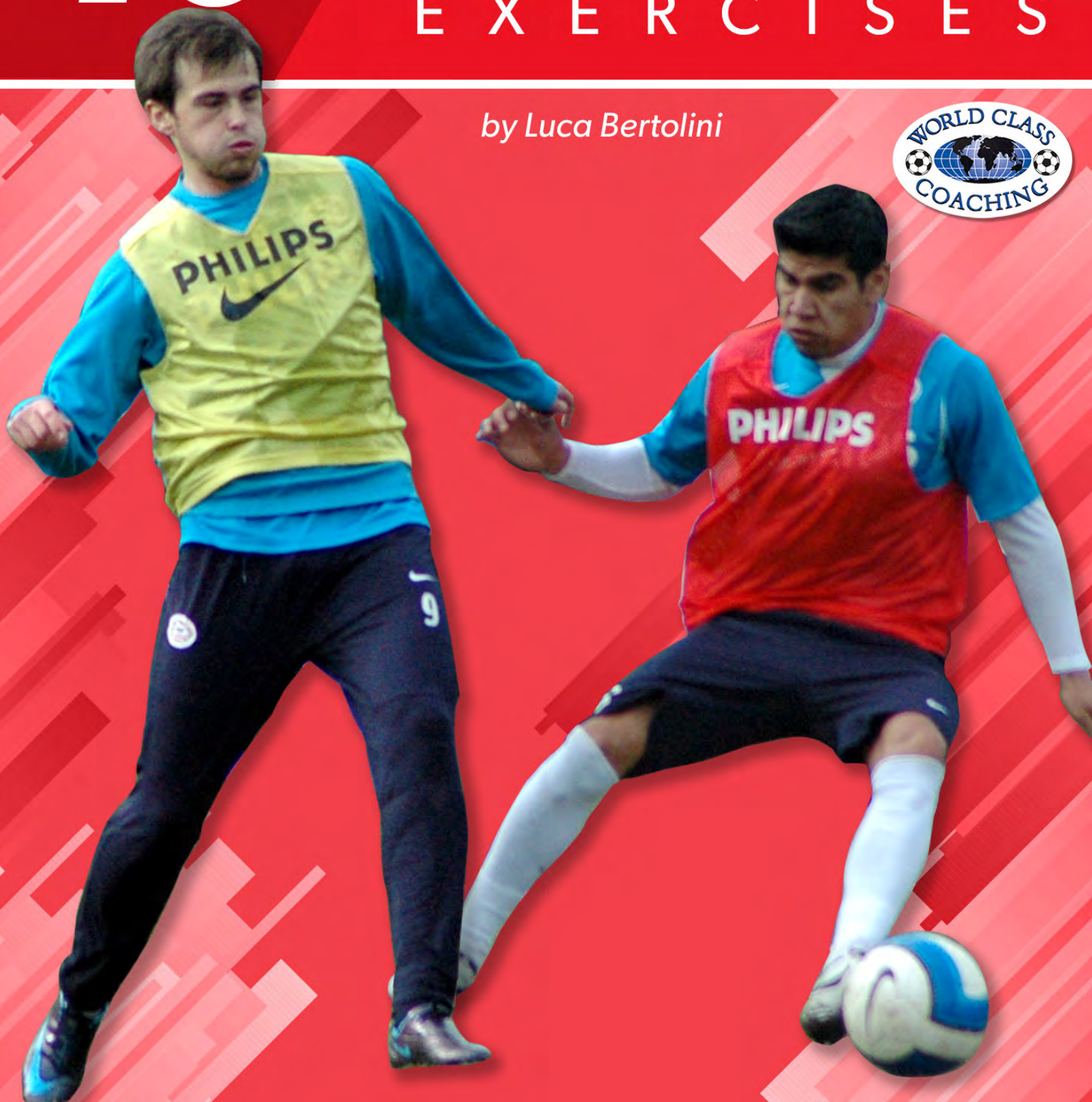


40

INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP DEFENDING EXERCISES

by Luca Bertolini



40 Individual Defending Excercises

By

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Introduction: defense principles of play

Soccer is a continuous sequence of small-sided games that connect different groups of players together, throughout all the four phases of the game (attacking, defending, transition to attack, and transition to defend); passing and receiving or dribbling the ball, or by moving without the ball into other areas, to receive or to defend.

Soccer is usually broken down into basic tactical principles that players must learn, read and practice on the pitch, to know how to improve their decision-making process and how to play.

The specific tactical principles of the defensive phase should help all players, both near the ball as well as away from it, to coordinate their actions and their tactical-technical behaviors within the team's defensive style, to save the own goal and to regain the possession. These principles should help players to guide their behaviors and positions in relation to the ball, their own goal, their opponents, their teammates and the dynamic events of the match.

The defending principles can be considered as follows: player, sectorial (forwards, midfielders, defenders), inter-sectorial (small-sided space moves near the ball of players involved in different sectors) or collective defensive actions, to create an advantage situation against the attackers, to recover the possession or just to counter them and to stop the opposition possession and attacking phase.

BASIC - PLAYER PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

Positioning: body placement and of the player on the pitch related to the ball position and direction, opponent body placement and goal to defend. We may consider as positioning all the actions that a player carries out during the transitions to defend phases.

Mark: A defender watching over an opponent of the attacking team, with the purpose of reducing the chances of taking part to the attacking move. 1 v 1 duels are related to the ball position and direction, the opponent body placement (in possession or not in possession) and the own goal to defend.

Interception: win the ball by closing the passing lanes, to avoid a forward pass between two players of the opposition team.

Anticipation: prevent the direct opponent from taking advantage while he is approaching the ball but not in possession yet.

Tackling: contact made with the foot during 1 v 1 duels, when the opponent is already in possession with the purpose of preventing the next offensive action or regaining possession.

Goal defense: positioning to cover the goal space and to close the passing lanes toward it, preventing the opposition from finishing.

Press: the individual action of a player who defends with intensity against the opponent already in possession or just after receiving the ball; the most important pressure actions are the 1 v 1 duels against the ball carrier. In general, a defender prevents the player in possession of the ball from playing forward or passing to a teammate and attempts to regain possession of the ball.

Prevent turning: pressure on an opponent who has his back to goal and is attempting to change the direction of the ball towards the attacking zone.

Cover: width and depth coverage by a player who creates a second defensive line in order to make the support of a teammate easier. For example, a center back behind the central midfielder can help him in case the opponent wins the first duel or an outer midfielder who help the fullback recovering the space behind him if he is overcome.

ADVANCED - TEAM PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

Balance: coordinated movements of the defending team from one part of the field to another, as the ball is moved to that part, keeping the defensive active area (near and around the ball) balanced and paying attention to the weak side (away from the ball). The objective is to reorganize the defense in front of the ball.

Tracking: to follow the runs of the opponents off the ball and of the player in possession when dribbling. For example, a defender chasing an attacking player who is making a forward and/or diagonal movement in front of the ball to generate a passing option.

Switching positions: the exchange of positions between two defenders in order to be more efficient defensively against cut, diagonal runs or overlapping combinations of the opponents. For example, a center back moves to the flank to defend the right-attacker and the left defender runs toward the center to cover the center back position, while retreating.

Zonal Defending: the equal distribution of defenders into space to create defensive efficiency and to prevent the opposition from reaching the goal; every player should be aware of the assigned area of responsibility.

Team pressure: intense, constant and organized actions from a group of players against the opponents to create defending numerical advantage 2 v 1, or more, on the ball, and as unit in the final third, middle third or first third.

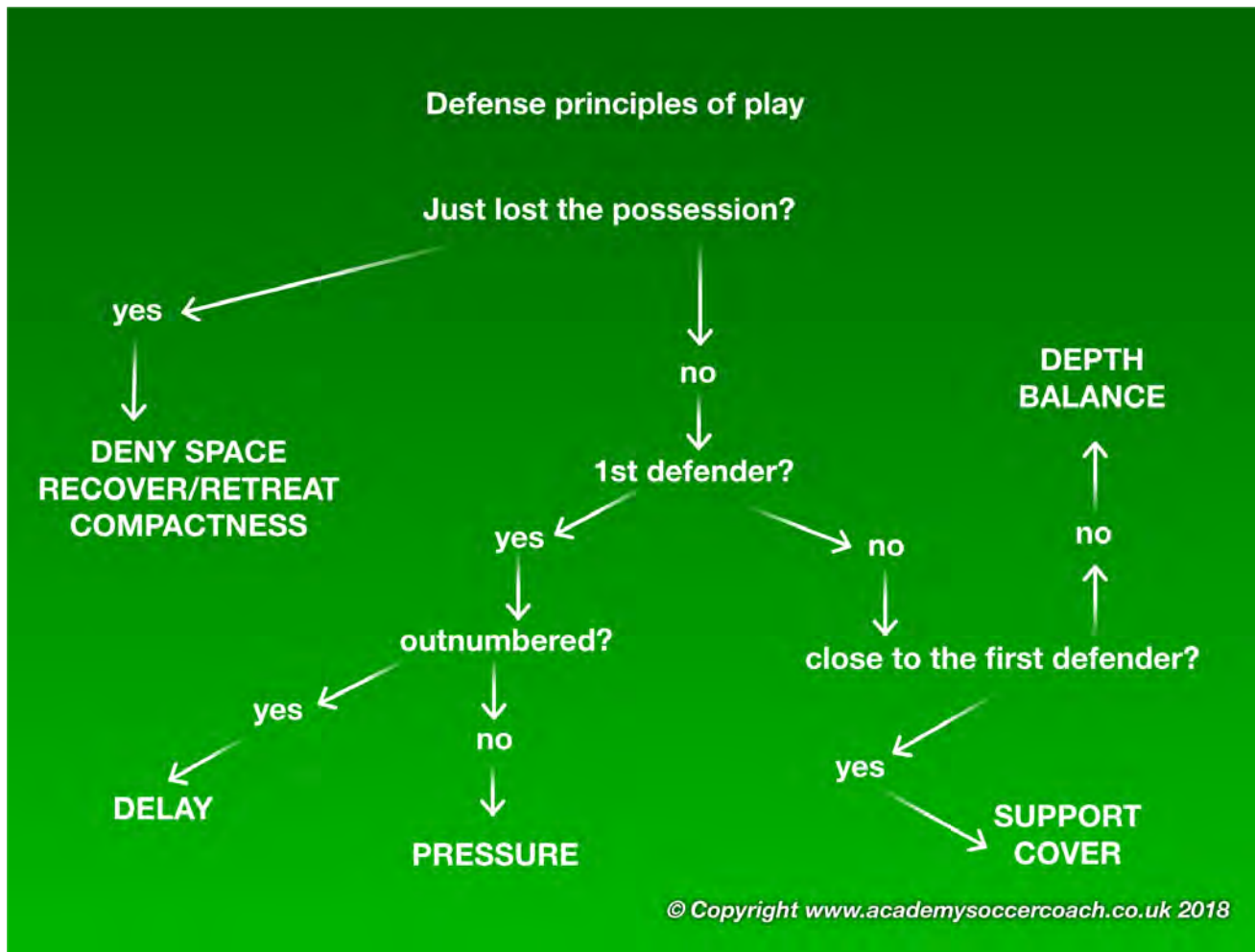
Retreat and recovery: movement of a group of players back toward defensive positions in order to reorganize the team's defensive shape and to avoid the opposition playing in behind the line and at the back of the last defense line, when the pressure action is not effective.

Compactness/Concentration: create high density of players near the ball to force the opposition's possession phase backwards or toward the sidelines.

Direct the opponent: force the direction of the possession phase of the opposition (player, sector or team) toward easier areas to defend; generally outside or inside to create high density of players.

Delay: action of the defending team against the opposition, to decrease the space of the offensive phase, restricting the passing options and avoiding dribbling moves to progress through the field and toward the goal. The rhythm of play must be slowed down.

How the players must exploit and apply these principles of play on the field, depending on the game situation? This following basic diagram helps us to answer the question:



Players defending roles and responsibilities

Goalkeepers

They must be confident, mentally tough, and brave to dominate the penalty area, great communicators to help and direct the defenders first, and all the teammates too. They must be able to anticipate the danger and to call the teammates to the right defending positions. As the roles of modern goalkeeper has developed, and they are fully field players now, they must provide cover all over the first third, when the team is pressing high the pitch or even only because the defense line is placed high. From a technical point of view, they must take up great starting positions to intercept, they must be excellent shot stoppers from long and short range and they must solve aerial situations. As the attacking teams are used to press high as prior defending phase, they must recognize when to catch the ball and when to parry it, to avoid second ball chances for the opposition.

Center Backs

As zonal defending has become a necessary dogma nowadays because of possession and positional play principles, they must know very well when to get tight, when to make space or cover and when to

‘drop off,’ when and how to track runners, understanding how to ‘hold the line’ and leave the opponents offside. They must be very careful to understand when to direct the opponent toward his weak foot and when to close him toward the sidelines to save the goal space. They also must be great communicators and help the teammates of the defense lines or of all the other sectors to keep organized and compact. They must be confident and comfortable in 1v1 situations, aggressive and composed in tackling situations, particularly set pieces. They should know how to anticipate the direct opponent, to intercept the ball ahead of the opposition players both on the ground and in the air.

Full Backs

The midfielders are asked to play up the pitch in modern soccer, as well as the wingers are asked to overload the center or to be placed very high and wide. When in possession, full backs are more playmakers rather than covering defenders. For these reasons, when the team loses the possession, they must be excellent at defending in 1v1 situations, as they are often alone. They have to know how and when to show the inside and the outside while facing the opponents and prevent them from crossing by tackling or blocking. It is very important to understand how to defend as part of the back four to cover the center backs; the distances and angles of the defense lines are vital to keep them compact.

Defensive Midfielder

First of all he must ensure lines of the team staying compact thanks to a good aerobic ability to play all over the pitch (first and middle third mainly). He usually has to control the space between the midfield and the defensive blocks to prevent opposition midfielders and forwards from passing in behind and over the defense line, containing and countering any penetration attempt and attack against. He must be good at man marking if the opposition forwards are lost by the center backs (from behind, side or front); depending on the situation he has to replace back players who have advanced forward, filling the space that may appear. He should press, double the mark or tackle when required in the middle third and final third (centrally and wide), as well as support the pressing teammates who need assistance, tracking runners or ball carriers.

Advanced midfielders

They must always be aware that they are the first defenders, when the team loses the possession. They must press with intelligence and determination, with the right angle and speed. They are the first players who have to try to direct the opposition possession phase toward easier areas to defend (sidelines or condensed center areas). They must track the opposition center defenders attempting to step into the midfield, anticipating and intercepting passes. During transitions to defend, if the pressure phase was not successful, they must recover behind the ball.

Wingers

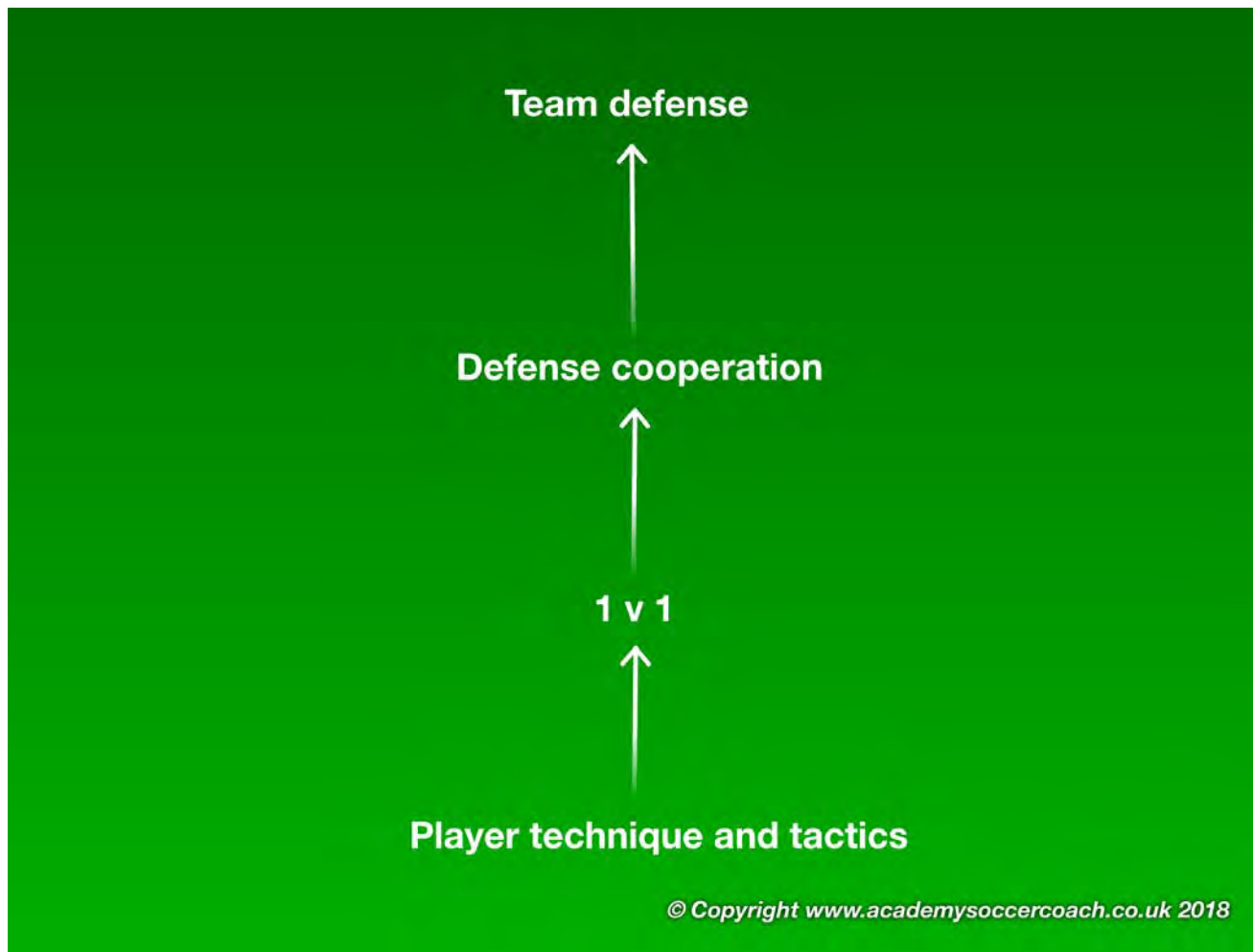
They must be good at recovering, reacting and acting as a first defensive barrier in wide areas, helping the teammates on the flanks and covering the position when the ball is on the opposite side. Wingers must learn how to attack with their man while he’s making runs, with or without the ball, by staying goal side; they must be able to tackle, delay the opposing player, and defend cross passes. It is very important how they counter the opposition building up phase of play, forcing the possession phase where the team prefers to defend.

Forwards

First of all, they have to know how to press, direct, delay and contain the opposition building up phase. Secondly they must come back into defensive side of field to help pick-up cleared or second balls,

receiving passes from teammates to make the possession safe; all the midfielders should be able to pass them the ball.

How to build up a defensive skilled player



The bases of a good defensive player are all the individual skills (technical, coordinative and cognitive) that allow to face an opponent to try to overturn a game situation from defense phase into a transition to attack or to manage a transition to defend phase as the possession is lost, to counter the opposition attacking phase, before being involved in the defense phase inside own half of the field; if it's not possible, then a player must be confident with the defense phase.

What is important to consider for a defending player?

- Area of the field
- Opponent
- Game situations (play by play, throw-ins, set-pieces, goalkeeper's kick)



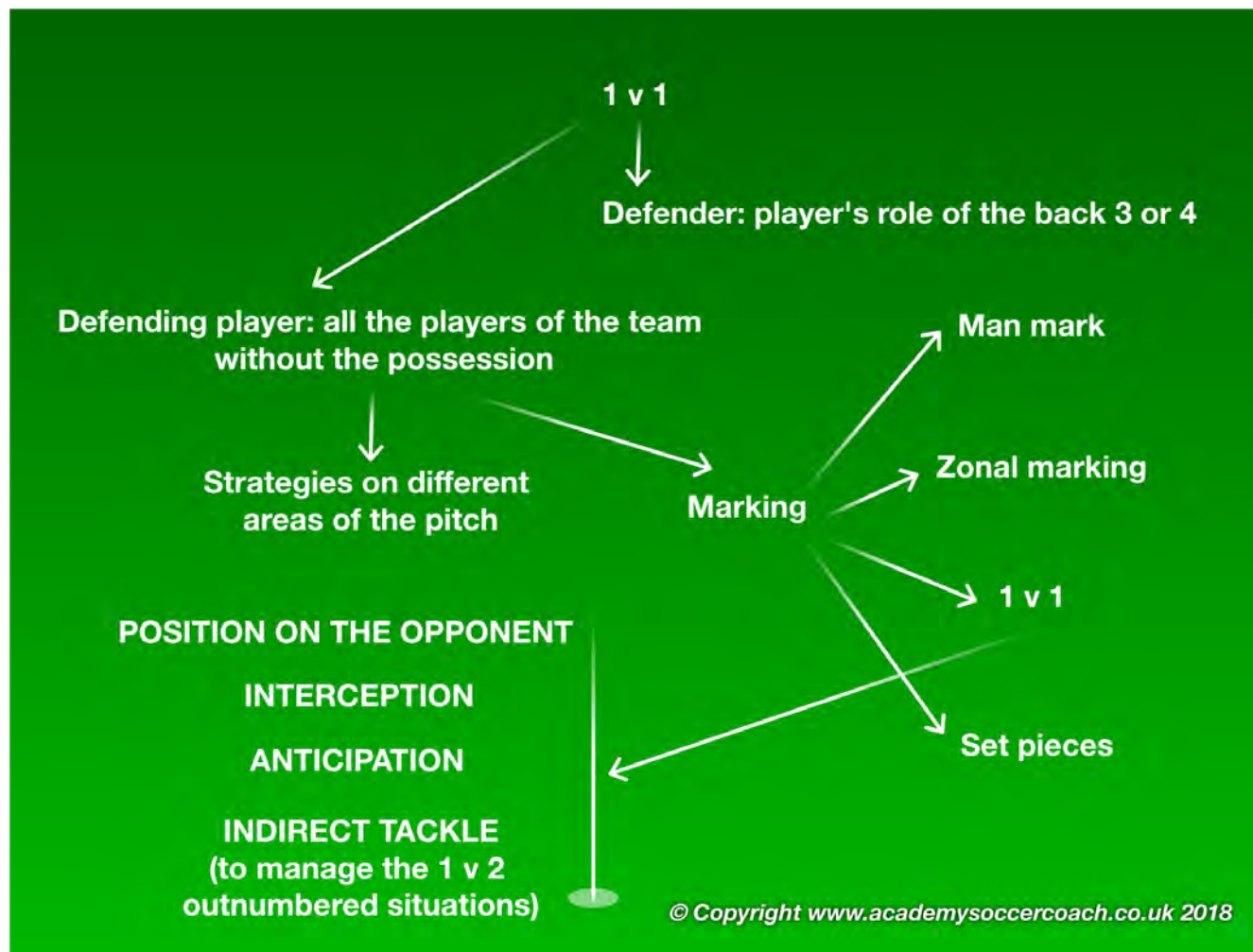
Player's action must be related to:

- Ball position: focus on the ball and on potential trajectories
- Opponents: every player to counter has different technical, tactical and physical characteristics
- Teammates: how to cooperate with a close teammate
- Area of the field: all the players of a team without possession can be considered as defenders (forwards are the first defenders)
- Own goal: the defenders must be placed correctly to force the opposition possession away from the goal

From a technical point of view, the following skills seem to be the most important:

- Tackles, interception and anticipation with right timings, reading space and trajectories
- Headers to send the ball away from dangerous areas and to defend the penalty area
- Acrobatics such as sliding tackles or aerial rebounds to solve dangerous situations

From defenders (player roles of the defense line) the players must develop themselves into defending players (all the players of the team without the ball).



These are the main skills to reach this objective:

- Marking: reduce the space and time for the ball carrier (direct mark) and for the potential receivers to be unmarked (preventive mark)
- Patience: wait for an advantage situation to take action and recover the possession
- Direct the opponent: force the player in possession toward easier areas to defend or to take advantage against him (his weak foot, or defender better skills)

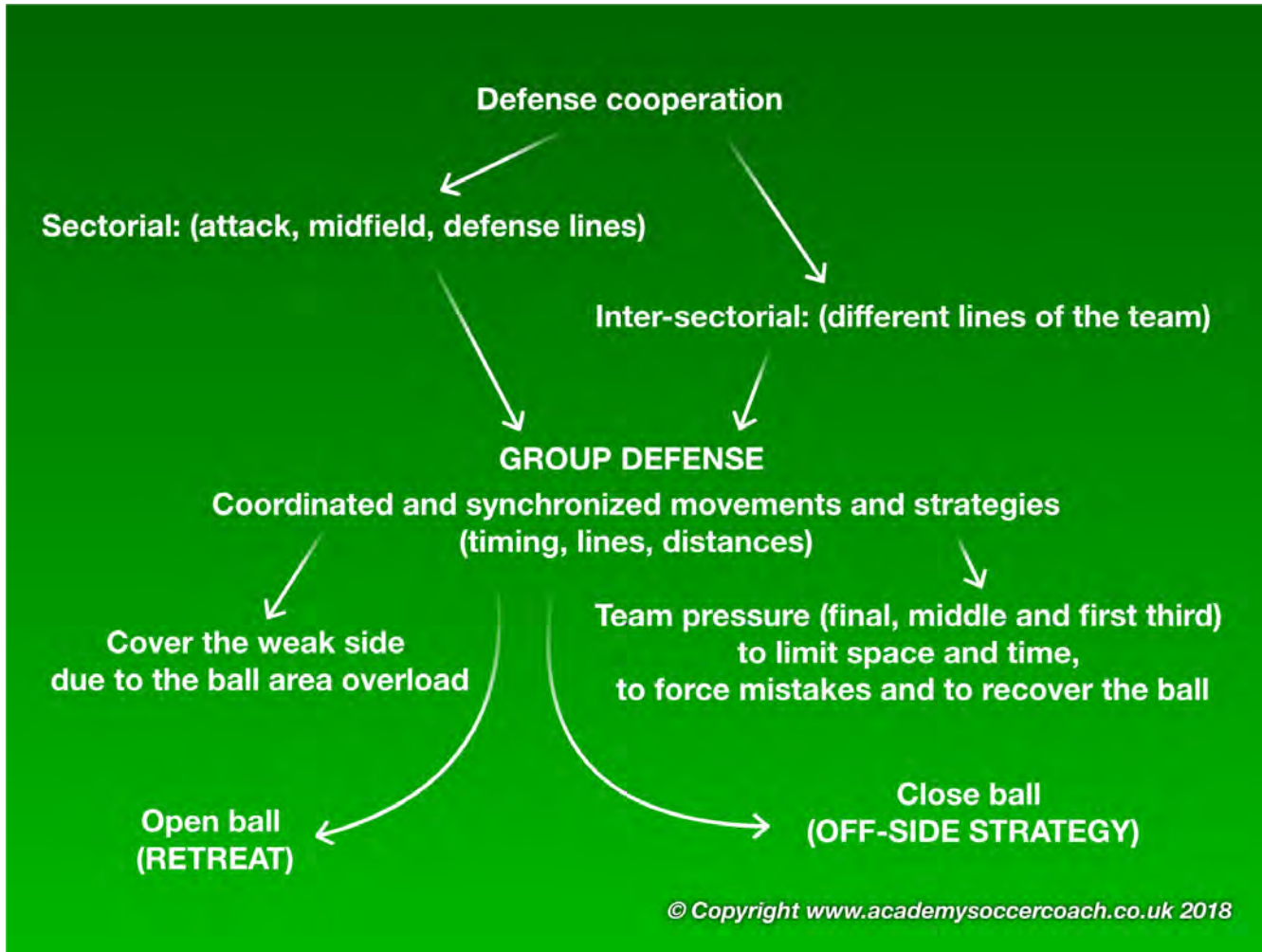
How to create effective group and team defense

What is the defender's behavior according to the different areas of the field? How to work on the strategies in each area of the field? Is it better to code the behavior rules to perform in each zone or to encourage experiences for the players to discover solutions?



All these sectorial and inter-sectorial principles of play create defense cooperation pattern of play and shape the team transition to defend and the defense phases.

Group defense means coordinated and synchronized movements and strategies related to timing, lines, and players' distances of the defending team.



Cover the weak side:

- Prevention on the weak side due to the density near the ball area
- Sectorial and inter-sectorial organization and cooperation
- Synchronization of movements and timing related to the offside strategy

Pressure:

- Inside the first third in case of outnumbered situations
- Inside the middle third to look for counter-attacks chances
- Inside the final third to counter the build-up phase of play of the opposition

When to press?

- Wrong ball control of the opponent
- Wrong body position of the opponent on the ball or of a potential receiver
- Wrong pass
- Wandering aerial balls
- Throw-ins

Offside strategy situations:

- Outnumbered defense situation
- "Easy reading" situation
- Goalkeeper, defense and midfield synchronization
- Zonal defending
- Player characteristics

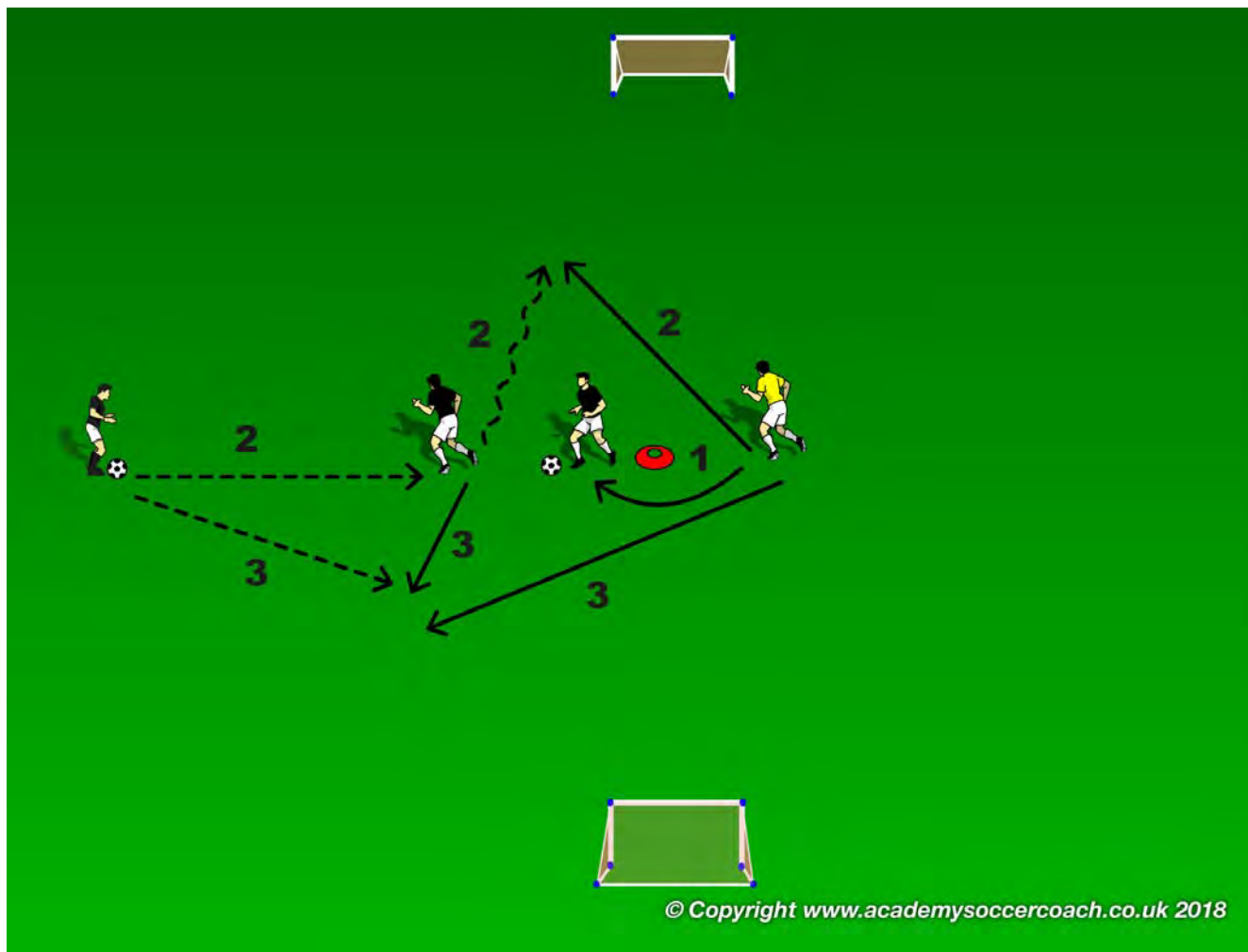
The principles of play of the **offside** or **retreat** strategies:

Open ball	Close ball
The opponent in possession can choose the best solution to progress the attacking phase, facing the goal to score in	The opponent in possession can't choose the best solution quickly as he is turned toward his own goal
Strategy?	
Open ball	Close ball
Retreat until the penalty area border line and then press the opponents if the defenders are in numerical advantage or use offside if outnumbered	Pressure to force the possession phase of the opposition backward or sideways

Note for the exercises: transitions (to attack and to defend) are understood every time the possession is won or lost.

1 v 1 Exercises

Exercise 1 - 1 v 1: on the ball, recover or retreat



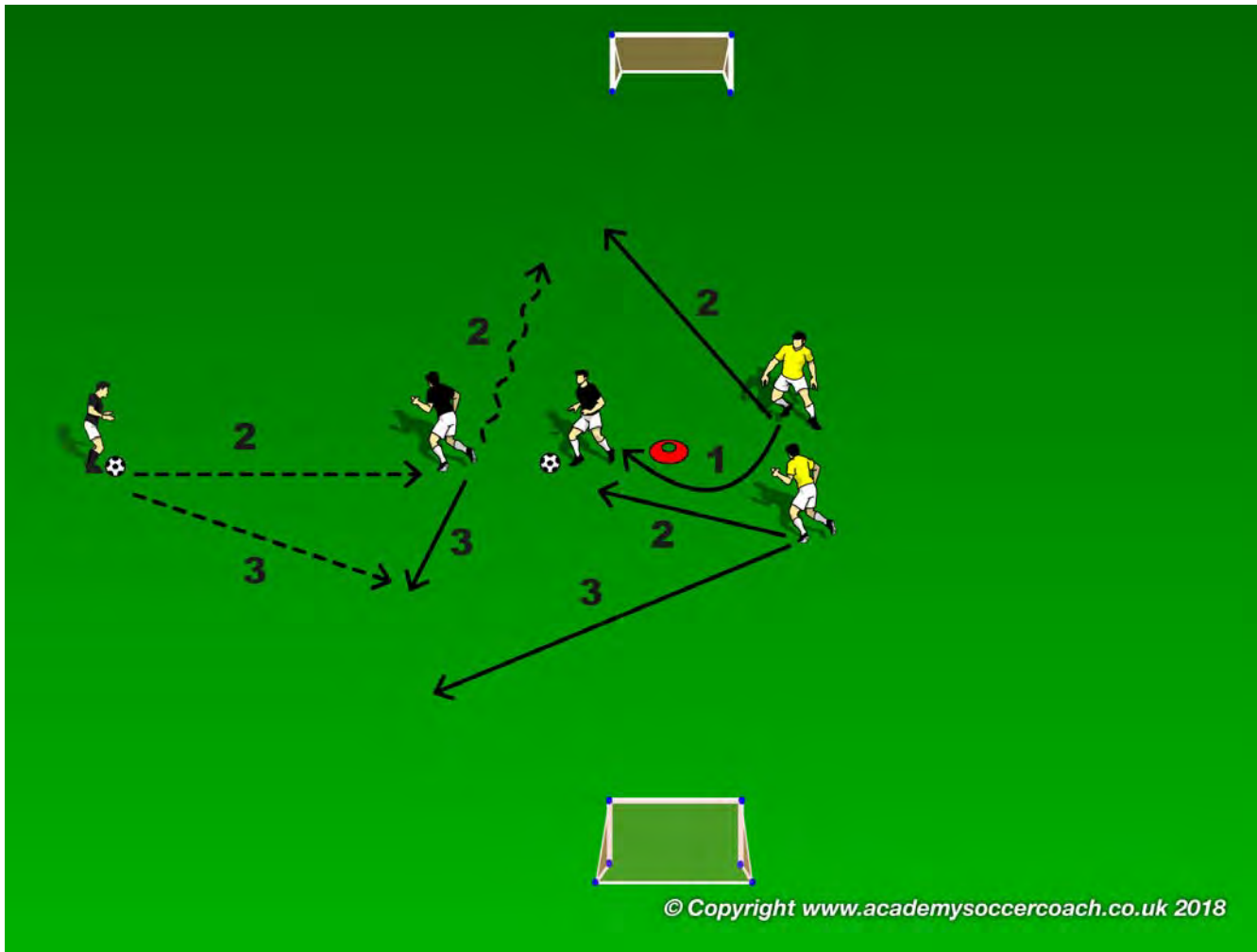
Set-up and Sequence: 3 players (2 forwards and 1 defender) and the coach are placed inside a rectangular space, as in the picture. 2 mini goals are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The coach or the center player can start the exercise, and depending on who is the receiver or the player in possession, the defender must act as follow:

- 1) Mark the player who is already in possession (the coach calls the "1").
- 2) The coach passes the ball toward the nearest forward, who must turn and attack the upper goal; the defender must recover the space to prevent him from shooting.
- 3) The coach passes the ball on the run of the nearest forward, who must turn and attack one of the 2 goals; the defender must retreat to close the space to prevent the opponent from shooting (by tackling or anticipating him)

Variations: perform the three defensive actions one after another.

Eye on: mark strictly, body position to deny space to the opponent toward the goal to defend, diagonal runs to recover and to close the goal space, retreat to counter the opponent while receiving.

Exercise 2 - Double 1 v 1: on the ball, recover or retreat



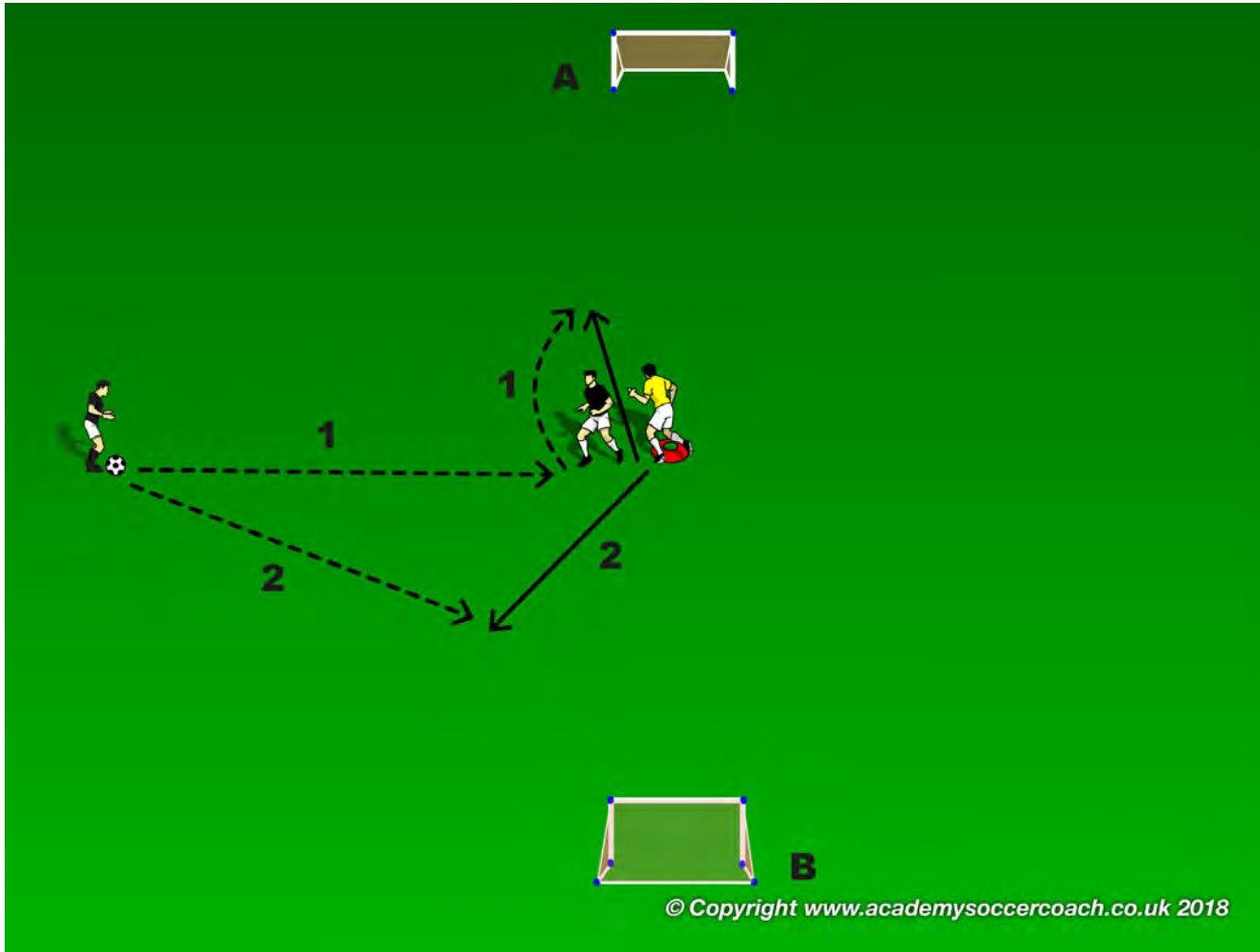
Set-up and Sequence: 4 players (2 forwards and 2 defenders) and the coach are placed inside a rectangular space, as in the picture. 2 mini goals are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The coach or the center player can start the exercise, and depending on who is the receiver or the player in possession, the defenders must cooperate and act, creating a double 1 v 1 duel, as follow:

- 1) Mark the player already in possession (the coach calls the "1")
- 2) One defender must recover the space toward the upper goal to prevent the forward from shooting and the second one must play 1 v 1 duel, marking the other opponent, who is already in possession.
- 3) If the coach passes the ball on the run of the nearest forward, who must turn and attack one of the two goals, the second defender must retreat to close the space to prevent the opponent from shooting.

Variations: the coach can indicate the task of each defender while playing the ball to start the sequence.

Eye on: quick decision making, quick reactions, cooperation, mark strictly, body position to deny space to the opponent toward the goal to defend, diagonal runs to recover and to close the goal space, retreat to counter the opponent while receiving.

Exercise 3 - 1 v 1 without the ball: counter or recover



Set-up and Sequence: 2 players (1 forward and 1 defender) and the coach are placed inside a rectangular space, as in the picture. 2 goals (named or numbered) are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The coach starts the exercise (and he also indicates the goal to attack), and depending on which kind of pass he plays, the defender must act as follow:

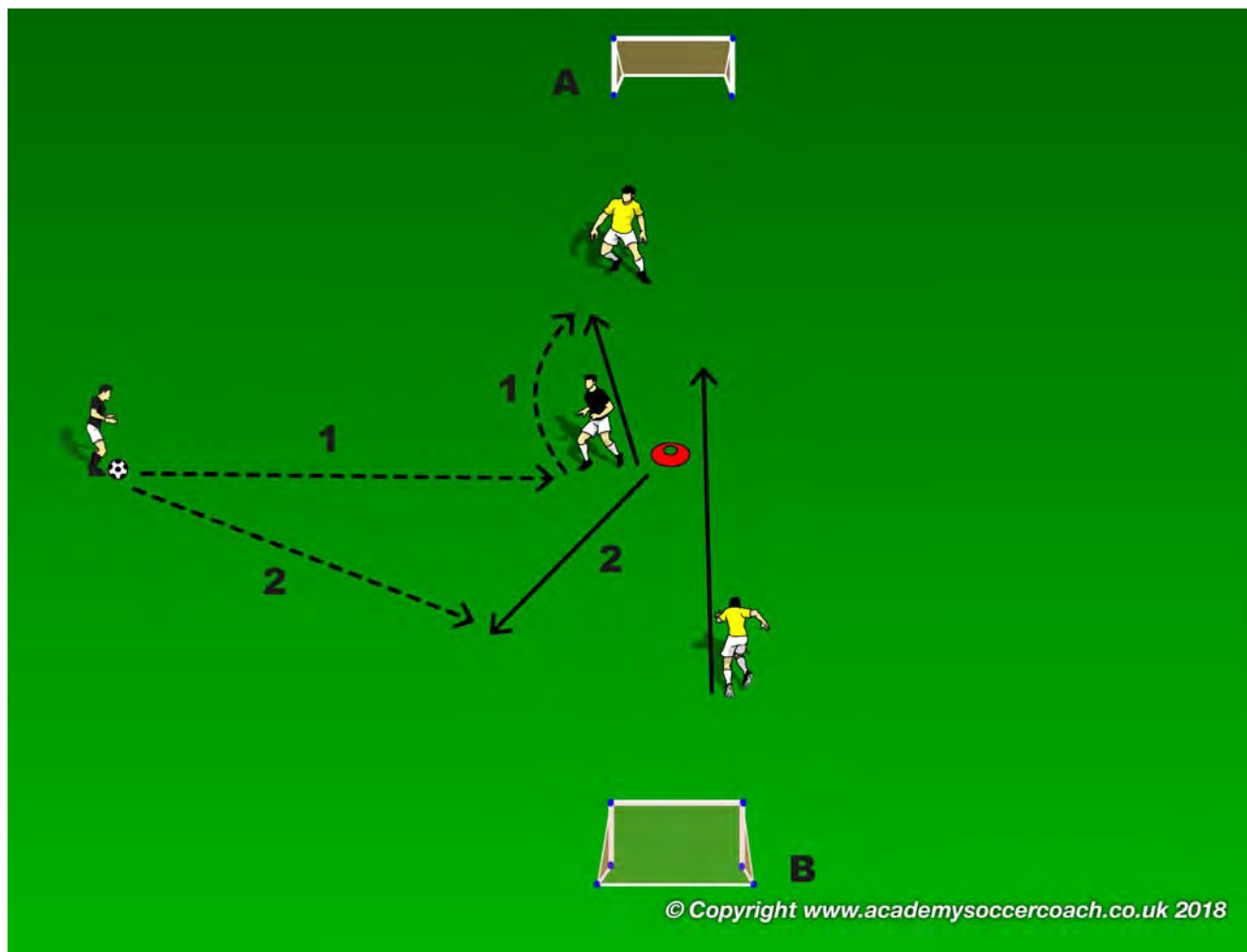
- 1) Mark the player while he is still without the ball and then counter to prevent him from shooting as he receives or even anticipating him. The forward must attack the goal A in the picture.
- 2) The coach passes the ball on the run of the forward, who must turn and attack one of the two goals; the defender must retreat to close the space to prevent the opponent from shooting (by tackling or anticipating him). The goal B must be saved.

If the forward attacked the goal B first, then the defender would have to recover the space to save the goal A.

Variations: perform the two defensive actions one after another.

Eye on: mark strictly, body position to deny space to the opponent toward the goal to defend, diagonal runs to recover and to close the goal space, retreat to counter the opponent while receiving.

Exercise 4 - 1 v 1 and double marking



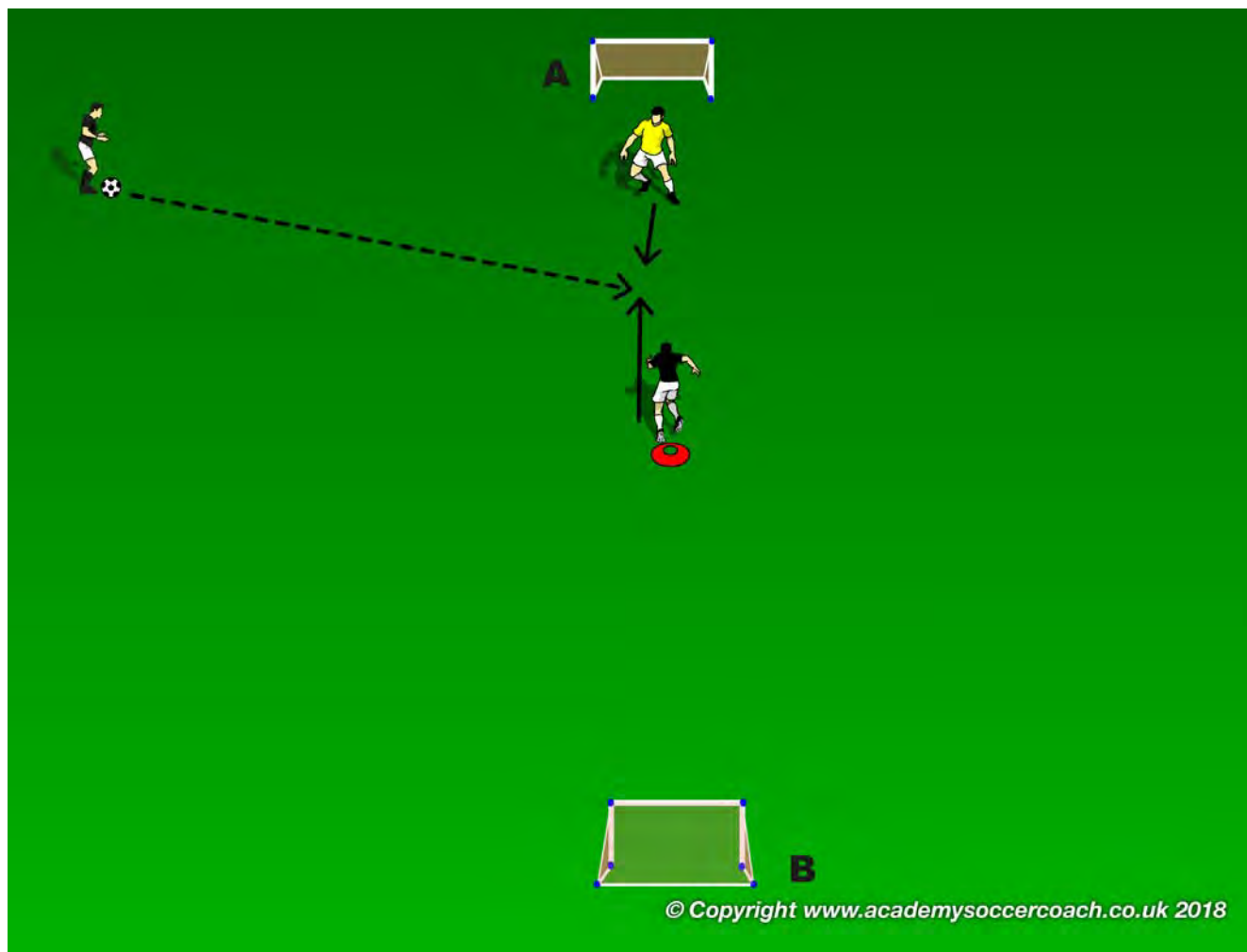
Set-up and Sequence: 3 players (1 forward and 2 defenders) and the coach are placed inside a rectangular space, as in the picture. 2 goals (named or numbered) are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The coach starts the exercise (and he also indicates the goal to attack), and depending on which kind of pass he plays, the defenders, who are placed in front of the goals, must act as follow:

- 1) Counter the forward who is already in possession to save the goal A and try to wait for the second defender to double the mark, recovering the space from the other goal.
- 2) The coach passes the ball on the run of the forward, who must turn and attack the goal; the defender must retreat to close the space to prevent the opponent from shooting (by tackling or anticipating him, or trying to wait for the double marking).

Variations: perform the two defensive actions one after another, to invite both the defenders to recover the space during the second sequence.

Eye on: defend with patience, quick reaction to double the mark, body position to deny space to the opponent toward the goal to defend, diagonal runs to recover and to close the goal space.

Exercise 5 - 1 v 1: save the goal



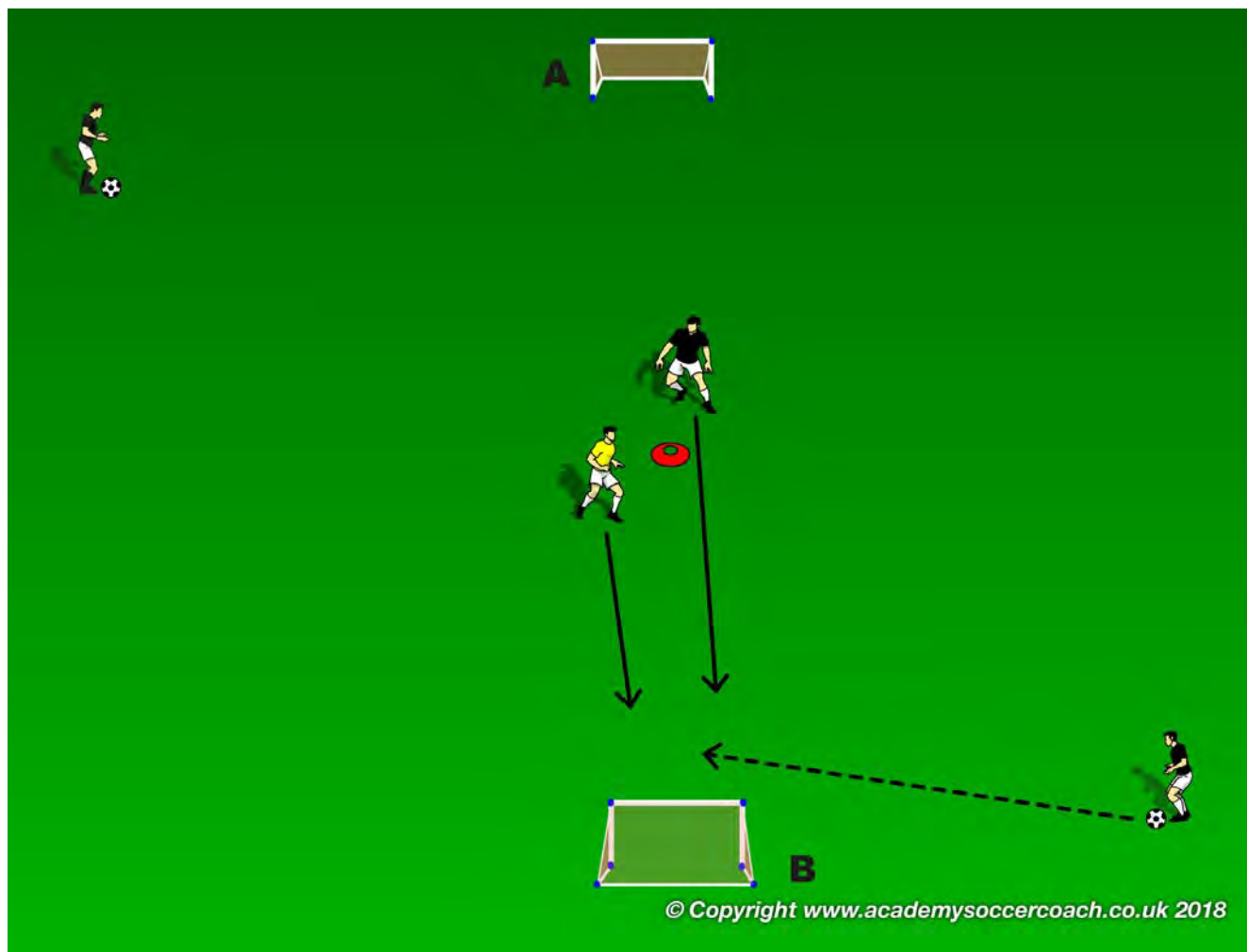
Set-up and Sequence: this is a variation of the previous practice, where the coach is placed on a corner of the rectangle and the forward must attack the goal without the ball.

The defender must save the goal anticipating the opponent and preventing him from finishing with the right body position to save the goal, to pay attention to the ball position, and to see him while he's getting closer.

Variation: the players are placed on the center cone, and they become defender or attacker, depending on which is the goal to defend and to attack. A second coach or player is required to start the move on the opposite corner.

Eye on: body position to deny space to the opponent toward the goal to defend, anticipation and tackling.

Exercise 6 - 1 v 1: save the goal and recover the space to prevent counter attacks



Set-up and Sequence: this is another variation of the previous practice, where coaches or players are placed on opposite corners of the rectangle and the sequence is repeated without a break.

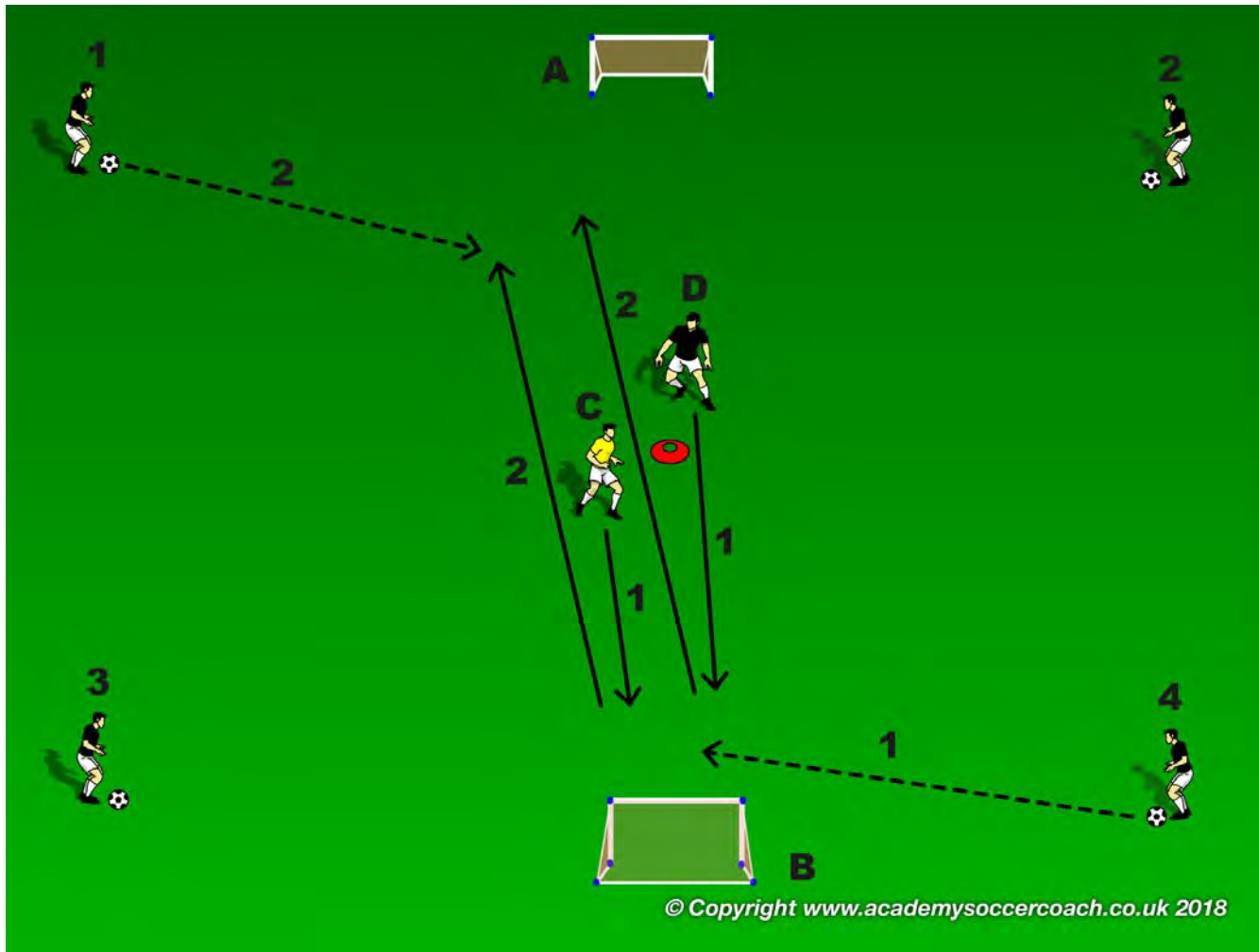
First of all, the defender must save the goal anticipating the opponent and preventing him from finishing with the right body position to save the goal, to pay attention to the ball position, and to see him while he's getting closer.

As the first sequence ends, the defender becomes attacker and he counters toward the opposite goal to finish (B). The player, who was attacking before, must recover the space back to prevent the counter attack.

From now on, the sequence is repeated without break.

Eye on: body position to deny space to the opponent toward the goal to defend, anticipation and tackling, quick reactions to defend the counter attacks.

Exercise 7 - 1 v 1: save the goal and recover the space to prevent counter attacks



Set-up and Sequence: 6 players (4 of them are numbered and in possession of a ball on the corners and 2 are named in the middle) are placed as in the picture. 2 goals are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The players in the middle are alternately defender and attacker.

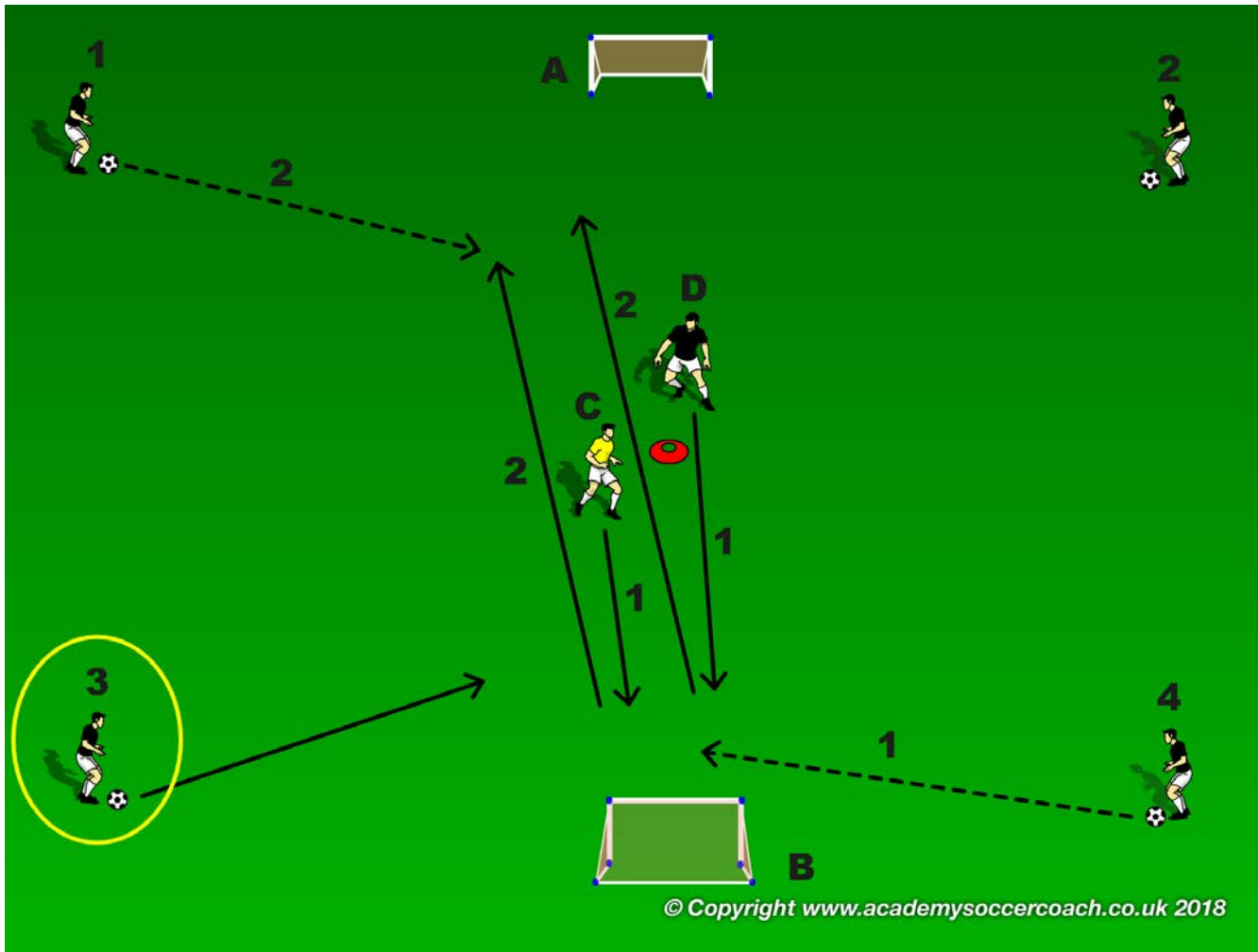
The coach must indicate every time the player who must kick the ball and the goal to attack, till all of them are without the ball.

This way the defender must decide if it's better to press, to tackle, to recover or retreat the position (1 - the defender in the picture must try to anticipate the attacker). He then can counter toward the opposite side - 2. The players must change the body position against the forward every time, depending on direction and on the player who passes the ball.

Variation: the coach can indicate the goal to attack every time a new ball is played.

Eye on: body position to deny space to the opponent toward the goal to defend, anticipation and tackling, quick reaction to defend the counter attacks, recover or retreat.

Exercise 8 - 1 v 1 waiting for double marking



Set-up and Sequence: this practice is a variation of the previous exercise. All the players are placed and act in the same way.

The important difference is a third player, who is called by the coach and who becomes a second defender (player #3 in the picture). He always supports the defender of each sequence.

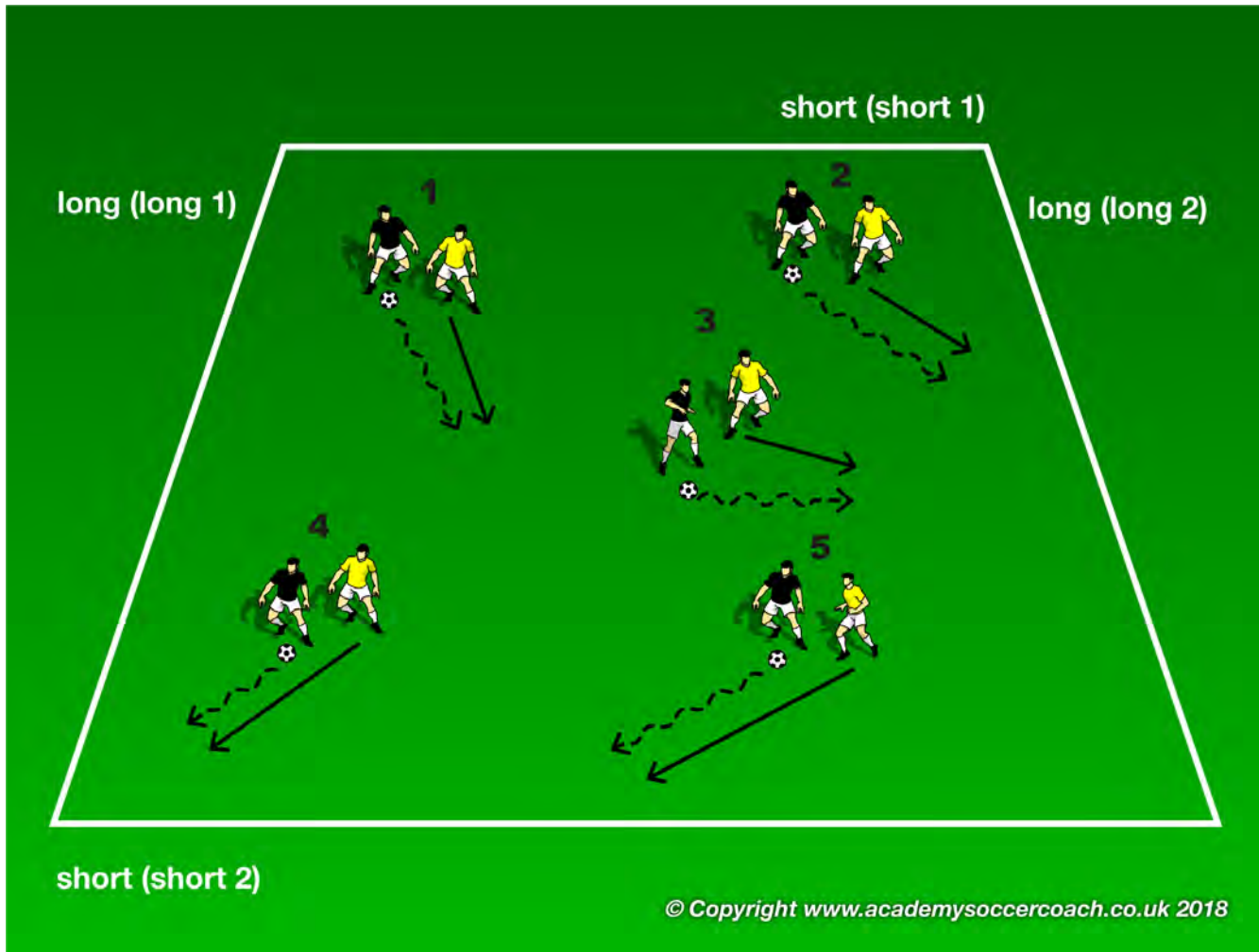
This way the defender can wait for the double marking, playing with patience rather than to force the duel against the forwards.

The players must change the body position against the forward every time, depending on the direction and on the player who passes the ball.

Variation: the coach can indicate the goal to attack every time a new ball is played.

Eye on: body position to deny space to the opponent toward the goal to defend, anticipation and tackling, quick reaction to defend the counter attacks, patience to wait for the double marking.

Exercise 9 - Multiple 1 v 1 (1): pressure against the ball carrier



Set-up and Sequence: the players are paired and numbered and they are placed inside a rectangular space, as in the picture. They are divided into 2 teams; 1 attacking team and the other one as defending team; one player is always in possession.

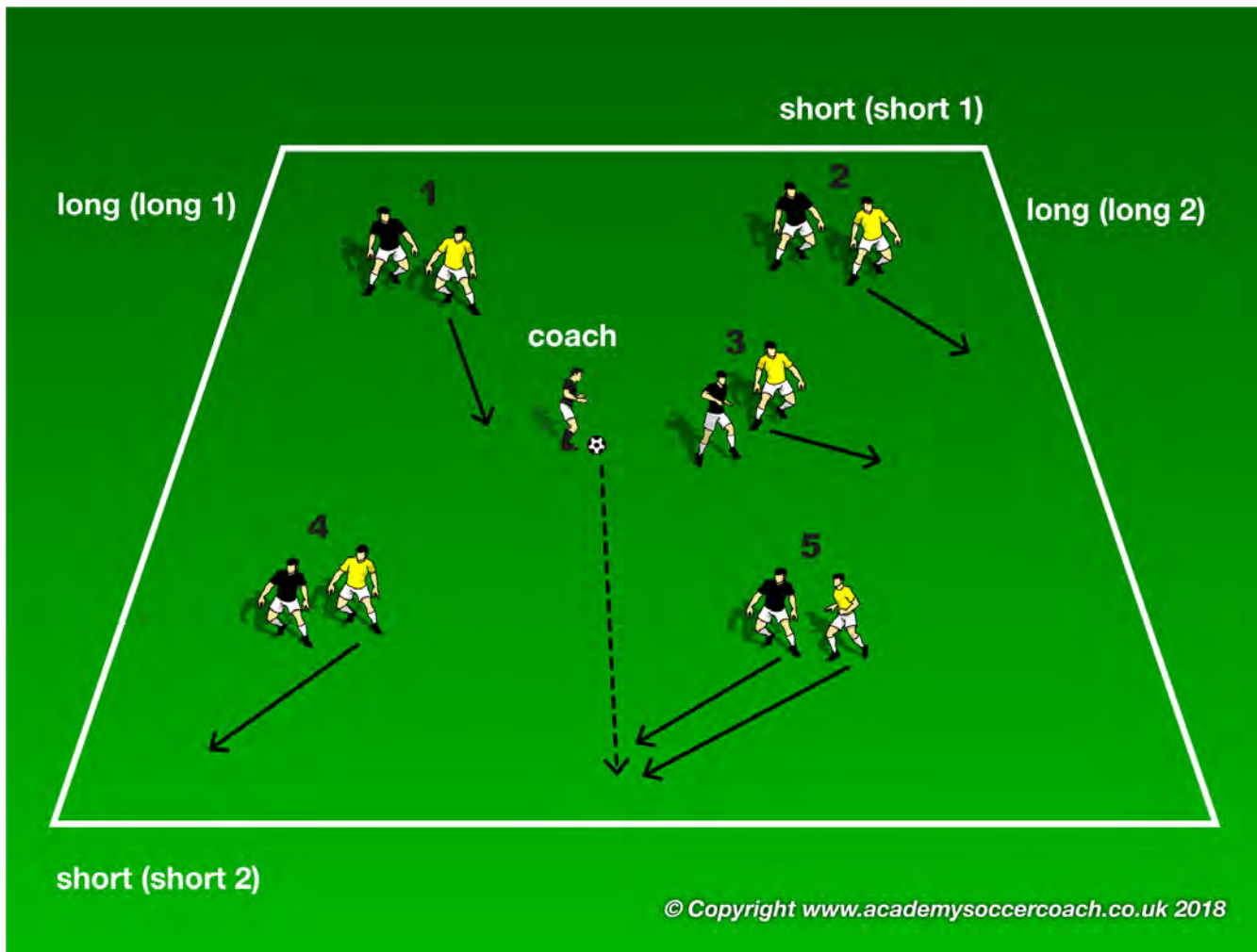
The coach indicates the couple and the side where the ball must be dribbled out of the rectangular space; the defender must put pressure, forcing the opponent toward the center or toward the weak foot, to prevent him from dribbling out.

The players who are not involved in the duel must go on dribbling and pressing passively.

Variation: the coach can indicate all the even or odd numbers of the couples. The players can defend or attack a goal rather than dribbling the ball out.

Eye on: body position to send the opponent toward his weak foot, press to recover the ball, deny space, tackling to avoid the opponent from dribbling out.

Exercise 10 - Multiple 1 v 1 (2): react to win or to recover the ball



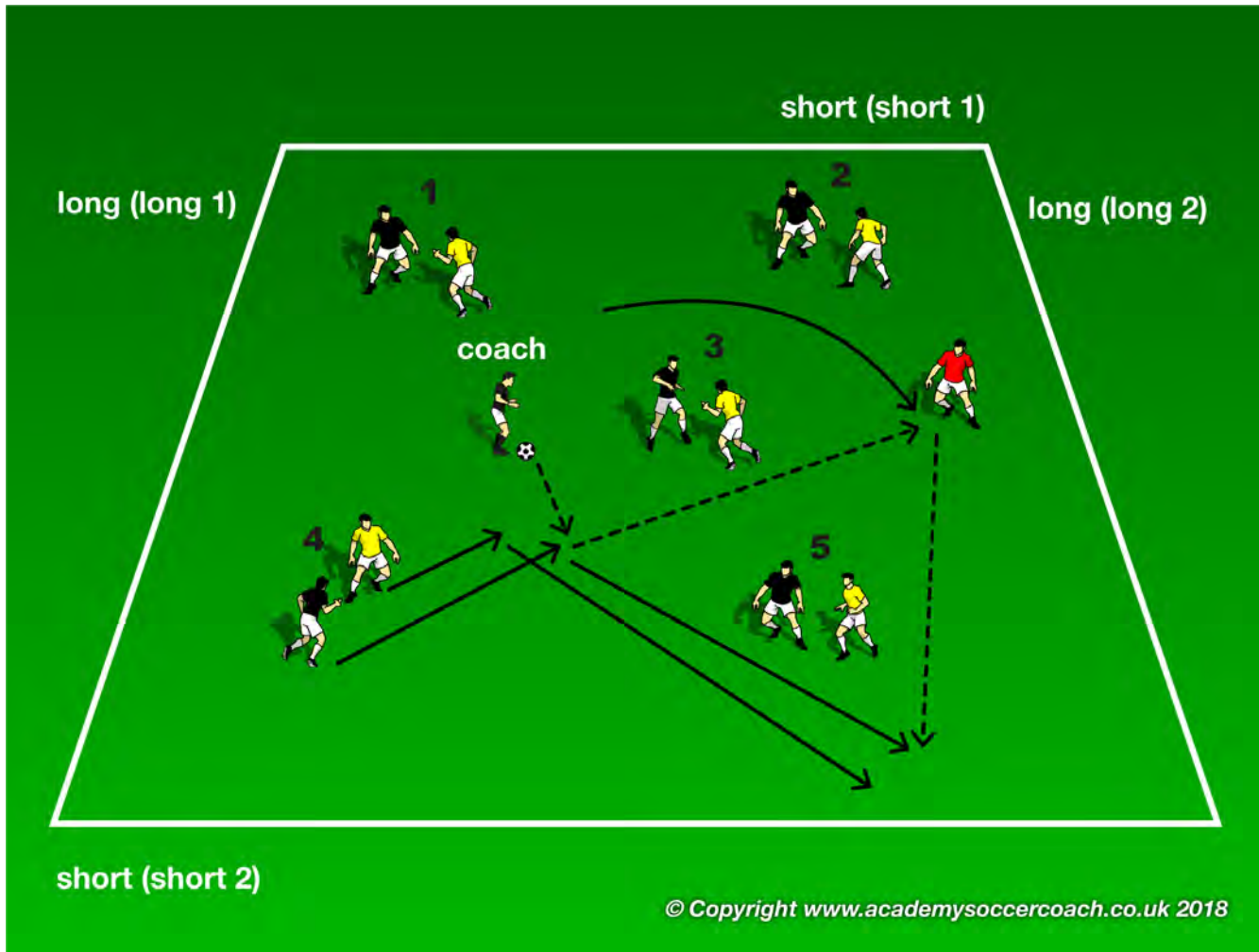
Set-up and Sequence: the players are paired and numbered and they are placed inside a rectangular space, as in the picture. They are divided into 2 teams; 1 attacking team and the other one as defending team; one player is always in possession. The 1 v 1 duels are without the ball at the beginning.

The coach indicates the couple that must dribble out of the rectangular space, kicking the ball; the defender must put pressure forcing the opponent toward the center or toward the weak foot to prevent him from dribbling out; the roles are decided time to time, depending on who is the receiver. The players who are not involved in the main duel, must go on playing 1 v 1 duels without the ball, competing for it as the coach kicks a new one.

Variation: the players can defend or attack a goal rather than dribbling the ball out.

Eye on: body position to send the opponent toward his weak foot, press to recover the ball, deny space, tackling to prevent the opponent from dribbling out.

Exercise 11 - Multiple 1 v 1 (3): close the passing lanes and force the opponent toward the center



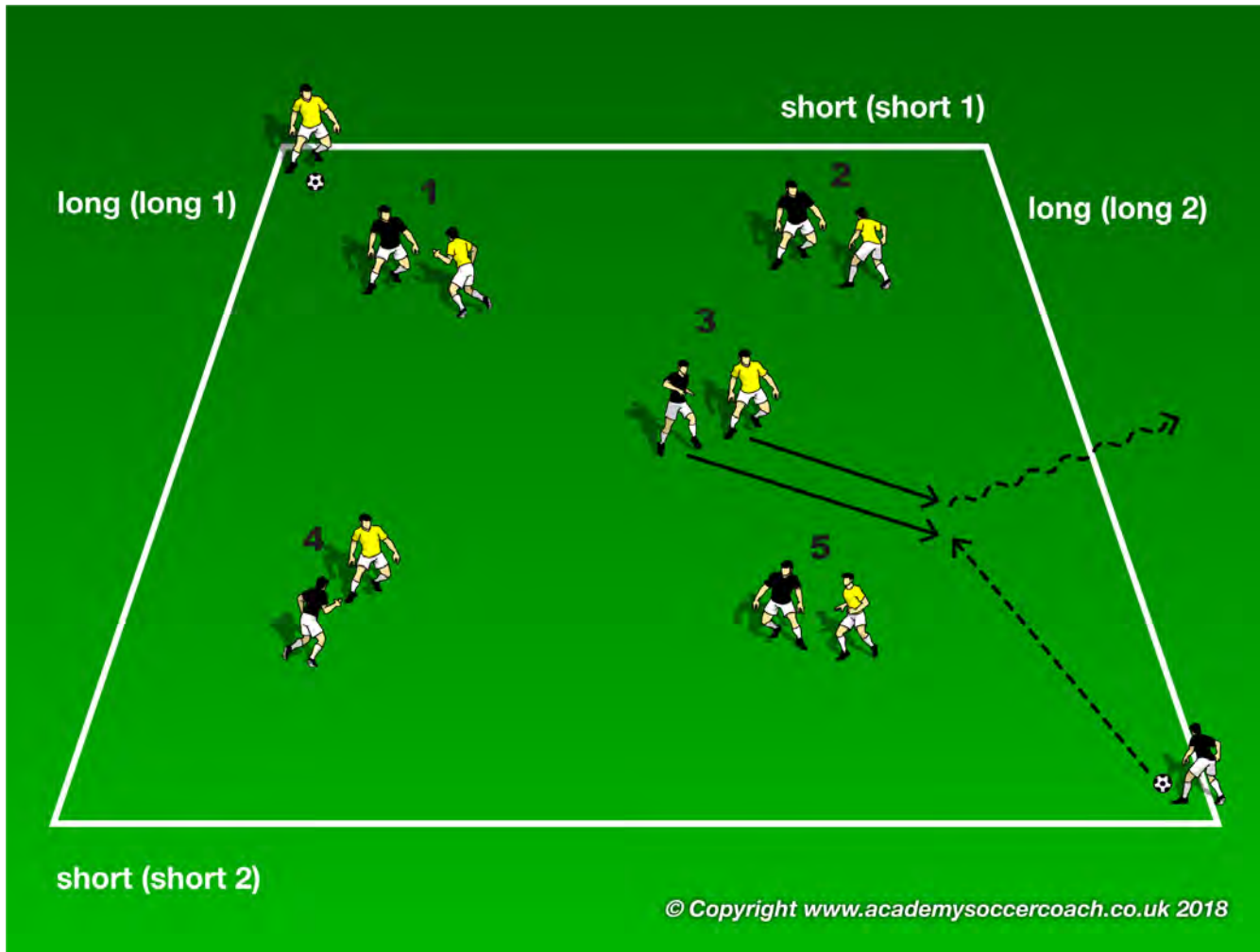
Set-up and Sequence: this practice is a progression of the previous one. The players are divided into 2 teams; 1 attacking team and the other one as defending team. The 1 v 1 duels are without the ball at the beginning.

The coach indicates the couple who must compete for the ball inside the rectangular space, kicking it; the defender must put pressure forcing the opponent toward the center or toward the weak foot to prevent him from dribbling out. Attacker and defender are decided time to time, depending on who is the receiver. The player with possession must play a 1 - 2 combination with a neutral player before dribbling the ball out. The defenders can then decide to go on marking the opponent, or to try to close the passing lanes between the attacker and the neutral player. The defender must be able to anticipate the opponent before receiving the return pass, or to close the passing lanes between them.

Variation: the free player can be a second defender to double the mark after the first passing combination.

Eye on: body position to send the opponent toward his weak foot or away from the easier passing lane toward the neutral player, deny space, tackling to avoid the opponent from dribbling out.

Exercise 12 - Multiple 1 v 1 (4): close the passing lanes and force the opponent toward the center



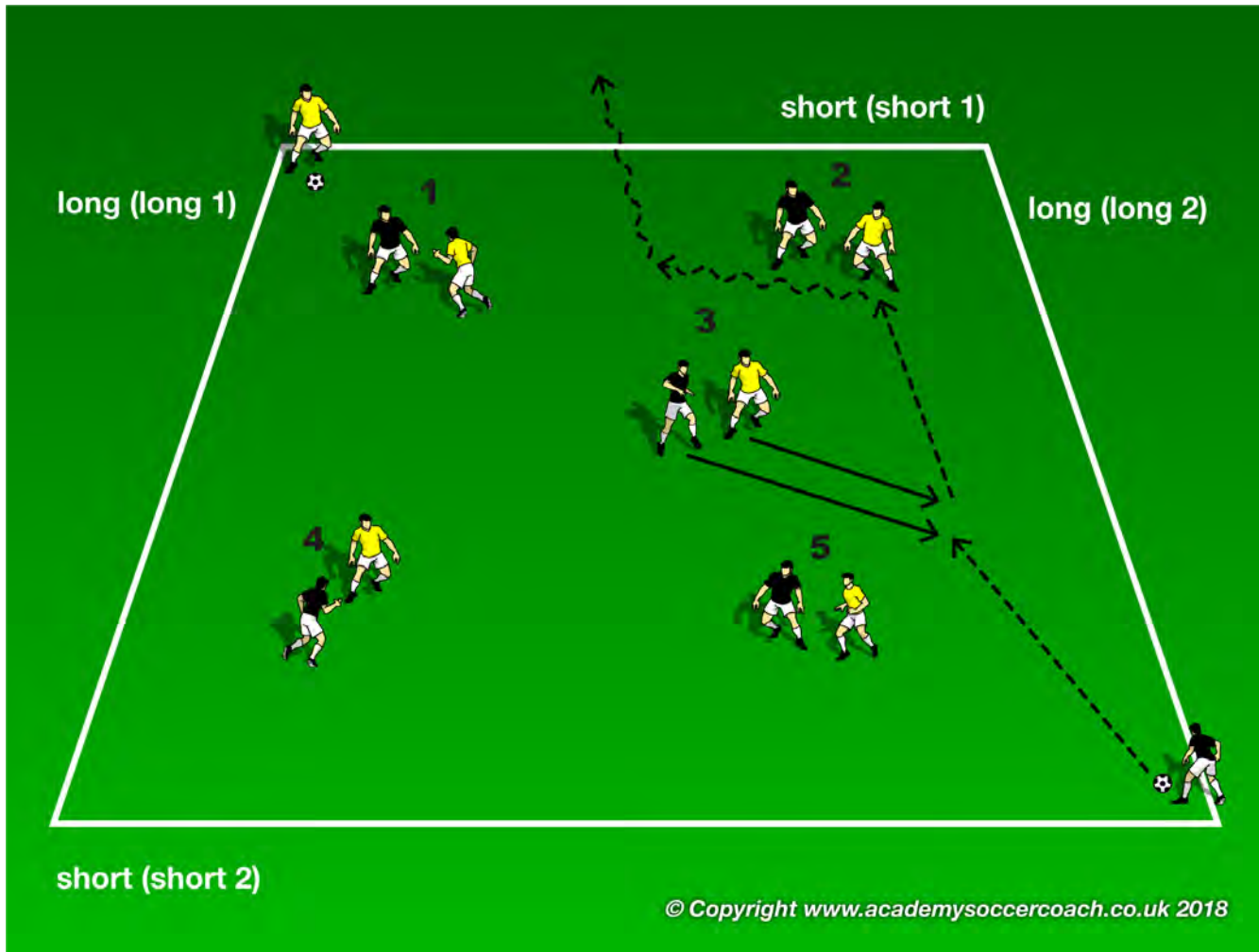
Set-up and Sequence: the players are paired and numbered and they are placed inside a rectangular space, as in the picture. They are divided into 2 teams. The 1 v 1 duels are without the ball at the beginning. One player is in possession for each team and placed on opposite corners.

The coach indicates the player who must pass the ball to the teammate; this way attacker and defender are identified. The defender must put pressure, forcing the opponent toward the center or toward the weak foot to prevent him from dribbling out; he can decide also to anticipate the opponent while he's going to receive. The players who are not involved in the main duel must go on playing 1 v 1 duels without the ball, competing for it when the first duels ends and when the second ball is played.

Variation: the player of the defending team, who is waiting on the opposite corner, can double the mark (2 v 1), or the player who kicked the ball can support the teammate in possession (1 v 2 outnumbered defense).

Eye on: anticipation, closure of passing lanes, body position to send the opponent toward his weak foot, press to recover the ball, deny space, tackling to avoid the opponent from dribbling out.

Exercise 13 - Multiple 1 v 1 (5): close the passing lanes and transitions to attack/to defend



Set-up and Sequence: this practice is a variation of the previous one. The set up and the sequence are the same.

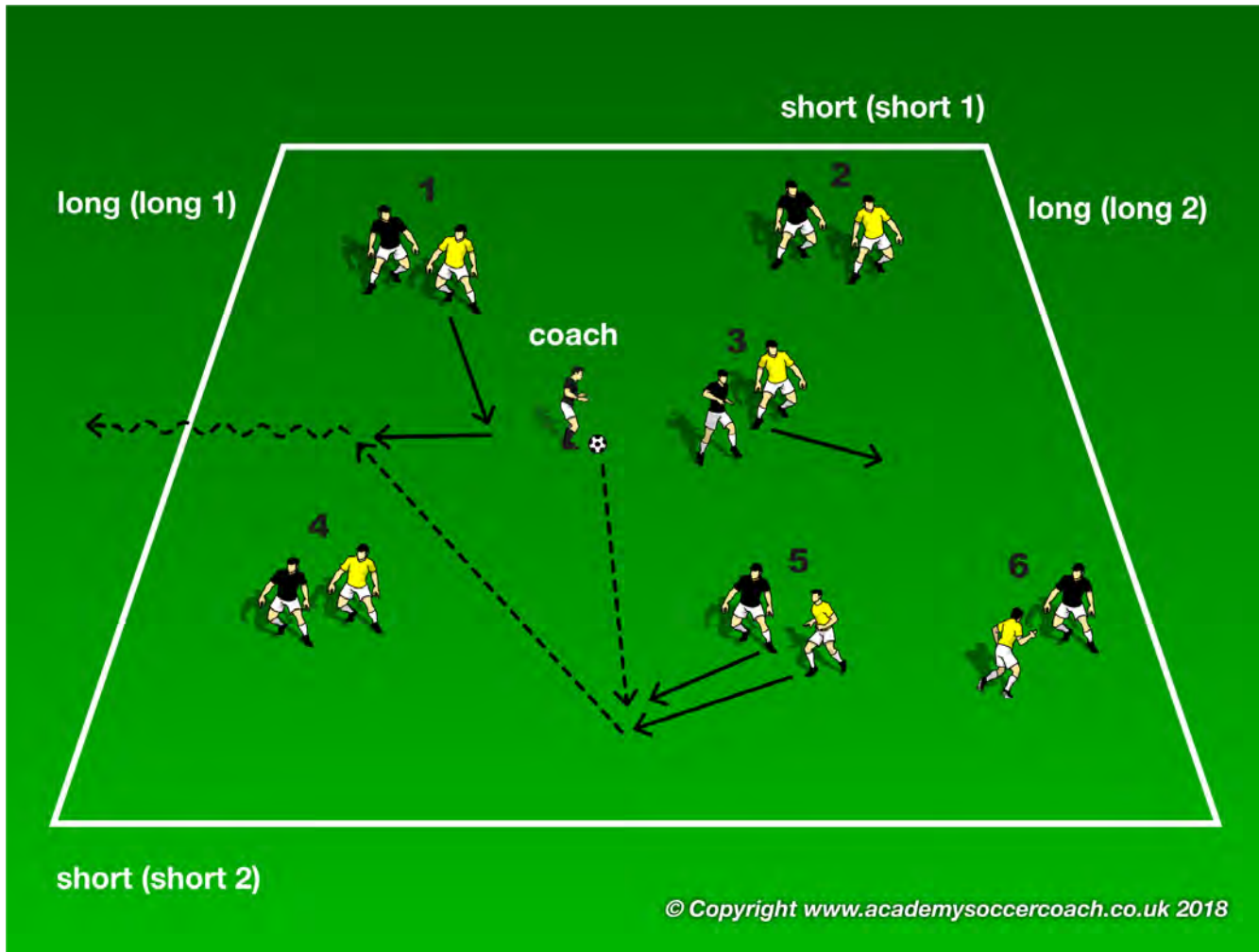
If the defender wins the possession, he must pass the ball to another teammate, who must dribble out of the opposite side from the one that has been saved before.

The defenders are now working on cooperation for transition to attack and who lost the possession must work on individual transition to defend.

Variation: the player of the defending team, who is waiting on the opposite corner, can double the mark (2 v 1), or the player who kicked the ball can support the teammate in possession (1 v 2 outnumbered defense).

Eye on: anticipation, closure of passing lanes, body position to send the opponent toward his weak foot, press to recover the ball, deny space, tackling to avoid the opponent from dribbling out, counter-pressing to avoid the opposition transition to attack.

Exercise 15 - Multiple 1 v 1 (7): close the passing lanes and transitions to attack/to defend



Set-up and Sequence: this practice is a variation multiple 1 v 1 (5): the set up and the sequence are the same. The players always coupled and numbered. The coach is placed in the center and in possession of the ball and he decides which couple has to perform the exercise.

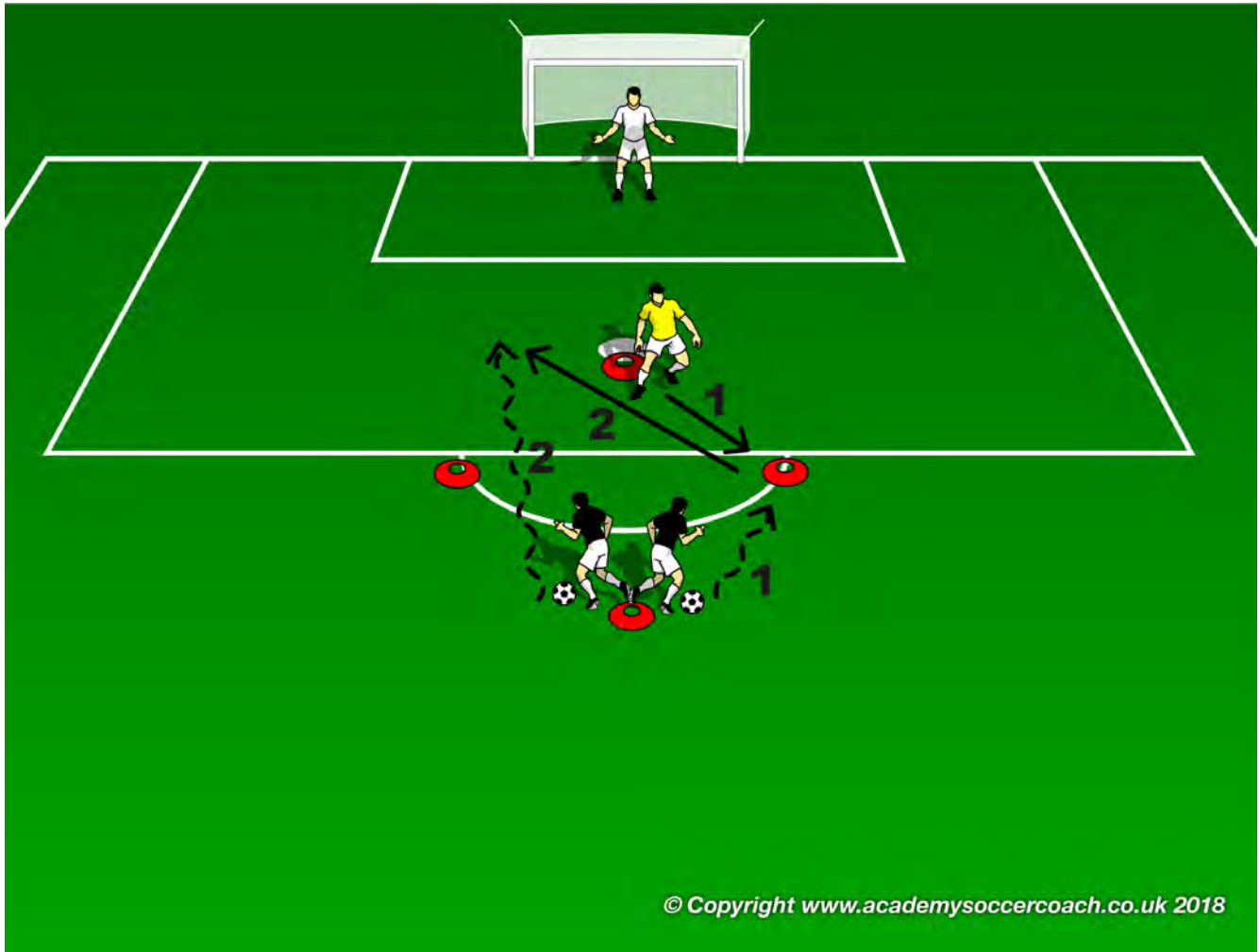
If the defender wins the possession, he must try to pass the ball to a teammate of the same kind of number of couple, even or odd.

The defender is now working on cooperation for transition to attack and a new player must work on individual transition to defend.

Variation: the player of the defending team, who is waiting on the opposite corner, can double the mark (2 v 1), or the player who kicked the ball can support the teammate in possession (1 v 2 outnumbered defense).

Eye on: anticipation, closure of passing lanes, body position to send the opponent toward his weak foot, press to recover the ball, deny space, tackling to avoid the opponent from dribbling out, counter-pressing to avoid the opposition transition to attack.

Exercise 16 - Double 1 v 1: counter the opponent and recover the space.



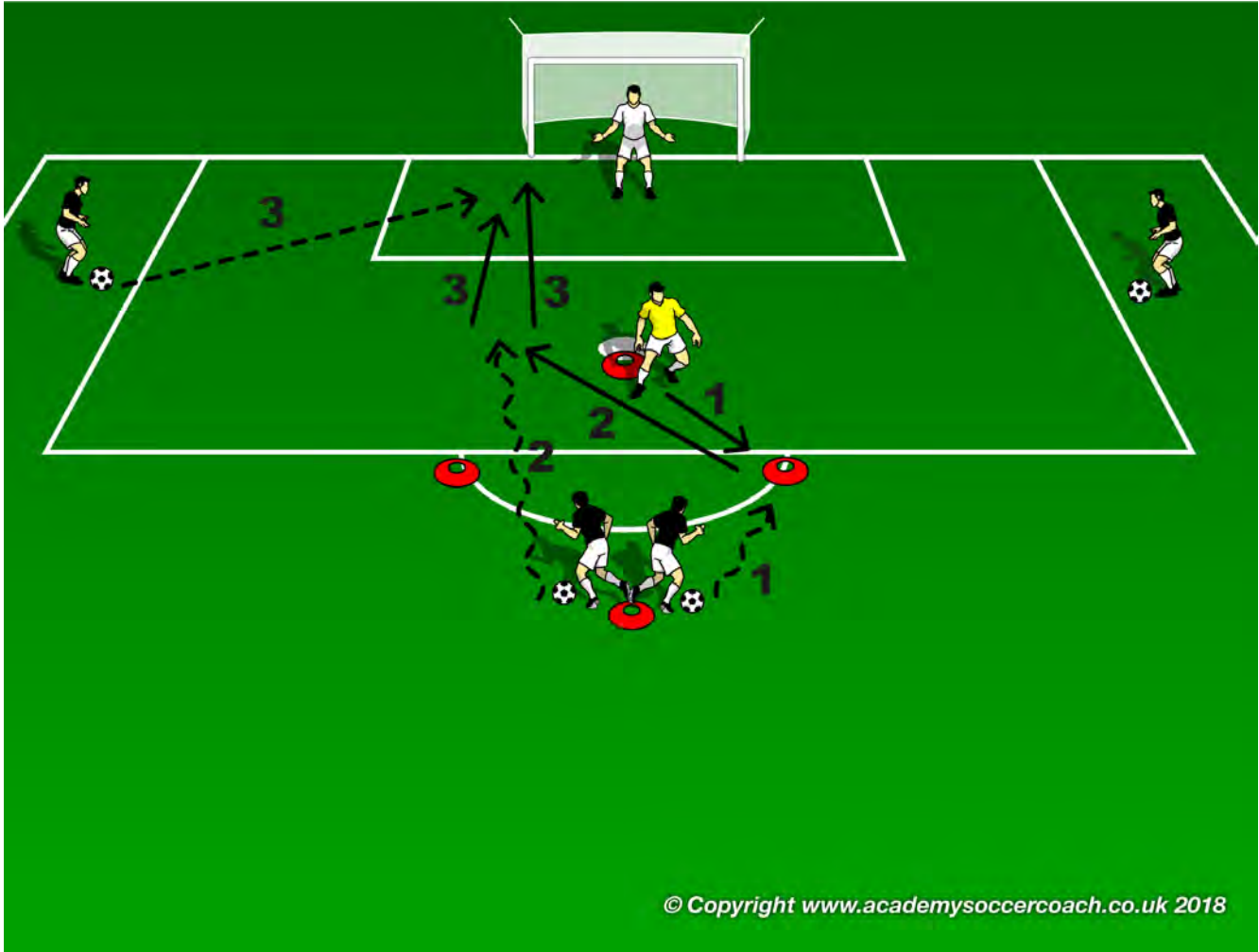
Set-up and Sequence: 3 players (2 forwards and 1 defender) are placed on a rhombus shape just over the penalty area in the center. Two forwards are in possession on the farther lower cone and the defender is placed on the nearest cone to the goal.

This first player in possession must dribble the ball toward the nearest cone on his right (or on the left); the defender must counter him, trying to force the opponent out of the penalty area, avoiding him from shooting or dribbling inside.

As the first duel ends, a second forward can cut the rhombus inside, dribbling toward the goal to finish; the defender must recover the space quickly to save the goal side and to send the opponent toward the end line, closing the goal space.

Eye on: attack the forward and be positioned to press and to force him out of the penalty area and backward, save the goal space retreating back.

Exercise 17 - Triple 1 v 1: counter the opponent and recover the space.

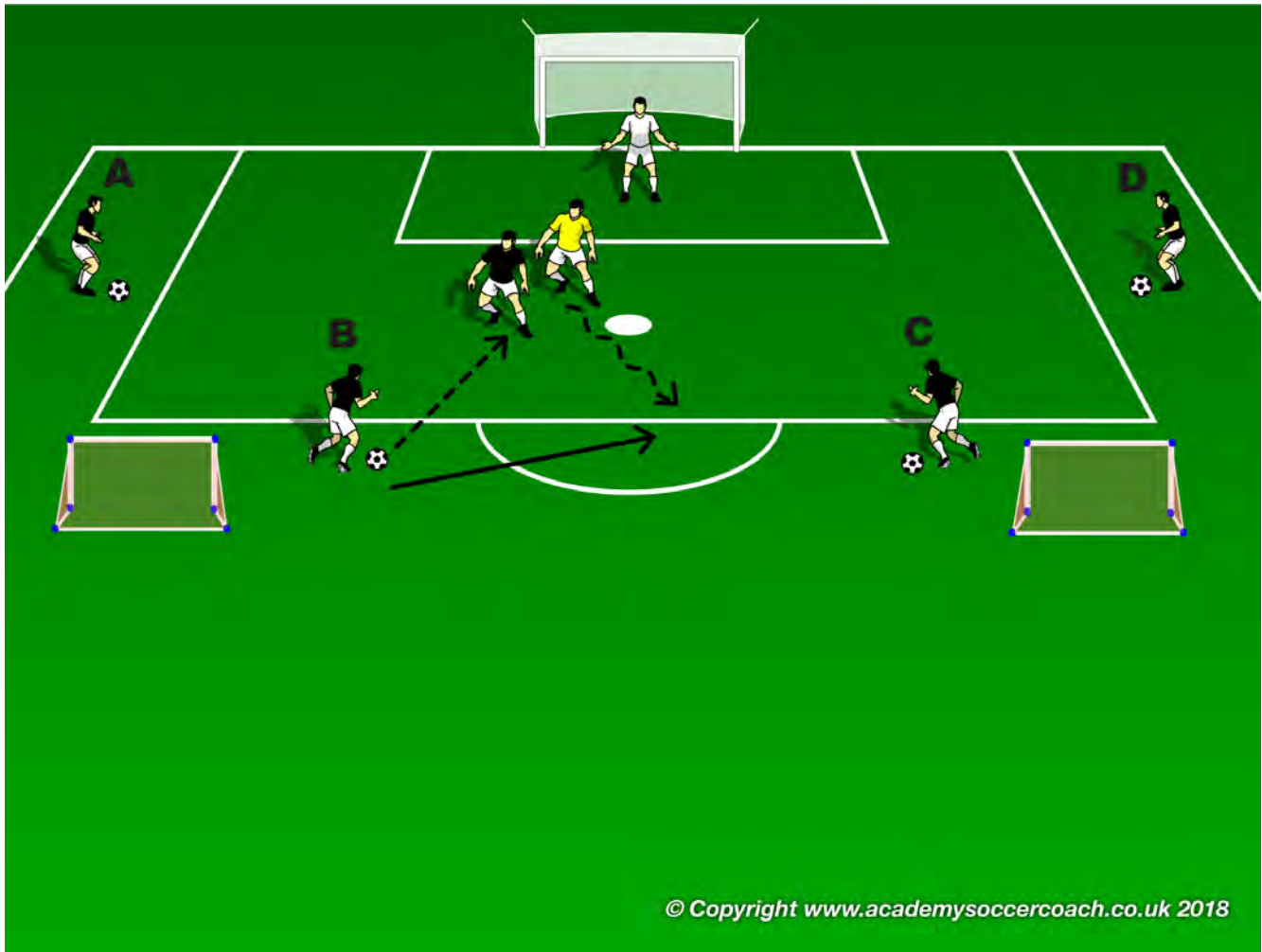


Set-up and Sequence: this exercise is a progression of the previous exercise. 2 forwards are in possession on the farther lower cone and 1 defender is placed on the nearest cone to the goal. 2 more forwards in possession are placed deep and sideways of the penalty area.

As the second duels ends (2), the defender must save the goal space being placed on the first pole (as in the picture), or on the second one too, as the coach decide which the side the cross pass must come from.

Eye on: attack the forward and be positioned to press and to force him out of the penalty area and backward, save the goal space retreating back and together with the goalkeeper, save the depth to avoid cross passes.

Exercise 18 - Multiple 1 v 1: be positioned against a forward inside the penalty area to save the goal space.



Set-up and Sequence: 4 named players are placed along the borderlines of the penalty area, as in the picture; a 1 v 1 duel is performed in the middle of the area. The defender must be able to prevent the forward from turning and to dribble the ball out of the penalty area and toward a wide mini goal.

The coach indicates the player who must pass the ball inside the penalty area; depending on who is the passer, the defender must press the opponent, preventing him from turning (center pass), or he must save the goal space and the pole (passes from the flank).

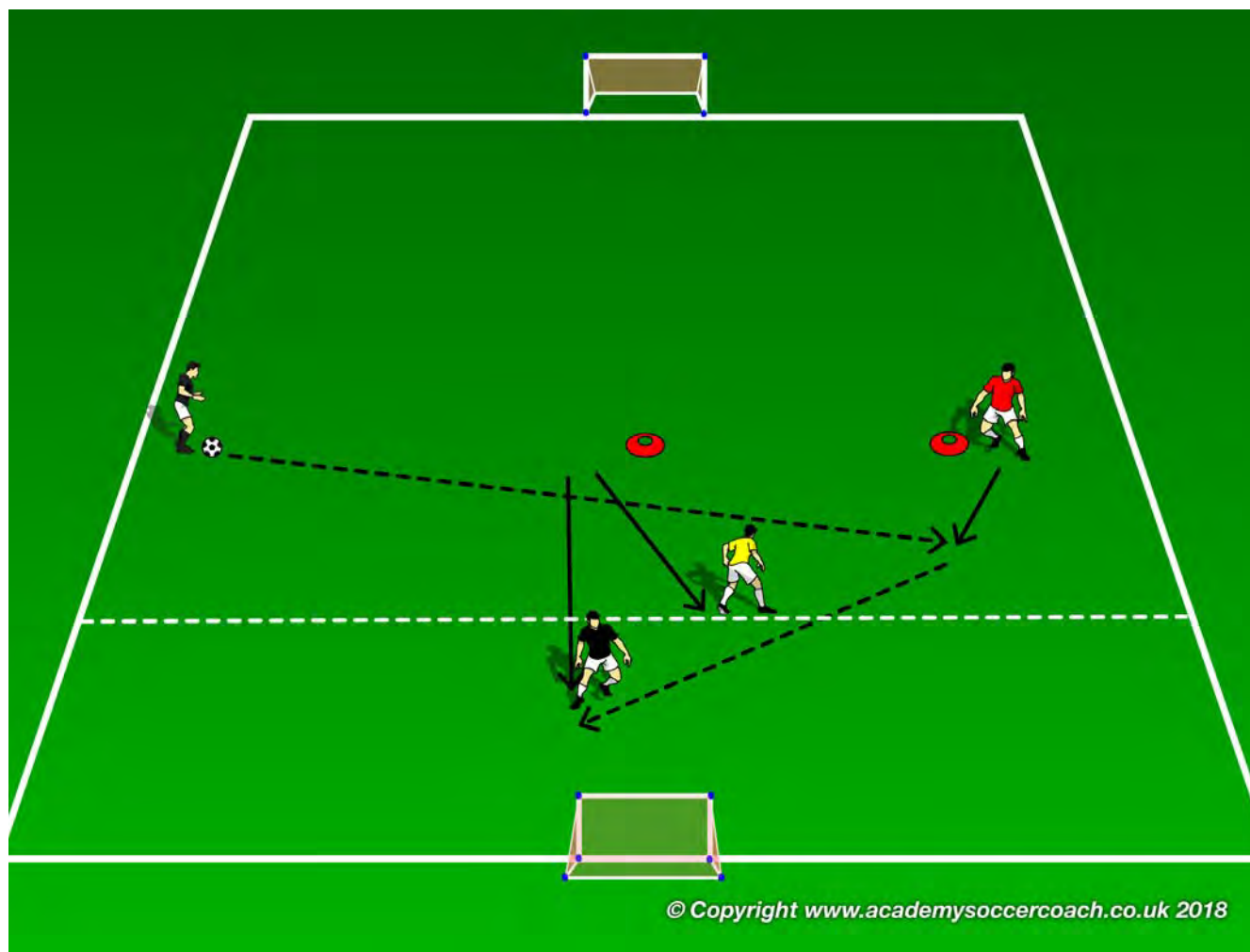
If the defender wins the possession, the player who passed the ball before becomes defender and he must close the space of the mini goal to score in.

Variation: the center forward must retreats, if the defender wins the possession, to help the pressure action of the teammate during the transition to defend phase of play.

Eye on: pressure to prevent the forward from turning, be placed between the forward and the goal space, pressure and counter-pressing to prevent transitions to attack of the new ball carrier.

1 v 2 exercises

Exercise 19 - 1 v 2 (manage the numerical disadvantage): pressure or offside



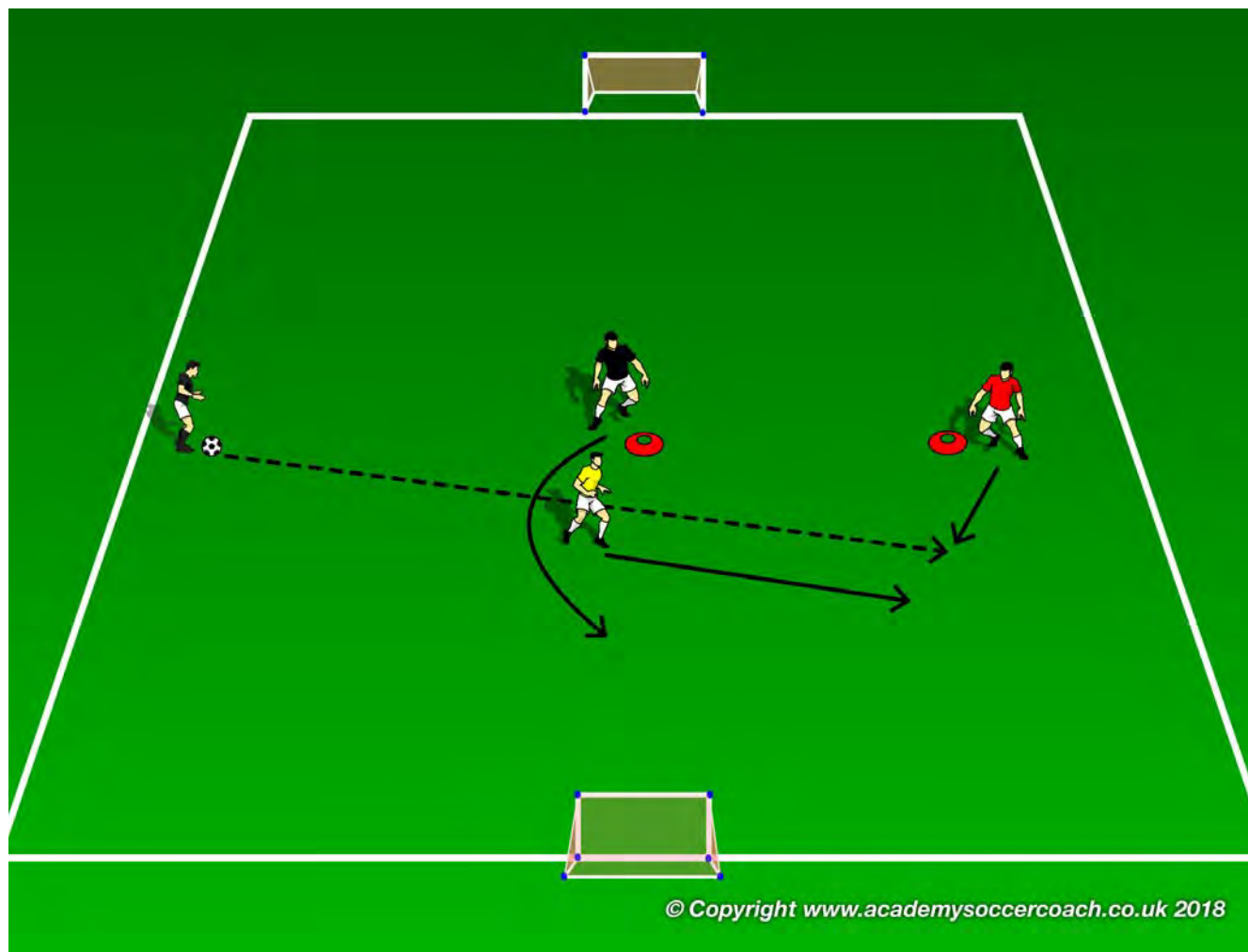
Set-up and Sequence: 3 players (1 forward, 1 defender and 1 neutral player) and the coach are placed inside a rectangular space, as in the picture. 2 goals are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle.

The neutral player decides where to move and to receive the pass from the coach to start the sequence. The defender, who is now outnumbered, must be positioned toward the goal to defend as soon as possible; he can decide to mark the forward on, leaving the neutral player free to dribble (he can't score) or to press the ball carrier to force him backward and leaving the forward offside (as in the picture).

The neutral player and the forward become defenders if the possession is lost

Eye on: quick reaction and positioning, mark strictly, leave the opponent offside, change attitude from 1 v 1 mark to tackle against the ball carrier before he can pass, retreat and press to counter the opponent as he wins the ball (defense in numerical advantage).

Exercise 20 - 1 v 2 (manage the numerical disadvantage): cover and avoid a pass in behind



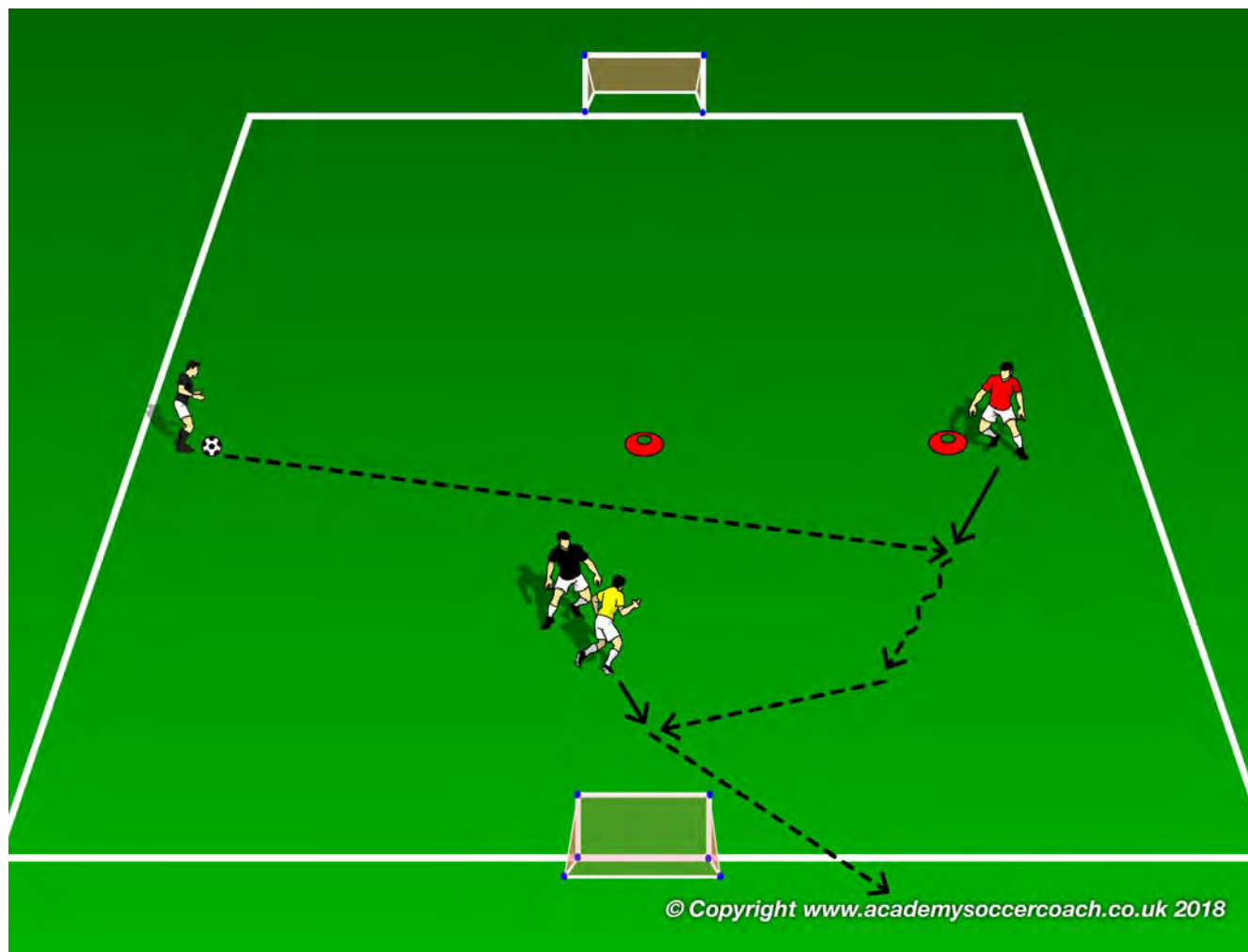
Set-up and Sequence: this exercise is a progression of the previous one. The defender is asked to press the neutral player in possession to avoid an in behind pass, on the run of the forward at the back.

The defender must be able to counter and to tackle the opponent while receiving for a clearance or to recover the ball. He closes the passing lane if he's on late.

The neutral player and the forward become defenders if the possession is lost

Eye on: quick reaction and positioning press and tackle the ball carrier before he can pass, retreat and press to counter the opponent as he wins the ball (defense in numerical advantage).

Exercise 21 - 1 v 2 (manage the numerical disadvantage): save the goal space



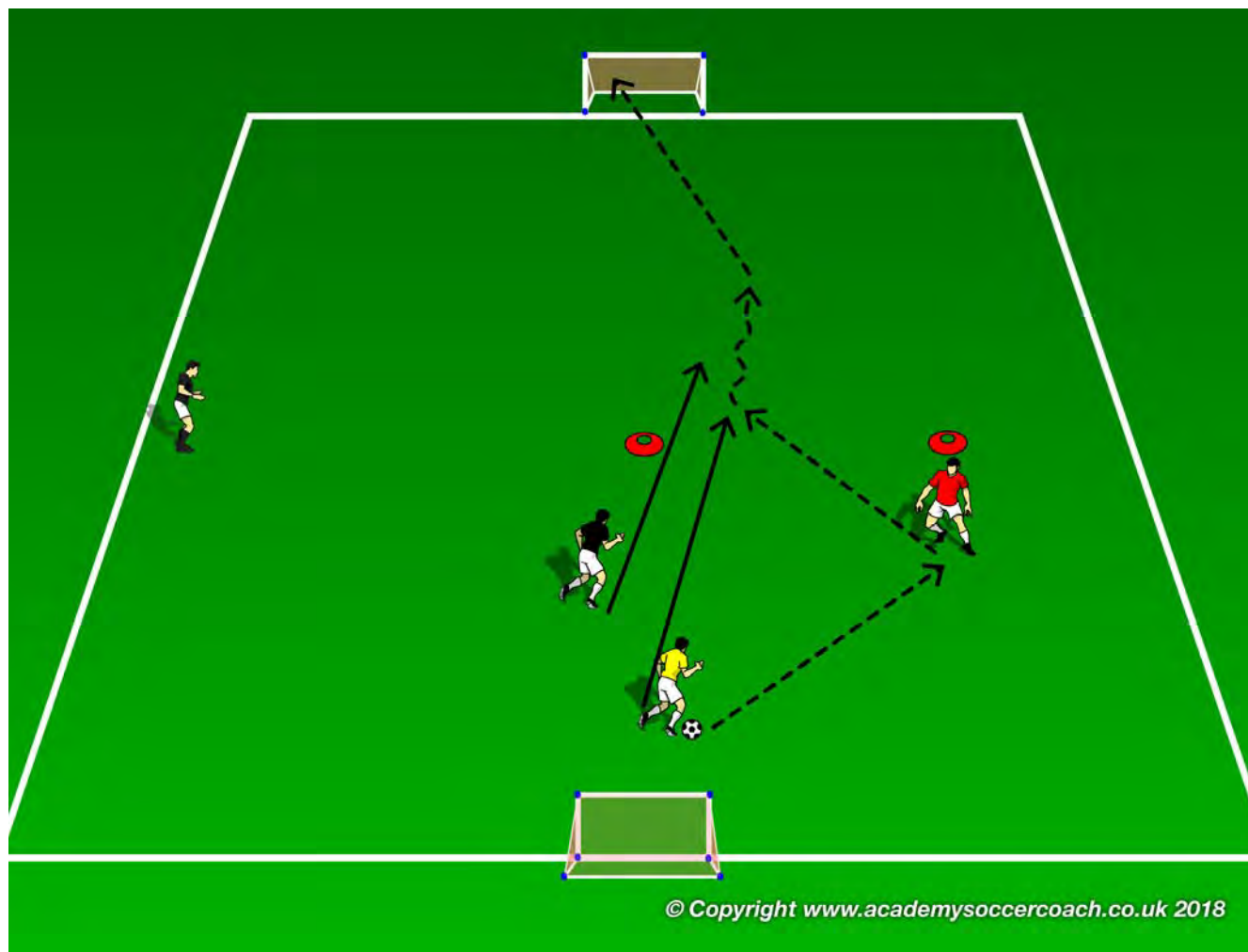
Set-up and Sequence: this exercise is another progression of the previous one. The defender is asked to close the goal space and the first pole against the forward.

The defender must be able to mark the forward on till the neutral player is about to pass (he can't score), and then he must intercept the ball on the first pole to prevent the attacker from shooting.

The neutral player and the forward become defenders if the possession is lost

Eye on: quick reactions, man on mark, interception, retreat and press to counter the opponent as he wins the ball (defense in numerical advantage).

Exercise 22 - 1 v 2 (manage the numerical disadvantage) or 1 v 1 transition to defend



Set-up and Sequence: this exercise is again another progression of the previous one. The defender is asked to close the goal space and the first pole against the forward.

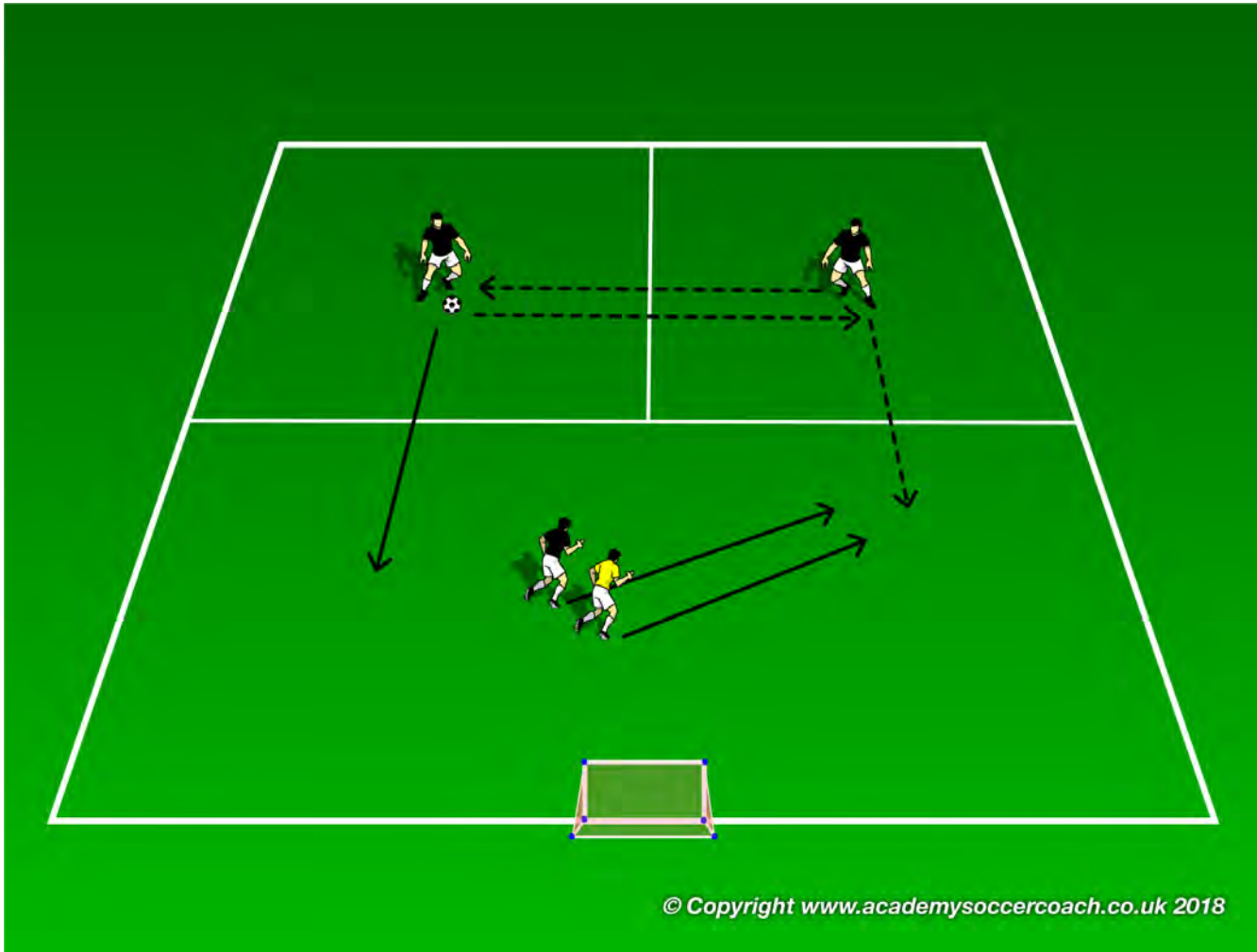
If the first defender can't win the possession, the coach can pass a second ball, the prior forward must act quickly into transition to defend, recovering the space to prevent the opponent from scoring.

The transition to attack can be organized thanks to the support of the neutral player.

The neutral player and the forward become defenders if the possession is lost.

Eye on: quick reactions, retreat to counter the opponent as he wins the ball as transition to defend.

Exercise 23 - 1 v 2 (manage the numerical disadvantage) or 1 v 1 transition to defend (2)



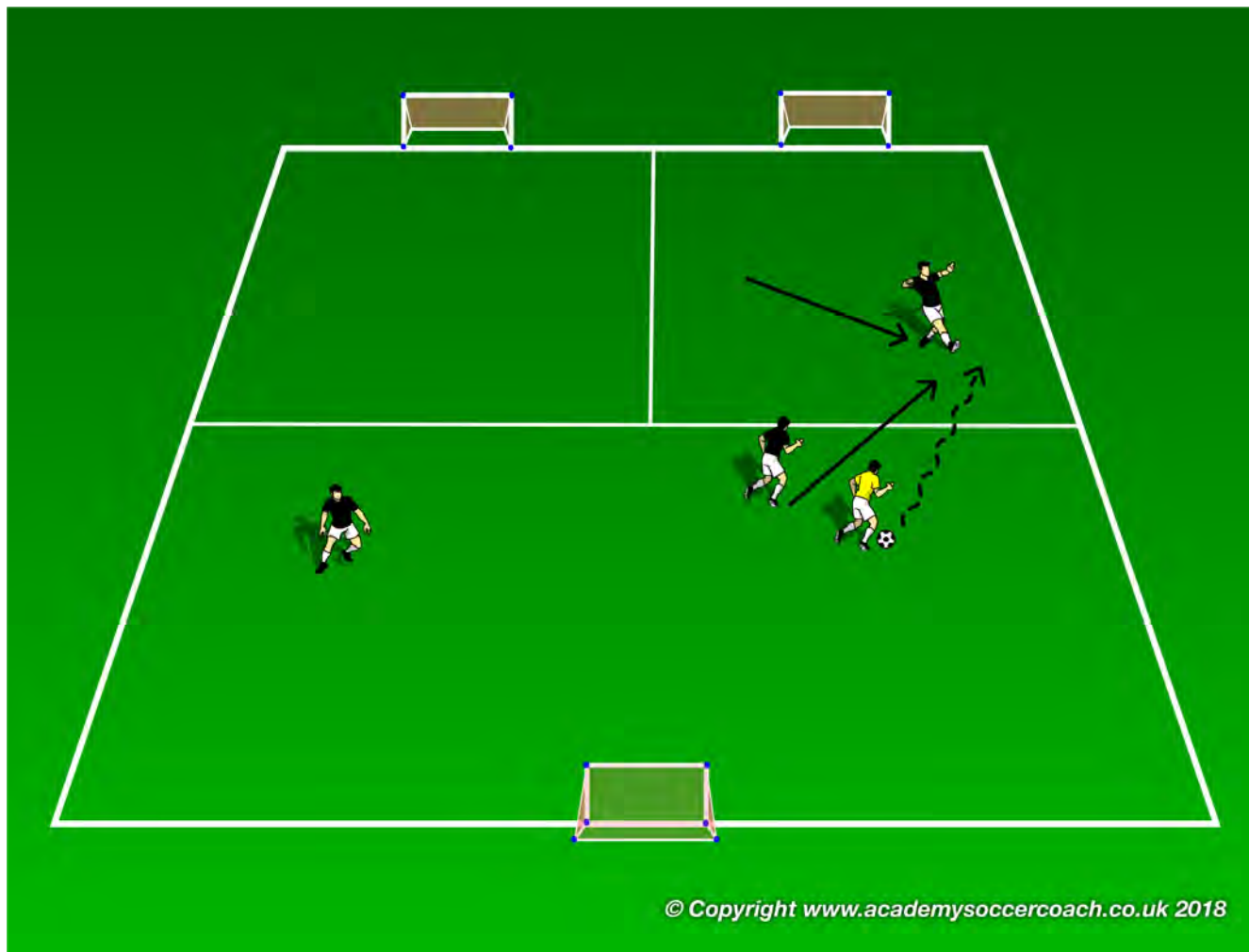
Set-up and Sequence: a rectangular space is divided into 3 areas, as in the picture. A 1 v 1 duel is played inside the main lower zone and 2 more forwards are placed inside upper and smaller areas, as in the picture.

The 2 forwards pass the ball to each other, go and back, while the 1 v 1 duel is being played without the ball; the center forward must be involved in the attacking phase within 6" from the beginning. The defender must mark him strictly to avoid him from being in possession or turning; if the forward is able to control the ball, the third player can run inside and the defender is now outnumbered and he must save the goal space to prevent them from finishing. If the defender wins the possession, he must dribble toward one of the upper areas and the player inside there becomes defender to prevent him from dribbling the ball out of the end line.

Variation: the prior center forward can retreat to create defensive numerical advantage (2 v 1).

Eye on: pressure to prevent the forward from turning, be placed between the forward and the goal space, pressure to recover the ball as soon as possible and counter-pressing to prevent transitions to attack of the new ball carrier.

Exercise 24 - 1 v 2 (manage the numerical disadvantage) or 1 v 1 transition to defend (3)



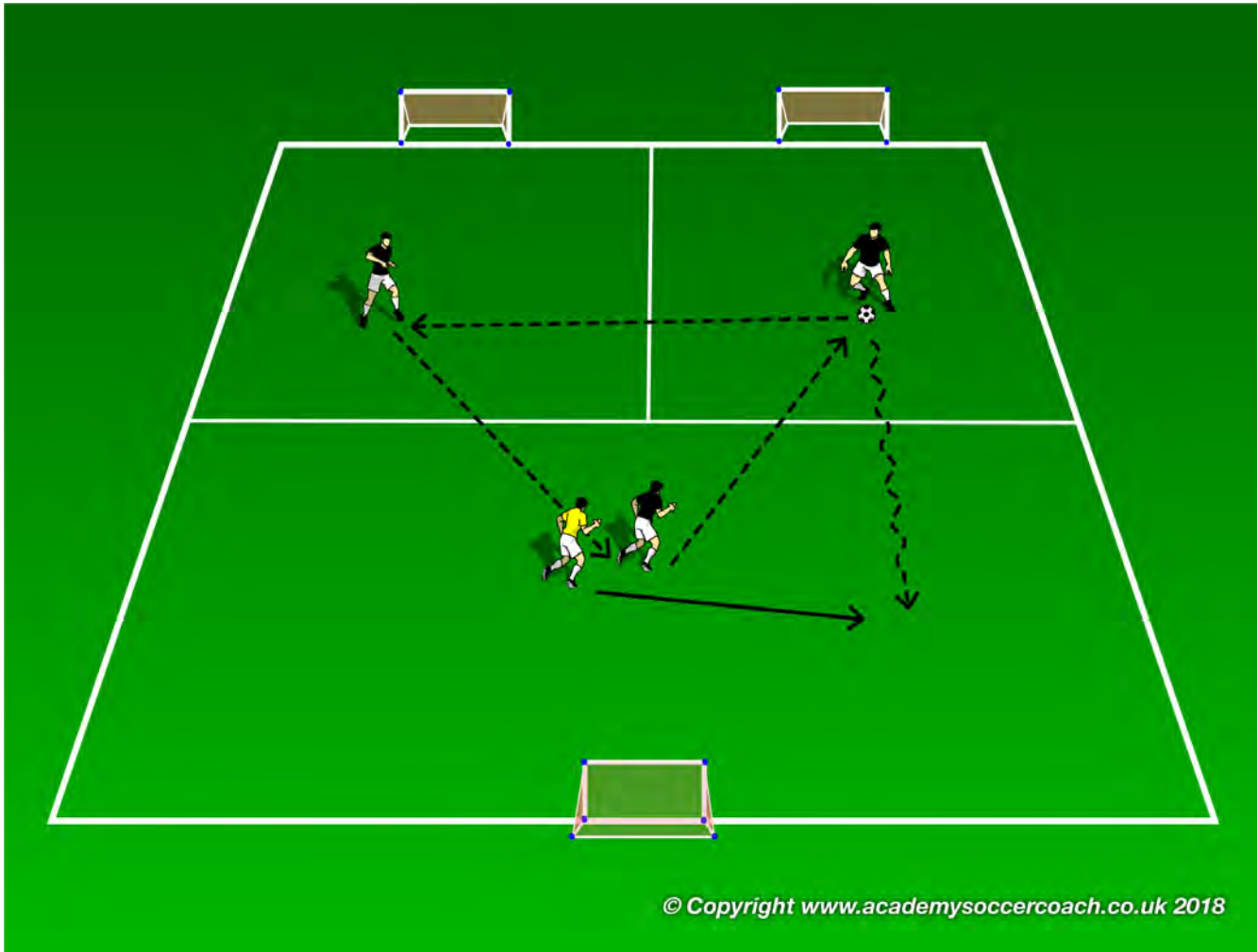
Set-up and Sequence: this practice is a variation of the previous one.

If the defender wins the possession, he must score in one of the two mini goals on the end lines of the smaller upper areas; the player inside there becomes defender to prevent him from shooting.

Variation: the prior center forward can retreat to create defensive numerical advantage (2 v 1).

Eye on: pressure to prevent the forward from turning, be placed between the forward and the goal space, pressure to recover the ball as soon as possible and counter-pressing to prevent transitions to attack of the new ball carrier.

Exercise 25 - 1 v 2 (manage the numerical disadvantage) or 1 v 1 transition to defend (4)



Set-up and Sequence: this practice is another variation of the previous one.

When the center forward receives the ball within 6" from the beginning, he must pass back to the third teammate inside the other upper area, who dribbles out to play 2 v 1 against the defender.

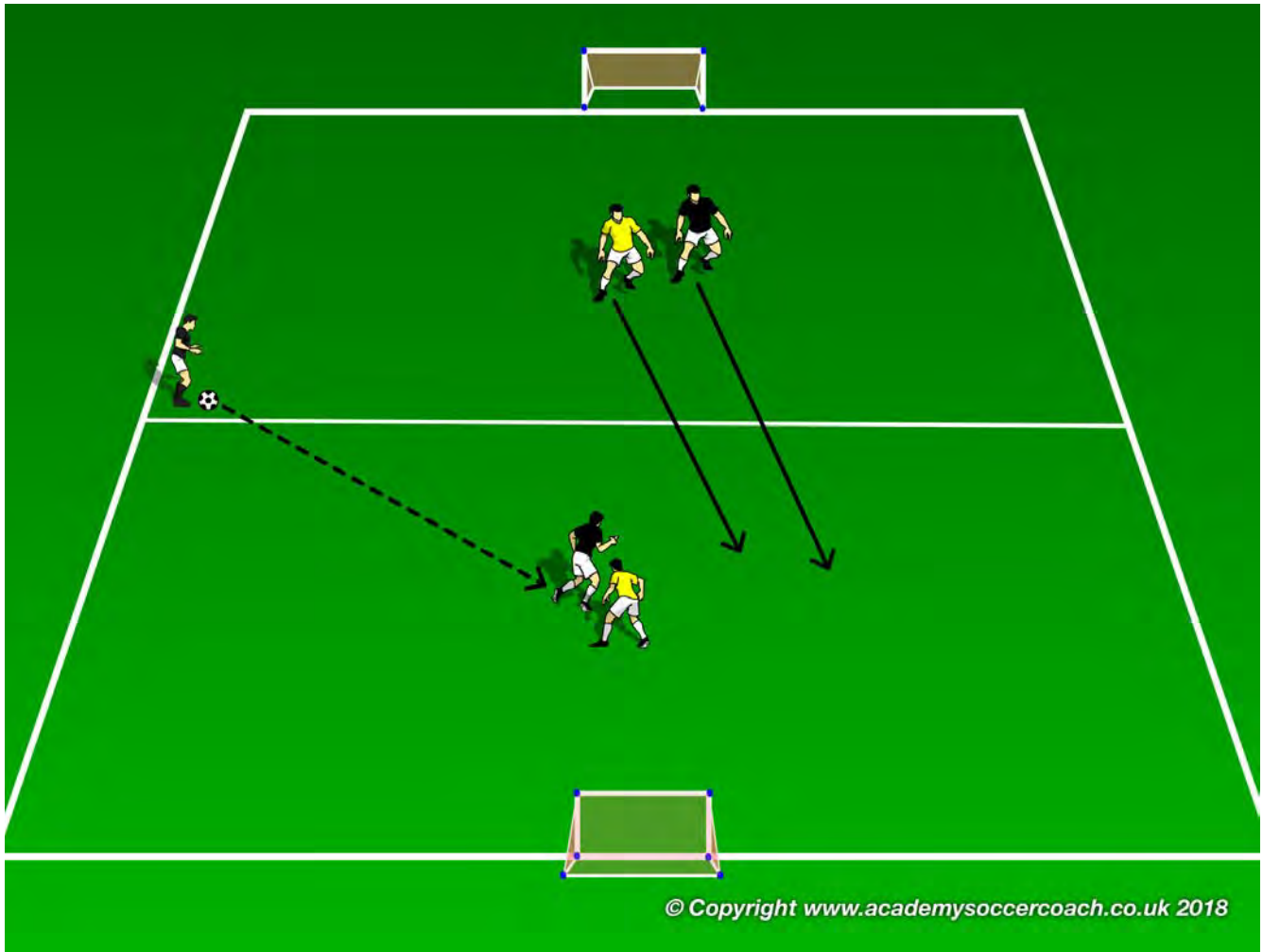
The defender must mark the first player strictly to prevent him from being in possession or passing back; if the forward is able to control the ball and to pass back, then the defender is now outnumbered and he must save the goal space against the new ball carrier to prevent him, or his teammate, from finishing. If the defender wins the possession, he must dribble toward one of the upper areas and the player inside there becomes defender to prevent him from shooting.

Variation: the prior center forward can retreat to create defensive numerical advantage (2 v 1).

Eye on: pressure to prevent the forward from turning, be placed between the forward and the goal space, pressure to recover the ball as soon as possible, cover the goal space and counter-pressing to prevent transitions to attack of the new ball carrier.

2 v 2 exercises

Exercise 26 - 2 v 2: mark the man on or track the opponent (1)



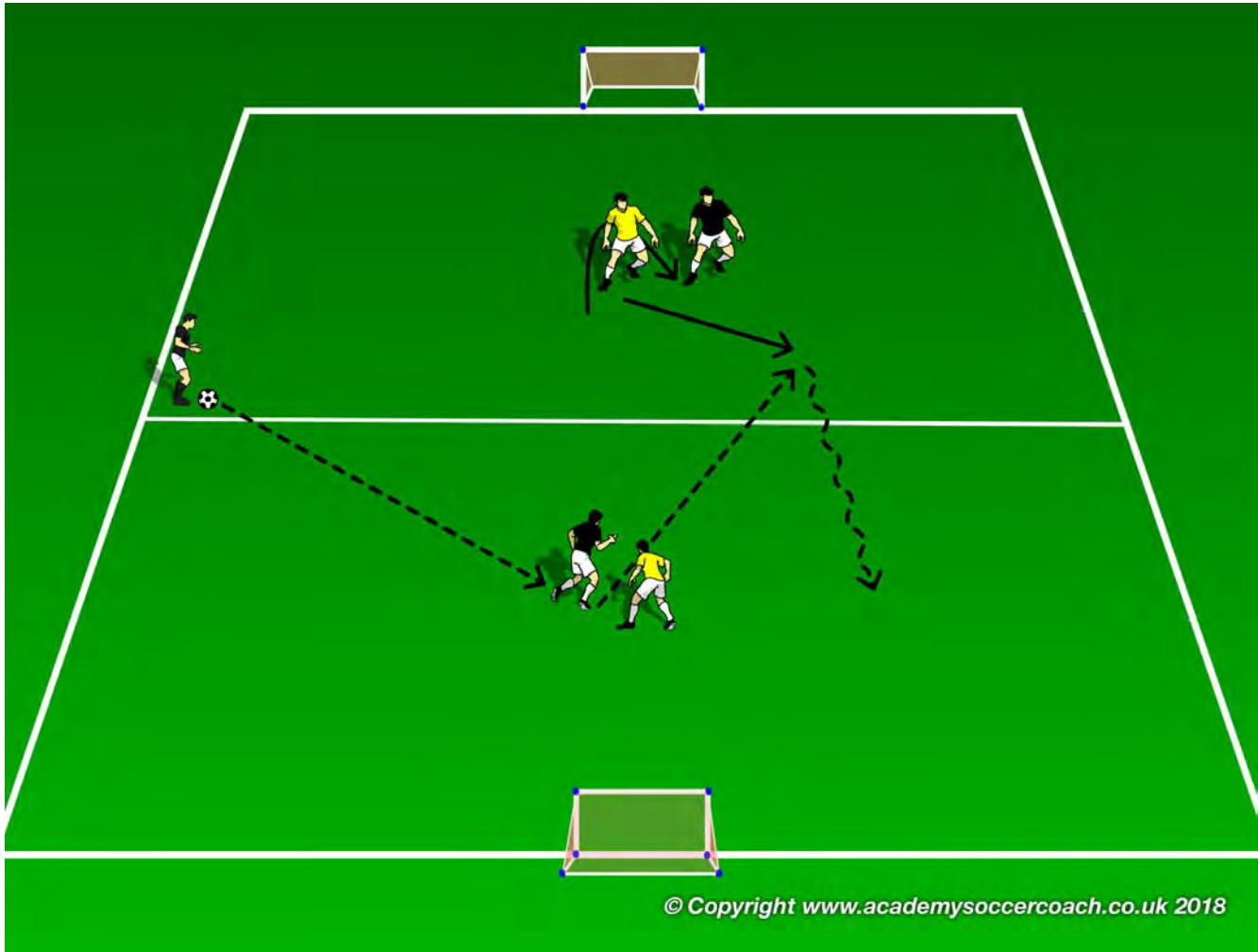
Set-up and Sequence: a rectangular space is divided into 2 areas as in the picture. A 1 v 1 duel is played inside each zone and the coach has the possession. 2 goals are placed along the end lines.

The coach decides the half of the pitch where to kick the ball; the defender, who is placed there, must mark the opponent on while receiving, to avoid him playing with the teammate, who's coming from the opposite half. The second defender must track the direct opponent; a 2 v 2 is now created inside one half.

If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack toward the opposite goal; the players who lost the possession must counter-press immediately, as transition to defend, to prevent any counter attacks.

Eye on: pressure to prevent the forward from receiving, be placed between the forward and the goal space while tracking him back, pressure to recover the ball as soon as possible and counter-pressing to prevent transitions to attack of the new ball carriers.

Exercise 27 - 2 v 2: mark the man on or track the opponent (2)



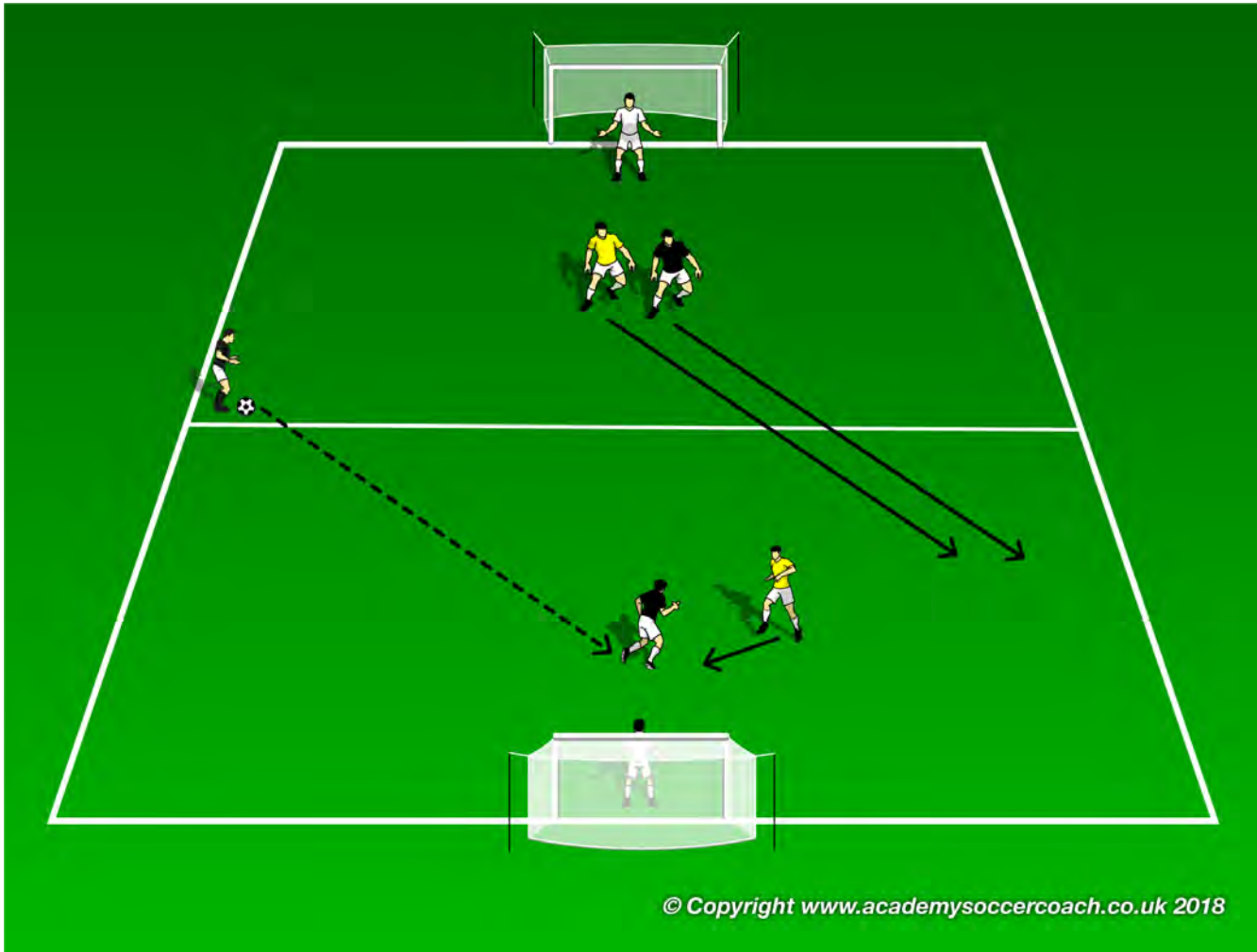
Set-up and Sequence: this practice is a variation of the previous exercise.

The coach decides the half of the pitch where to kick the ball; the defender, who is placed there, must mark the opponent on while receiving, to avoid him passing the ball back to the teammate on the other half, who could dribble to finish. The second defender must track the direct opponent, trying to anticipate him while receiving.

If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack toward the opposite goal; the players who lost the possession must counter-press immediately, as transition to defend, to prevent any counter attacks.

Eye on: pressure to prevent the forward from receiving, be placed between the forward and the goal space while tracking him back, pressure to recover the ball as soon as possible and counter-pressing to prevent transitions to attack of the new ball carriers.

Exercise 28 - 2 v 2: pressure to avoid the opposition building up phase



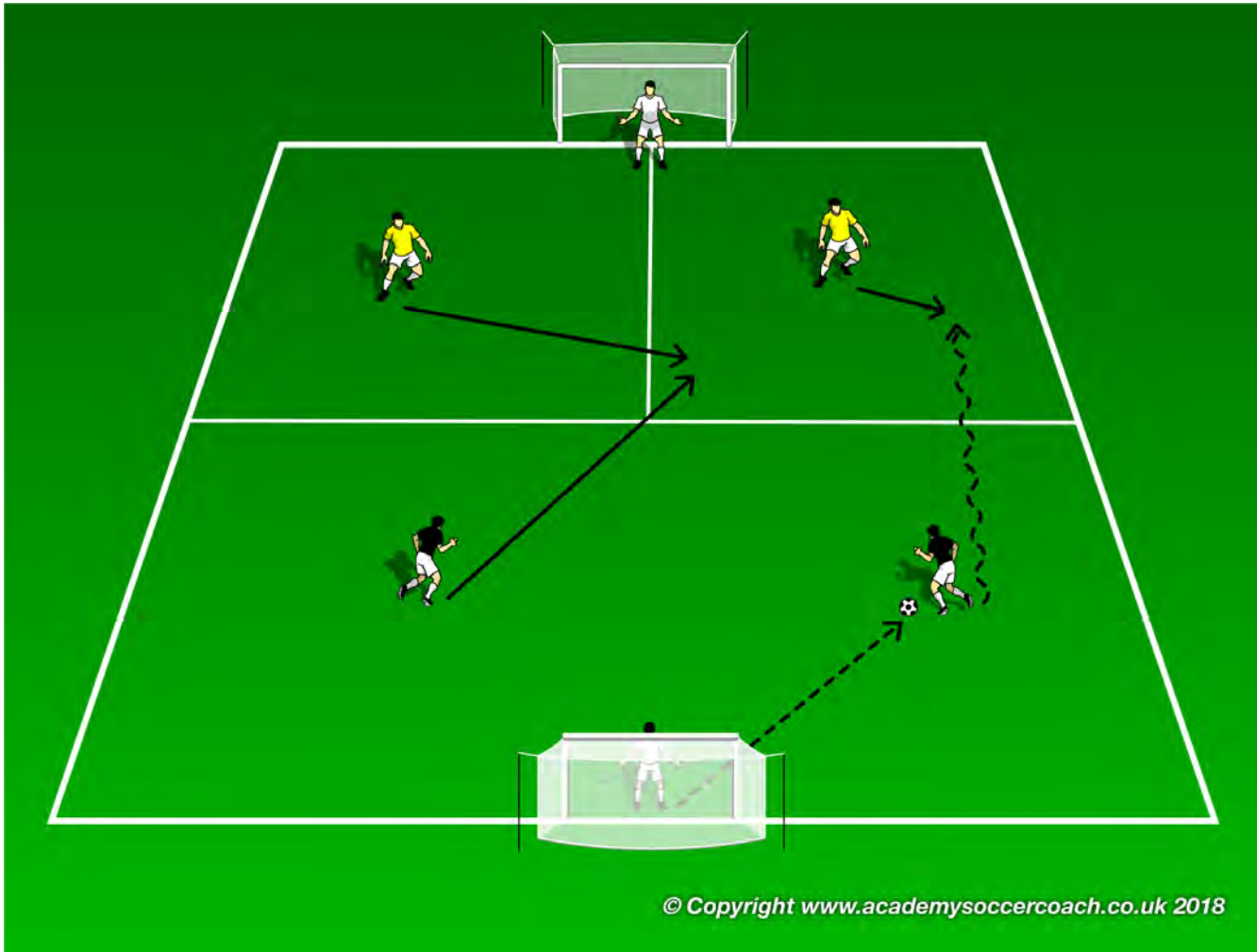
Set-up and Sequence: a rectangular space is divided into 2 areas, as in the picture. A 1 v 1 duel is played inside each zone and the coach has the possession. 2 goals with goalkeepers are placed along the end lines.

The coach decides the half of the pitch where to kick the ball; the defender, who is placed there, must put pressure on the opponent while receiving to prevent him from building up and from playing with a teammate, who's dropping back from the attacking half. The second defender must track the direct opponent to prevent him from receiving; a 2 v 2 is now created inside one half.

If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack toward the goal of the pressure area; the players who lost the possession must counter-press immediately, as transition to defend, to prevent any finishing phase.

Eye on: pressure to prevent the forward from receiving and building up, track back to avoid support play, pressure to recover the ball as soon as possible and counter-pressing to prevent transitions to attack of the new ball carriers.

Exercise 29 - 2 v 2: pressure inside a strong side

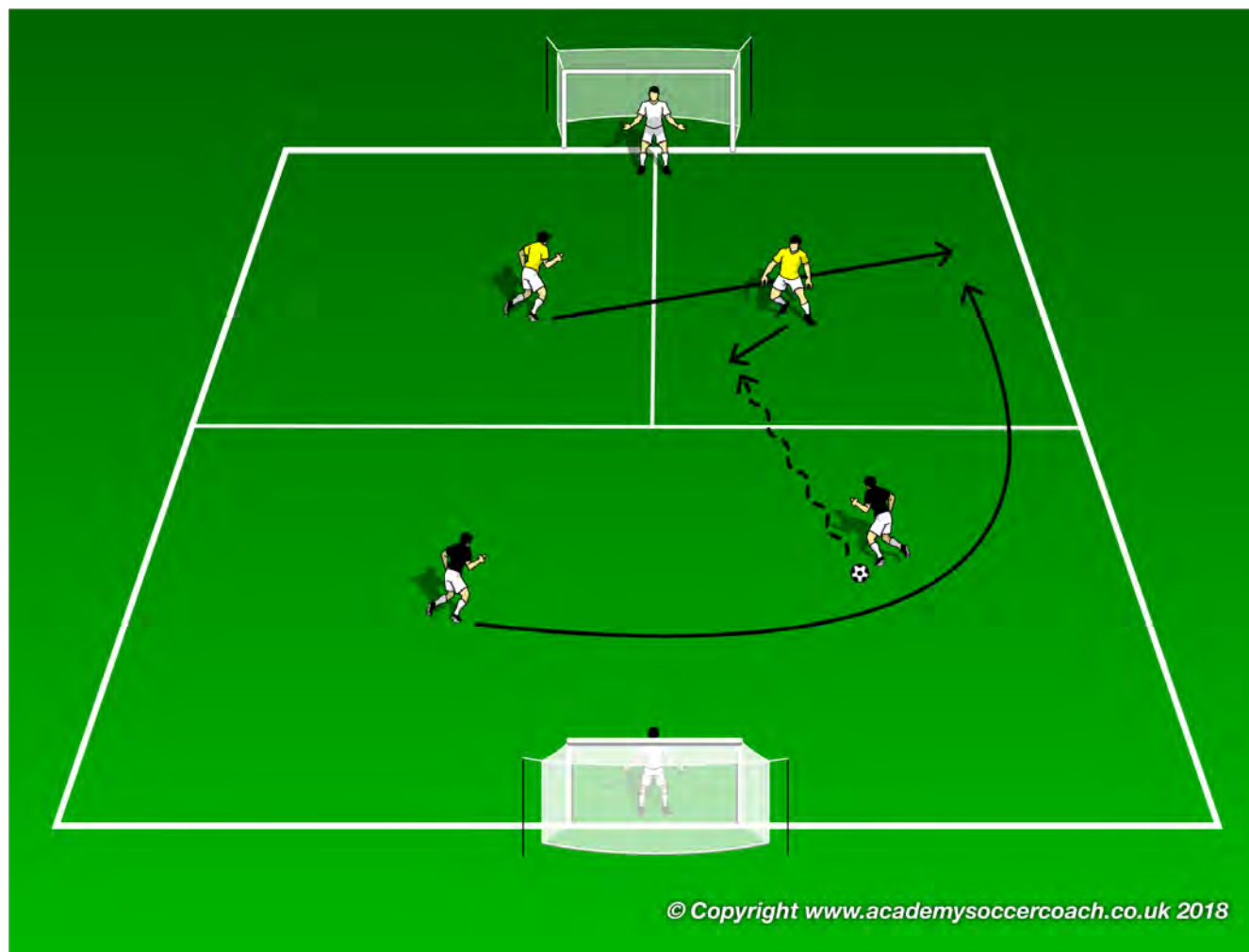


Set-up and Sequence: a rectangular space is divided into 3 areas, as in the picture. 2 goals with goalkeepers are placed along the end lines. A 2 v 2 duel is played inside the area; the attacking couple builds up from the back freely, but the players must choose one of the smaller finishing areas to shoot on goal (on the right in the picture). The defenders are placed inside each upper area to save the goal space at the beginning; as the attacking phase is being developed inside one of those zones, the first defender must try to counter the ball carrier, waiting for the support of the teammate, who must close the space to the incoming opponent. They should exchange the mark while shifting across if needed. If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack after a safe back pass to the goalkeeper; the players now in transition to defend must put pressure to avoid the attacking team (the yellow couple) from dribbling inside the main area, where they can finish freely.

Variation: create a strong side and finish/defend a weak side (the free smaller area during the building up phase)

Eye on: pressure on the strong side and to avoid the building up phase, patience to wait for defense support, recover the space to save the weak side.

Exercise 30 - 2 v 2: cover the overlap runs



Set-up and Sequence: this practice is a variation of the previous one.

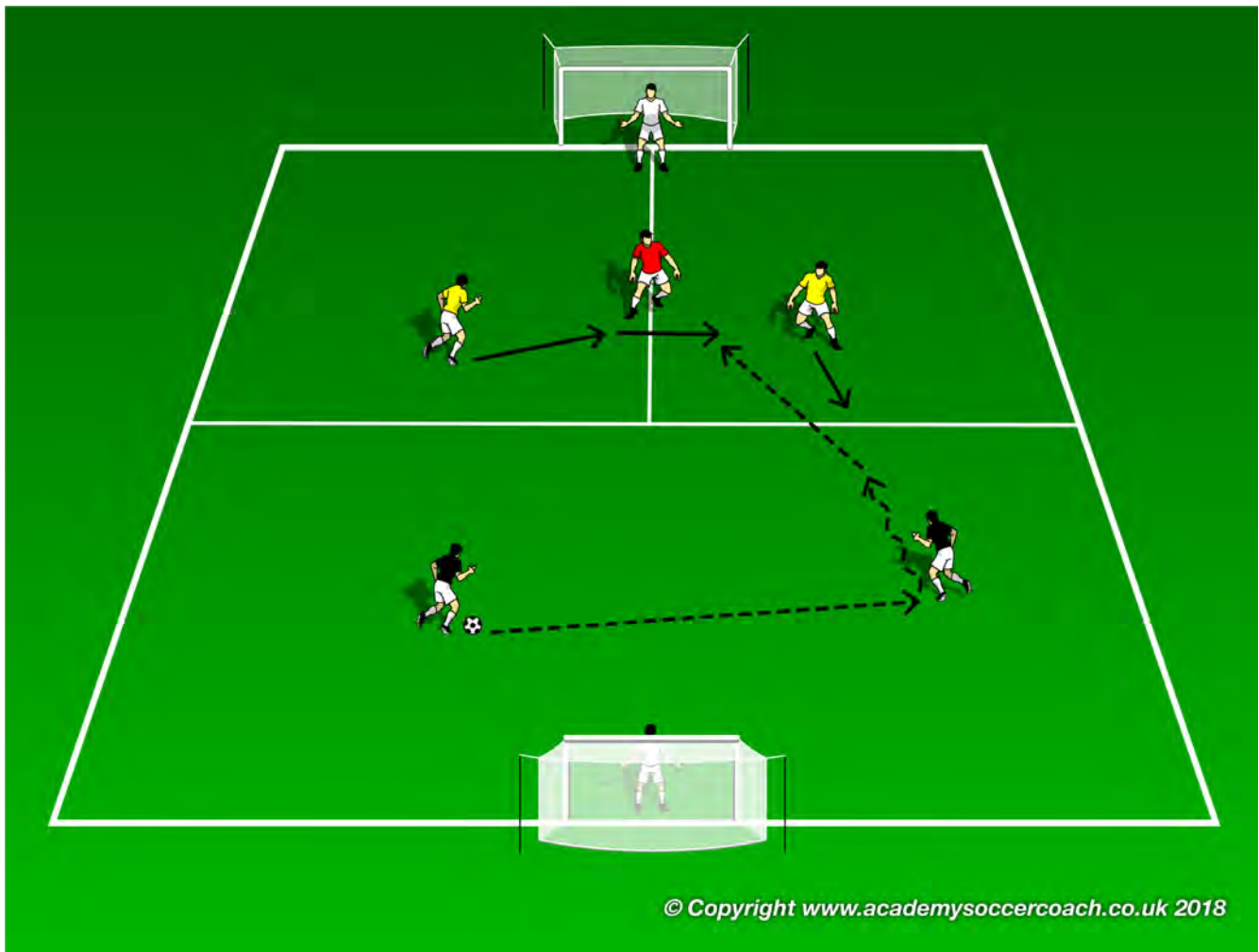
The couple of players in possession must finish inside one of the smaller upper areas and after an overlap run.

The defenders are again placed inside each upper area to save the goal space at the beginning; as the attacking phase is being developed inside one of those zones, the first defender must try to counter the ball carrier and to wait for the support of the teammate, who must close the space behind him to counter the overlap movement of the opponent. If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack after a safe back pass to the goalkeeper; the players now in transition to defend must put pressure to avoid the attacking team (the yellow couple) from dribbling inside the main area, where they can finish freely.

Eye on: pressure on the strong side and to avoid the building up phase, patience to wait for defense support, recover the space to save the weak side.

2 v 2 + 1 exercises

Exercise 31 - 2 v 2 + 1: manage the numerical disadvantage against a center forward



Set-up and Sequence: a rectangular space is divided into 3 areas, as in the picture. 2 goals with goalkeepers are placed along the end lines. A 2 v 2 duel is played inside the area; the attacking couple builds up from the back freely. The defenders are placed inside each upper area to save the goal space at the beginning. A fifth neutral field player is free to move between the upper areas, acting as center forward.

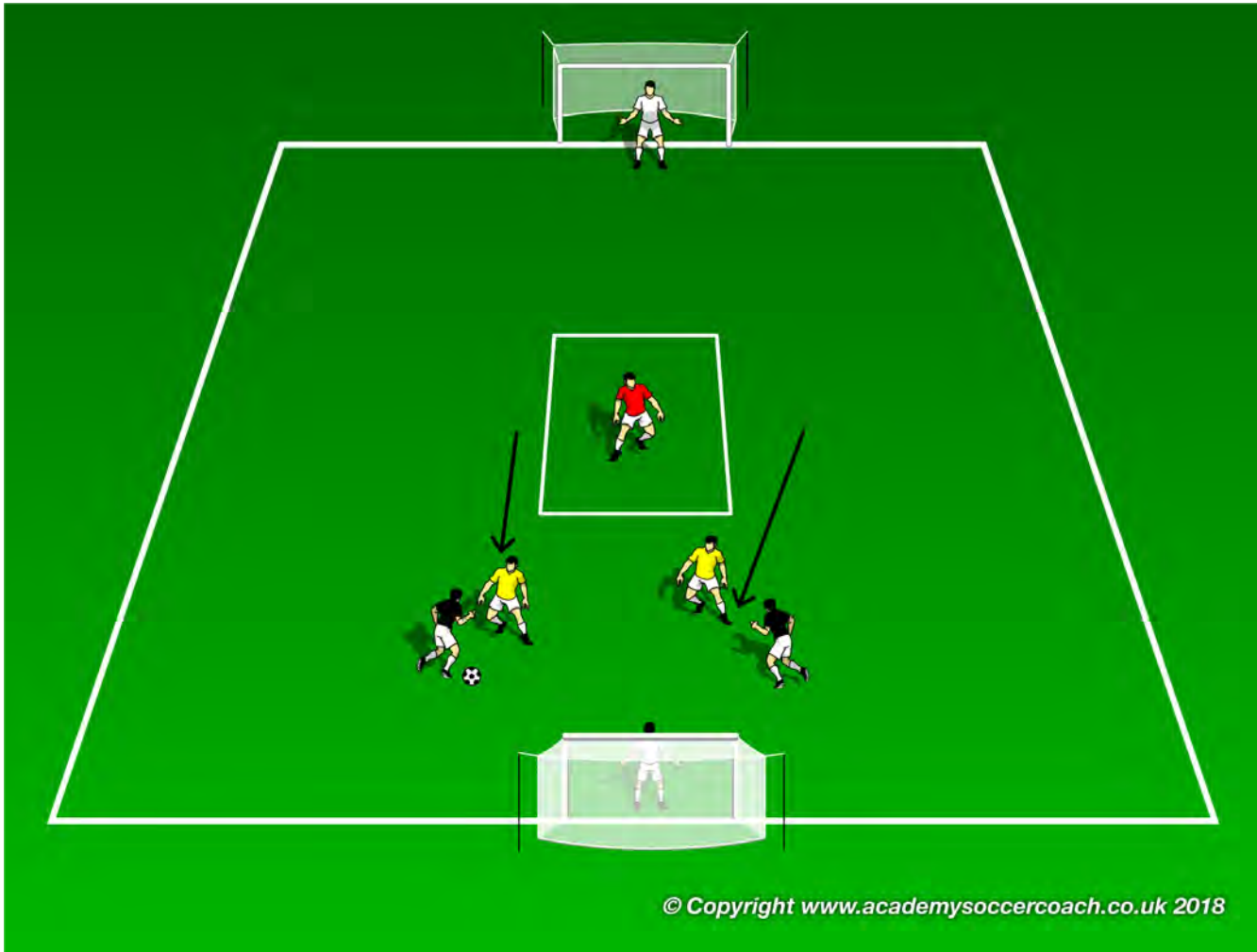
The defenders must create numerical advantage 2 v 1 against the center forward, while the attacking couple is building up from the back. As the red player receives, the defenders are outnumbered 2 v 3; it is very important to try to anticipate the forward immediately to avoid the outnumbered situation. If it's not possible, the defender must cover the goal space.

If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack after a safe back pass to the goalkeeper; the players now in transition to defend must put pressure to avoid the attacking team (the yellow couple) from dribbling inside the main area, where they can finish freely. The free player becomes the first defender who must counter the possession phase of the new attacking team. A 3 v 3 duels is created

during the transitions phase (attack / defend) and a 3 v 2 numerical advantage is created during the second defense phase.

Eye on: pressure and anticipation to win the ball, cover the space if outnumbered, force the possession phase backward with defensive numerical advantage.

Exercise 32 - 2 v 2 + 1: prevent the opponents from playing behind the defense line



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Set-up and Sequence: A 2 v 2 + 1 duel is played inside a rectangular space. 2 goals are placed along the shorter sides of the set-up. A fifth red neutral player is placed inside a center small rectangle where he is free to move and waiting to receive the ball. The couple with possession starts in front of the own goal to build up and the defending couple starts the exercise sideways the area in the middle.

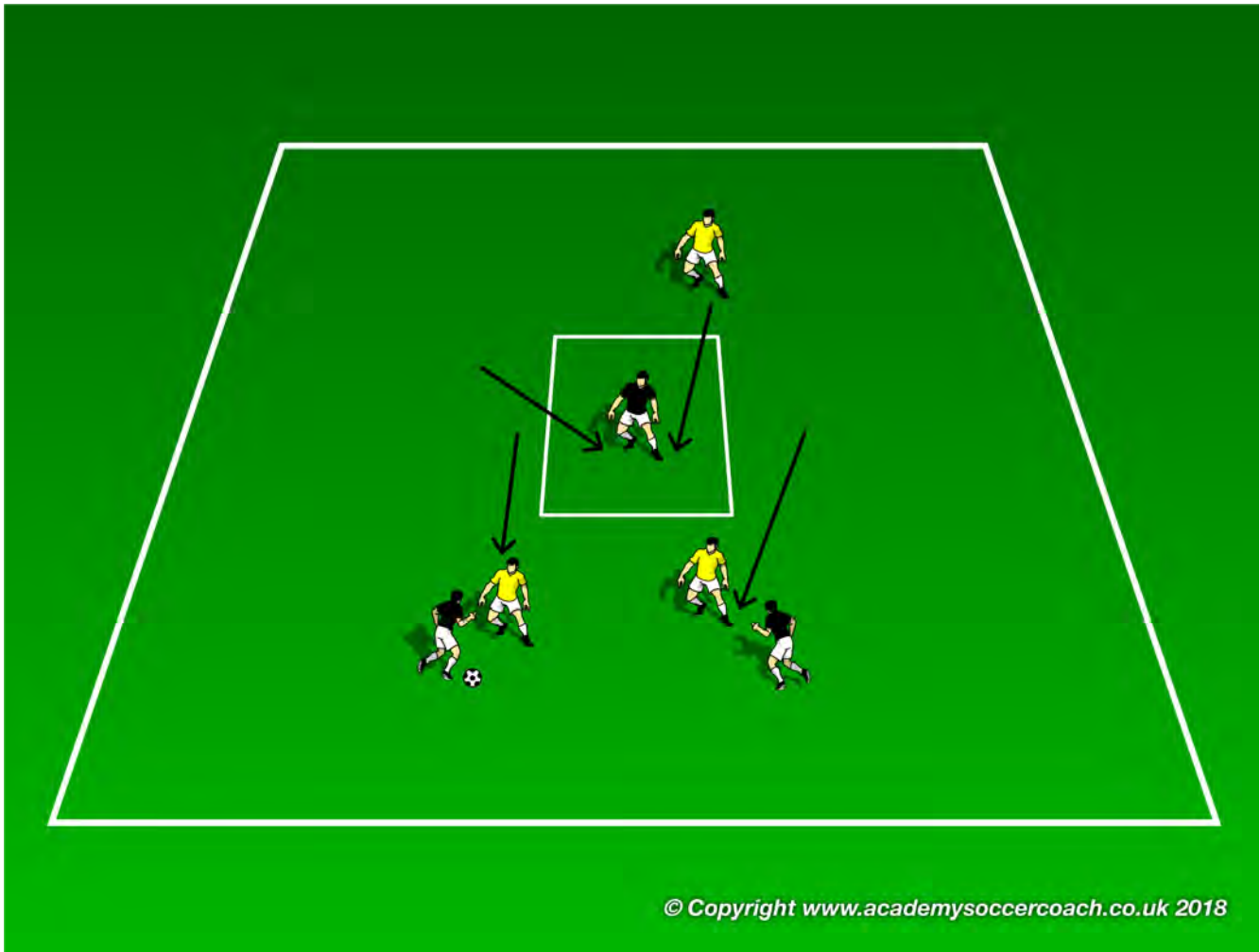
As the first player of the attacking couple receives from the goalkeeper, both the defenders must run up over the middle area and put pressure to prevent the players in possession from passing at their back and toward the center free neutral player. If he receives, the attacking team can finish 3 v goalkeeper. If the defenders recover the possession, they can counter attack 2 v 2, or they can be helped by the neutral player, through a first safe pass, as transition to attack phase. The couple of players that lost the possession must counter press immediately as transition to defend.

Variation: both the goalkeepers are in possession, and the coach can decide the attacking and the defending couple time to time.

Eye on: pressure to close the passing lanes and to counter the transitions to attack phase of play.

3 v 3 exercises

Exercise 33 - 3 v 3: prevent the opponents from playing behind the defense line (1)



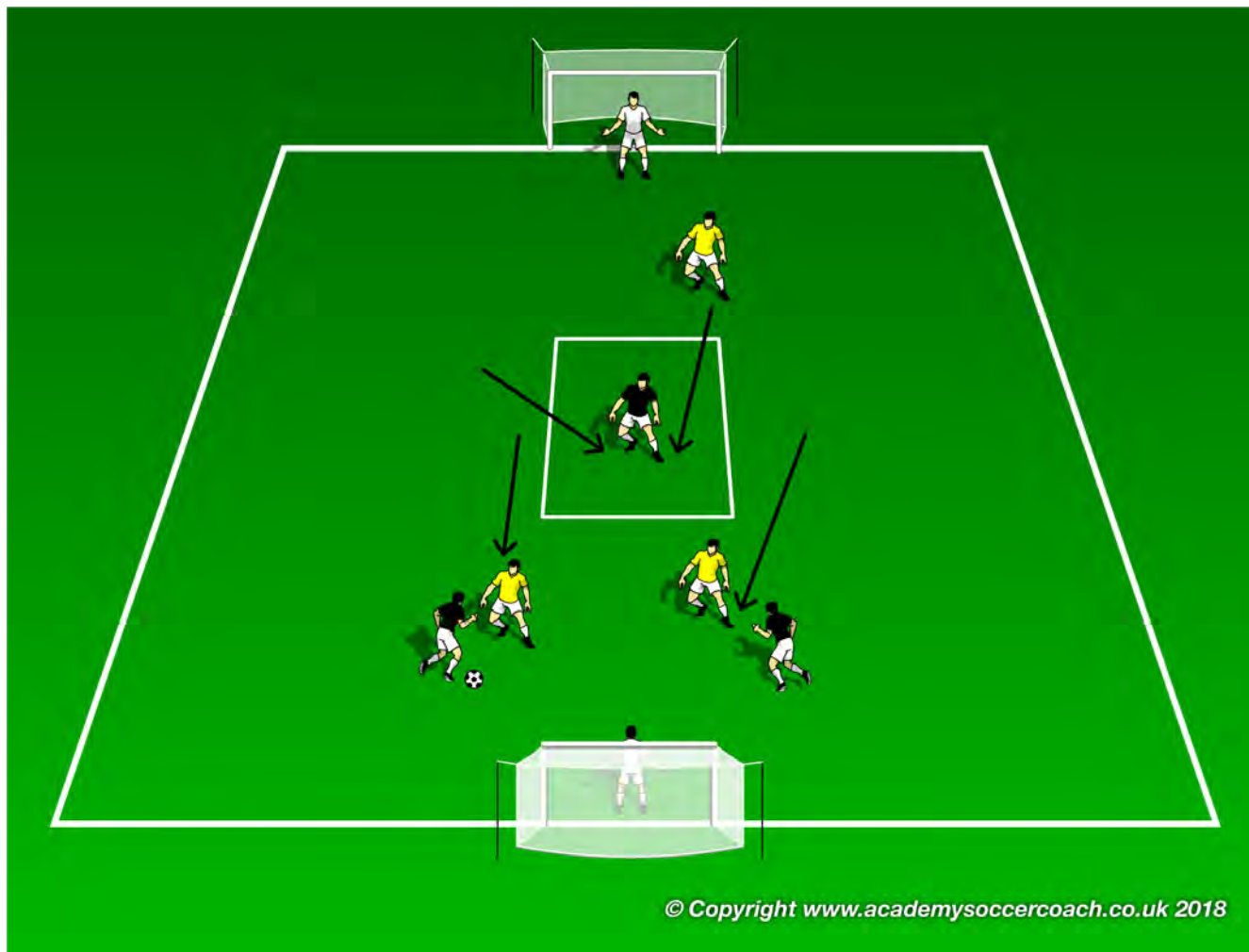
Set-up and Sequence: a 3 v 3 possession duel is played inside a rectangular space; the goal for the possession team is to make a player receiving a pass inside the center smaller area. This is a directed possession game; the black players must play from the bottom to the top, when in possession, and the yellows vice versa.

The defenders must be able to move over the middle area and to put pressure to avoid the players in possession from passing at their back and toward the center area, where the third defender can run inside to counter the opponent, who is dropping back there; if the player in possession is able to send a back pass, then the attacking team gains 1 point.

If the defenders recover the possession, they must keep the ball, trying to find the way to direct the possession to win the point. The players who lost the possession must counter press immediately, as transition to defend, to avoid the positioning of the new team with possession.

Eye on: pressure to close the passing lanes, to prevent an opponent from receiving and to counter the transitions to attack phase of play. Anticipation and tackling against the center player while moving or receiving.

Exercise 34 - 3 v 3: prevent the opponents from playing behind the defense line (2)



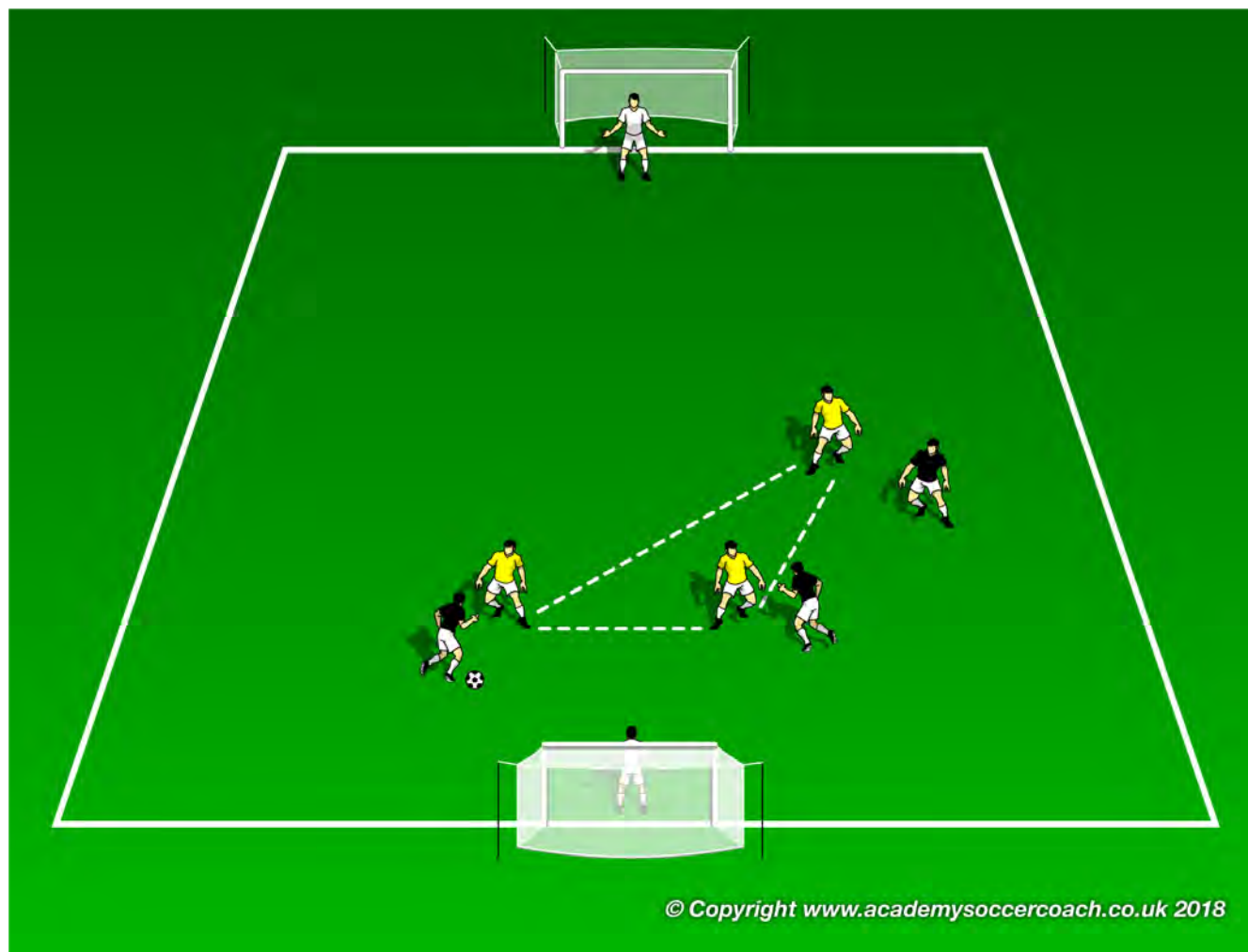
Set-up and Sequence: this is a variation of the previous exercise. A 3 v 3 possession duel is again played inside a rectangular space, but 2 goals with goalkeepers to defend and to attack are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The black players must play from the bottom to the top, when in possession, and the yellows vice versa.

The defenders must be able to move over the middle area and to put pressure to avoid the players in possession from passing at their back and toward the center area, where the third defender can run inside to counter the opponent, who is dropping back there. If the player in possession is able to send a back pass, then the team is free to attack the opposition goal to score.

If the possession team is able to attack the opposition goal, than the defenders must retreat quickly to save the goal space. If the defenders recover the possession, they must keep the ball, trying to counter attack freely. The players who lost the possession must counter press immediately, as transition to defend, to avoid any counter attack or possession phase.

Eye on: pressure to close the passing lanes, to prevent an opponent from receiving and to counter the transitions to attack phase of play. Anticipation and tackling against the center player while moving or receiving.

Exercise 35 - 3 v 3: shape defense triangles

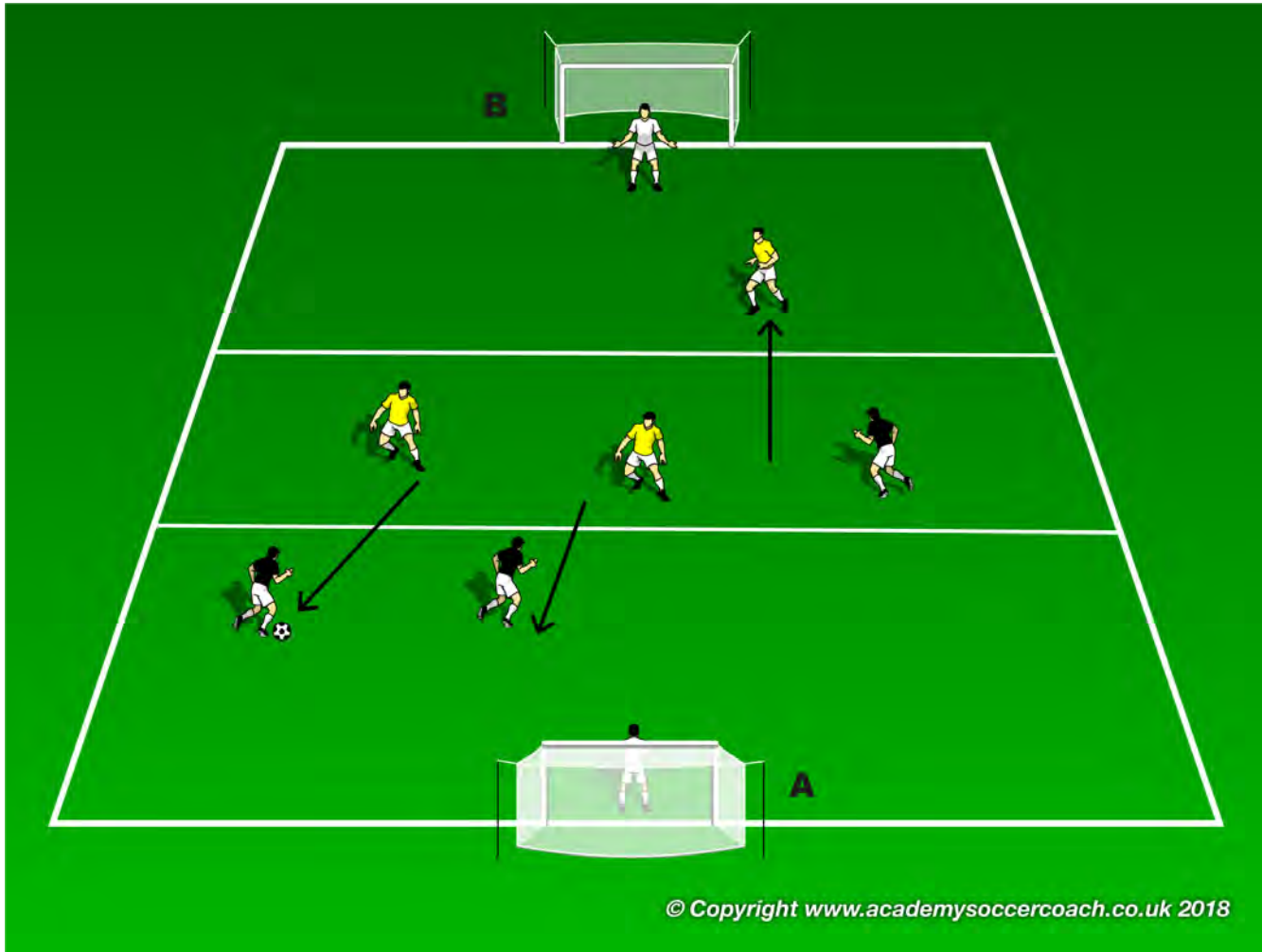


Set-up and Sequence: a 3 v 3 possession duel is again played inside a rectangular space and 2 goals with goalkeepers to defend and to attack are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The black players must play from the bottom to the top, when in possession and the yellows vice versa. The defenders must be able to shape defensive triangles; 2 of them must press the ball carrier and the nearest opponent, who is placed along the easiest passing lane. The third defender must decide if to close the goal space, providing balance, or to mark the last opponent on, if he's close to the goal to defend or if he's placed in a useful position to finish. If the possession team is able to attack the opposition goal, than the defenders must retreat quickly to save the goal space. If the defenders recover the possession, they must counter attack freely and as quickly as possible. The players who lost the possession must counter press immediately, as transition to defend, to avoid any counter attack or possession phase.

Variation: the coach can play a second ball to manipulate transitions to attack and to defend, to force the player shaping defensive triangles.

Eye on: pressure to close the passing lanes, provide balance at the back, mark the opponent on if he is placed in dangerous positions, counter pressing to avoid counter attacks, quick transitions.

Exercise 36 - 3 v 3: pressure and balance



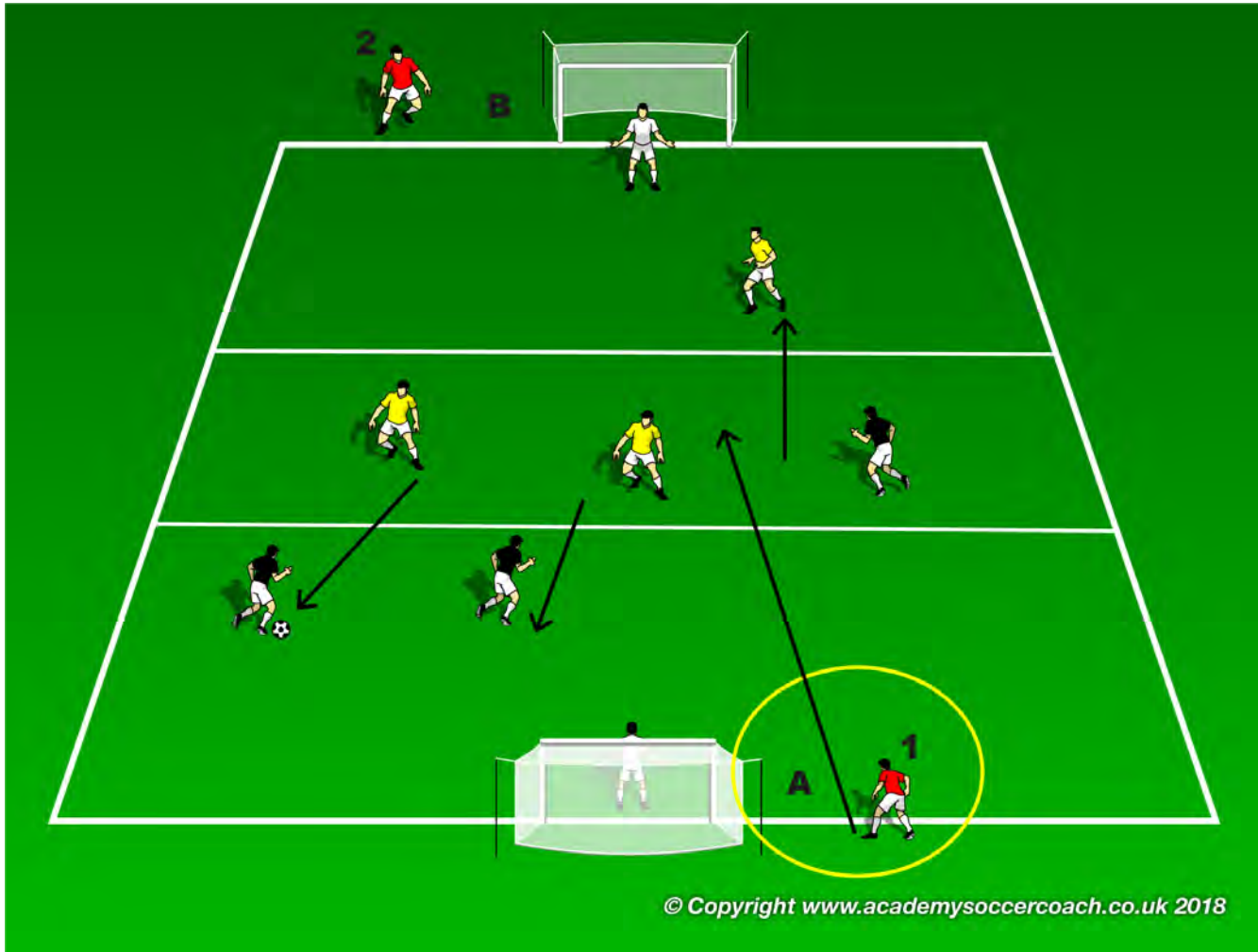
Set-up and Sequence: a 3 v 3 possession duel is played inside a rectangular space and 2 named goals with goalkeepers to defend and to attack are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The playing area is divided into 3 parts; all the players start each sequence from the middle one.

The coach indicates which is the goal to attack (B in the picture) and this way he finds out the attacking team (black) and the defending team (yellow). 2 players of the black team must drop back inside the first third to build up and 2 of the defending must put pressure in final third; the third defender must drop back inside the first third to cover the goal space and to counter the potential inside runs of the third attacker.

Variation: the coach can play a second ball to manipulate transitions to attack and to defend, to force the player shaping defensive triangles.

Eye on: pressure to close the passing lanes, provide balance at the back, mark the opponent on if he is placed in dangerous positions, counter pressing to avoid counter attacks, quick transitions.

Exercise 37 - Alternate 4 v 3: numerical advantage and disadvantage



Set-up and Sequence: a 3 v 3 basic possession duel is played inside a rectangular space and 2 named goals with goalkeepers to defend and to attack are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The playing area is divided into 3 parts; all the players start each sequence from the middle one.

The coach indicates which is the goal to attack (B in the picture) and this way he finds out the attacking team (black) and the defending team (yellow). 2 players of the black team must drop back inside the first third to build up and 2 of the defending must put pressure in final third; the third defender must drop back inside the first third to cover the goal space and to counter the potential inside runs of the third attacker.

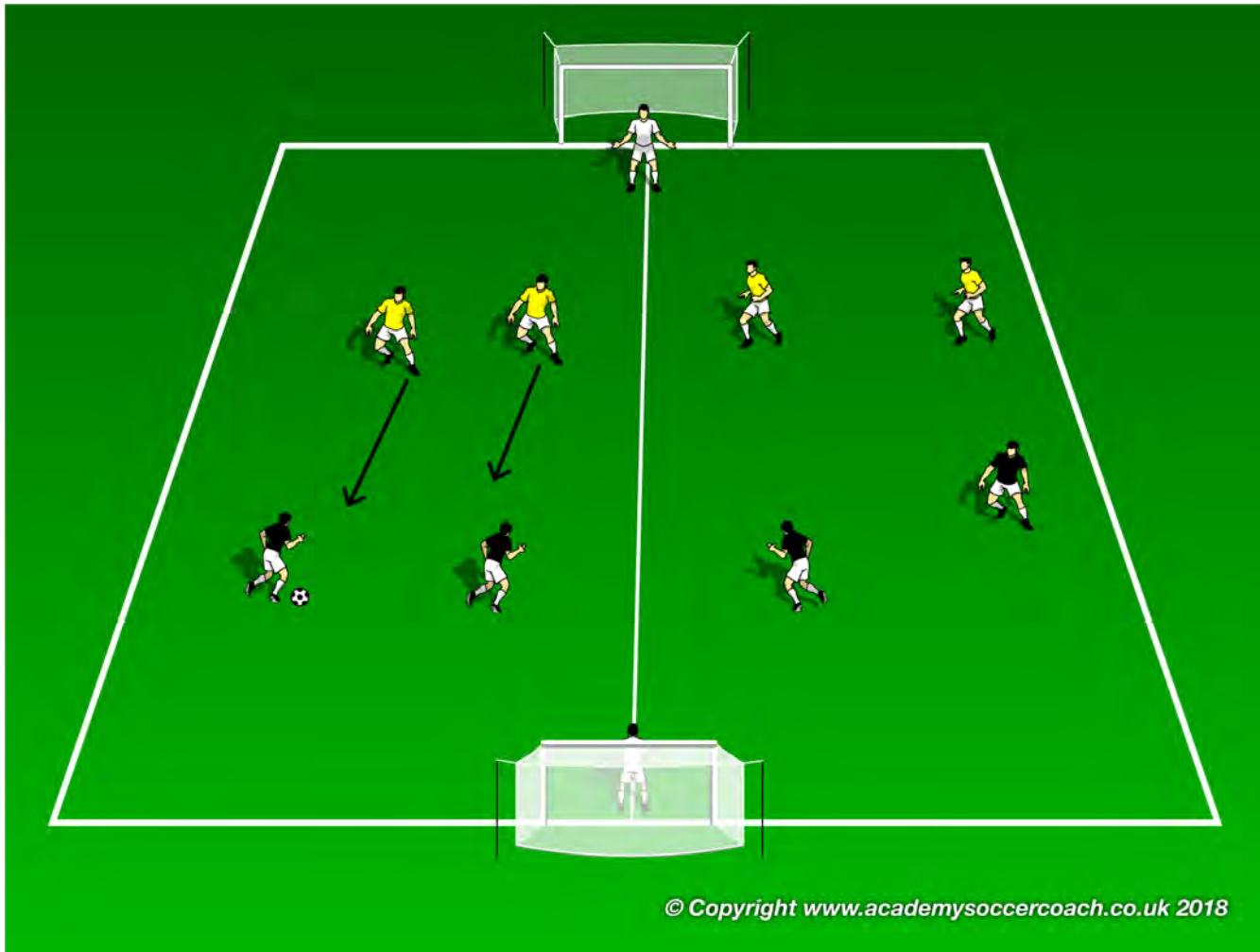
A fourth defender, the free player 1 in the picture, runs inside the middle third of the pitch to create defense numerical advantage 3 v 2; but he can't run out of this part. If the forward are able to play out of the middle third, he can't defend again. The pressure against the opposition building up has to be strong then.

Variation: if the forwards are able to play in the middle third, the other free player can run inside to create numerical advantage for the possession team. The defenders are then outnumbered 3 v 4 in the first third; they have to save the goal space, rather than to press the opponents.

Eye on: pressure to close the passing lanes, provide balance at the back, mark the opponent on if he is placed in dangerous positions, counter pressing to avoid counter attacks, quick transitions.

4 v 4 exercises

Exercise 38 - 4 v 4: double 2 v 2, alternate pressure and balance



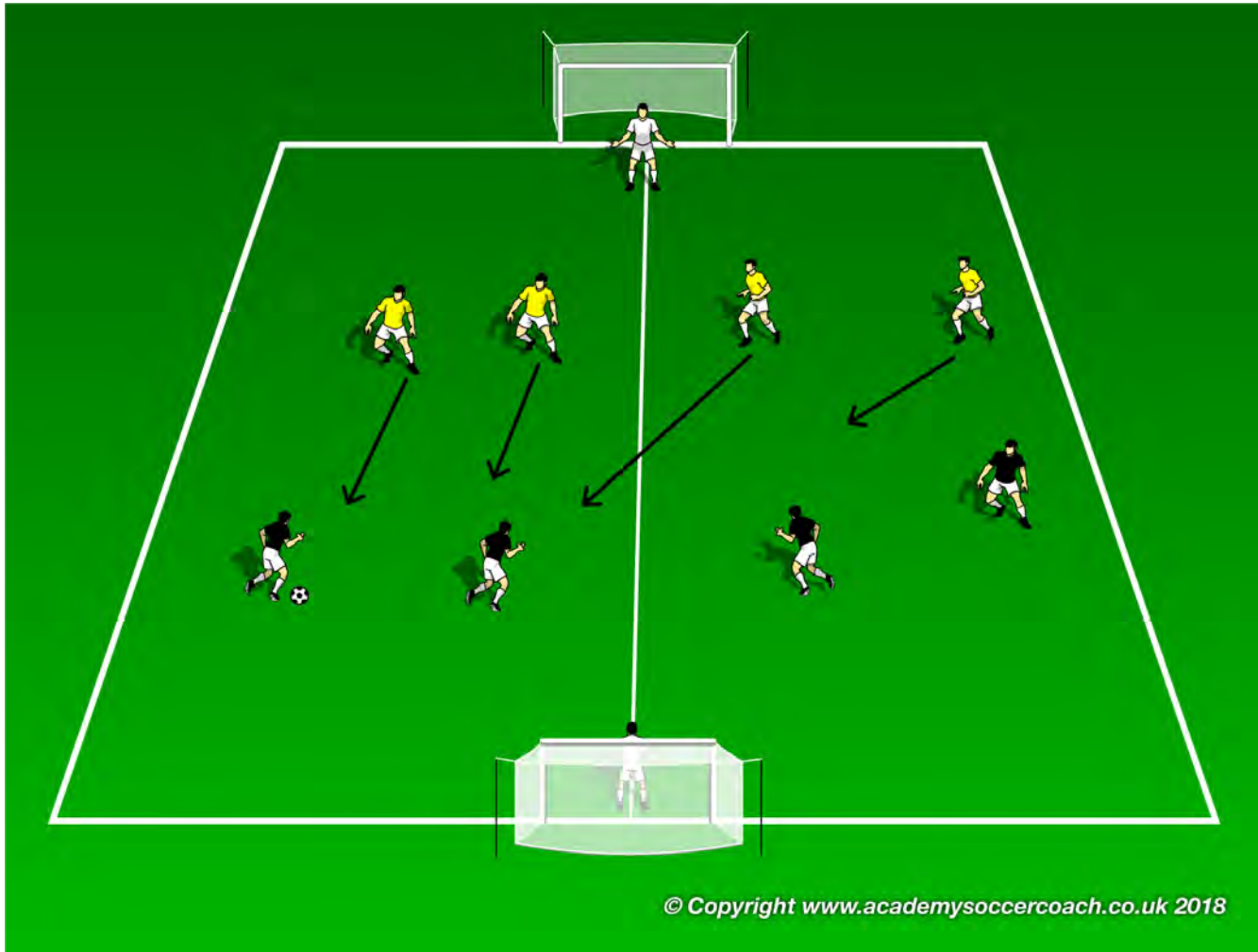
Set-up and Sequence: a 4 v 4 possession duel is played inside a rectangular space and 2 goals with goalkeepers to defend and to attack are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The playing area is divided into 2 parts vertically; 2 v 2 duels are played inside each area.

The coach decides which is the attacking team and the defending team by passing the ball. The 2 defenders of each part, where the ball is being played, must put pressure to prevent the possession team from switching play to other side. The attacking team can finish after a fix number of switches of side. The other 2 defenders must save the goal and be ready to press the first receiver and the other opponent. If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack freely and a 4 v 4 duel is played.

Variation: the coach can play a second ball to manipulate transitions to attack and to defend.

Eye on: pressure to close passing lanes, provide balance at the back, save the space, mark the opponent on if he is placed in dangerous positions, counter pressing to avoid counter attacks, quick transitions.

Exercise 39 - 4 v 4: double 2 v 2, create a strong defense side and cover the weak one.

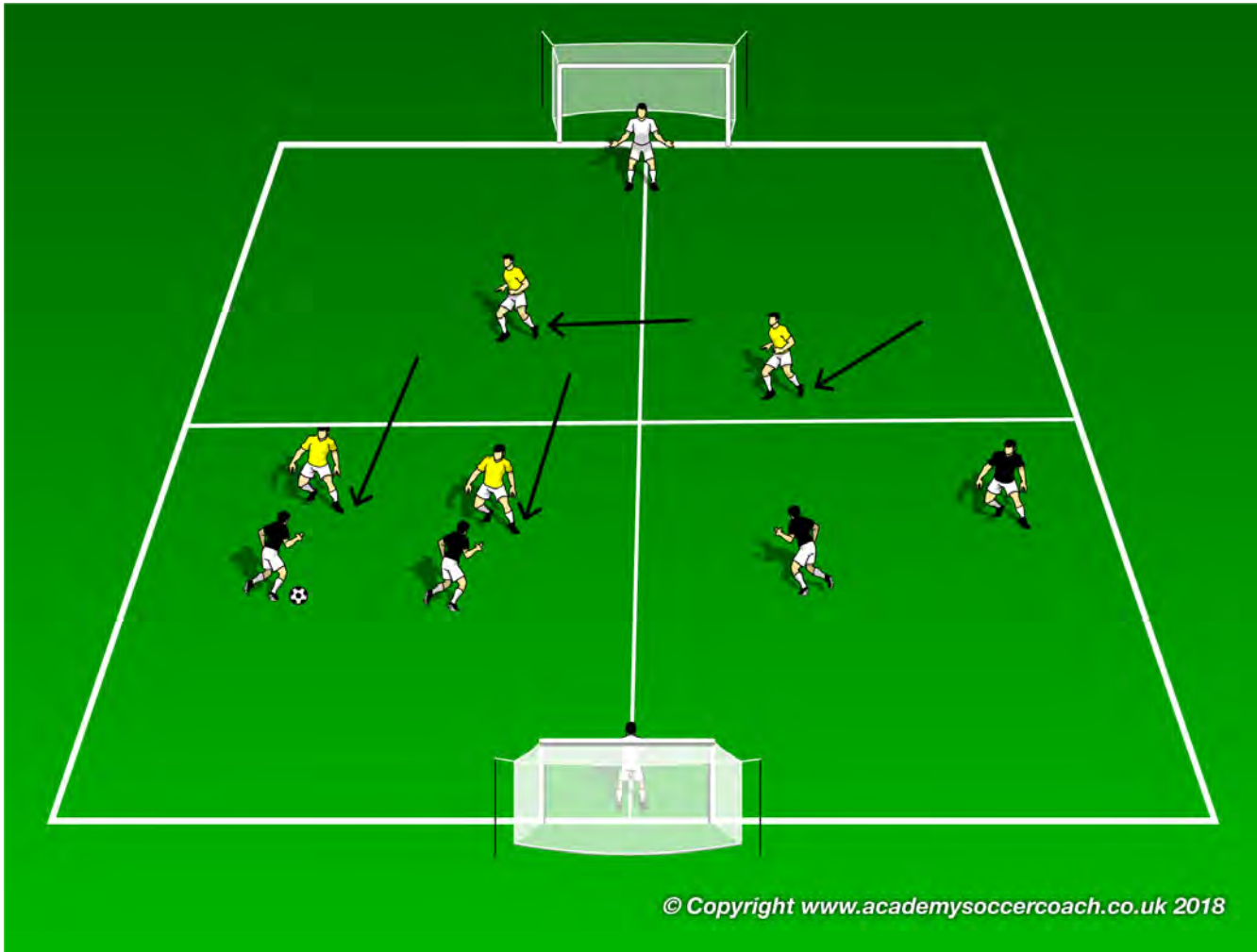


Set-up and Sequence: this practice is a variation of the previous one. A 4 v 4 possession duel is played inside a rectangular space and 2 goals with goalkeepers to defend and to attack are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The playing area is divided into 2 parts vertically; 2 v 2 duels are played inside each area. The coach decides which is the attacking team and the defending team by passing the ball. When a couple of the attacking team has the possession, the defenders inside the same half must be supported by a third teammate coming from the opposite side, to create numerical advantage 3 v 2 and a strong side. The defender on the other half is outnumbered 1 v 2. The goal of the defenders is to recover the possession as quickly as possible to counter attack, avoiding any switch of side by the forwards. If the forwards are able to switch the side, the defender must try to slow down the rhythm of play, waiting for the support of a teammate (2 v 2) or for a new numerical advantage situation 3 v 2. If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack freely and a 4 v 4 duel is played; the team that lost the possession must act immediately to organize a counter-pressing move.

Variation: the coach can play a second ball to manipulate transitions to attack and to defend.

Eye on: pressure to close passing lanes, provide balance at the back, save the space, exploit the strong side and cover the weak one, counter pressing to avoid counter attacks, quick transitions.

Exercise 40 - 4 v 4: double 2 v 2, cover and balance.



Set-up and Sequence: 4 v 4 possession duel is played inside a rectangular space and 2 goals with goalkeepers to defend and to attack are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle. The playing area is divided into 4 parts vertically and horizontally; 2 v 2 duels are played inside half and 2 players are placed inside a quarter of the pitch, as in the picture.

The coach decides which is the attacking team and the defending team by passing the ball. When a couple of the attacking team has the possession inside a quarter of the field, the defenders of the same half and of the quarter in front, run inside the opposition part to put pressure 2 v 2. 1 defender from the opposite side must provide cover behind them and inside the free quarter of the pitch. The fourth defender must be placed near the playing half. This way a safe strong side is created, but a weaker side is left in the other part.

The goal of the defenders is to recover the possession as quickly as possible to counter attack, preventing any switch of side by the forwards and staying balanced at the back.

If the forwards are able to switch the side, the first defender there must try to slow down the rhythm of play, waiting for the support of a teammate (2 v 2) or until the same defense situation is created again.

If the defenders win the ball, they can counter attack freely and a 4 v 4 duel is played; the team that lost the possession must act immediately to organize a counter-pressing move.

Variation:

1. The coach can play a second ball to manipulate transitions to attack and to defend.
2. If the possession team loses the ball, the same defense pattern must be created as soon as possible.

Eye on: pressure to close passing lanes, provide cover and balance at the back, save the space, exploit the strong side and cover the weak one, counter pressing to avoid counter attacks, quick transitions.