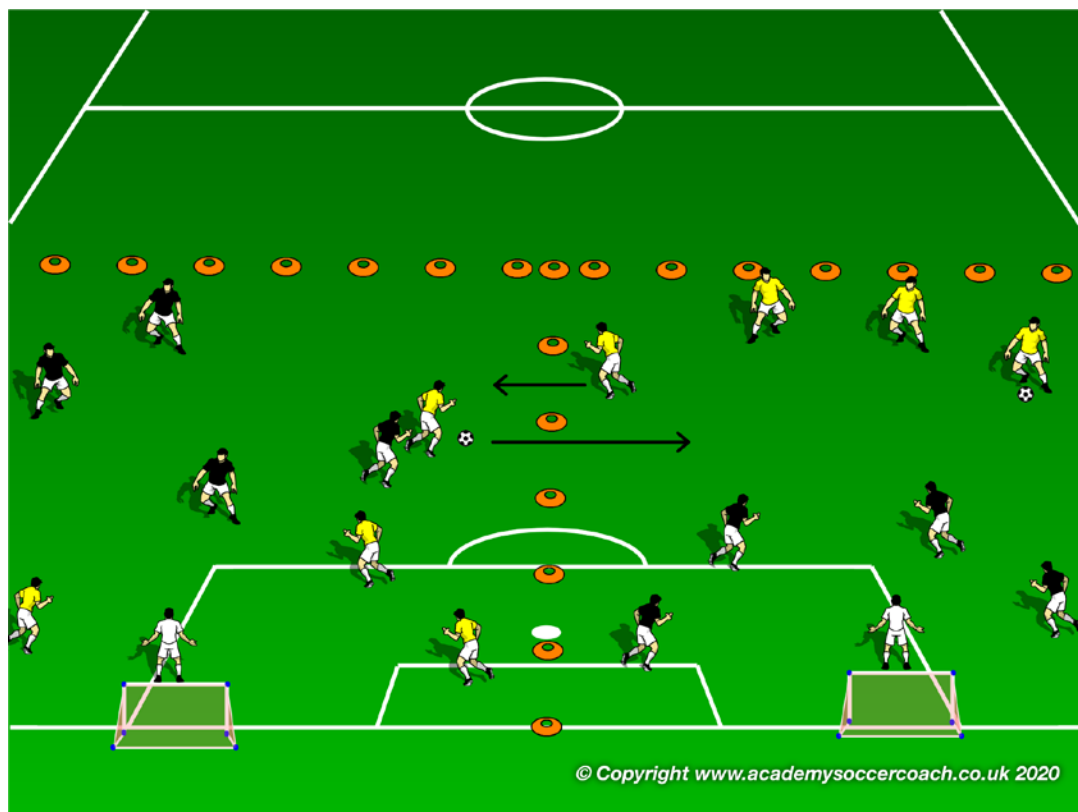


Execution:

The attacking team on the left field plays a 4v4 against the defenders on the left field with the objective of scoring, the same happens on field 2 with the yellows. If the defenders are able to win the ball back they can then play to their attacking players on the opposite field.



If a goal is scored the goalkeeper then plays to the opposite field. An attacking team can also gain possession of both balls on an attack, while the team on the opposite field attempts to position themselves to receive/defend on or both of the balls. Players can switch sides of the field, with or without the ball, but must be replaced by a player from the side they are entering.



Any play that goes out of bounds is a free kick from the line, in addition, corners are allowed. The winner is the team with the most goals after the assigned time. The defending and attacking side of each team then switch and the game is restarted.

Variations:

The numbers and size of the pitch can be varied depending on age and ability of players.

Winning stipulations can be adjusted to the number of goals scored.

The fields can be adjusted to be back to back instead of side to side.

German Dead Ball Game

Description:

This is a training activity used by the Germans, and described in Raphael Honigstein's book *Das Reboot*, at the 2014 World Cup. While they used it to practice their set pieces in the lead up to their final victory, it is a great opportunity to utilize counter attacking opportunities from dead balls. Teams often will commit numbers forward in these situations, leaving space behind them to be exploited, especially out wide. The focus, therefore, should be for the coach to focus on defensive team and help dictate their shape "breaking out" from the turnover.

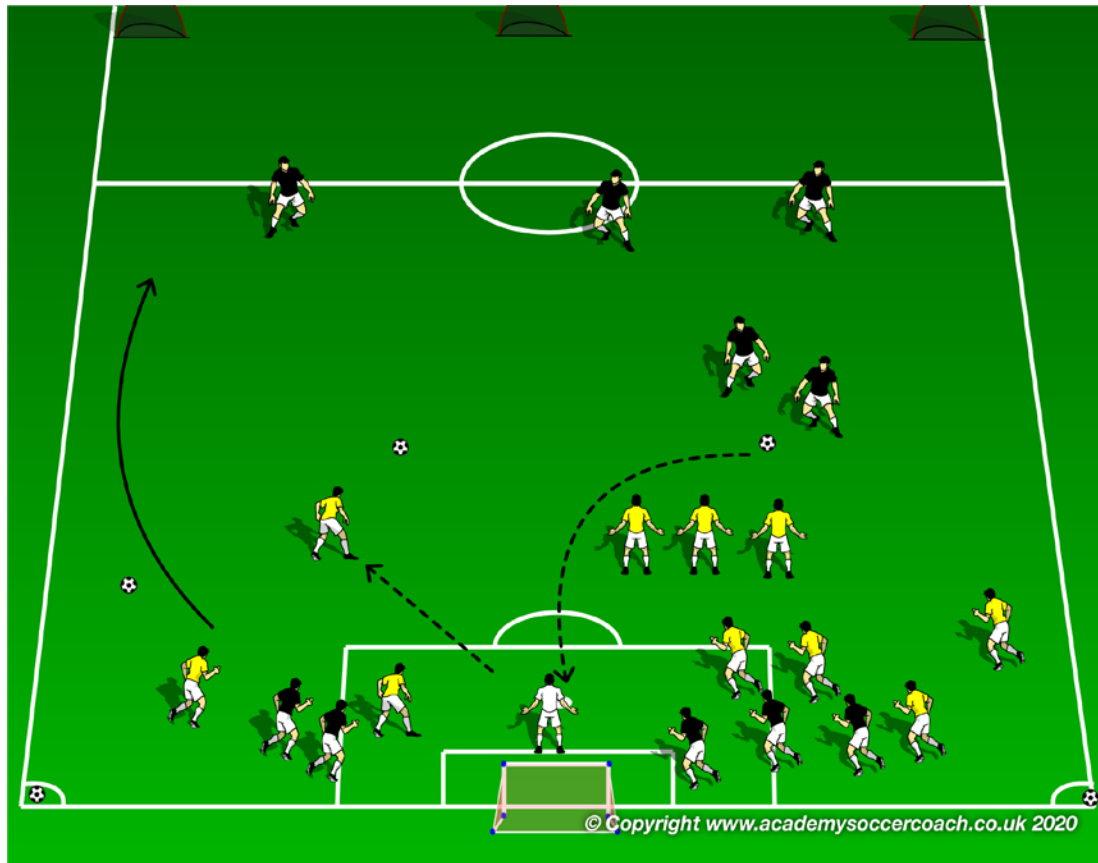
Setup:

Balls should be set up in four different areas of the pitch, and two at the corner flags. There should be an attacking team of 11 players set up at one of the dead ball areas. The 11 defending players should set up accordingly. The field should be cut into 2/3rds with breakout goals at the opposite end.



Execution:

The attacking team chooses one the 4 in-field set pieces, or the corners to start their attack. Each team gets time to set up their set piece and defensive plan. Play starts on the coaches whistle. The attacking team attempts to score from the set piece, and plays until the ball goes out of bounds or they lose possession. If the defending team wins possession it then looks to break out and score on the breakout goals.



Play stops if either team scores or the defensive team loses possession. Once one of those things has occurred there is a break for the offensive team to set up at the next dead ball situation and the defensive to set up a wall. This continues until the attacking team has played all six dead ball situations. The team with the most goals scored wins.

Variations:

-The number of set pieces and positioning can vary depending on what the coach wants to accomplish from the activity.

-The number of breakout goals, and their position can be altered to dictate where coaches want their players to look attack during a counter attack

-The game can alternate on a full field pitch with the play resetting on opposite sides of the fields, breakout goals at the sideline, and teams alternating who takes the set pieces.



Conclusion

This book is no way meant to be a comprehensive view of the fullback since each team will define the role of their fullbacks differently based on personnel, system, style, age, talent level, etc. but I hope that in some way this gives you some core idea of the ways fullbacks can be used for attacking purposes and leads to you implementing them in new and interesting ways in your team's and programs. There is no way to tell how the role of the fullback will evolve in the coming decades, but I predict the importance coaches and analysts put on the fullbacks will continue to increase. Soccer is unlike sports like basketball, a strong link sport where one dominant athlete can cover for the deficiencies of a teammate. It is a weak link sport, due to the low scoring and luck aspects inherent in it's play, where a team is deficient will be exposed in the course of, if not a game, a season. That is why fullbacks, from a very early age, must be taught that their job is much more important than pushing opposition wingers out wide and booting balls forward to strikers, or that some players are "offensive" and some "defensive"