

DEVELOPING SOCCER INTELLIGENCE THROUGH 7v7 *by Philip Cauchi*



Volume 2

Developing Soccer Intelligence Through 7 v 7 Volume 2

By

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Introduction.

Various methods are used to develop game intelligence. Small sided games with or without constraints are great tools which help the players, especially the youth to learn how to understand and read the game. The literature presented in this book is about following a methodological approach which guides the coach to deliver both effective and interesting training sessions.

The exercises used or referred to are all based on the 7v7 format. This format is very effective with players irrespective of their age, but who are developing their game intelligence by moving from the simpler 4v4 and into the more complex and more dynamic game involving more numbers. We must be careful when moving to a higher level as the game becomes more complex with more teammates and opponents. It is therefore appropriate to choose a method where the players raise their bar but at the same time they will be competent enough to undergo the challenge, thus stretching their soccer abilities.

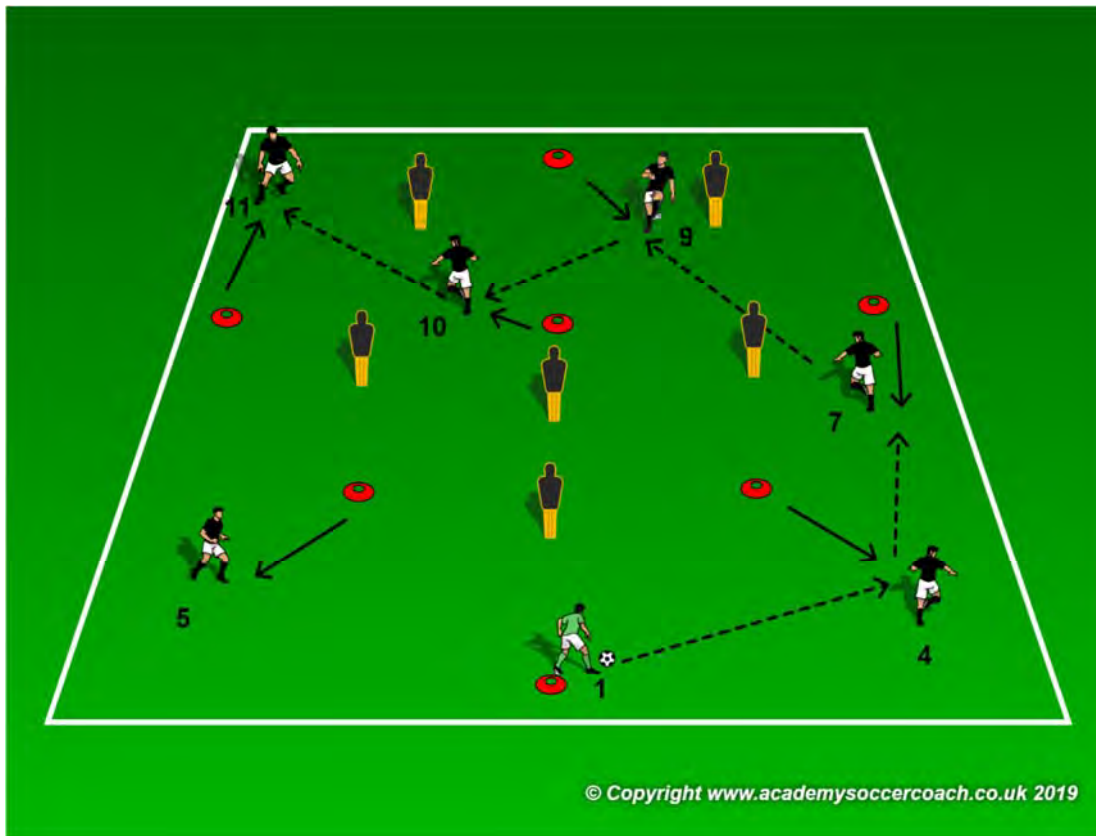
The 7v7 has more lines than the 4v4, but less than 9v9 which makes it perfect as the next step in the players' learning process. We can start building gradually from 5v5 or 6v6 if we feel the need to. We can also start playing 7v7 in grids, where players are restricted to particular areas thus giving them the image of team shape in a 7v7. When the players grasp the necessary concepts we can then move to removing the grids. Exercises involving grids are demonstrated in chapter 7.

High level players and teams may also practice 7v7 to develop certain principles of play and especially the relations between the various sectors of the team. With the use of 7v7 the coach may simplify the problem but nevertheless the basic structure of the team still remains. This makes it an ideal scenario to highlight specific problems which will become more visible using this method. Teams from grassroots to top professionals use the 7v7 format. Hope you will enjoy this book and that it helps you in your work with your teams!

Training exercises.

The exercises presented in this chapter are all linked to a specific phase of play and also to a particular formation. The first four exercises give a general idea of how a specialised warm-up to develop particular player habits within a system and also a style of play could be organised. From exercise five till exercise twenty seven we will concentrate on the attacking phase thus on the build-up and scoring tasks. Exercises twenty eight till thirty seven deal with the development of the defensive phase of the team. In these exercises focus is on the yellow team as opposed to all other exercises where the focus is on the black team. From exercise thirty eight till exercise forty five we work on developing the necessary communication between the players of different sectors during the phase of possession. This is done using positional play exercises.

Exercise 1 – Warm-up in 1-2-3-1 formation.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Build-up and circulate the ball in a 1-2-3-1 system of play.

Area: 30 yards in length and 25 yards in width.

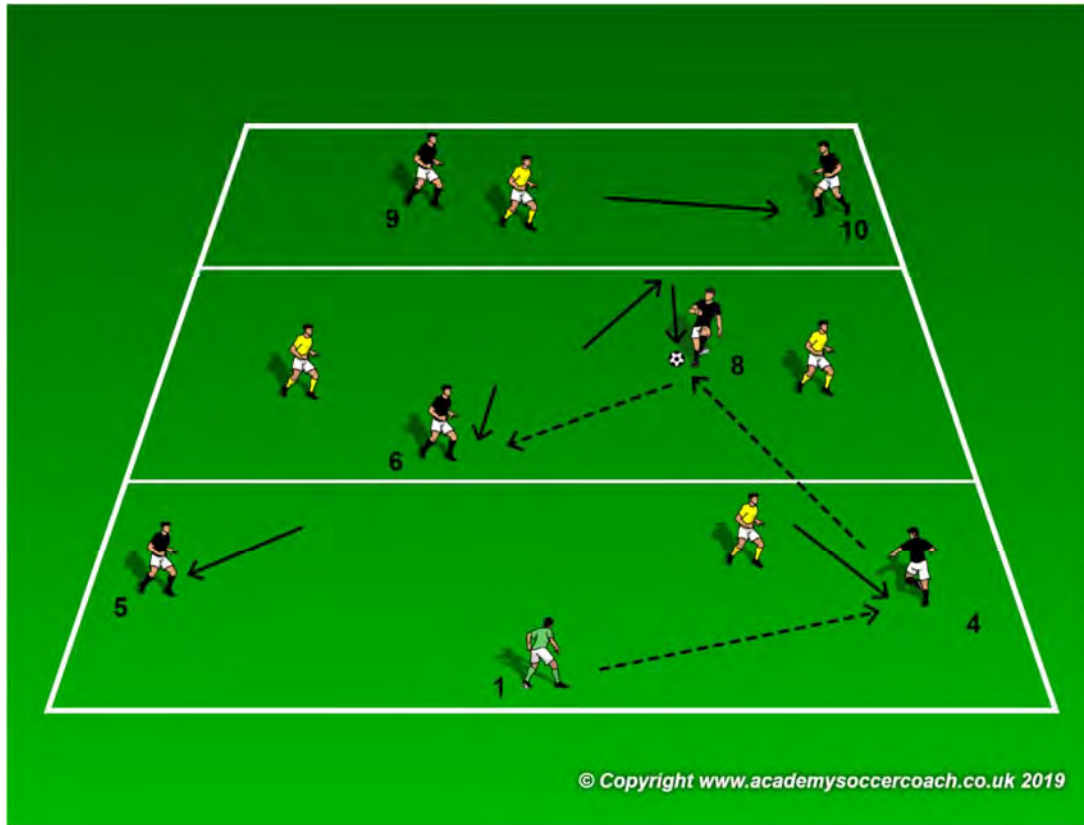
Equipment: Markers to mark the general positions of the formation, ball and mannequins.

Players: Seven, who are positioned in a 1-2-3-1 formation as indicated by the markers.

Description: Players have their assigned marker as a point of reference. They may however move around it as if to get unmarked in order to create the necessary passing options. The mannequins are used to simulate the positioning of the opponents playing in a 1-2-3-1 system of play. Therefore the players develop the habit to receive the ball unmarked in the spaces between the lines.

Progression: Play with a two touch restriction in order to increase the speed of play.

Exercise 2 – Warm-up in a 1-2-2-2 system of play in grids.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Build-up and circulate the ball in a 1-2-2-2 system of play.

Area: 30 yards in length and 25 yards in width divided into three equal sectors each measuring 10 yards in length.

Equipment: Markers to mark grids, ball and bibs.

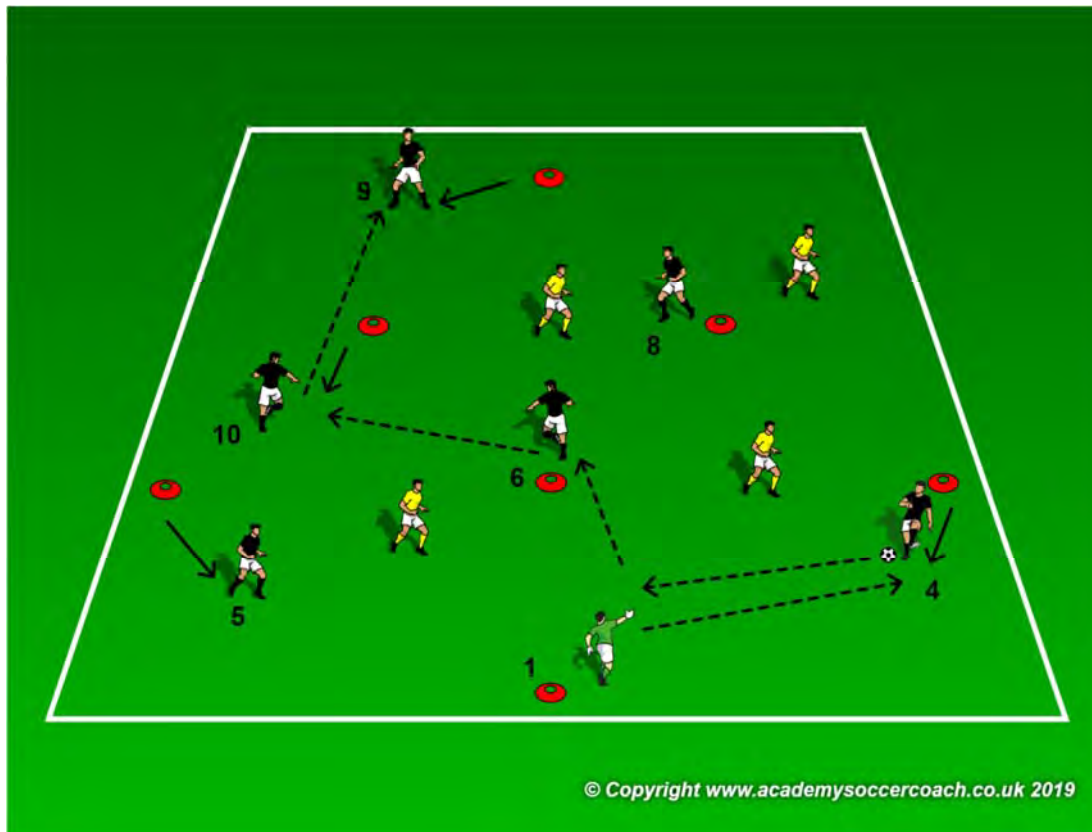
Players: Seven attackers, who are positioned in a 1-2-2-2 formation inside the grids and four defenders – one in the attacking team's defensive third, two in the middle sector and another one in the attacking team's attacking third.

Description: All the players must remain inside their assigned sector. The attacking team aim to circulate the ball without the defenders intercepting the passes. Defenders may only intercept passes and not tackle the ball-carrier.

Progressions:

1. Play with a two touch restriction.
2. The defenders may tackle to win the ball.

Exercise 3 – Dynamic warm-up in a 1-3-2-1 system of play.



System of play: 1-3-2-1.

Aim: Build-up and circulate the ball in a 1-3-2-1 system of play.

Area: 35 yards in length and 30 yards in width.

Equipment: Markers to mark the general positions of the formation, ball and bibs.

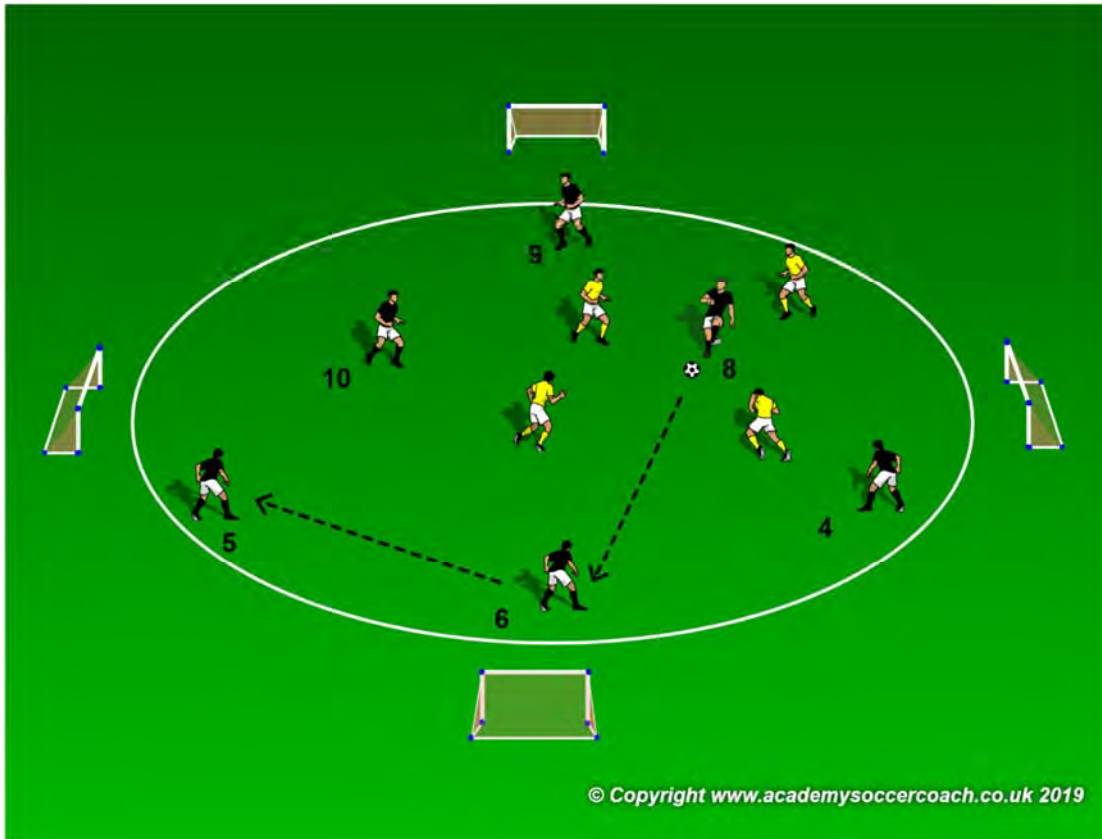
Players: Seven, who are positioned in a 1-2-3-1 formation as indicated by the markers. Another four players act as defenders.

Description: Players have their assigned marker as a point of reference. They may however move around it as if to get unmarked in order to create the necessary passing options. The defenders aim to intercept passes but are not allowed to tackle the ball-carrier.

Progressions:

1. Play in a reduced area measuring 30 yards in length and 25 yards in width.
2. The defenders may tackle to win the ball and score on a regular goal defended by the goalkeeper of the attacking team.

Exercise 4 – Circular rondo.



System of play: 1-3-2-1.

Aim: Circulate the ball quickly through good positional play.

Area: Circle with a diameter of 20 yards.

Equipment: Markers to mark the circle, four yellow bibs, four mini goals and a supply of balls.

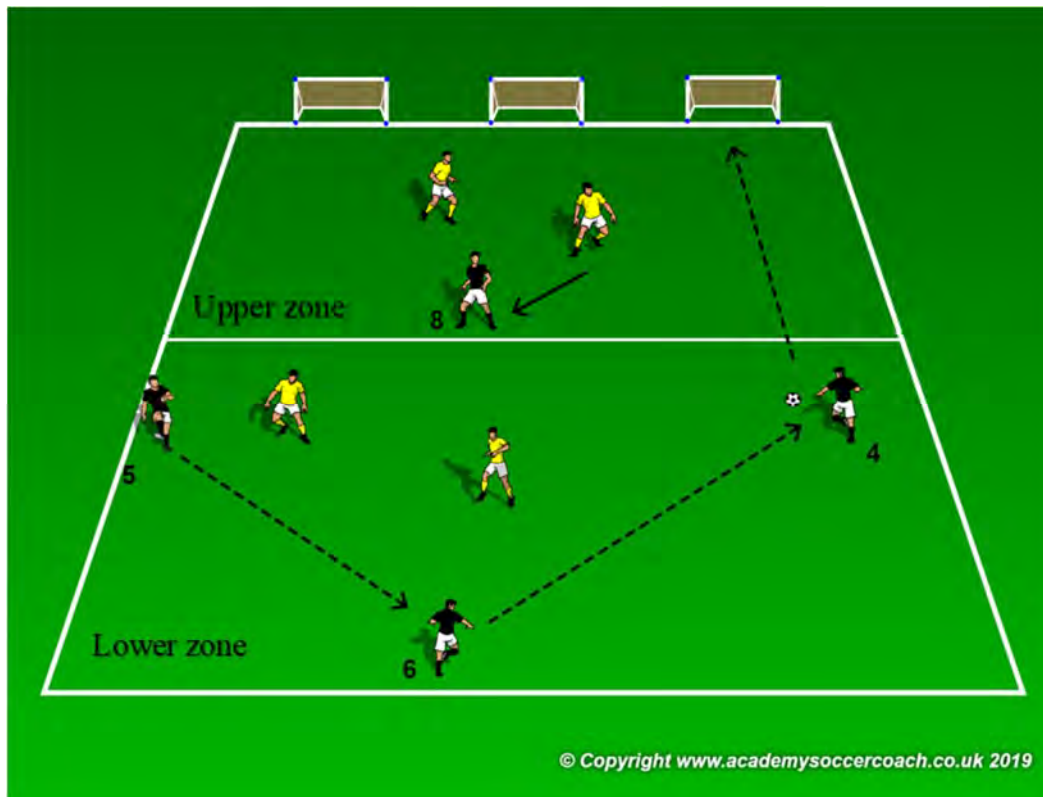
Players: The six players of the attacking team are set in a 3-2-1 system of play while the four defenders play in a 2-2 formation.

Description: The attacking team aims to complete ten consecutive passes to score a point. The defending team aims to win the ball and score in any of the four mini goals.

Variation: The attacking may score in any of the goals after completing ten consecutive passes. If the goal is score from a third man play action, the goal counts double.

Progression: The numbers 8 and 10 are neutral. Therefore we have a 4v4+2 situation. The goals are repositioned in a way that a team attacks the two goals positioned opposite to the two they are defending. The diameter of the circle might need to be increased according to the level of players we have at our disposal.

Exercise 5 – Play the forward pass into midfield.



System of play: 1-3-2-1.

Aim: To create and exploit space to play vertically.

Area: 20 yards by 15 yards which is divided equally into two horizontal zones.

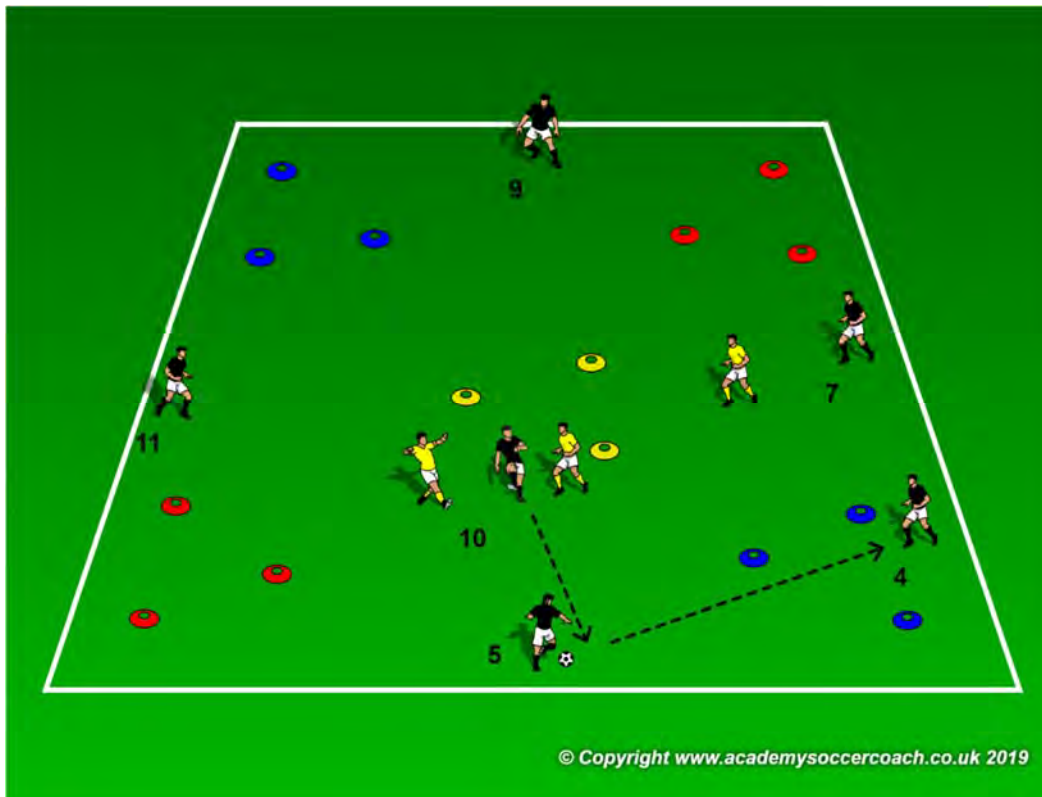
Equipment: Markers to mark the play area, four yellow bibs and three mini goals positioned at one end of the area.

Players: Three players of the attacking team (blacks) are positioned in lower zone while another player of the same team is positioned in the upper zone. The defending team (yellows) have two players in each zone.

Description: The attacking team starts the play from the lower zone with the aim of scoring in any of the three mini goals. Goals may be scored from anywhere on the pitch. The black team's number 8 simulates a midfielder with whom players 4, 5 and 6 can combine play. The midfielder can turn with the ball and try to score himself when the opportunity is on. The mini goals simulate passes into midfield or directly to the striker. If the yellow team win the ball they score by dribbling over the end line defended by the black team.

Variation: The attacking team have a goalkeeper in the goal positioned on their end line.

Exercise 6 – Scoring through the gates rondo.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Circulate the ball quickly through good positional play.

Area: 20 yards by 15 yards.

Equipment: Markers to mark the area and the triangles, three yellow bibs and a supply of balls. Each side of the triangle should measure approximately two yards in length.

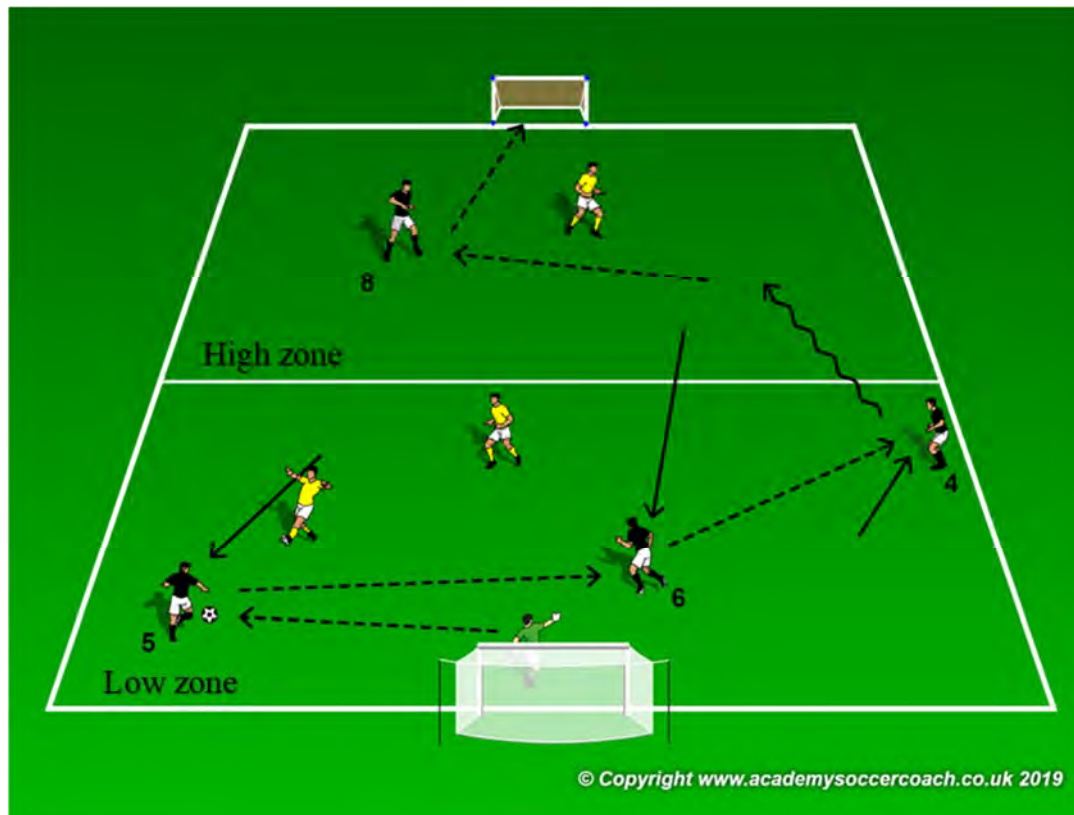
Players: The six players of the attacking team are set in a 2-3-1 system of play. The three defenders aim to disrupt the attackers from circulating the ball.

Description: The attacking team aims to score by successfully passing the ball through the triangles. If the defenders win the ball they score two points by dribbling it outside the marked area.

Variation: Players 5, 9 and 10 are neutrals. Therefore we play a 3v3+3 with quick transitions.

Progression: Play 4v4+2 by removing one of the central defenders (4 or 5) and assign it to the yellow team. The number 10 will play as neutral.

Exercise 7 – Build-up with three at the back.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Create options to advance forward in the first stage of the build-up.

Area: 30 yards in length and 20 yards in width divided into two equal horizontal zones.

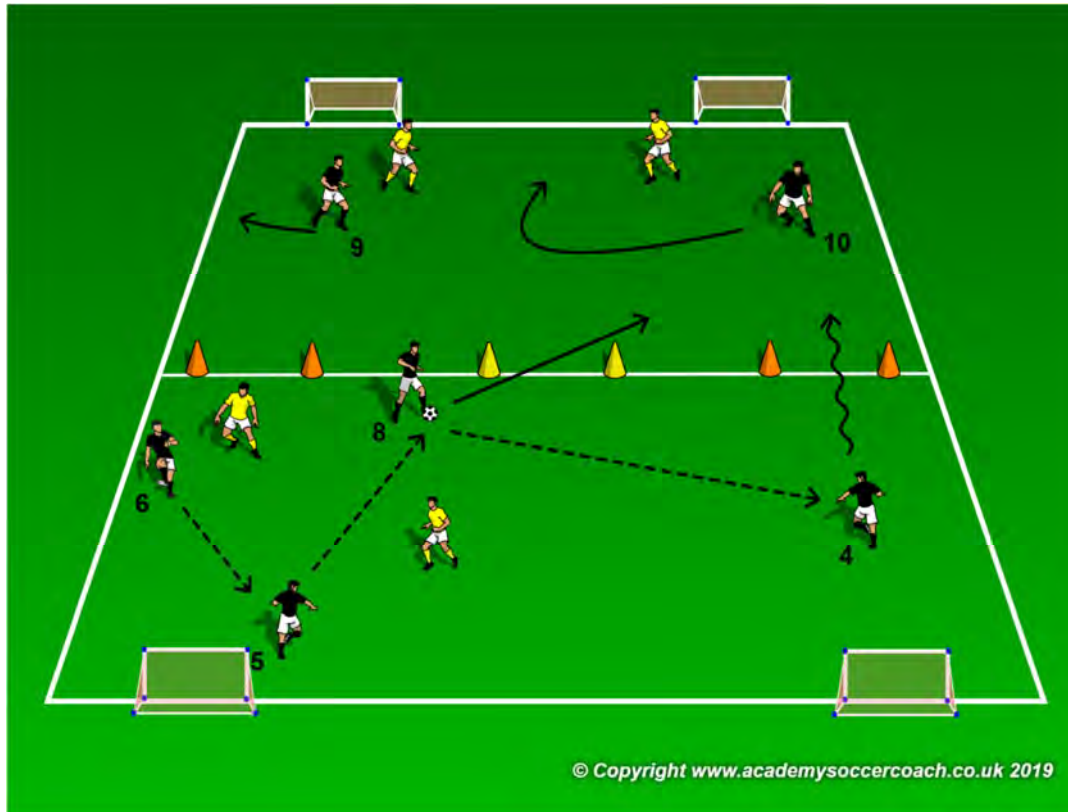
Equipment: Markers to mark the play area, three yellow bibs, and a regular goal positioned at one end line and a mini goal positioned at the opposite end line. We also need a supply of balls.

Players: The attacking team (blacks) have two players and a goalkeeper in the low zone and two players in the high zone. The defending team (yellows) have two players in the low zone and another in the high zone.

Description: The exercise starts with the attacking team's goalkeeper in possession of the ball. During this moment we want the two central defenders (4 and 5) to open up wide while midfielder 6 drops to create numerical superiority and further options. The attacking team plays the ball into the high zone to score in the mini goal. The ball may be advanced into this zone with a dribble or by passing directly to midfielder 8.

Progression: Reduce the width of the pitch to 15 yards.

Exercise 8 – Build-up through gates: 4v2 to 4v2.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Rapid circulation of the ball to open passing lanes.

Area: 25 yards in length and 20 yards in width divided into two equal horizontal zones.

Equipment: Markers to mark the play area, cones to be used as gates, four yellow bibs and four mini goals.

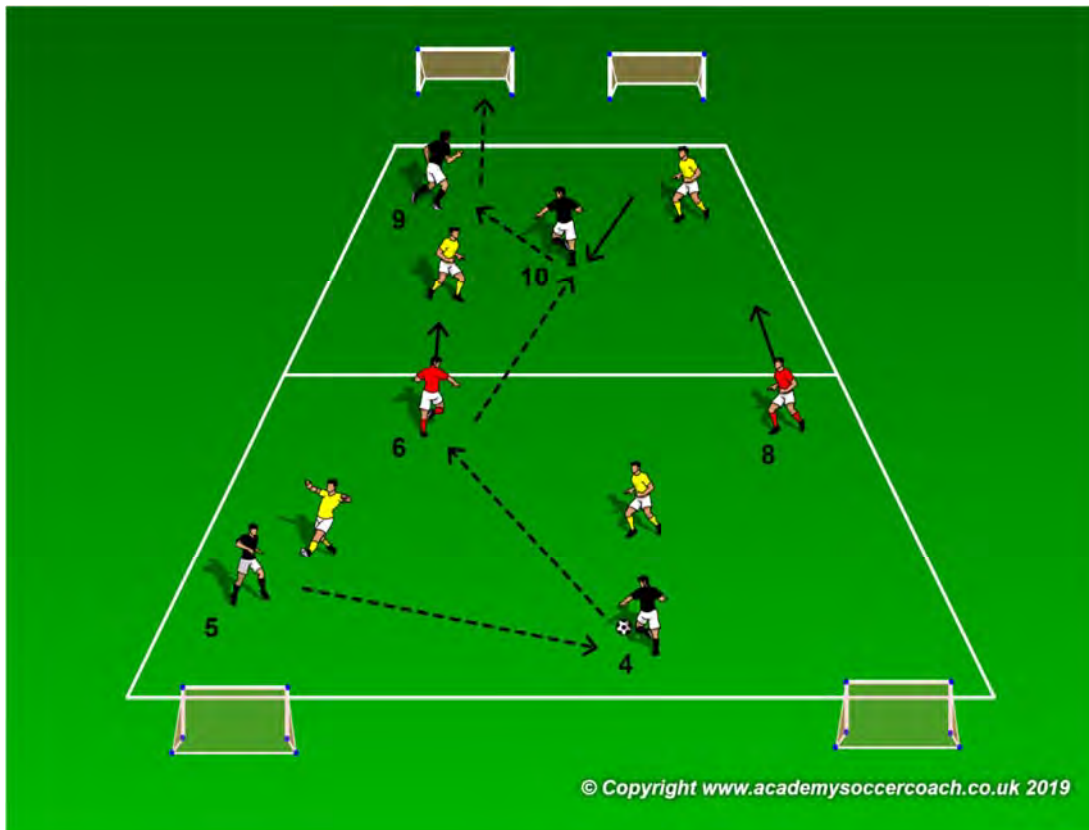
Players: Six players for the attacking team and four players for the defending team.

Description: The exercise starts with the attacking team building from their own half against two defenders. The attacking team aims to guide the ball into the opposite half through any of the three gates either by passing or dribbling. The situation in this half becomes a 4v2 in which the attackers now aim to score in any of the two mini goals. Only two attackers are allowed to move from one half of the pitch to the other. The defenders must remain inside their assigned zone. If the defenders win the ball, they counter on the opposite two mini goals.

Progressions:

1. One of the defenders is allowed to track back to defend inside the team's own half.
2. Both defenders are allowed to track back to defend inside their own half.

Exercise 9 – 4v4+2 on two zones build-up play.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Build up play from the back with quick and accurate passes.

Area: 30 yards in length and 18 yards in width divided into two equal horizontal zones.

Equipment: Markers to mark the play area, four yellow and two red bibs, two mini goals are positioned two yards away from each goal line, and a supply of balls.

Players: Four players for each team. These are two defenders and two attackers. The two neutral players act as midfielders.

Description: The defenders and attackers of both teams are restricted to play inside their assigned zone. Only the neutral players are allowed to move from one zone to another. Therefore in each half of the pitch we have a 4v2 situation in favour of the team in possession.

Progressions:

1. Remove the middle line, thus having no zones and play 4v4+2.
2. Play 5v5 with one assigned midfielder for each team. No zones exist! The area might need to be enlarged according to the level of the players we have at our disposal.

Exercise 10 – The build-up ladder.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Build up play from the back with quick and accurate passes.

Area: 24 yards in length and 12 yards in width divided into three equal horizontal zones each measuring 8 yards in length by 12 yards in width.

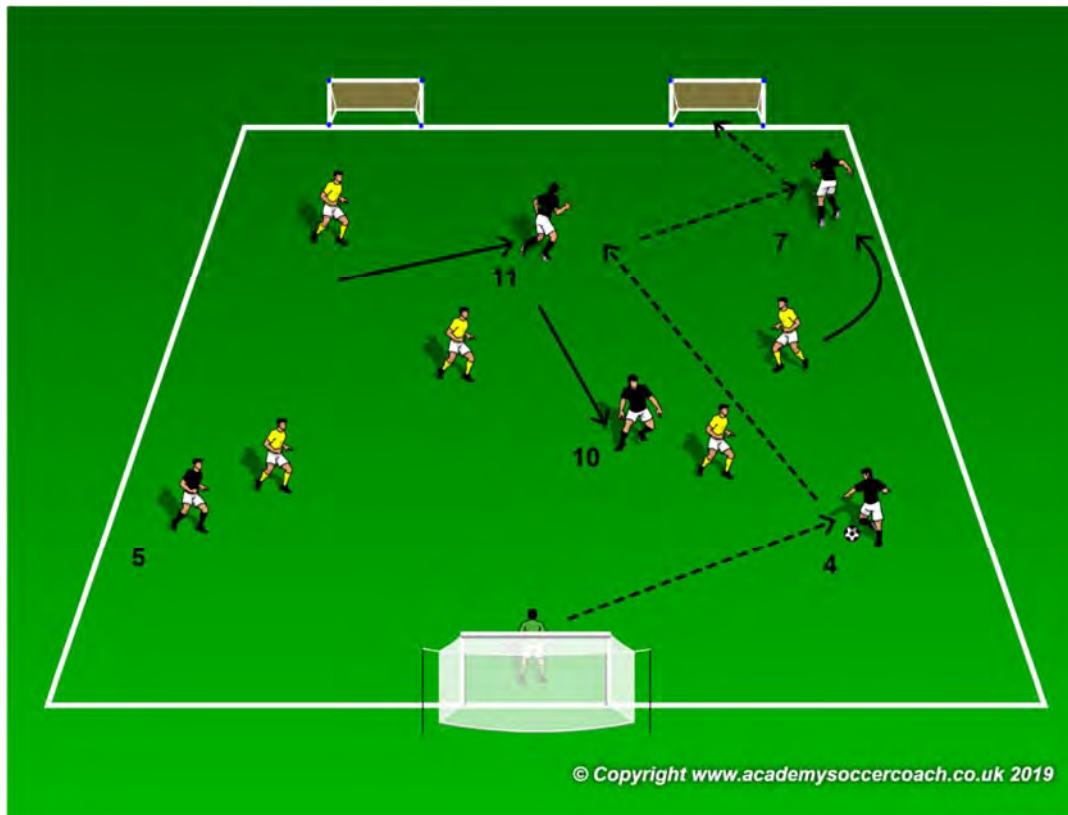
Equipment: Markers to mark the play area and zones, three yellow bibs, a mini goal is positioned at each end line and a supply of balls.

Players: Two players for the attacking team (blacks) and a player for the defending team (yellows) in each zone.

Description: Play always starts by the black team by players 4 and 5. Play is 2v1 in favour of the black team in each zone. The ball must be played from one zone to the next. In the last zone the two attackers 9 and 10 try to score in the mini goal. If the defending team wins the ball they aim to score in the opposite mini goal.

Progression: Remove one midfielder from the black team and put him with the yellows. Now in the middle zone the situation is 1v2 against the black team. One of the black team's defenders (4 or 5) may dribble into the middle zone to create a numerical parity.

Exercise 11 – GK+5v5 build-up game.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Build up play from the back with quick and accurate passes.

Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width.

Equipment: Markers to mark the play area, one regular goalpost positioned on one end and two mini goals positioned on the opposite, five yellow bibs and a supply of balls.

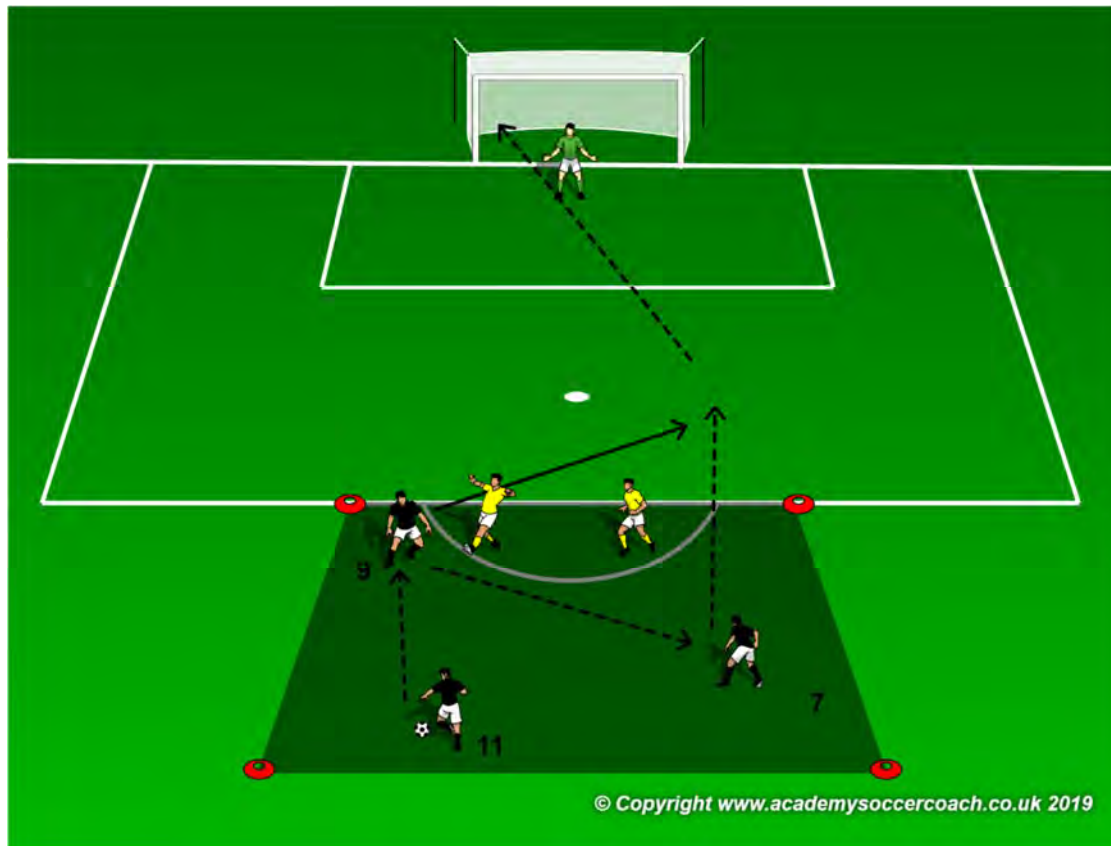
Players: A goalkeeper and five players for the attacking team who line up in a 1-2-3 system of play and the defending team who line up in a 3-2 system.

Description: The attacking team aims to score in the two mini goals while the defending team aims to score in the regular goalpost defended by the goalkeeper. No throw-ins or corner kicks exist. If a goal is scored or the ball goes out of the playing area, the team in possession starts from their own goal line. In the case of the attacking team play starts from the goalkeeper.

Progressions:

1. Have the defending team play with six players.
2. Play with equal numbers but if the attacking team scores within fifteen seconds of initiating the attack, the goal counts double.

Exercise 12 – 3v2 to finish on goal.



System of play: 1-1-2-2-1.

Aim: To recognise the right moment to play the killer pass.

Area: 15 yards in length and 12 yards in width and which is 16 yards in front of goal.

Equipment: Markers to mark the area, two yellow bibs, a regular goal and a supply of balls.

Players: Three attackers, two defenders and a goalkeeper in goal.

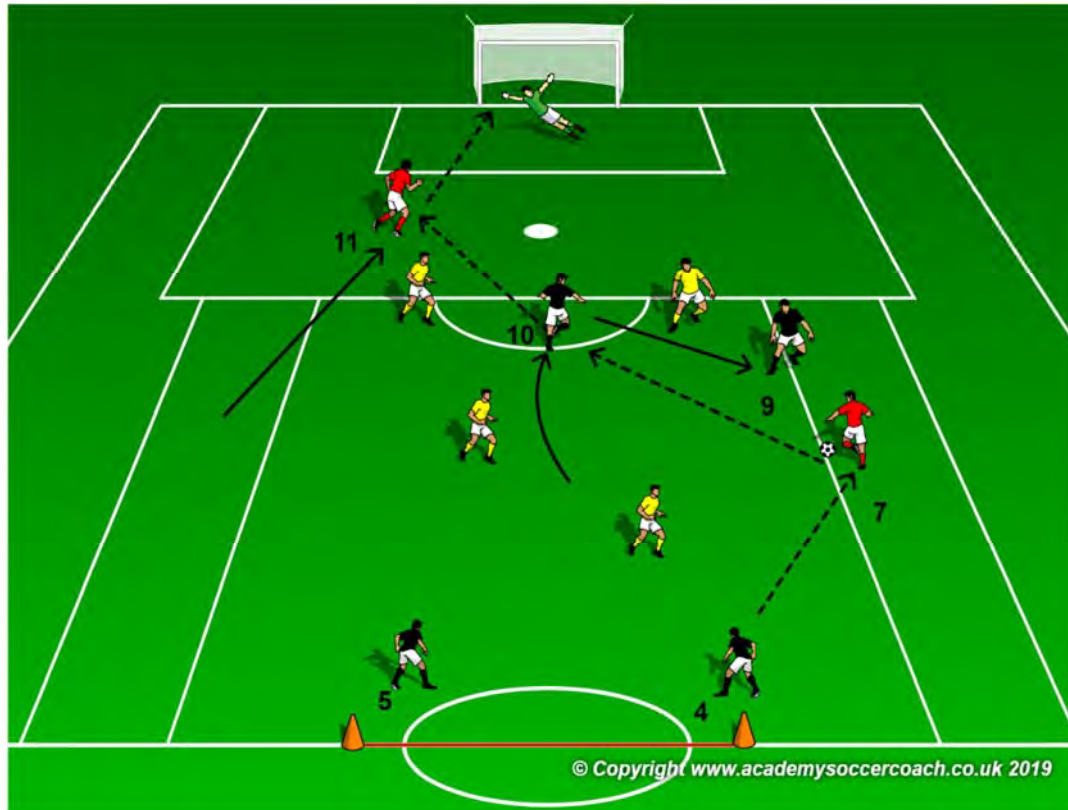
Description: After making three sequential passes the attackers aim to play the final pass for one of the attacking players to conclude at goal. The attacker must shoot first time without being pressured by the defenders. The attacker cannot be behind the defenders to receive the ball outside the area at the moment the pass is played. Otherwise he will be in an offside position.

Variation: A second attacker follows the shot for any rebounds.

Progressions:

1. A defender tracks back to defend and apply pressure on the attacker.
2. A second attacker follows the action while another defender tracks back thus making the situation a 2v2.

Exercise 13 – Positional attack 4v4+2.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Create the space and options to penetrate.

Area: 30 yards in length and 25 yards in width.

Equipment: Markers to mark the general positions of the formation, ball and bibs.

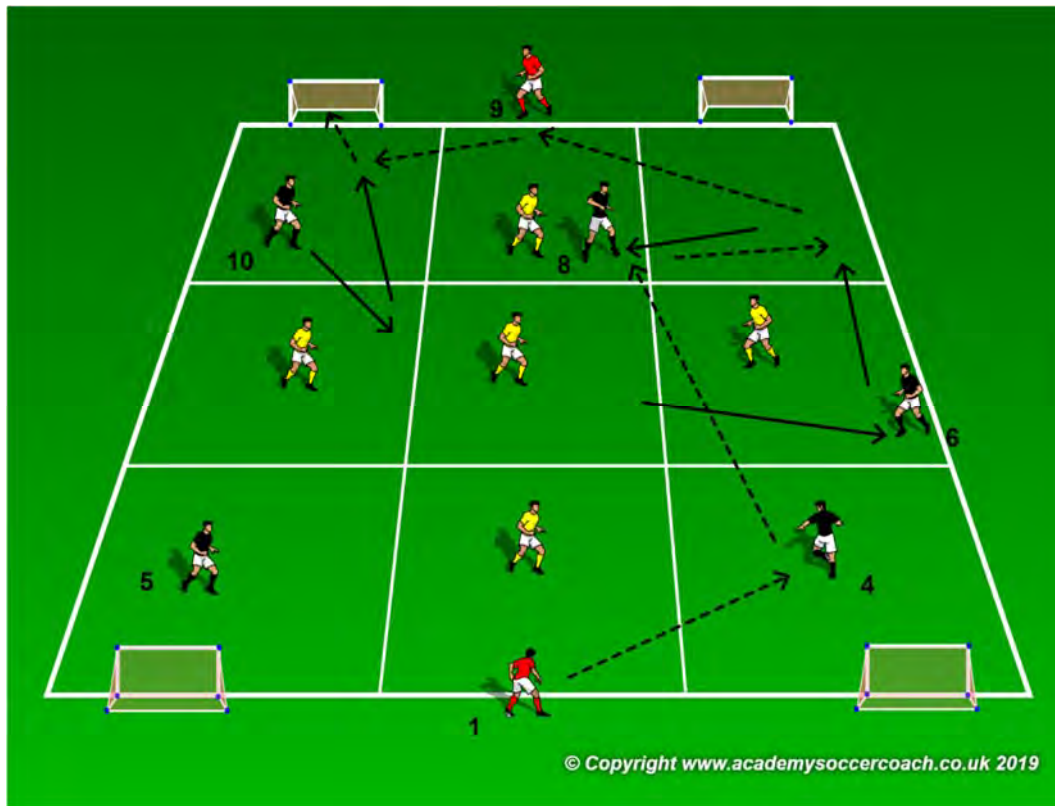
Players: Four attackers, four defenders and a goalkeeper and two neutral lateral midfielders.

Description: This exercise is based on the 1-2-3-1 system of play. The attacking team (blacks) aim to score by playing penetrating passes and shoot from inside the penalty area. The neutral lateral midfielders are situated in the lateral zones but may cut inside to receive a through pass to finish on goal if the situation is on. If the defenders win the ball, they counter and aim to score by dribbling through the counter gate which in the diagram is marked by two cones connected with a red line.

Variations:

1. All shots must be taken one touch from inside the penalty area.
2. Fast attack – if a goal is scored in less than 10 seconds from the start of the action by the attackers from their goal line, it counts double.

Exercise 14 – Grid game: combine with the target player.



System of play: 1-2-1-2-1.

Aim: Support the forward pass to the striker.

Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into three equal vertical channels and three equal horizontal channels.

Equipment: Markers to mark the grids, four mini goals and bibs (five yellow and two red).

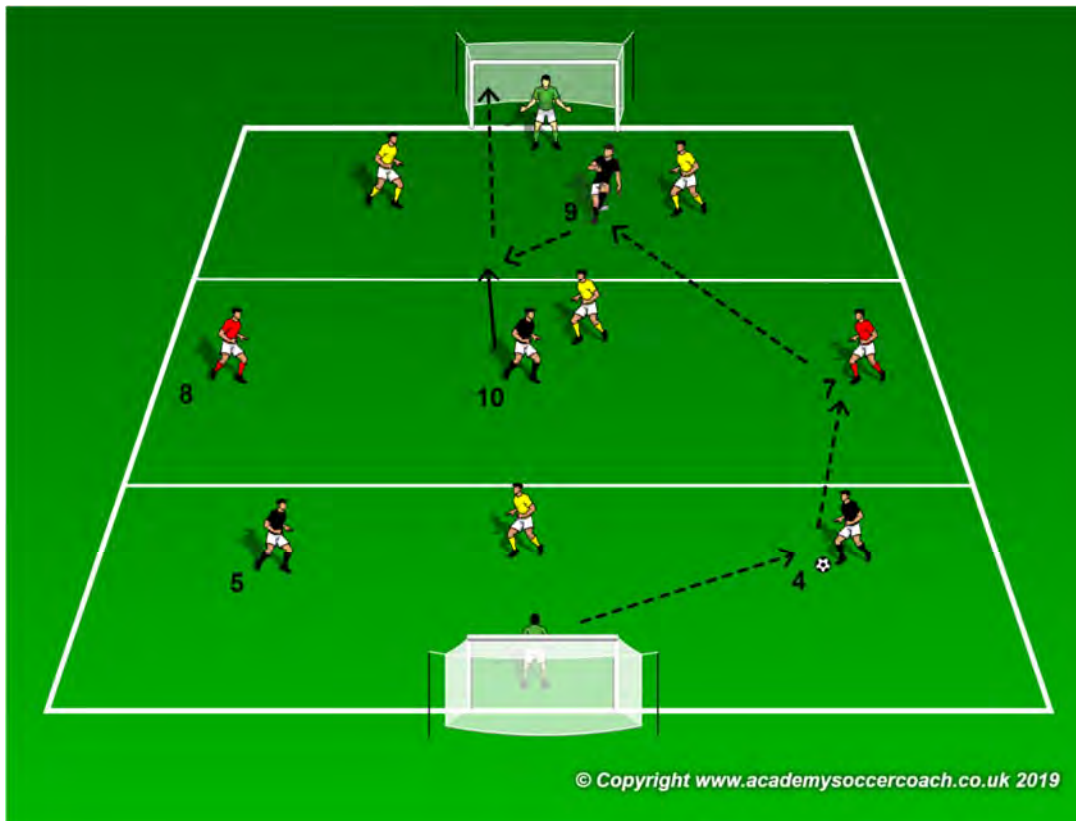
Players: Two teams of five and two neutrals.

Description: Both teams must combine with their assigned target players prior to scoring into either of the two mini goals positioned on the goal line. Inside a grid there cannot be two players of the same team. However, players are free to move anywhere provided that team balance is retained.

Progressions:

1. To work on balance in midfield, midfielders 6 and 8 cannot be on the same horizontal or vertical adjacent zones.
2. Again working on having balance in midfield, in the middle grid there should always be a player. If player 6 moves to another grid, then 8 should move into the middle one.

Exercise 15 – Build-up through zones.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Create passing options to play in verticality.

Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into three equal vertical channels.

Equipment: Markers to mark the grids, two regular goalposts and bibs (four yellow and two red).

Players: Two teams both set in a 2-1-1 formation plus two neutral players who must remain inside the central channel.

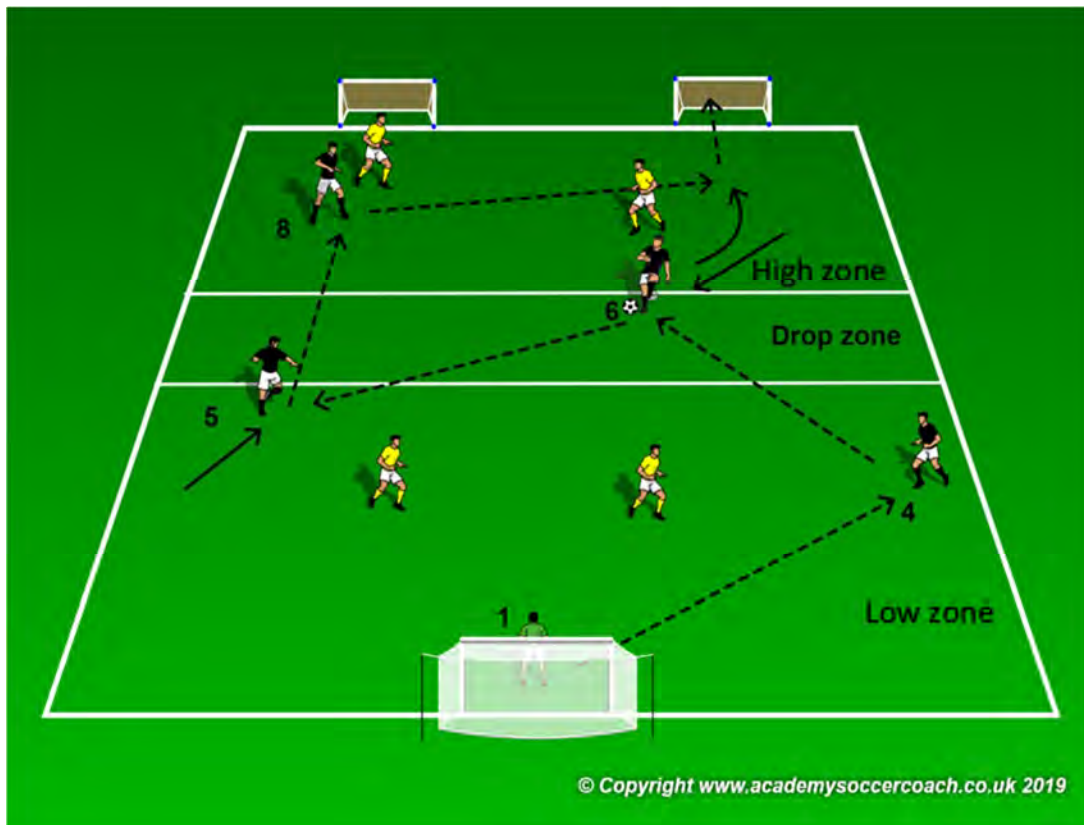
Description: Teams are restricted to build-up play through the middle zone. All players except the neutrals may move anywhere on the pitch.

Progressions:

1. Play 2v2 in the middle channel (two black v two yellow) with only one neutral player.
2. Play 3v3 with no neutral players.

Variation: To make this exercise more realistic we can also have both teams score a point for every goal scored from a direct ball played by by-passing the middle zone. Teams score two points if a goal is scored after a build-up through the middle zone.

Exercise 16 – Mobility in the build-up.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Create passing options to play in verticality from the back.

Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into three horizontal zones. The high zone measures 15 yards in length, the drop zone measures 5 yards while the low zone measures 20 yards.

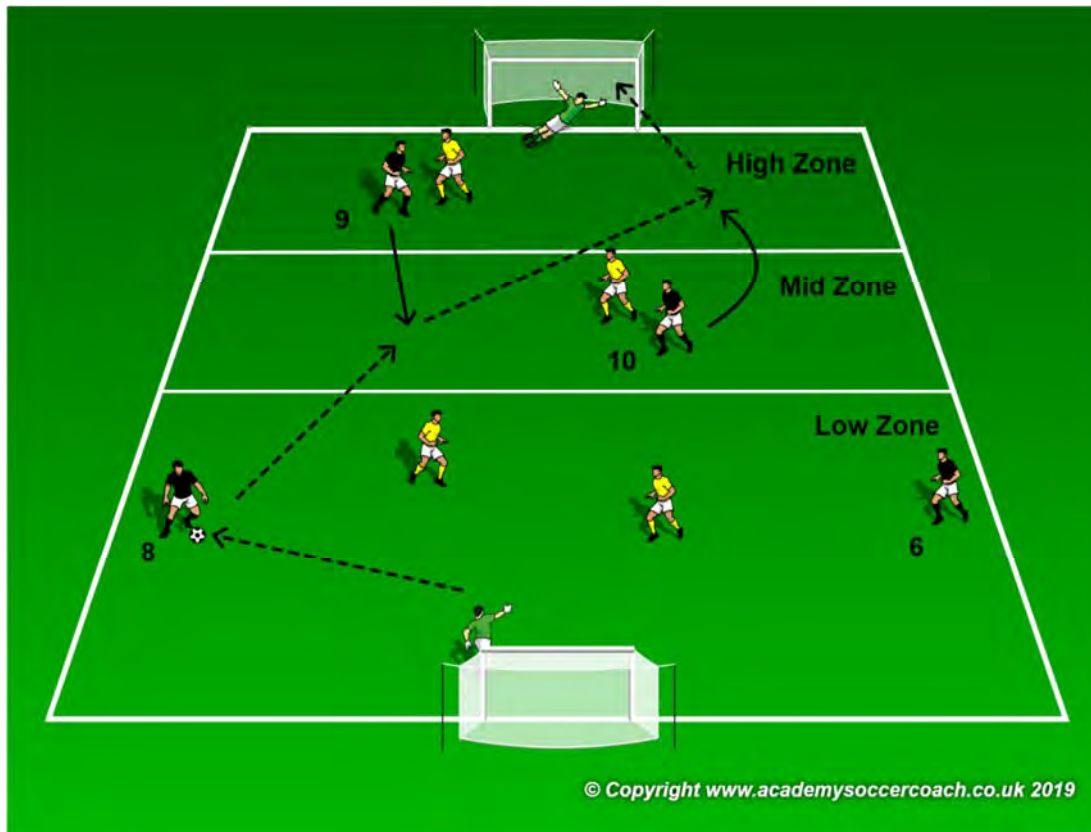
Equipment: Markers to mark the grids, one regular goalposts on one end and two mini goal posts on the opposite, and bibs (four yellow).

Players: Both teams are set in a 2-2 formation with the build-up team having a goalkeeper in goal.

Description: Play always starts from the attacking team's goalkeeper (blacks). The drop zone should remain free for one of the two midfielders to drop into and receive the ball unmarked. This should develop the habits of the two midfielders that when one of them drops, the other remains high.

Variation: Play with a neutral player who helps to create overloads in the low and high zone.

Exercise 17 – Mobility in the final third.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Unlock spaces to play in verticality to create a scoring opportunity.

Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into three horizontal zones. The high zone measures 10 yards in length, the mid zone measures 10 yards while the low zone measures 20 yards.

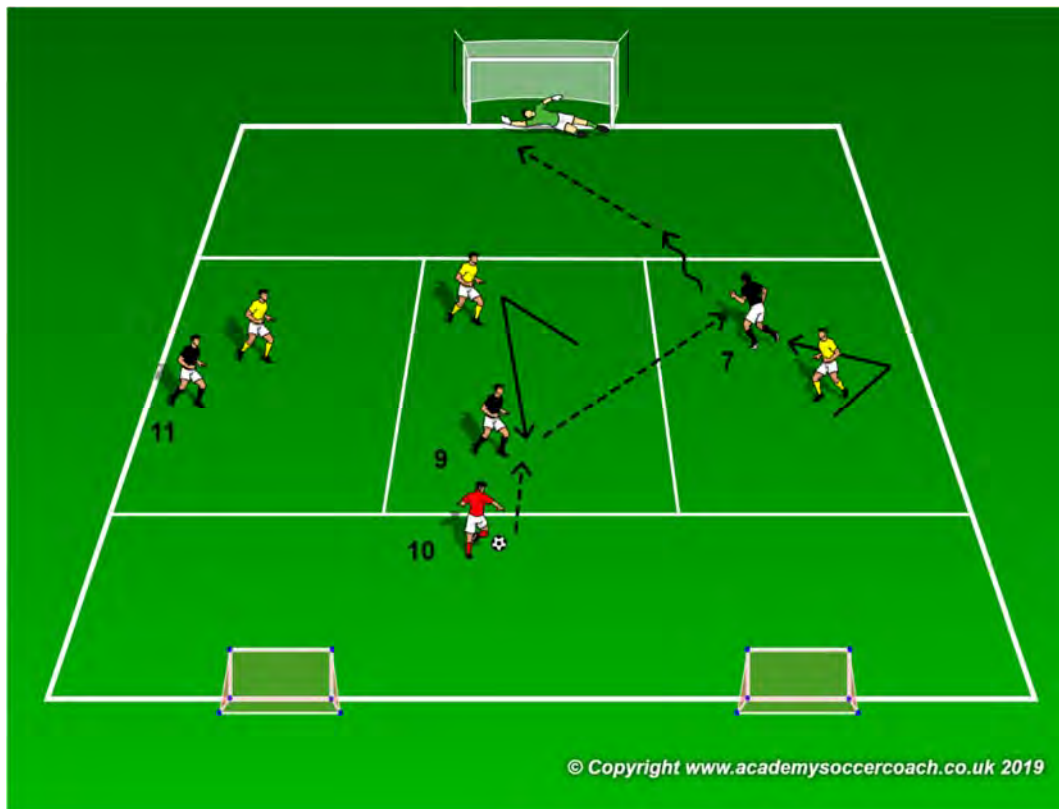
Equipment: Markers to mark the grids, a regular goalpost on each goal line and bibs (four yellow).

Players: Both teams are set in a 1-2-2 formation.

Description: Play always starts from the attacking team's goalkeeper (blacks). Players must remain inside their assigned zones. However, attackers 9 and 10 are allowed to interchange positions between them in order to lose their marker and create the necessary space to play the ball into advanced areas close to the opponent's goal. The defenders inside these zones are not allowed to switch zones.

Progression: The defenders inside the high and mid zones may follow the attacker when the latter change zones.

Exercise 18 – Combining play in attack to score.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Create and exploit space in attack to finish at goal.

Area: 35 yards in length and 30 yards in width. In the middle sector of the area three equal grids are marked each measuring 15 yards by 10 yards.

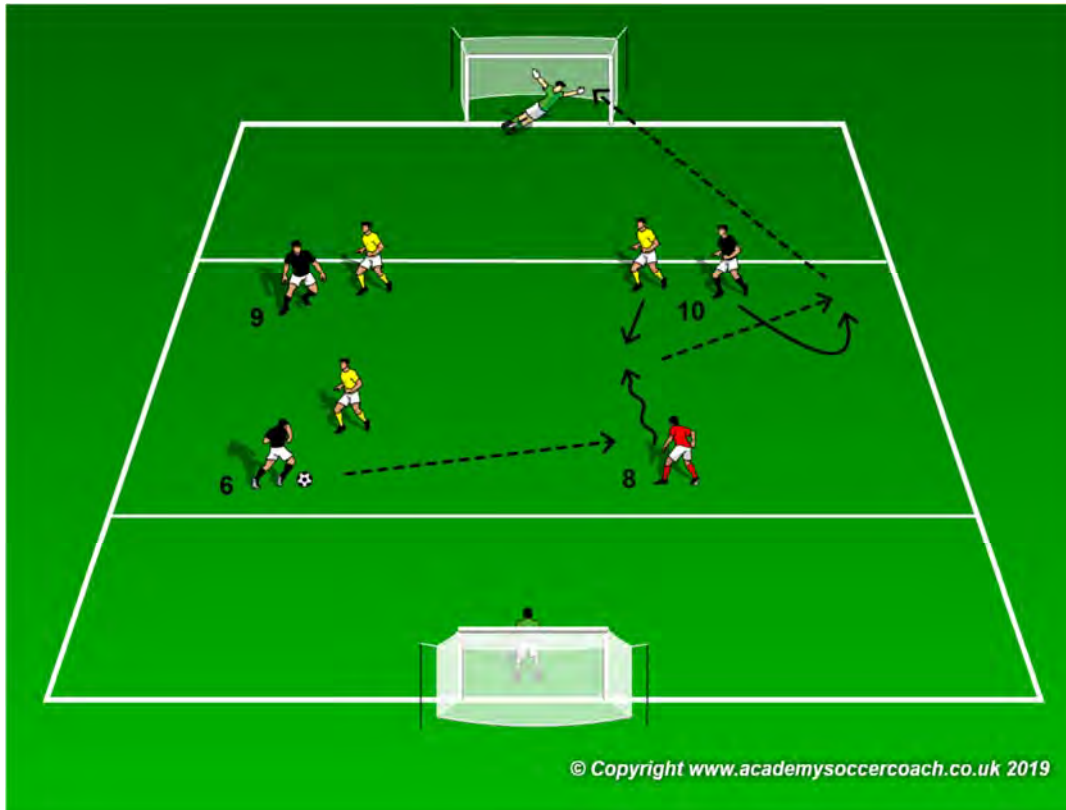
Equipment: Markers to mark the grids, a regular goalpost on one goal line and two mini goals on the opposite goal line. We also need three yellow bibs and one red.

Players: A defender and an attacker are positioned in each grid. A neutral player at the bottom of the area who creates a numerical overload for the team in possession.

Description: Players are restricted to remain inside their assigned zones. The neutral number 10 helps to create further options for the team in possession. This player however is not allowed to score. The attacking team (blacks) aim to score in the regular goal, while the defending team aim to win the ball and counter on the two mini goals. Upon the defenders win possession of the ball, the players are free to move anywhere. Every restart takes place from the red number 10 who will then play for the attacking team, since we are coaching the attackers.

Progression: Attacking players may move into different zones to unlock space (mobility).

Exercise 19 – 3v3+1 scoring game.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Create and exploit space in attack to finish on goal.

Area: 40 yards by 25 yards. We mark the middle area to measure 20 yards by 25 yards.

Equipment: Markers to mark the area and grids, three yellow and one red bib. Two regular goalposts.

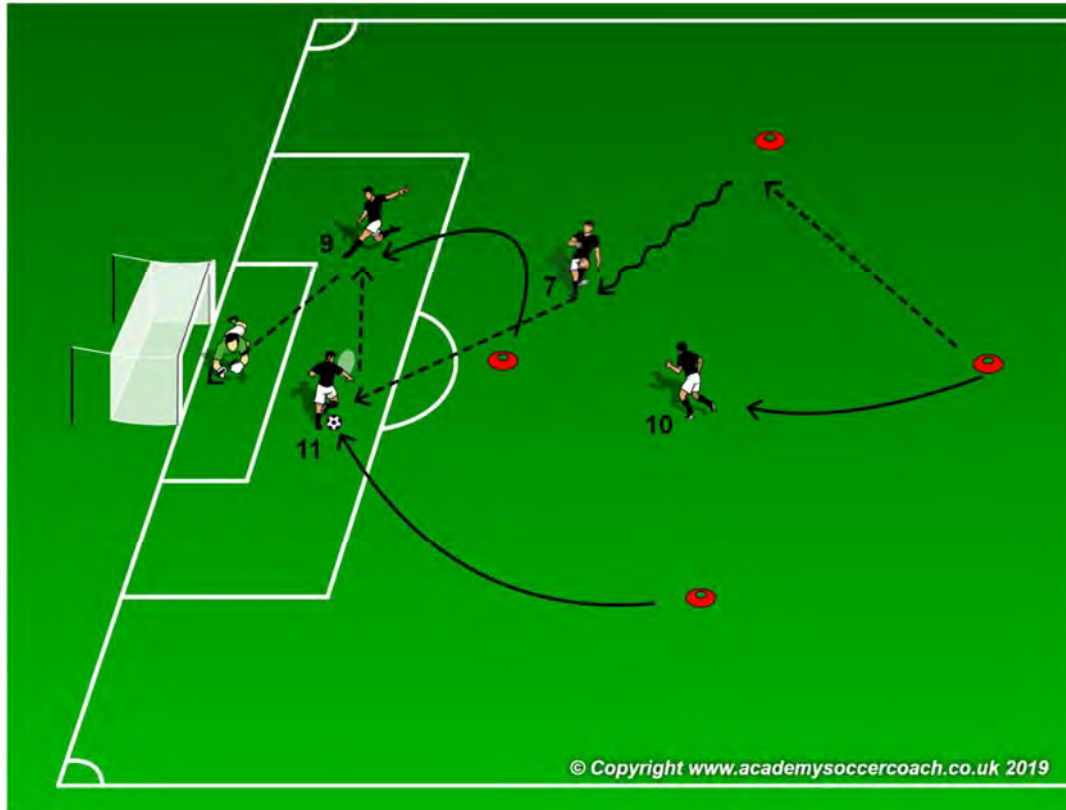
Players: A goalkeeper is positioned in each of the two goalposts. Three players in each team plus one neutral who plays for the team in possession of the ball.

Description: Both teams aim to score in the opponent's goal. Play takes place inside the middle area. If a goal is scored or the ball goes out of the play area, the goalkeeper of the team in possession restarts play.

Variation: Reduce the length and width of the pitch to measure 20 yards by 25 yards and remove the middle area.

Progression: In an area measuring 20 yards by 25 yards play 3v3 plus goalkeepers without a neutral player. If a goal is scored after a combination such as a wall-pass, a third man play, an overlap, etc. the goal counts double.

Exercise 20 – Finishing practice – the spin.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Create and exploit space in attack to finish on goal.

Area: 50 yards by 40 yards.

Equipment: Markers to mark the starting positions, a regular goalpost and a supply of balls.

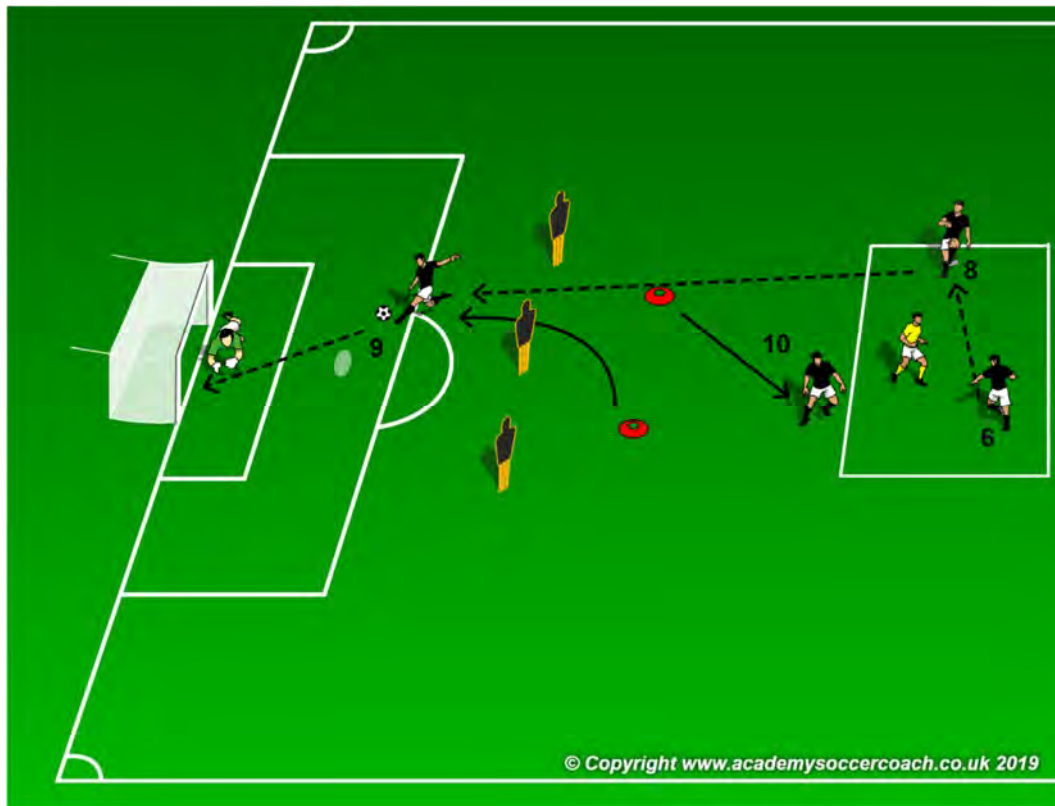
Players: A goalkeeper is positioned in the regular goalpost. Attackers 10, 7, 11 and 9 are to be positioned as in the 1-2-3-1 system of play.

Description: Sequence starts when midfielder 10 passes to the right lateral midfielder 7 who dribbles towards the inside. The striker 9 spins away to create space for the pass towards the left lateral midfielder 11 who cuts inside to create an overload and further options. Midfielder 11 returns the ball into the striker's path to finish on goal.

Variation: Instead of finishing the attack with a shot himself, the striker 9 passes the ball back to midfielder 10 to finish on goal.

Progression: Position two defenders who defend in and around the central zone of the penalty area. Mark this area. The attackers are now forced to be creative with their movements of how to infiltrate the defence. Shots may only be taken from inside the marked area.

Exercise 21 – Finishing practice – the compass movement.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Create and exploit space in attack to finish on goal.

Area: 50 yards by 40 yards.

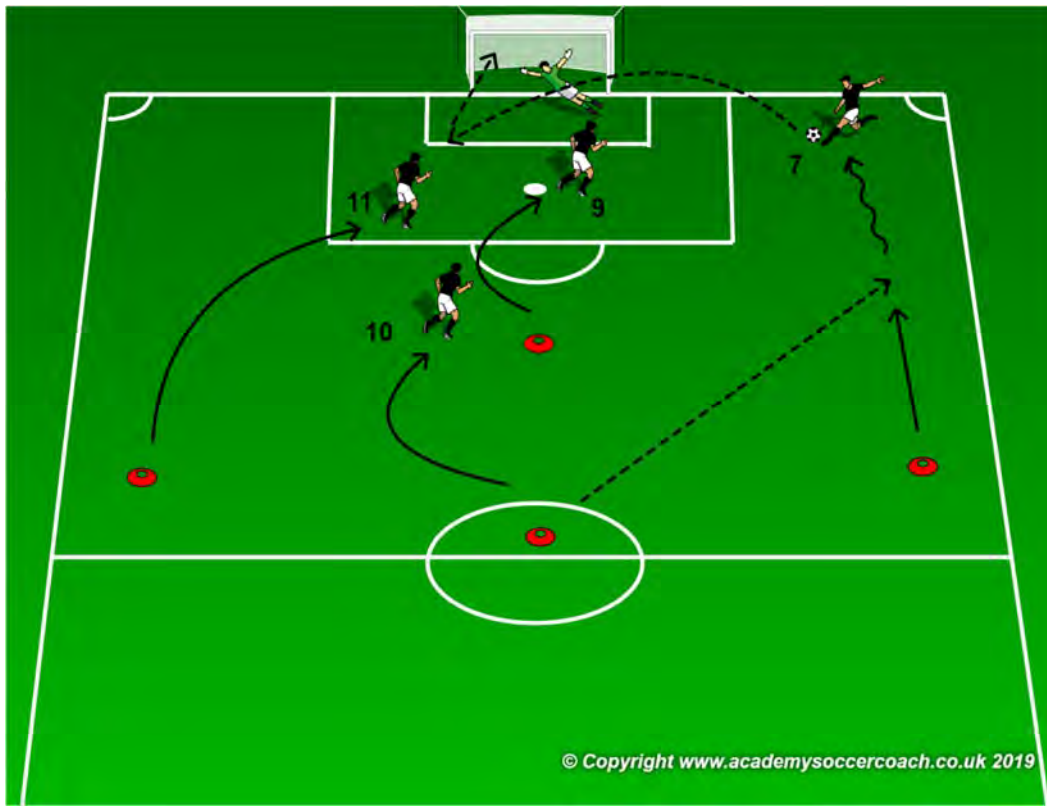
Equipment: Markers to mark the strikers' starting positions and the 2v1 zone, mannequins (or large cones), yellow bibs for the defenders, a regular goalpost and a supply of balls.

Players: A goalkeeper is positioned in the regular goalpost. Attackers 9 and 10 are positioned as shown in the above diagram. In the 2v1 area midfielders 6 and 8 play against the defender.

Description: In the 2v1 area midfielders 6 and 8 keep the ball against the defender until the opportunity to play forward arrives. When one of the two midfielders receives the ball and has the time and space to play vertically, the closer of the two strikers to the midfielder on the ball should drop to open a passing lane for the other striker to attack depth. The midfielder plays a vertical pass for the other striker into the space created. The striker finishes on goal.

Variation: Practice the movement of the two strikers without the defender. Therefore we will have midfielders 6 and 8 passing the ball to each other and then unleash the forward vertical pass at the right opportunity.

Exercise 22 – Crossing practice.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Use of width in attack to create scoring opportunities.

Area: 50 yards by 40 yards.

Equipment: Markers to mark the starting positions, a regular goalpost and a supply of balls.

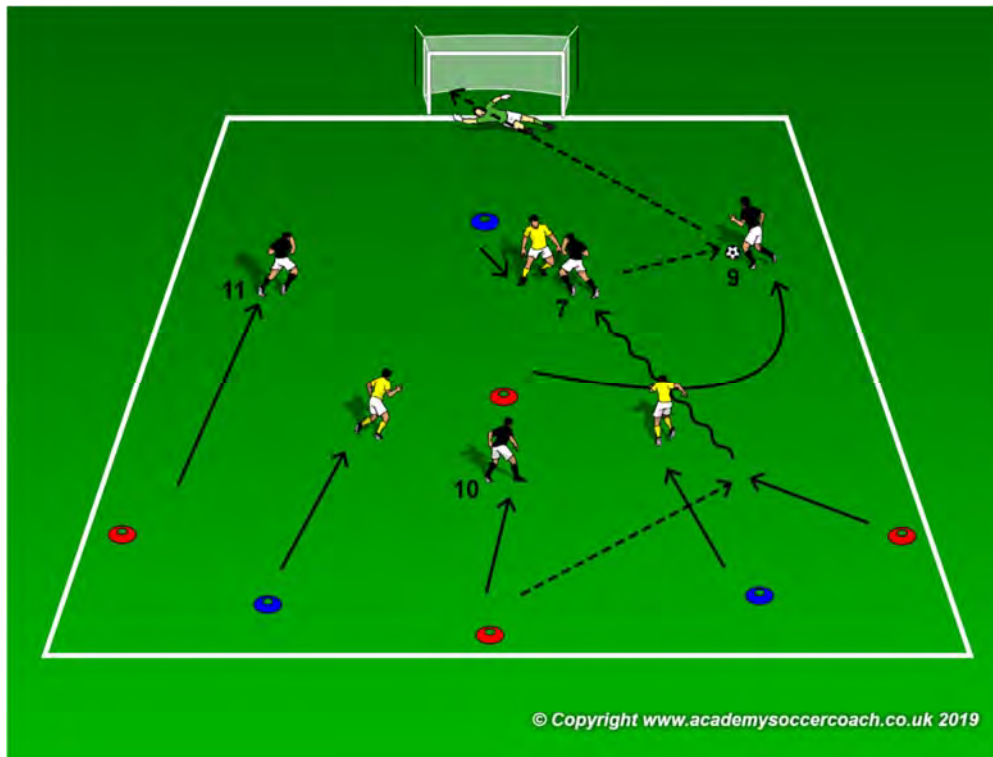
Players: A goalkeeper is positioned in the regular goalpost. Attackers 10, 7, 11 and 9 are to be positioned as in the 1-2-3-1 system of play.

Description: Sequence starts when midfielder 10 passes to the right lateral midfielder 7 in the space in front of him. The lateral midfielder 7 dribbles forward at speed to deliver a cross. The striker 9 attacks the first post, the left lateral midfielder 11 cuts inside to attack the second post, while midfielder 10 positions himself just outside of the penalty area. The same sequence is repeated with a cross delivered from the left flank by attacker 11.

Variation: Instead of crossing the ball, the lateral midfielder 7 dribbles towards the goal line and plays a cut back pass to midfielder 10 to finish on goal.

Progression: Two defenders are positioned inside the penalty area. The attackers now have to figure out ways to overcome the resistance supplied by the defenders.

Exercise 23 – Fast attack 4v3 + goalkeeper.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Create and exploit space in attack to finish on goal.

Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width with a regular goalpost positioned on the opposite goal line.

Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and starting positions, three yellow bibs and a supply of balls.

Players: Four attackers who start from the positions marked in red and three defenders who start from the positions marked in blue.

Description: The sequence starts with the central midfielder 10 passing to the right lateral midfielder 7 while the striker 9 spins off towards the flank. The lateral midfielder 7 searches to commit the central defender with the intent of freeing the striker 9 to receive without pressure and finish on goal. As soon as the central midfielder 10 passes to the lateral midfielder 7, all players including the defenders become active. If the defenders win the ball they aim to guide it and stop it over the opposite end line to score a point.

Progression: Have two defenders who start in front of goal and only one recovering defender. We may also include a time constraints in which the attacking team aim to score.

Exercise 24 – Attacking a high line.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: To penetrate a high defensive line and score.

Area: 50 yards in length and 35 yards in width. The area is divided into three vertical zones – two lateral and one central – of which the lateral measure 5 yards in width while the central measures 25 yards. A single horizontal zone and an offside line is marked 20 yards from goal.

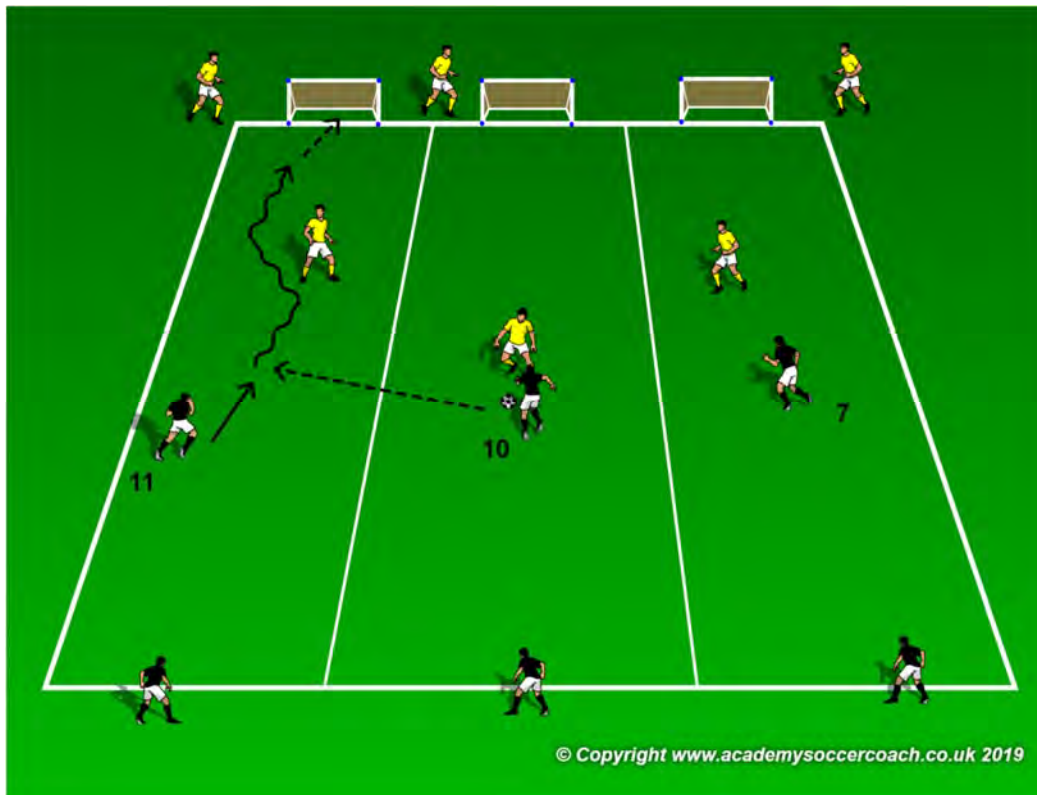
Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and zones, a regular goal which is positioned on the goal line and two mini goals which are positioned on the opposite goal line. Three mannequins positioned on the offside line and four yellow and two red bibs.

Players: The attacking team (blacks) is composed of two central defenders, a central midfielder and a striker. The defending team is composed of a striker and three midfielders. The neutral players play with the team in possession but when the black team has the ball they become the lateral midfielders 7 and 11 as shown in the illustration above.

Description: Play always starts by the black team as we are working on their attacking movements. The blacks can score only after a through pass is played. The yellows aim to win the ball and counter on the two mini goals.

Variation: The lateral midfielders 7 and 11 can also cut inside to receive the ball and score.

Exercise 25 – The three vertical channels game.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: To dominate the 1v1 in attack.

Area: 20 yards in length and 24 yards in width. The area is divided into three vertical channels each measuring 20 yards in length by 8 yards in width.

Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and the vertical zones. A mini goal is positioned at one end of each vertical zone. We also need yellow bibs for the defenders and a supply of balls.

Players: The players are divided into two groups – attackers and defenders. The attacking players' positions should refer to positions 7, 10 and 11, which is the midfield line in the 1-2-3-1 system of play.

Description: The attackers aim to score in any of the three mini goals. If the defenders win the ball they pass it to the next group of three attackers to take their turn against the new defending group. All the players must remain inside their assigned zone. However, the attackers are allowed to score in any goal which is not inside their zone. After each round both sets of players change roles.

Progression: The attacking players are allowed to switch zones during an attack.

Exercise 26 – Play behind the back line.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: To create space in attack to play vertically behind the defence.

Area: 40 yards in length by 40 yards in width and which is inside a regular pitch measuring 60 yards in length and 40 yards in width. The 40 yard by 40 yard area is further divided into three vertical zones each measuring 10 yards in width.

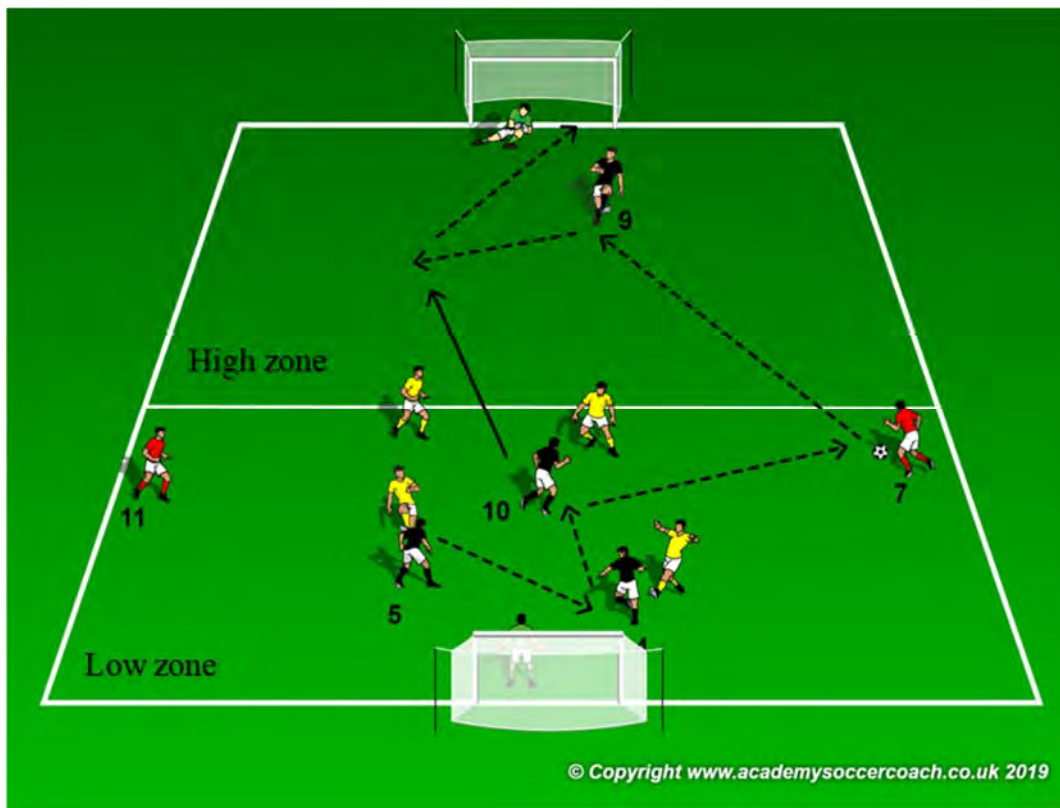
Equipment: Markers to mark the area and zones, six yellow bibs, two regular goal posts and a supply of balls.

Players: Each team lines up in a 1-2-3-1 system of play.

Description: Play takes place inside the 40 yard by 40 yard area. Both teams aim to create and exploit the space to play vertically behind the opposition's defensive line. When the ball is played behind the defence, the situation can either be the attacker taking a direct shot on goal, or a lateral midfielder playing the cross for the attacker to conclude at goal as shown in the above diagram.

Progression: A defender tracks back to defend and apply pressure on the attacker.

Exercise 27 – Support the attack from a counter.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: To support the attack upon initiating a counter.

Area: 50 yards in length by 30 yards in width. This area is divided into a high and low zone. The high zone measures 30 yards by 30 yards while the low zone measures 20 yards in length by 30 yards in width.

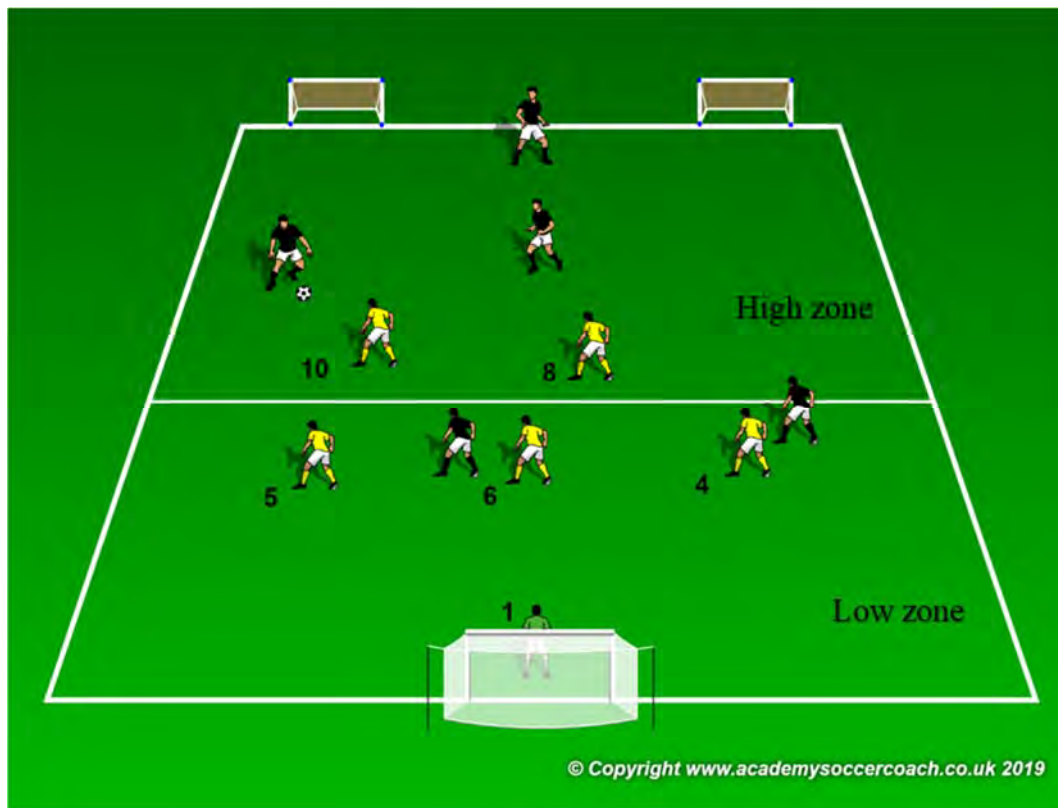
Equipment: Markers to mark the area and zones, four yellow and two red bibs, two regular goal posts positioned at each end line of the play area and a supply of balls.

Players: The black team have three players positioned in the low zone and one in the high zone. The yellow team have four players positioned in the low zone. Two neutral players are positioned in the low zone. Both teams have a goalkeeper in goal.

Description: The yellow team starts in possession of the ball inside the low zone. Their aim is to score on the goal defended by the black team's goalkeeper. If the black team wins the ball, they aim to play it to their striker who is situated in the high zone. The striker lays the ball to another teammate to finish on goal with a first time shot.

Progression: A defender tracks the attacker who supports the forward pass.

Exercise 28 – Deny penetration in midfield.



System of play: 1-3-2-1.

Aim: Prevent the opponents from playing the ball into dangerous zones.

Area: 50 yards in length and 40 yards in width divided into two horizontal zones. The high zone measures 30 yards in length, while the low zone measures 20 yards.

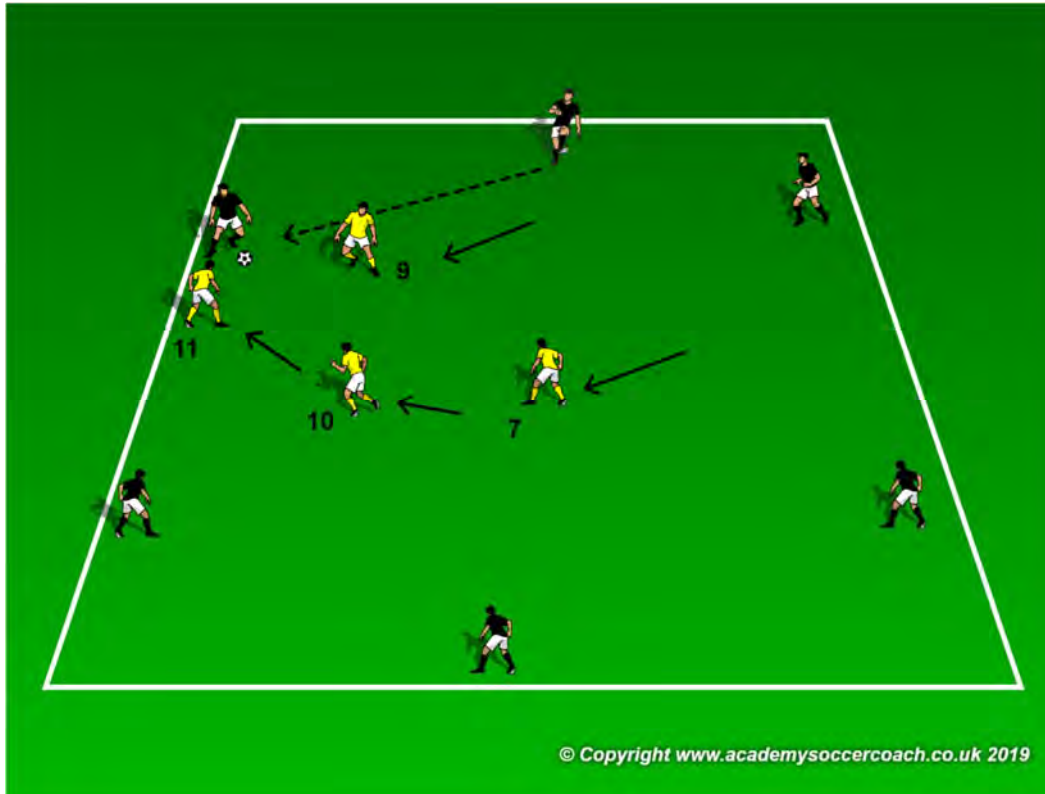
Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and zones, a regular goalpost on one goal line, two mini goals on the opposite goal line and bibs (five yellow).

Players: The attacking team is made up of five players while the defending team is made up of five players and a goalkeeper. The defending team (yellows) are set in a 1-3-2 formation.

Description: Normal game where the defending team protects the regular goal and attacks the mini goals. If the attacking team scores from inside the low zone it equals double the points. This forces the defending team to be more compact, protect the passing lanes, and aim to win the ball higher up the field. All restarts take place in the high zone by the attacking team.

Progression: If the attacking team plays ten consecutive passes, it counts as a point. This method of scoring comes in effect when we need to establish a strategy to quickly regain possession of the ball, such as when we are losing in a match.

Exercise 29 – 6v4 pressing rondo.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Apply timed and well-coordinated pressing actions to win the ball.

Area: 30 yards in length and 25 yards in width.

Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch, four yellow bibs and a supply of balls.

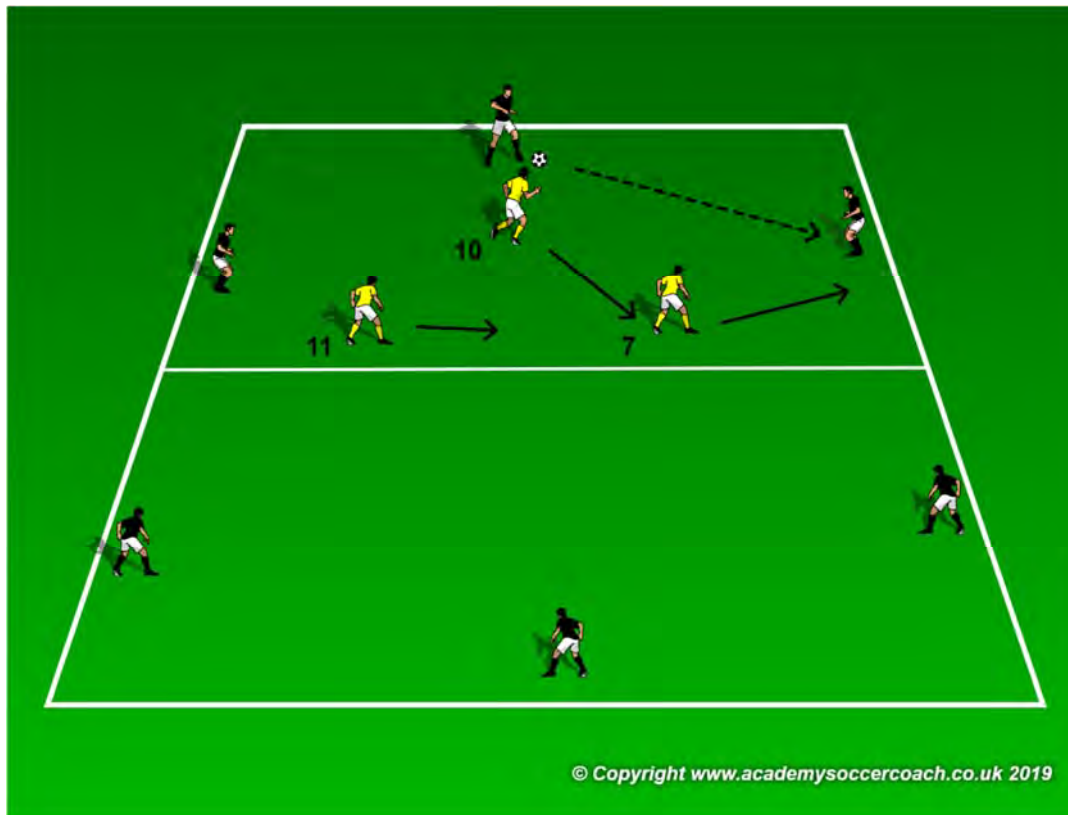
Players: The attacking team is made up of six players which are scattered inside the play area. The four defending players are set in 3-1 formation of the 1-2-3-1 system of play.

Description: The attacking team aims to keep possession of the ball for a pre-set number of passes to score a point. The defending team aims to win the ball and dribble it out of the area from either end line to score a point.

Progressions:

1. Increase the play area to measure 35 yards in length and 30 yards in width.
2. Reduce the pre-set number of passes for the attacking team to score a point. This forces the yellow team to be more aggressive in their pressing.

Exercise 30 – Deny the forward pass.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Deny the opponents from playing vertically, win the ball and counter.

Area: 30 yards in length and 25 yards in width which is divided into two equal horizontal zones.

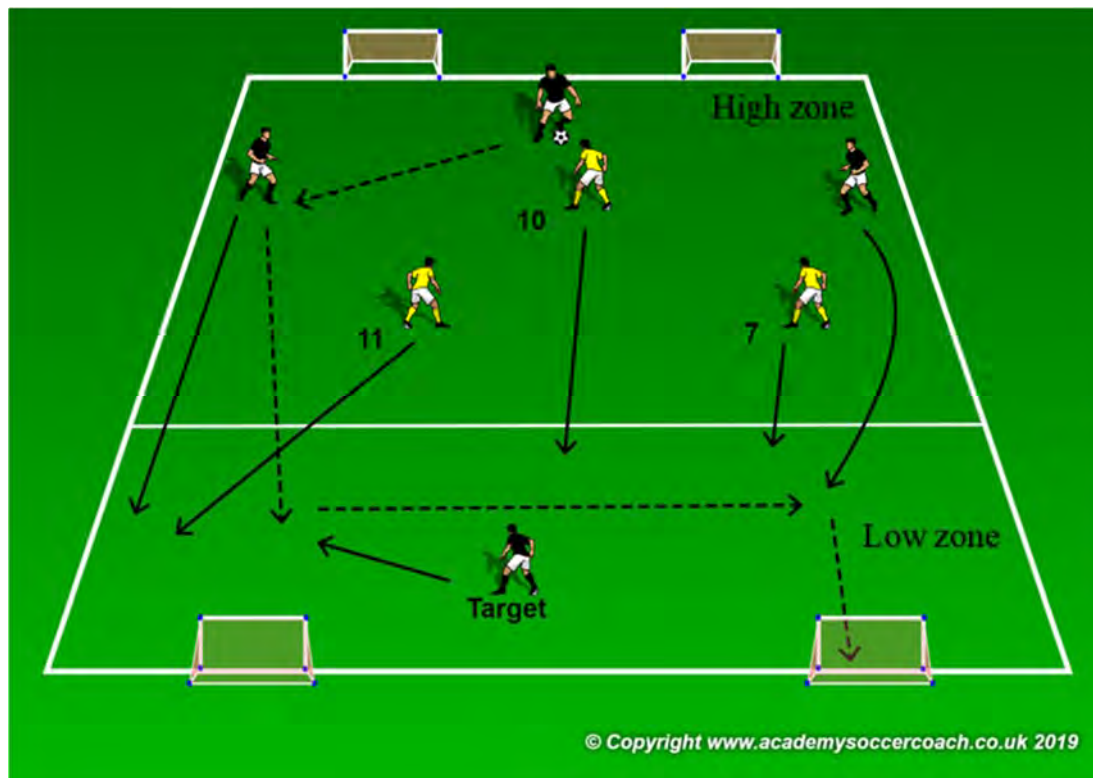
Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch, three yellow bibs and a supply of balls.

Players: The attacking team is made up of three players in each zone, totalling six players, while the defending team is made up of three players.

Description: The attacking team aims to play the ball from one zone to another to score a point. If the ball is successfully played into the other zone, the attacking team's players in that zone must complete three passes before attempting to play the ball back into the original zone. The defending team aims to win the ball and counter on the end line of the zone where the ball was won.

Variation: The ball must be played only on the ground, therefore no high balls are allowed.

Exercise 31 – Organised midfield defending.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Prevent the opponents from playing the ball to the target player, follow the attack and score.

Area: 35 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into two vertical zones. The high zone measures twenty 5 yards in length while the low zone measures 10 yards.

Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and zones, two mini goals are positioned on a goal line and another two on the opposite goal line. We also need three yellow bibs.

Players: The attacking team is composed of three midfielders and one target player who must remain inside the low zone. The defending team is composed of three midfielders. **Description:** The attacking team score if they successfully combine with the target player prior to receive a return pass to score in any of the two mini goals. If the defending team win the ball they counter on the opposite two mini goals.

Progression: Remove the zones and play 4v3 in favour of the attacking team. Scoring can be done in different ways and therefore not restricted to combine play with the target player.

Exercise 32 – Reorganise quickly in defence!



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: To get reorganised in defence quickly, deny the opponents from scoring and build a counter attack.

Area: 60 yards by 40 yards divided into two equal halves on a normal soccer field.

Equipment: A regular goal is positioned on both goal lines.

Players: The sequence always starts from the positions shown in the above illustration.

Description: The opposition's central midfielder starts with the ball and passes it to the player on either flank. Midfielders 6 and 8 must quickly track back and recover while the central defenders 4 and 5 remain composed to delay the attack. If the defenders win the ball, they play it into the opposite half for a 2v2 to take place. After the attack is over or the ball goes out of play, a new attack starts in the same manner with all the players in the positions shown.

Progressions:

1. The central midfielder can also pass to the striker who comes short.
2. Midfielders 6 and 8 have a larger distance to cover when tracking back.
3. If the defenders win the ball, all the players need to be in the opposition's half of the field for a goal to count, thus pushing players forward on the counter.

Exercise 33 – React to the switch of play!



System of play: 1-3-2-1.

Aim: To remain compact when the opponents switch play, win the ball and counter.

Area: 60 yards by 40 yards divided into two equal halves as on normal soccer field.

Equipment: A regular goal is positioned on both goal lines.

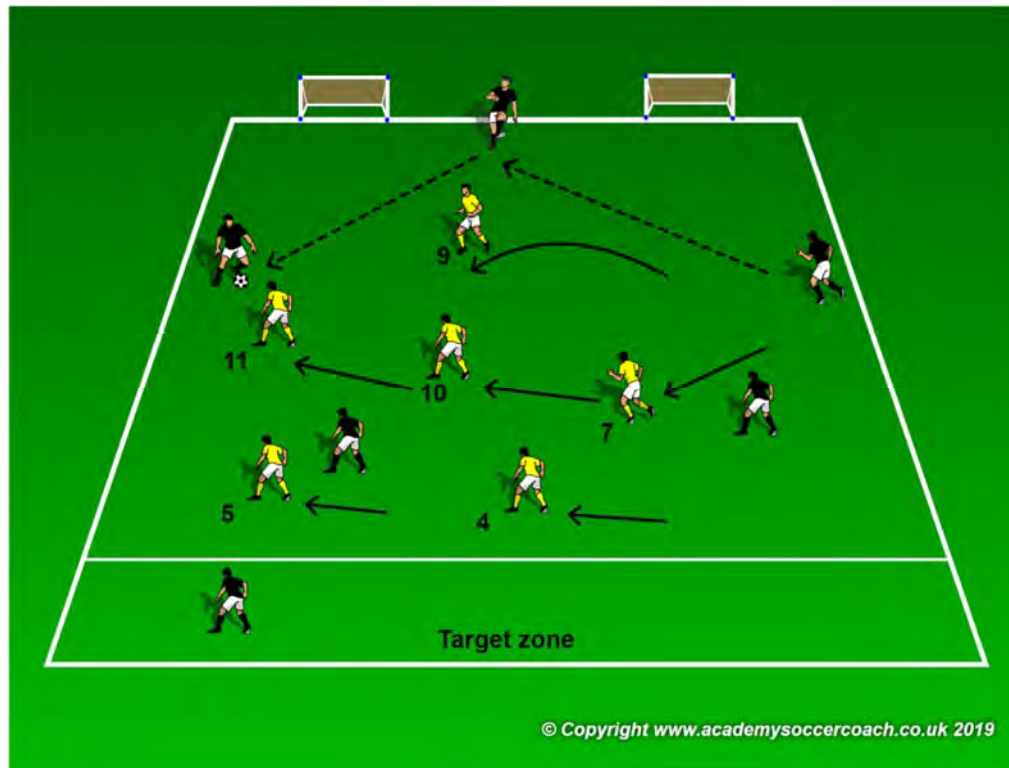
Players: The sequence always starts in the positions shown in the above illustration.

Description: Players A, B and C pass the ball to each other while the defence shifts accordingly. At any given moment players A, B or C depending on who has the ball pushes forward to attack. The defence has to react to the movement of the attacking team, prevent them from scoring and initiate a counter attack on the opposite goal.

Variations:

1. Attackers must attack from the flank with players A or C cutting inside while the closest midfielder overlaps or underlaps.
2. Players A and C switch play directly without involving B.
3. Players A and C can play balls directly into the penalty area defended by the yellow team.
4. The attacking team moves their forwards towards the flanks.

Exercise 34 – Team compactness!



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: To remain compact and deny the opponents the opportunity to play in verticality, win the ball and counter.

Area: 30 yards in length by 40 yards in width with an additional target zone measuring 5 yards in length.

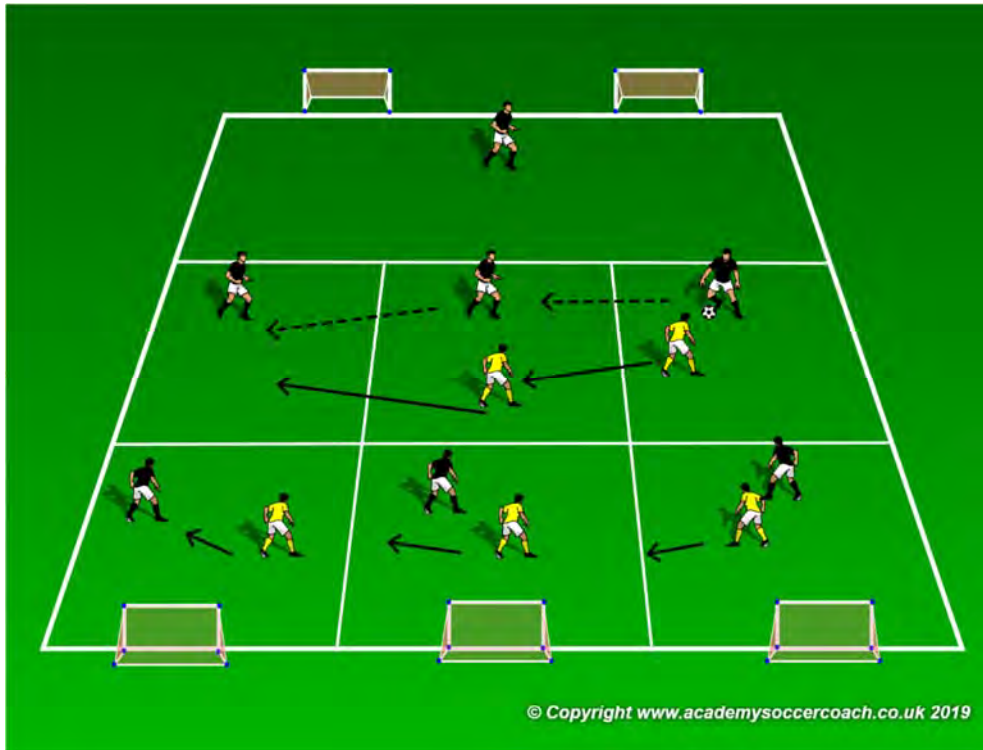
Equipment: Markers to mark pitch and the target zone and two mini goals on the opposite end.

Players: The defending team is positioned in a 2-3-1 formation while the attacking team plays in any formation the coach feels it will challenge his players.

Description: The attacking team (blacks) aim to pass the ball to the player inside the target zone. The defending team (yellows) work collaboratively to prevent the attackers from playing the ball into the target zone, win the ball and counter on the two mini goals.

Progression: The attacking team's player inside the target zone may be rotated. Therefore, the defending team must be aware of any positional rotations (mobility) in order for the attacking team to create and exploit space to penetrate.

Exercise 35 – Protect your zone!



System of play: 1-3-2-1.

Aim: Players to defend their zone, intercept forward passes and initiate counter attacks.

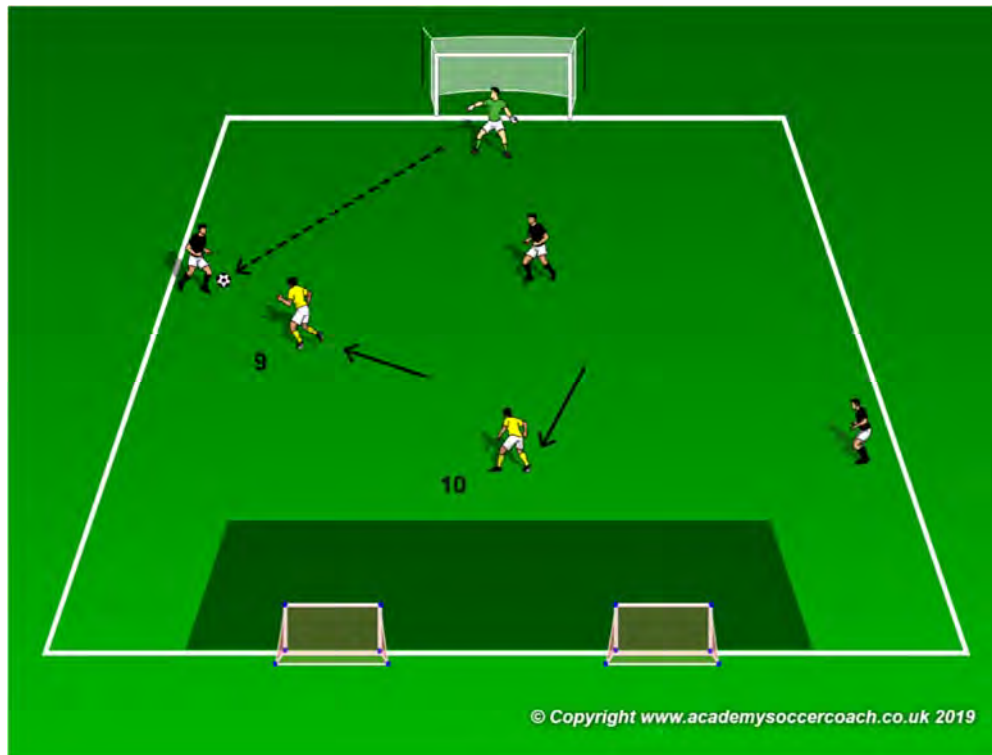
Area: 30 yards by 30 yards. The defensive two thirds of the pitch are divided into six zones each measuring 10 yards by 10 yards.

Equipment: Markers to mark pitch and zones and five mini goals. Three of these mini goals are positioned on the goal line inside each marked zone defended by the yellows and the other two are situated on the opposite goal line.

Players: The defending team are positioned in a 3-2 formation with each player guarding his zone. The attacking team has a player in each of the six zones plus a defender who will be mainly used to switch play.

Description: All the players must remain inside their zone. The defenders move according to the position of the ball while remaining inside their zone. They aim to close the forward passing gaps as well as any opening to the goal inside their zone. At the same time the defenders must mark the player inside their zone. If the defenders win the ball, play becomes free and they try to score in any of the two mini goals positioned on the opposite goal line.

Exercise 36 – Front two defending



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: The attackers collaborate to prevent the opponents from playing down the middle of the pitch.

Area: 25 yards by 15 yards with a scoring zone (shaded area) for the attacking team that measures 5 yards by 10 yards.

Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and a scoring zone. A regular goalpost on one end and two mini goals on the opposite. Two yellow bibs and a supply of balls.

Players: The attacking team may play as two central defenders and a central midfielder or three central defenders. The defending team is composed of two strikers.

Description: The attacking team's objective is to guide the ball inside the scoring zone from where they aim to score a point. The defending pair aim to prevent the attacking team from scoring, win the ball and counter on the regular goalpost. Whenever the ball goes out of play or a goal is scored (for either team), the play restarts from the goalkeeper. Therefore we make sure that the defending pair are getting enough defending practice.

Progression: Enlarge the area to make it more challenging for the defending pair to prevent the attacking team from scoring and win the ball.

Exercise 37 – Protect the zone



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Retain team compactness and discipline to win the ball.

Area: 50 yards in length by 40 yards in width with a marked area that measures 10 yards in length by 20 yards in width as a scoring zone for the black team.

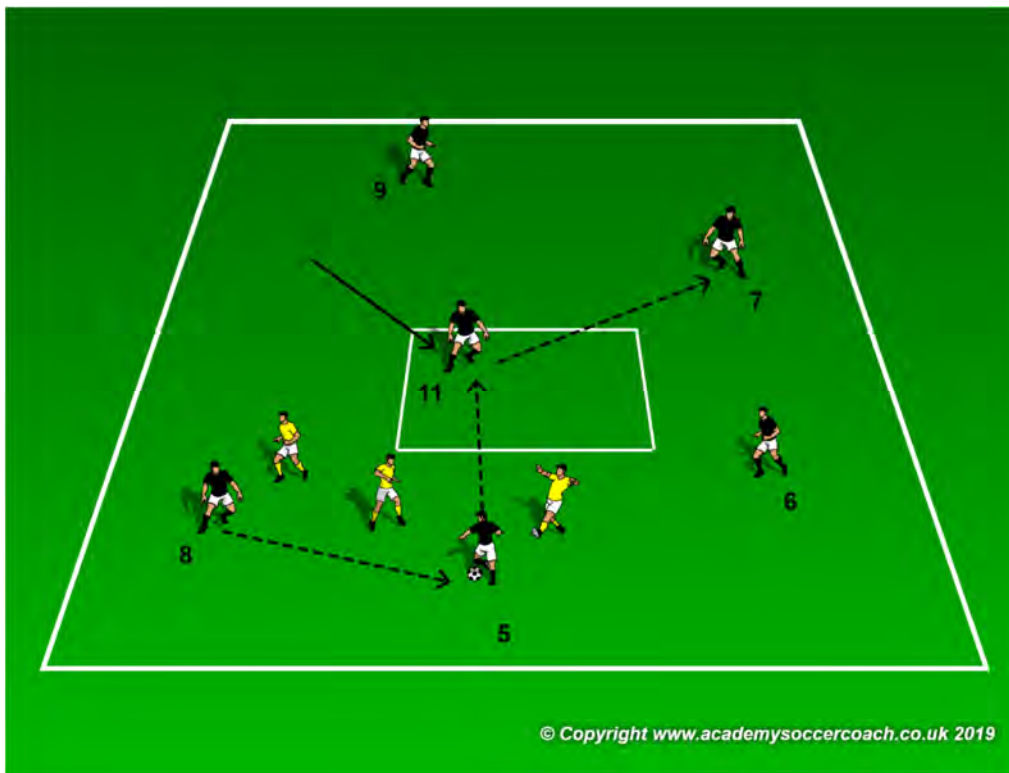
Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and the scoring zone. A regular goalpost on one end, six yellow bibs and a supply of balls.

Players: Six players for the defending team (yellows) and six players plus a goalkeeper for the attacking team (blacks).

Description: Play always starts from the black team's goalkeeper. The yellow team's aim is to prevent the black team from guiding the ball into the scoring zone. If the yellow team wins the ball they counter on the regular goal defended by the black team.

Progression: A target player is positioned inside the scoring zone. The attacking team's aim is to pass the ball to the target player. The target player can be another goalkeeper.

Exercise 38 – Positional play: 6v3 find the link player.



System of play: 1-1-2-2-1.

Aim: To recognise the moment when to move into the appropriate space and link play.

Area: 30 yards by 18 yards with a 2 yard by 2 yard zone in the middle.

Equipment: Markers to mark the area and the middle zone.

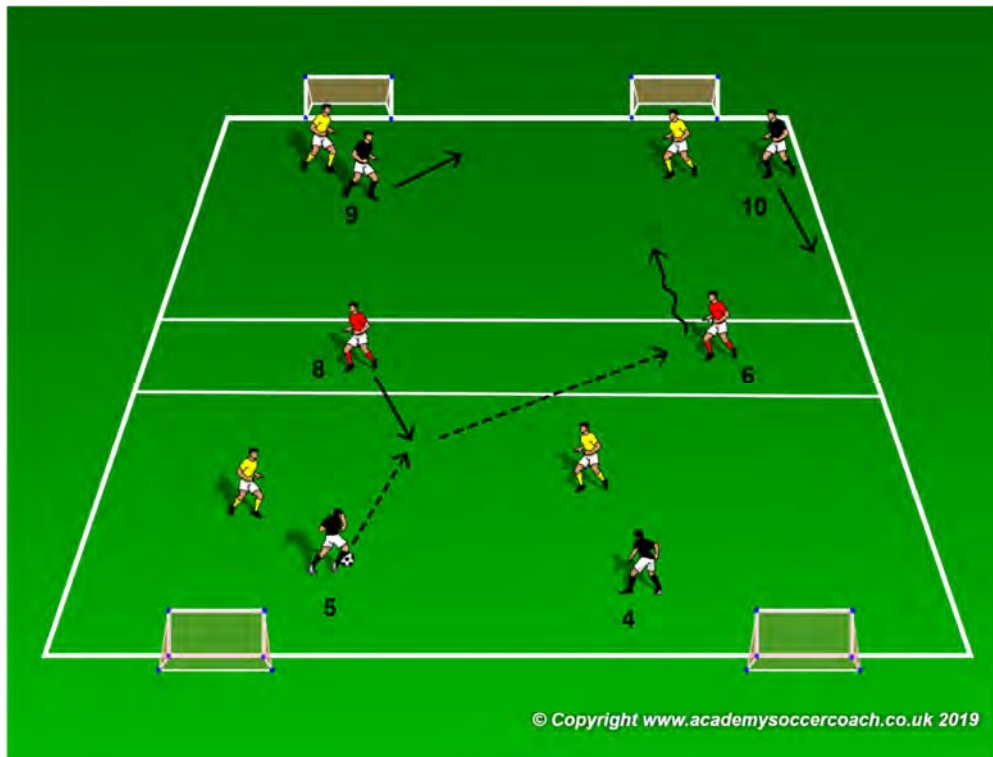
Players: The attacking team consists of six players positioned as in the 1-1-2-2-1 system of play. The defending team consists of three players.

Description: The attacking team aims to play the ball inside the middle zone for another attacker to meet the pass and act as the link player, thus scoring a point for his team. The defenders aim not to allow this pass to occur. However, the defenders are not allowed to enter the middle zone. If the defenders win the ball they aim to score a point by dribbling it out of the area.

Variations:

1. The defenders are not allowed to tackle but to only intercept passes.
2. Start with a player already situated inside the middle zone. Progress this by having the receiver coming to meet the ball inside the zone at the moment it is passed.

Exercise 39 – Positional play: 4v4+2 on four goals with a middle horizontal channel.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Teams build play from their own zone through the middle two neutral midfielders to score in the opposite two mini goals.

Area: 30 yards by 18 yards which is divided by a horizontal zone in the middle measuring 5 yards in length.

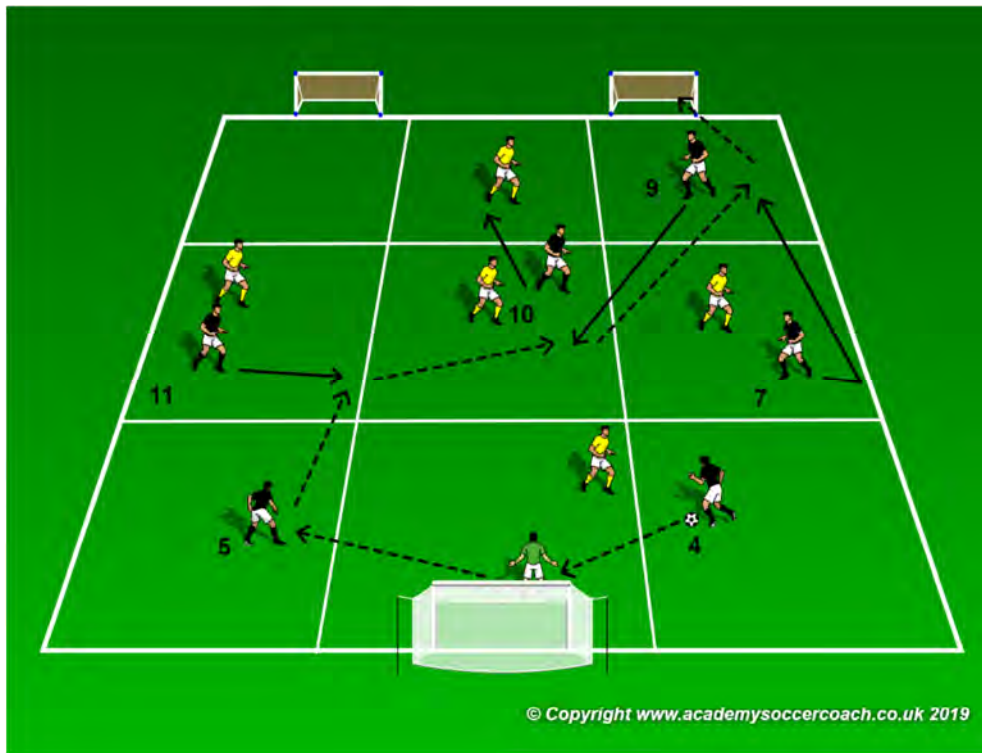
Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and the middle horizontal zone, four mini goals and a ball. Two mini goals are positioned on each goal line.

Players: Teams have two defenders in their defensive zone and two attackers in the offensive zone. Two neutral midfielders are situated in the middle horizontal channel.

Description: Teams build up from their own defensive zone and must play the ball to any of the two midfielders prior to move the ball into the offensive zone to score. Only one midfielder may drop to receive the ball in the defensive zone and only one midfielder may join the attack in the offensive zone.

Progression: Remove the middle horizontal channel and play 5v5+1 with both teams fielding a midfielder and another one which is neutral, thus giving the team in possession a numerical advantage.

Exercise 40 – Positional play: 7v5 in grids.



System of play: 1-2-3-2.

Aim: Build up a structured attack through good positional play.

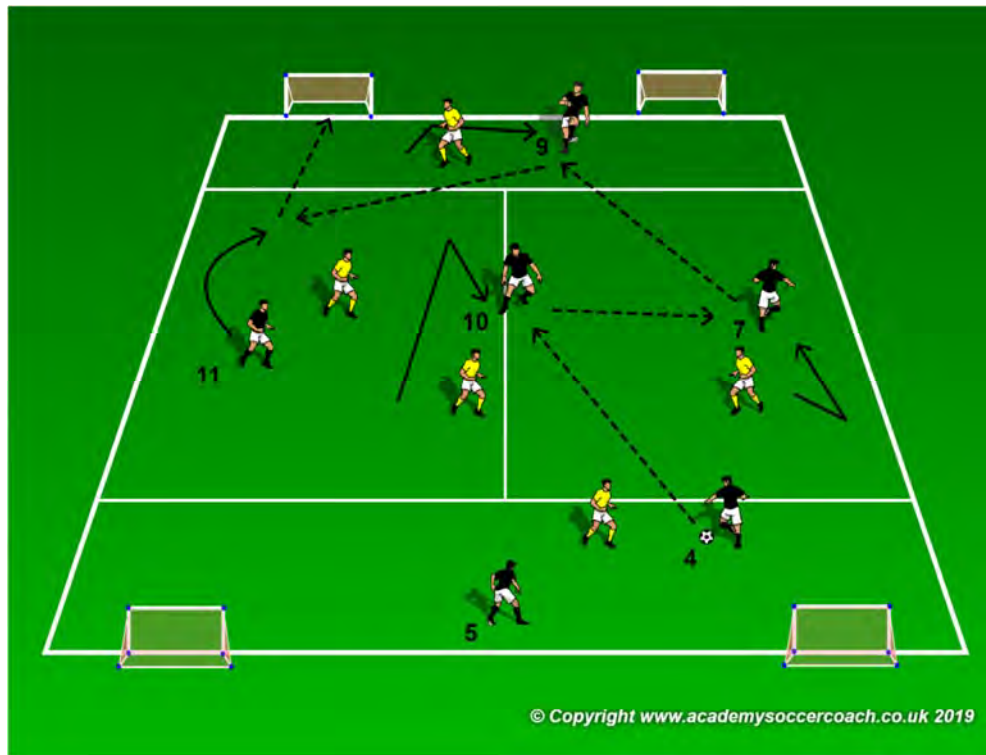
Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into three equal vertical channels and three equal horizontal channels.

Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and zones, five bibs, a ball, a regular goal positioned at one end and another two mini goals positioned at the opposite end.

Players: The attacking team (blacks) have seven players including a goalkeeper and six outfield players while the defending team has five outfield players.

Description: The attacking team aims to build up play from their goalkeeper through the zones. The players of the attacking team may move into different grid zones, however only one player from this team is allowed in each zone. Therefore, player may rotate zones as shown in the illustration above. The yellow team players (defenders) may also move anywhere, however they are also not allowed to have more than one player in the same zone. The attacking team must play the ball through adjacent zones thus forcing the players to create the necessary space and support for the ball-carrier. If the defending team wins possession of the ball, they counter on the regular goal defended by the black team's goalkeeper.

Exercise 41 – Positional play: 6v5 in zones with four goals.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Build up a structured attack through good positional play.

Area: 50 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into four zones. We have the end zones which are 5 yards in length and the middle zone divided into two equal vertical zones.

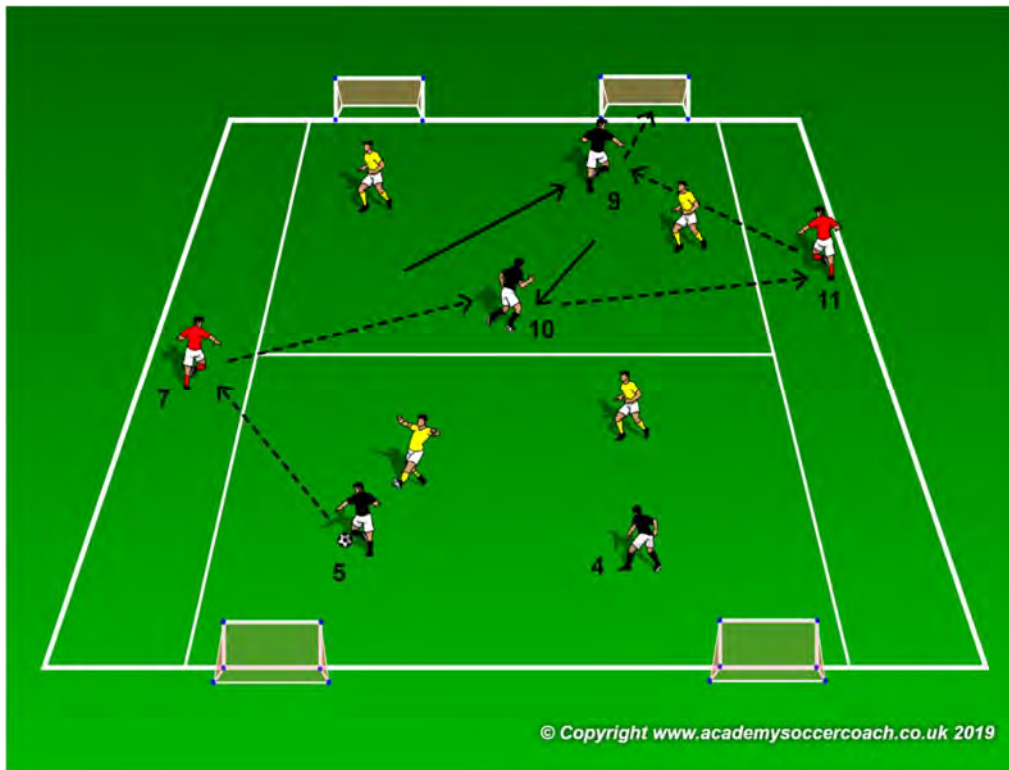
Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch and zones, five yellow bibs, a ball, and four mini goals. On each goal line we have two mini goals positioned twenty yards apart.

Players: The attacking team (blacks) have six players while the defending team has five outfield players.

Description: The attacking team aims to construct play from their defensive end zone through the middle zone. Goals may be scored from anywhere on the pitch. The black team players must remain inside their assigned zone with only the number 10 allowed to switch zones. However, if a goal is scored after a combination with the striker (black number 9) it counts twice. If the defending team wins possession of the ball they counter and attack on the black team's two mini goals.

Progression: The yellow team players are not restricted to specific zones and therefore try to overload the area around the ball, challenging the blacks to play quick and accurate passes.

Exercise 42 – Positional play: 2v2 + 2v2 + 2 lateral midfielders.



System of play: 1-2-3-1.

Aim: Build up a structured attack through good positional play.

Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into four zones. The two horizontal zones each measure 20 yards in length and 22 yards in width. The two flank zones measure 40 yards in length and 4 yards in width.

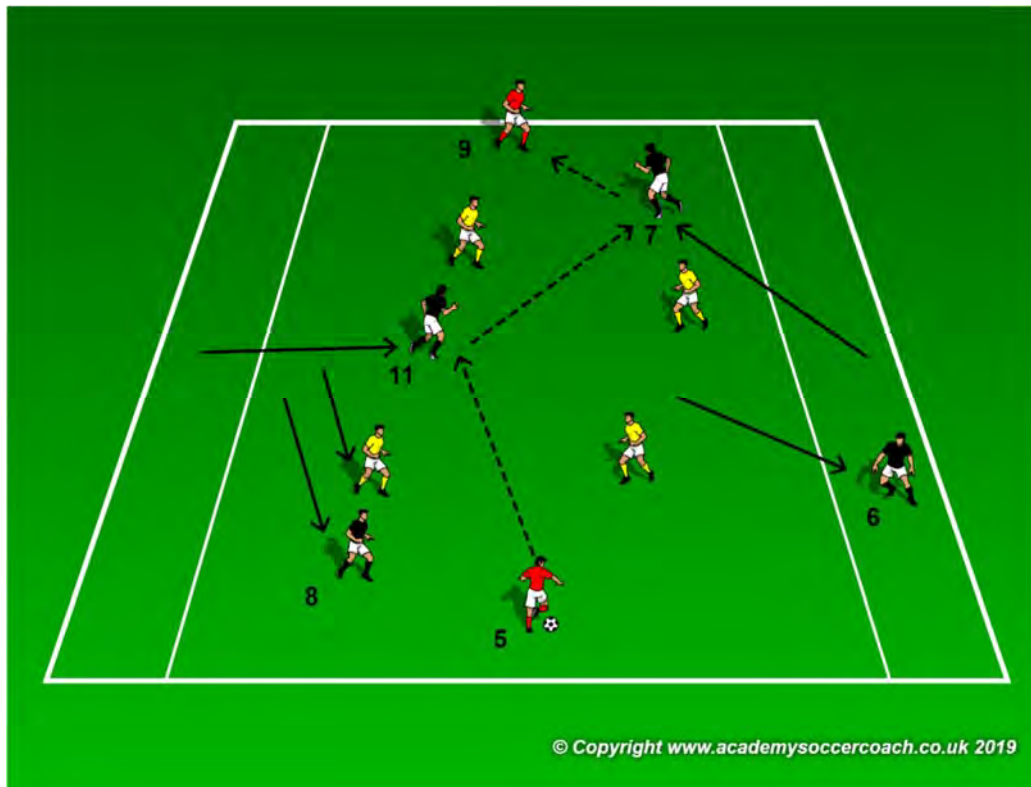
Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch area and zones, four yellow and two red bibs, four mini goals and a ball.

Players: Two teams of four players each and two neutral lateral midfielders in each flank zone. Each team has two players in each horizontal zone.

Description: The players are restricted to remain inside their assigned zones. The flank players move up and down the flank zones to give the team in possession numerical superiority. Goals may only be scored from inside the opponents' defensive horizontal zone. When the ball goes out of play or a goal is scored, play restarts by the team in possession from their own defensive zone.

Progression: The flank players are not allowed to score. This restriction challenges the attacking players to find ways to create space for themselves or their teammate.

Exercise 43 – Positional play: 4v4 + 2 targets with lateral zones.



System of play: 1-1-2-2-1.

Aim: Retain possession of the ball through organised positional play.

Area: 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width divided into three zones. The middle zone measures 20 yards in width while the lateral zones measure 5 yards.

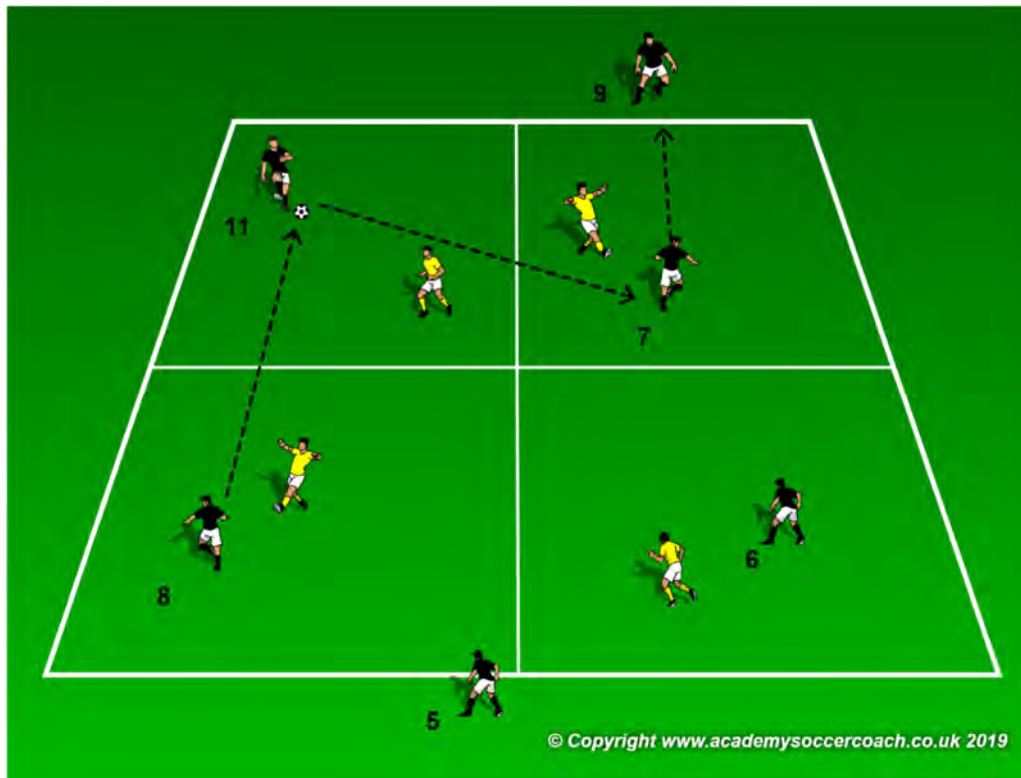
Equipment: Markers to mark the pitch area and zones, four yellow and two red bibs and a ball.

Players: Both teams are organised in a 2-2 formation and we also have two target players, one at each end line who are neutral and play with the team in possession.

Description: Both teams aim to retain possession of the ball. While doing so they use the lateral zones as guidelines to both create more playing options to the ball-carrier and also positional rotation to open up spaces and passing lanes. The players are however not restricted to remain inside their assigned zones. In the above image we see black 11 who recognises the space to cut inside to receive the ball from 5. Inside the lateral zones the players may be tackled as it occurs in a real game. The neutral target players may also be tackled.

Progression: Remove the lateral zones and see if the players can recognise the patterns of movements that have been carried out when playing with zones.

Exercise 44 – Positional play: four quadrants possession.



System of play: 1-1-2-2-1.

Aim: Retain possession of the ball through organised positional play.

Area: 20 yards in length and 20 yards in width divided into four equal squares.

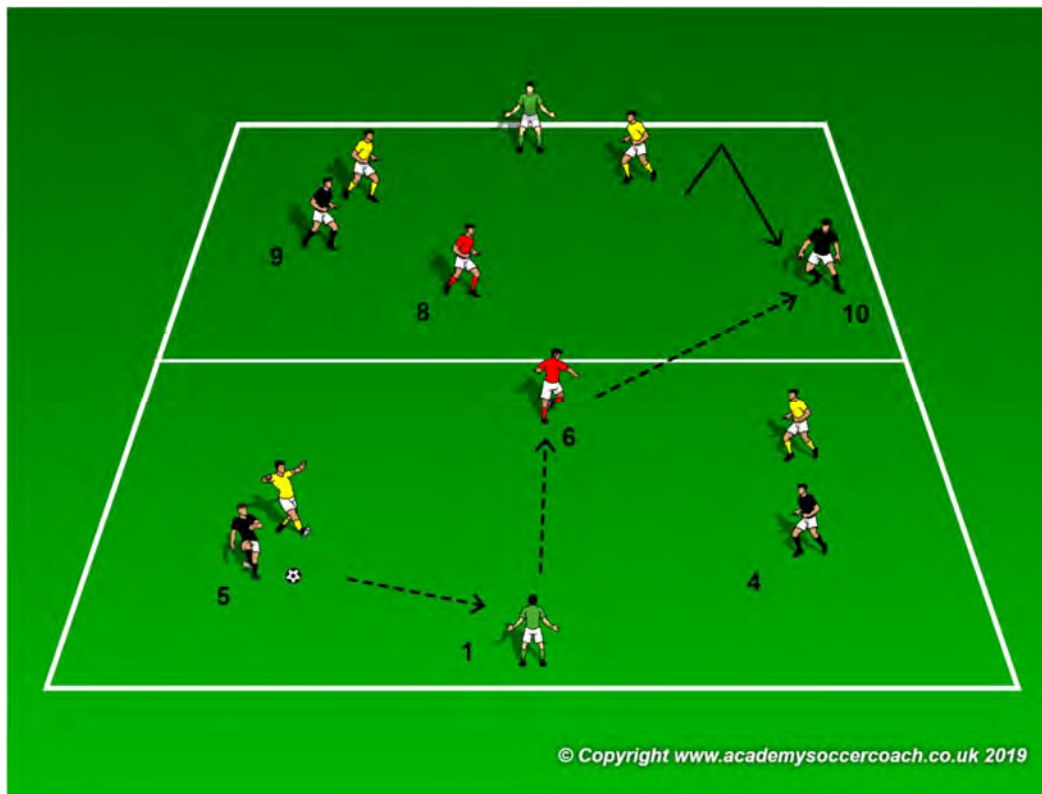
Equipment: Markers to mark the area and zones, four yellow bibs and a ball.

Players: Both teams have a player in each zone. The attacking team also have two additional players – one at the bottom of the area (number 5) and one at the top (number 9).

Description: The attacking team tries to retain the ball for a pre-established minimum number of passes in order to score a point. All players must remain inside their assigned zone. If the defenders win the ball they keep possession and they also try to reach the minimum number of passes required to score a point.

Progressions: Remove the zones and play freely where the players can move anywhere inside the play area. We might need to enlarge the area so that the players will have more space to circulate the ball. Furthermore, two mini goals may be positioned on both end lines where each team aims to score in the two defended by the opponents.

Exercise 45 – Positional play: 4v4+4 involving the goalkeepers.



System of play: 1-2-2-2.

Aim: Retain possession of the ball through organised positional play.

Area: 30 yards in length and 20 yards in width divided into two equal horizontal zones.

Equipment: Markers to mark the area and zones, four yellow and two red bibs and a ball.

Players: Both teams have two players in each zone. In each zone there is a neutral player and a goalkeeper who also plays as a neutral.

Description: The two teams aim to keep the ball for a pre-set number of passes to score a point. The players must remain inside their assigned zones.

Progressions:

1. Remove the zones and play in a single area.
2. Assign a neutral player to both teams. Play 5v5+2 with the goalkeepers being the two neutral players.
3. Play a normal game of 6v6 including the goalkeepers with a regular goal positioned at each goal line.

About the author.



Philip Joe Cauchi has been coaching for the past 18 years where he has coached players from different abilities, gender and age. His specialisation is in developing the potential of youth soccer players. Philip's qualifications include a UEFA A licence, a UEFA Youth A Elite licence, a Soccer physical trainer's licence, a Bachelor of Education with Physical Education and the SAQ® International diploma in developing speed, agility and quickness. At the moment Philip is coaching in Malta with the Mosta F.C. youth academy, which is one of the top academies on the island.

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