

# 40

# POSSESSION

## EXERCISES

*by Luca Bertolini*



# 40 Possession Games

*By*

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# Table of Contents

Introduction: how to calculate and consider the average of ball possession?	4
Does a higher ball possession create a competitive advantage and leads to score and win?	7
Types of ball possession	6
Does a higher ball possession create a competitive advantage and leads to score and win?	7
Possession and positional play	7
Direct play vs. possession play	8
How and why playing with a possession style?	12
Exercises	14

## **Introduction: how to calculate and consider the average of ball possession?**

Pep Guardiola, in *Pep Confidential*, by Martí Perarnau, says that possession should not be done just for the sake of it. Ball possession needs to be done with an ultimate objective in mind.

Pep Guardiola says, “It’s not possession or one-touch passing that matters, but the intention behind it. The percentage of possession a team has or the number of passes that a group or an individual makes is irrelevant in itself. What’s crucial is the reason they are doing these things, what they are aiming to achieve and what the team plans to do when they have the ball. That’s what matters!”

In the book, Guardiola also explains the 15-pass build-up rule: “Having the ball is important if you are going for 15 consecutive passes in the middle of the field in order to maintain your shape, whilst at the same time upsetting the opposition’s organization. How do you disorganize them? With fast, tight, focused passing as part of this 15-move sequence.”

The debate around soccer ball possession started and increased during the Spanish “tiki-taka” of Guardiola’s Barcelona and of the national Spanish team seasons. The perception of the importance of ball possession is not recent. For example, Johan Crujff used to say: “Without the ball, you can’t win. If we have the ball, they can’t score.”

How is ball possession calculated and is the focus on ball possession a synonymous with success? Do teams play better if they are focused on ball possession, or do better teams have higher quality, and is this the only reason why they can complete more passes?

During the 2000’s, possession percentage has been considered the main key factor to judge the quality of a team: the higher the ball possession percentage, the better the team was. Even if possession percentage progressively lost importance, it still a key factor to understand and for a complete assessment of a team philosophy or style of play.

Or better yet, the detection method of the ball possession has changed, as it doesn't really matter the time of possession of a soccer team anymore; the number of completed passes in a game has become the main theme to be focused on. Nowadays, the possession percentage is calculated on these data, paying attention to not overstate the percentages related to those teams with high amounts of short passes in the build-up phase (Manchester City and Napoli, for example).

A new idea about possession percentage considers it as the possession starts upon a player controlling the ball and ends when they no longer do; the total possessions for each team are then added up and divided by the total number of possessions.

The methods have the goal to understand if, when and how the possession phase of a team is effective, and if it leads to goals and victories.

Possession play means more time spent in the opposing half, more chances to score goals, less time on the ball for the opponent and then fewer chances to score. The possession team maybe vulnerable to counter attacks when the possession is lost and the pressure phase is not well organized.

The slow play rhythm means losing out on counter attacking opportunities. The attacking phase may become predictable for the defense if the speed and rhythm of play are not properly controlled and

varied. If the opposition goal is well covered defensively and if the opposition is prepared to put many players inside the final third (their first third), finishing becomes very hard as quick opportunities may be wasted; again, variations of rhythm and speed of play are crucial.

Keeping the possession eventually makes the opposing team frustrated and more prone to mistakes. The possessing team controls the pitch, analyzing all the options and dictating the phases of play and opposition. Players' vision and speed of play are crucial.

Being able to pass the ball precisely and fast is important: the more a team moves the ball, retaining possession, the higher their chances to disorganize the opponents' lines and to exploit attacking opportunities are. One way to increase such efficiency is to move the ball fast. To do so, being able to pass it with as few touches as possible is the key.

On the other side, if a high defensive line is needed to play with a possession style, the team may be vulnerable to counterattacks.

## Types of ball possession

When does ball possession begin? This time may be set to the moment of first contact with the ball of the player, or, more realistic, the ball is considered to be in a player's possession when it's around his action space. Ball possession can be then defined as follows:

**Team ball possession** is a sequence of **individual ball possession phases**, which are made of one or more phases in which an action can be performed with the ball, becoming **individual ball actions**. It is possible for an individual ball action to be separated from the phases without ball control (while the ball is in the air, as instance). An **individual ball control** is an individual ball action where the ball control is present. **Team ball control** is the union of all team ball phases; **team play making** is the team ball control plus the intermediate void phases.

**Individual ball possession** begins the moment a player is able to perform an action with the ball and it ends the moment for another player begins.

**Team ball possession** begins the moment when an individual ball possession for one team's players begins and it ends with the first opposition individual ball possession begins.

The time interval in which a player can perform an action with the ball is then separated out from this simple definition of ball possession. This interval no longer includes the time from the ball being passed on until the start of individual ball possession of the next player. It is important to make this distinction in view of the fact that the configuration on the pitch during this time interval determines the tactical options available and their chances of success.

**Individual ball action** of a player begins the moment this player is able to perform an action with the ball and had no one else prior to this. It ends the moment the player is unable to perform any further action with the ball.

A further internal distinction can be made based on the level of ball control exhibited. If a player has the ball sufficiently under control and he can consciously choose between several play options or if he must attempt to deliver the ball to a specific area of the pitch being extreme pressure.

**Individual ball control** for a player begins when the individual for this player begins and he is able to decide between several play options during the individual ball action. It ends the moment this particular individual ball action of the player ends.

**Team ball control** is the union of all individual ball controls; the period of time during which any player in the team has control of the ball. The "team playmaking" includes the periods of time during which the ball is being passed between the players of a team. Team Ball Control of a team begins when an individual ball control for one of this team's players begins and ends as soon as the individual ball control of this player ends.

**Team Playmaking** for a team begins when an individual ball control for one team's players begins and the team has had no other individual ball control immediately prior to this. It ends with the last individual ball control before the next individual ball action of a player of the opposing team.

## **Does a higher ball possession create a competitive advantage and leads to score and win?**

Possession style of play can surely give competitive advantage; the average number of passes that a team is able to complete every match is always related to the average number of goals that a team is able to score. The average of goals that a team scores in one match is usually a certain percentage of the average of pass accuracy. The amount of the passes is then related to pass accuracy, which is correlated to the length of the passes themselves (the shorter are obviously the more accurate); and also, there is a high correlation between the number of short passes (<25 yards) and the number of scored goals. The number of goals a team scores clearly depends on the number of shots they take and moreover on the shots on target.

The shot is the final act of a quick or an articulated build-up, or a set piece and the build-up phase is a series of passes. If a team is technically skilled enough to keep the possession, with a pass accuracy of 100%, during an attacking phase, then the result can only be a shot (the team is supposed playing to score); it means that when a team is able to produce many accurate passes, its chances to take shots on goal would increase and moreover the chances to shoot from more suitable positions to score.

What determines pass accuracy? It is players' technical abilities and how the players interact among one another. Pass accuracy improves when the percentage of short passes (<25 yards) on total passes increases; this is the reason why teammates should always provide multiple passing options near the ball carrier.

To play with short passes rather than with long ones requires the players to be well-positioned on the pitch to form triangles, offering nearby solutions to the teammate with the ball; more passes can be completed staying closer together, and fewer counterattack solutions to the opponents are conceded when the ball is lost. As Johan Crujff was used to say, it isn't the man on the ball who decides where the ball goes, but the players without the ball. Their running actions determine the next pass.

The number of passes, by itself, cannot really identify if a team is successfully possession oriented or not. More important than the number of passes is therefore where on the pitch a team touches the ball and the speed of the passes between the opposition's lines.

## **Possession and positional play**

Coaches like Pep Guardiola and Maurizio Sarri are two of the main believers of positional play, a training method and style of possession play too that looks for control of the ball as one of main characteristics and targets.

Positional Play ("*Juego de Posición*," in Spanish) is mainly related to Johan Crujff, even if it was first developed at Ajax by Jack Reynolds and then by Rinus Michels, who exported the "total football" to Barcelona. It is mainly based on the positional references of the players, to make a team able to maintain a useful shape both during the attacking phase (be prepared in case of loss of possession) and during defending phase (be ready to attack if the possession is recovered).

Good positioning means pass accuracy, which is correlated with the number of passes a team is able to complete. As we already stated, the number of passes is positively correlated with the number of shots on target and with the number of goals. A team's ability to produce a fluid build-up influences the results.



## **Direct play vs. possession play**

### Definitions

#### **Direct Play Defined**

- 1) Players pass the ball forward very often or as soon as possible**
- 2) Passes are often long and vertical and toward the opposition goal**
- 3) Passes are played behind the opponents lines and moreover at the beck of the defense line**
- 4) Second balls are crucial**
- 5) Goalkeepers usually plays long balls as solution against opposition pressure**
- 6) Throw-ins and free kicks are played toward the final third**

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#### **Possession Play Defined**

- 1) Passes are played in all directions (360°); sides of play are switched many times during each possession phase**
- 2) Angles and passes lanes are created by players movements; passes can be into teammates' feet or through the space**
- 3) Defense and midfield lines are the play makers of the possession phase**
- 4) Wide play sequences are used to open deep spaces, create weak areas and exploit them**
- 5) The moves start from the back; passes, throw-ins and set-pieces are made to keep the possession first**

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### **Direct Play Technical Key Factors**

- 1) Low number of consecutive passes to building up (short passing sequences of 4 or less passes)**
- 2) Direct and long passes over midfield; attacks moving fast over and through midfield**
- 3) Early and forced deep passes or dribbles**
- 4) Attacks and finishing phases with at least 1 long pass and a maximum of 2/3 passes before shooting**
- 5) Counterattacks as first idea after regaining the possession**

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### **Possession Play Technical Key Factor**

- 1) Skilled players are crucial**
- 2) High number of consecutive passes; at least 5 passes or more to build up from the back**
- 3) Long and elaborate play, attacks with short passes only (five or more passes)**
- 4) Attacks moving slowly through midfield as indirect playing strategies**
- 5) Finishing phase starts only when a clear space is created**
- 6) Safe possession is better than counter attacks attempts**

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### Arguments for Possession Play

- 1) The possession phase is usually long;  
the opposition hasn't the ball, so they can't attack
- 2) The speed of play and the rhythm  
of the game can be controlled
- 3) It's possible to rest with the ball, when the rhythm is too high,  
the opponents are good (or better), or the team is leading the match
- 4) Attacking and finishing phases are well  
supported thanks to high team block
- 5) Opposition counter attacks  
are prevented by a high pressing defensive block
- 6) The possession is lost with many players near the ball

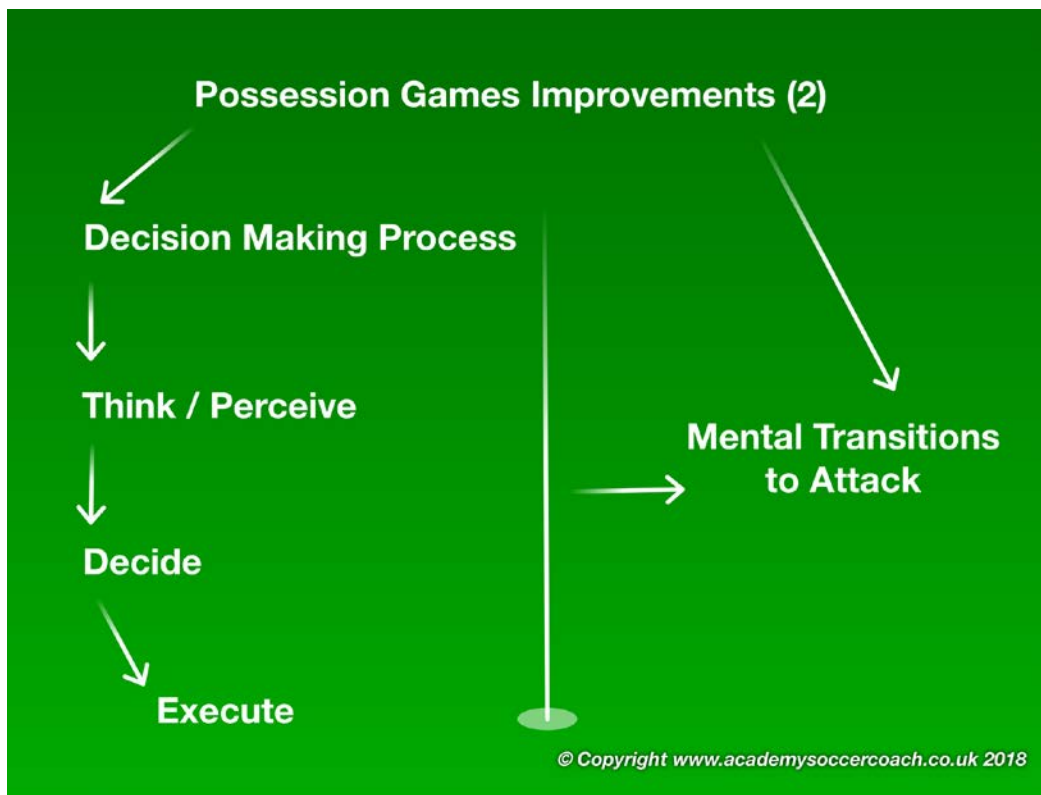
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### Arguments for Direct Play

- 1) The ball is near the opposition goal  
within a short and quick time
- 2) Forward repeated sprint ability is crucial;  
opposition defenders may face troubles  
in covering depth spaces
- 3) Possession is lost away from the own goal;  
less goals are supposed to be conceded
- 4) It prevents the risks of mistakes and loss of possession  
while playing out from the back or in the middle third
- 5) Opposition counter attacks  
are prevented by a low defensive block

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Improvements of possession play



## **How and why playing with a possession style?**

Possession is a principle of play which can be practiced, taught, and coached. Players decide and choose the best solution while in possession; for this reason is very important, one of the key factors in soccer.

Which are the principles of play (individual or team) that can be coached through possession games (possession play)?

### **Play the way you face**

Often the first idea of a player is to turn and dribble the ball toward the opposition goal, but they must be coached to perform quicker and easier passes toward the direction they face, with one or two touches, rather than thinking to dribble against 4 or 5 defenders. This way the speed of play will increase, making the possession phase easier.

### **Play away from pressure**

Players should be coached to recognize the overload areas of the field where pressure action may be taken by the opposition. Once they understand and realize these situations, the player in possession must be able to pass toward the easiest option, out of the pressure area, and the teammates must be able to be available and unmarked. The goal is a team still in possession as opposed to a team that is now defending.

### **Create connections**

Players should be coached to maintain depth and width, what is considered to be good team shape. Team shape creates connections between the players, who should be coached to pass and receive into the space. Focus on the timing of these runs, on the verbal cues, speaking, and non-verbal cues (eye contact, body movement) and control of the ball are crucial; possession games are very useful to coach connections. Inside and outside overlaps or 3rd man runs are classic examples of these connections.

### **Pass and dribble on diagonals**

Playing flat at the back and in the middle third is a risky way to give a counter attack chances to the opposition. The players should be coached to build up and attack with diagonal passes. Players should be also coached to dribble on a diagonal to create multiple options. Diagonal trajectories are always difficult to defend.

### **Support play on good angles**

To support the moves on good angles is important when playing on diagonals. Support must come at angles in the passing lanes and from every player throughout a game. The roles must constantly change as the ball moves. The whole team must understand positioning but also all the players must have proper body positions when in support.

### **Make a pass and move**

After passing, the mistake of watching the ball is very common, moreover for youth players; they should be coached to make a pass and then move, not watching at the ball. If it were possible, moving forward would be the best solution; it can be very effective especially inside the attacking third, if the timing is correct. In general, passing and moving keep the attacks dynamic and forces the defenders to adjust their shape constantly.

### **Receive the ball across your body into space**

Players should be coached to receive the ball across their body into space (the ball is in front of their feet and facing the open space) while teammates are moving to open spaces and then to move into another space themselves. To receive a pass into a corner or facing away from the rest of the team are not useful solution to keep the possession safe and the possession phase dynamic.

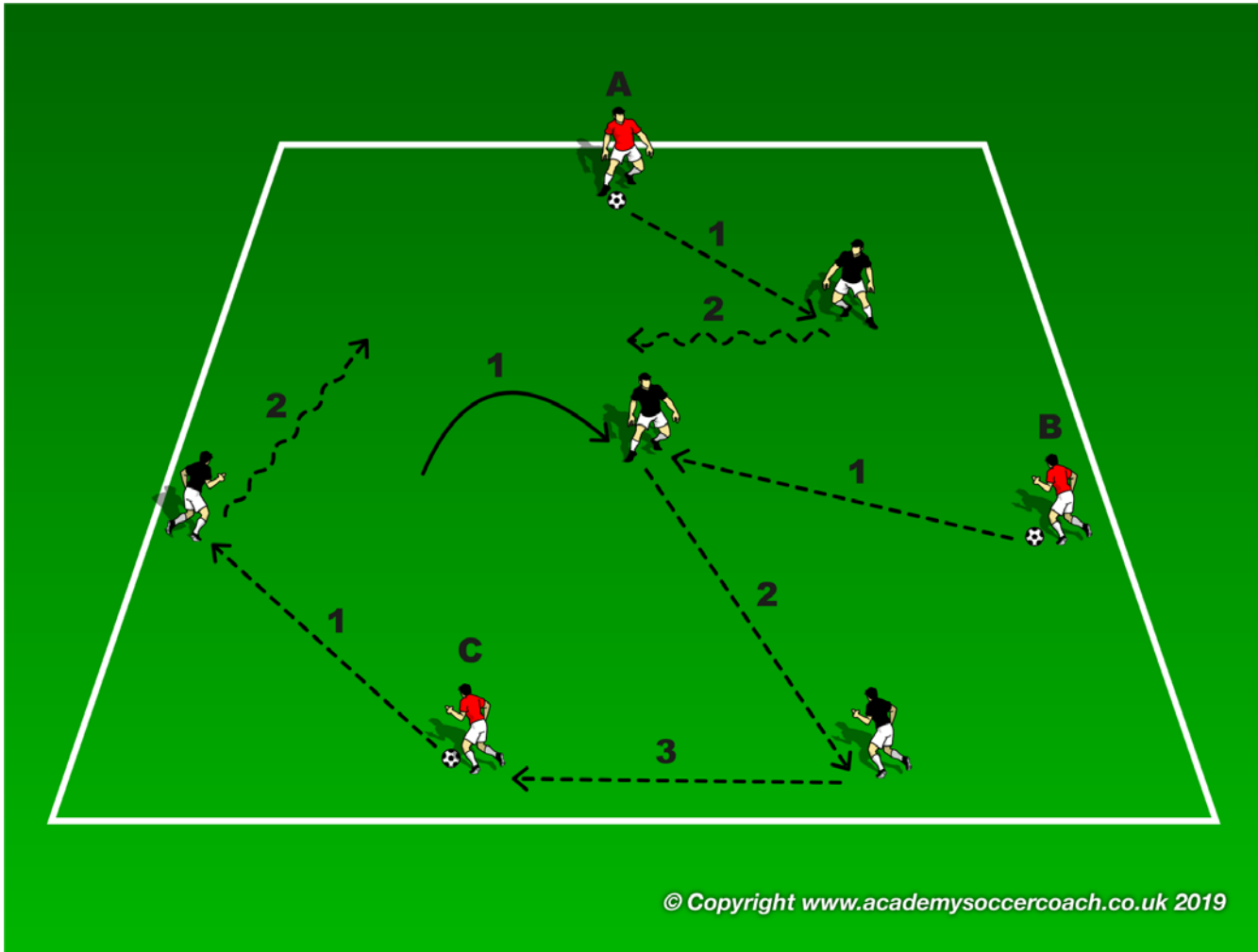
### **Speed of play**

The first touch is the key to successful possession of play at speed. Speed of play is the key to successful possession at higher levels. Players should be coached to be skilled with a proper first touch within multidirectional possession games.

These are the 4 options for a quick first touch that can help the speed of possession play:

1. First touch forward to go forward while attacking whenever possible (the first defender is off the ball and the receiving player has space to touch forward). He should look forward to check the attacking options to maintain possession of the ball if the move can't be finished.
2. Backward touch to go forward with a second touch; the receiving player is cut off by a defender from going forward and he touches backward to be a little away from the opponent and to check any forward best attacking option.
3. Backward first touch to play a backward pass (the defense is tight and the entire team is behind the ball). To pass backward allows keeping the possession.
4. Forward touch to then play backwards, if the ball carrier is under pressure after the first touch and there's no chance to play forward toward a free teammate and the risk to lose the ball is high.

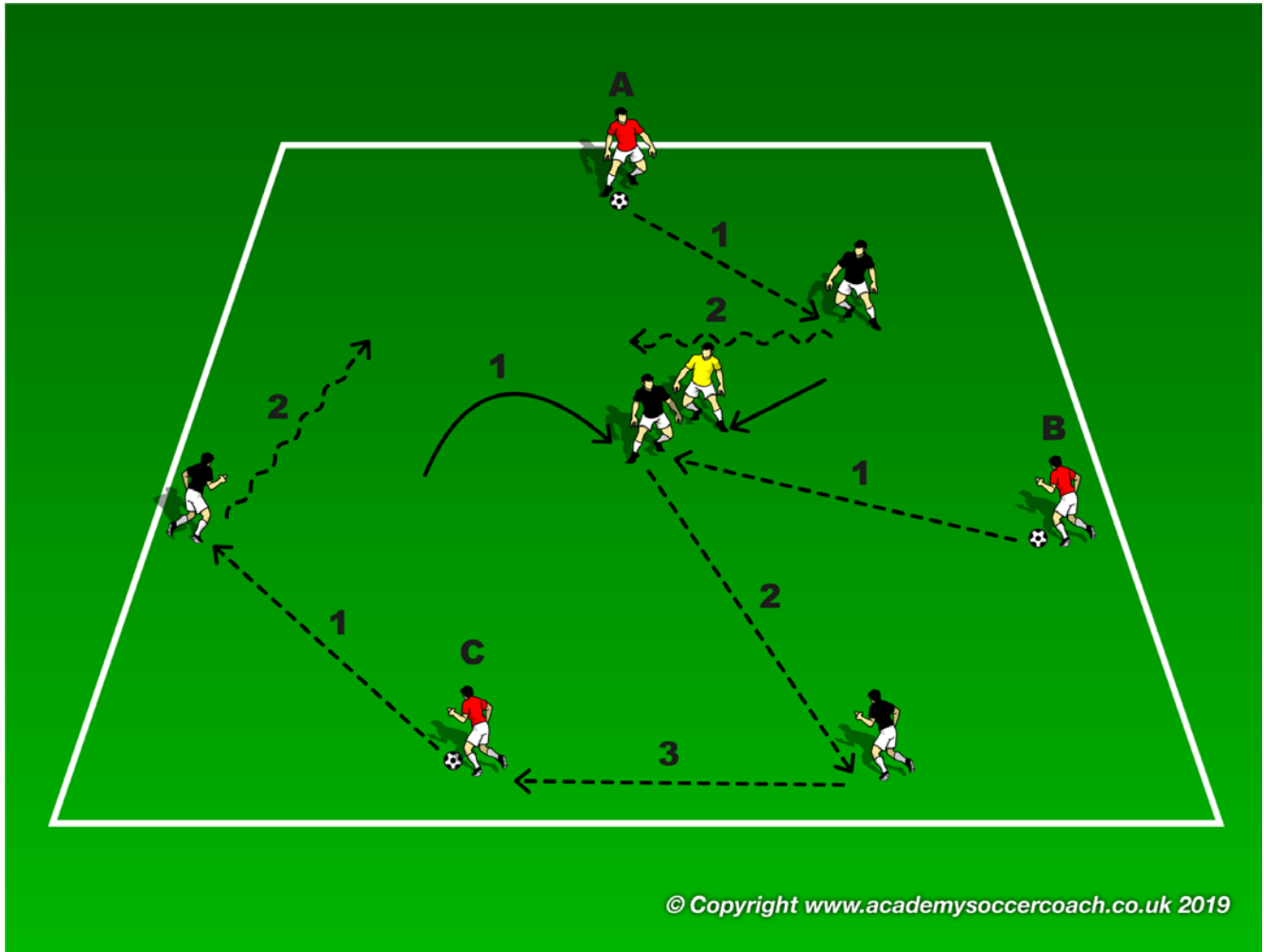
Exercise 1 (play the way you face): ball circulation - 1



**Set-up and sequence:** 7 players (3 reds with the ball and 4 blacks without) are placed inside a rectangular area and they dribble and run freely. 3 of the 4 black players receive a pass from the reds following the coach signal (a whistle, as instance - 1) and the fourth without possession must move to be an easy passing option for one of the receivers (2), passing again to a red player to complete the sequence (3). He should be placed in front of the teammates who had to change space to receive, as in the picture. The others in possession of the ball must dribble it till the sequence must be started again.

**Coaching points:** move without the ball, move properly to be an easy and quick passing option.

## Exercise 2 (play the way you face): ball circulation under pressure - 1

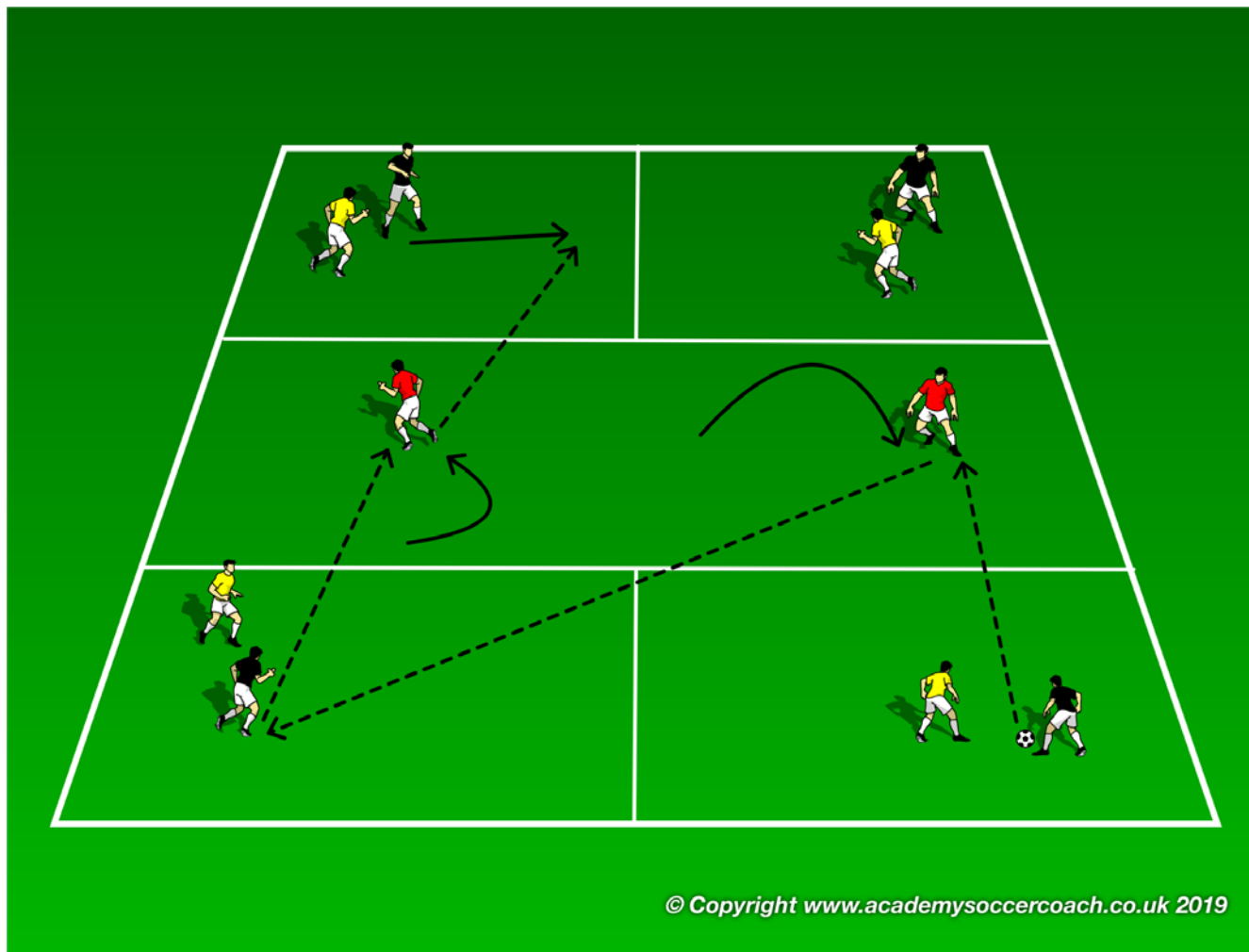


**Set-up and sequence:** 8 players (3 reds with the ball, 4 blacks without and 1 yellow defender) are placed inside a rectangular area and they dribble and run freely. 3 of the 4 black players (one of them is under the pressure of a defender) receive a pass from the reds following the coach signal (a whistle, as instance - 1) and the fourth without possession must move to be an easy passing option for the teammate who receives under pressure (2), passing again to a red player to complete the sequence (3). He should be placed in front of the teammates who had to change space to receive because of the opposition pressure, as in the picture. The others in possession of the ball must dribble it till the sequence must be started again.

**Coaching points:** move without the ball, control and receive under pressure, move properly to be an easy and quick passing option for a teammate under pressure.



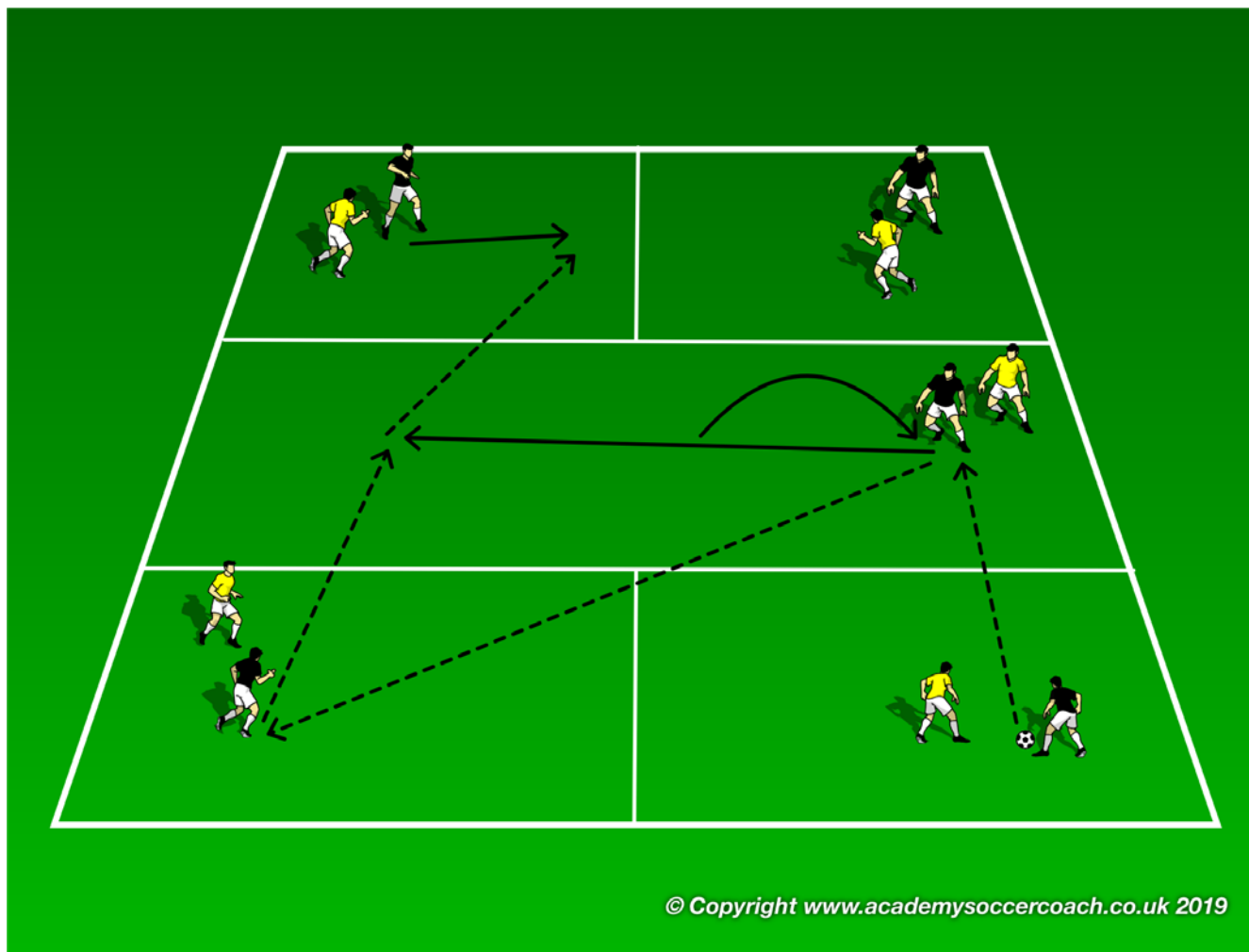
### Exercise 3 (play the way you face): ball circulation - 2



**Set-up and sequence:** 10 players (4 blacks, 4 yellows and 2 reds) are placed inside a rectangular area that is divided into 5 zones, as in the picture. 1 v 1 duels are played inside the corner zones and the red players are free to receive and pass all over the middle area, being an easy passing options for the players of the possession team. The ball must circulate among the outer areas, through the red players, passing vertically or on diagonals. When all the players of a color have touched the ball together with the reds, the team gains 1 point.

**Coaching points:** ball circulation, play out from the pressure, be an easy passing option.

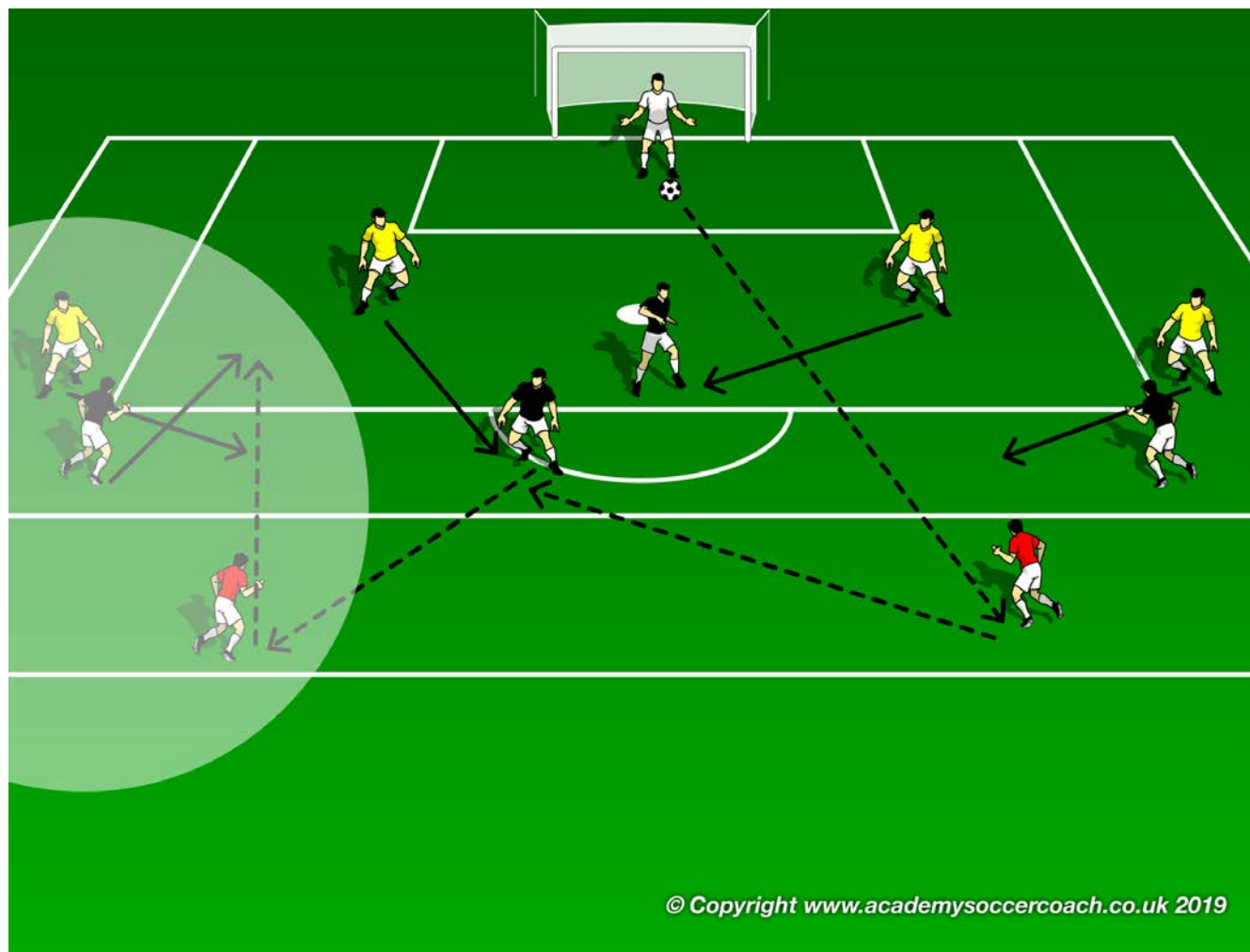
## Exercise 4 (play the way you face): ball circulation under pressure - 2



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous one. 10 players (5 blacks and 5 yellows) are placed inside a rectangular area that is divided into 5 zones as in the picture. 1 v 1 duels are played inside the corner zones and in the middle area, where the players must be easy passing options for the outer teammates. The ball must circulate among the outer areas, through the center one, passing and receiving vertically or on diagonals; the ball must always circulate through the center and directly from an outer area to another. The center players must have link role. When all the players of a color have touched the ball together with the reds, the team gains 1 point.

**Coaching points:** ball circulation, play out from the pressure, be an easy passing option.

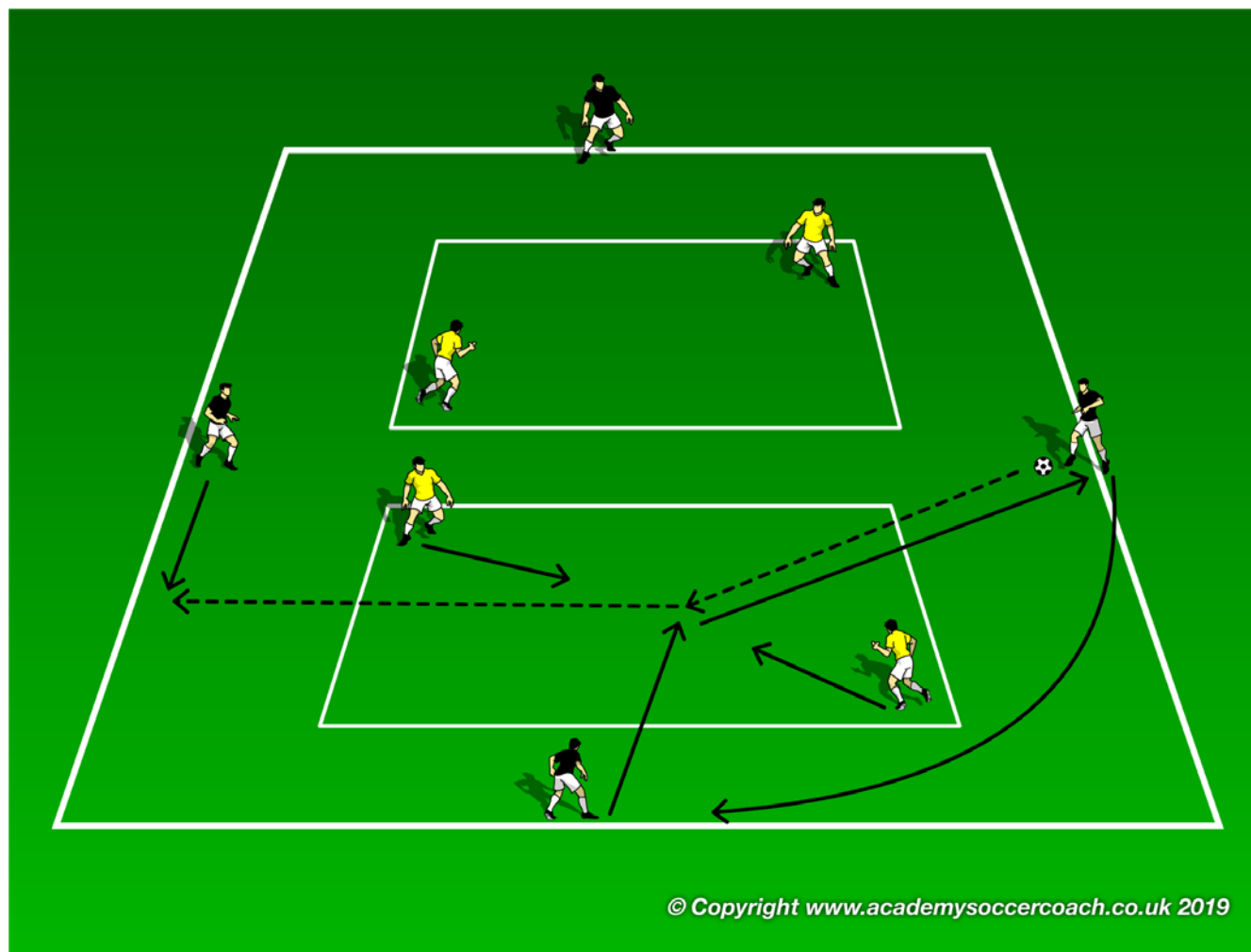
Exercise 5 (play the way you face): 1-4-2 v 2-3-1 (1)



**Set-up and sequence:** 1 goalkeeper and 4 defenders against 4 black attackers are placed inside an area 5 yards longer than the penalty area. 2 red free players are placed inside a further 10 yards area, acting as midfielders for both the teams. The goalkeepers passes the ball toward one of the midfielders and the attacking move must be developed to score playing always to the nearest and easiest option. If the goalkeeper passes to the defenders, their goal is to keep the possession, passing the ball toward the red midfielders.

**Coaching points:** ball circulation, play toward the easiest passing options, be an easy passing option.

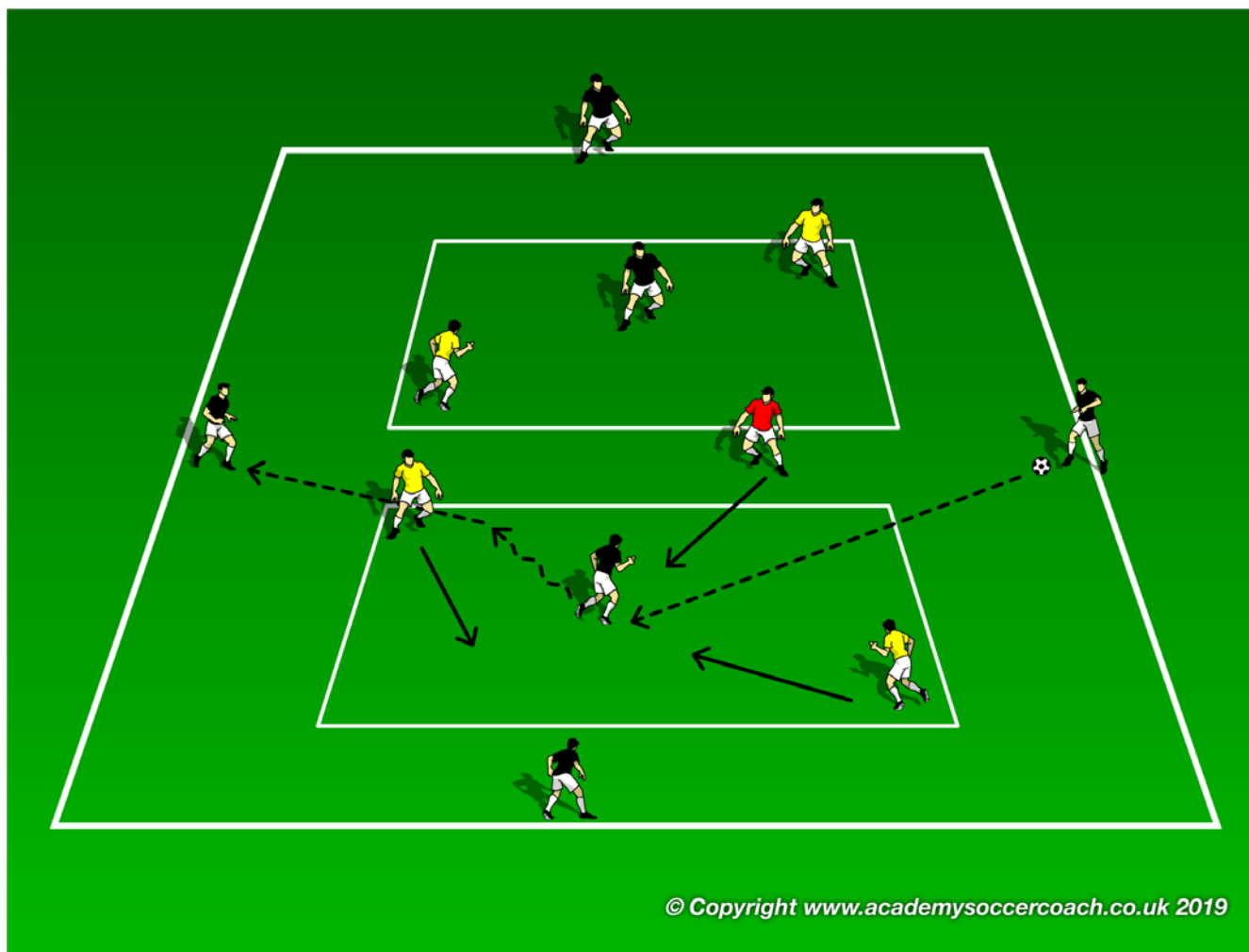
## Exercise 6 (play away from pressure): alternate 1 v 2



**Set-up and sequence:** 8 players (4 blacks and 4 yellows) are placed inside a rectangular area that includes 2 more smaller zones, where the defenders are asked to play. The players of the possession team are placed along the sidelines of the set-up. The goal of the possession team is to circulate the ball, waiting for a teammate who runs inside one of the receiving area, to control the ball under the pressure of the defenders (1 v 2) and to play out. The passer and the receiver exchange their position after every complete sequence. If the defenders win the ball, the roles of the teams must be switched.

**Coaching points:** control and receive under pressure and outnumbered, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage.

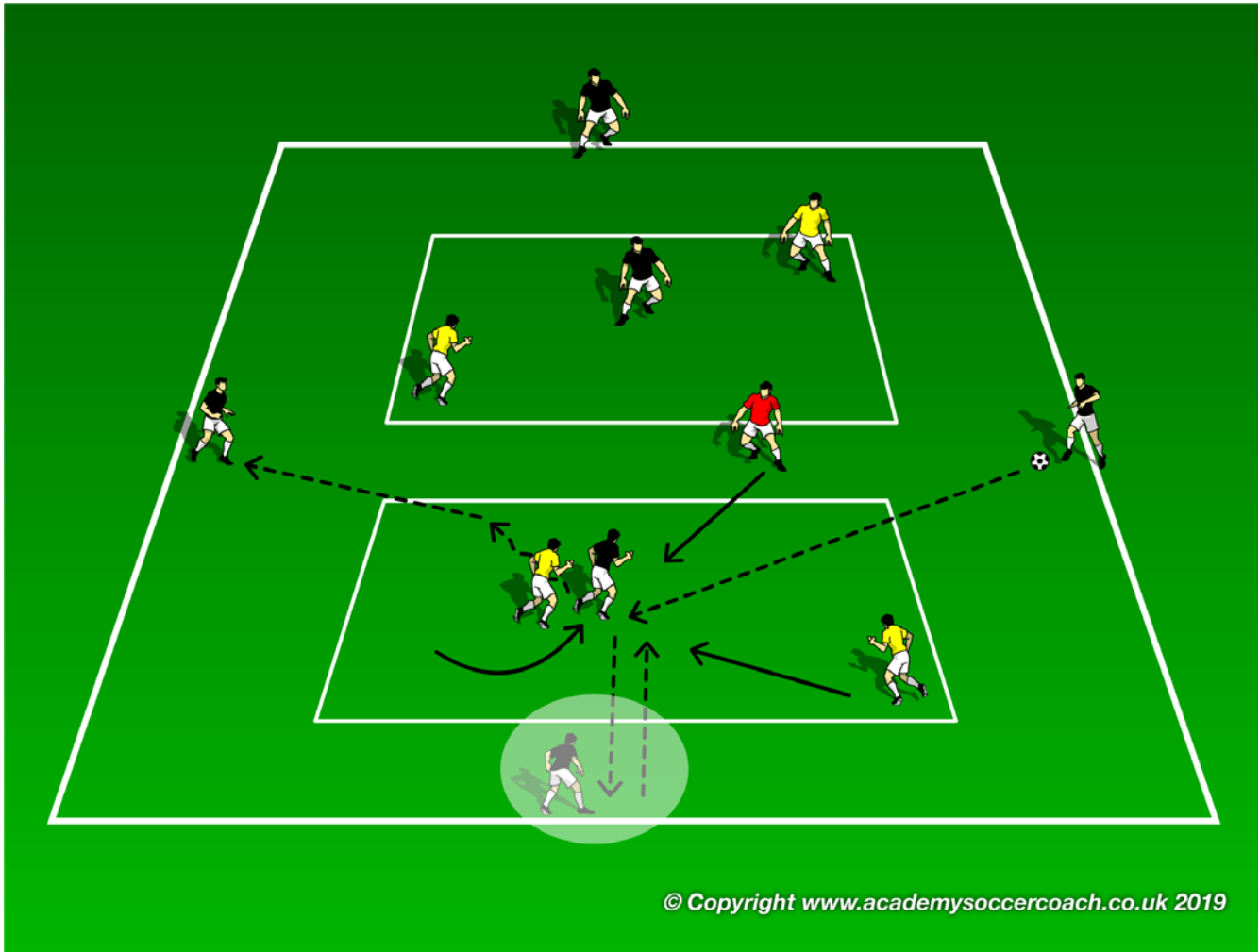
## Exercise 7 (play away from pressure): alternate 1 v 3 - 1



**Set-up and sequence:** 11 players (6 blacks and 4 yellows and 1 red free player) are placed inside a rectangular area that includes 2 more smaller zones, where 2 defenders and 1 forward are asked to play. The other 4 players of the possession team are placed along the sidelines of the set-up. The goal of the possession team is to circulate the ball to allow a teammate inside the center areas receiving a pass, to control the ball under the pressure of the defenders and of the incoming red free player (1 v 3) and to play out. The passer and the receiver exchange their positions after every complete sequence. The goal of the defenders is to create a strong area around the ball to win it back; if they are able to win it, the roles of the teams must be switched. The red player always wins the ball for the defending team.

**Coaching points:** control and receive under pressure and outnumbered, create a strong area near the ball, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage.

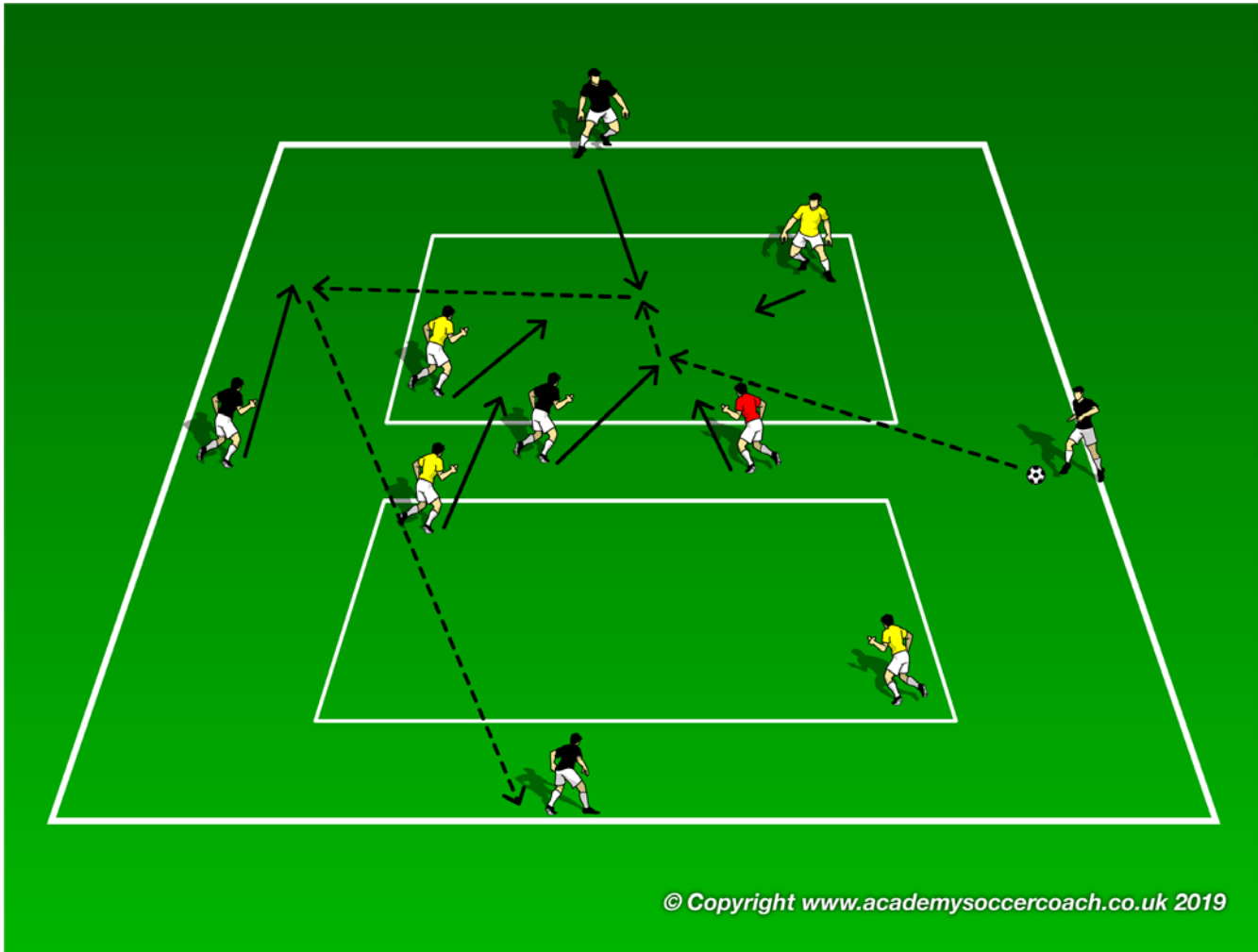
## Exercise 8 (play away from pressure): alternate 1 v 3 - 1



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous one. 11 players (6 blacks and 4 yellows and 1 red free player) are placed inside a rectangular area that includes 2 smaller zones, where 2 defenders and 1 forward are asked to play. The other 4 players of the possession team are placed along the sidelines of the set-up. The goal of the possession team is to circulate the ball to allow a teammate inside the center areas receiving a pass, to control the ball under the pressure of the defenders and of the incoming red free player (1 v 3) and to play out toward a 3rd man, after a wall passing combination. The passer and the receiver exchange their positions after every complete sequence. The goal of the defenders is to create a strong area around the ball to win it back; if they are able to win it, the roles of the teams must be switched. The red player always wins the ball for the defending team.

**Coaching points:** control and receive under pressure and outnumbered, create a strong area near the ball, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage.

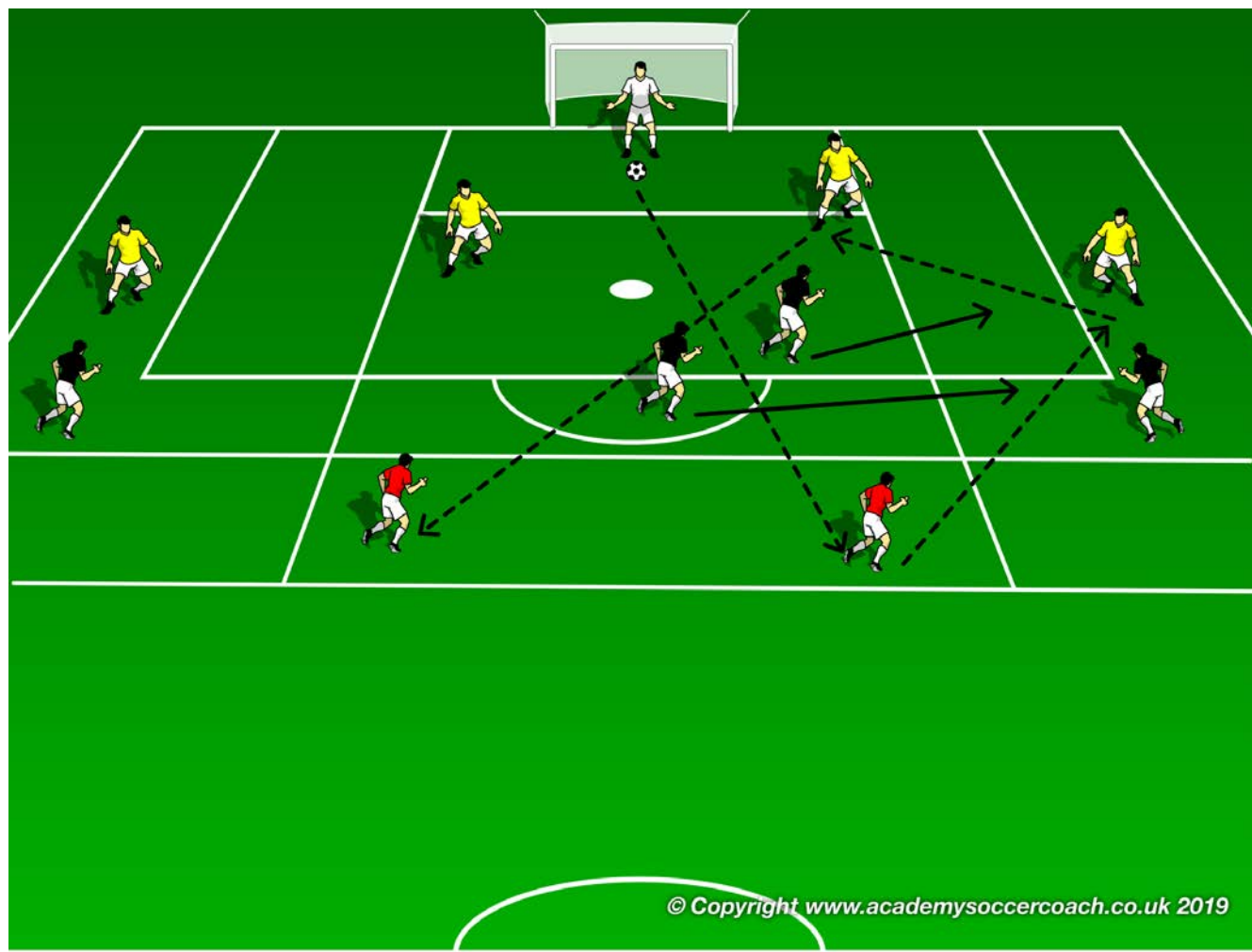
Exercise 9 (play away from pressure): 2 v 4 to switch the side



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is another variation of the num.7. 10 players (5 blacks and 4 yellows and 1 red free player) are placed inside a rectangular area that includes 2 smaller zones, where 2 defenders are asked to be placed at the beginning. 4 players of the possession team are placed along the sidelines of the set-up and the fifth one starts in the middle. The goal of the possession team is to circulate the ball to allow 2 teammates inside the center areas receiving a pass, to control the ball under the pressure of the defenders (2 of that area, the red free player and the fourth one coming from the opposite center area) and to play out toward a 3rd man, after a wall passing combination. The goal of the defenders is to create a strong area around the ball to win it back; if they are able to win it, the roles of the teams must be switched. The red player always wins the ball for the defending team.

**Coaching points:** control and receive under pressure and outnumbered, create a strong area near the ball, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage.

Exercise 10 (play away from pressure): 1-4-2 v 2-3-1 (2)

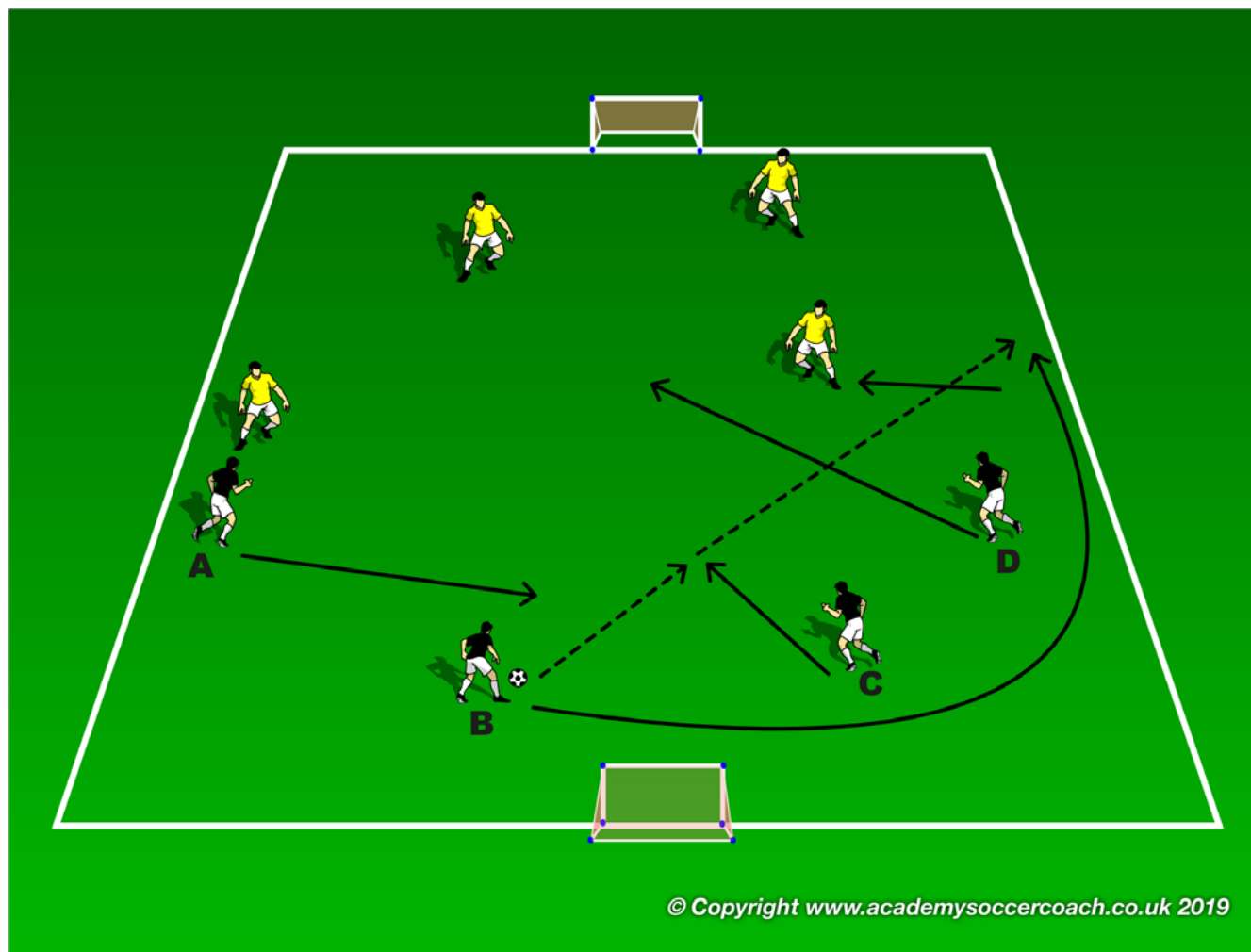


**Set-up and sequence:** 1 goalkeeper and 4 defenders against 4 black attackers are placed inside an area 5 yards longer than the penalty area (the playing area is divided into 3 parts). 2 red free players are placed inside a middle 10 yards area, acting as midfielders for both the teams. The goalkeeper passes the ball toward one of the midfielders who passes back to a fullback; the yellow players must keep the possession, passing the ball to the second red midfielder as soon as possible. The black players must try to create strong areas near the ball to recover the possession (3 v 1 or 3 v 2); if they can, they must shoot as soon as possible.

**Coaching points:** control and receive under pressure and outnumbered, create a strong area near the ball, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage.



## Exercise 11 (create connections): 4 v 4 (1) - overlaps



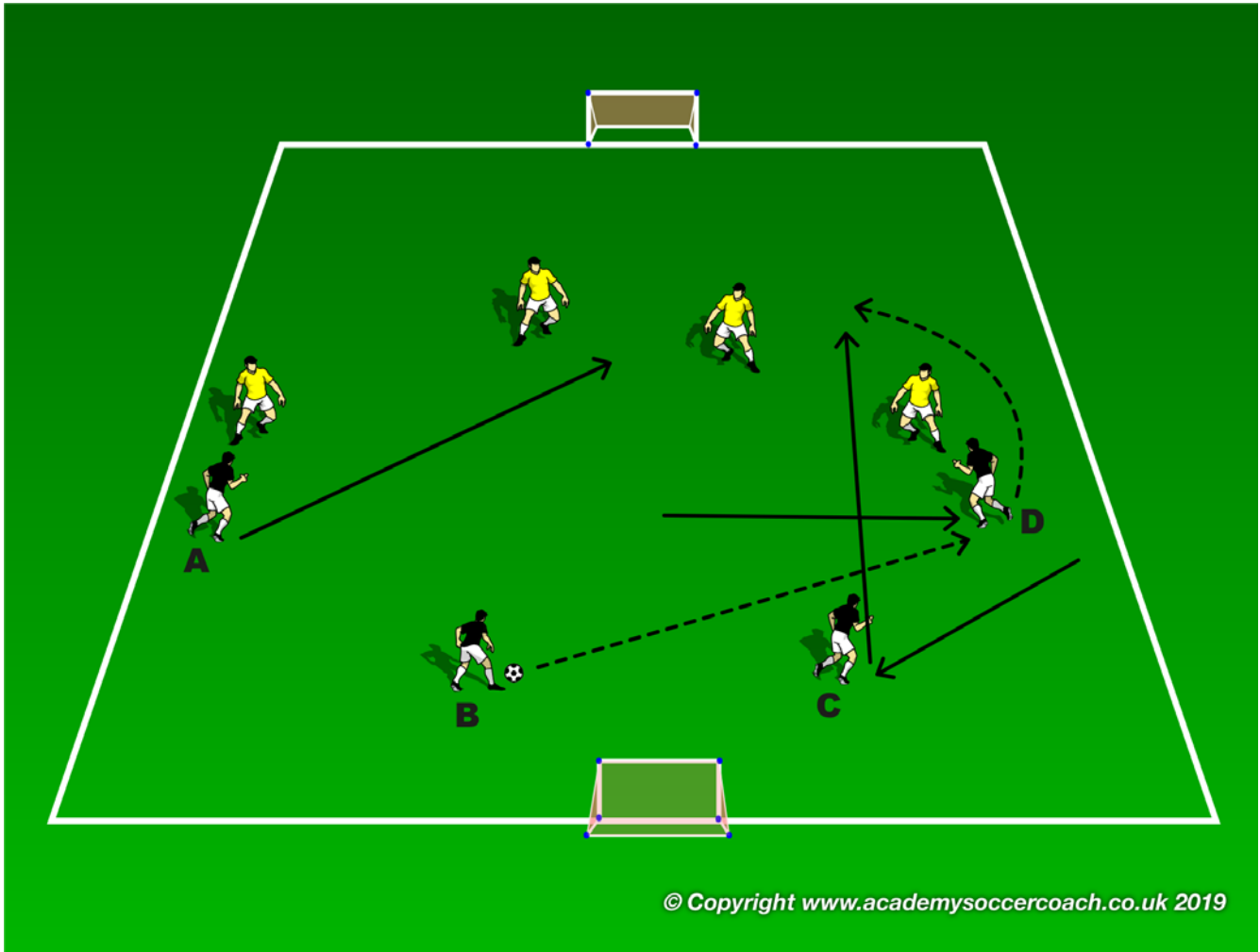
**Set-up and sequence:** 2 teams of 4 players each are placed in a rectangular set-up and 2 mini-goals are placed in the center of the end lines, as in the picture. The team with possession must build up and finish as follow:

- After a first forward pass (B to C), the receiver must wait for an overlap of the passer.
- The third teammate must run deep as the overlapping player receives (D).
- The fourth player must provide balance shifting across from the opposite side (A).
- The first receiver of the move (C) must help the attacking move from the back.

**Variation:** the players decide the overlapping one and the team shape positioning (but the basic shape must be respected).

**Coaching points:** coordinated movements of the players, speed of play to create connections, quality of passes and receptions.

Exercise 12 (create connections): 4 v 4 (2) - inside overlaps



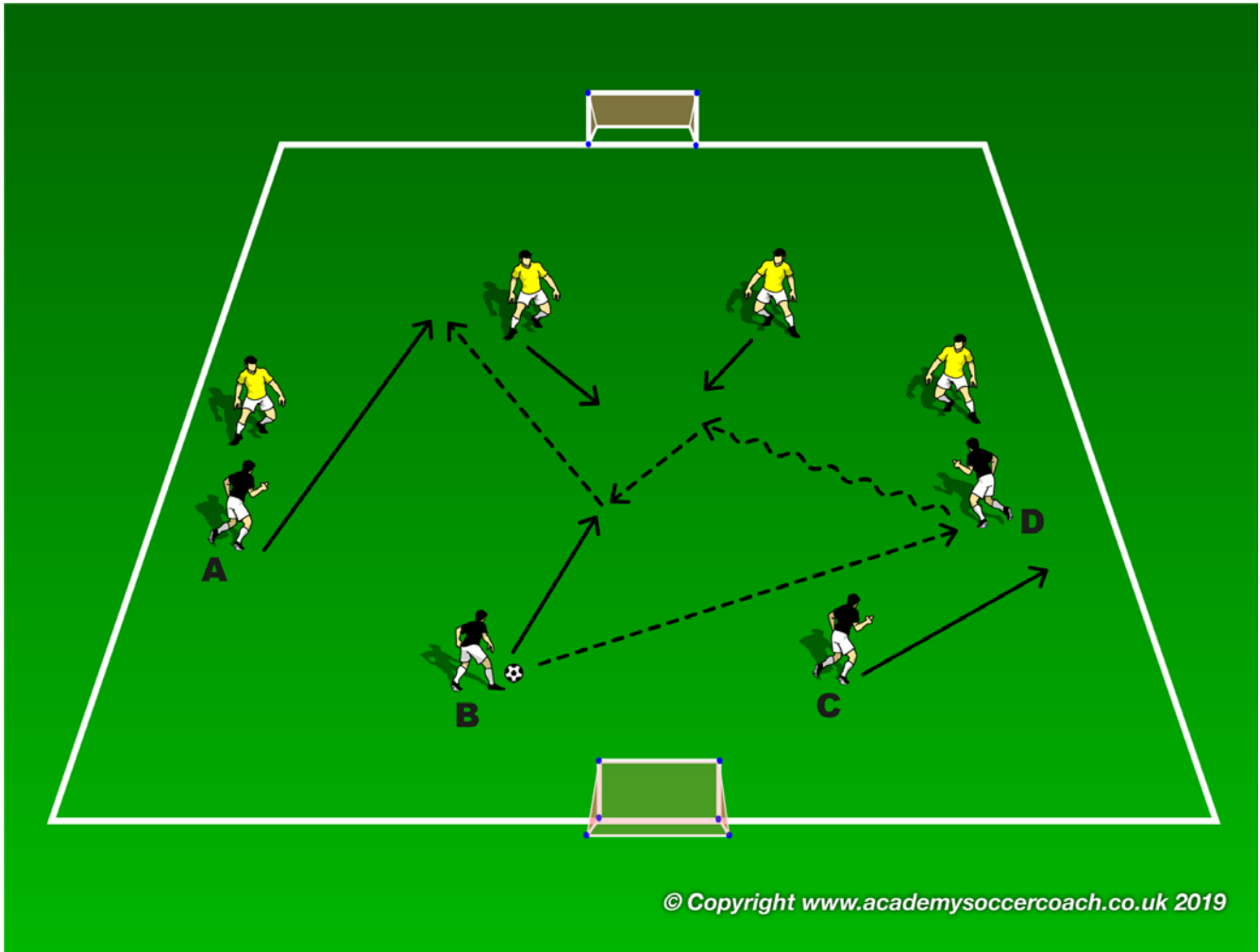
**Set-up and sequence:** 2 teams of 4 players each are placed in a rectangular set-up and 2 mini-goals are placed in the center of the end lines, as in the picture. The team with possession must build up and finish as follow:

- After a first forward pass (B to D), the receiver must be placed wide shifting across from the center. After his pass, he must support the attacking move.
- The third teammate must overlap inside to receive a second pass after a 2 times movement (C).
- The fourth player must run deep to help the attacking move (A).
- The first player of the move in possession (B) must provide balance at the back.

**Variation:** the players decide the overlapping one and the team shape positioning (but the basic shape must be respected).

**Coaching points:** coordinated movements of the players, speed of play to create connections, quality of passes and receptions.

Exercise 13 (create connections): 4 v 4 (3) - support play



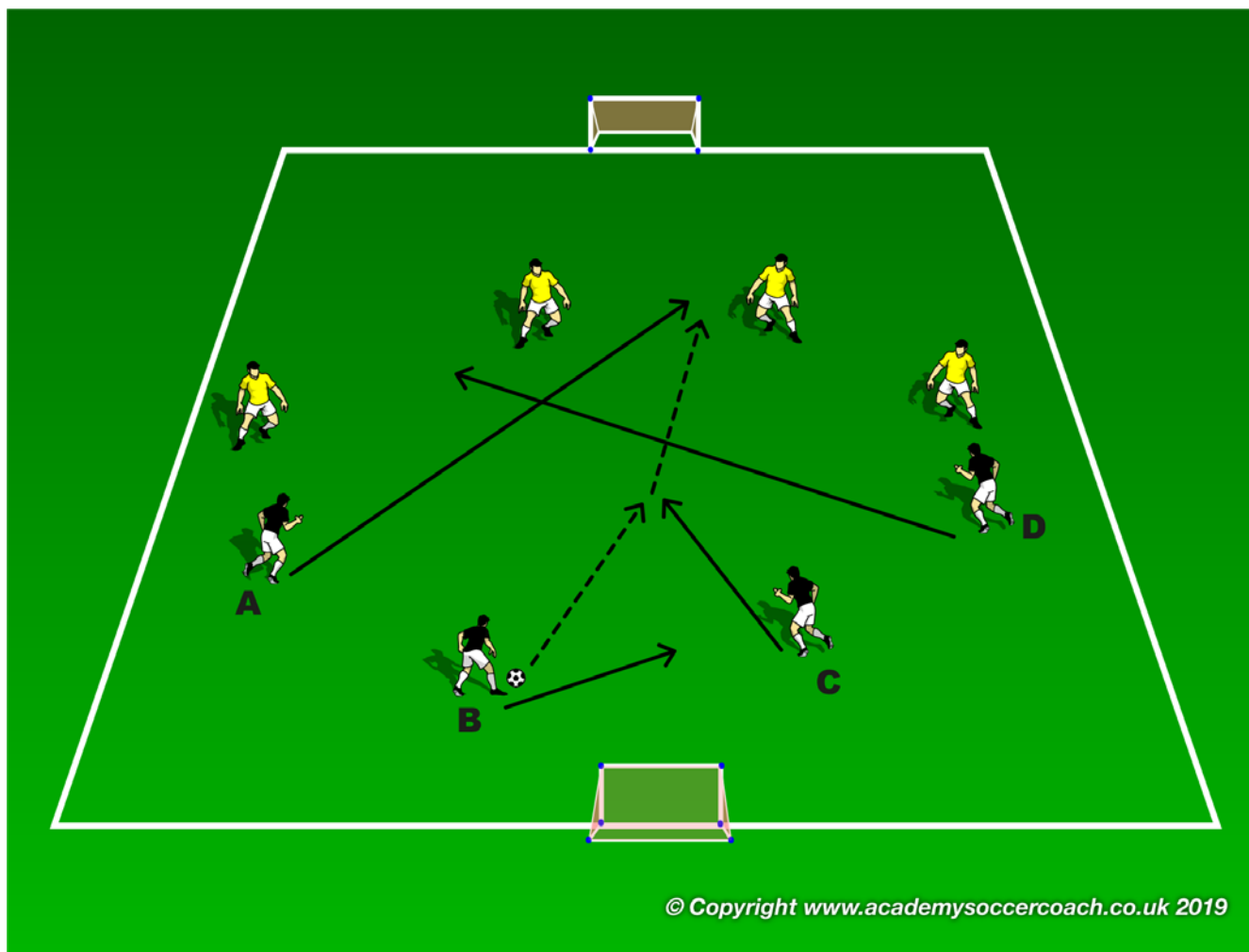
**Set-up and sequence:** 2 teams of 4 players each are placed in a rectangular set-up and 2 mini-goals are placed in the center of the end lines, as in the picture. The team with possession must build up and finish as follow:

- After a first forward pass (B to D), the receiver must be placed wide shifting across from the center. After his pass, he must support the attacking move.
- The third teammate must overlap inside to receive a second pass after a 2 times movement (C).
- The fourth player must run deep to help the attacking move (A).
- The first player in possession of the move (B) must provide balance at the back.

**Variation:** the players decide the connections and the team shape positioning (but the basic shape must be respected).

**Coaching points:** coordinated movements of the players, speed of play to create connections, quality of passes and receptions.

## Exercise 14 (create connections): 4 v 4 (4) - play in behind



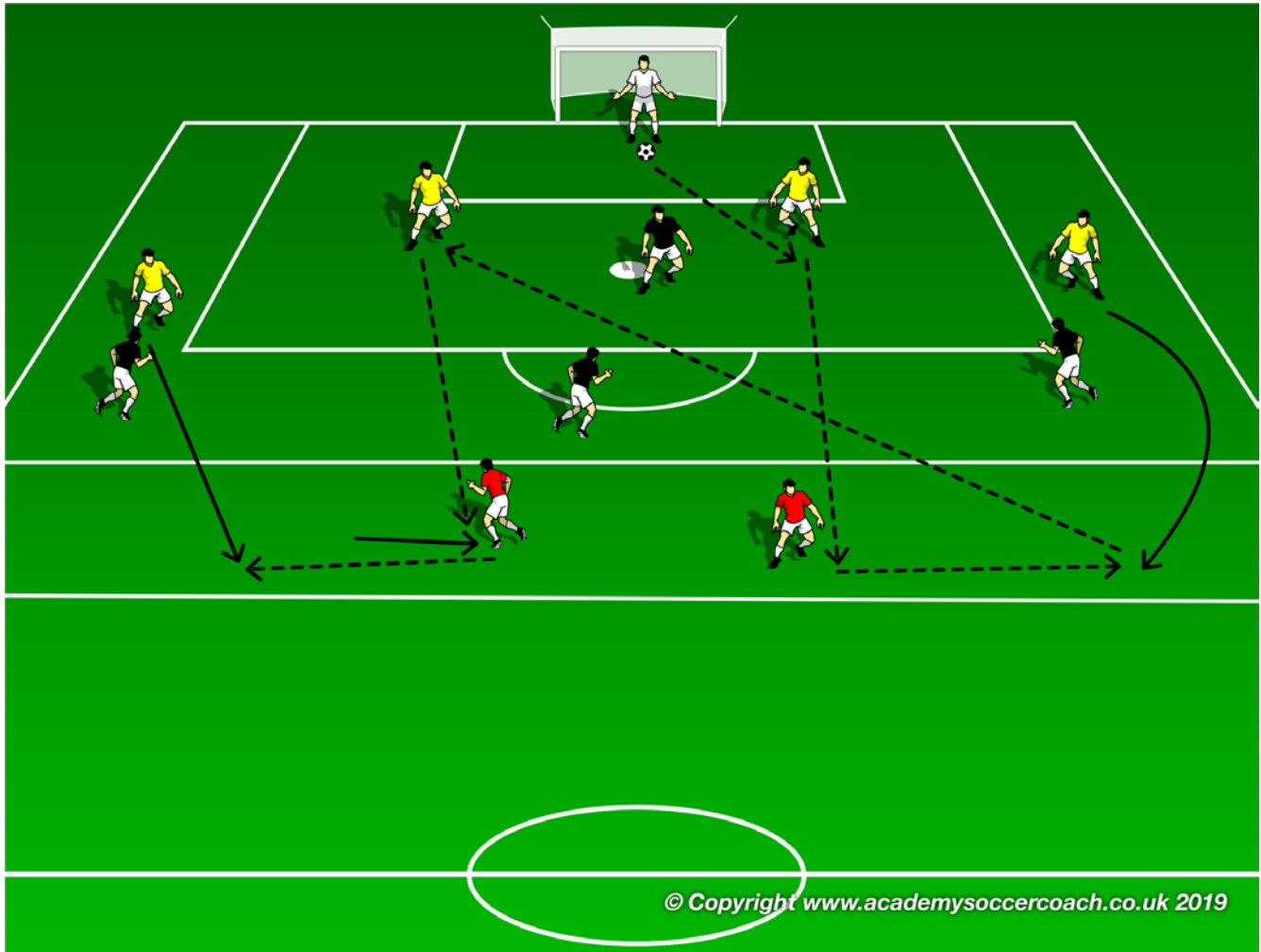
**Set-up and sequence:** 2 teams of 4 players each are placed in a rectangular set-up and 2 mini-goals are placed in the center of the end lines, as in the picture. The team with possession must build up and finish as follow:

- After a first forward pass (B to C), the receiver must control the ball while running forward.
- The third and fourth teammates must move, crossing the runs, to be able to receive a decisive final pass at the back of the defense line (A and D).
- C must support the attacking move behind them.
- B must provide balance at the back.

**Variation:** the players decide the overlapping one and the team shape positioning (but the basic shape must be respected).

**Coaching points:** coordinated movements of the players, speed of play to create connections, quality of passes and receptions.

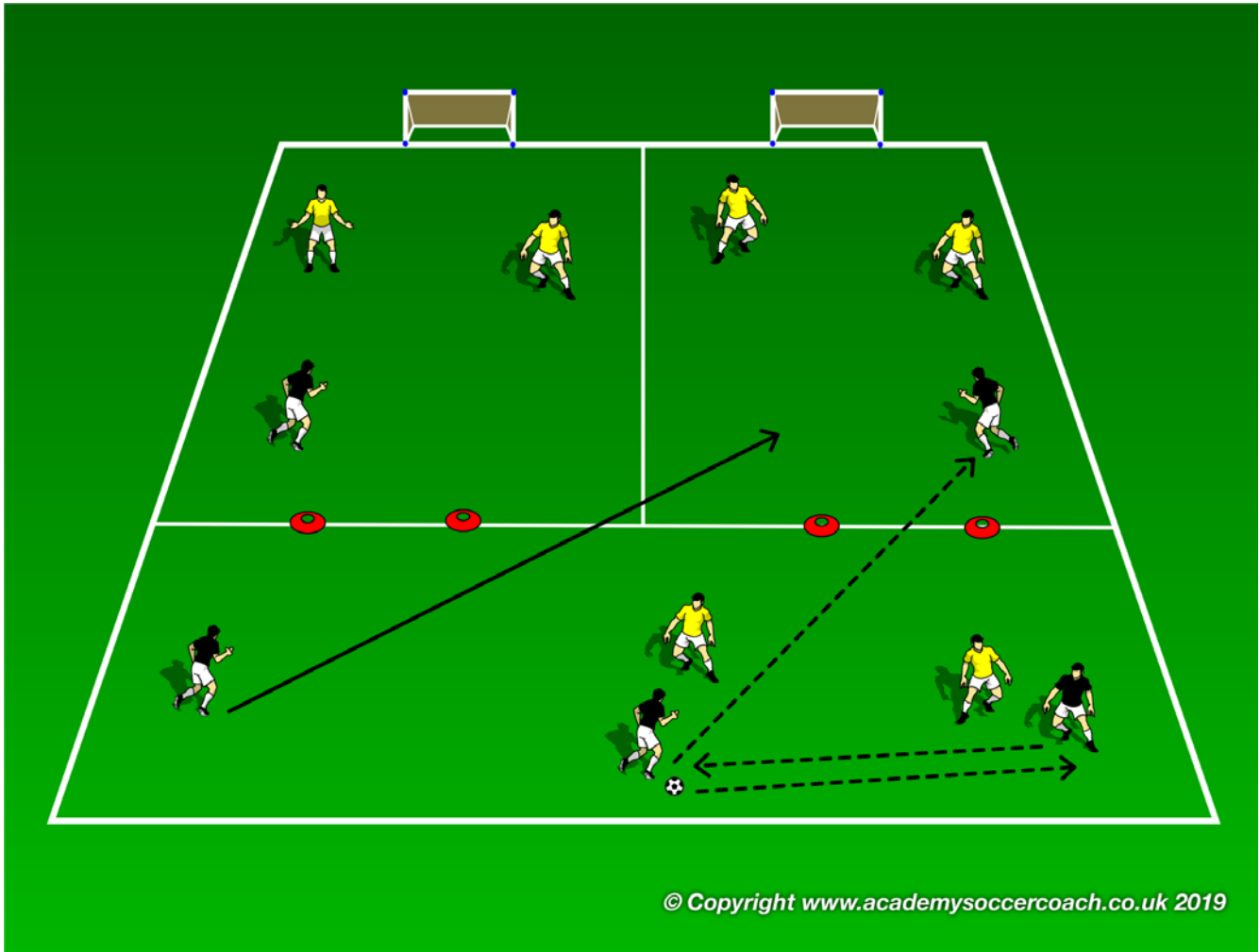
Exercise 15 (create connections): 1-4-2 v 2-3-1 (3)



**Set-up and sequence:** 1 goalkeeper and 4 defenders against 4 black attackers are placed inside an area 5 yards longer than the penalty area. 2 red free players are placed inside a middle 10 yards area, acting as midfielders for both the teams. The goalkeeper passes the ball toward one of the center backs to start the sequence; the fullback must overlap to receive behind the opposition forward to keep the possession. When the second center back can receive, the fullback next to him must overlap internally to be an option for the red midfielder. The black players must put pressure against the defenders and if they win the ball, they must counter attack through crossing forward runs behind the defense line and support play sequences with the midfielders.

**Coaching points:** control and receive under pressure and outnumbered, create a strong area near the ball, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage.

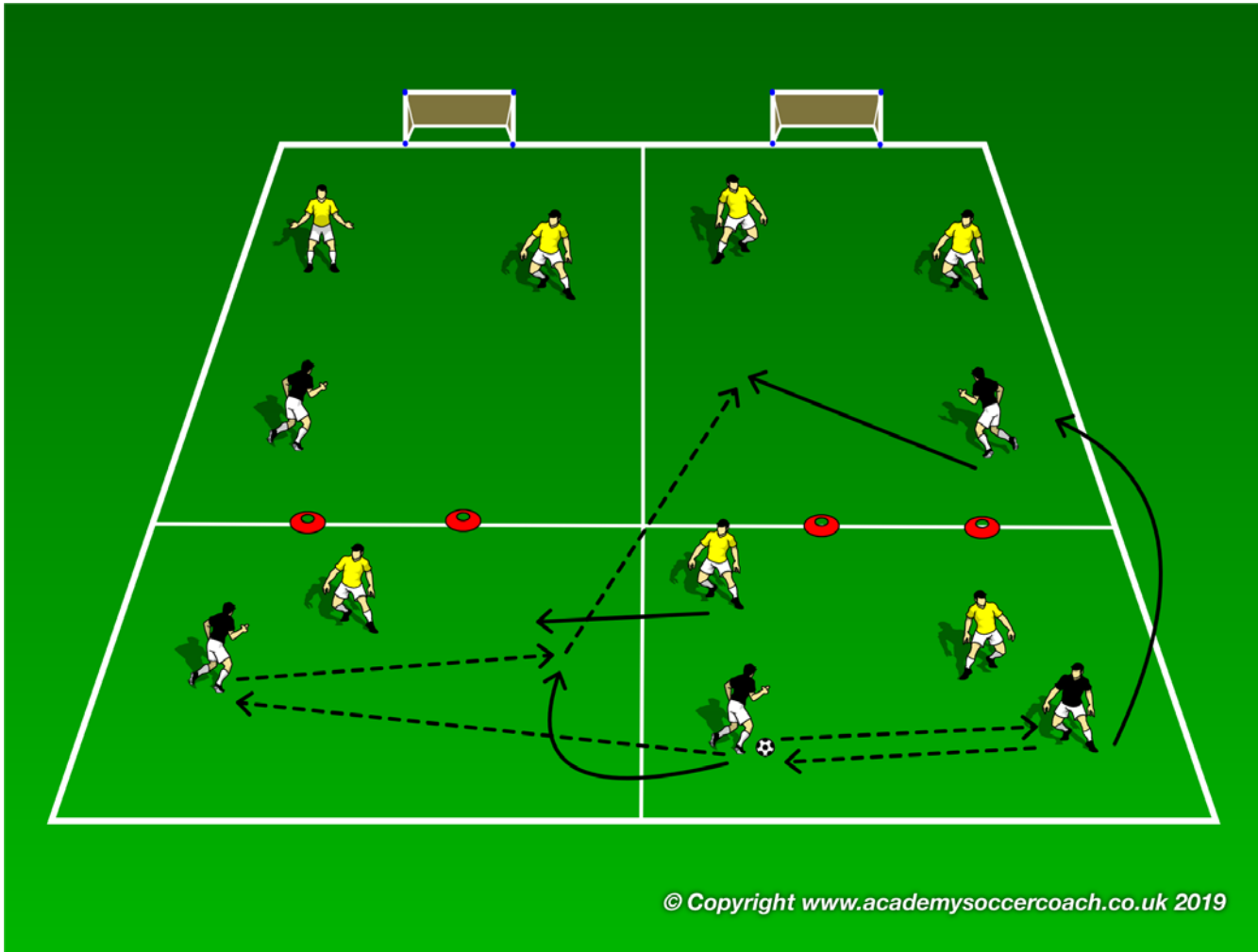
Exercise 16 (pass and dribble on diagonals): 3 v 2 + 2 v 2 (1)



**Set-up and sequence:** 2 teams of 6 (yellows) and 5 (blacks) players are placed inside a 3 areas set-up. 2 cones goals are placed along the borderlines of the lower main area and of the upper finishing areas, as in the picture. A 3 v 2 duel is played inside the building up area and 2 v 1 duels are played inside the finishing areas. The team in possession must combine inside the building up area to play forward and toward one of the finishing areas, passing the ball through the cone gate. A 1 v 2 duel is played there, at the beginning; the third player must run diagonally inside to equalize the number of players, creating a 2 v 2 duel. The attacking couple must finish in the mini-goal; if the defenders win the possession, they can counter attack to score inside the cone's mini-goal. Passes and runs must always be performed on diagonals.

**Coaching points:** combine quickly, play on diagonals, support the attacking moves, pressure during numerical advantage situations, balance while defending with equal number of players.

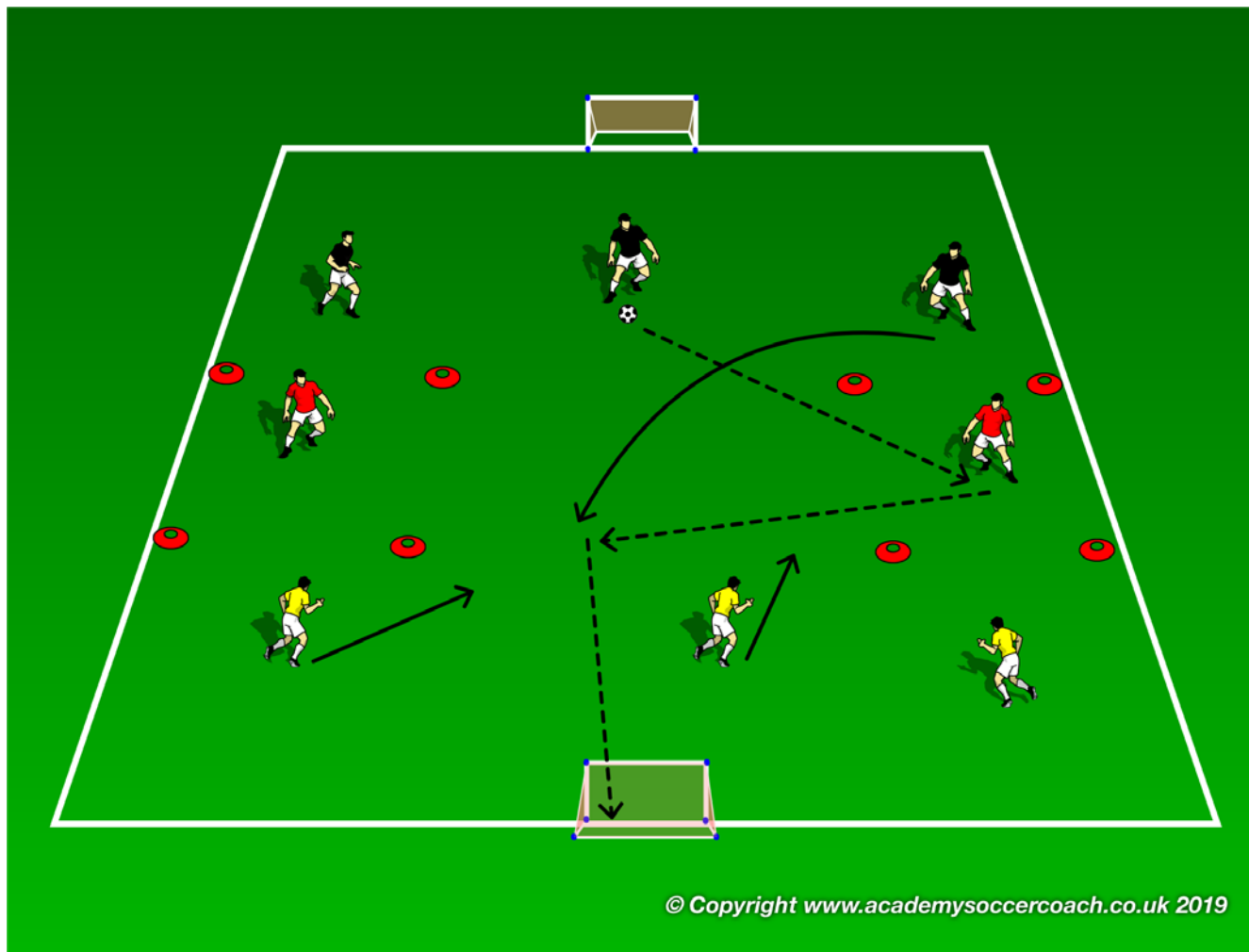
Exercise 17 (pass and dribble on diagonals): 3 v 2 + 2 v 2 (2)



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous one. 2 teams of 7 (yellows) and 5 (blacks) players are placed inside a 4 areas set-up. 2 cones goals are placed along the borderlines of the areas, as in the picture. A 3 v 2 duel is played inside the building up areas and 2 v 1 duels are played inside the finishing areas. The team in possession must combine inside the building up areas, shaping 2 v 2 momentary duels on the ball before playing forward and toward one of the finishing areas, passing the ball through the cones' gate. Both the attacking players and the defending players must shift across the lower areas to equalize the duels. A 1 v 2 duel is played inside the finishing area, at the beginning; the third player (the first in possession of the sequence) must run inside to equalize the duel, creating a 2 v 2. The attacking couple must finish in the mini-goal; if the defenders win the possession, they can counter attack to score inside the cone's mini-goal. Passes and runs must always be performed on diagonals.

**Coaching points:** combine quickly, shift across to support the teammate in possession, support the attacking moves, play on diagonals, pressure during numerical advantage situations, balance while defending with equal number of players.

Exercise 18 (pass and dribble on diagonals): 3 v 3 + 2

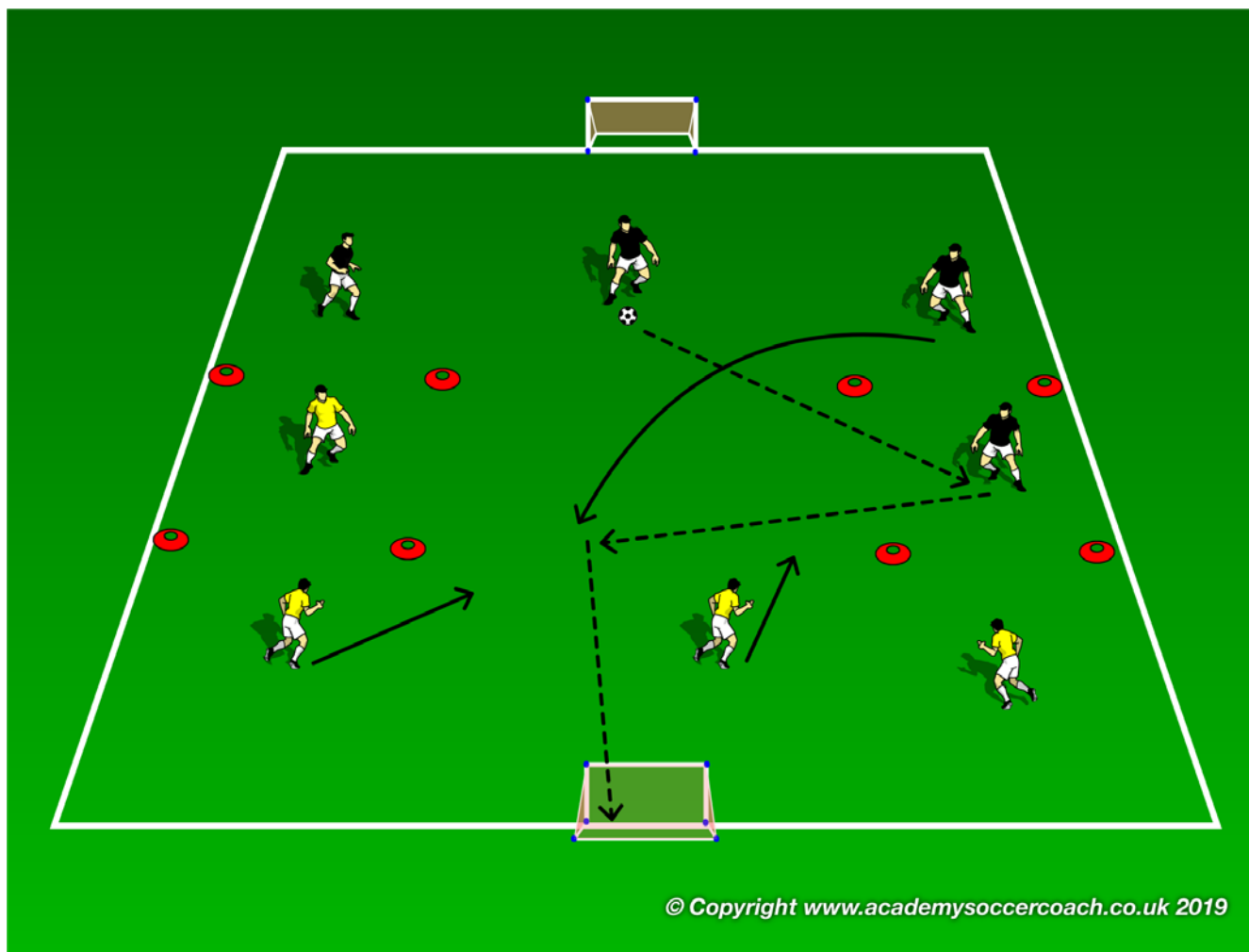


**Set-up and sequence:** a 3 v 3 + 2 duel is played inside a rectangular set-up. 2 goals are added in the center of the end lines and 2 small squares are placed wide in the middle of the pitch; 2 red neutral players are free to move inside. The team with possession must finish playing on diagonals toward one of the free players and after an inside run to finish, receiving the back pass from the smaller squares. The defenders must try to close the passing lanes toward the wide squares or to intercept the return passes toward the center; if they win the ball, they must counter attack in the same way toward the opposite side.

**Coaching points:** play on diagonals, create an attacking strong side, inside runs without the ball, closure of passing lanes.



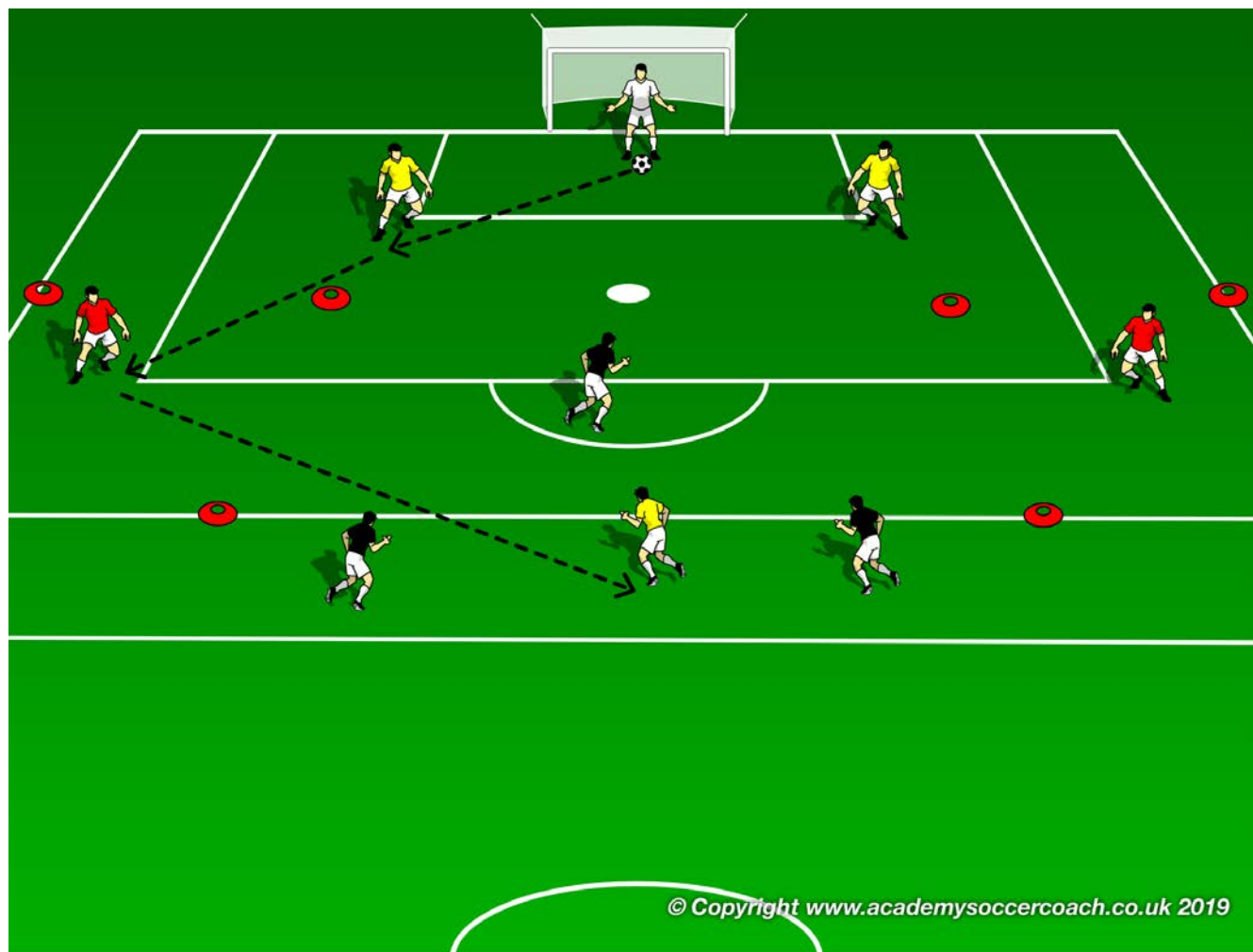
Exercise 19 (pass and dribble on diagonals): 3 + 1 v 3 + 1



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous exercise. A 3 + 1 v 3 + 1 duel is played inside a rectangular set-up. 2 goals are added in the center of the end lines and 2 small squares are placed wide in the middle of the pitch; 1 player for each team is free to move inside, as in the picture. The team with possession must finish playing on diagonals toward the teammate inside the right square and after an inside run to finish, receiving the back pass. The defenders must try to close the passing lanes toward the wide squares or to intercept the return passes toward the center; if they win the ball, they must counter attack in the same way toward the opposite side.

**Coaching points:** play on diagonals, create an attacking strong side, inside runs without the ball, closure of passing lanes.

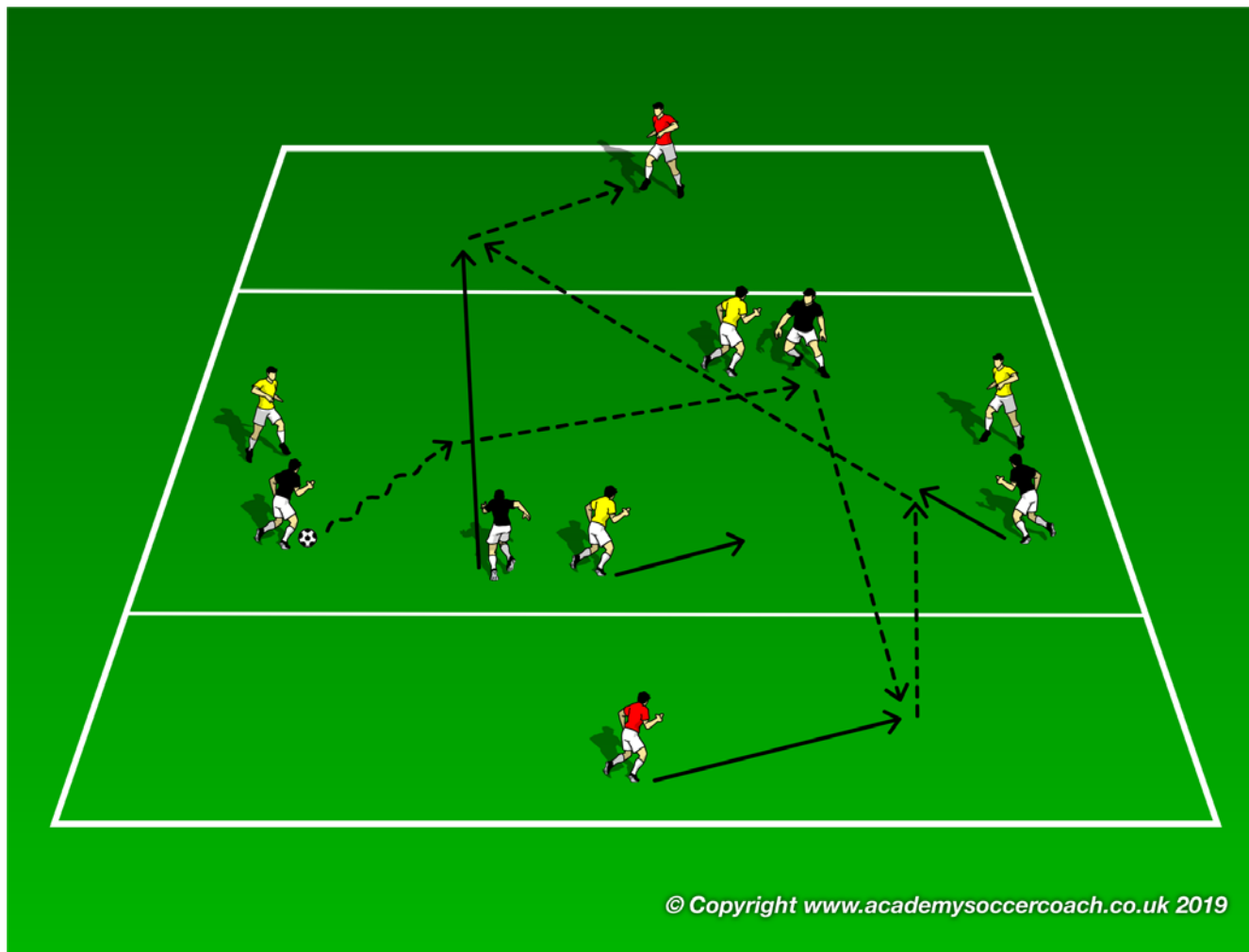
## Exercise 20 (pass and dribble on diagonals): 3 v 3 + 2



**Set-up and sequence:** 1 goalkeeper, 2 center backs and 1 midfielder of the building up team, 2 midfielders and 1 forward of the black team and 2 fullbacks (red free players) are placed inside a third of a regular field. The midfielders are placed inside a 10 yards area, just out of the penalty area. The goal for the yellow team is to build up, playing on diagonals toward the wide red fullbacks and from them toward the center midfielders. The forward of the black team must try to force the direction of the building up phase and the midfielders must recover the possession exploiting the numerical advantage. If they win the ball, they must counter attack, playing on diagonals with the opposite fullback, who becomes a winger in this situation.

**Coaching points:** build up through diagonal combinations, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage, counter attack through the opposite side.

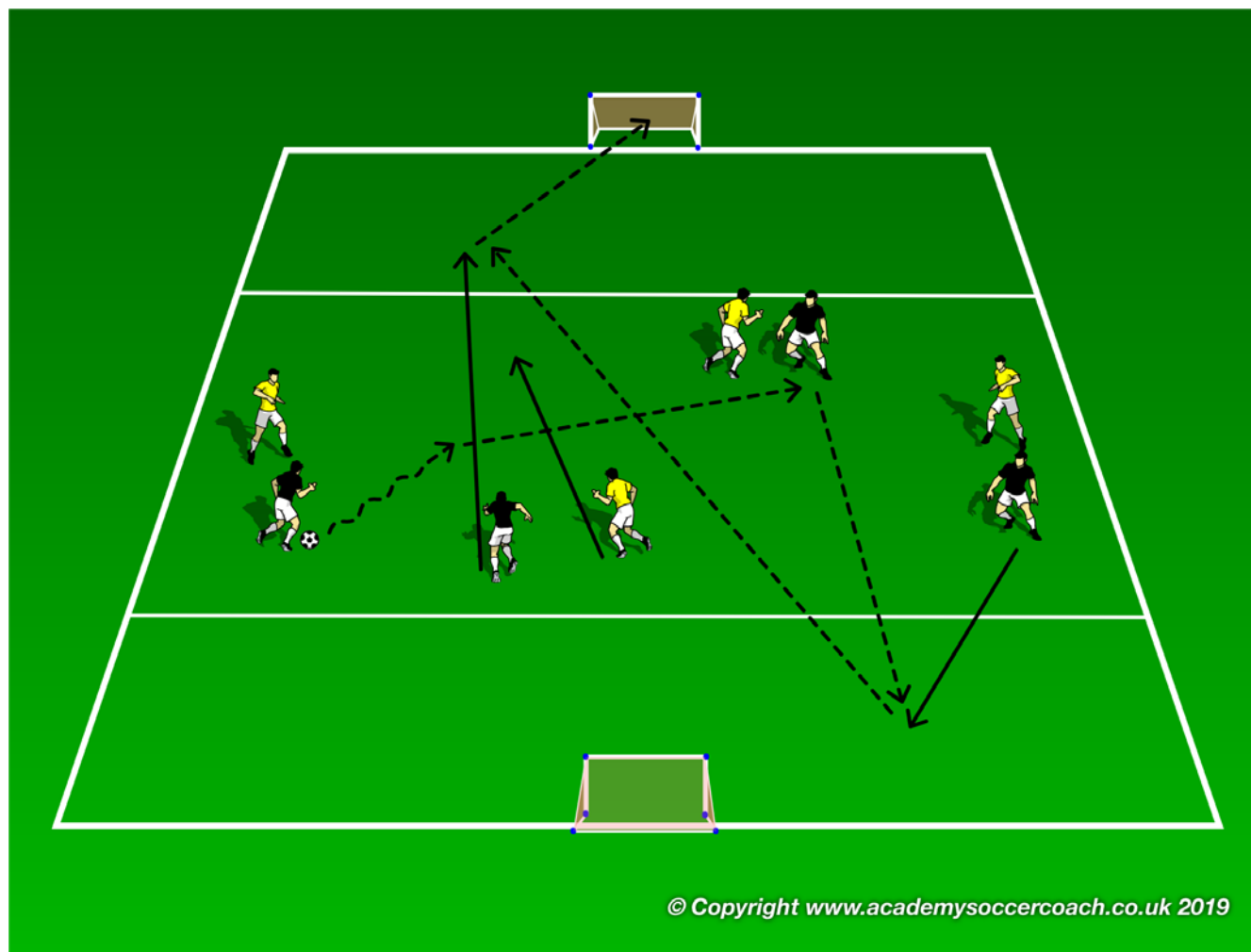
## Exercise 21 (support play on good angles): 4 v 4 + 2



**Set-up and sequence:** a rectangular set-up is divided into 3 areas. A 4 v 4 duel is played in the middle and 2 red neutral players are free to move inside the outer zones. The possession team gains 1 point when the players are able to keep the possession, passing back toward the first free player and then playing toward the opposite one, who must receive a pass from an attacking player inside the outer area, as in the picture. All the players of the attacking team must be involved in the possession phase. The defenders can choose to press the possession team in the middle or to try to close the passing lanes between the outer neutral players and the attacking opponents. If they win the possession, they must play the same way.

**Coaching points:** build up through diagonal combinations, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage, counter attack through the opposite side.

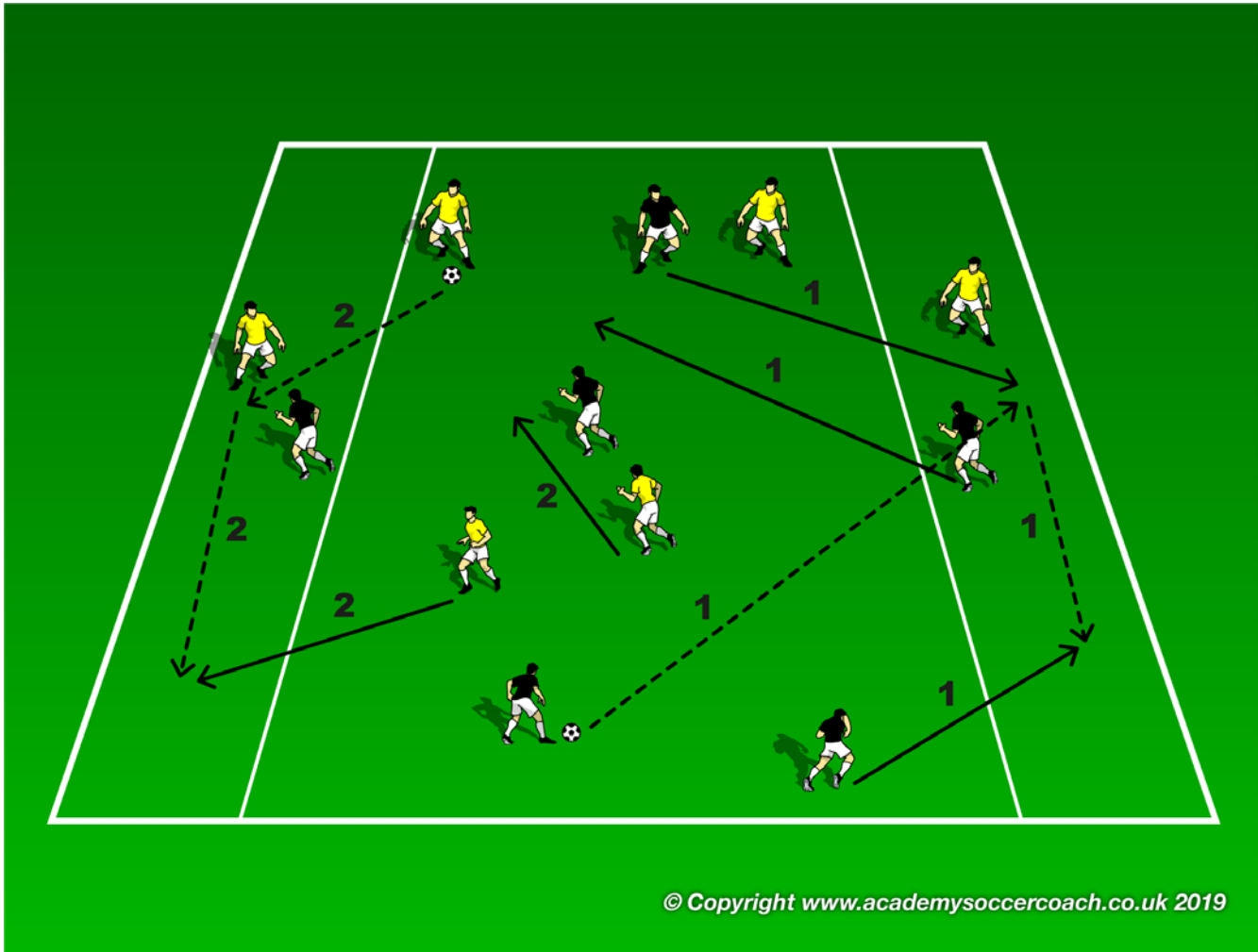
## Exercise 22 (support play on good angles): 4 v 4 - support play



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous one. A rectangular set-up is divided into 3 areas. A 4 v 4 duel is played in the middle. The possession team gains 1 point when the players are able to keep the possession, passing back toward a supporting teammate who runs back inside the first third and then playing toward the opposite one, where another teammate must receive a pass to score in the mini-goal. All the players of the attacking team must be involved in the possession phase. The defenders can choose to press the possession team in the middle or to try to close the passing lanes toward the outer areas. If they win the possession, they must play the same way.

**Coaching points:** build up through diagonal combinations, support the move at the back and over the last defense line, pressure to win the ball exploiting the numerical advantage, counter attack through the opposite side.

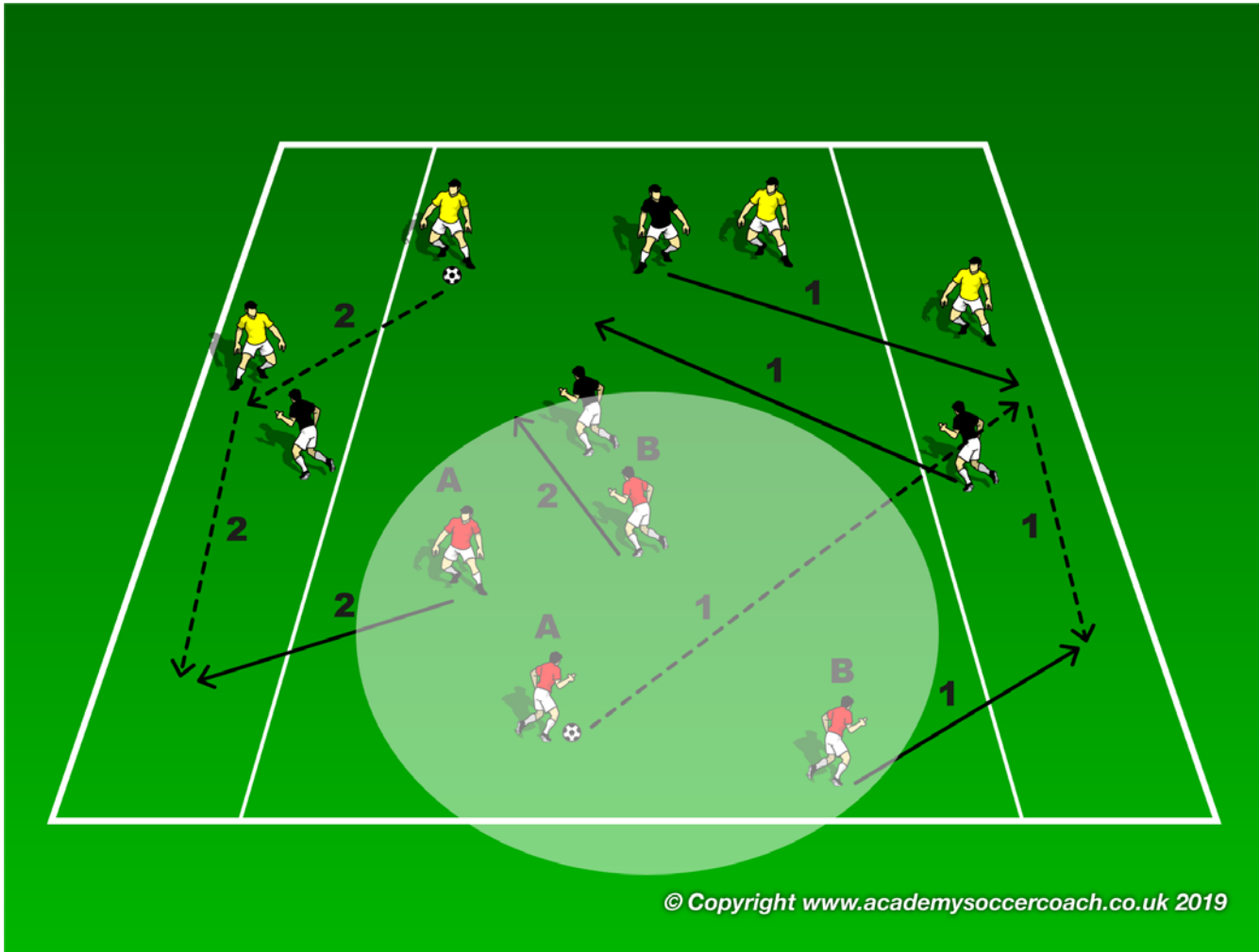
Exercise 23 (support play on good angles): 6 v 6 - back support and wide support



**Set-up and sequence:** a rectangular set-up is divided into 3 areas (a center one and 2 flanks). A 6 v 6 duel is played between 2 teams with different formations: the black team is shaped in a 2-3-1 (the advanced wingers are placed inside the flanks) and the yellow team is shaped with a 4-2 formation (the fullbacks are placed inside the flanks). The black team must attack through a wide dropping back run and back support pass (1) and the yellow team must attack through a wide forward support run, when a fullback is in possession (2).

**Coaching points:** back and wide support runs, combinations to free the center forward and the fullbacks and wingers.

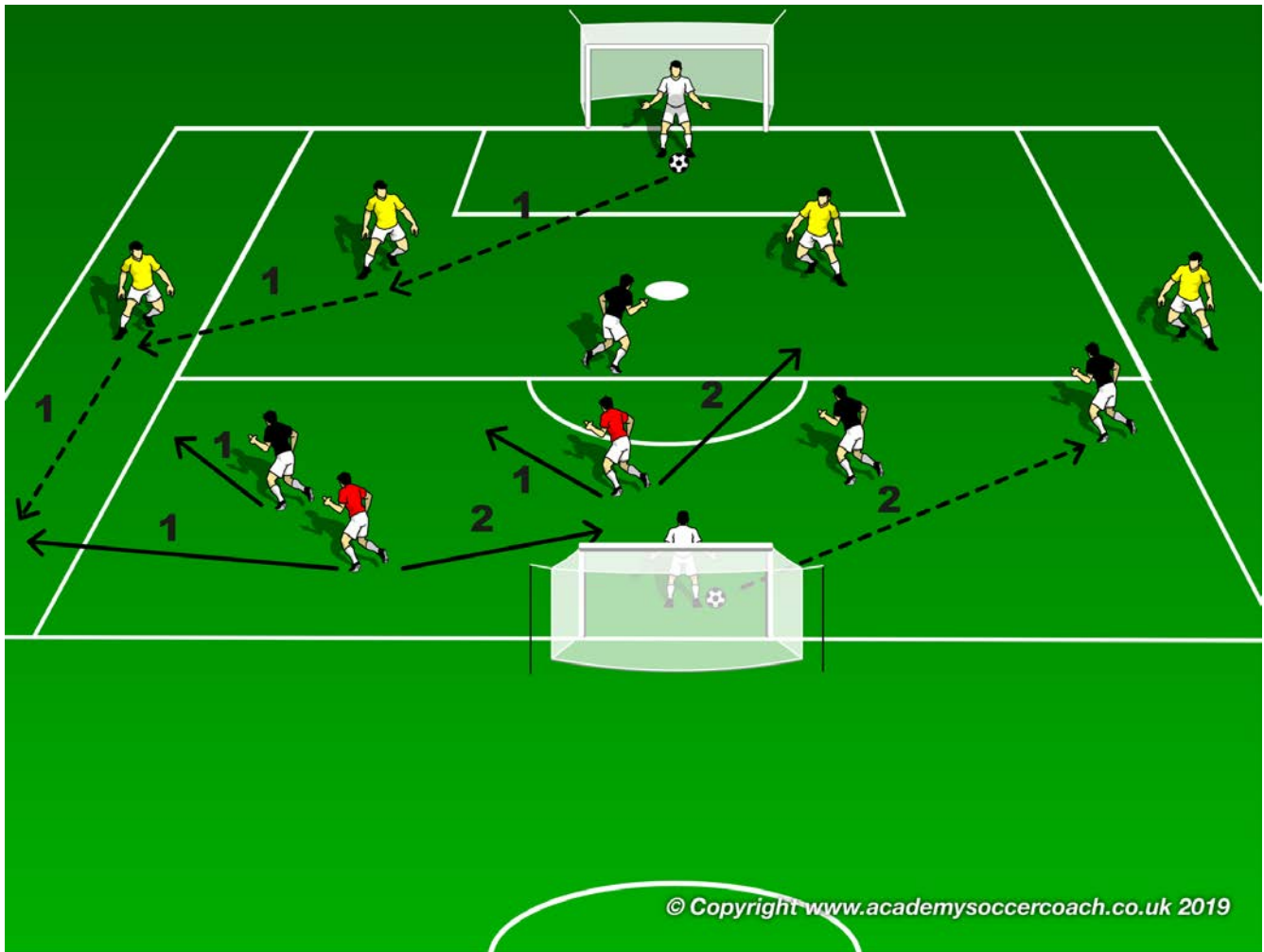
Exercise 24 (support play on good angles): 4 + 2 v 4 + 2



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous one. A rectangular set-up is divided into 3 areas (a center one and 2 flanks). A 6 v 6 (4 + 2 v 4 + 2) duel is played between 2 teams with different formations: the black team is shaped in a 2-3-1 (the advanced wingers are placed inside the flanks) and the yellow team is shaped with a 4-2 formation (the fullbacks are placed inside the flanks). The red free players (A and B) are the midfielders of both teams. The sequences are now alternated; if the yellow team starts the move, the midfielders must be wide support (2) and if the red players start the move, the black team must finish after a dropping back run of the center forward and wide back run of a midfielder (1). The defending team must press the opponents, even if outnumbered, to prevent them from finishing the sequence. Every complete sequence is a gained point for the team in possession.

**Coaching points:** back and wide support runs, combinations to free the center forward and the fullbacks and wingers.

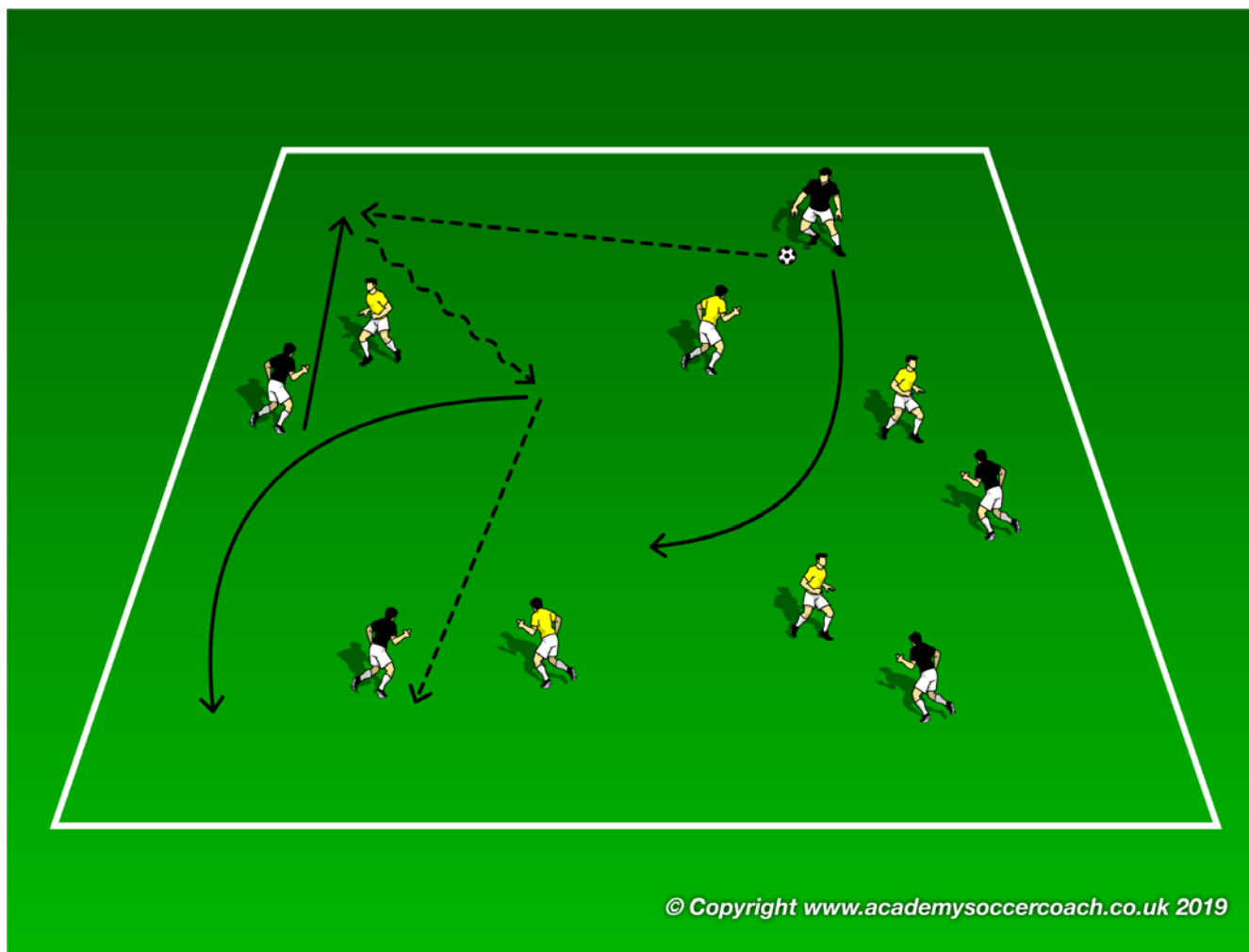
Exercise 25 (support play on good angles):



**Set-up and sequence:** 1 goalkeeper and 4 defenders against 4 black attackers are placed inside a third of a regular field. The field third is divided into 2 center areas and 2 flanks. 2 red free players are placed inside the lower middle, acting as midfielders for both the teams. 2 goals and goalkeepers are placed in the center of the end lines. The coach decides the goalkeeper who must start the sequence. If the goalkeeper of the yellow team starts (1), he passes the ball to a center back and then wide toward the fullback, then one red player supports the move, running wide and the second midfielder must shift across near the ball area. If the goalkeeper of the black team starts the move, the first midfielder must be a support, running forward to play as second attacker and the second midfielder must provide balance at the back. Only after these kinds of combinations, the attacks can be finished.

**Coaching points:** support the move running wide, shifting across, moving forward or providing balance, quick reactions to understand the roles inside the sequences.

Exercise 26 (make a pass and move): run forward the receiver

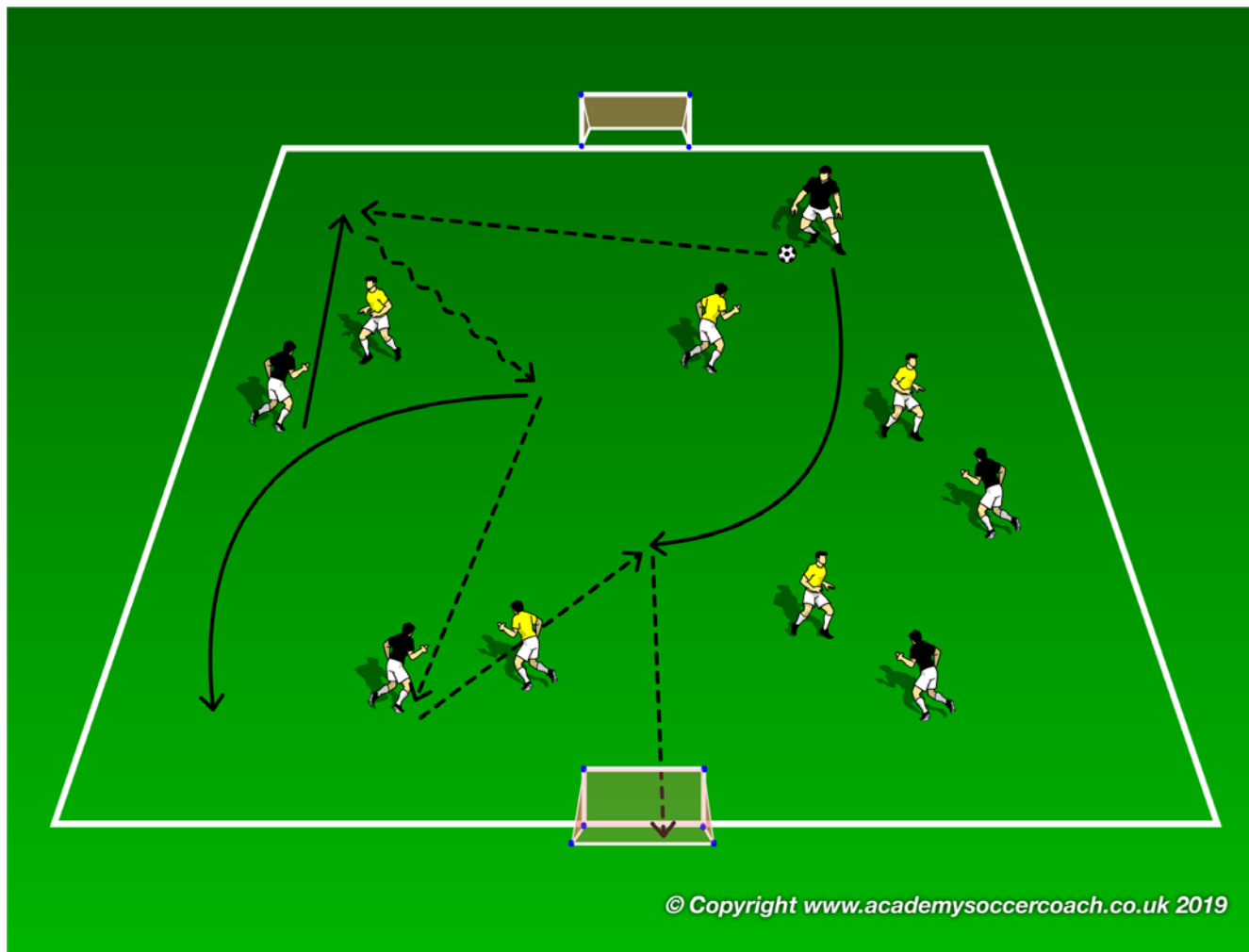


**Set-up and sequence:** a 5 v 5 duel is played inside a rectangular space. The possession team must keep the ball, playing in all directions with a main goal: a forward run over the receiver, but not on the same line, must follow every pass. Every 2 complete passes and movements, 1 point is gained. The defenders can choose to play 1 v 1 or to stand on potential spaces to cover them.

**Coaching points:** support the move running forward, be placed on different lines, space coverage.



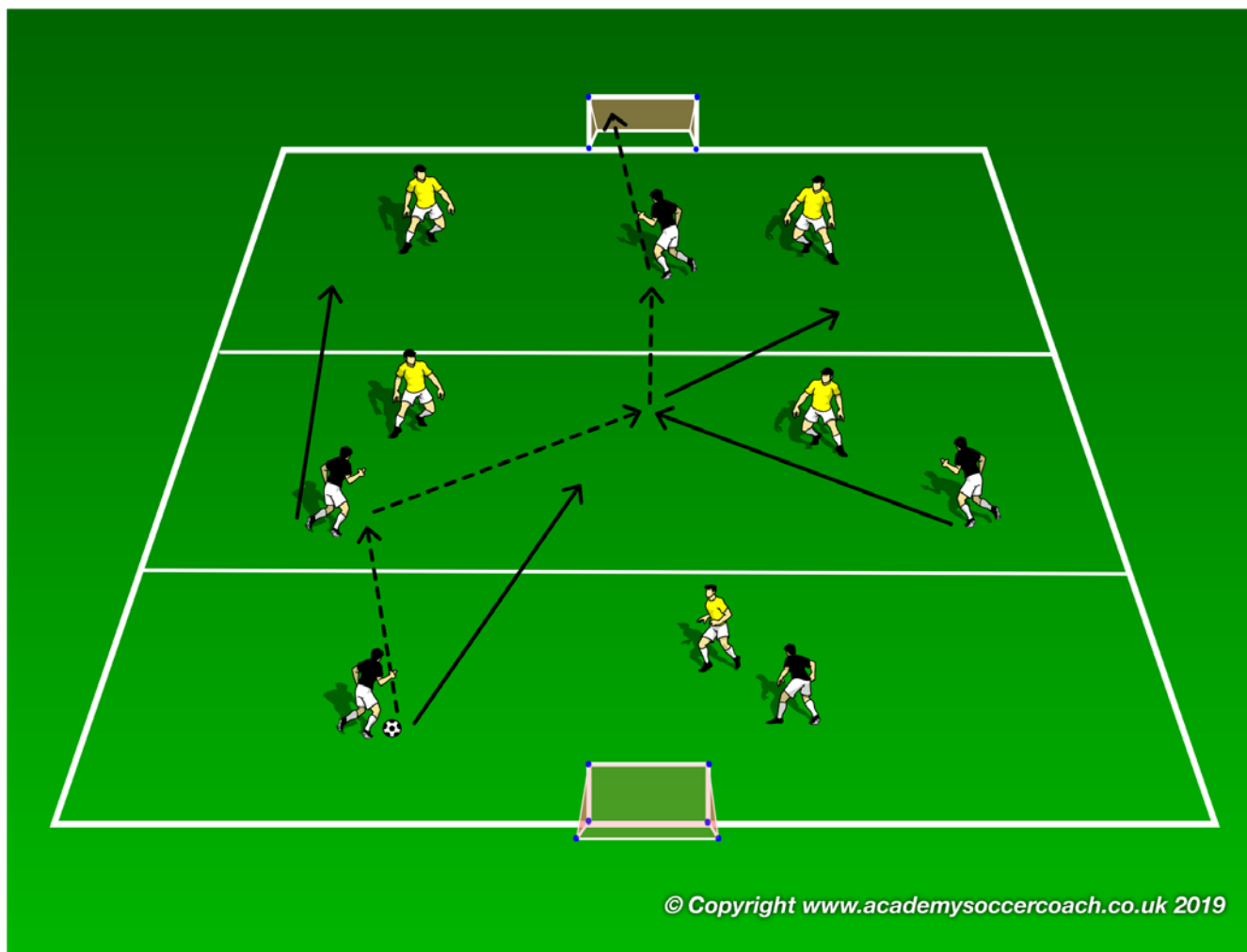
## Exercise 27 (make a pass and move): run forward the receiver and finish



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous one. A 5 v 5 duel is played inside a rectangular space. The possession team must keep the ball, playing to attack and to defend a mini-goal: a forward run over the receiver, but not on the same line, must follow every pass. Every 2 complete passes and movements, a finish attempt is possible. Scoring worth double is the player who started the move can shoot. The defenders can choose to play 1 v 1 or to stand on potential spaces to cover them.

**Coaching points:** support the move running forward, be placed on different lines, run without the ball to finish, space coverage.

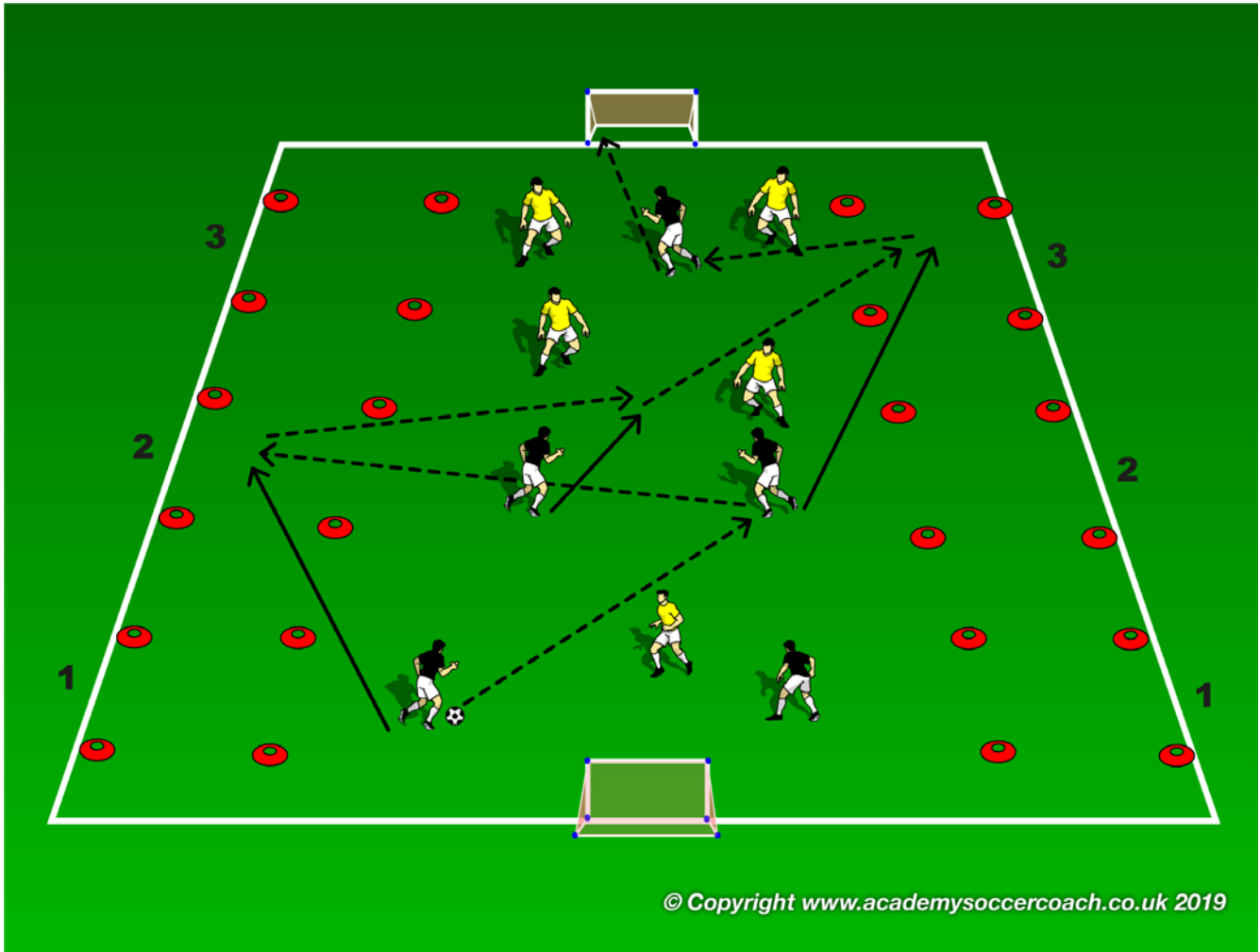
Exercise 28 (make a pass and move): 5 v 5 - run forward to create numerical advantage



**Set-up and sequence:** a 5 v 5 duel is played inside a rectangular space that is divided into 3 areas. 2 v 1 duels (defense with numerical advantage) are played inside the outer areas and a 2 v 2 duel is played in the middle third. The goal for possession team is to build up and to create 3 v 2 duels inside the middle third and the final third to finish. 2 v 2 and 1 v 1 duels are then played in the middle and first third during the final stage of the move. If the defending team wins the ball, the counter attacks must be played the same way and the players who lost the possession must run back toward their starting positions.

**Coaching points:** support the move running forward, create numerical advantage, run without the ball to finish.

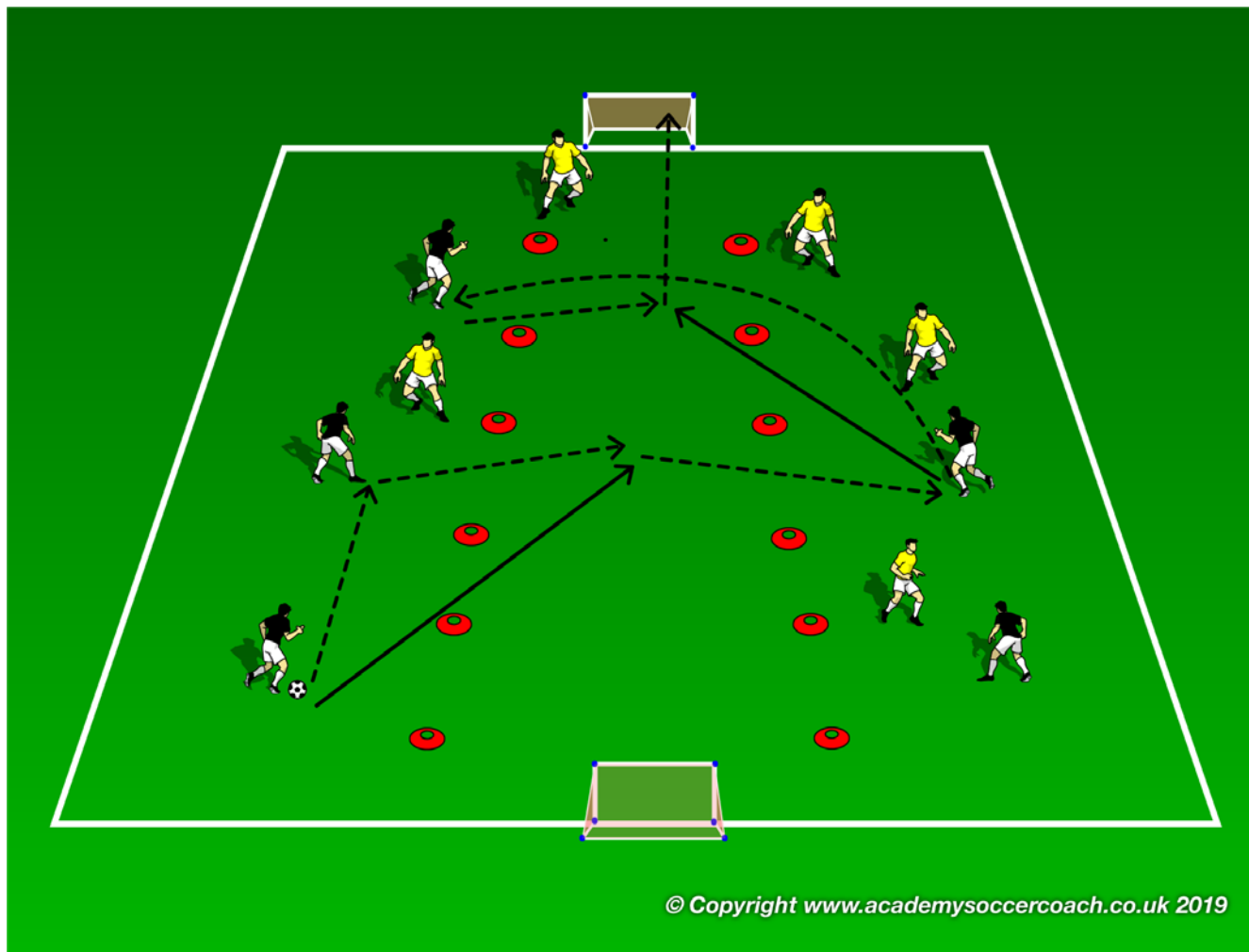
Exercise 29 (make a pass and move): 5 v 5 - run forward and wide



**Set-up and sequence:** a 5 v 5 duel is played inside a rectangular space. 6 wide squares are marked and numbered on each flank (1 - 2 - 3). The possession team must keep the ball, playing to attack and to defend a mini-goal: a forward run inside a wide square to complete a triangle combination or to receive as third man, must follow every pass. Every 2 complete passes and movements, a finish attempt is possible. The defenders can choose to play 1 v 1 or to close the passing lanes; if they win the possession, they must counter attack the same way.

**Coaching points:** support the move running wide and forward, be placed on different lines, run without the ball to finish, space coverage.

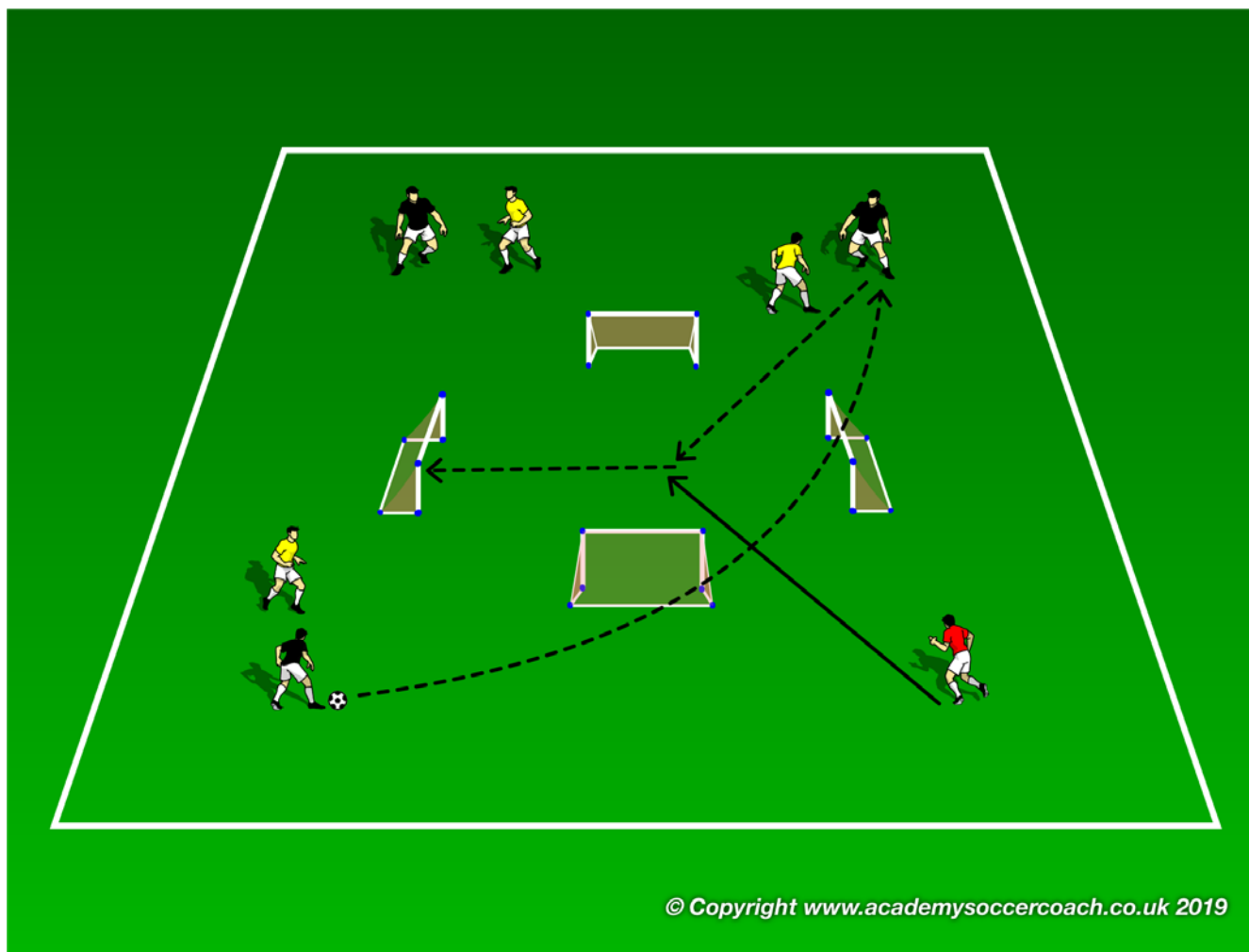
Exercise 30 (make a pass and move): 5 v 5 - run forward and wide



**Set-up and sequence:** a 5 v 5 duel is played inside a rectangular space. 3 squares are marked along the center channel of the set-up. The possession team must keep the ball, playing to attack and to defend a mini-goal: a forward run inside a center square to complete a triangle combination or to receive as third man, must follow every pass. Every 2 complete passes and movements, a finish attempt is possible. The defenders can choose to play 1 v 1 or to close the center passing lanes; if they win the possession, they must counter attack the same way.

**Coaching points:** support the move running from the flank toward the center, be placed on different lines, run without the ball to finish, space coverage.

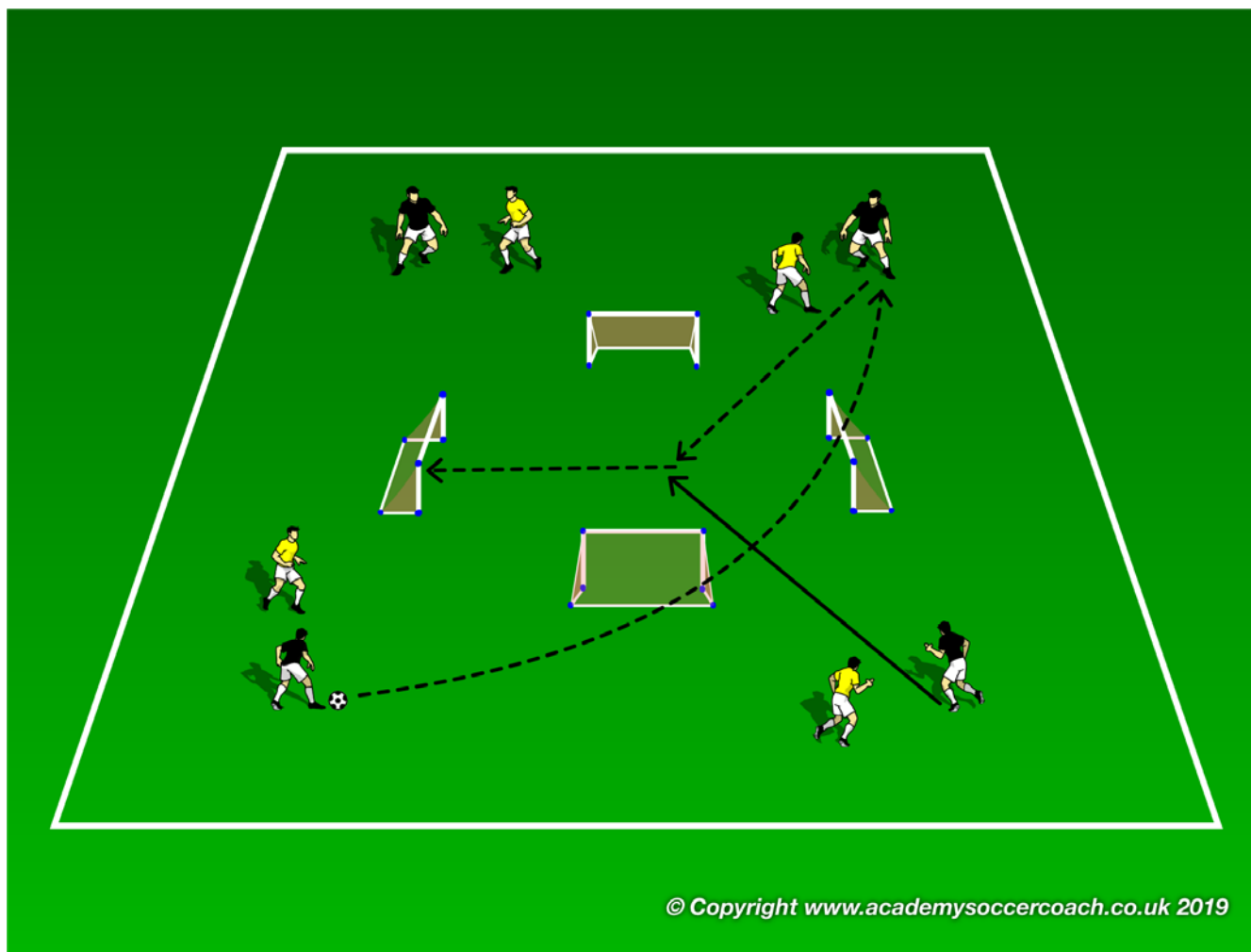
Exercise 31 (receive the ball across your body into space): 3 v 3 + 1



**Set-up and sequence:** a 3 v 3 duel is played inside a rectangular space and 4 goals that are turned toward the center, are placed in the middle. The red free player has finishing tasks after a passing combination of the possession team. When 2 of the 3 players have touched the ball, switching the side from a corner to another, the free player must run inside the goal space, without pressure, receiving across his body to shot toward the mini-goal in front of him. The defenders must try to recover the possession through 1 v 1 duels.

**Coaching points:** timing of support runs, switch the side as soon as possible, 1 v 1 defending duels.

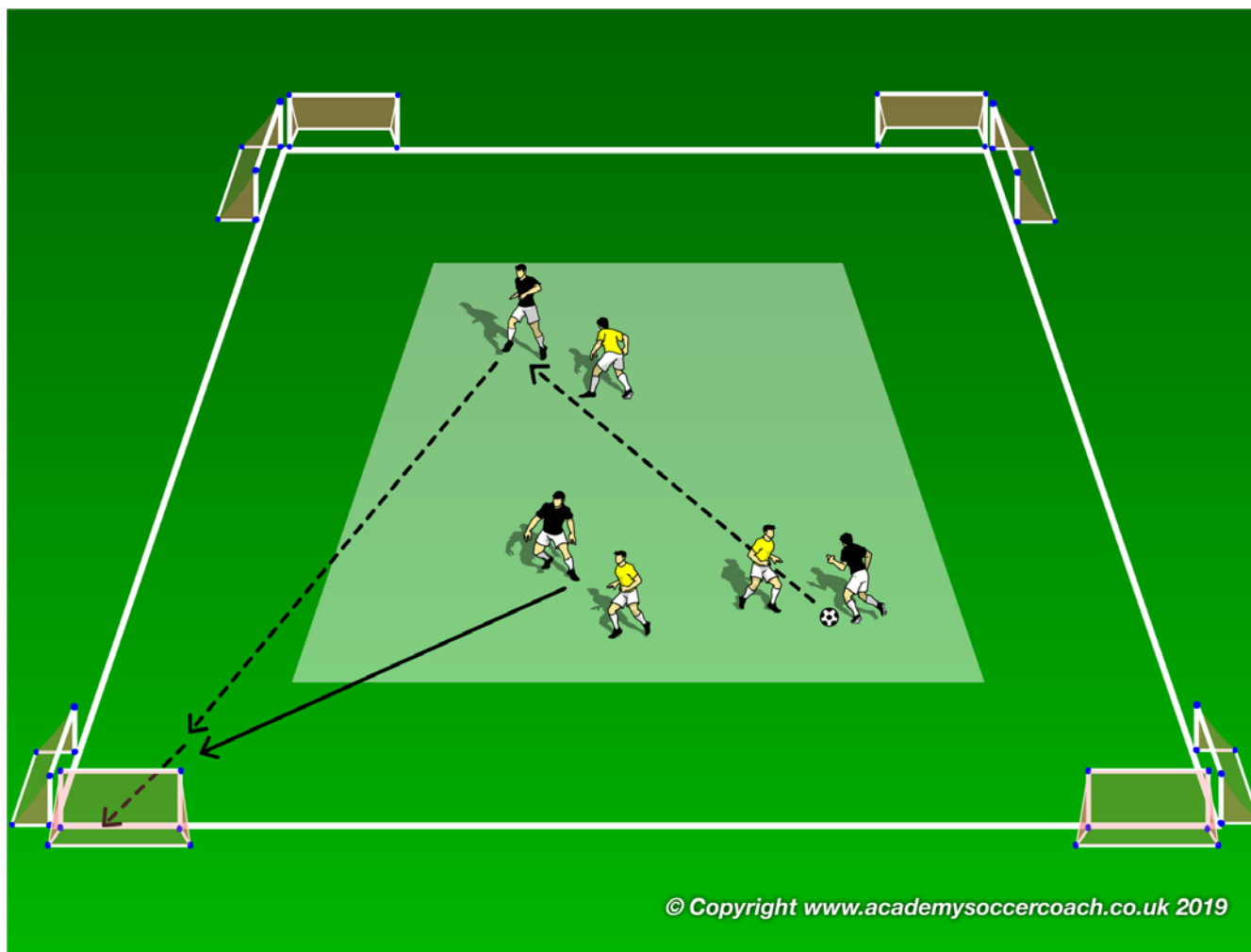
Exercise 32 (receive the ball across your body into space): 4 v 4



**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous one. A 4 v 4 duel is played inside a rectangular space and 4 goals that are turned toward the center, are placed in the middle. When 2 of 3 players have touched the ball, switching the side from a corner to another, a third teammate must run inside the goal space, under the pressure of an opponents, receiving across his body to shot toward the mini-goal in front of him. The defenders must try to recover the possession through 1 v 1 duels, if they recover the possession, they must play the same way.

**Coaching points:** timing of support runs, switch the side as soon as possible, 1 v 1 defending duels.

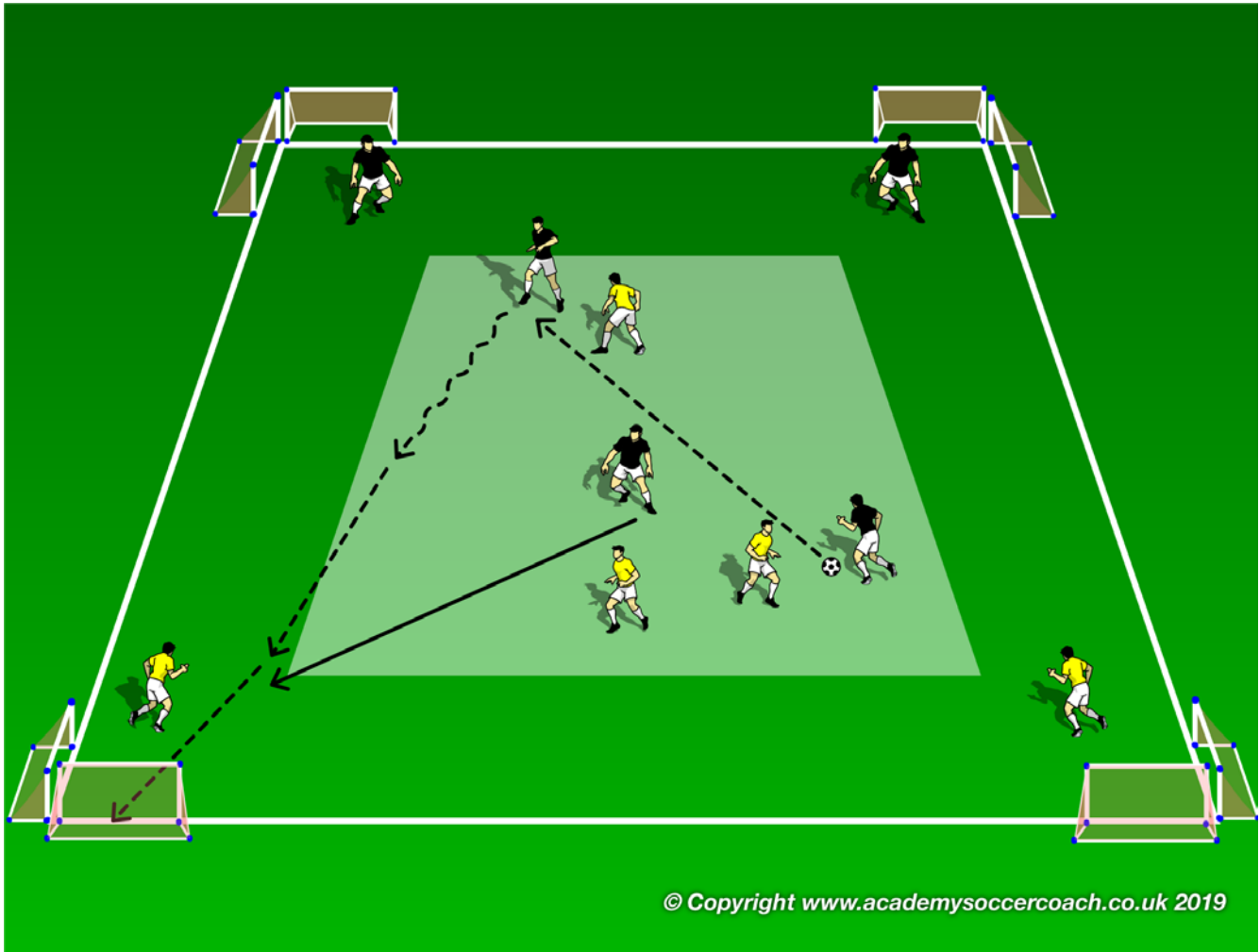
Exercise 33 (receive the ball across your body into space): 3 v 3



**Set-up and sequence:** a 3 v 3 duel is played inside a center rectangular set-up and 8 goals that are turned toward the center, are placed on the corners of a larger rectangular space. When 2 of 3 players have touched the ball, a third teammate must run outside the middle space, under the pressure of an opponents, receiving across his body to shot toward the mini-goal in front of him and his run direction. The defenders must try to recover the possession through 1 v 1 duels or tracking the third man of the possession team; if they recover the possession, they must play the same way.

**Coaching points:** timing of support runs, 3rd man runs timing, 1 v 1 defending duels.

Exercise 34 (receive the ball across your body into space): 5 v 5

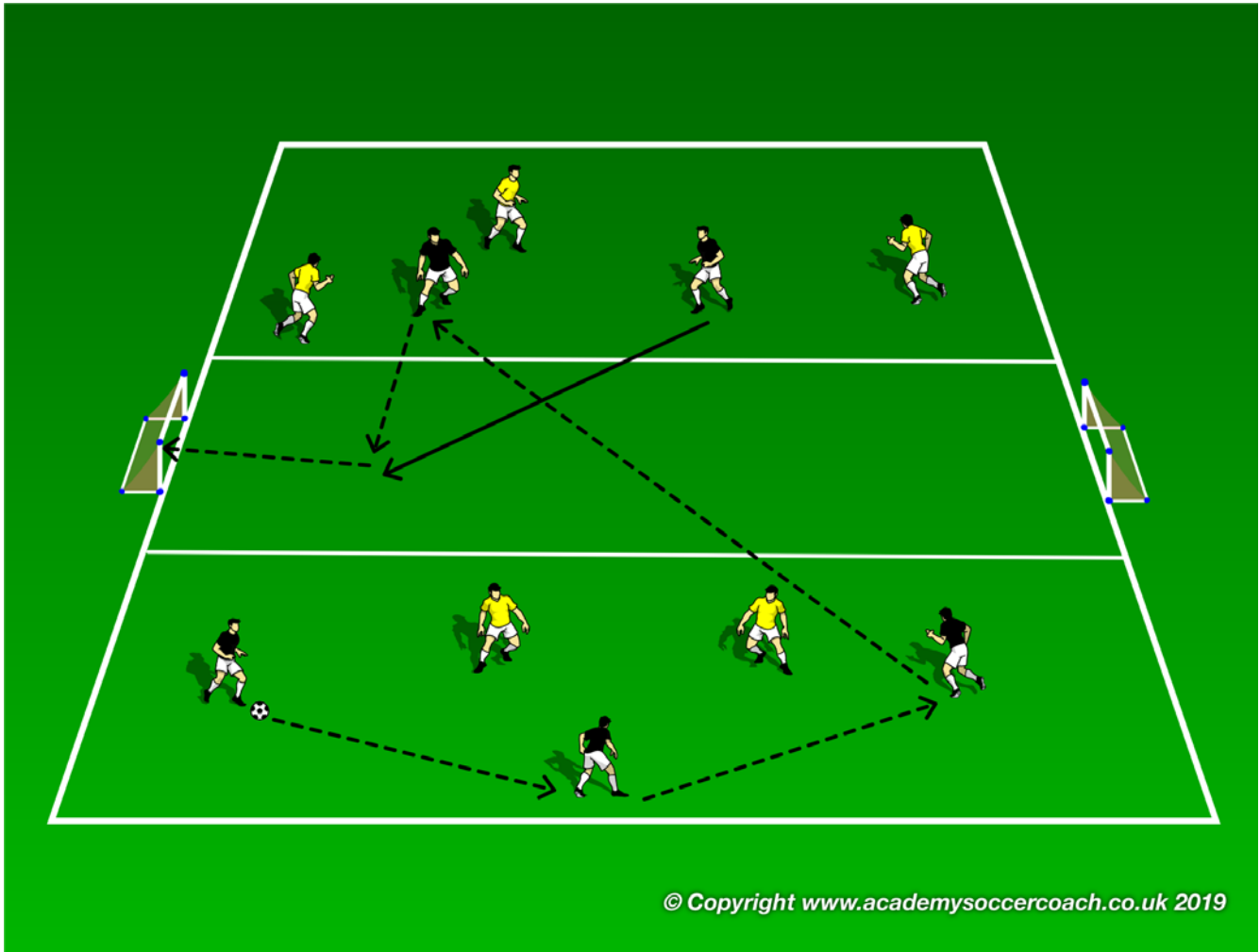


**Set-up and sequence:** this exercise is a variation of the previous one. A 3 v 3 duel is played inside a center rectangular set-up and 8 goals that are turned toward the center, are placed on the corners of a larger rectangular space. Each team attacks 4 goals and defends the other 4 thanks to 2 defenders who are placed in front of them. When 2 of 3 players of the possession team in the middle have touched the ball, a third teammate must run outside the middle space, under the pressure of an opponents, receiving across his body to shot toward the mini-goal in front of him and his run direction, before the second defender can counter him. The defenders must try to recover the possession through 1 v 1 duels, tracking the third man of the possession team or through the numerical advantage (2 v 1) in front of the goal; if they recover the possession, they must play the same way, counter attacking toward the opposite side.

**Coaching points:** timing of support runs, 3rd man runs timing, 1 v 1 defending duels, doubling the mark.



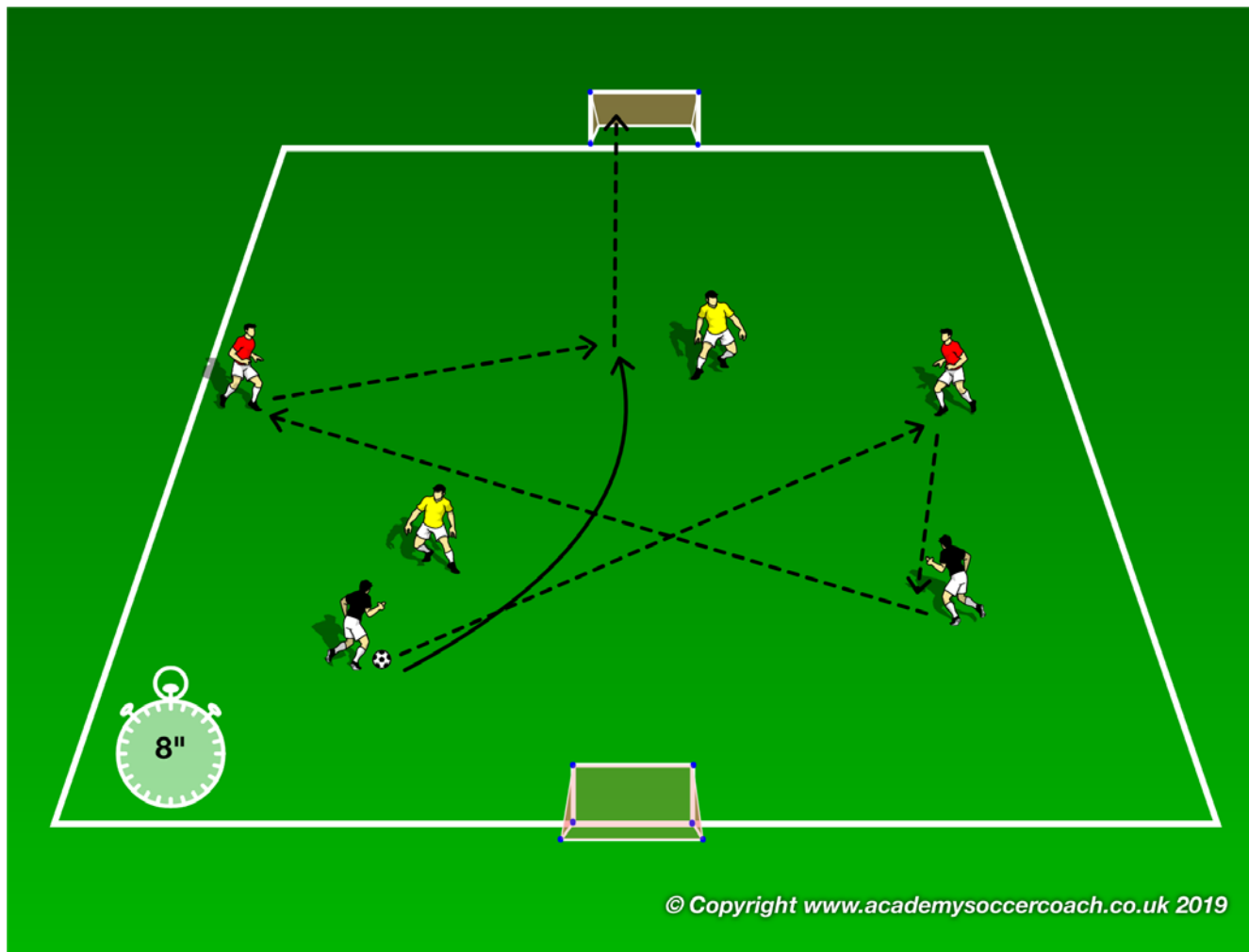
Exercise 35 (receive the ball across your body into space): 5 v 5



**Set-up and sequence:** a 5 v 5 duel is played inside a rectangular space that is divided into 3 areas. 3 v 2 duels are played inside the outer areas. 2 goals are placed along the sidelines of the middle area. The direction of play is vertical while building up the moves to send the ball to the forwards, and it becomes horizontal to finish; as the first forward receives, the second one must cut in front of him to receive across his body and to finish toward the easiest mini-goal. The defending team must try to close the passing lanes if outnumbered 2 v 3 and must put pressure when in numerical advantage 3 v 2. If the defenders win the ball, they must play the same way.

**Coaching points:** support the move through cutting runs, quick finishing if outnumbered, run without the ball to finish, closure of passing lanes and pressure to recover the possession.

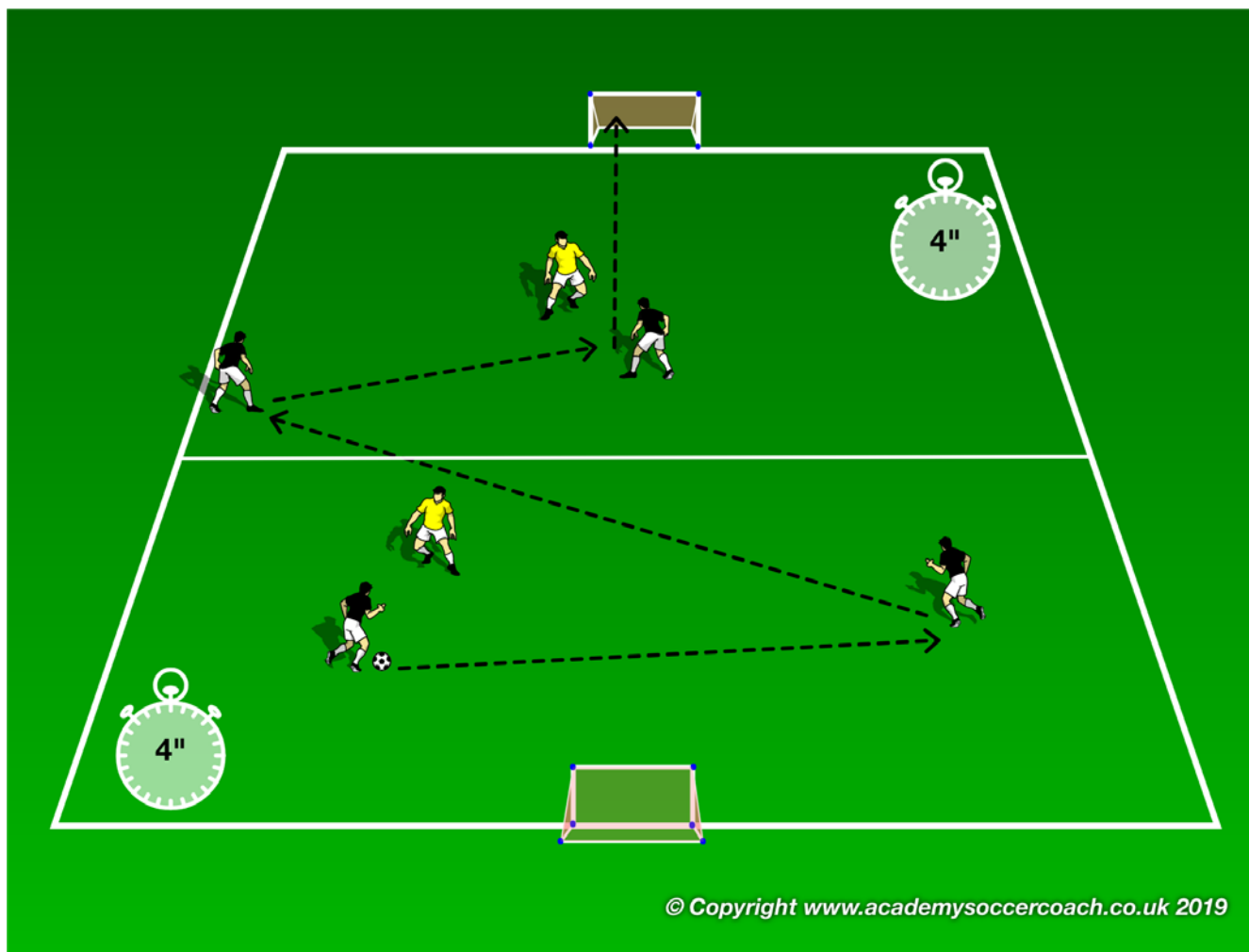
Exercise 36 (speed of play): 2 v 2 (+2)



**Set-up and sequence:** a 2 v 2 (2) duel is played inside a rectangular space. The possession team must finish within 8" after the first ball touch. Scoring worth double if the move is finished through a third man run and if both the red free players have touched the ball. If the defenders win the ball, after a pressure action or a closure of passing lane, they must finish within the same limit of time.

**Coaching points:** speed of play, finish with the fewest number of touches possible, escape the marker, exploit the numerical advantage.

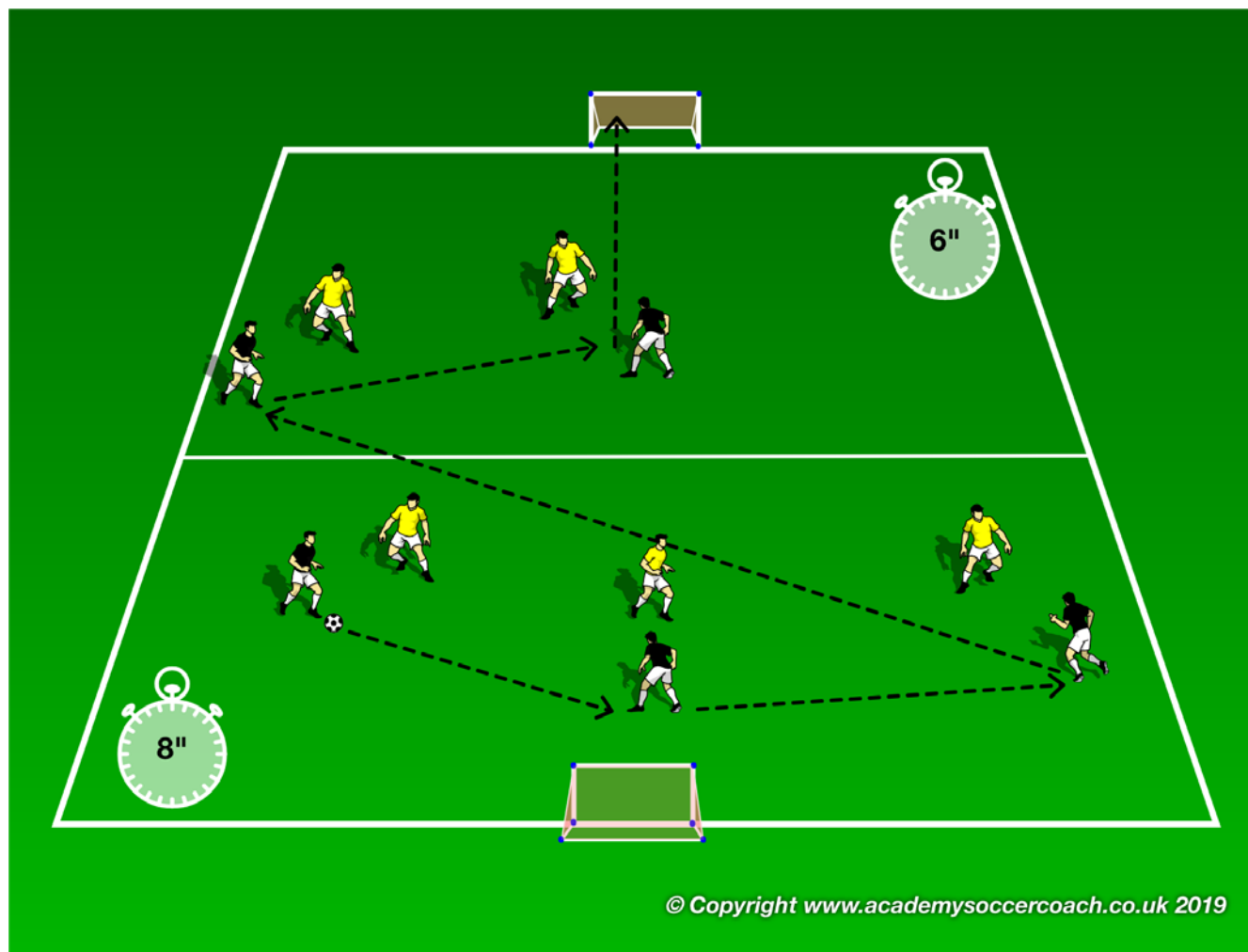
### Exercise 37 (speed of play): double 2 v 1



**Set-up and sequence:** a double 2 v 1 duel is played inside a rectangular space that is divided into 2 parts. The possession team must overcome the first 2 v 1 duel with the aim of building up within 4", after the first ball touch and the move must be finished again within 4", as the middle line is overcome. If the defenders win the ball, they can score directly or wait for the other teammate to create a 2 v 2 duel that must be won within 8".

**Coaching points:** speed of play, finish with the fewest number of touches possible, combine quickly, support play if the defenders win the ball.

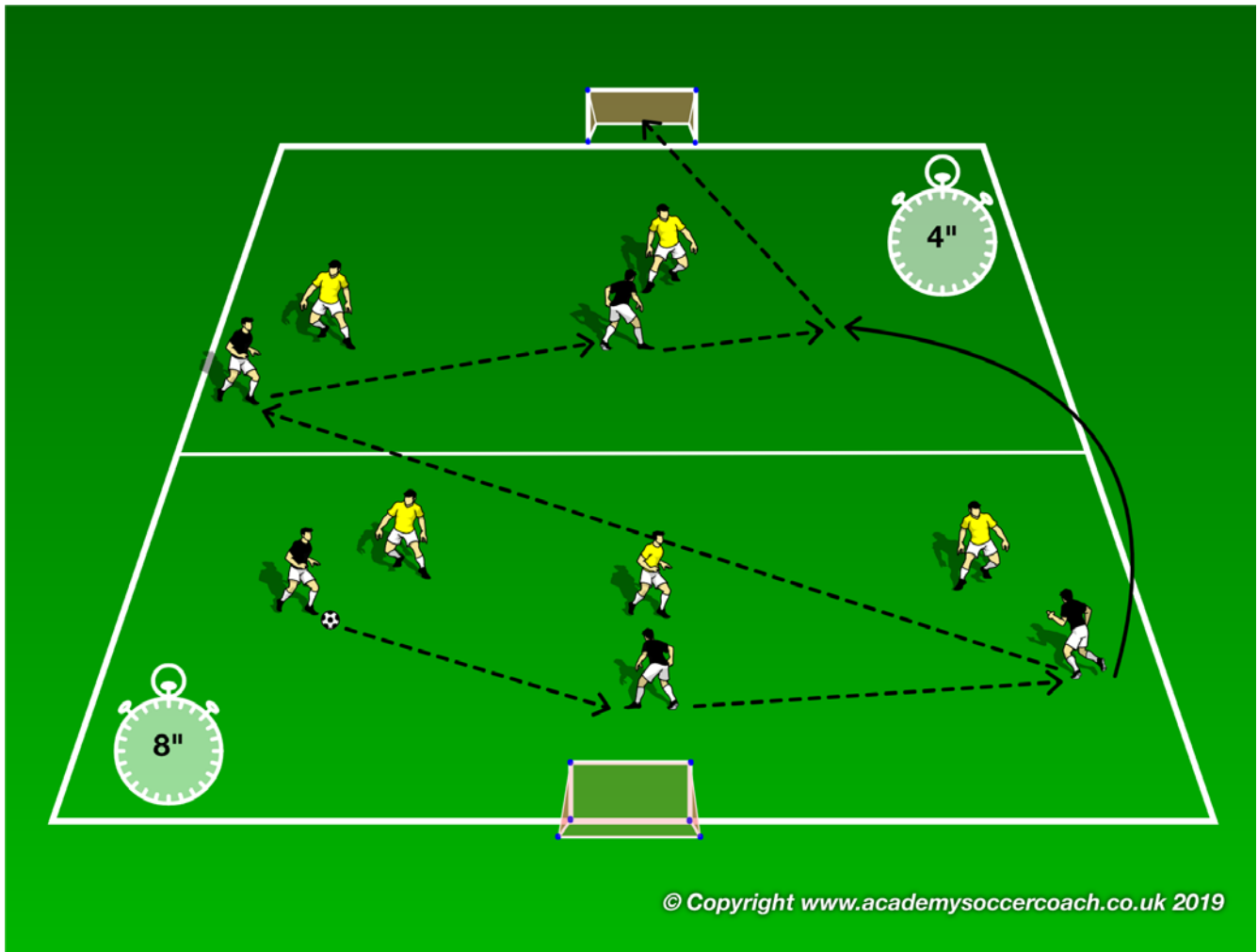
Exercise 38 (speed of play):



**Set-up and sequence:** a 3 v 3 and a 2 v 2 duels are played inside a rectangular space that is divided into 2 parts. The possession team must overcome the first 3 v 3 duel with the aim of building up within 8" after the first ball touch and the move must be finished within 6", as the middle line is overcome, winning the 2 v 2 duel. If the defenders win the ball inside the lower area, they must score within 8"; if the defenders of the 2 v 2 duel win the possession, a 5 v 5 duel is created to shot toward the opposite goal within 14".

**Coaching points:** speed of play, finish with the fewest number of touches possible, combine quickly, support play if the defenders win the ball.

Exercise 39 (speed of play): 3 v 3 and 2 v 3 duel



**Set-up and sequence:** a 3 v 3 and a 2 v 2 (then 2 v 3) duels are played inside a rectangular space that is divided into 2 parts. The possession team must overcome the first 3 v 3 duel with the aim of building up within 8" after the first ball touch and the move must be finished within 4" as the middle line is overcome, winning the 2 v 2 duel that becomes a 2 v 3 duels thanks to a third forward, who supports the finishing phase. If the defenders win the ball inside the lower area, they must score within 8"; if the defenders of the 2 v 3 duel win the possession, a 5 v 5 duel is created to shot toward the opposite goal within 12".

**Coaching points:** speed of play, finish with the fewest number of touches possible, combine quickly, support play if the defenders win the ball.

Exercise 40 (speed of play):



**Set-up and sequence:** 1 goalkeeper and 4 defenders against 4 black attackers are placed inside an area 5 yards longer than the penalty area. A 2 v 2 duel is played inside a middle 10 yards area, acting as midfielders for both the teams. The goalkeeper passes the ball toward one of the attacking midfielders to build up and overcome the opposition pressure within 6". As the ball is played inside the finishing area, the attacking phase must be finished within 6". If the defenders win the ball a general 6 + gk v 6 duel is played to dribble over the last end line of the set up within 12".

**Coaching points:** speed of play, build up with the fewest number of touches possible, combine and finish quickly, support play if the defenders win the ball.