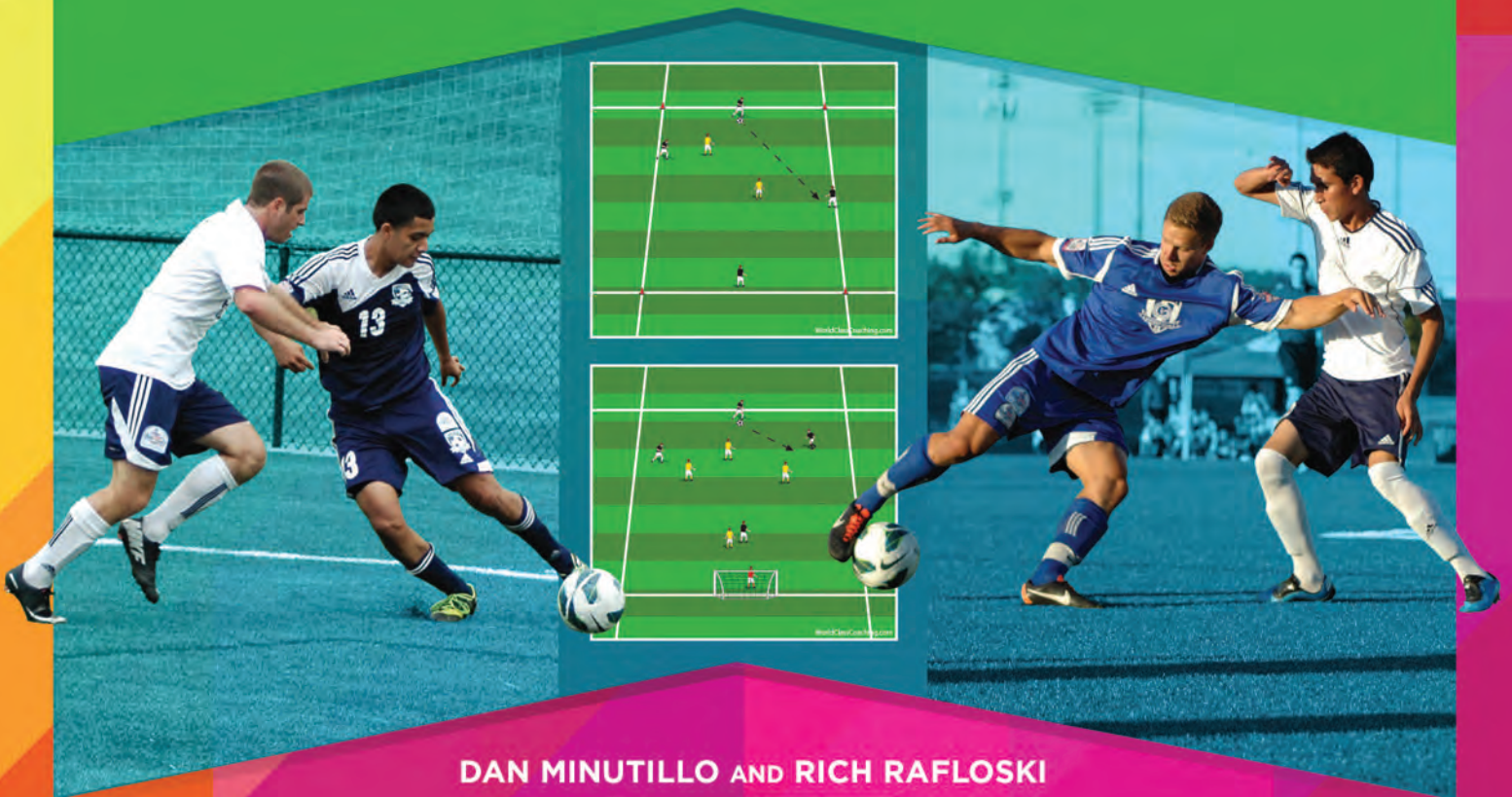


PROGRESSIVE SOCCER TRAINING IN GRIDS



DAN MINUTILLO AND RICH RAFLOSKI



Progressive Soccer Training in Grids

by
Dan Minutillo
&
Rich Rafloski

Published by
WORLD CLASS COACHING

Progressive Soccer Training in Grids

**Organizing training sessions using one grid that
morphs from one exercise to the next**

First published October, 2013 by
WORLD CLASS COACHING 3404 W. 122nd Terrace Leawood, KS 66209

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Written and Edited by Dan Minutillo and Rich Rafloski



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MORPHING

One Grid

Progressive Soccer Training

INTRODUCTION

Too much time is wasted by a coach or staff setting up grid after grid before and during a training session to accommodate different exercises to be accomplished by a soccer team during the session. Morphing during soccer training allows a coach to set up just one grid with very minor modifications for an entire session, changing only the exercises during the session but not usually changing the grid size or shape. This is done by maintaining the same grid for an entire training session (except for the usual scrimmage at the end of the session) reconfiguring players, adding target players, adding neutral players, adding wide players or moving goals in and about the grid, allowing variations in exercises by this reconfiguration based on a singular training theme during the session.

To add value to this book, soccer training themes are discussed, one theme per chapter, with the elements of that training theme broken down in detail and analyzed to help the novice or expert coach recognize those elements during the training session. Each technical and tactical training theme is explained in detail. Four small sided games per theme per chapter are provided and described in detail, including grid set up, player configuration, and rules and restrictions for each exercise. A diagram of each exercise is included in the book as a visual. Each diagram contains additional information which further explains each small sided game presented. Coaching points are provided in each chapter so that a coach can use “coaching in the game” at the right time, that is, “at coachable moments” to help imprint technical and tactical aspects of the game on players.

Morphing is set up so that a coach can have a clear and concise “one stop” resource no matter which formation or system of play within that formation is chosen. This book can be used for every training session, from the start to the end of the soccer season—training theme, technical and tactical elements related to that theme, training exercises/small sided games, coaching points, and detailed diagrams of each game with a further explanation of the exercises on each diagram, all in one book.

Morphing is a new concept in soccer coaching in which the coach still sets a theme for a training session as usual but then only uses one grid from the start to the end of the session, varying exercises by changing the position and movement of players within the chosen theme rather than using time modifying the grid. The exercises included in this book promote and were specifically chosen to ensure quick and deep imprinting on players.

For example, assume that the training theme for a soccer training session is wide play. The base grid might be a square grid of about 40 x 40 yards depending on the number of players at the session. This square 40 x 40 yard grid would not change during the entire 90 minute or two hour soccer training session but, every ten minutes or so, the configuration of the players, use of targets, wide players, or neutrals, and the use or placement of goals might change. The grid and player configuration morphs to suit the next exercise related to the training theme, quickly and easily.

The size of the base grid can be different than as suggested in each chapter and changed by the coach depending on the number of players participating or whether a coach wants to speed up play using a smaller grid or slow down play using a larger grid.

For the most part, all information needed to run a full training session related to a specific theme is included in every single chapter. The best training exercises, covering almost every soccer training theme, are part of this book revolving around this new concept, morphing, so that, with rare exception, you only set up once per training session using multiple exercises in that session. This will become obvious and clear after reading a few chapters of this book.

To ensure clarity, very detailed diagrams, drafted by soccer coach Rich Rafloski, are used to describe each exercise (small sided games) in every chapter of this book, relating to the theme of each chapter. An entire training session related to the chosen theme for that session is provided in each chapter of this book. A coach will merely need to choose a training theme before the training session begins and then follow the progressive diagrams explaining each exercise related to that theme in the sequence provided without having to change the size or configuration of the grid to allow a seamless movement from one exercise to the other for an entire training session. Morphing is a very efficient and all inclusive method to train soccer players of all ages and all levels of play with specific training sessions described and diagramed for clarity.

Each diagram starts with the basic grid for that chapter's theme and then the following diagrams in each chapter change to show and explain the next exercise for a session revolving around the theme for that session. This is done so the reader can merely determine the theme for a session, copy the diagrams for that session, bring those copies to the training session and set the one base grid for that session on the field, and then merely morph the grid based on the diagrams to accommodate each of the exercises to be used in the training session.

It is important to note that the lines representing off the ball player movement or ball movement in the diagrams do not represent specific movement of a player or the ball required for the exercise but are merely examples to help the reader understand the exercise. Therefore, the lines shown in the diagrams do not represent patterns.

The reader merely chooses a theme for the session, goes to that specific chapter in the book, and then follows the exercises described for the session in the applicable chapter. If a coach does not fully understand or needs a refresher about the technical and tactical points presented by a certain theme, then he merely needs to look to the breakdown of "elements" as related to that theme as provided in each chapter for each training theme, or take a quick look at the coaching points mentioned in that chapter. Again, each theme in each chapter is explained in detail whether that theme is a technical or tactical in nature.

Each chapter relates to a traditional soccer training theme as follows:

CHAPTER 1

Shielding

CHAPTER 2

Wide Play

CHAPTER 3

Counter Attack on Transition

CHAPTER 4

Possession

CHAPTER 5

Third Man Runs

CHAPTER 6

Passing

CHAPTER 7

Receiving and Turning

CHAPTER 8

Shooting and Finishing

CHAPTER 9

Small Group Defending

CHAPTER 10

Team Defending, Vertical and Horizontal Pressing

CHAPTER 11

Combination Play to Create Scoring Opportunities

CHAPTER 12

Check Runs

Most of the ideas and concepts presented in this book are addressed to soccer coaches/managers, though trainers and players that want to improve their tactical and technical understanding of the game, league and club directors attempting to implement a standardized, efficient training progression league or club wide, will also benefit from reading this book.

Morphing

CHAPTER 1

Training Theme 1

Shielding—Teaching the first attacker to shield the ball and the first defender to take the ball from a player trying to shield it.

Shielding by the First Attacker

Shielding is an individual technical skill used by a first attacker to keep the ball away from an opponent who is tight on the first attacker's back, that is, committed pressure by the first defender during the run of play. Shielding is an offensive maneuver used to hold (possess) the ball to delay the run of play until help arrives so that the ball can be passed by the first attacker (the player with the ball) to a player supporting the attack, or, as a method to move the defender out of position to enable the first attacker to turn and shoot when in the vital area. In either case, shielding is an important part of any player's individual technical repertoire and if done properly, is an effective offensive tool.

Shielding requires excellent balance, core (abs and lower back), and lower body strength especially if the first defender, who is committed and tight on the back of the player shielding the ball, is bigger and stronger than the first attacker. That defender will bend his arm, so as not to get called for a foul, and push and shove the first attacker from the back to try to knock him off balance while poking at the ball with his foot closest to it. It will be difficult for the first attacker to hold off this first defender without using proper shielding technique, again, especially if dealing with a typical big center back as the first defender.

Proper Shielding Technique by the First Attacker

The most important part of shielding the ball is the body position of the first attacker just before and at the time the ball is at the foot of the first attacker. Assume that the ball has not yet been collected by the first attacker and that both the first attacker and the first defender are running at a 50/50 ball (a ball which two opposing players have an equal chance of collecting) ready to collect it. The first attacker must approach the ball so that he is in a position to be able to put his body between the ball and the first defender. This usually means approaching the ball at an angle (diagonal) to the first defender, with the body acting as a wedge between the ball and the defender. This is the approach to the ball by the first attacker to be taken just before attempting to collect the 50/50 ball if the ball is to be shielded.

Once the first attacker beats the first defender to the ball and is in a position to collect it with the defender to his back, the attacker must stay low and move the ball to his foot farthest from the defender otherwise the defender will poke the ball away. The defender merely needs to poke the ball away, in any direction, in order to disrupt the first attacker. The first attacker has the more difficult job of trying to hold onto the ball, find for a passing option (a player in support), and make a pass or take a shot on goal. All of this has to be assessed and accomplished by the first attacker within a few seconds while shielding the ball from a big back poking at the ball and hitting him in the ribs with his elbow—not an easy task.

Once the ball is on the first attacker's front foot, he can then spread his arms, get low for good balance (knees bent), leaning slightly back into the first defender so that he can feel him move allowing the first attacker to adjust his body as the defender moves. For the most part, shielding is a stationary maneuver but the first attacker can actually steer the defender to one side or the other by adjusting his body slightly so that the attacker can attempt to turn to the opposite side for a pass or a shot on goal. If shielding is done properly, it can be used to manipulate the movement and body position of the first defender.

For each chapter of this book, technical and/or tactical “elements” relating to the training theme will be presented in list format. Upon review of these elements, the reader will have a better understating of specific aspects of the theme or, at the very least, a refresher describing the technical or tactical maneuvers mentioned in that chapter.

The First Attacker

Elements of Shielding as the First Attacker

The first attacker should be quick to the ball;

Position his body to act as a wedge between the ball and the first defender as he approaches the ball;

Collect the ball in a way to position the first defender on his back and in a way so that he can quickly get the ball on his front foot;

Extend his arms, body low, leaning slightly back;

Attempt to steer the first defender on his back one way or the other so that the first attacker can pass the ball to a teammate in a supporting position or turn and take a shot on goal;

Use the strength of the quadriceps and core to hold off the first defender.

The First Defender

Defending Against Shielding as the First Defender

Assuming that the first attacker got to the ball first and shields it from the first defender, the first defender must act quickly to get into a position to take the ball. The first defender will want to exert committed pressure tight on the back of the first attacker who is trying to shield the ball. To do this, the first defender must move quickly to close space between himself and the first attacker. He then must slow down once he is near the first attacker so that he could get into good position to pressure the first attacker, sideways on, with his knees bent, and body low, tight on the first attacker’s back using committed pressure. An easy way to remember this is “quick, slow, sideways, low”. Coach Angela Kelly coined this phrase while coaching at the University of Tennessee. Note that, in this scenario, the first attacker beat the first defender to the ball and is shielding it.

It is extremely important that the first defender be sideways on so that one of his feet is closer to the ball than the other. This will allow him to poke at the ball as the first attacker is attempting to move it away from that foot. The first defender must stay low, knees bent for good balance. His arm must be bent (so as not to be called for a foul) and touching the back of the first attacker, pushing him without fouling him. A bent arm will allow the forearm of the first defender to feel the back of the first attacker as he moves. He must adjust his body as the first attacker moves trying to hold him off but he must be constantly poking at the ball, particularly when, for a split second, the ball is off the foot of the first attacker.

How to Take the Ball as a First Defender

If the first attacker is shielding properly, it will be very difficult for the first defender to take the ball. The greatest weapon that the first defender has is the pocker, that is, his foot closest to the ball. As the first defender holds tight on the back of the first attacker, arm bent, he must be constantly bothering the first attacker by moving his foot forward, poking his foot toward the ball from behind the first attacker to disrupt him, to make him adjust. The first defender must try to hit the ball to poke it out to a teammate.

Remember that the first attacker will be leaning slightly back with the ball on the foot furthest from the defender so the “poker” may not work but it can be used to move the first attacker out of position preventing a turn or a pass—disrupt, disrupt, disrupt by poking at the ball. The first defender does not need to take the ball from the first attacker to be successful in this situation. If a good pass to dangerous space is prevented, the first defender has been successful.

The First Defender

Elements of Defending When a First Attacker Is Shielding the Ball

The first defender should be able to get to a 50/50 ball first because his goal is to disrupt the play which is easier than attempting to collect the ball as is required of the first attacker;

The first defender must close down space quickly to the ball;

Then slow down to within an arms distance of the first attacker if the first attacker collected the ball first;

Set up sideways on so that the poker is close to the ball;

Apply committed pressure tight on the back of the first attacker;

Body low for good balance;

Arm bent so as not to get called for a foul;

Use the poker to disrupt the ball.

One additional side note, there are times when you want to teach a defender to use “uncommitted pressure” instead of committed pressure behind the first attacker. Uncommitted pressure, as mentioned again later in this book, means that the first attacker has his back to the first defender but the first defender is not “committed”, that is, he is not right up against the first attacker. The first defender is about an arm’s length behind the first attacker.

Why? Occasionally, the first defender may want the first attacker to turn into him rather than allowing the possibility of turning around him to take a shot on goal or make a pass to a player behind the first attacker. In other words, in certain circumstances, the first defender may think that he has a better chance of taking the ball from the first attacker at the point of the turn or just after the turn of the first attacker rather than trying to take it facing the back of the first attacker when the first defender’s primary weapon is the poker. Uncommitted pressure by a first defender will usually prompt a first attacker to turn allowing the first defender to “face up” the first attacker and slow the play or take the ball.

SHEILDING EXERCISE 1

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this book is to use traditional soccer training themes to provide full training sessions revolving around a theme without changing the size or configuration of the grid, or with very minor changes to the grid. The first theme to be discussed is shielding and the first exercise for this theme is called “The Pit”.

THE PIT---Teaching the first attacker to shield the ball; and teaching the first defender how to take a ball when the ball is properly shielded by the first attacker.

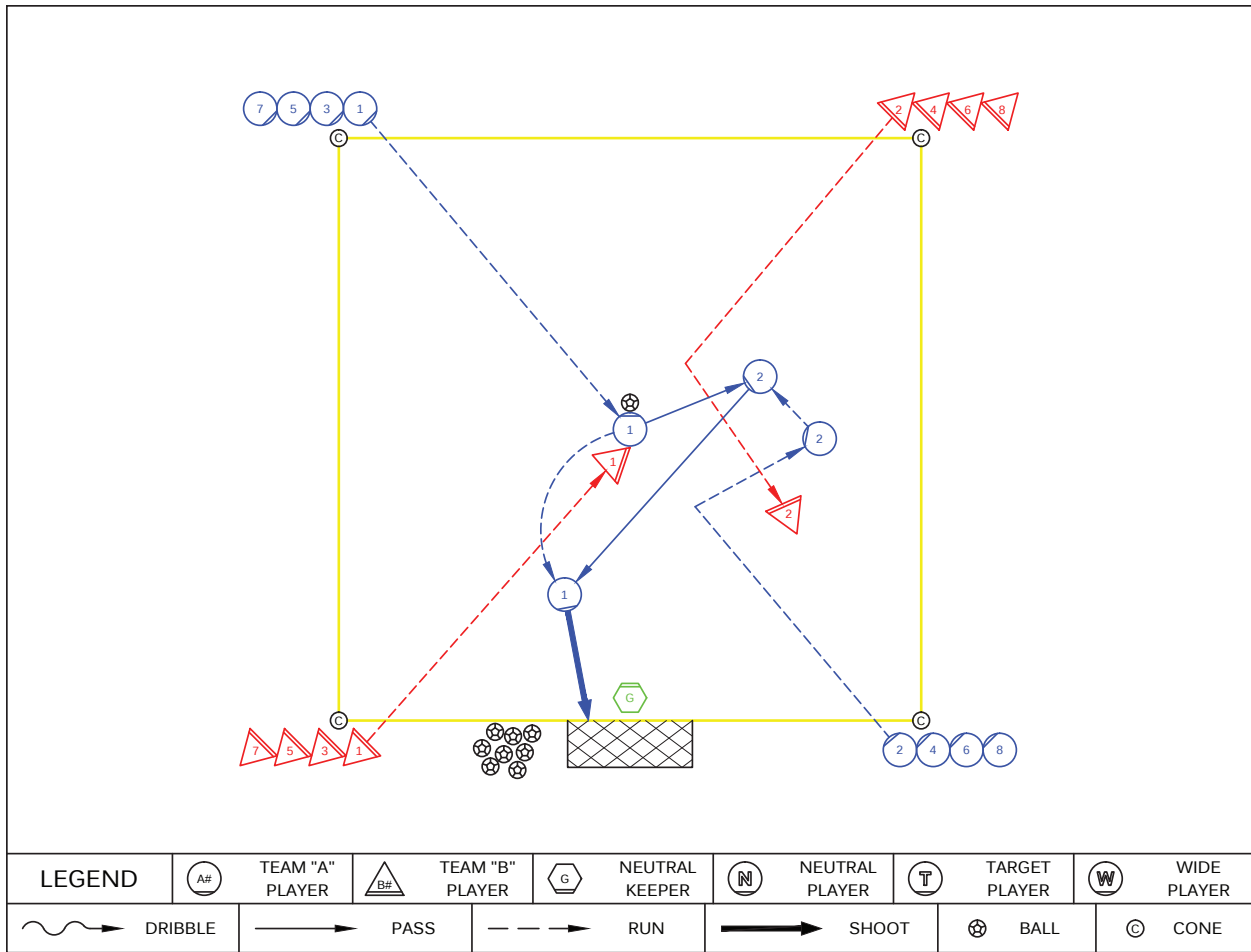


Diagram 1

As shown in Diagram 1, the grid for The Pit is about 40 x 40 yards square with a disk at each corner of the grid. The Pit is played initially to one goal placed in the middle of an end line as placed on a normal soccer field, with a keeper. The players are divided into two equal teams, in bibs with one team standing in a line at a corner behind a cone with teammates standing in a line at a corner diagonal to them. The teams, in bibs, are standing diagonal to each other in lines at corners. Diagonal players are on the same team designated by similar color bibs. A good supply of balls is placed inside of the goal near the back of the net.

The Pit starts with the keeper rolling a ball about 20 yards from goal vertically onto the field. The first player in each line attacks the ball as it is moving on the field. The teams are 2 v 2. The first player to get to the ball (the first attacker) collects it. Once the ball is collected, that player must take a moment to pause and shield the ball no matter where the defenders are located on the other team, even if that player has an opportunity to pass the ball to an open teammate. Once the first attacker has shielded the ball for just a moment, he then can look for his teammate in support and pass the ball to him. That teammate will of course be wearing the same color bib. As soon as at least one pass is completed by this team of two players, whichever player on the team has an opportunity, can then shoot the ball. Collect, shield, pass, shoot are the rules for The Pit.

The purpose of this exercise is to teach the player with the ball how to properly shield it from a first defender and to teach the first defender how to take the ball from the first attacker. This exercise should move quickly at game speed with a player only standing in line for about 90 seconds or less, just enough time so that he can physically recover. Once a shot on goal happens, the keeper must immediately take a ball and send it out about 20 yards from goal to start the next rotation of players into The Pit. The rotation of players in this exercise should happen very fast. The prior team must vacate the field wide and quickly so as not to interfere with the next group of four players sprinting to the ball to try to collect it.

Review the elements of shielding mentioned earlier and set up the grid as shown in Diagram 1. The rules for this exercise must be followed for every rotation but the most important rule is that all players on the field must compete hard to collect the 50/50 ball rolled out vertically by the keeper. This exercise is to be played at game speed.

The player that wins the ball should immediately shield it allowing a defender to get tight on his back. Most times a player will naturally try to dribble or pass the ball away from the defender but, in this exercise, the first attacker must pause to allow the first defender to get committed on his back, tight—an unnatural delaying maneuver by the first attacker but this serves a purpose for this exercise.

The first attacker must try to pass the ball the way that he is facing to his open teammate. The teammate in support must keep moving as the first attacker is pivoting one way and the other so that there is a clear passing lane from the first attacker to the teammate, hopefully, the way the first attacker is facing. Once the first attacker passes the ball to the teammate, that team can either continue to pass in order to create a shooting opportunity or shoot the ball straight away, if possible.

Whether the shot is saved by the keeper or missed, the players on the field quickly clear the grid wide, out of the play, and the keeper rolls another ball vertically about 20 yards up field to start another rotation of four players, two teams, and the game starts again.

The player that collects the ball becomes the first attacker and his team attacks the goal but if the ball is stolen, the team with the ball now attacks without having to shield. This will become much clearer if you review Diagram 1 carefully. Note that, though you set up the grid with two goals, only use two goals for Exercise 4; use only one goal for Exercises 1, 2 and 3.

Coaching in the Game

Use “coaching in the game” to help the first attacker learn to shield. Coaching in the game will help with quick imprinting of proper shielding technique. The elements of coaching in the game are: observe, stop play at a teaching point (at the point of the error, a coachable moment), explain the issue (describe what you want to correct and how to correct the error), have the players demonstrate the mistake (replay), explain the correction, set a trigger point (the ball or player movement immediately before the mistake) and then have the players demonstrate the correction by restarting the exercise at the trigger point. Basically, stop, explain, and restart but during the exercise (during the small sided game)—correct during the run of play. The “Coaching Points” provided in each chapter of this book can be used to teach applicable technical and tactical parts of the themes presented.

Coaching Points to Help the First Attacker

The first attacker must be quick to the ball using a short, powerful burst as a first step directly toward the ball starting a straight line run covering the shortest distance to the ball. This is not the time to use a curved or diagonal run. The first attacker must cover as much ground as possible in as short a time as possible moving from his place on the field to the ball in the shortest possible distance ready to be confronted at the time he attempts to collect the ball. Once the first attacker gets very close to the ball, at that time, he angles his body to cut out the first defender as a wedge between the first defender and the ball.

Once the ball is reached, just after the ball is collected by the first attacker, the most important element of shielding for the first attacker is body position. Watch the body position of the first attacker as he approaches the ball. If the attacking player's body is properly angled as mentioned above in a position to act as a wedge between the ball and the defender, he must then get low, leaning slightly back with arms out so that he can feel the movement of the first defender with his arm or hand.

Review the paragraphs above regarding the first attacker's body position and adjust a player not correctly following each such coaching point using coaching in the game.

Coaching Points to Help the First Defender

The first defender is the player that did not get to the ball first. The most important element of shielding for the first defender is setting up on the first attacker quickly as soon as he is reached. The first defender must set up sideways on using hard committed pressure on the first attacker's back so that his foot closest to the ball can be used as a poker to try to disrupt the ball. The first defender must stay low, knees bent, for balance. Good body position will allow the first defender to steer the first attacker in a direction to minimize or eliminate passing options and good body position will allow the first defender to use the poker to disrupt the ball. If the first defender's body position is wrong, use coaching in the game to make the correction.

MORPHING THE GRID, SAME THEME, MODIFIED EXERCISE

SHIELDING, EXERCISE 2

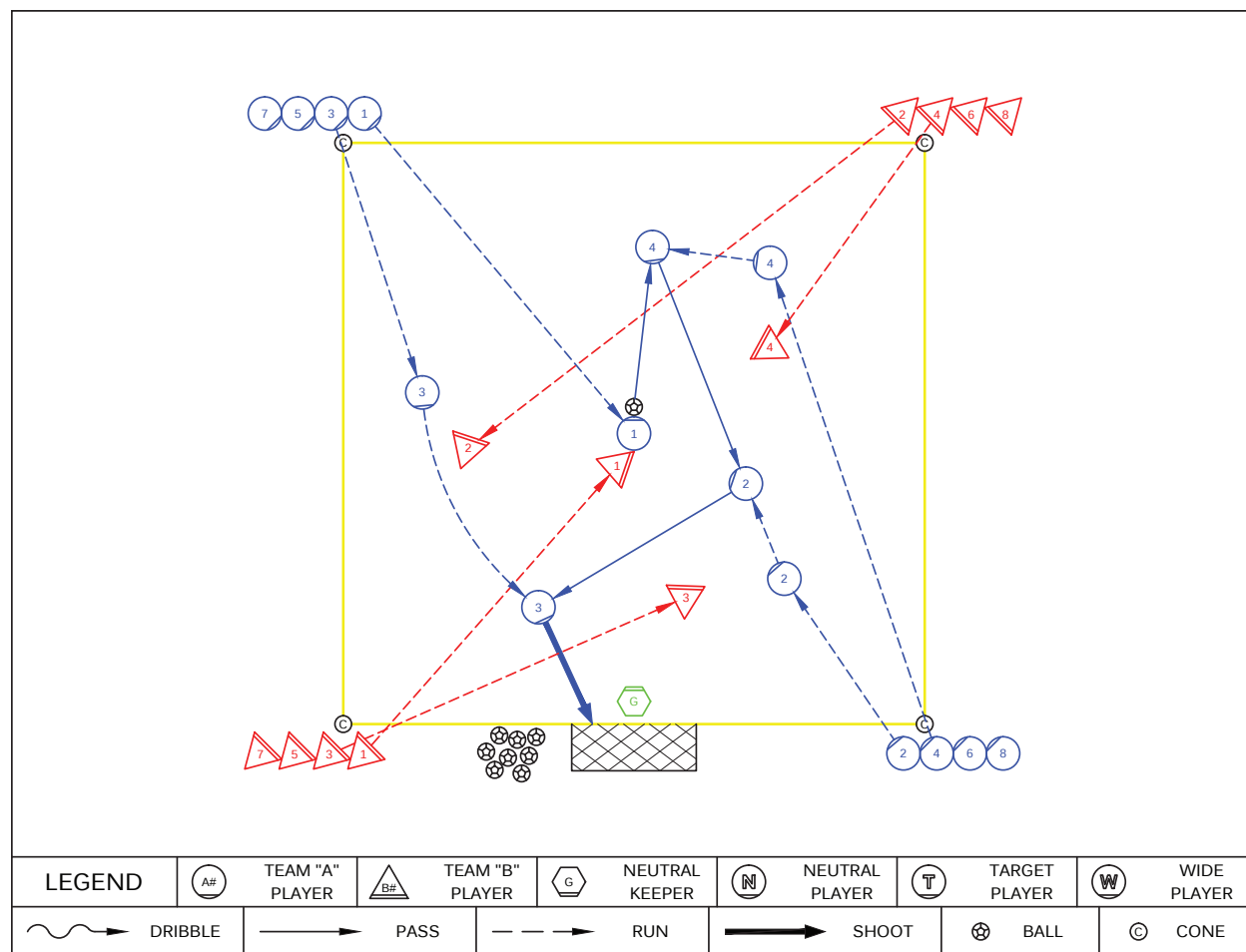


Diagram 2

Using the same grid, rather than playing 2 v 2 as shown in Diagram 1, see Diagram 2 for 4 v 4 play. The rules, which are to collect, shield, pass, and shoot remain the same in this Exercise as in Exercise 1; and shielding principles are the same as in Exercise 1 but space will be much tighter because there are double the number of players in the same size grid as in Exercise 1, forcing the players to play faster in this tighter space.

Because of this crowding, there will naturally be less touches on the ball and this will speed up play. Allow all players unlimited touches so that the player shielding the ball does not feel pressure to release it due to touch restrictions but you will notice that the players will naturally take less touches before releasing the ball because space will be restricted. Make sure each game is started very quickly, one game after the next, played at game speed so that shots are taken often and players are not waiting in line for more than about 90 seconds. See Diagram 2 for a good visual of Exercise 2.

SHIELDING, EXERCISE 3

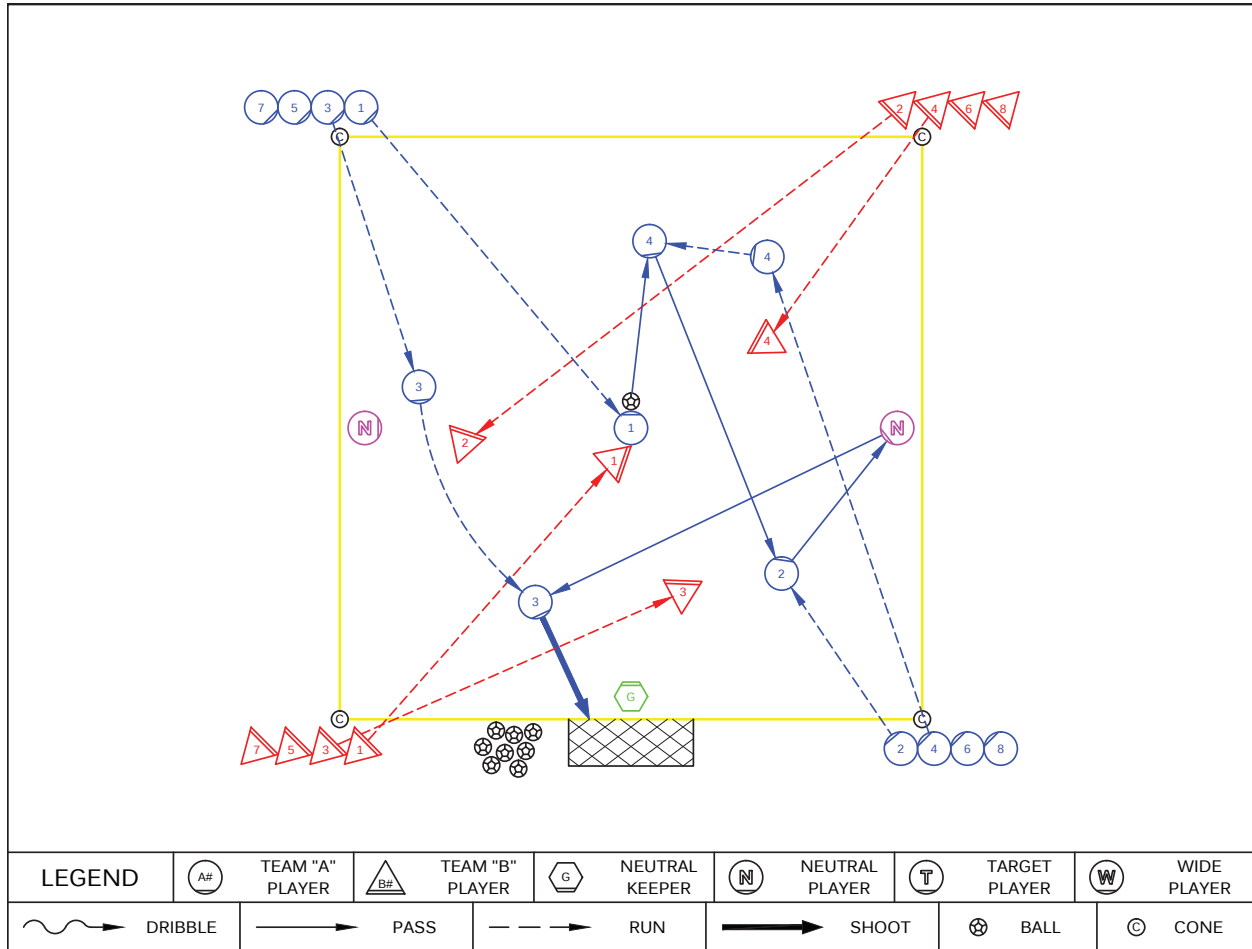


Diagram 3

Using the same grid, continue to play 4 v 4 but add two neutral players inside the grid. The neutral players do not wear bibs and they stay in the grid rotation after rotation. As shown in Diagram 3, the neutrals must pass the ball back to a player on the same team that passed it to the neutral. The neutrals cannot defend and they are not allowed to collect the ball as the game is started. The neutrals only role is to receive passes and make passes for both teams. This will make it easier for the first attacker to find a passing option and more difficult for the first defender to take the ball. A secondary effect of using neutrals is to speed up play on attack, especially when coaching adult aged teams because more passing options and more clear passing lanes will be available.

Once the team is playing at a satisfactory pace, limit the touches of the neutrals to two and then to one touch. As shown in Diagram 3, the balance of the rules for this third exercise remain the same as the first exercise, collect, shield, pass, shoot.

SHIELDING, EXERCISE 4

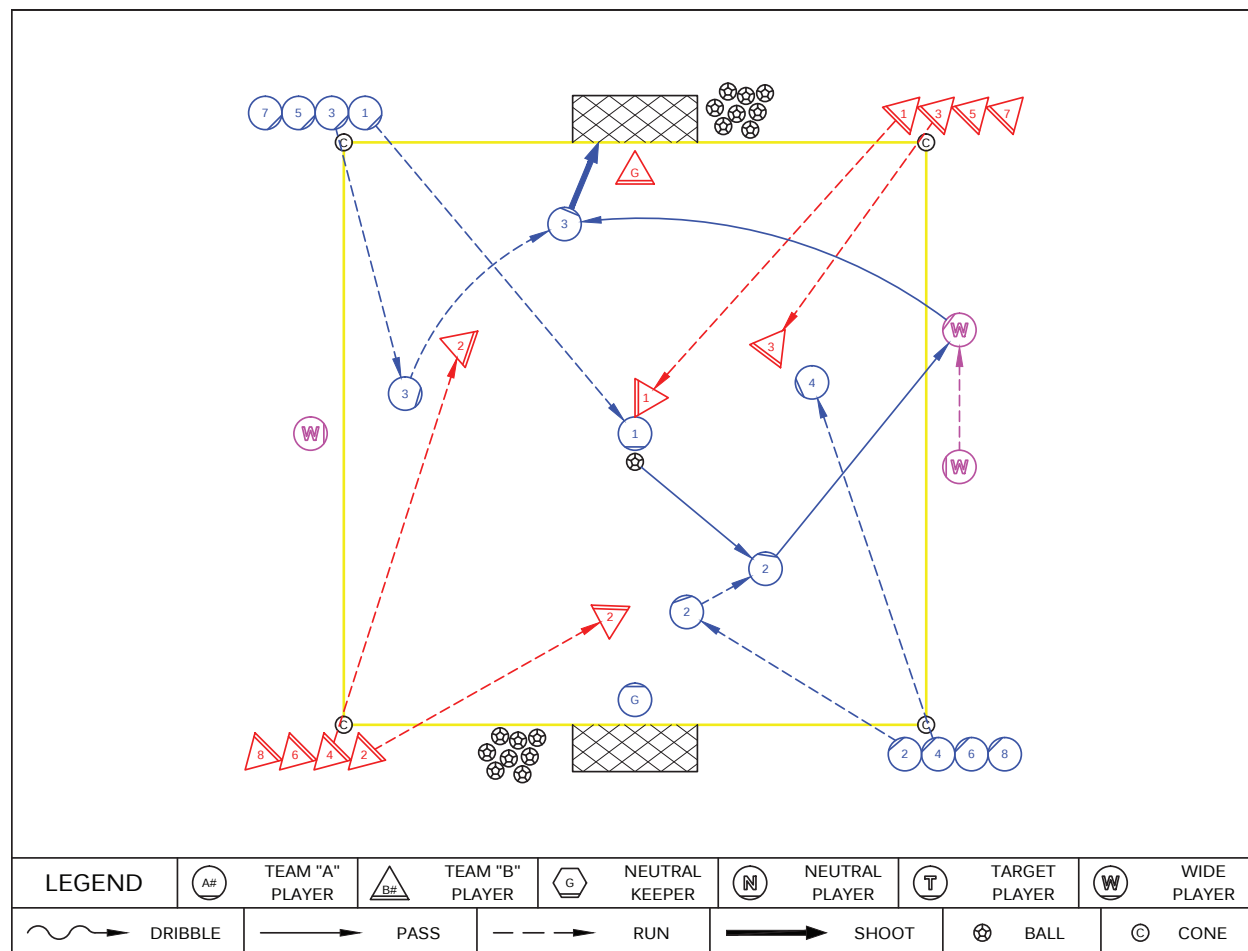


Diagram 4

As shown in Diagram 4, using the same grid, continue to play 4 v 4 but add two wide players at the side lines, outside the grid, and add a second goal with a keeper. The wide players are neutrals. The game is now directional with one team in bibs attacking one goal and the other team attacking the opposite goal. The wide players have unlimited touches and cannot enter the grid. They are to collect a pass and send the ball into the vital area for a shot on goal by the attacking team. On transition (the attacking team loses the ball), the team in possession now attacks in the direction of its goal.

The above four exercises and the training session progression mentioned below will occupy an entire 90 minute or two hour training session. Each exercise relates to the theme, shielding the ball and defending against a shielded ball. As usual, and as is the case for every chapter of this book, always end the training session with a full team scrimmage but emphasize the concepts in this chapter during the scrimmage.

TRAINING SESSION PROGRESSION

As an aside, a good tried and true training progression for one training session for every training theme mentioned in this book is:

1. A very short discussion with the players about the training theme;
2. A good warm up including a dynamic and then a static stretch;
3. Perform the four exercises in the progression presented, following the diagrams sequentially, using coaching in the game to make technical and tactical corrections;
4. A full team scrimmage emphasizing the theme of the training session without interruption by coach;
5. Body weight calisthenics—strength work;
6. A good cool down;
7. A very short discussion about the session and any important housekeeping.

CHAPTER 2

Training Theme 2

Wide Play—Teaching players to move the ball wide on attack to use space in the outside channels efficiently and effectively.

Wide play is an offensive tactic using the width of the field by moving the ball to an outside channel (to a wing) out of pressure. In many cases, during the run of play, the weak side outside channel is not congested with defenders and can be used either to counter attack wide or to move the ball at a quick pace wide and up field without opposition.

Keep in mind that the weak side and strong side (that side of the field where the ball is located when looking at the field vertically) outside channels can be worked during the run of play especially during build up out of the back or middle third of the field. The weak side can be used on attack with off the ball runners moving wide into the weak side outside channel spreading the opponent's defense and the strong side outside channel can be used for combination play.

Wide play is one of the best ways to start a counter attack. If an opponent has taken a shot on goal in the vital area and that shot was saved by the keeper, the wings will usually be open because the attacking team has numbers in or around the goal channel while trying to create a scoring opportunity or collect a rebound.

At the time of the save, the keeper has the opportunity to develop the play quickly out of the back by moving the ball wide, on the ground for a quick counter attack up the wing. Wide play also pulls an opponent's defenders out of the goal channel to allow quick combination play in the goal channel after the ball has reached the front third on transition.

In summary, wide play is important on transition; or to move the ball out of pressure during the run of play; or to spread an opponent's defense.

Elements of Playing Wide

An outside player on the strong side must get wide and free from a defender with a clear view of the ball unobstructed by an opposing player;

The wide player should start his run early so that he reaches an outside channel as the first attacker is ready to pass the ball;

The outside player must have his body open to the ball and open to the direction that he intends to pass or move the ball once collected;

The first attacker inside the main grid must be able to see the receiver unobstructed and must send the ball to space in the direction that the receiver is facing so that he can run onto the ball to collect it in stride;

If the pass is to space it must be with touch, not over weighted;

If the only option is a pass to feet, it must be firm, with pace;

The passer should make a run to space after the pass is made allowing the receiver to play the way he is facing to send a pass back to the passer if that is the best passing option.

Wing play requires movement from teammates playing inside in order to provide passing options using 1-2 combinations as discussed later in this book. Once an inside player makes a pass wide, that inside player

must move to open space to provide another passing option for the receiver. Why? Though the outside channels may be less congested by opponents, the side line restricts the size of the playing area on the wings thereby restricting passing options on one side of the field so inside players must keep moving to provide passing options inside of the wing player.

**WIDE PLAY
EXERCISE 1**

For the purpose of this chapter, as shown in Diagram 5, assume the field is divided into three horizontal sections, namely the back, middle, and front third of the field; and three vertical sections, namely the left, goal, and right channel. Also consider the vital area that part of the field near the goal about at the six yard box.

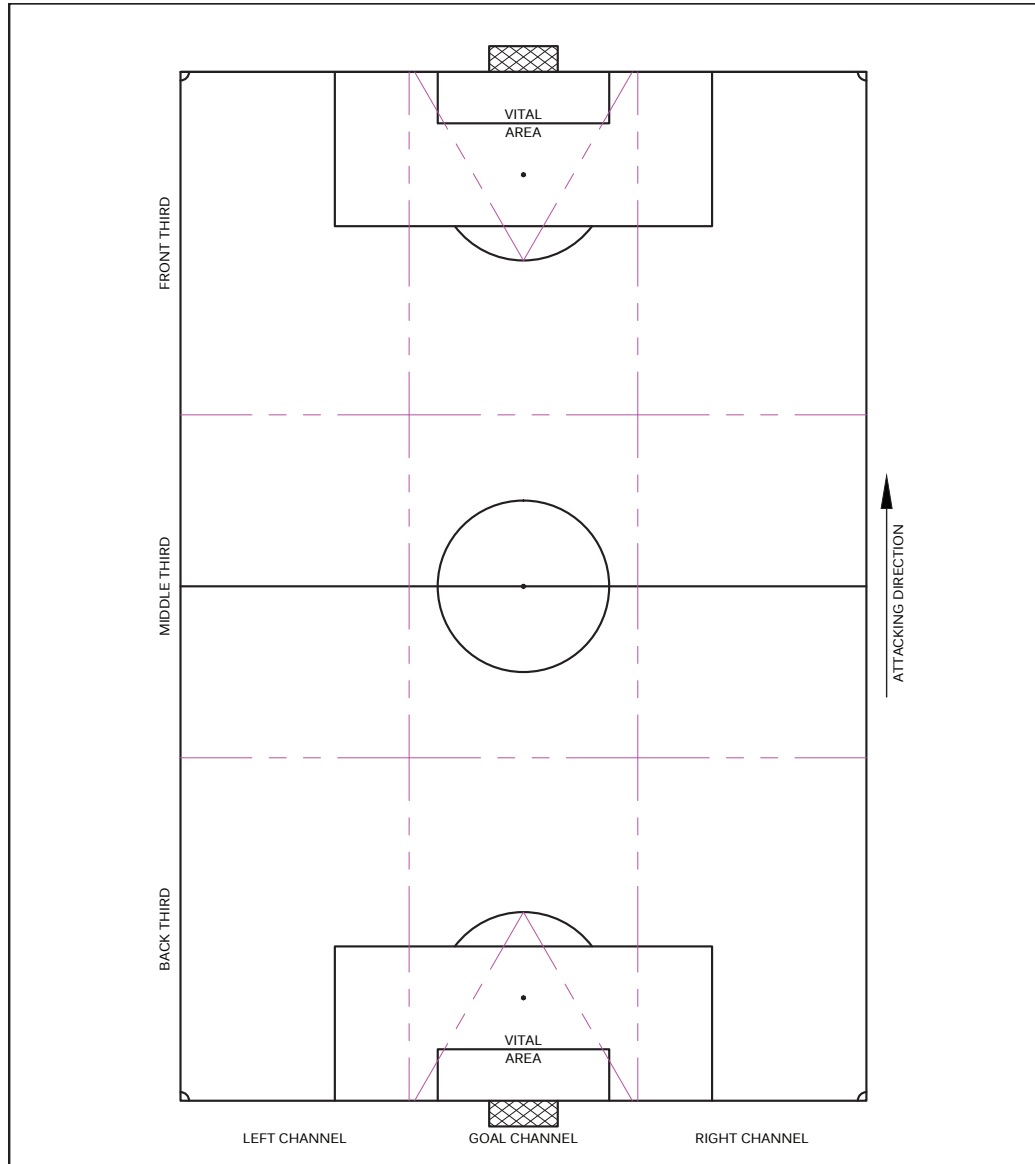


Diagram 5

THE FREE ZONE GAME—Teaching inside players to move the ball out of pressure wide and wingers to make off the ball runs wide on the strong side to prepare to receive a pass with body position open to the passer and to the place the ball will be moved (either to the goal or to another receiver).

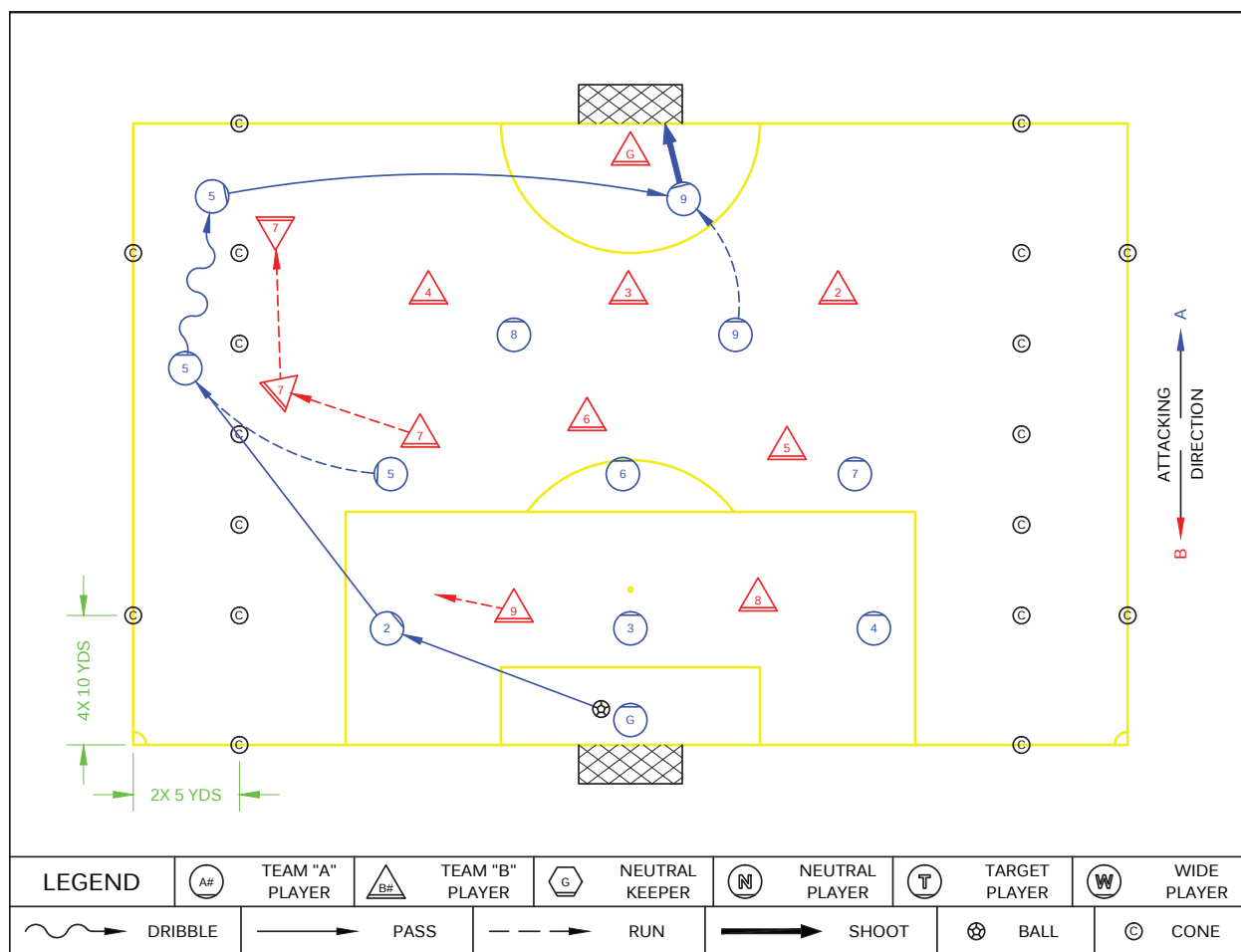


Diagram 6

As shown in Diagram 6, this exercise requires a half field grid marked with disks providing a five yard wide channel on each side of the grid, two goals with keepers, two teams in bibs, and a half dozen balls in or to the side of each goal. This game is directional (one team attacks in a direction and the other team attacks in the opposite direction) and allows goal scoring with unlimited touches by the players.

The object of this game is to pass the ball into the free zone, that is, the outside marked channels, to allow a teammate from the same team as the passer, to run onto the ball in the free zone, collect it, move it up field without opposition, and either pass the ball to an open teammate in the goal channel or near it, or to cross the ball into the mix to provide a scoring opportunity.

The wide player who collected the ball is unopposed, free to move up field in the free zone, undefended. If the ball is collected by the keeper, he too can move the ball into the free zone as a teammate moves into that zone. Only one player is allowed in the free zone at one time so that player can move the ball unopposed. No passes are allowed within the free zone. The ball must be moved from the free zone, inside to a teammate in the main grid and this can be done at any time by the first attacker in the free zone. A shot on goal is not allowed from the free zone.

If the ball is passed into the main grid by the first attacker in the free zone and is intercepted, the ball can be played by the intercepting team. The team that collected the ball in the main grid then has the opportunity to start an attack toward its goal using the main grid and the free zone to do so.

This exercise is basically a half field directional game with the wing areas free of defenders. It is not a crossing and finishing game because the player with the ball in the free zone can pass the ball back or lateral out of the free zone into the main grid during the run of play. Finishing will be discussed in a later chapter of this book.

A player cannot plant himself in the free zone waiting for a pass. The receiver must make a run into the free zone as the passer is about ready to release the ball. You want the passer to recognize the visual cue that the receiver is ready to make a run into the free zone and then release the ball to space in front of that player so that he can run onto it. You also want the receiver to recognize the visual cue showing that the passer is ready to make the pass to him.

You do not want to limit the touches of the players for this exercise. Limiting touches will prompt bad decisions by the first attacker whether that player is in the main field or in the free zone. Speed of play is not an objective of this exercise, though the players should try to play at game speed.

Coaching Points for the Passer in the Main Grid

As mentioned earlier, use coaching in the game as described to teach wide play during this small sided exercise. Make sure that, when the first attacker is in the main grid, he looks for a pass wide first so that he can learn to spot a player ready to move into the free zone. The first attacker must keep his head up, looking for an open player near the free zone. He should pass with touch to space just in front of the player moving into the free zone. The ball must be properly weighted. The first attacker should try to play the way he is facing using the players around him in the main grid to create an opportunity to pass the ball to a teammate running into the free zone.

Coaching Points for the Receiver in the Free Zone

If a possible receiver is in passing range of the first attacker, he must have his head up looking to time a run into the free zone. As the pass is coming to him, his body position should be open to the ball and open to the place on the field that he intends to move the ball. He must show for the passer with an outstretched left hand if he wants the ball to his left, right hand if he wants the ball to his right, or both hands in front of his body if he wants the ball at his feet. His first touch on the ball should move it in the direction of his intended next touch. As soon as he sees a receiver open in the main grid which will advance the ball toward goal or open space, he should make the pass to that player—recognize good passing options.

Coaching Points for Defenders When the Ball is in the Free Zone

From the defender's viewpoint, as the ball moves to the back third of the field (toward the goal being defended), the defenders must stay compact (in or near the goal channel, close to each other) and concentrated (behind the ball) always looking to be in a position to be able to protect the goal channel.

If the ball is in a free zone channel, the strong side outside back should position himself near the first attacker (he is the first defender and must mark the first attacker) just outside of the free zone in the main grid (remember, this defender is not allowed into the free zone) and the weak side defender should balance off of the weak side attacker with his body positioned goal side (inside the weak side attacker), diagonal to the goal and slightly retracted from this weak side attacker. Do not allow this defender to mark him tight; balance off of him. If the ball is in the main grid, usual defending principles apply as will be discussed in later chapters of this book.

WIDE PLAY, EXERCISE 3

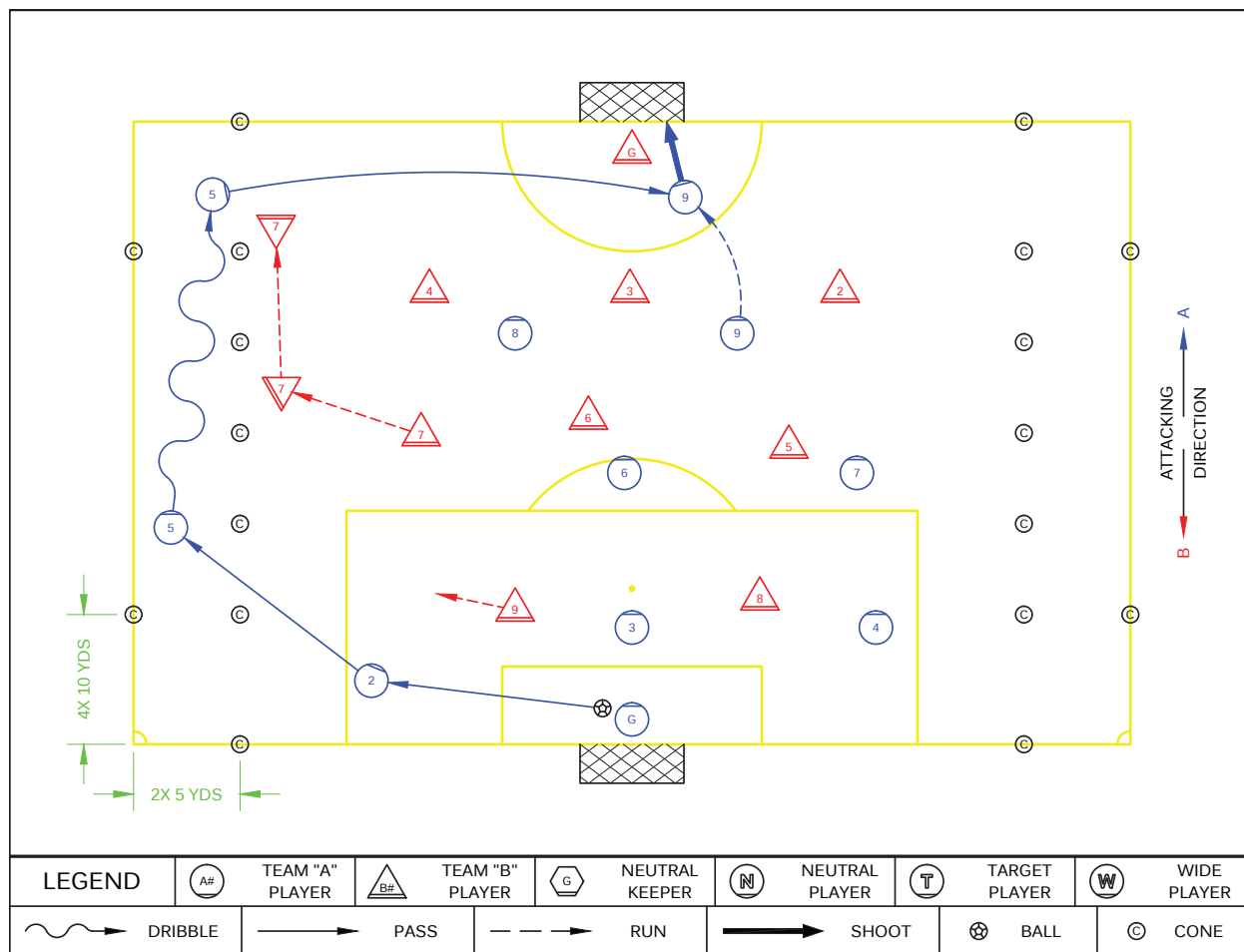


Diagram 8

As shown in Diagram 8, go back to numbers even on each team and allow a player from the team in possession to hold in the free zone allowing a pass to that player while he is standing, body opened as mentioned above, in the free zone. In other words, the receiver no longer has to make a run into the free zone to collect a pass. He can wait in the free zone for a pass into it, undefended as the ball is being played by his teammates in the main grid. However, as soon as the ball is lost by his team in the main grid, the teammate in the free zone must vacate the free zone and get back into the main grid quickly. When his team has the ball, that wide player can remain in the free zone, moving in it, looking for an unobstructed passing lane between himself and the first attacker, or hold in the free zone waiting for a pass.

WIDE PLAY, EXERCISE 4

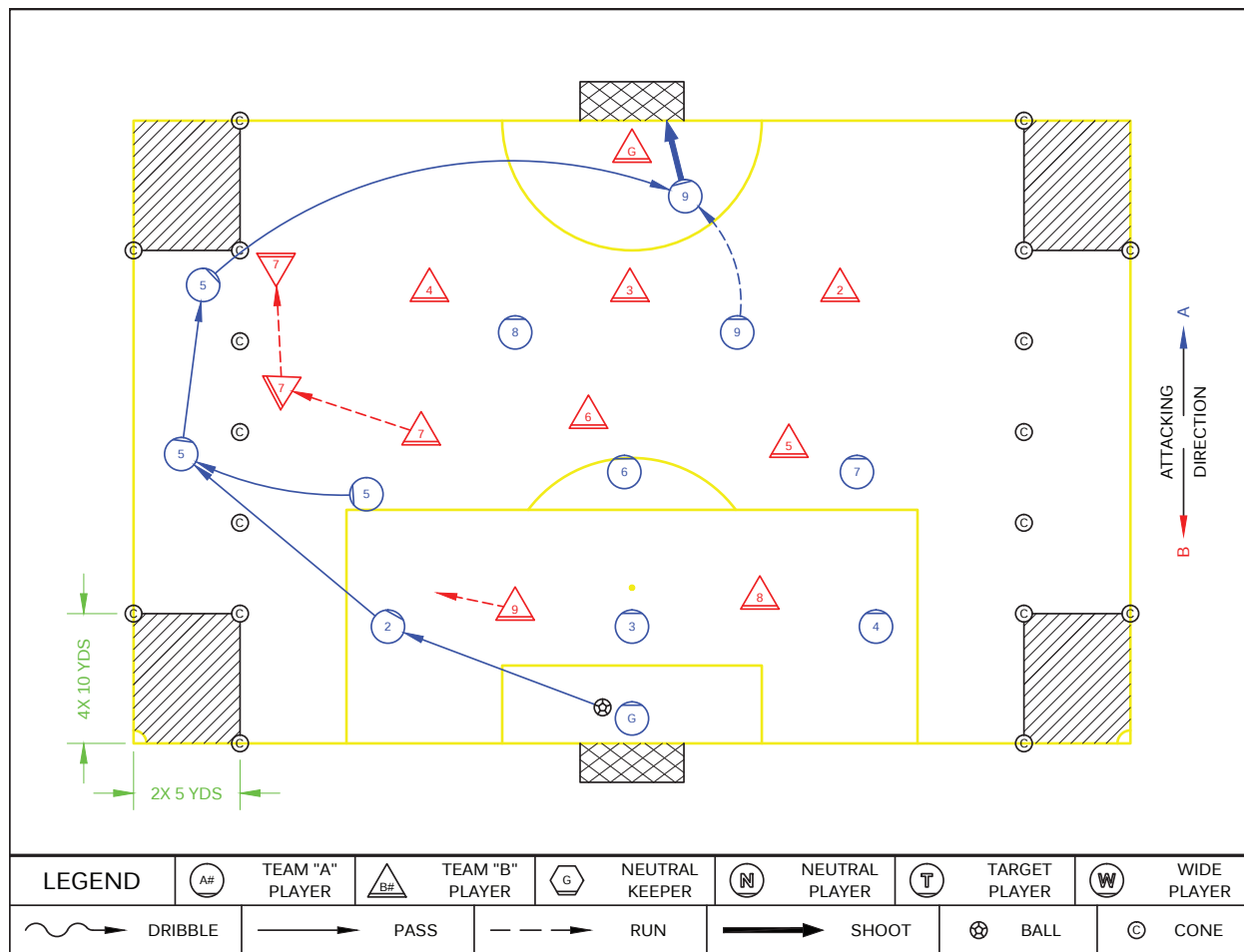


Diagram 9

As shown in Diagram 9, in order to take away the option of crossing the ball at the end line and to force more wide combination play in the midfield area, shrink the vertical size of the free zone by adding one disk about ten yards from each side (end line) of the free zone. This will avoid the natural tendency of the players to dribble the ball to the end line in the free zone to whip in a cross. This will also force quicker decision making in the middle third of the field, taking away a possible cross from the end line, allowing less room for the first attacker to dribble vertically.

During this exercise, you should see more 1-2 combinations between the players inside the main grid and the free zone player in the middle third of the field and you should see more early crosses into the box from the midfield area of the field forcing attacking players to set the mix in the vital area early.

The four exercises above and the training session progression mentioned earlier will take up a full two hour or 90 minute training session. The balance of the training session should follow the training session progression provided earlier.

CHAPTER 3

Training Theme 3

Counter Attack on Transition—Teaching players how to create scoring opportunities on transition and how to defend against a quick counter attack.

Counter Attack on Transition—Offense

Transition means that the team in possession lost the ball; they turned it over to the other team. At the moment of transition, most players on the team that just lost the ball will be in an attacking position and the team shape will be their attacking shape not their defending shape on the field. At the point of transition, the team in possession can take advantage of this situation by quickly attacking up field with numbers up as the other team attempts to gain individual defensive positioning and team defensive shape. The defending team will be in front of the ball rather than behind it because they were in attacking positions up to the point of losing the ball. A quick counter attack after transition is a potent weapon to create a goal scoring opportunity.

The first attacker should avoid moving the ball back (a back pass) or dribbling the ball, each of which will defeat a quick counter attack after transition. Try to teach players to move the ball forward first and, if no forward passing options, to move the ball wide to space for a quick counter. The first attacker will usually not need to switch the point of attack on a counter because the team that just lost possession will not yet have its defensive shape.

The methods used for a quick counter attack on transition and the reasons why they are effective follow:

1. A long ball over the top to a waiting striker who may be one on one with a defender which is effective because the team that just lost the ball has not yet gained its defensive shape.
2. A quick pass wide to a wing player who can move the ball in space up field wide which is effective because the team that just lost the ball will have numerous players in or near the vital area, goal channel, because the players on the attacking team were trying to create a scoring opportunity.
3. Splitting multiple opponents in the goal channel with a smart, quick pass up field which is effective for the same reason as noted in 2 above.

Elements of Attacking on Transition (offense)

If you are instructing the first attacker, teach that player to:

Act quickly;

Take chances with the ball;

Look to move the ball up field to a lone striker who is one on one with a defender, or to numbers up first;

If no options up field, look to move the ball wide to space;

Split as many opponent's as possible with a first pass.

If you are instructing an off the ball runner, teach that player to:

Make curved or diagonal runs quickly up field;

Get open in a way that the first attacker can play the way he is facing (to speed up the attack).

TRANSITION, OFFENSE, EXERCISE 1

FLYING CHANGES—Teaching players to attack up field quickly on transition.

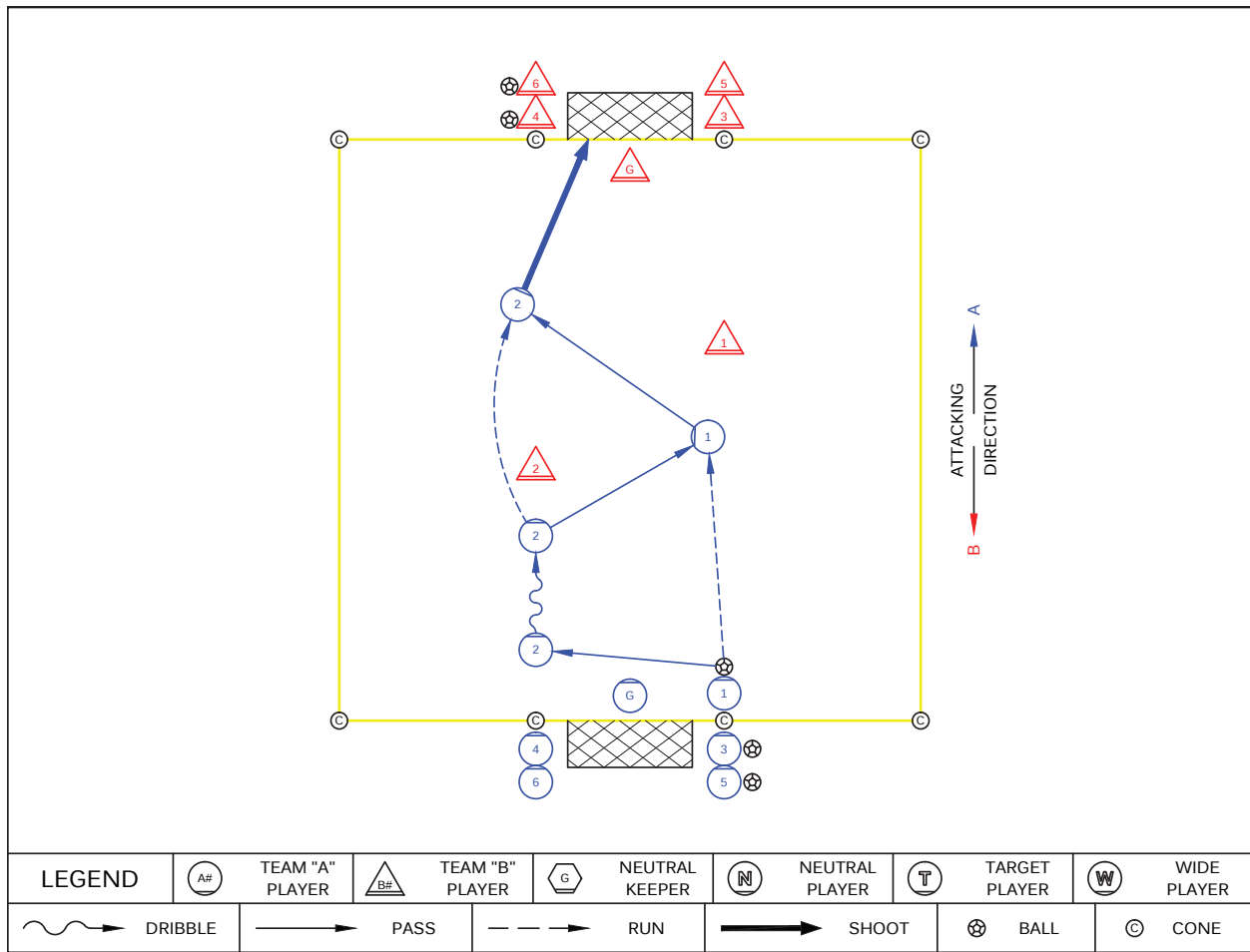


Diagram 10

This small sided game is part of the coaching repertoire of most soccer coaches and is also called the Recovery Run game, or the Transition Game. The purpose of the game is quick thinking and quick movement to counter attack on transition. This exercise is technically a game used to teach recovery runs after the ball is lost by an individual player but it works well also to teach player movement after transition.

The object of this game is teach players how to move the ball up field toward goal by working the ball in quick, short passes in tight space as opposed to moving it up field to a striker using a long ball or wide to a wing player.

As shown in Diagram 10, set up about a 40 x 40 yard grid marked by disks, with goals on both end lines with keepers. Two teams in bibs are divided equally into four lines, one line on each side of the goals on the end line. This game is directional so one team (divided into two equal lines) is on one side attacking one direction toward goal and the other team on the other side attacking the other direction. Each team has about ten balls placed in two lines diagonal to each other. For this part of the training session, the teams are playing 2 v 2.

The game starts with one team making a first pass lateral to a teammate to start quick short passes moving toward goal in the grid as the other team closes space to defend their goal. The team in possession tries to get a shot on goal. After the shot, if successful or not, the team that was attacking must now defend as the other team sends new players from the end line to attack. The team that was defending sprints off the field, wide so as not to disrupt the game and the keeper drops the ball behind him. See Diagram 10.

Coaching Points to Help the Team in Possession

The most important coaching points which can be emphasized using coaching in the game are quick movement of the ball to numbers up followed by quick combination play. Look for the receiver to evade the nearest defender and get open facing the first attacker after transition. As soon as the first attacker releases the ball, he must get to open space with an unobstructed passing lane from his teammate with the ball. Initially, in a 2 v 2 game, off the ball runs should be short to enhance speed of play. Finally, look to the first attacker to advance the ball forward as a first passing option, if possible.

TRANSITION OFFENSE, EXERCISE 2

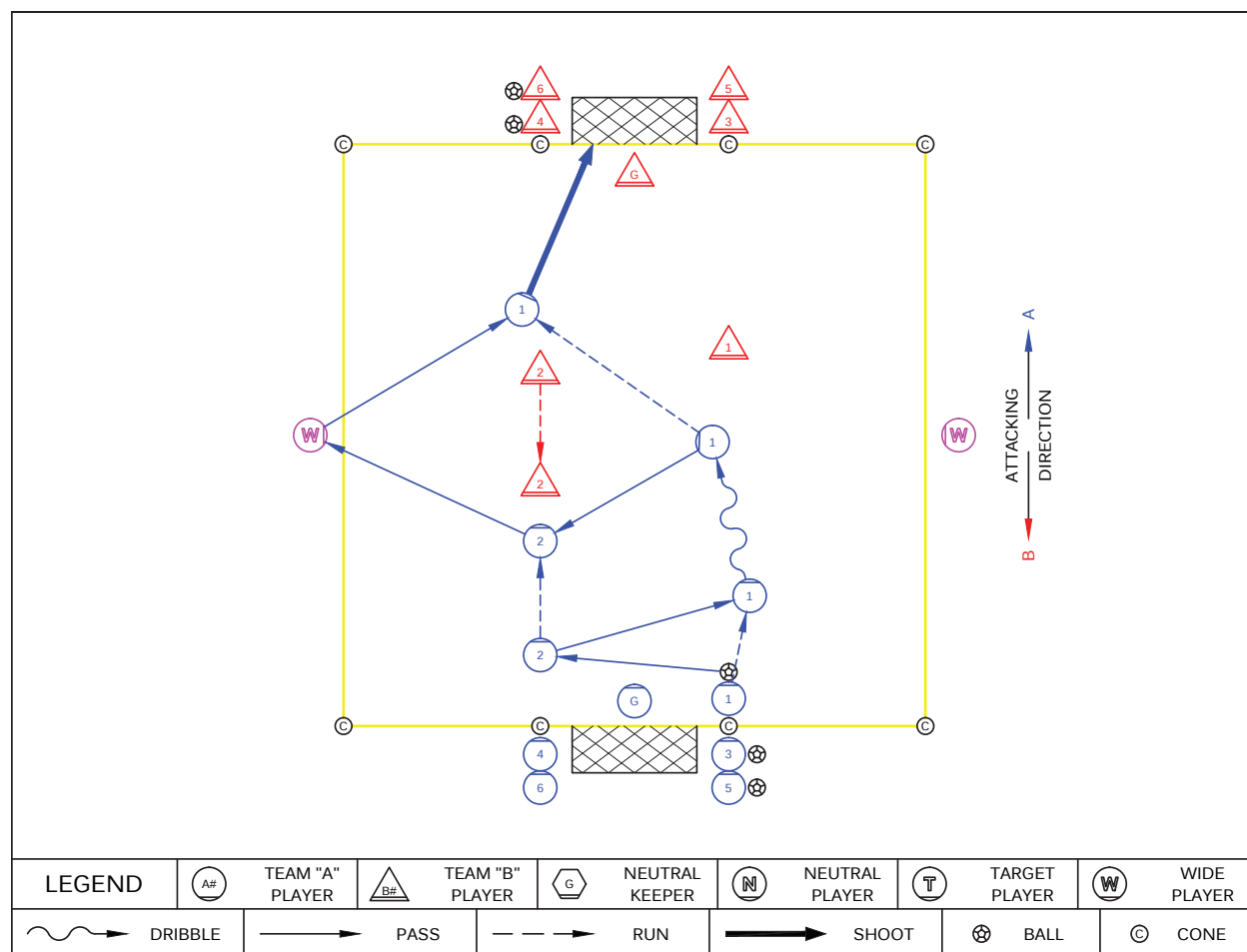


Diagram 11

As shown in Diagram 11, without changing the grid or player configuration, add two wide players for each team outside the sidelines at about midfield. This exercise is also directional so one team continues to occupy one side of the field and the other team occupies the other side. The wide players cannot be used by the keeper to start the game, or on any first or second pass by the attacking team. They can only be used in the build up after a team has completed two passes. This restriction avoids long passes out of the back, wide on buildup which defeats the teaching purpose of the game. The wide players cannot defend and the ball cannot be taken from them.

The purpose of this exercise is still quick attack on transition but at a slightly slower pace than Exercise 1 of this Chapter. The players should continue to use short, quick, combination play rather than long balls. Rotate wide players every few shots on goal, coaches' choice.

Exercise 2 slows play down just enough to give the attacking team an opportunity to set up the attack using combination play on the buildup. The extra players, wide, can be restricted to one or two touches but do not restrict the touches of the players inside the grid. Give the players inside the grid time to develop the attack, to learn visual cues on transition, and to build confidence on the counter attack.

If you determine that the game is too slow, merely allow the wide players to enter the field and join the attacking team at the point of transition. More players on the field will force quick play due to lack of space

and the players will not have the luxury of using an open, wide player as a passing option to slow things down. See Diagram 12.

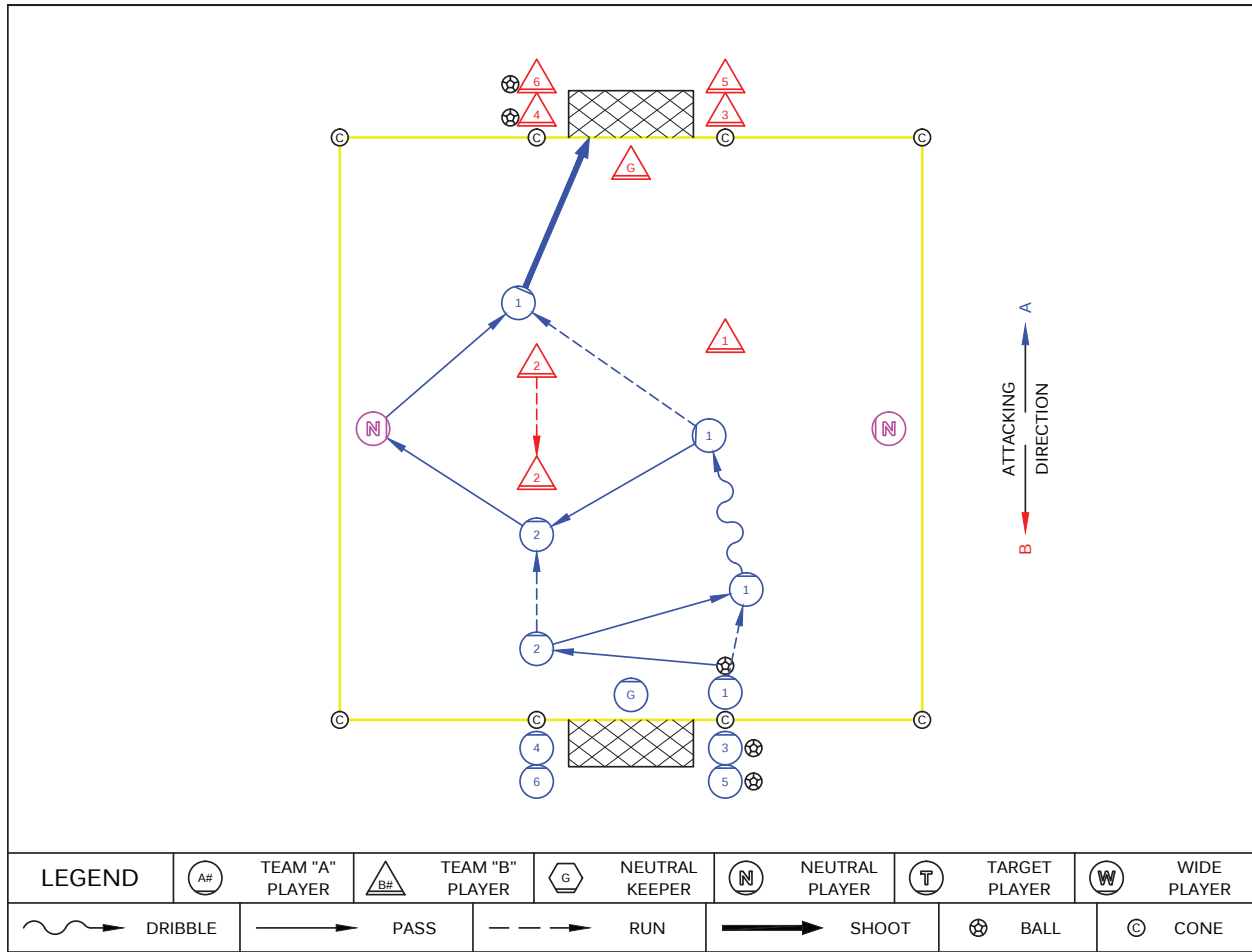


Diagram 12

TRANSITION OFFENSE, EXERCISE 3

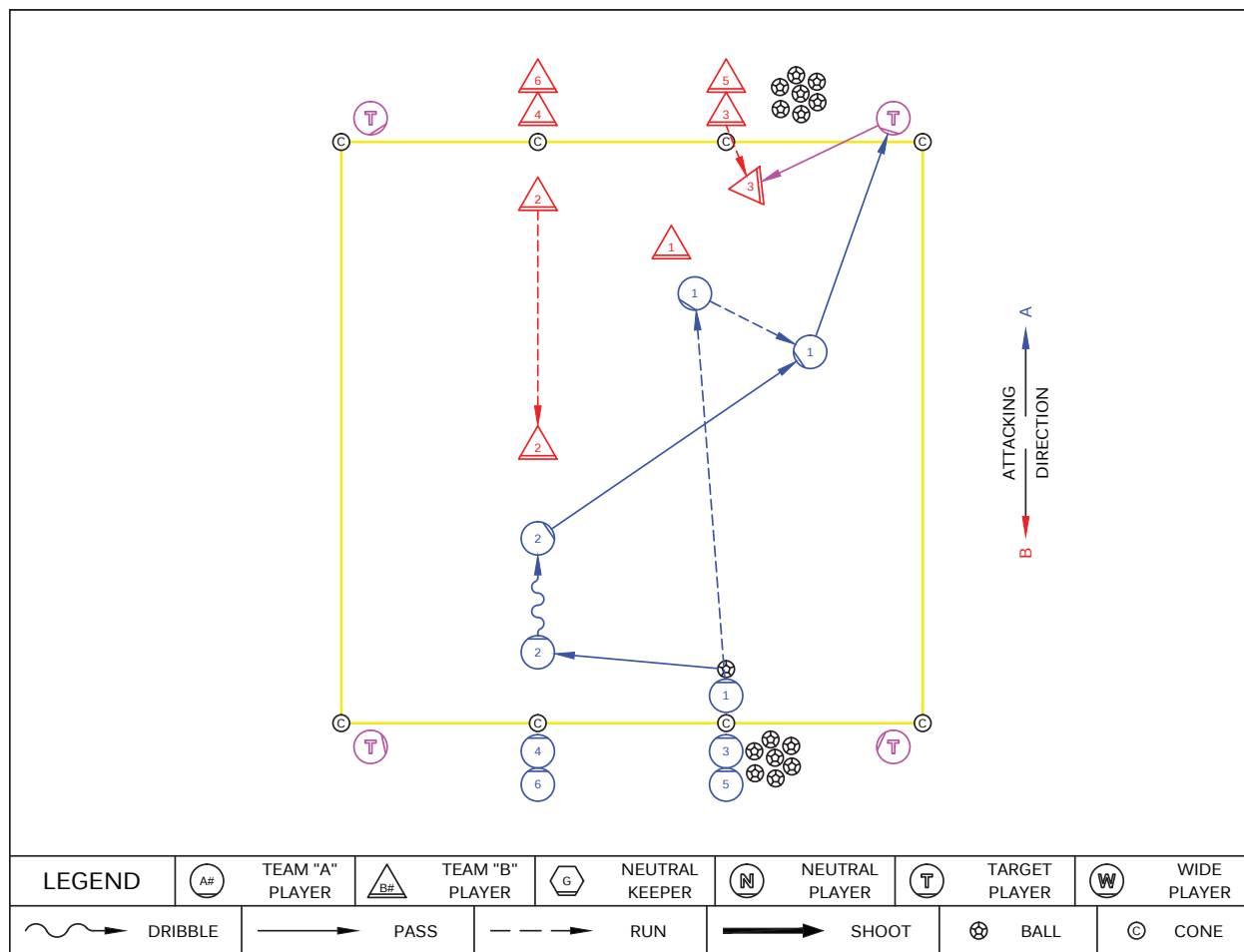


Diagram 13

As shown in Diagram 13, remove the wide players and add two target players per team outside each end line, toward the corners. If a target player receives a pass, he immediately sends it back into the grid to the team that was defending that is now attacking (in other words, a new attacking team enters the field from the end line). This speeds up the game and may take a few rotations for the players to be able to switch quickly enough from defending to attacking on transition. As soon as the ball is hit by a target player on an end line, transition happens and the attacking team must now defend. The target should not send a long ball no matter what direction. A long ball defeats the intended purpose of the exercise. Encourage short, quick passes to work the ball up field at the point of transition. The target players can be restricted to one or two touches. This game is directional. The players should only use the target if there are no other passing options available to the passer (first attacker).

Defeating a Counter Attack on Transition—Defense

Use the same exercises as mentioned above in this chapter but now, rather than focusing on the attack on transition, use coaching in the game to focus on defending. Information is provided below regarding defending on transition.

Elements of Defending on Transition

The defending team should do everything possible to slow the counter attack immediately after the ball is lost;

Considering individual player responsibility on transition, usually the player that lost the ball on transition will be the closest to it and that player should immediately close down space to the first attacker and try to get the ball back;

Considering team shape on transition, in order to slow down the counter attack, first, always leave a man or two deep behind the attacking players to be available to slow down play on transition; If you use two players deep, make sure that they are compact, staggered and diagonal to each other to provide some depth when defending;

You want to use two players defending so that one can provide cover for the other in the event of a break-away or so that one can be used as a first defender while the other cuts passing lanes when defending the counter attack;

In any event, having a player deep will allow that player to attempt to collect a long ball over the top on transition;

Usually the faster players on the team will take this deep role for obvious reasons;

Considering formation and large group defending on transition, get as many players concentrated behind the ball as possible. Have players drop quickly to defend.

Having players concentrated behind the ball allows the defending team to mark an opponent and to cut the opponent's passing lanes on counter attack. This requires a very high work rate by players on the defending team especially by those players who were part of the attack high up field. Running up and down from one end of the field to the other against a counter attacking team like Real Madrid during League play, or Chelsea against Benfica in the Europa League Final, 2013, for example can be exhausting but there are a few things that can be done to make the job a bit easier. Most teams playing against Real Madrid will drop about eight players behind the ball on transition and two of those players will be balancing wide to slow the counter attack up the wings.

Teach players to obtain defensive shape as players drop, not to wait until each player is in position behind the ball and then attempt shape. In order to get concentrated on transition, every player except possibly one of the forwards must get behind the ball as quickly as possible but this must be done intelligently, that is, make runs down field which result in defensive shape as a team.

You can see defensive shape as the best teams in the world react to transition at the immediate moment of transition, not after the counter has already started. Their players start to move into their defensive positions as soon as the ball is turned over. Teach players not to chase the opponent but to go to space consistent with defensive responsibility—get defensive shape behind the ball as quickly as possible then step forward to pressure the opponent.

So, at the moment of transition, the first defender is trying to quickly get into a position to pressure the ball, other defenders are dropping to maintain defensive shape and to cut passing lanes. Once defensive shape is obtained, step to pressure as a team.

Another maneuver to slow the counter attack is not to double team at the time the counter starts. This may seem counter intuitive on first blush. Why not double up against the first attacker at the point which the ball was given up? Wouldn't doubling up on the first attacker give the defending team a better chance to quickly recover the ball? Yes, but, if a second defender moves out of position to double up on a first

attacker at the point of transition, an opponent will be open to receive a pass near the first attacker which will speed up the counter attack up field, a dangerous situation when the defending team has not yet set their defensive shape. This is not a general rule of defending but should only be used if playing against a quick counter attacking team.

Oddly enough, defending players will be better served by getting into defensive shape to slow the attack and then step to pressure rather than use an extra player on the ball to double team which provides a quick passing option near the first attacker for the defending team. Again, this sounds counter intuitive because the defending players nearest the ball will have a first instinct to get the ball back at transition by putting as much immediate pressure on the ball as possible doubling up on the first attacker. Taking a defending player out of position to double up on the ball aids a quick counter attack by allowing an easy passing option near the first attacker. On transition, allow the first defender to take this immediate responsibility by pressuring the first attacker at the moment of transition while the balance of the team sprints deep into position to get defensive shape and then steps to slow the counter attack.

One other thing to consider when defending on transition is the system of play on defense. Has coach instructed players to play high pressure, medium pressure, or low pressure when defending? See Diagrams 14, 15, and 16 showing a high, medium, and low pressure line of confrontation. A team that defends using high pressure with players all the way to the end line will not have to drop as deep if the ball is lost in the front third because the players will already be high when they lose the ball. In this situation, immediate pressure on the ball in the front third of the pitch or at the opponent's end line will require less down field running to create a high pressure defense also high up the field.

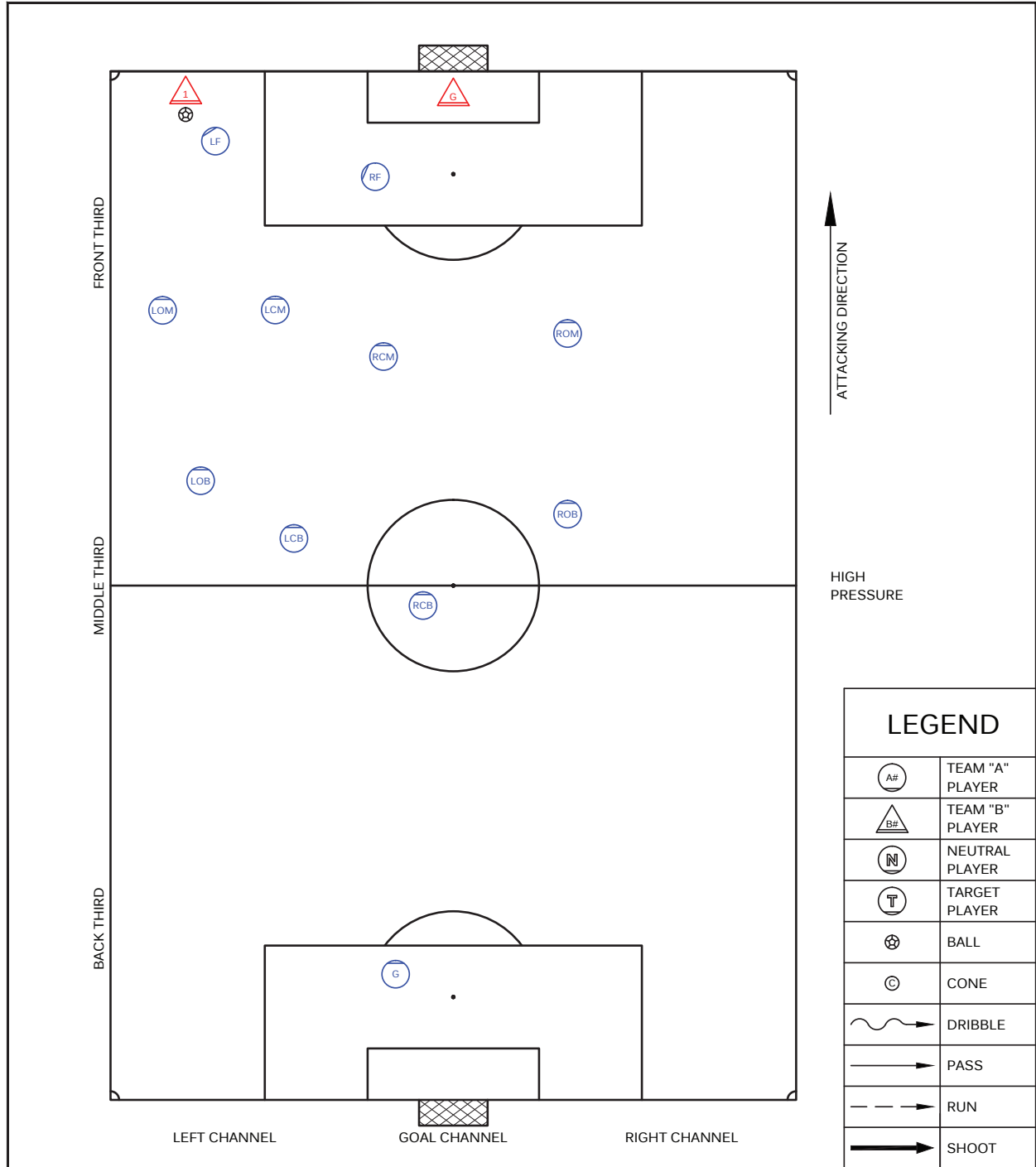


Diagram 14



Diagram 15

But if the coach asks for a low pressure defense, then the team that just lost the ball on transition will not create its line of confrontation (where it will confront the ball on the field) until, for example, the half way line, or even at the top of their eighteen yard box. This deep line of confrontation forces the defending team which just lost the ball to drop deep down field quickly in order to set the line of confrontation and then set the line of defense (that place where the back line sets up, so many yards from the ball) and then

As shown in Diagram 17, an attacking team is high in the front third of the field attempting to create a scoring opportunity. As shown in Diagram 18 the attacking team loses the ball (transition), with one player acting as a first defender, as the balance of the players on the defending team are retreating to get into defensive shape deeper down field. The shape is evident as the defending team starts to retreat at the moment of transition—the direction of each player’s run from the moment of transition, starts to show team shape. As shown in Diagram 19, defensive team shape is clear when the players are deeper down field with the defending players now holding their positions and stepping forward to pressure the ball as group.

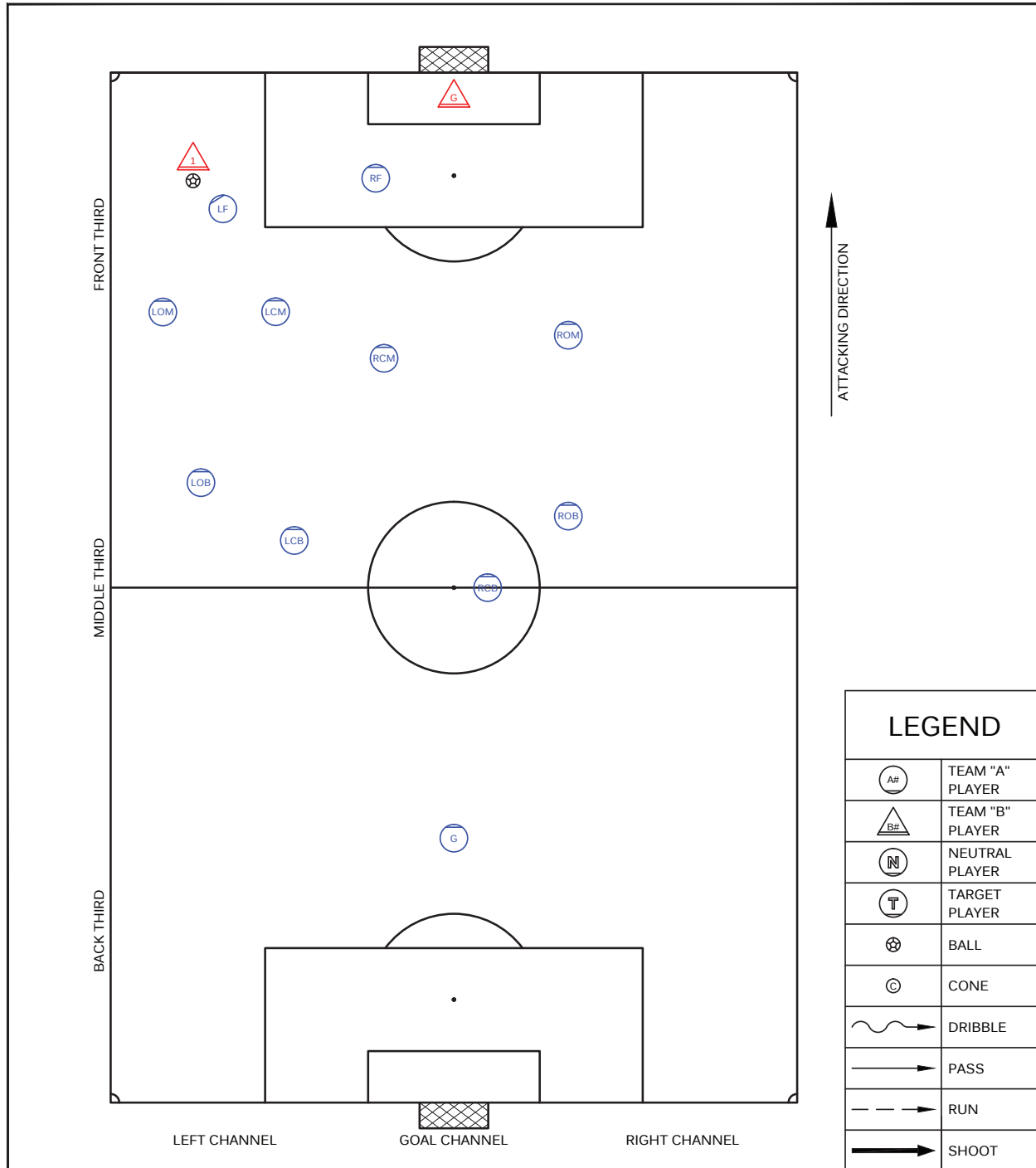


Diagram 17

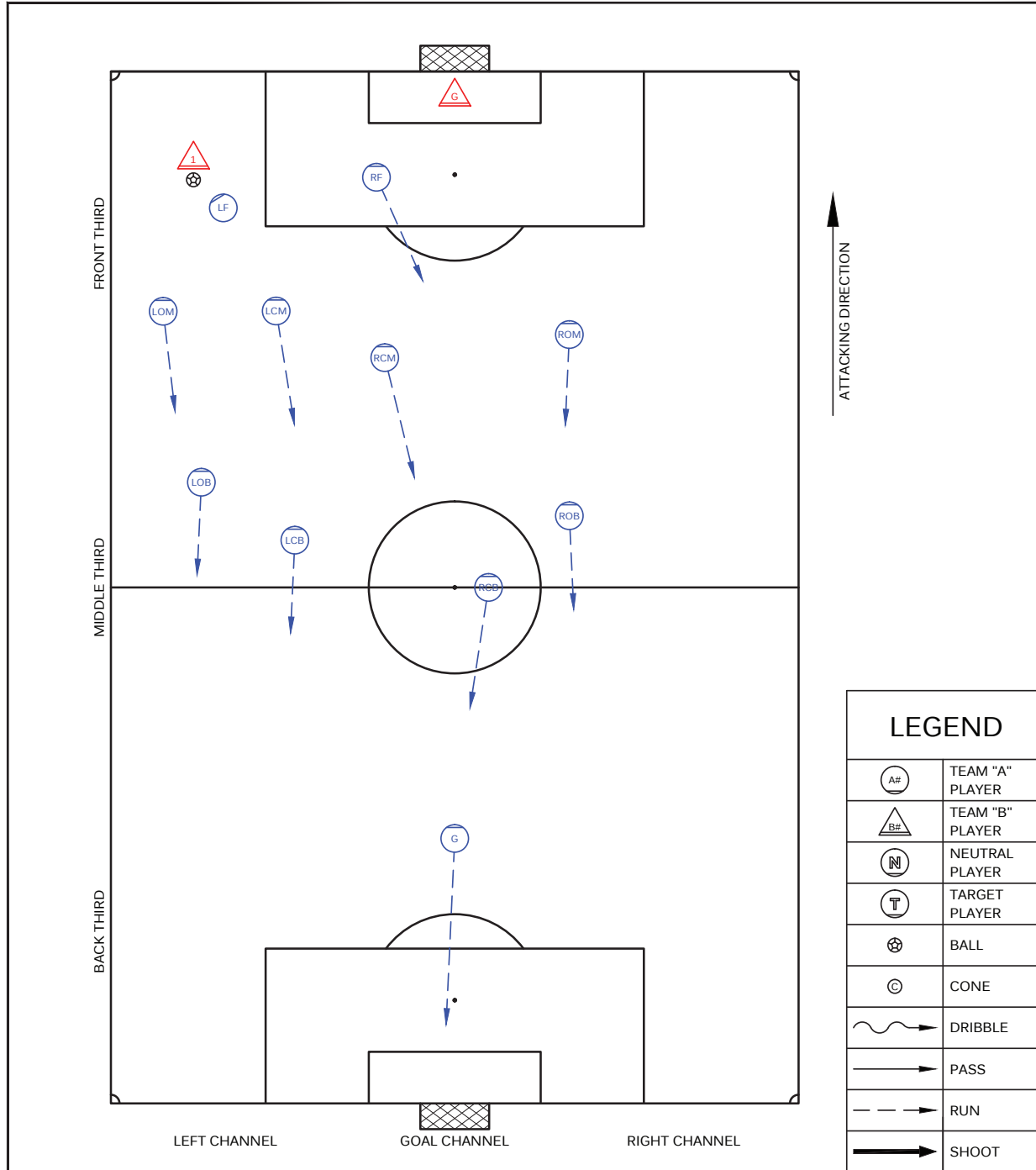


Diagram 18

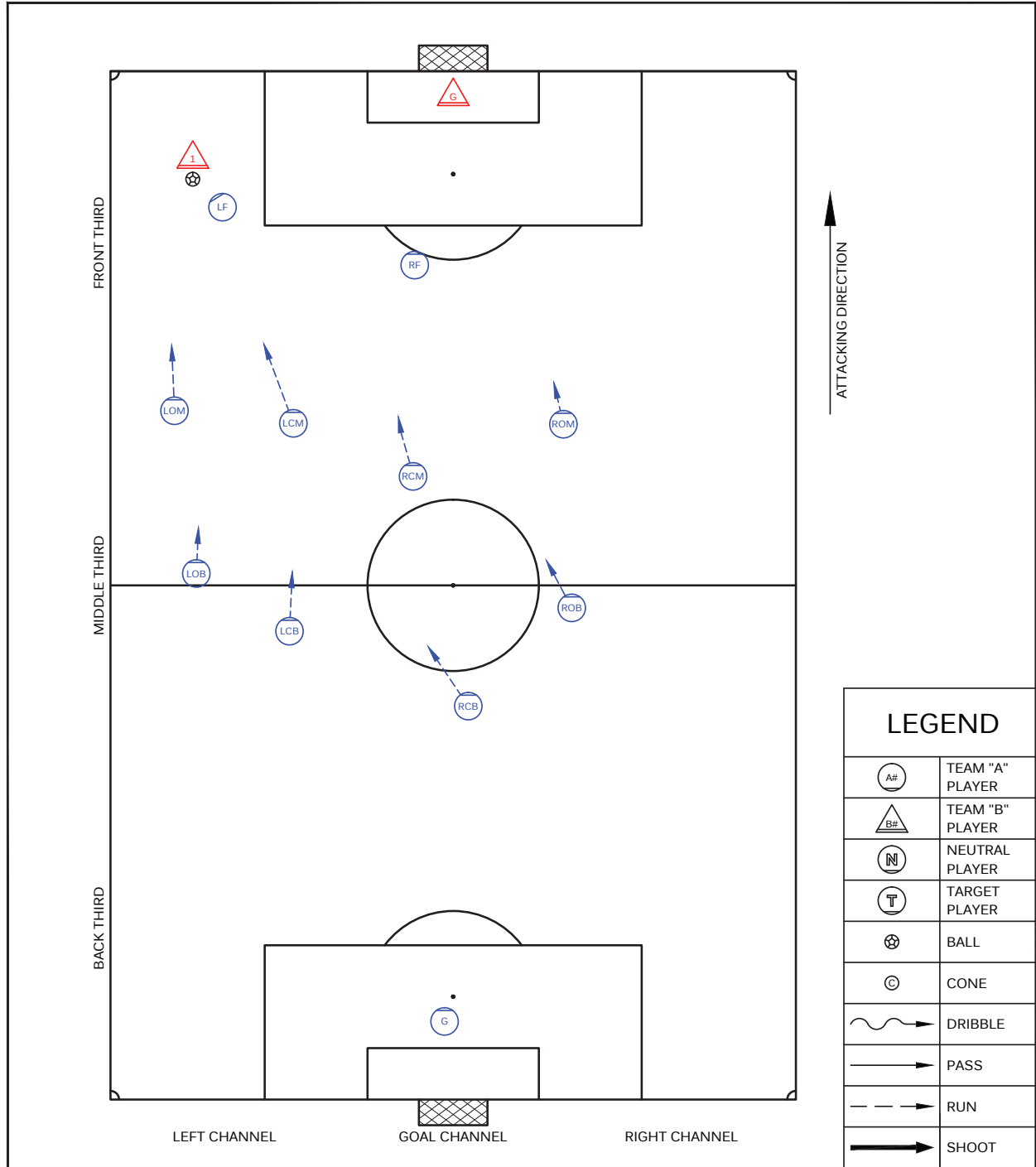


Diagram 19

CHAPTER 4

Training Theme 4

Possession—Teaching players to keep the ball using quick combination play and teaching off the ball runs in the back and middle third of the field to create passing options.

Possessing the ball for the greater period of time during a game does not mean that a team will be victorious. Possessing the ball in the back and middle third of the field does not necessarily create scoring opportunities but it does allow a team to break down the opponent’s defense to set up the opportunity for quick passing in the front third of the field to score.

This chapter covers possession, moving the ball in the back and middle third of the field without interception by the opposing team. Teams like Barcelona usually claim a higher time of possession than their opponent but that does not always translate into a win, especially if most possession of the ball moves it lateral rather than forward and occurs in the back or middle third of the field as was evident in the later stages of Champions League 2013 for Barcelona. It’s beautiful to watch a high possession Barcelona game but stunning to see a quick Real Madrid counter attack or a powerful attack generated by Bayern Munich resulting in a goal after only a few passes from the back to the front third of the field. Possession using short combination play, for the sake of merely holding the ball, will not produce a result—the ball has to end up in the back of the net.

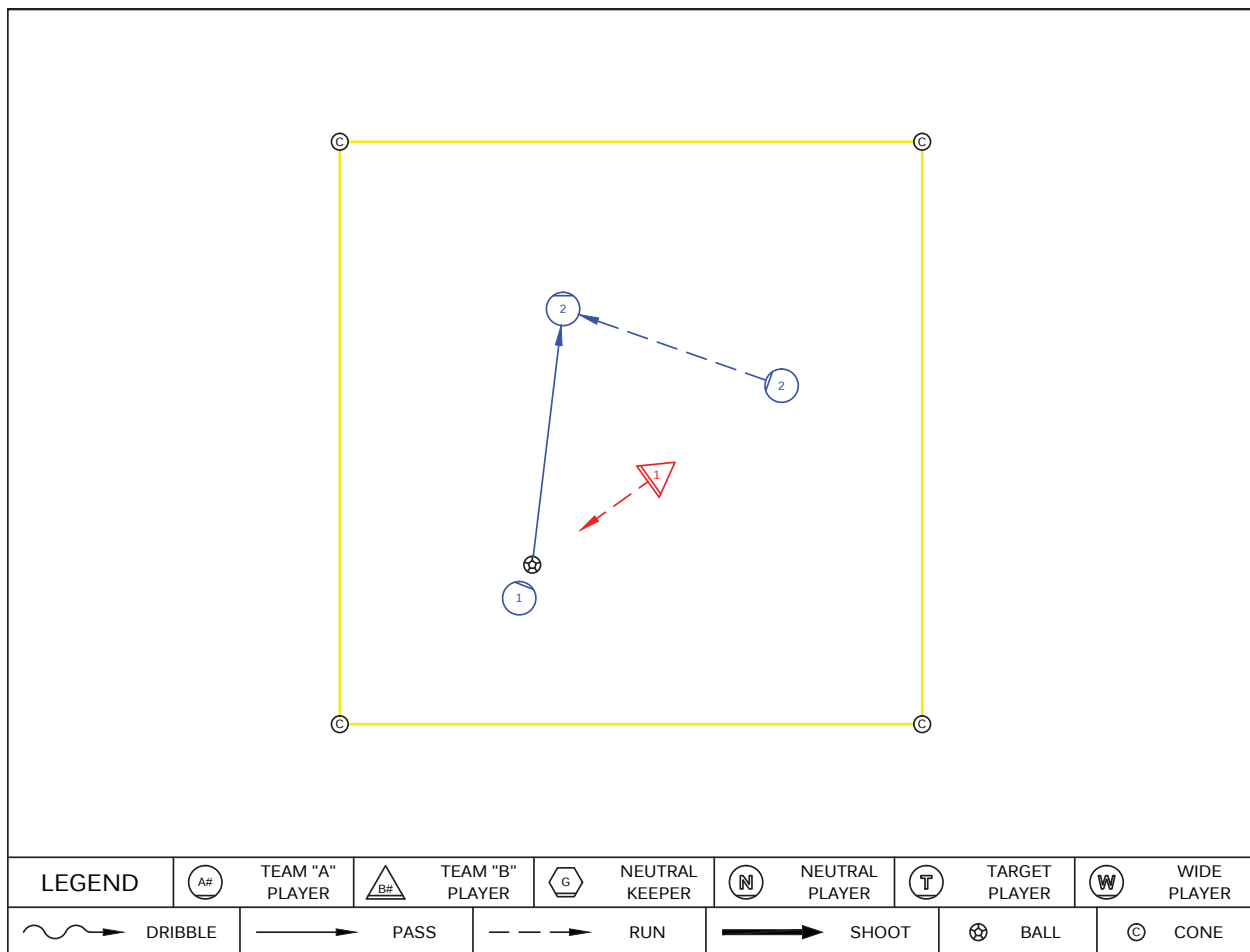


Diagram 20

Possession, on the offensive side, is made up of two main components during the run of play, the first attacker with the ball who is concerned with the weight of the pass, choosing to pass to feet or to space, the passing option that is optimum to enhance speed of play versus advancing the ball or conforming to the system of play; and the receiver who is concerned with moving in a direction to create an unobstructed passing lane for the first attacker (see Diagram 20), or to pull out a defender to create a lane for a teammate (see Diagram 21), or to position himself so that the first attacker can pass the ball the way he is facing using as few touches as possible, or to position himself open to the ball and open to the place that he intends to move the ball. Pace, touch, time, space, speed of play, second pass, and the system of play to be followed by the team are all considerations of the passer and potential off the ball runners as receivers at the time of the pass. The faster the passer and receiver process this information, the faster they will be able to play.

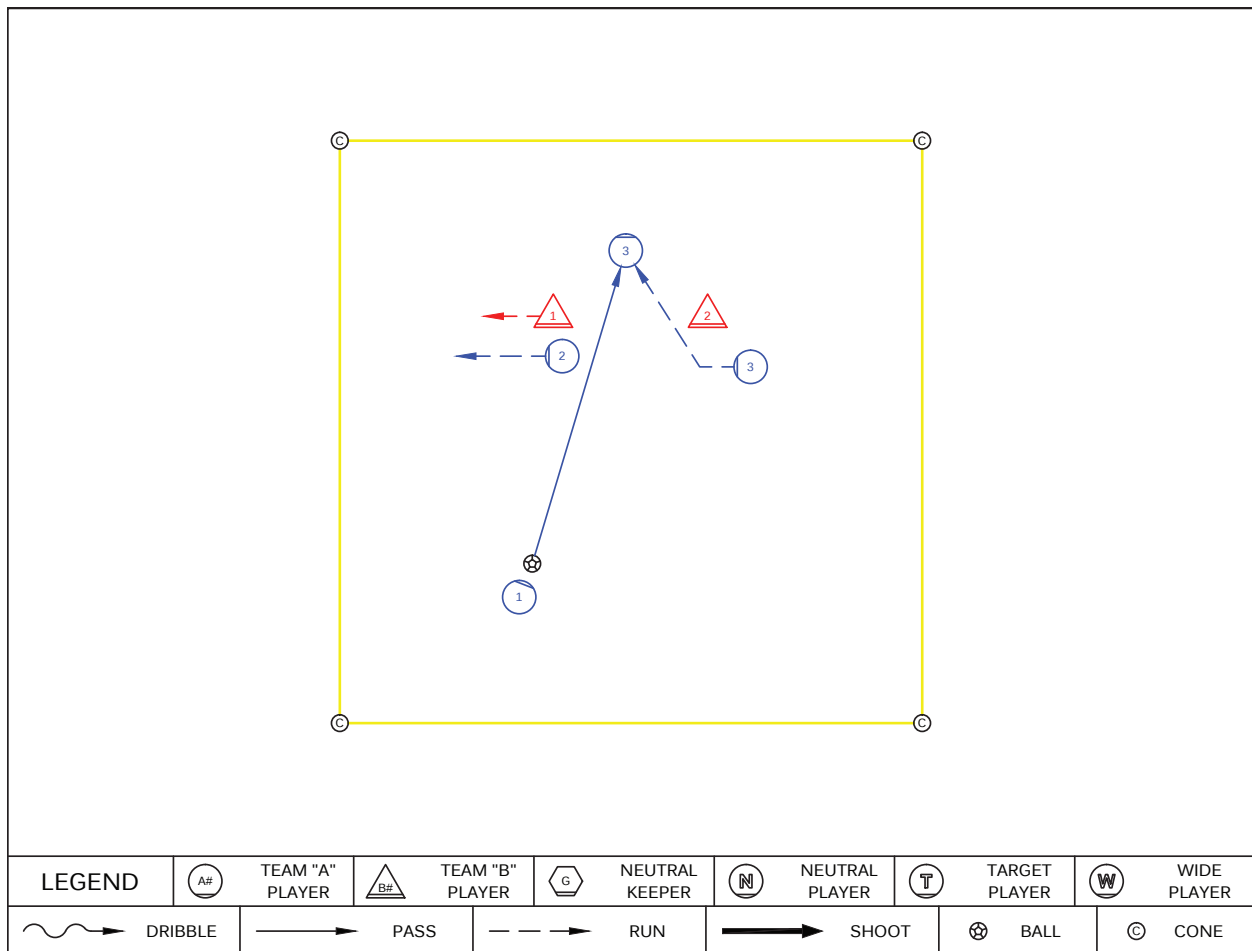


Diagram 21

Possession, the First Attacker

To avoid an interception of the ball, the first attacker, the player with the ball, should pass the ball hard, with pace to feet but soft with touch to open space allowing the receiver to run onto the ball to collect it. As discussed later, the receiver will show left, center, or right for the ball and the passer must place the ball in a way to lead the receiver in the direction that he shows for it. If the first attacker is not under pressure and has time and space, he can evaluate multiple passing options, if not, he may be forced to play the ball to the nearest open player. Most important is that the first attacker play the way he is facing (pass in the direction he is facing) if possible in order to speed up play and try to move the ball away from pressure so the receiver has time and space to make the next pass.

Another issue that the first attacker must consider is playing consistent with the system of play chosen by the coach for a particular game. If, for example, coach sees his team as a counter attacking team with great speed on the wings, he may request inside players to look wide for a passing option first even though other options might be available during the run of play. System of play must be considered by the first attacker at the time of the pass.

Possession, the Receiver

The receiver must put himself in a position to receive the ball out of, and away from, pressure if possible. He must show for the ball by extending his left hand if he wants the ball placed to space to his left; his right hand if he wants the ball placed to space to his right; and both hands pointing downward if he wants the ball at his feet. This type of direction will not only provide a convenient, anticipated ball to the receiver but it will speed up play because showing for the ball forces the receiver to have his body in a position to make the next pass.

Showing for the ball helps the first attacker know where to put the ball; helps the receiver know how to position his body; and helps other off the ball runners to know where the receiver intends to go next with the ball before it is passed. The receiver's body position and showing for the ball tells this entire story with the movement of just one or both hands and results in faster play.

The receiver should show and then receive the ball open to it in a way that reflects the direction that he wants to play it. Again, how quickly the players can process this information (speed of thought) will determine speed of play. If consistent with the system of play, teach players to look first for a forward pass to advance the ball up field, then for a diagonal or lateral pass and lastly for a back pass. Keep possession. It's better to lose a bit of real estate (pass backwards) than to lose possession of the ball.

One other very simple trick to speed up play is to trap the ball with one foot and pass it with the other. This not only speeds up play but also allows the receiver to evade a defender by receiving the ball near the defender but touching it softly to the other foot away from this defender so as to make an unobstructed pass.

A simple concept that is often overlooked by receivers is that a ball passed to the receiver is usually passed from a place of numbers up by an opponent, that is, from pressure. Therefore, there is a good chance that the receiver will need to look to an opposite side of the field or at least look away from the place where the ball was passed, and move the ball in the opposite direction to avoid pressure. Opponent activity (pressure) will be near or around the ball at the time it is passed, obviously because there is more activity on the strong side, where the ball is, than on the weak side, where the ball is not. Receive a ball from a place of pressure or numbers up (from the strong side) and pass it to a place out of pressure to numbers down (to the weak side).

Possession, the Third Man Off the Ball Runner

Third man runs will be addressed in another chapter of this book. For the purpose of this chapter, the third man runner is not the passer or the intended receiver but another teammate near the play who puts himself in a position to receive the next pass once the intended receiver has collected the ball. To maintain possession, off the ball third man runners must make quick, curved or diagonal runs in order to create passing options for the receiver. All players near the ball must quickly get in position to support the first attacker making their runs so that the first attacker can play the ball the way he is facing. Third man runs from a possession viewpoint tend to pull defenders out of position to create open passing lanes for other teammates near the ball (see Diagram 22).

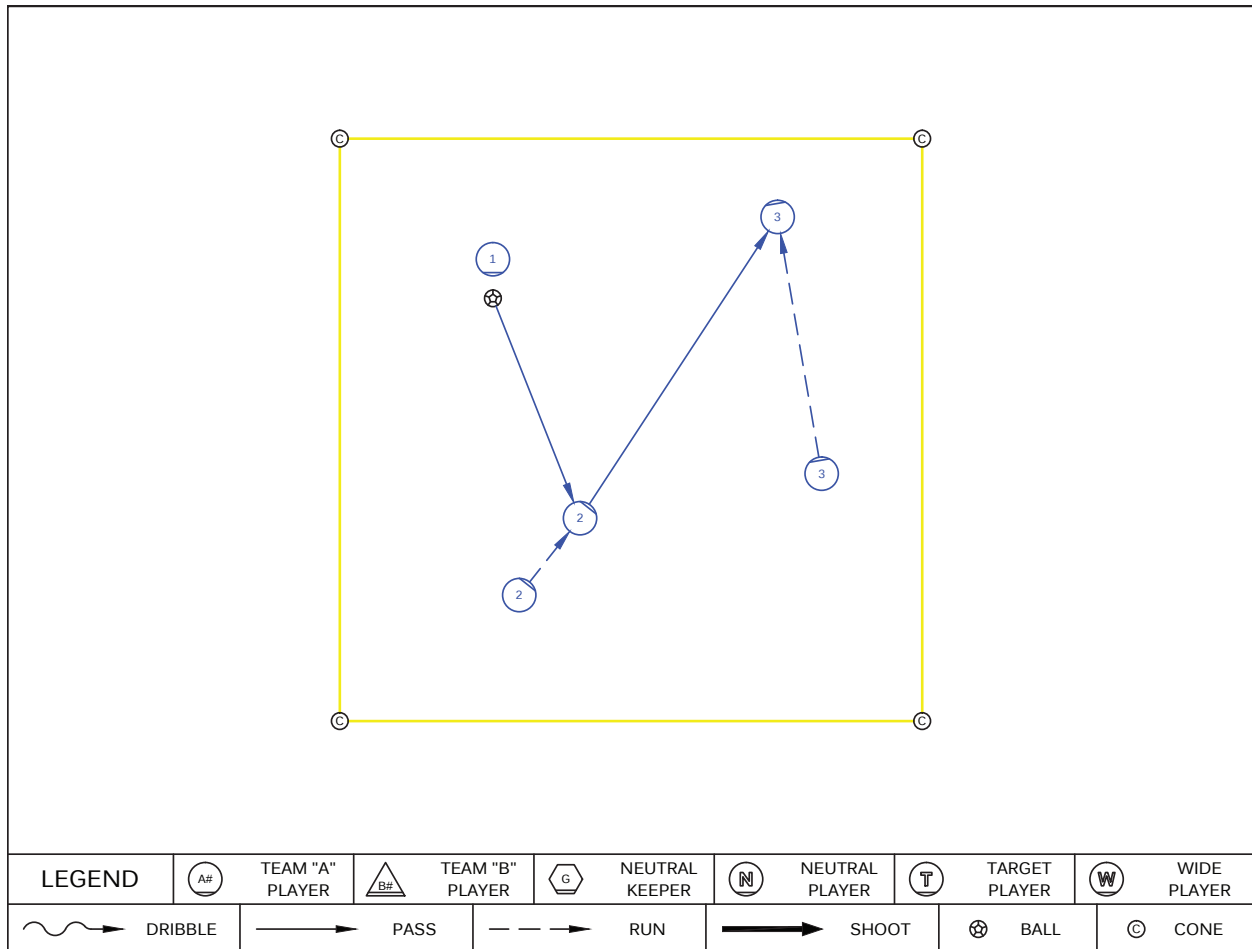


Diagram 22

Elements of Possession

As the passer (the first attacker) pass properly weighted balls to space with touch, to feet with pace;

The inside of the passer's foot will usually produce the most accurate pass;

Sweeping the ball upward on contact will force it to hug the ground and move it in the intended direction;

To speed up play, teach players to pass the ball the way they are facing but try to follow the rules of the chosen system of play;

The passer (the first attacker) should pass to a receiver who is not under heavy pressure;

Observe possible receivers around and supporting the attack to determine how they are "showing", the visual cue that will tell the passer (first attacker) where to place the ball in relation to the off the ball runner;

Curve passes around defenders if possible;

After a pass is made teach players to make a quick, short run to space and to advance the play or to be ready for a back pass.

As the receiver, teach players to show for the passer;

To open his body to the ball and to the place where the pass is intended;

To trap the ball with one foot and pass it with the other to speed up play;

Pass and move;

If the player is an off the ball third man runner, teach the runner to start the run as the ball is passed from the first attacker and to get in a position so that the receiver can play (pass) the way he is facing.

POSSESSION EXERCISE 1

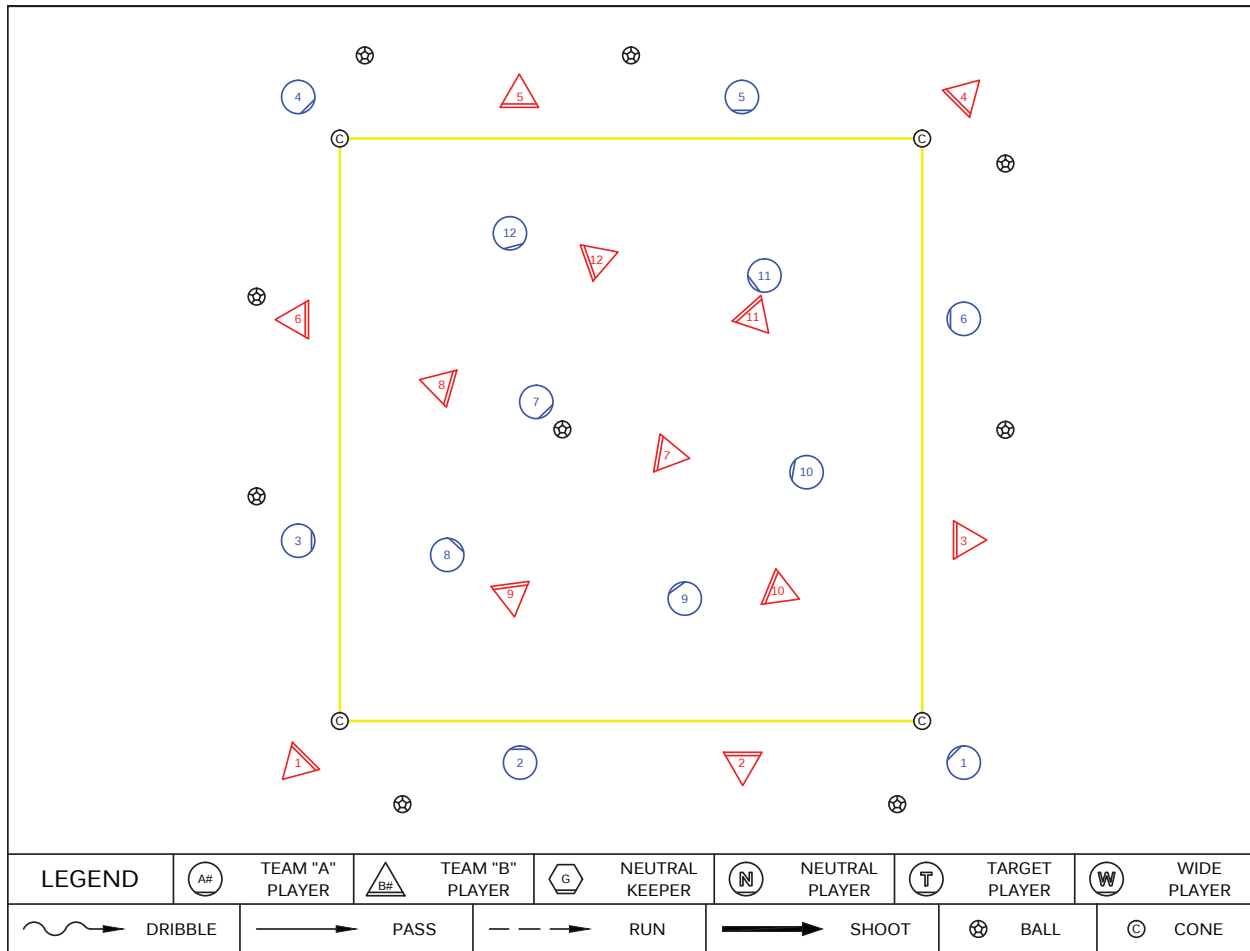


Diagram 23

THE INSIDE OUTSIDE GAME—This simple game covers all elements of possession for the passer (the first attacker), the receiver and for the off the ball runner as discussed below.

As shown in Diagram 23, set up a 35 x 35 yard grid, two teams in bibs, a good supply of balls placed about five yards outside the grid. Divide the players into two teams with half of each team placed just outside the grid, every other player from an opposite team, equally spaced apart. All other players are inside the grid (two teams in bibs).

The specific purpose of this exercise is to teach the players inside the grid to play possession in tight space and to make intelligent off the ball runs; and to teach the players outside the grid to receive the ball open to the ball and open to where they want to move the ball. All elements of passing, moving, and receiving are part of the exercise. This same exercise can be used to teach third man runs as will be discussed later in this book.

Coach tosses a ball inside the grid to start an unlimited touch possession game by the players inside the grid, non directional in tight space. The team in possession merely tries to complete passes as the other team inside the grid tries to intercept the ball. Both teams try to maintain possession with crisp, short passes inside the grid.

While this possession game is happening inside the grid, the players outside the grid are moving laterally a few feet in each direction (as much room as they have without bumping another player placed lateral to him) and calling for the ball once a teammate in the grid has it and is able to play it the way he is facing to a teammate outside the grid calling for the ball. Ideally, the teammate outside the grid should show for the ball as described earlier.

If the first attacker inside the grid is under heavy pressure, at that point he should play the ball to a teammate outside the grid. If he is not under heavy pressure, the first attacker inside the grid should pass it to a teammate inside the grid (play possession inside the grid).

As soon as the ball is collected by the teammate outside the grid, that player makes a pass to a different teammate (different than the passer) inside the grid and those two players (the passer and the receiver) exchange places, that is, the player who was inside the grid sprints outside of it and the player who was outside the grid sprints into the grid and the possession game continues.

If this game is played correctly, the players outside the grid will be constantly moving laterally to get open; constantly calling for the ball when the first attacker inside the grid is in a position to play the ball the way he is facing to his teammate outside the grid; and always showing for the ball just before it is passed to that player.

Review the elements of possession as the passer, as the off the ball runner, and as the receiver mentioned earlier in this chapter. Each of those elements can be taught using coaching in the game during this one exercise.

Coaching Points to Help the Passer

Instructing the passer: Teach the passer to use the inside of the foot if possible for best accuracy and weight the pass to the receiver's feet with pace or to space with touch. If the pass is made to space, the passer should lead the receiver so that he is able to run onto the ball to speed up play. If the pass is made to feet, the ball should be weighted, heavy so that it arrives quickly.

Teach players to keep their head up so that it can quickly be determined in which direction the receiver is showing for the ball. Try to force players to pass the ball the way they are facing to speed up play. It takes more touches to move the ball or to turn the ball a different direction than if the ball is played as facing—the more touches, the greater the chance that an opponent might take the ball, and the slower the game. Most important, make sure that the passer moves to space to get open or to move a defender to create space for a teammate after each pass. Look first to advance the ball forward, then lateral and lastly back.

Coaching Points to Help the Receiver.

Instructing the receiver: Teach the receiver to show using the left, right, or both hands indicating where he wants the passer to place the pass. If the receiver cannot see the ball unobstructed, he is probably not open to receive a pass. The receiver must know where he is going to pass the ball before he receives it. Teach the receiver to set his body position so that he is facing both the ball and the place on the field where he intends to move the ball. The receiver must trap the ball with one foot and try to pass it with the other in order to speed up play. Instruct the receiver that the ball probably came from a place of pressure or numbers up by the opponent so he should look to move it to a different place out of pressure and to numbers down that the opponent. Always teach to play the system.

Coaching Points for the Off the Ball Runner

Instructing the third man runner: If you are instructing the third man running (which will be explained in greater detail later in this book), make sure that he starts his run as the first attacker is passing the ball to the receiver and that he sets his body position so that the receiver can get the ball to the third man run-

ning so that he could receive it the way he is facing. As an off the ball runner, the third man can get open for a pass or move in a way to pull a defender away from open space to allow a teammate to get into that space to receive a pass. Curved and diagonal runs are much harder to defend against than a straight run. Moving a yard in one direction or the other can make the difference between being open and not being open. The third man should make his runs so that the first attacker has the opportunity to advance the ball. Always teach to play the system.

MORPHING THE GRID, SAME THEME, MODIFIED EXERCISE

POSSESSION EXERCISE 2

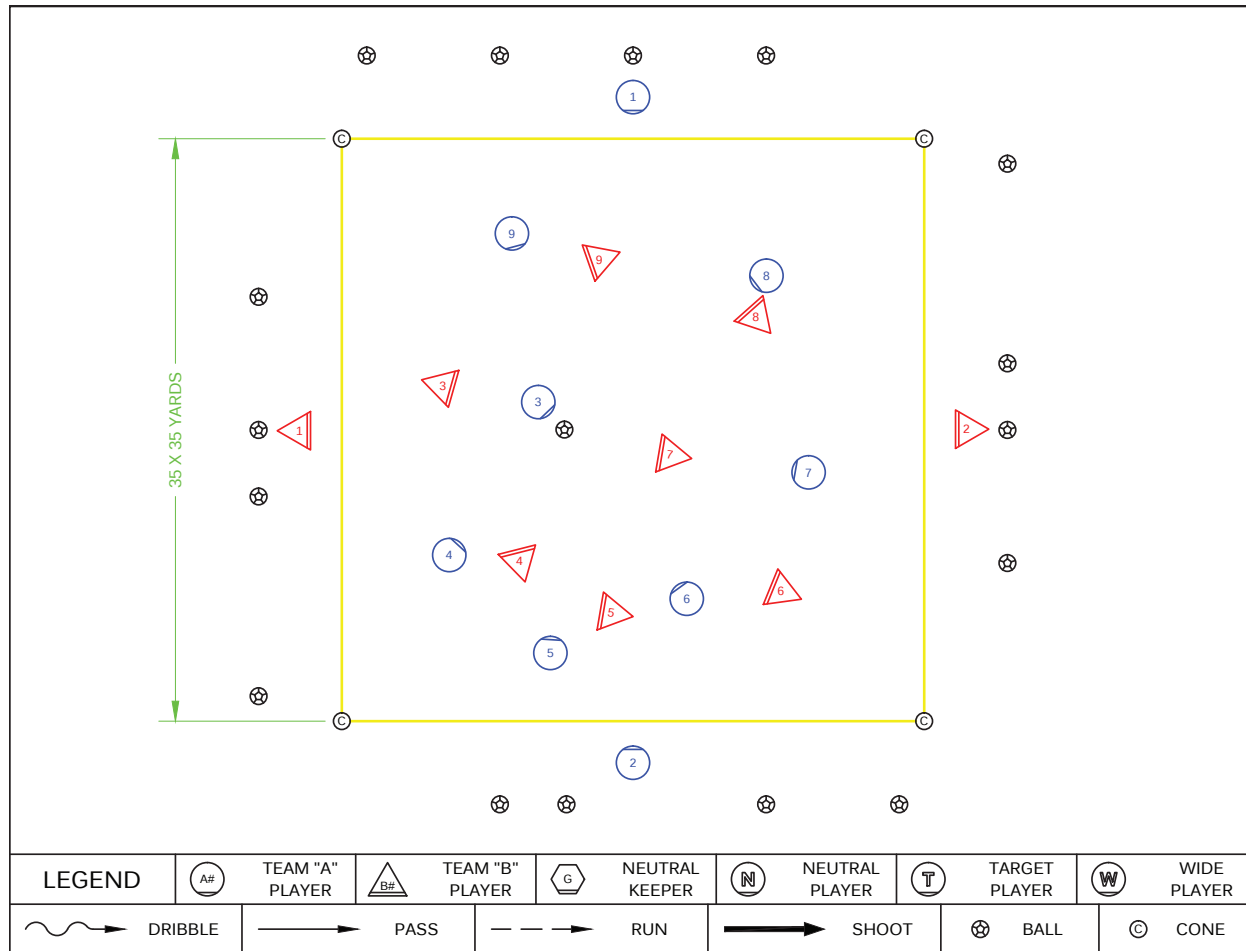


Diagram 24

Using the same grid, move all the players into the grid to play two touch possession. Move two players from each team outside the grid placing players from the same team across from each other. As the players inside the grid are playing two touch possession, the players outside the grid call for a pass, receive it outside the grid with one foot and then, in one touch, pass the ball to a teammate inside the grid with the other foot. If you have too many players for a productive passing session inside the grid, move additional players outside the grid, evenly by team, equal numbers across from each other.

This game allows the players to play quickly in tight space using the players outside the grid only when under heavy pressure or only if there are no other passing options to teammates inside the grid. The

players outside the grid can move laterally during the run of play and should show for the ball as explained earlier. Plenty of balls should be available near the grid so that the game can continue to move quickly if a ball is passed out of play. See Diagram 24.

POSSESSION EXERCISE 3

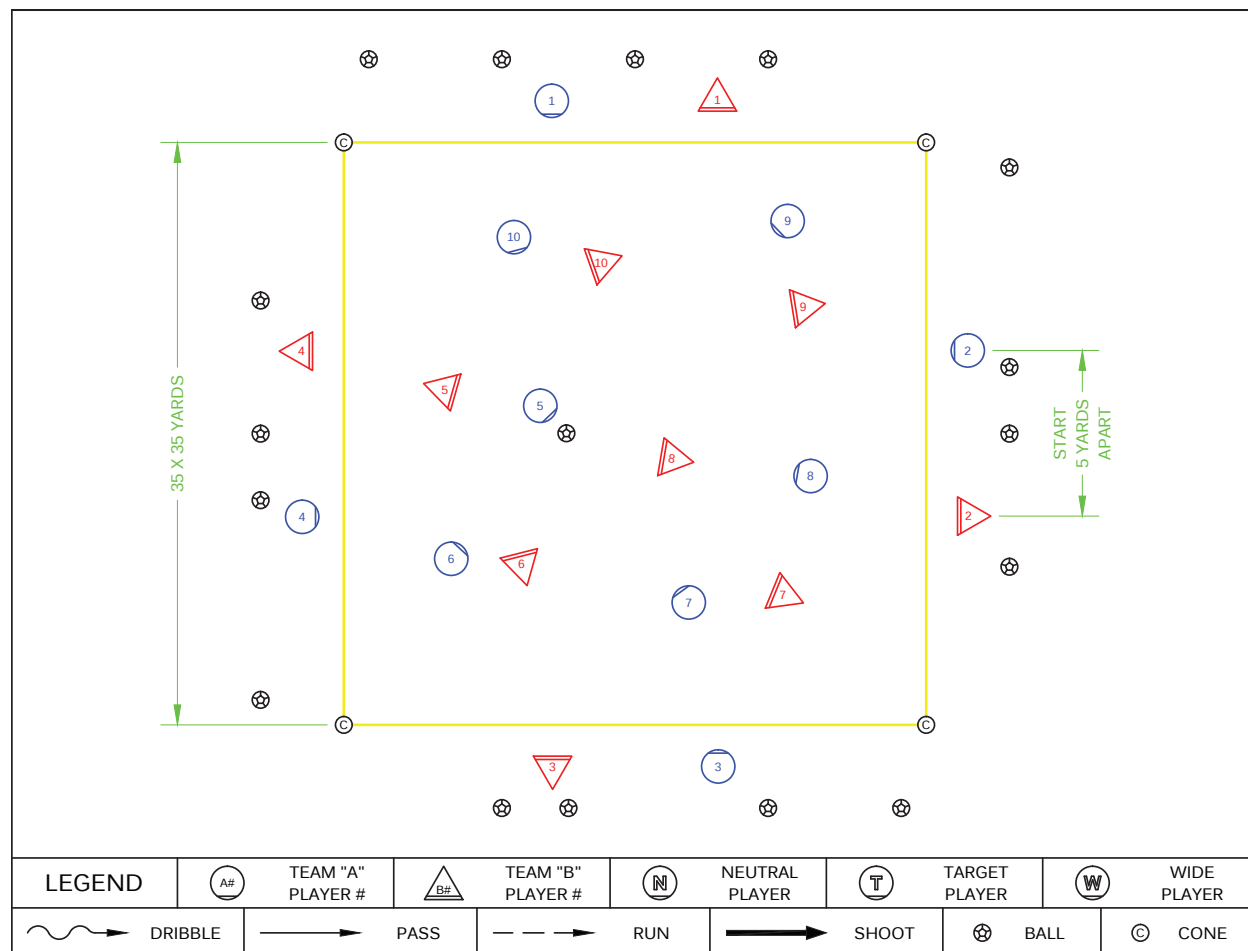


Diagram 25

Using the same grid, set up the players outside the grid so that at each side of it there is one player from each team standing about five yards apart. The rules are the same as for Exercise 2 above except that the players outside the grid, as paired up, fight for possession of the ball as it is passed to them by a teammate. Whichever player outside the grid collects the ball, that player has two touches after the ball is cleanly collected to move the ball to a teammate inside the grid.

Do not allow the players outside the grid to stray too far from it (maybe five yards at the most) while fighting to collect the ball. Players inside the grid must keep moving to allow quick, unobstructed passing options for the first attacker outside the grid. This game requires maturity by the players outside the grid because they must not stray too far from the grid perimeter while fighting for the ball. If they do, stop the game and pass another ball into the grid and restart the game. After a few restarts, the players outside the grid will conform. See Diagram 25.

POSSESSION EXERCISE 4

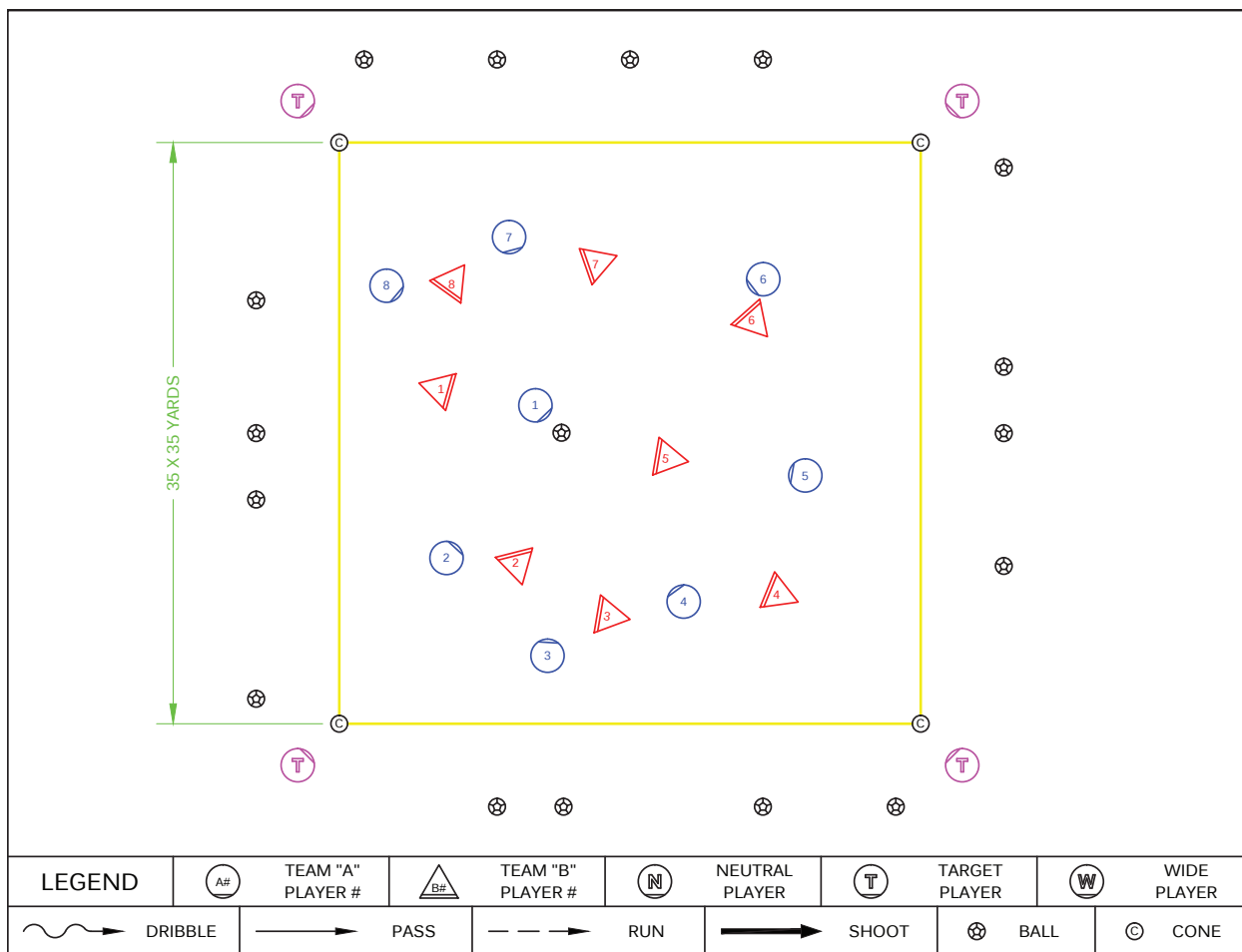


Diagram 26

Using the same grid, add four players, one player at each corner of the grid as neutral targets. These target players should stand about five steps straight back from the corner, facing the grid, without bibs. The object of this game is to pass a ball to any target for a point, so long as the target, two touch maximum, passes the ball back to any player on the same team as the passer. This will force the players to keep their head up, looking for a target player. You can use a keeper as a target allowing the keeper to use his hands or feet. See Diagram 26.

CHAPTER 5

Training Theme 5

Third Man Runs—Teaching support players on attack to make unpredictable off the ball runs to space confusing defenders in order to receive a second pass from the receiver.

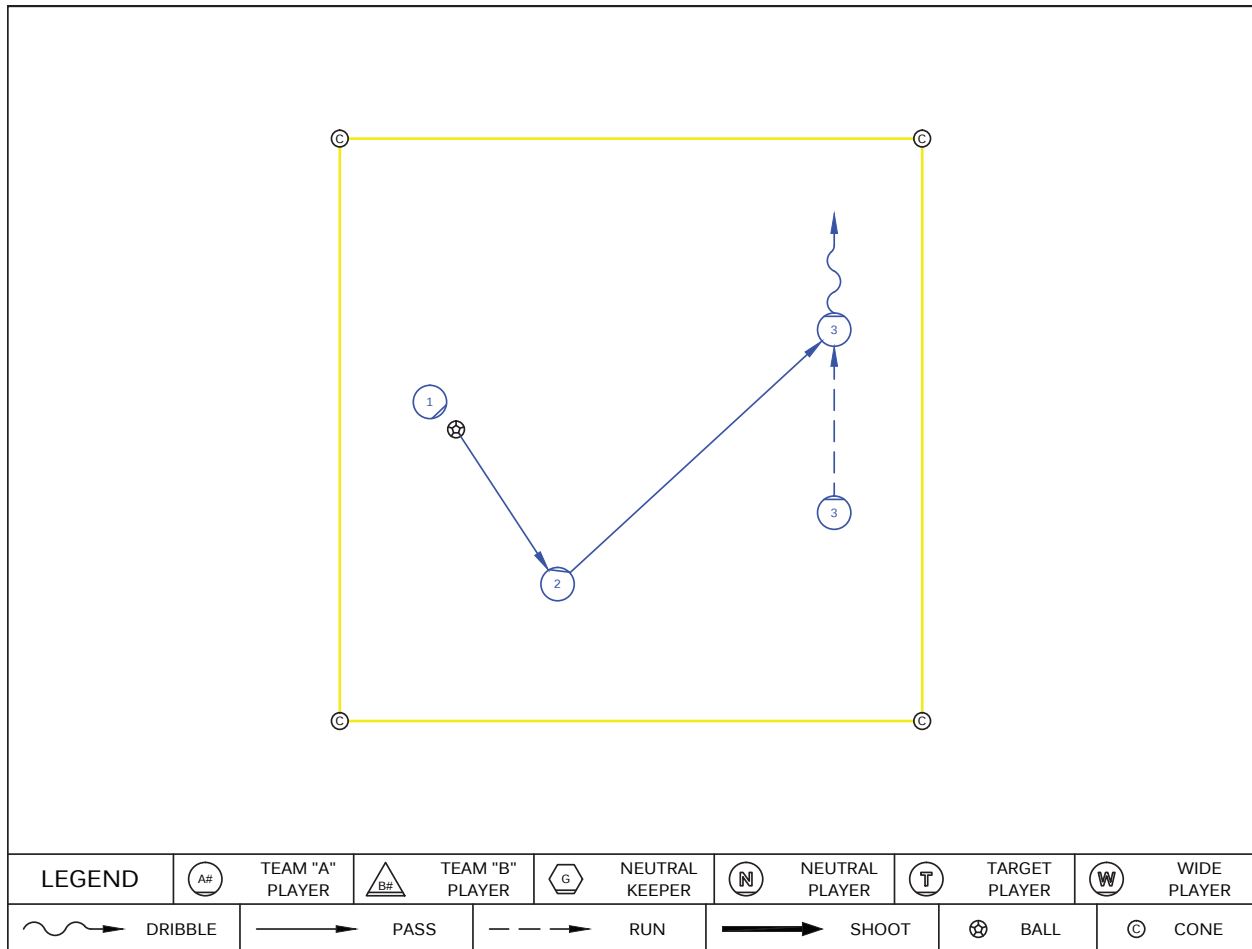


Diagram 27

Before explaining each exercise in this chapter, it is productive to review two diagrams, Diagram 27 and 28, showing two, third man running patterns. Please review each diagram. These Diagrams show random third man running patterns and are not mandatory runs for the exercises presented later, they are merely examples. After reviewing these diagrams, explain the concept of third man runs to your team and have three or four players demonstrate how third man runs are made. Continue to demonstrate various types of third man runs until all players on the team understand the concept.

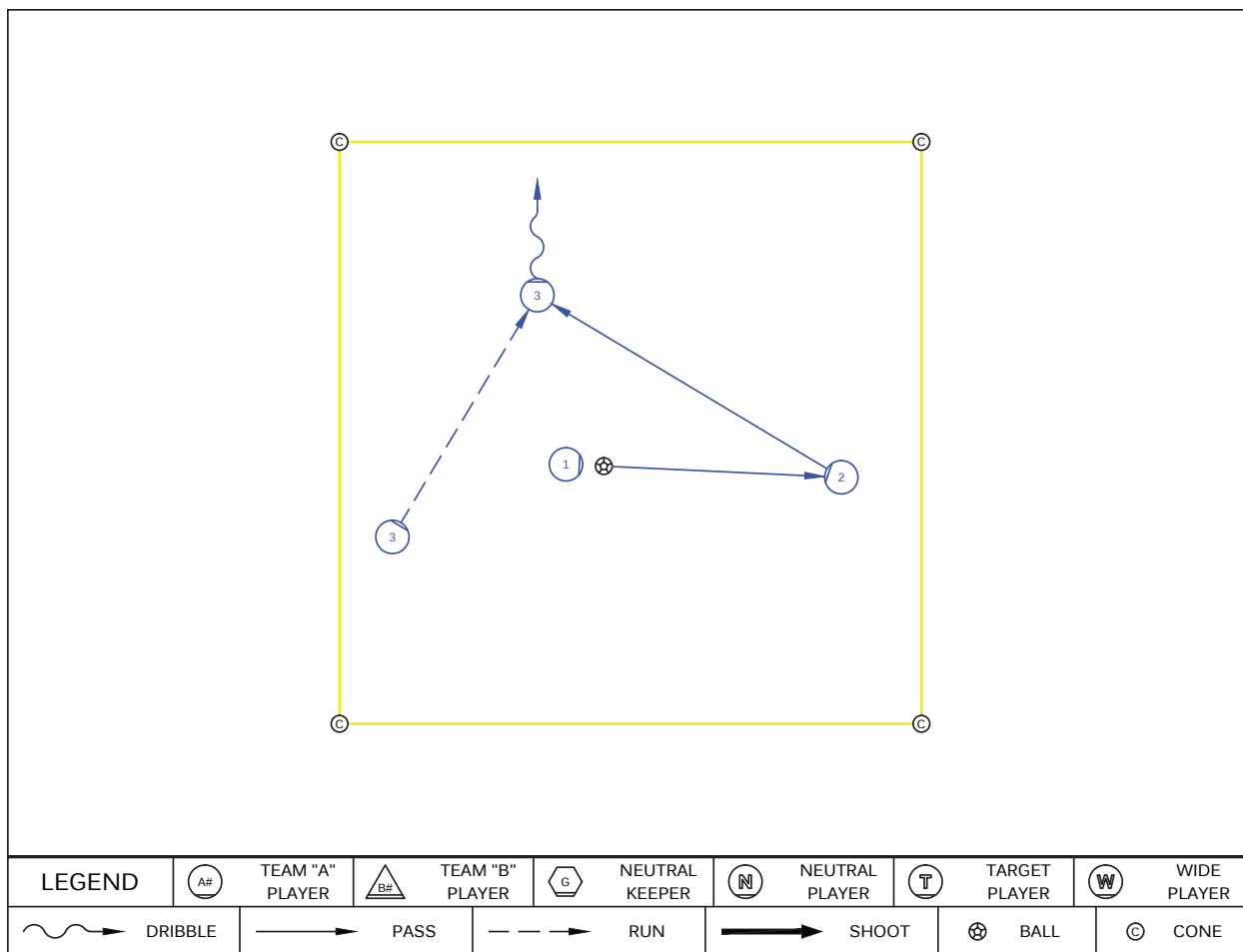


Diagram 28

The third man is not the first attacker or the receiver, he is the off the ball runner in support of the play moving to open space at the time the first attacker is ready to pass the ball to the intended receiver.

Players must understand the concept of third man runs before participating in the exercises in this chapter.

Note that third man running exercises are usually directional (going toward goal), as Diagram 27 and 28 illustrate, so that the runner can move in a way to advance the ball up field, but, to teach the concept, third man run exercises do not have to be directional.

Third man running is an offensive tactic used to create a passing option to the runner or to create open space for a teammate, receiver. The third man is not the first attacker or the intended receiver but a third off the ball runner in support of the play. A third man run is normally made from a position deeper than the first attacker who is up field. If the run is timed properly, that is, the third man run starts at the time the first attacker is ready to pass to the intended receiver, it is a lethal weapon because the run is unexpected and unpredictable.

The run should be made so that the intended receiver can play the way he is facing with a pass to the third man running after the intended receiver collects the ball. So there are three players in a third man run, the first attacker, the intended receiver, and the off the ball third man runner. The intended receiver provides a visual cue to the third man runner based on the way he is facing so that the runner can get into a position open to the ball (open to the intended receiver) and open to the place/direction where the runner will

pass or move the ball next. Ideally, the pass to the runner will lead him up field, passed with touch, so that he can run onto the ball to create a scoring opportunity.

A third man run is a good way to defeat a high line of defense or an offside trap played by an opponent especially if the third man runs originate in the midfield when the forwards are holding even with the line of defense. It's easier for a third man runner to time his third man run to be on sides at the time of the pass by the intended receiver because he has two opportunities to slow the run; one at the pass of the first attacker to the intended receiver and then again at the pass to the third man by the intended receiver.

When I mention, "slow the run" I don't mean to slow the runner's speed, I mean to make the run using a deeper curve or a slighter, less angled diagonal run in order to get at the line of defense as the ball is passed to him by the receiver. Watch teams like the Seattle Sounders during their best years under Sigi Schmidt or Liverpool under Brandon Rogers as the midfield runners beat the line of defense or beat the trap using deeper curved runs to end up at the line of defense at just the right time.

Third man runs normally happen in the middle and front third of the pitch but not for the purpose of completing a through ball to the runner but for the purpose of merely completing another pass on the way to a scoring opportunity. Another reason that third man runs happen in these parts of the field is because players realize that these runs will open space in dangerous areas of the field by moving defenders about the field as these defenders follow the runners they are trying to track or mark. Many times the third man runner will not get the ball. The receiver will pass the ball to another teammate because the runner created space for that teammate to receive a pass.

The third man runner is a potent offensive weapon that should be part of the attacking repertoire of every team. It is an easy concept to teach so long as the concept is first explained by the coach and then visuals (patterns) are presented on the field with all players watching as mentioned earlier. Again, please see Diagrams 27 and 28 for a couple of those patterns.

Elements of the Third Man Run

The third man should:

Start the run as the first attacker is about to pass the ball to the intended receiver;

Visually process the body position of the receiver in order to make the third man run in a direction so that the receiver could pass to the third man the way the receiver is facing to speed up play;

Receive the ball open to the passer (the intended receiver) and also open to the place that he intends to move the ball;

The runs of the third man should be curved or diagonal, especially if he is close to the opponent's line of defense, to evade defenders and so as not to be caught off sides.

THIRD MAN RUN EXERCISE 1

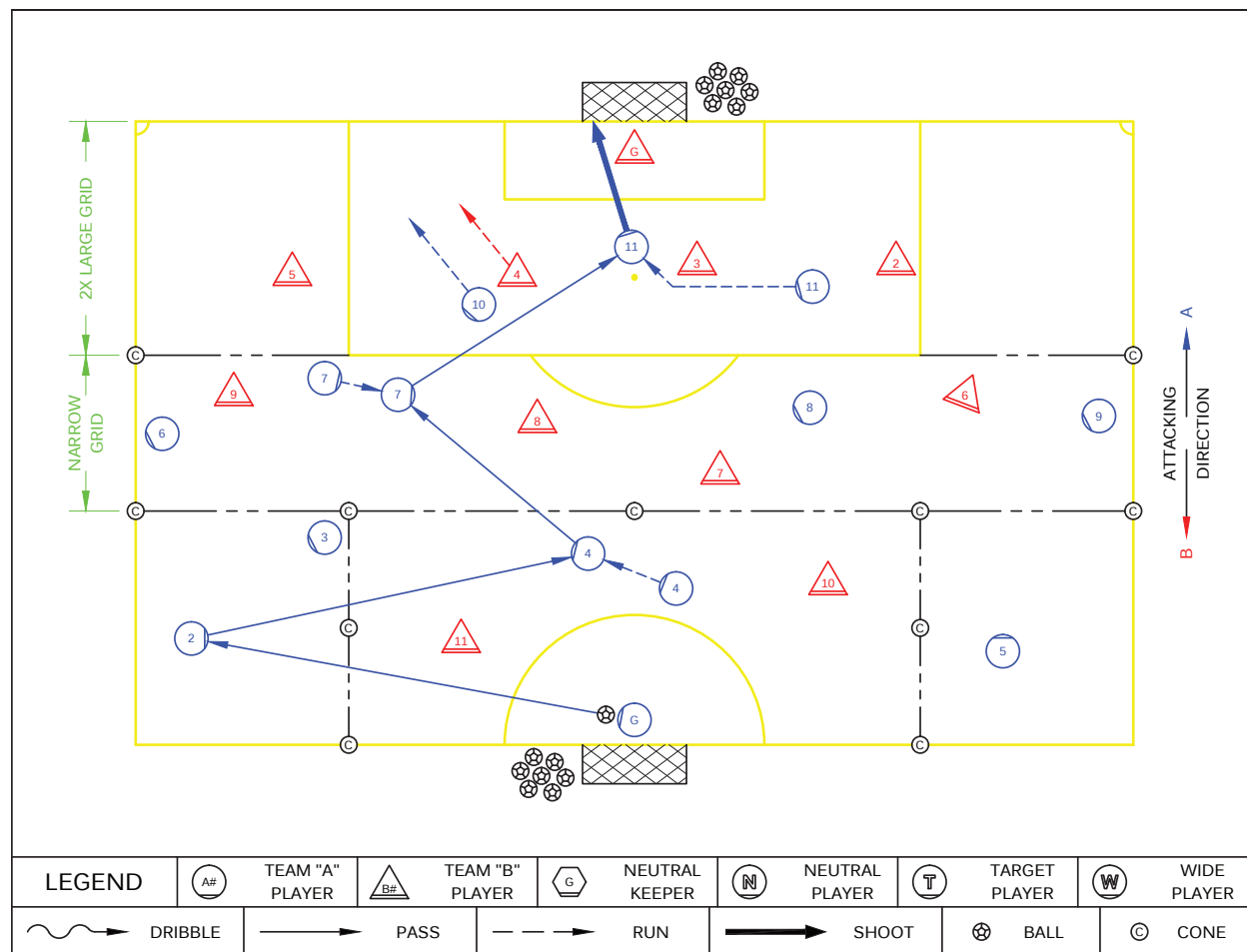


Diagram 29

The Pattern Play Game—Teaching off the ball runners who are not the intended receiver of the first attacker to make productive third man runs in all thirds of the field.

As shown in Diagram 29, this exercise requires a one half field grid divided into three horizontal parts by small disks, including two equal parts bordering one smaller (narrower) part set between the two equal parts of the grid; two teams in bibs; two goals with keepers and a good supply of balls placed equally inside the back of the net or next to each goal.

Players in the middle grid, for the purpose of third man runs, are the first attackers ready to pass to an intended receiver in an adjacent grid in the direction that team is attacking. As soon as a teammate in the narrow center grid gets the ball, the intended receiver in a larger grid must show for the ball and the third man runner who is in the same grid as the intended receiver must start his third man run so that the intended receiver can pass the ball the way he is facing (play the way he is facing) to the third man running.

The game is directional to two goals, one at each end line with keepers. The game starts with a pass from the keeper, wide to a teammate in a grid closest to him. From the time of the pass by the keeper, the players in the grid closest to the keeper pass the ball to teammates in their grid looking for an opportunity to get the ball to a teammate (the intended receiver) in the narrow center grid. As soon as the first attacker is

ready to pass the ball to an intended receiver, a third player in the other large grid starts his third man run.

The intended receiver must show for the ball, collect it and look to pass the ball to the third man running . The player with the ball in the large grid closest to the keeper that started the play is the first attacker in a third man running scenario; the intended receiver in the narrow grid is the second player in the scenario; and the runner in the other large grid is the third man running in the scenario.

Basically, this exercise requires possession in a large grid resulting in a first attacker sending a ball to an intended receiver showing for the ball in the narrow grid as the third man runner is moving to space in the other large grid. The third man runner is the player that should end up with the ball in the other large grid and then either take a shot on goal or pass it to a teammate so his team can play possession trying to break down the opponent's defense for a shot on goal. If the team in possession loses the ball, the game starts again going the other direction without an interruption in play.

It is imperative that the coach demonstrate a few third man run patters to the players before this exercise starts as mentioned earlier in this chapter otherwise imprinting will be slow. Demonstrating a few patterns will give the players a good idea about movements required at the time of the pass from the first attacker.

Make it clear to the players that third man runs start at the time the first attacker is starting to pass the ball, not at the time of receipt of it by the intended receiver and not at the time this receiver starts to make his pass. The first attacker starts the third man run scenario in the large grid farthest away from the third man runner who is moving in the opposite large grid as the intended receiver is showing for the ball in the center narrow grid.

Use coaching in the game as described earlier to stop and restart the game to teach the first attacker, intended receiver, and the third man runner to properly effect a third man running scenario.

Coaching Points for the First Attacker in a Third Man Run

All three players in a third man run scenario must execute their respective duties precisely in order to successfully move the ball up field. Do not only focus on the third man runner during these exercises. The first attacker must get his head up before the pass so that he could see the how the intended receiver is showing, left, at feet, or right. The pass should be to space with touch not pace, so as to lead the intended receiver, so long as leading him does not put him under pressure. A mature player (first attacker) will see the third man running at the time he makes the pass to his intended receiver. The first attacker and the third man runner must be synchronized.

Coaching Points for the Intended Receiver in a Third Man Run

The intended receiver, the second player in a third man run scenario, must show for the ball and be open to the ball and to the place he intends to move it. He should be taught to collect the ball in a way that will allow him to pass it the way he is facing to the third man running. He should trap the ball with one foot and pass it with the other foot in order to speed up the pass to the third man or, better yet, pass the ball to him using just one touch.

Coaching Points for the Third Man Runner

The most important coaching point for the third man runner is to start the run at the time the first attacker is ready to make the pass not when the ball is at the feet of the intended receiver. His run must be made in a direction so that the intended receiver can play the ball the way he is facing to speed up play. He should show for the ball and time his run so that he is not caught off sides if he is running close to the opponent's line of defense. Curved and diagonal runs are much harder to defend against than straight runs. The third man runner who collects the ball must be made aware that at the time he receives the ball, he is now the

first attacker for another third man run and, for that reason, all elements of third man running for the first attacker, intended receiver, and third man runner must be understood by all participants in the exercise.

THIRD MAN RUN EXERCISE 2

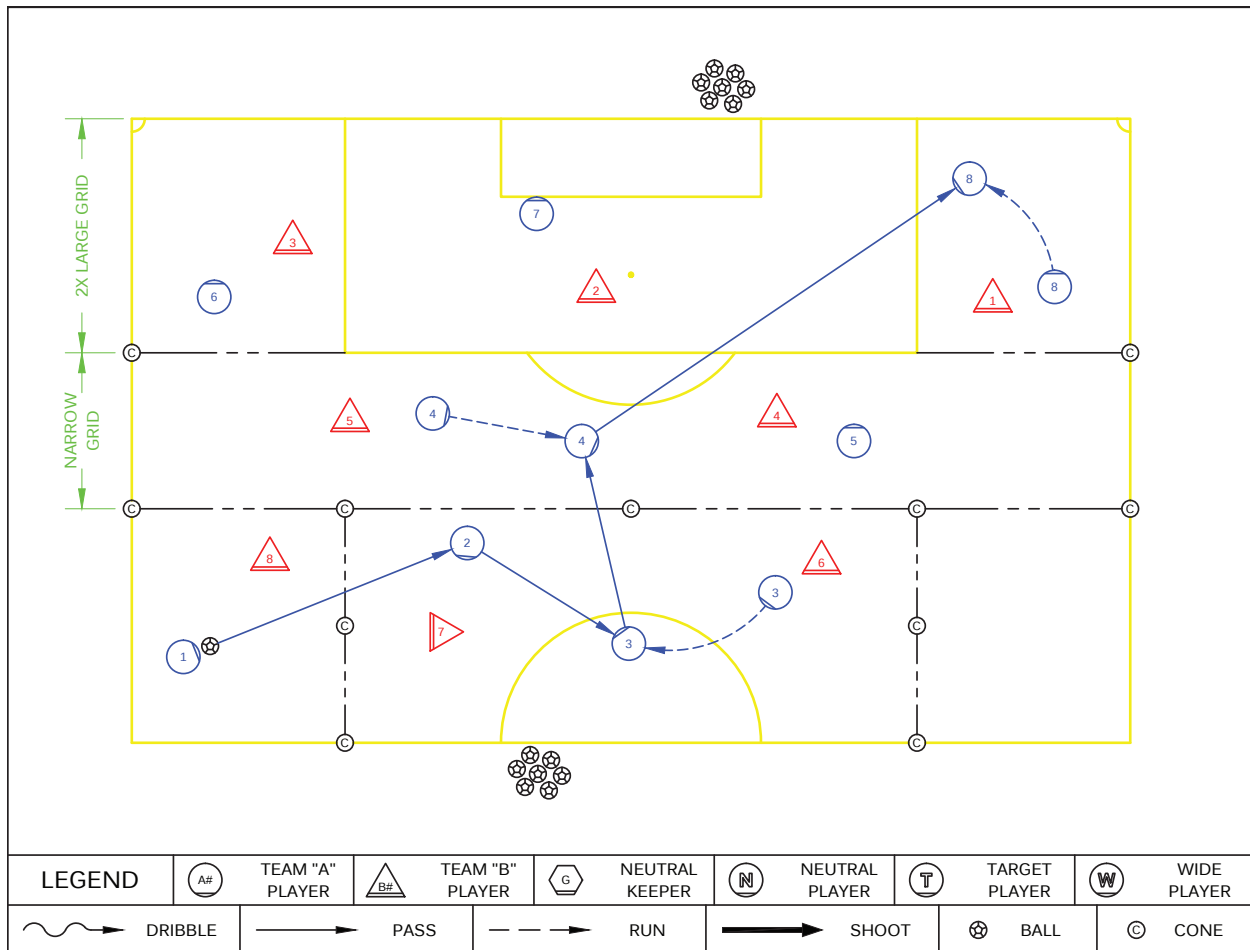


Diagram 30

As shown in Diagram 30, the grid and player set up for this third man run exercise is the same as for the first exercise. In this exercise, the players in the large grids play possession and upon the completion of just two passes, the next teammate to touch the ball (third pass) passes it to an open player in the center, narrow grid. So, the game is still directional but there is no shooting on goal, and limited build up in the large grid. This pass limitation makes it very difficult for the intended receiver who must be constantly moving to get to open space to support the first attacker. The receiver in the narrow grid must then collect the ball and using a maximum of two touches, pass the ball to a teammate who is making a third man run in the other large grid. If played correctly, this is a very fast game requiring much faster speed of play and speed of thought than the first exercise because of the number of pass limitation for the players in the large grids and touch limitation for the players in the narrow middle grid. When the third man running collects the ball, the game continues but now going the other direction, that is, two passes, then the third teammate in the large grid to touch the ball passes to a receiver in the center grid who has two touches maximum to pass the ball to the third man running in the other large grid and continuing. If the game is too fast for the level of the players, add one neutral to each large grid who will play to the team that passed to the neutral. This will provide more passing options and slow speed of play for the players in the large grid.

THIRD MAN RUN EXERCISE THREE

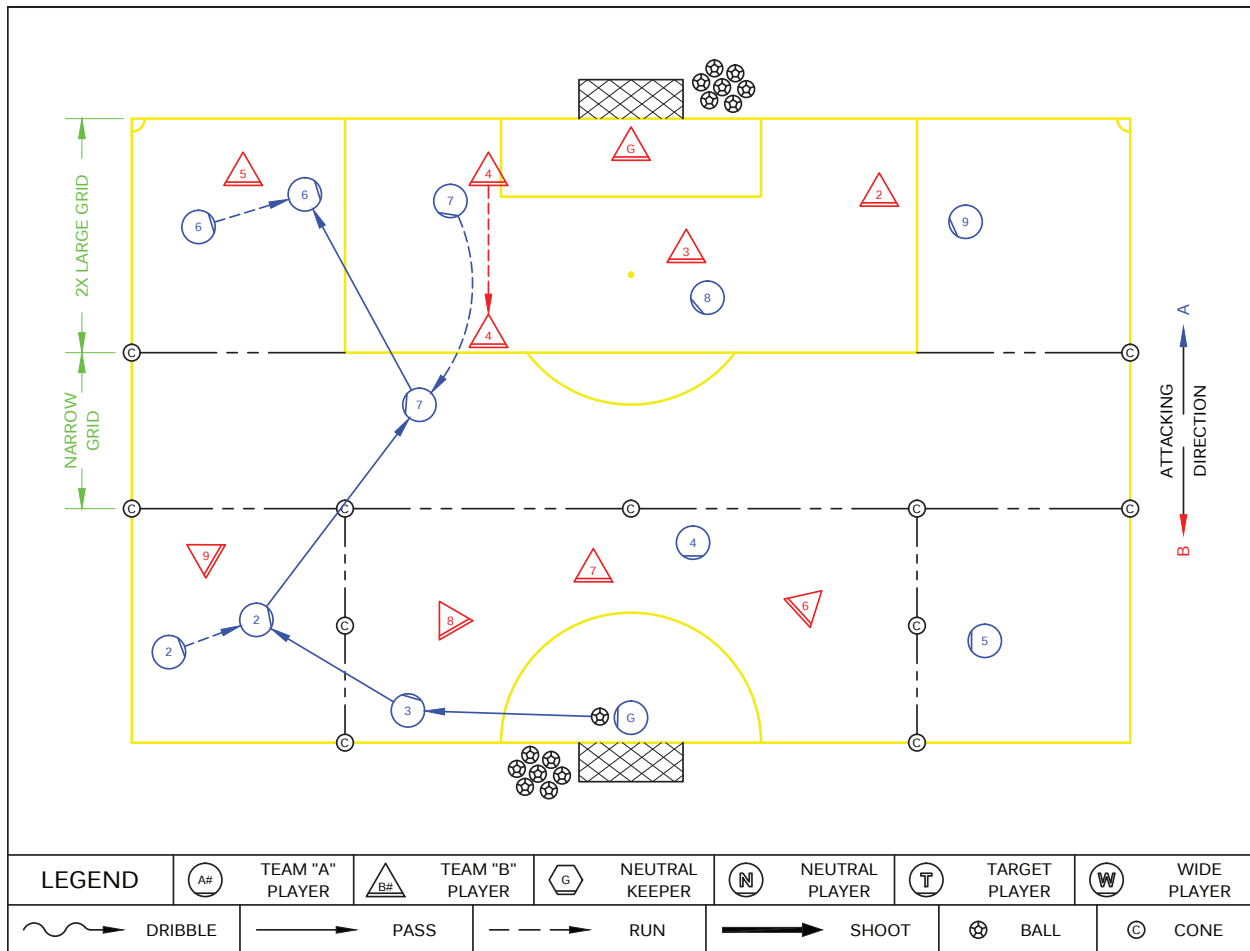


Diagram 31

As shown in Diagram 31, this next exercise allows a coach to isolate and identify the third man running by forcing the third man runner into the center, narrow grid. The third man runs must end in this grid.

The grid configuration is the same but the player configuration is different than the prior third man run exercises. The team is already divided in two, in bibs with an even number of players from each team in the two large grids with goals at each end line and a keeper in each goal with plenty of balls in the back of the net or near both goals. The smaller, narrow grid in the middle has no players in it at the set up.

A keeper starts the game by developing the play out of the back with a wide, lateral pass. The team in possession passes the ball inside their respective grid. Inside the grid, third man runs develop which result with the first attacker and the intended receiver working in the grid but the third man runner, at the time the first attacker is ready to pass the ball, can make his third man run into the narrow center grid to receive a pass from the intended receiver.

Only one third man runner from the team in possession is allowed into the center grid at one time. Coach will be able to easily identify the third man run because the result will be a player (runner) in the center grid. The player in the center grid collects the ball, quickly passes it to a teammate in the opposite large grid and the players in that grid play possession until a third man run develops at which time the ball is

sent into the center grid collected by the third man, to continue the game. All of the elements for third man runs mentioned above are the same except that the runner collects the ball in the center grid and then passes it unopposed.

Again, the purpose of this game is to make sure that players understand the concept of the third man run by isolating the runner in the center grid. As an added component, this game can be played instructing the third man runner to yell the name of the intended receiver just as the first attacker is making the pass to the intended receiver and as the runner is making his third man run into the center channel.

THIRD MAN RUN EXERCISE 4

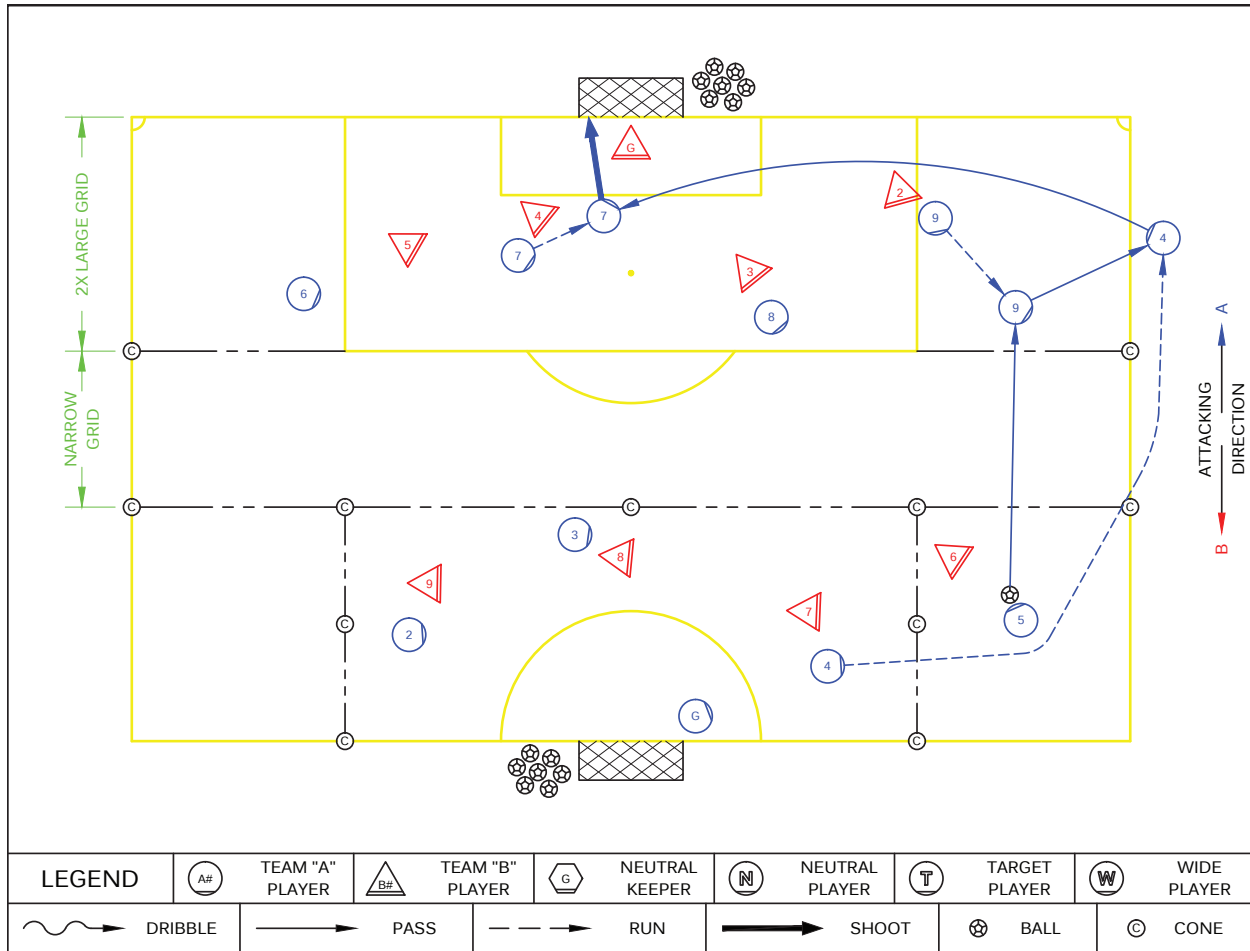


Diagram 32

As shown in Diagram 32, the grid and player configuration is the same as for Exercise 3 but with keepers. This exercise will teach players to make the third man run wide on an overlap. The players must remain in their respective large grids and not enter the middle grid. The third man run for this exercise must be a wide overlap of the first attacker started at the time the first attacker is ready to pass the ball to the intended receiver who sees the overlapping run and passes the ball to the overlapping third man runner. The third man runner is to collect the ball outside (wide, outside the sideline) of his respective grid. In other words, the third man runner can use that area just outside of his grid to accomplish an overlap and receive the pass, outside the grid. When the third man runner collects the ball, he can pass it back into his grid or advance the ball to a teammate in the other large grid for a shot on goal or merely center the ball into

the mix. If this game is too difficult for your team, add two neutrals in the narrow center grid, playing for both sides, passing back to the team that passed to the neutral, either direction. This will slow the game down to allow players to accomplish overlapping third man runs from the large grids ending with a third man running wide, outside the grid.

CHAPTER 6

Training Theme 6

Passing—Teaching the first attacker to recognize passing options based on visual cues; teaching properly weighted passes with touch to space and with pace to feet; using ball possession to open the opponent's back line; passing to split defenders.

Passing as the First Attacker

Many teams pass the ball back, or laterally, to hold possession safely even though a passing option is available up field. An MLS team like Portland under Caleb Porter, or at a bit higher level as ranked world wide, Barcelona, presently chose to lose real estate rather than taking a chance to advance the ball. This is not a criticism but reflects a certain style of play, as opposed to PSG in the French League or Manchester United in the EPL that tend to take more risks with the ball in order to get it into the front third of the field. One style is not better than the other, just different.

Whatever the formation, system or style of play, if the goal is ball possession, up field or otherwise, once the first attacker has the ball, his role at that point in time is always the same, complete the pass whether the first attacker needs to use the inside, outside, laces, toe or any other part of his foot, or any other part of his body, his job is to complete the pass.

To do this, the first attacker must have the speed of thought to quickly process the visual cues presented to him which show passing options around him. It's not always the case that a receiver is holding in open space pointing both hands to his feet calling for the ball. Visual cues to be recognized by the first attacker are usually much more subtle, and may require a curved pass around a defender who is obstructing a straight passing lane to space, or a hard passed ball to the feet of an unsuspecting teammate, or a long ball to an outside channel or deep up field. If the first attacker is not able to see the field because of bad body positioning or is not able to recognize a visual cue to determine the best option based on the system and style of play of his team, he stands a better chance of losing the ball than completing a pass.

The exercises which follow are designed to teach the first attacker to recognize visual cues, to process that information quickly, to properly weight passes and to use passing to open an opponent's line of defense. This chapter is not about speed of play or creating through ball opportunities, or passing technique, though these concepts are naturally a part of passing.

Elements of Passing as the First Attacker

Assuming that the passer received the ball open to it and open to the place where he wants to move the ball, he must have his head up already knowing generally where he wants to put his pass;

Know which part of his foot that he is going to use in advance of the pass;

Be ready to hit the ball in any way possible, knees bent or legs straight, or leaning over it or bending back, whatever body positioning that he thinks will work under the circumstances even if under heavy, threatening pressure;

He must see the field so that he can recognize the visual cues provided by his teammates ready to receive the ball; and

See the body position of opponents near him and the placement of opponents around the field.

Where is the open passing lane and how does the first attacker use that lane? The simplest rule is if the first attacker cannot see the receiver, unobstructed, that receiver is not open to receive a short pass on

the ground. If no receivers can be seen unobstructed, look to curve a pass on the ground or look to bypass defenders with a ball over their head. Considering all of the above, this is quite a bit of information to process in the blink of an eye.

PASSING EXERCISE 1

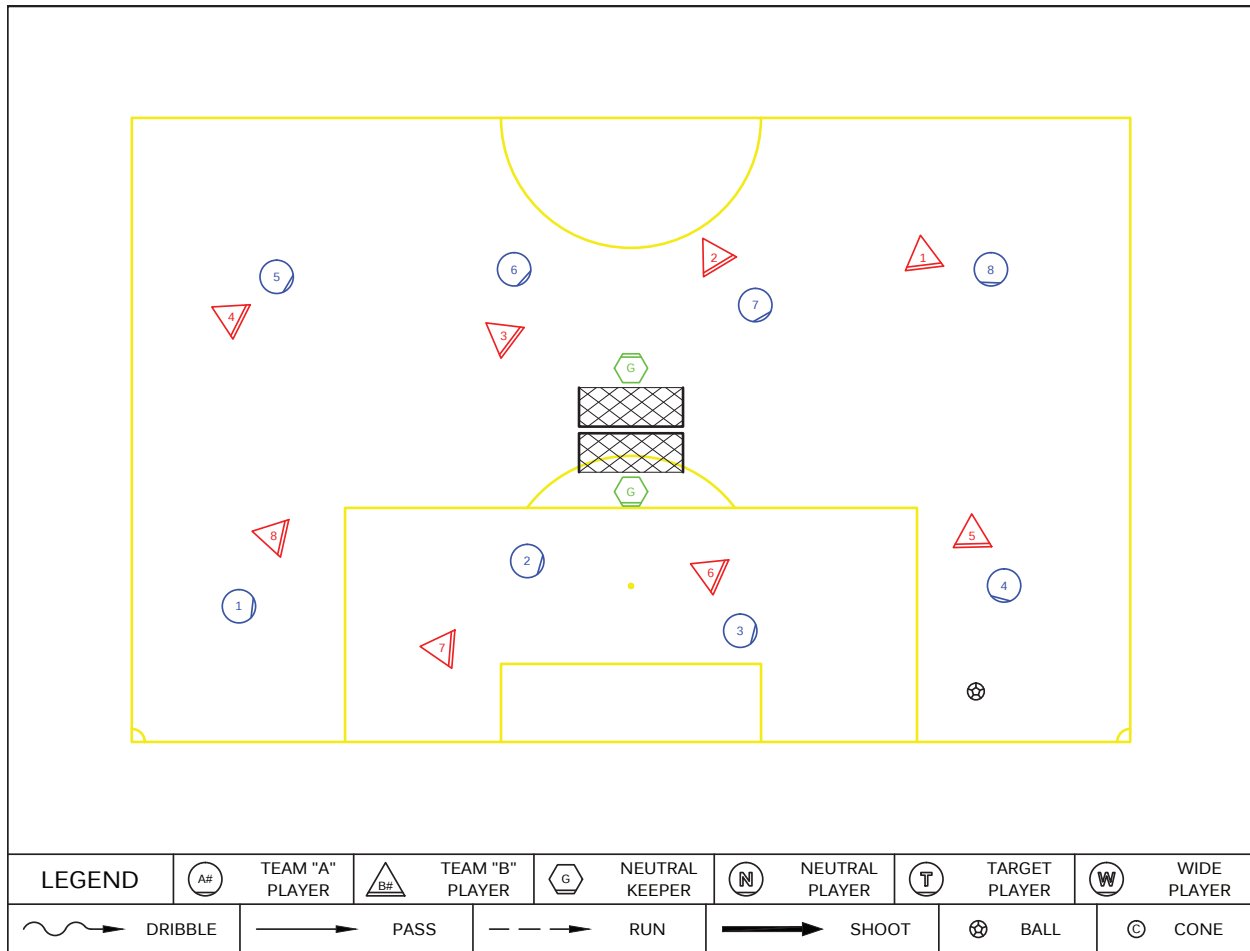


Diagram 33

As shown in Diagram 33, this first passing exercise requires two goals, back to back, any size with or without keepers, placed in the middle of a half field, with two teams in bibs trying to score in either goal. A good supply of balls should be at each sideline outside the grid. This exercise forces the first attacker to be aware of teammate and opponent placement throughout the entire field because either team can score on either goal.

Coach starts the game by playing a ball on the ground farthest away from both goals to force the players to develop the attack away from goal. The team in possession has unlimited touches to move the ball toward either goal to try to create a scoring opportunity. The first attacker must be constantly looking at the entire field with the head on a swivel, similar to two greats as examples, Carlos Valderrama of Columbia, and Ally Wagner of the USWNT. In this exercise, the first attacker must be constantly looking for the best passing option as both of these players have demonstrated over the years, to hold possession of the ball not only on the half of the field where the ball is located but also on the other side of the field.

The first attacker's teammates will be making runs to space on both sides of the field in order to draw defenders out of position and to be a passing option. After a shot on goal, coach sends out another ball farthest away from the team that just scored and to a player on the other team to start the game again. If you want to speed up play, limit touches on the ball.

Coaching Points to Help the First Attacker

For this exercise, it is extremely important that the first attacker keep his head on a swivel quickly and constantly perusing all parts of the field near and away from him. Off the ball runners should be instructed to keep moving to provide passing options. If a good option is missed by the first attacker, the game should be stopped and the first attacker corrected using coaching in the game. The first attacker should look to the outside channels if the goal he is facing is obstructed and if he intends to move the ball to the other goal using combinations.

PASSING EXERCISE 2

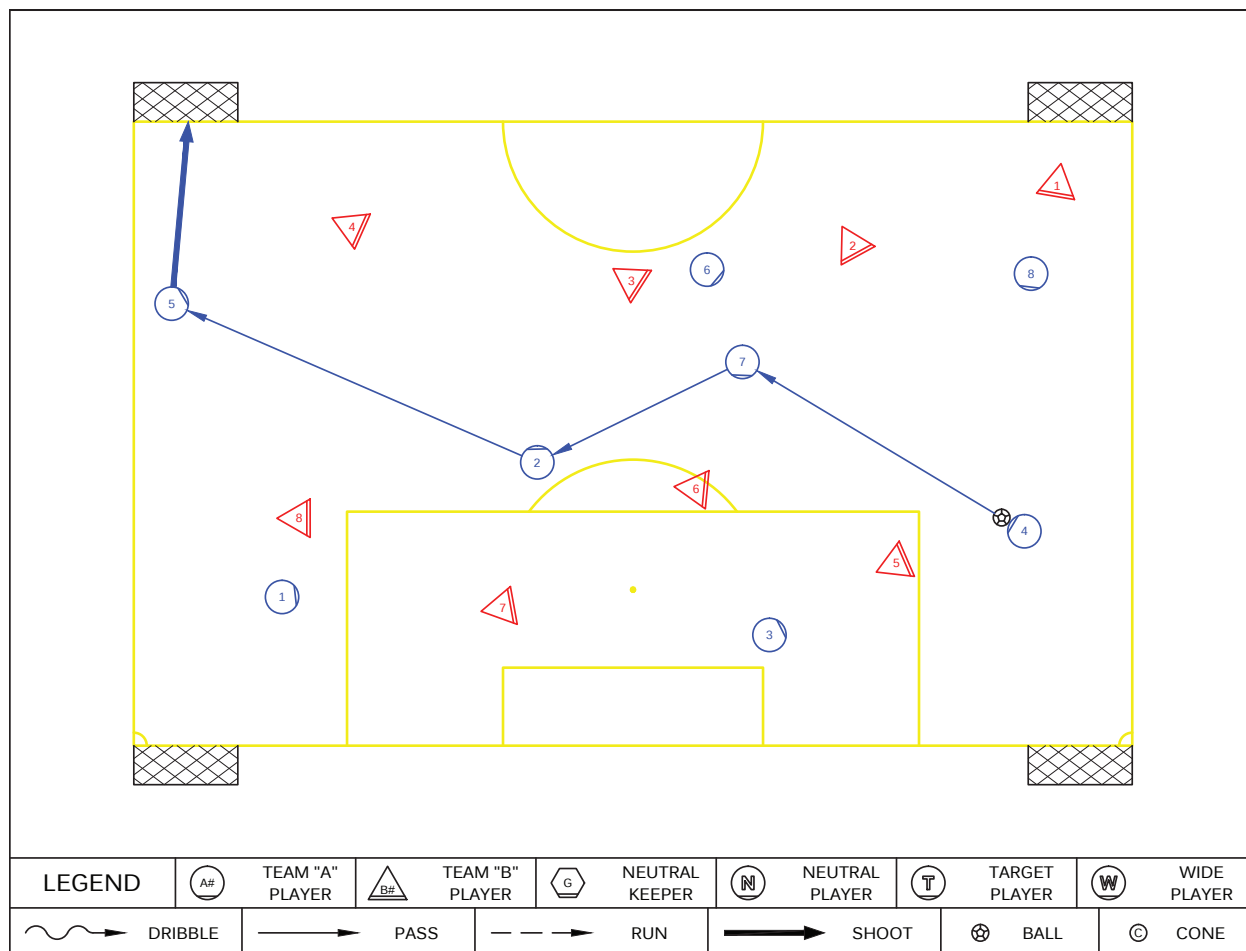


Diagram 34

As shown in Diagram 34, use the same grid, same teams but move the goals from the middle of the field to an end line, facing the field at each corner. Do the same with two more goals at the opposite end line, facing the field at each corner. This is a four goal game with goals at end lines facing each other near the corner of the field. This game is directional with each team attacking in a different direction.

Coaching Points to Help the First Attacker

In this exercise, the first attacker is looking to change the point of attack with a dangerous switch from one outside channel to the other or likewise with an additional pass through the goal channel to a teammate who will receive the ball, turn and switch it. The additional goals placed at the corners will emphasize the opportunity to change the point of attack. The pass that allows a switch is usually made to feet allowing the receiver to turn the ball and switch the field of play. If this is messed or not executed properly by the first attacker, correct this using coaching in the game.

PASSING EXERCISE 3

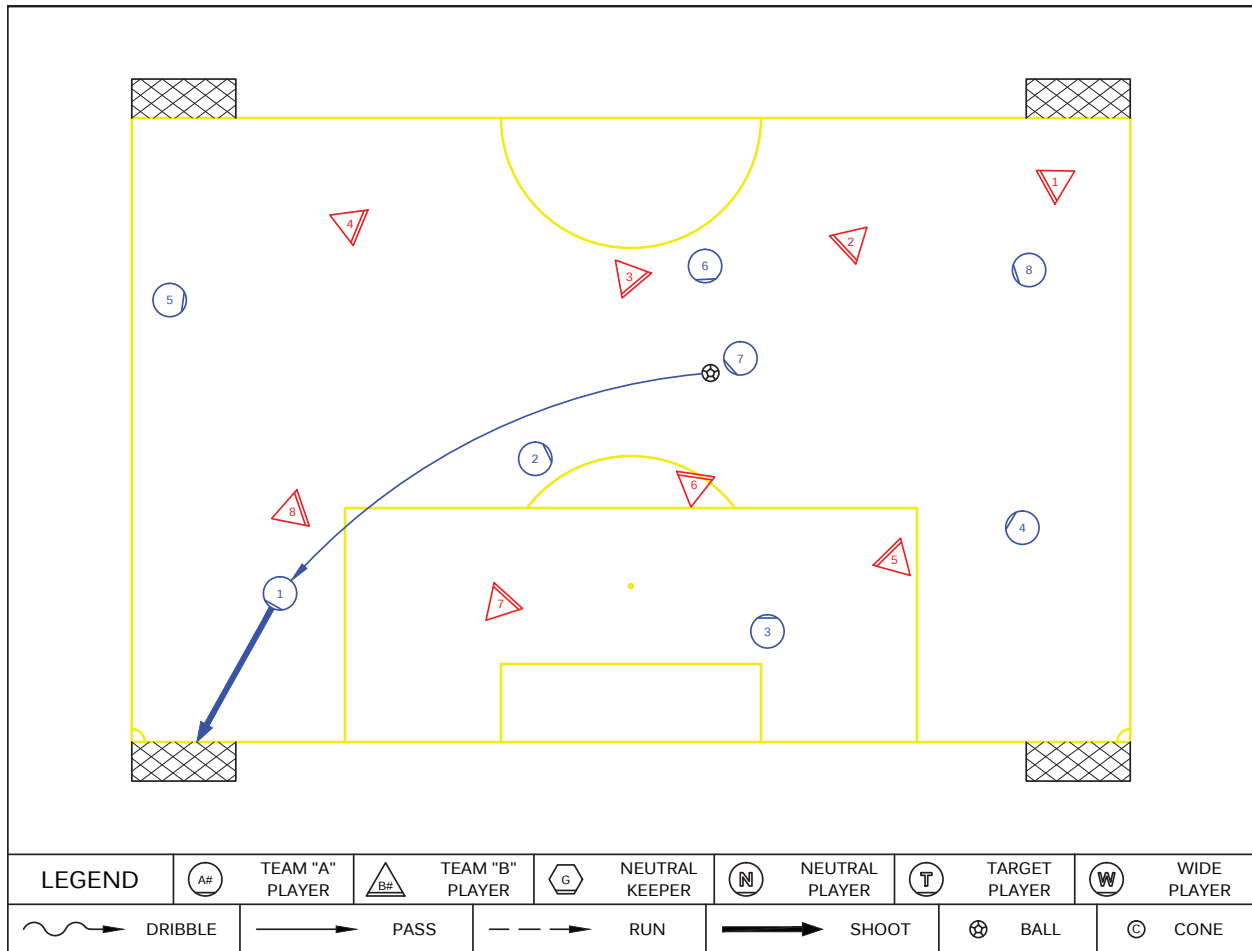


Diagram 35

As shown in Diagram 35, use the same grid, goal and player configuration as Exercise 2, two teams in bibs playing against each other but for this exercise either team can score in any goal.

Coaching Points to Help the First Attacker

This exercise radically increases passing options for the first attacker and will allow him multiple opportunities to create quick and dangerous scoring chances. Look for the first attacker to recognize these options. Though still encouraged, not as much off the ball movement will be required by the off the ball runners because teammates of the first attacker will be open in many parts of the field. Encourage the first attacker to make the most dangerous pass, one that will result in advancing the ball to goal for a second ball to goal. This exercise takes pressure off of the first attacker and increases pressure on the team not in possession because multiple live goals are used.

PASSING EXERCISE 4

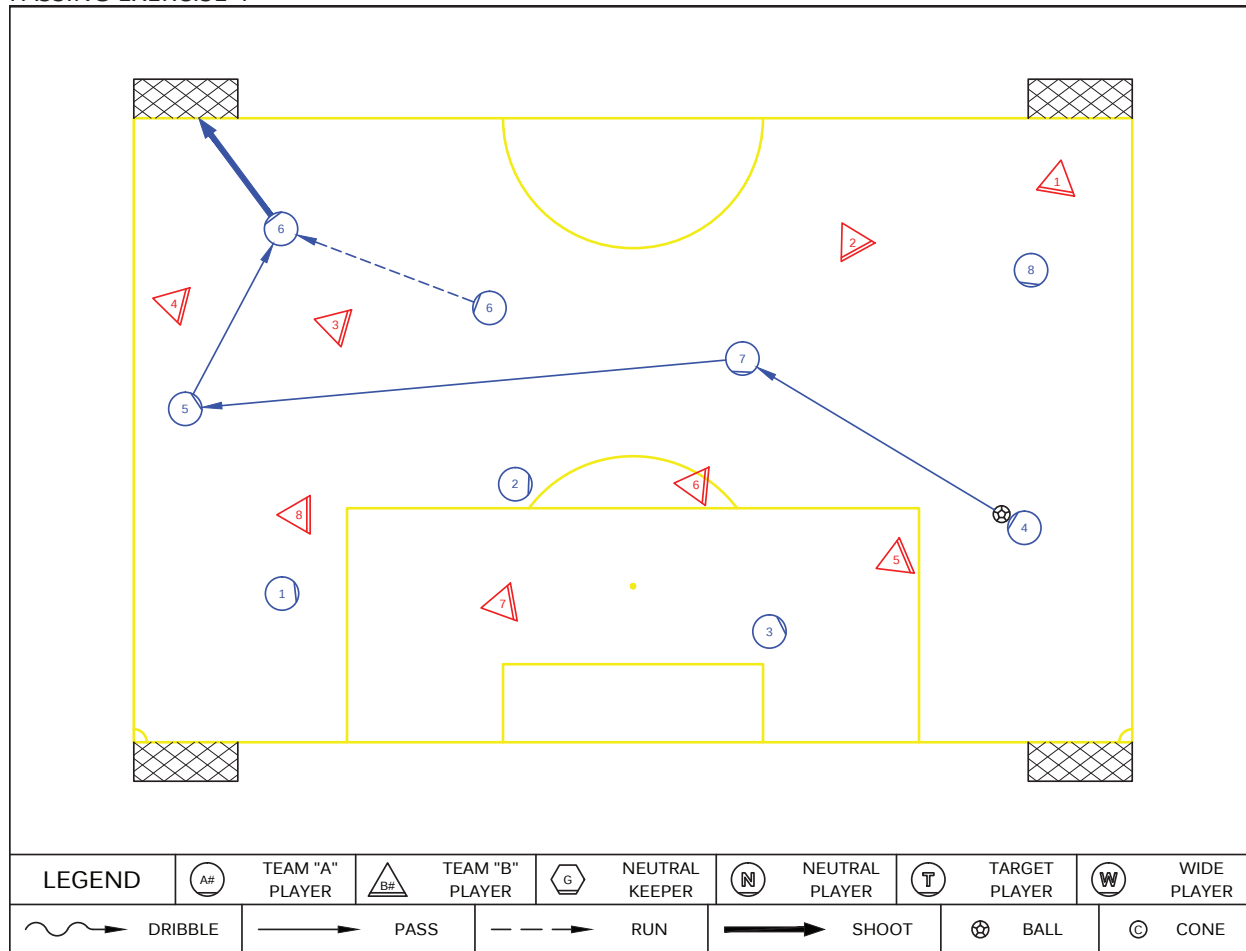


Diagram 36

As shown in Diagram 36, use the same grid, goal and player configuration as Exercise 2, two teams in bibs playing against each other but for this exercise one team can only score going a certain direction in either of the two goals, likewise for the other team. In other words, this game is truly directional with one team attacking one way and the other team attacking the other way but to either of the two goals at the end lines with the restriction that a shot on goal can only happen immediately after a switch or after splitting defenders.

Coaching Points to Help the First Attacker

This exercise encourages the first attacker to look wide for passing options to create scoring opportunities by switching the point of attack if one channel is jammed with defenders; or going directly to goal and splitting defenders if that option is available.

Splitting defenders with a pass happens when the pass bypasses two defenders by passing between them (splitting them) therefore providing numbers up to the attacking team (because the defenders are behind the play upon completion of the pass) once the ball passes the defenders. Also look for first attackers to demonstrate that they understand that they will normally receive a pass from a part of the field in which there is numbers down and should look to pass to a part of the field where the first attacker's team has numbers up. Make sure that the first attacker passes to space with touch and to feet with pace. For every exercise use coaching in the game to correct the first attacker in the event such an opportunity is missed by the first attacker.

CHAPTER 7

Training Theme 7

Receiving and Turning—Teaching individual technique which allows the first attacker who just received the ball to quickly switch the point of attack during the run of play in one or two movements.

Because proper receiving technique is so important when collecting the ball to turn it to switch the point of attack, receiving will be addressed in this chapter along with turning. Receiving the ball happens on the field during the run of play as many times, if not more times, than a pass; it's just not noticed more than a pass. Proper receiving technique must be practiced not assumed.

The ball must first be received, collected, before it can be passed. Receiving the ball by the first attacker in a way that will allow a turn by the first attacker encompasses most, if not all, of the elements to accomplish any type of ball collection during the run of play, for almost any purpose.

Receiving the ball is as important as the pass. Without proper technique when receiving the ball, a productive, properly weighted pass after the ball is collected is difficult especially if the receiver is under heavy pressure. Receiving a ball in tight space to feet is an art accomplished properly and consistently time after time by very few soccer players. Considering its importance, receiving is not nearly emphasized enough during training sessions.

Understanding how to stop a ball at feet with a soft touch which allows the receiver/first attacker to move the ball on that first touch in any direction while, at the same time, keeping the ball at his feet to accomplish a turn or other difficult maneuver with the ball. This is an asset which can be used over and over again especially by players who occupy the goal channel on the field at game time.

Many professional soccer players like Messi for example, are said to have Velcro on their boots because on receipt of the ball, it stops dead near his foot if that is what was intended; or when dribbling through traffic, the ball seems to be glued to his foot even though opponents are trying to take it. This soft touch on the ball is not innate, it is developed and is an extremely important component of receiving.

Under pressure, a passer might heavily overweight a ball (pass it too hard) to the feet of the receiver. The receiver's ability to collect a hard hit ball with a soft touch can either enhance or kill a play. The trick is not only to softly receive that ball but to move it on first touch in the direction of the intended second touch, to turn, for example. This is called a useful first touch as will be discussed in more detail later.

The most important element of receiving a ball is body position at the time of the pass to the receiver. As mentioned in other chapters, the receiver's body must be open to the ball and open to the place where he wants to move the ball, except when receiving the ball to turn. Turning requires receiving the ball from one direction and moving to the opposite direction in most cases.

A player cannot face the ball and at the same time a direction opposite of the place it is coming from. So, when receiving the ball to turn with it, teach the receiver to face the ball, possibly side on in the direction that you want him to turn. As the ball is approaching, make sure that the receiver lifts the receiving foot just slightly off of the ground so that he can cushion the ball as it hits the foot. Cushioning the ball will avoid a hard stop which happens if the foot is fixed to the ground. At that point the receiver can start to adjust the body to turn.

At the point of impact ball to foot, make sure that the receiver's knees are bent for balance. The receiver should slightly move his foot back, again to cushion the ball so that, as it hits the foot, the ball remains near the receiver. Some players look as if they are taking a short hop just before the ball reaches their foot. This is a good way to approach receiving the ball so long as the receiving foot moves slightly back to soften the

blow of the ball in order to control it.

Once the ball has been trapped (received), turning it to a different direction merely requires body movement in the direction of the turn. Focus on the movement of the body, not the movement of the feet. As the first attacker's body turns, his feet will adjust to the movement of the body corresponding to the movement of his body. Players turn using different foot skills playing to their technical strengths. Therefore, one player will turn the ball using different foot movements, different parts of the foot, different body position than another player so focus on the movement of the body, not the movement of the foot.

Most players will receive the ball prior to a turn using the same receiving technique over and over again, but they will use varying methods to turn with the ball. There is no one correct way to turn a ball. So long as the turn is accomplished, allow players to use their own individual technique. Don't force a player to use a certain technique to turn a ball. Turning is complicated especially when under heavy pressure. Players will naturally use the technical foot skills that they are most comfortable when turning a ball. Those with poor foot skills may choose to let a ball run past them and then hit it to accomplish a switch without trapping and turning the ball. The end result, that is, to switch the point of attack, is of utmost importance here, not technical proficiency when turning.

The basic elements of a very simple method used over and over again to turn a ball are: knees bent to receive the ball while balanced; soft first touch on the ball to collect it close to the body; turn the body in the direction that the first attacker plans to move the ball; use the outside of the foot closest to the ball to guide the ball as the body is being turned in the intended direction; keep the ball on the outside of the foot until the turn is complete; the second touch (pass or dribble) with the other foot should move the ball to the intended place or receiver on the field. This is a way to simply turn the ball moving it from one direction to an opposite or to a different direction.

As mentioned above, some players prefer to turn by allowing the ball to run through their legs and then run onto the ball or to touch it through their legs and then run onto it. Others prefer to stop the ball dead and pull it back or quickly turn it using a different part of their foot. Some players like to push the ball very wide if space permits and then sprint to it in the opposite direction that it was received. Each player will find his own technique to accomplish a turn. Merely get the first attacker to adjust his body and his feet will accomplish the turn in a manner that is comfortable for him.

Elements of Receiving and Turning to Change/Switch the Point of Attack

Before the ball is received, the intended receiver should know where he intends to move the ball;

He should recognize the body position of the first attacker understanding how he, the intended receiver, must position his body to be face on to the first attacker (the passer);

The receiver must be in a balanced position which usually requires a low body position;

He must know how he will collect the ball and turn into space, in advance of receiving the pass.

In summary, the key to a good turn with the ball is for the receiver to know that there is space around him to turn the ball and accelerate to space to beat an opponent. The receiver will usually have his knees slightly bent facing the ball as it is passed to him with his back to the place on the field where he wants to move the ball to (turn). A soft first touch is accomplished by moving the receiving foot back just a bit upon impact while in a position to turn using any comfortable turning technique. The useful first touch sets the ball up for a second touch on the ball to create the turn.

Turning the Ball with Back to Goal, Committed or Uncommitted Pressure by a Defender

If the receiver has his back to goal with a defender tight on him (committed pressure, see Diagram 37)

then the ball will usually be served heavily weighted to feet. Upon receipt of the ball the receiver should have his arm out feeling the defender (see The Pit above) so that he can decide which way to turn. If the defender is on his left, the receiver should be taught to turn to the right and vice versa. Teach the receiver to shield the ball as mentioned in The Pit above; turn using the outside of the foot, slightly wide of the defender, and shoot.

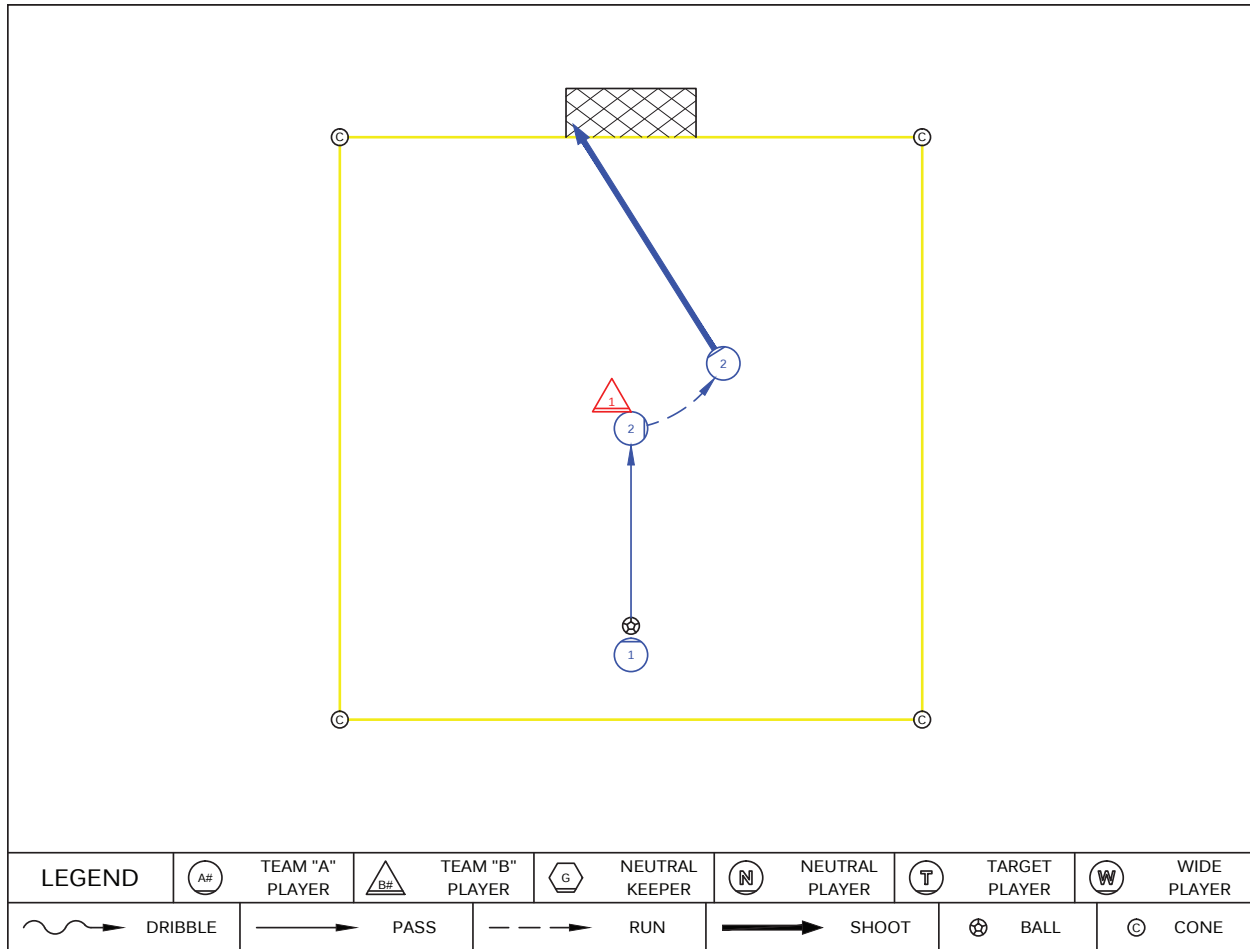


Diagram 37

As discussed in other parts of this book, if the defender is applying uncommitted pressure as mentioned then there is no need for the first attacker to have an arm extended to feel the body position of the opponent because the opponent will allow space between the first attacker and himself in order to induce the first attacker to turn into that space so that the first defender can take the ball. See Diagram 38.

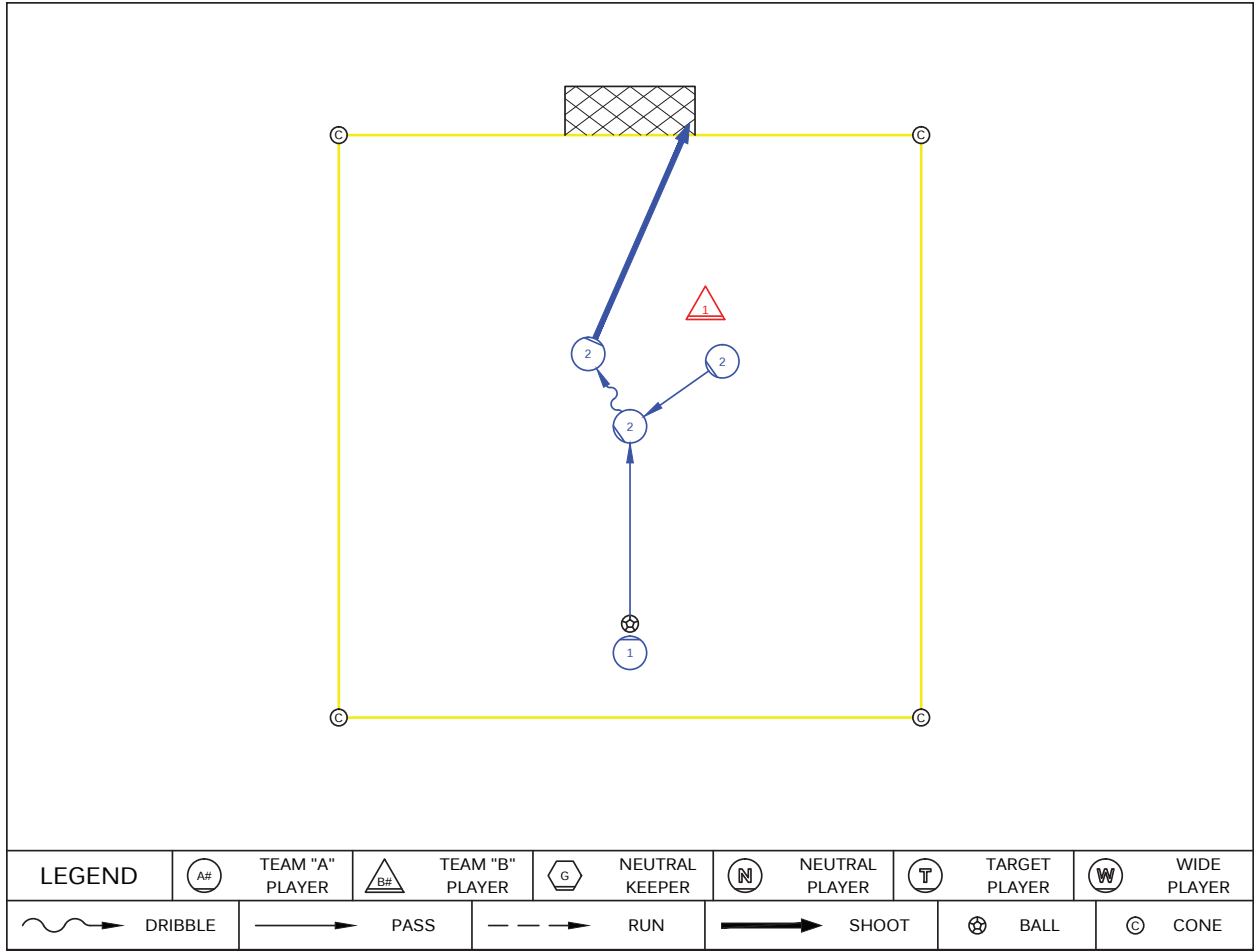


Diagram 38

RECEIVING AND TURNING EXERCISE 1

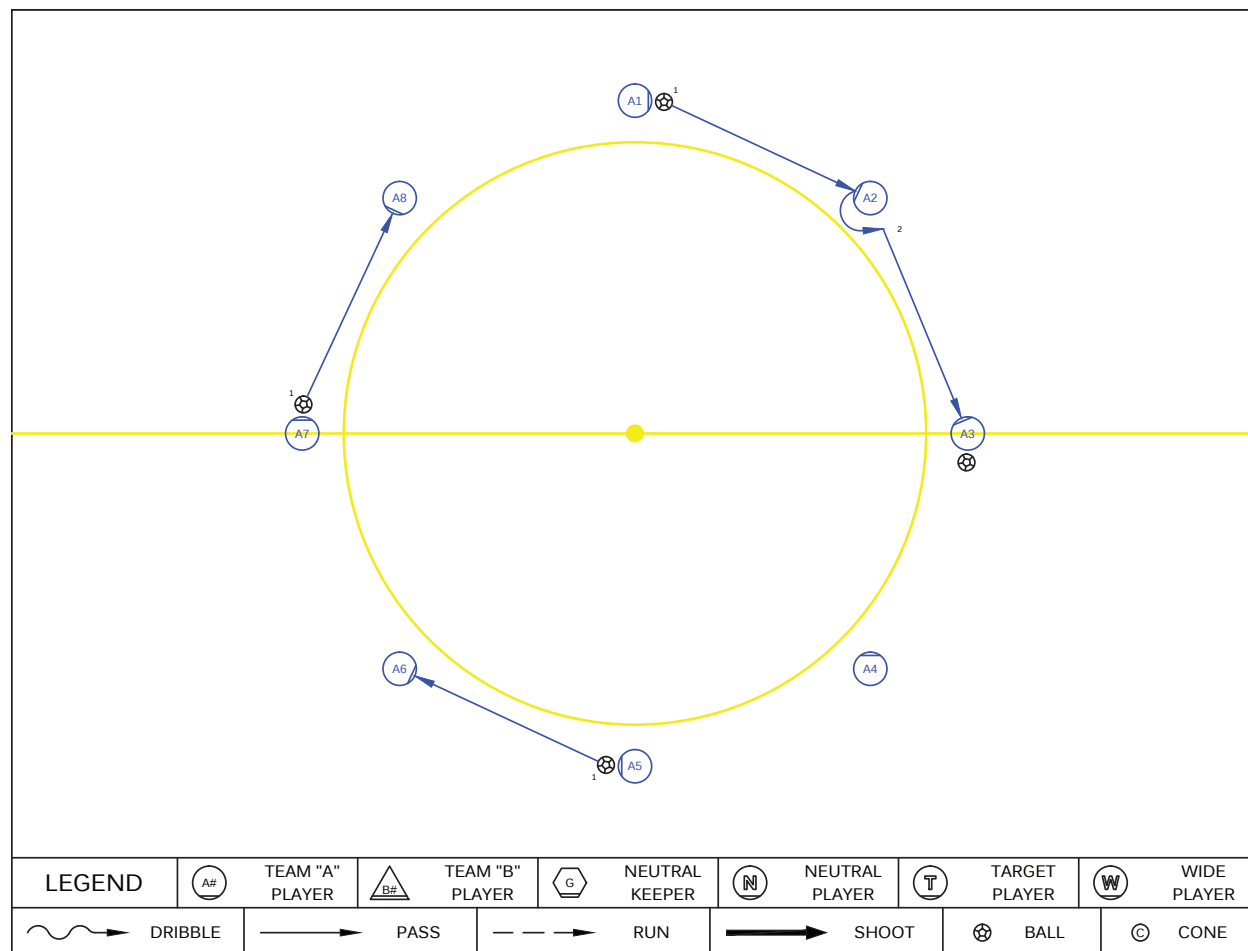


Diagram 39

As shown in Diagram 39, because receiving and turning with the ball as a first attacker is an individual technique, it is best to teach it not using a competitive small sided game at first, so this exercise is set in a circular grid about the size of a standard sized center circle (the center circle on the field can be used if available) with players positioned a yard or so outside the circle about one yard apart from each other all facing in one direction. There are no teams competing against each other in this exercise and every other player has a ball.

At the coach's call, the players with the ball all pass in the same direction to the player just ahead of them in the circle, for example clockwise (1). The receiver collects the ball, turns and immediately passes to the player just ahead and so on (2). Every player is active so there are no waiting lines as this technical exercise progresses. As soon as coach notices a player that is receiving and turning correctly, stop the exercise and use that player as an example; allow that player to receive the ball, turn and pass it to the player ahead of him. Restart the exercise and if a player is not receiving the ball correctly or not turning and passing the ball satisfying the technical elements mentioned earlier, stop the game and use coaching in the game to make the correction.

If the exercise is moving too quickly for the team, give balls to every third or fourth player rather than to every other player and restart the exercise using the same rules mentioned above. At some point, stop the exercise and reverse the direction of the ball so the players will now turn in the opposite direction, counter

clockwise, forcing them to use a different maneuver to turn the ball.

Choose a player that is using an out of the ordinary method to turn as an example so that players are exposed to different methods of turning but please note that any method should be acceptable so long as the elements mentioned above are generally met. Do not restrict players to only one or two methods to turn the ball. Every player will develop a turning technique that is most comfortable for that player.

For each of the exercises in this chapter, the receiver should always attack the ball as it is rolling to him, even if that means taking only one step forward toward the ball.

Coaching Points to Help the Player Receiving the Ball and Turning It

For a typical turn, the receiver should be facing the passer; knees bent for balance as the ball approaches the receiver. The receiver must be aware of space around him and know where he is going to pass the ball (turn it) in advance of receiving it. The receiver should use a soft first touch by slightly retracting the receiving foot to cushion the ball; a slight hop upon receipt will help illustrate how this can be accomplished moving the ball in a way to set up the second touch. Allow any maneuver to turn the ball but make sure that it is done quickly, unlimited touches if needed.

RECEIVING AND TURNING (CHANGING DIRECTION) EXERCISE 2

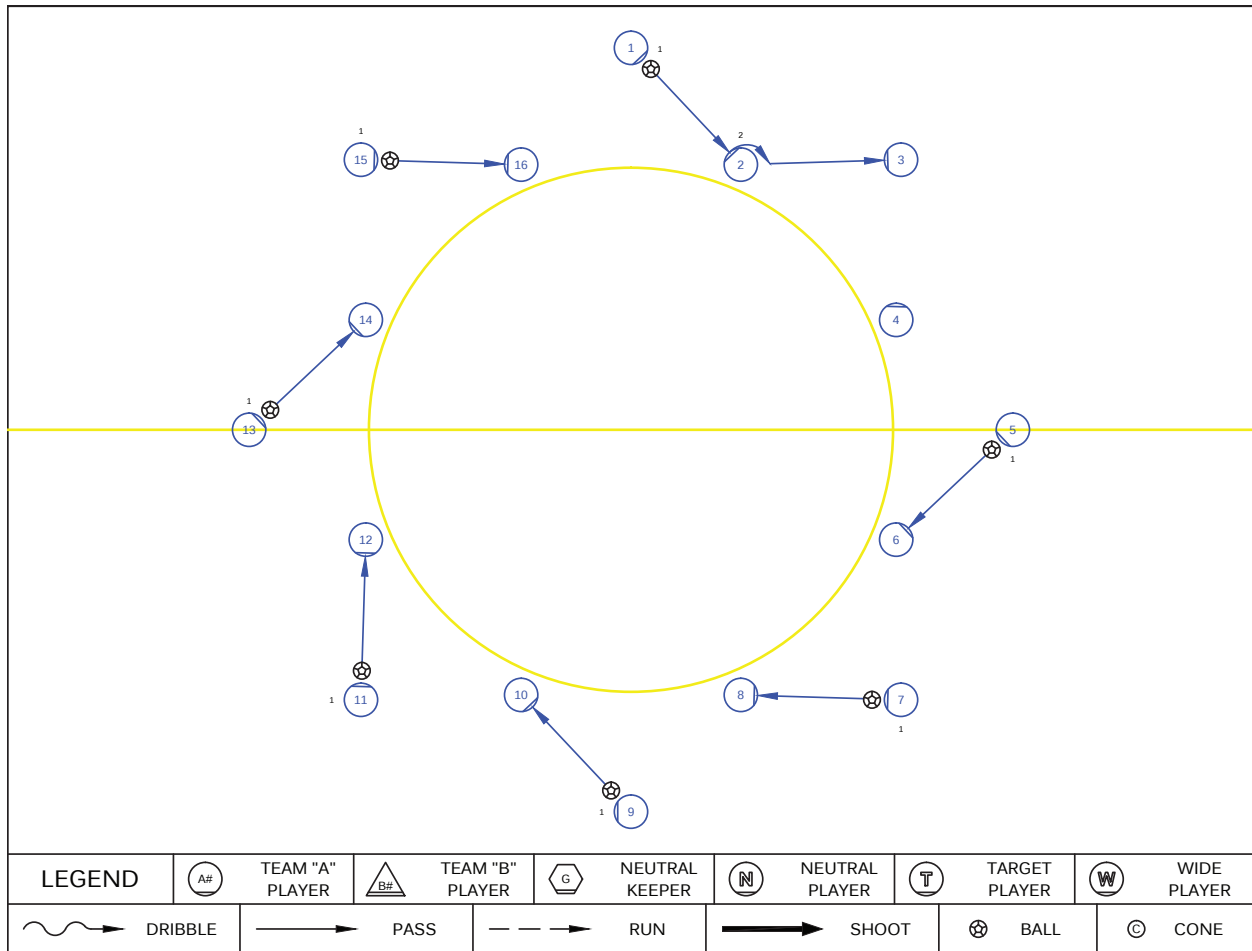


Diagram 40

As shown in Diagram 40, use the same circular grid as in Exercise 1 but stagger the players so that every other player is about five yards away from the perimeter line of the circle. Every other player therefore creates triangular configurations around the circle. The players that moved five yards out from the circle each have a ball.

The exercise starts on the coach's signal and each player with a ball passes clockwise to the player ahead of them (1) (in the first instance that would be to the player nearer the perimeter of the center circle). That player receives the ball and must pass it to the next player up field, that is, to a player at the top of the triangle away from the perimeter of the circle (2). The players should not be restricted by number of touches or by the manner in which they chose to accomplish the turn.

Players will sort this out on their own. During this exercise, look for a clean change of direction even though that change in direction might not require a full turn with the ball. This exercise teaches a slight variation of a full turn.

RECEIVING AND TURNING EXERCISE 3

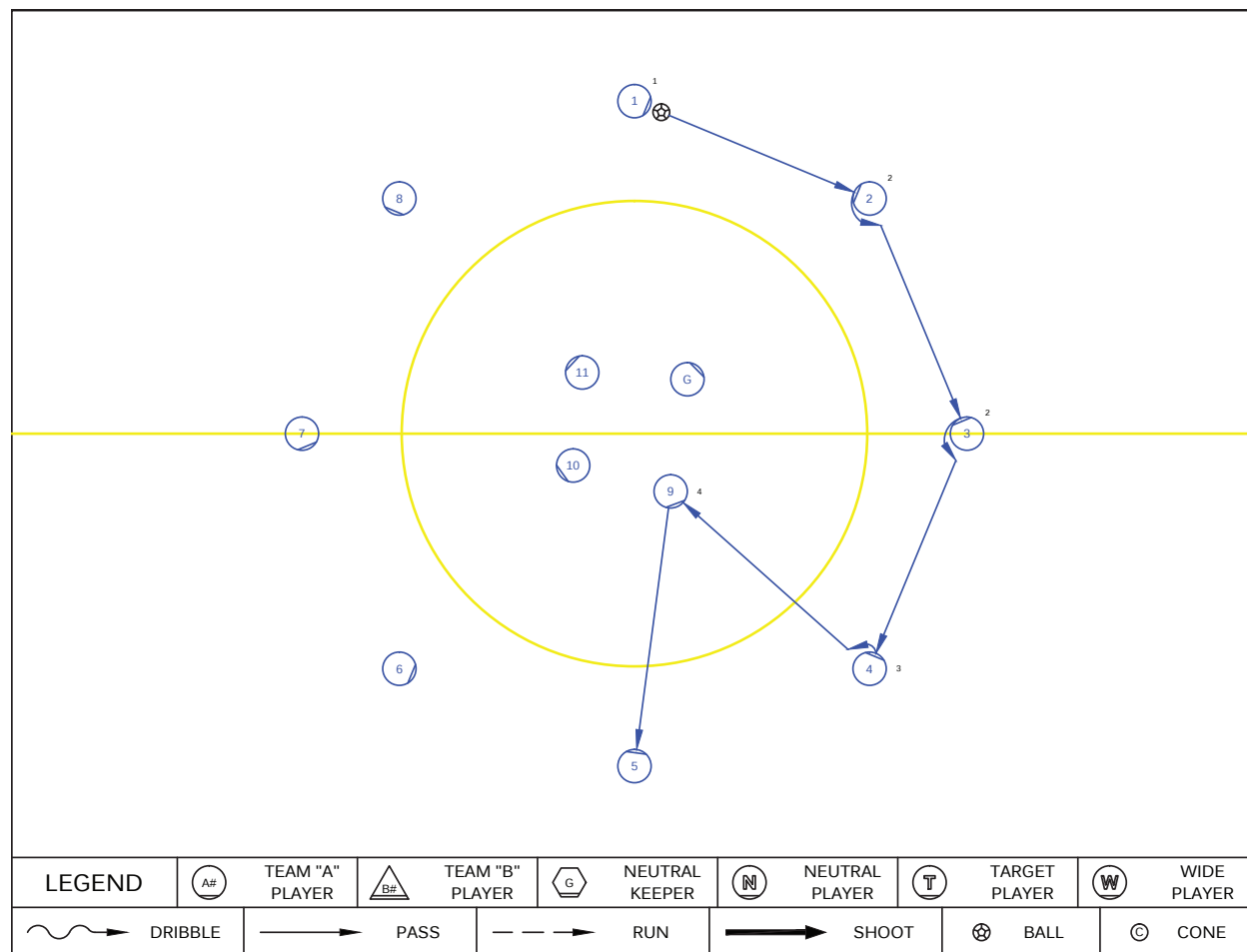


Diagram 41

As shown in Diagram 41, configure the players as in Exercise 1, in a circle, one player next to the other, facing one direction but have each player step back about five yards to make the circle bigger than the size of a center circle. Every other player has a ball. This exercise starts by moving the ball clockwise.

Different than Exercise 1, every third or fourth player should have a ball(1); add either goal keepers, field players, or a mixture of each into the center of the circle facing away from each other toward the other players (facing outward) forming the outer circle. As the ball is moved around the outer circle (2) as in Exercise 1, a player inside the circle calls the name of a player from the outer circle one pass before he receives the ball (3), and at the time that player in the outer circle receives the ball, he is to pass the ball hard to the feet of the player that called his name inside the circle.

The receiver in the inner circle, one touch, facing outward, passes the ball to the next person in line in the outer circle and the game continues (4). The players in the inner circle should be told to always allow a few passes (turns) by the players in the outer circle before calling another name in the outer circle. Goal keepers in the inner circle could use their hands for this exercise. This exercise will force the players to be keenly aware of the players around them (those in the inner, center of the circle) and will force them to keep their head up while the ball is moving.

RECEIVING AND TURNING EXERCISE 4

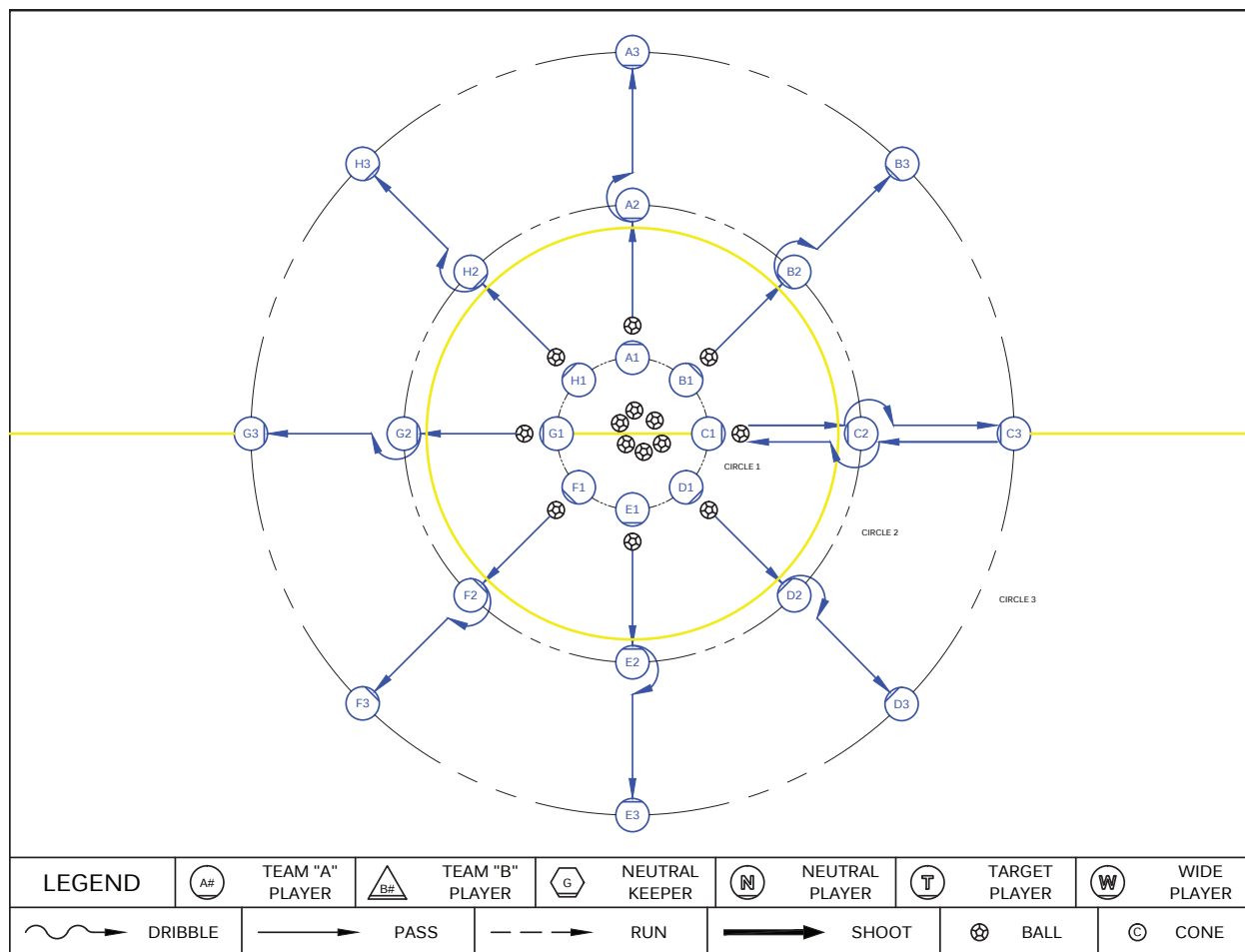


Diagram 42

As shown in Diagram 42, for Exercise 4, there are three circles with the same number of players in each circle, that is, an inner circle, a middle circle, and an outer circle. The players are now configured in the same way as in Exercise 3 with keepers, field players, or a mix in the inner circle; an equal number of players forming the middle circle; and an equal number of players forming the outer circle about ten yards away from the players in the middle circle. So, these three circles of players basically form vertical lines made up of three players per line. These three players are vertical to each other and remain with their partners throughout the entire exercise—three partners/players per group in a line; three circles, one at the core, one in the middle, and one outside of the middle circle. Diagram 42 will clear up any confusion regarding the set up.

The object of this exercise is to have the player in the middle in the group of three players receive the ball, turn it quickly and pass it, changing its direction after the turn. Circles are used rather than merely lining up players vertically on the field so that partners can be changed often and quickly so that all players will have an opportunity to see their teammates turn and learn as they are watching the turn. Having players in vertical lines in a circle also allows a coach a much better visual of the players doing the exercise.

The players in the inner circle each have a ball with a few balls behind them at the core of the circle. The players in the inner circle face outward and start the exercise by passing the ball (or rolling it if keepers are used) to their partner nearest them in line, vertically in the middle circle. That player in the middle circle

receives the ball, turns and passes it up field to the last partner in the outer circle who passes it back, one touch to the partner that just passed the ball to him in the middle circle. If a bad pass is made which sends the ball out of the playing area, the partner at the core restarts the exercise using a ball from the core.

After five passes to the center player, the inside players rotate clockwise by one line to change partners and the game continues until there has been a full rotation of the center player, back to where he started. At that point, the player in the outside circle changes places with his partner in the center circle and the game continues until he has made a full rotation. Also, the player in the inner circle (the core circle) changes places with his partner in the center circle and the game continues. All players will have had a chance to turn the ball and see their teammates turn the ball. The multiple circle configuration makes it much easier for players to watch each other than straight lines of players lateral to each other spread the width of the field, albeit, the reason for circles of players rather than lines of players side by side.

Again, the object here is to have all players exposed to different players turning the ball. Circles are used for this exercise because this is a quick and simple way to change players and still allow all players to have an equal chance at turning the ball.

CHAPTER 8

Training Theme 8

Shooting and Finishing—Teaching players to shoot from distance and to finish in the vital area.

The object of shooting and finishing is the same, get the ball in the net, but the definition of each word is often confused as the words are incorrectly used interchangeably by coaches.

To give the reader a visual for the purpose of this book, shooting is the art of hitting a ball to goal swiftly, intensely, and with pace usually from a place outside the vital area. Shooting requires strength, power, the confidence to take a chance from distance, and impeccable technique when hitting a ball with great pace. World stage players like Cristiano Ronaldo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic have the athletic ability, technical ability, and most important the ego and strength to shoot long to goal with accuracy even under heavy pressure. Players like Preki and Arjen Robben each have a cannon for a left foot and possess a strong willingness to shoot from distance but they have difficulty in very tight space when double teamed as would most players at their level. Shooting requires much more strength and power than finishing.

Finishing is the art of passing or pushing a ball to goal with touch and with deadly accuracy to avoid a moving keeper. Finishing usually happens in the vital area. Most times a ball is finished after a series of quick combinations in or near the 18 yard box, moving the ball closer and closer to the net until the final soft touch results in a goal. Finishing requires great vision to be able to see the tiniest opening in goal, quickness of thought and quickness of movement, and a killer instinct while around goal. Power or proper technique is not required to finish on goal so long as the ball ends up in the net.

A world stage player like Messi is much more devastating around the vital area using a tiki-taka, very quick, style of play resulting in a finishing shot to goal, left or right footed. Messi moves just a few feet to open space in front of goal, drifting forward or back unnoticed by a defender, evading that defender. He knows that he only needs a measured foot or less of open space in goal to slip a ball into the net because he has the necessary awareness, precision and extreme speed of thought in very tight space, including a quick release (short, quick but powerful stroke to the ball) for a finish to goal. On the coaching side, world stage coaches like Johan Cruyff and Luis Aragones showed us a tiki-taka style of play resulting in precise finishing on goal from their players while coaching in Spain for example.

Shooting

Hitting a ball hard from distance so that it knuckles into goal confusing the keeper; or hitting a one-time volley at waist height hard to goal before the ball hits the ground; or catching a half volley, sideways on with the laces hard to goal; or dropping a free kick from twenty yards out around a wall, upper V to goal, is all about shooting and proper shooting technique.

Elements of Shooting

At the time the ball is hit, in most cases the head must be down, looking at the ball as the foot touches it and the head must be held in that position until after impact;

Power in shooting comes from the weight of the body moving through the ball not from the foot, ankle or leg. It's no different than a boxer using his body to lean toward his opponent as he throws a punch. Mike Tyson is a great example of this. Though Tyson's arms are the size of large underground pipes, his body provided knock-out punching power during boxing matches as he leaned into his opponent hitting him with a fist but backed by the weight and power of the rest of his body. Shooting is no different; the power to propel the ball forward hard and fast comes from the body, not the foot or the leg;

Watch the ball as the foot hits it. This will put the body in a position to add power to the shot as will having

the knee of the shooting foot over the ball as the ball is about to be hit;

Shooting hard to net does not require great leg strength so long as the shooter follows through at the time of a long distance shot so that he lands on his shooting foot ahead of the placement of the ball after the ball is hit. This will also put body weight behind the shot on goal;

The plant foot should be next to the ball, in line with it at the time the ball is hit.

Proper shooting technique includes: placing the plant foot next to the ball pointed in the direction that the shooter wants the ball to travel; arms out for balance; seeing the ball as it is hit; following through and landing on the shooting foot in front of the ball; keeping the head down as the shooter goes through the ball using his body weight to propel it. To send a direct ball with ball movement to goal, teach players to hit it in the middle and to concurrently sweep up on the ball as it is hit. To curve a ball to goal, hit it slightly left or right of center using the same shooting technique as mentioned above.

Finishing

Finishing is the art of passing or pushing a ball into goal from or near the vital area preceded by combination passes from teammate to teammate in the six yard box, using a small bit of available space provided by the poor placement of the keeper to get the ball into goal.

Elements of Finishing

Though finishing ends when the ball is in goal, it usually starts with quick, tiki-taka combination play in the vital area in front of goal;

The biggest difference between the technical aspects of shooting and finishing is that when finishing the head is usually up because power is not necessary;

The body is usually not properly balanced because of the chaos that exists in tight space in the vital area just before a shot on goal;

The closer a player moves to goal with the ball, except on a breakaway after transition, the less space to work in as defenders crowd the box.

Great vision, quick release, quick movement, speed of thought, and the ability to shoot off balance are the requirements of a good finisher. Power is not required but the ability to see or sense a very small opening in goal at just the right moment is required.

SHOOTING AND FINISHING EXERCISE 1

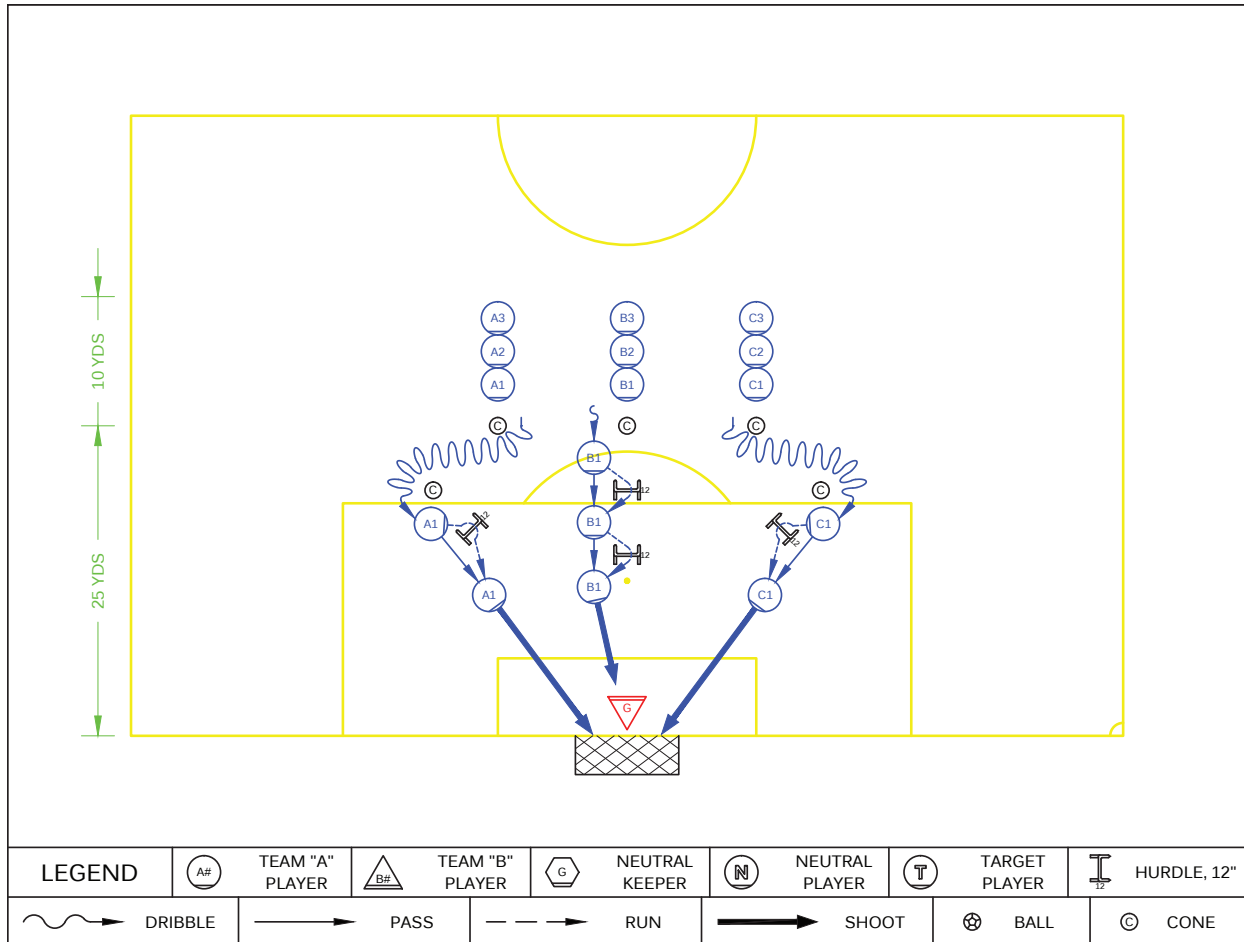


Diagram 43

Each exercise in this chapter dedicates part to shooting and part to finishing without having to change the configuration of the grid.

OBSTACLES—Teaching balance and body position while shooting and finishing.

Shooting

As shown in Diagram 43, set up two goals opposed to each other in the middle of each end line of a half field. This first exercise will use only one goal with a keeper so chose one goal at one end line. Three disks are placed about twenty five yards away from the end line, lateral to each other, about ten yards apart.

The team is divided into three equal parts with an equal number of players standing behind each disk facing the goal (line A, B, and C as noted in Diagram 43). Each player has a ball. For the two outside lines

of players, a small disk is put onto the field about five yards wide and about five yards in front of the first player standing in the outside lines. A small 12" hurdle is placed about three yards up field toward the goal and about three yards inside toward the goal channel.

For the one inside (center) line of players, place two small 12" hurdles about five yards advanced of the center disk with a five yard distance between hurdles (in a straight line right up the middle of the goal

channel). If you do not have hurdles, you can use a row of three small cones or some other equipment that a player can easily jump over.

The players in each of the three lines standing at the disks are facing the goal, which has a keeper in it. The first player in the line at the left dribbles toward and around the outside of the disk in his line and then cuts the ball inside so that he can be in a position to push the ball wide to the right of his hurdle and then jump over the hurdle. Just after he jumps over the hurdle, he has one touch to position the ball (a useful first touch) and then on his next touch he shoots the ball to goal. The shot should happen quickly and should be taken outside of the six yard box.

As soon as the first player in the left line jumps over the hurdle, that is a cue for the first player in the middle line to start. The player in the middle line starts to dribble straight to the first center hurdle, pushes the ball to the right of it, collects the ball and does the same as he approaches the second hurdle, jumps the second hurdle and has one touch to position the ball for a shot on goal outside of the six yard box.

As the center player jumps the second hurdle, that is the cue for the first player in the third line to start. The player in the third line starts to dribble around the outside of the cone in front of him. He does the same as the player in the first line did resulting in a shot on goal outside of the six yard box.

Rotate players from one line to the next after each shot on goal. After a few rotations, only allow the players to shoot with their weak foot but force them to sort out how to get the ball to that foot during the exercise. Do not demonstrate; let the players figure this out on their own.

After a few rotations of about ten shots per player, move the disks and hurdles back about ten yards forcing a longer shot on goal and continue the exercise. If you feel like your players need more space, move the lines, disks and hurdles on the outside, a bit wider. If you feel like your players can accomplish this exercise in tighter space, move the outside lines and equipment closer to the center.

Coaching Points to Help Players Shoot on Goal

Promote a useful first touch to be taken just after players jump the last hurdle before their shot on goal. The shots are not defended against so there is room to move the ball toward the strong foot (a useful first touch) to open space. This first touch before the shot on goal should be on the ground, lightly weighted allowing the shooter to run onto it, plant foot next to the ball facing where the ball is to be placed, knee over the ball, striking it with laces, hard and landing on the foot that struck the ball so that the weight of the body creates power, because the body is thrust forward, as the ball is hit.

SHOOTING AND FINISHING EXERCISE 2

The Three Shot Game

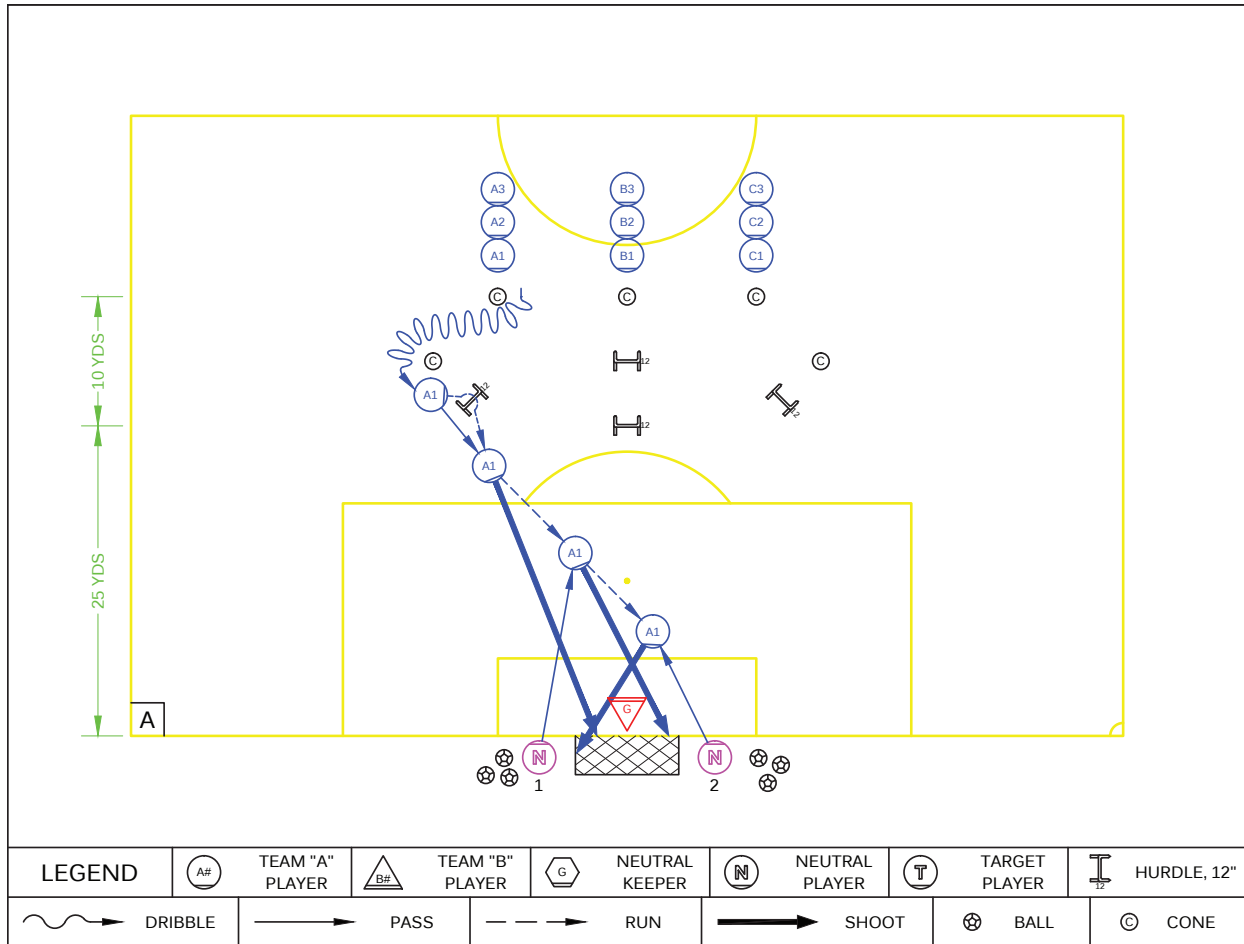
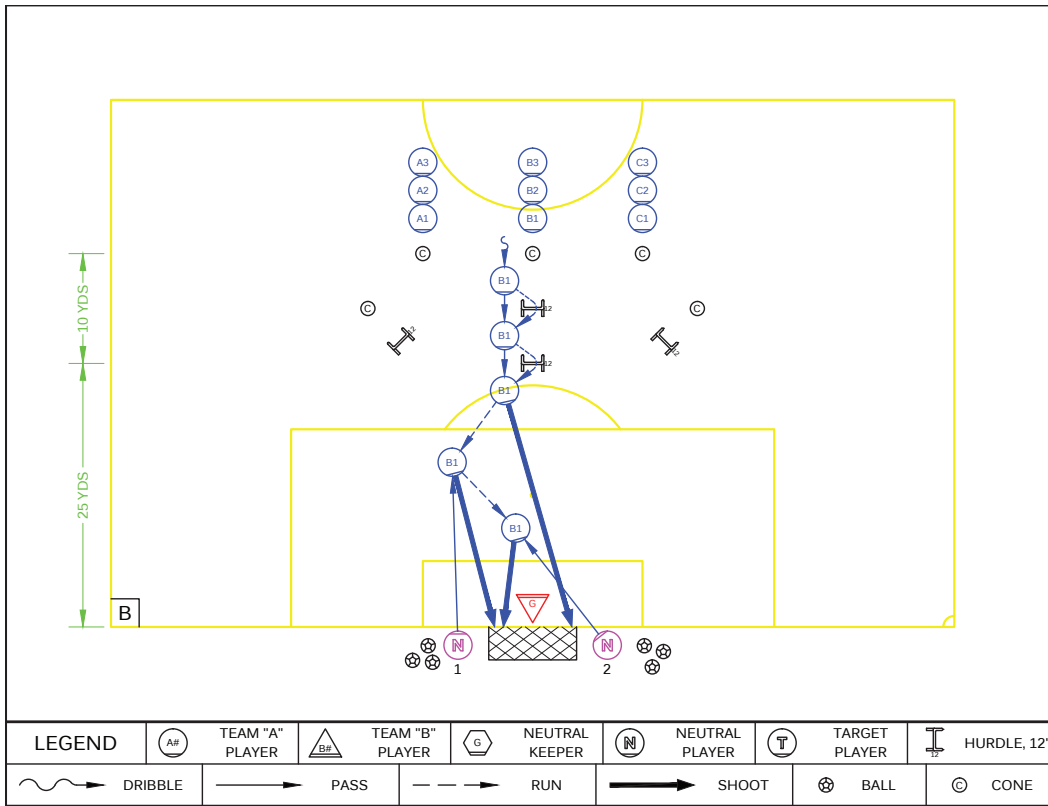


Diagram 44-A

Finishing

As shown in Diagram 44, this exercise uses the same grid but emphasizes finishing rather than shooting. Leave the disks and hurdles in the same position as in the second part of the exercise, that is, ten yards back from their original position—farther away from the goal. Add a neutral player next to but outside the posts of the goal. Both neutral players standing outside of the posts have about ten balls next to them but off of the field of play. Remove the keeper for the first part of this exercise.

The first player in the first outside line goes through the same paces as in Exercise 1 but just after he takes a shot, the neutral player at the post nearest to him, kicks the ball laterally across the goal mouth allowing the shooter to run onto it to take a second shot on goal. As soon as the shooter hits the second ball, the neutral player at the farther post kicks the ball laterally across the goal mouth allowing the shooter a third shot on goal. These three shots are taken very quickly. Since there is no keeper, emphasize quickness rather than accuracy—players should not have a problem putting the ball on frame



.Diagram 44-B

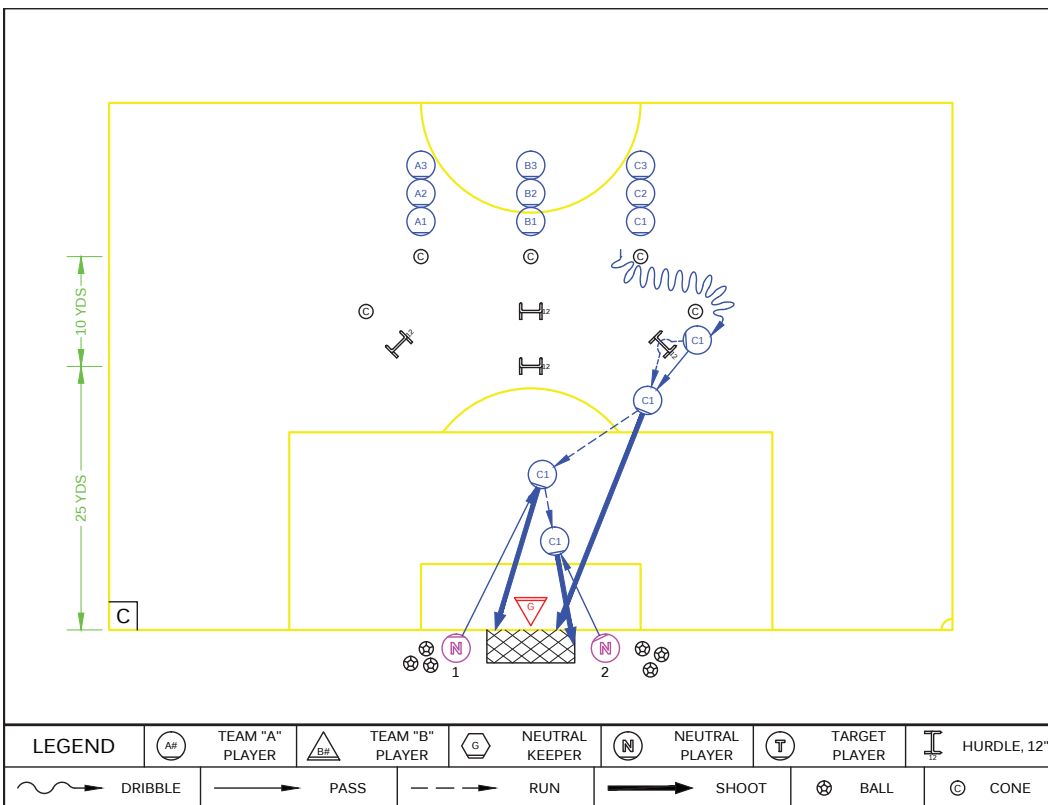


Diagram 44-C

As soon as the third shot is taken, the player in the middle line starts his approach to his hurdle and completes that part of the exercise as in Exercise 1 for the middle player. At the shot, Neutral 1 as shown in Diagram 44, and then Neutral 2 as shown in Diagram 44, pass the ball as they did for the first shooter giving the middle player three shots on goal. At the time of the last shot, the first player in the third line does likewise. Once that player shoots, the next player in the first line starts the progression again until five rotations are completed. After each shot, the players rotate lines, one line to the right.

Now add a keeper and continue the exercise, same procedure and same rotation. Adding a keeper will help to replicate game like conditions for the finish to goal but will force quickness and accuracy.

SHOOTING AND FINISHING EXERCISE 3

Shooting Under Pressure

Shooting, Adding Defenders, Pressure, Tight Space

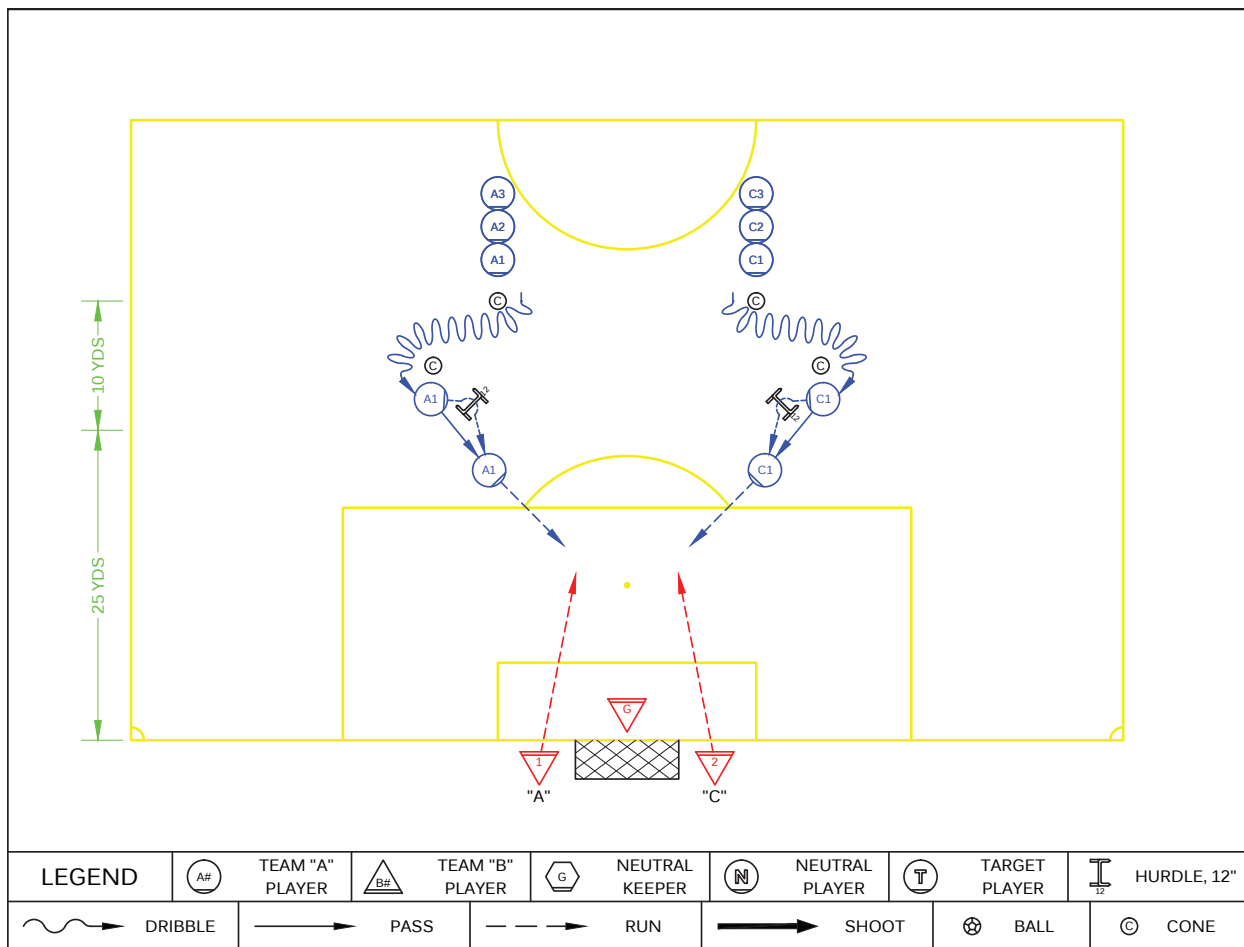


Diagram 45

As shown in Diagram 45, leave the disk and hurdle configuration the same as for Exercise 2, that is, farther away from goal than in Exercise 1, except that the center line and two center line hurdles are removed. The players in the center line are equally divided into the two outside lines. Leave the neutral players near each post as in Exercise 2 but in this exercise, rather than pass balls across the goal mouth as in Exercise 2, the neutral post player nearest the attacker runs onto the field as the attacker jumps the last hurdle to

pressure him. Only one post player runs onto the field to defend against one attacking player. This puts the attacking player under pressure to move at game speed when taking the shot on goal. As soon as the attacker shoots, the player at the front of the next wide line starts to dribble as the game continues. Rotate all players after about five full rotations.

SHOOTING AND FINISHING EXERCISE 4

Finishing From a Wall Pass

Finishing, Remove Defenders from the Posts, Add Wide Neutral Players

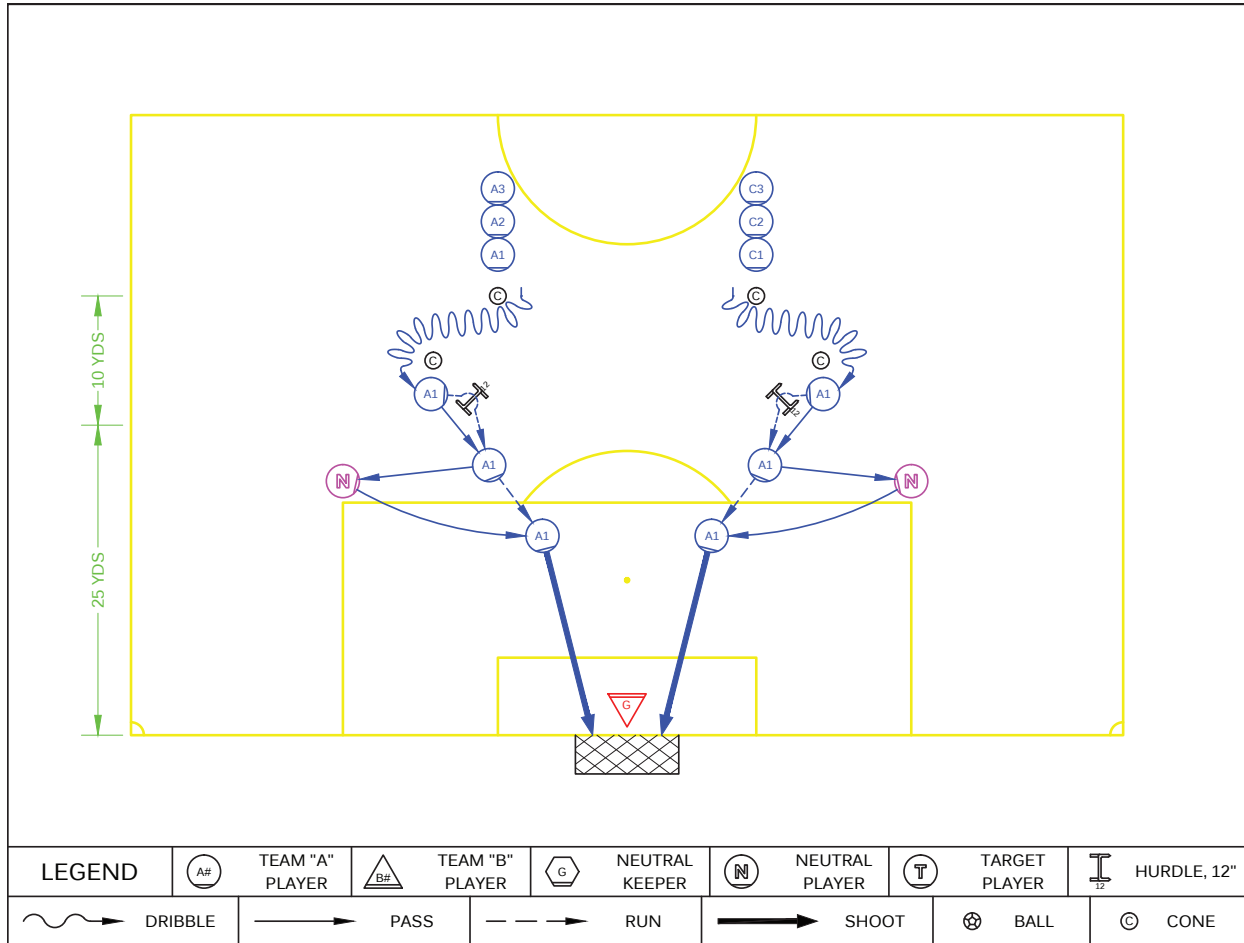


Diagram 46

As shown in Diagram 46, use the same grid and same player and equipment configuration as in Exercise 3 but remove the neutral players at the posts and move them wide about five yards outside of and diagonal (advanced) to the last hurdle on each side of the grid. There are still only two lines as in Exercise 3 but the lateral neutral players are used for combination play with the first attacker in order to move the ball closer to goal and to finish. So, rather than shoot after moving the ball past the hurdle, the first attacker passes the ball to the nearest wide player, who immediately sends a ball across the goal mouth allowing the finish away from the keeper. The first player in the second line starts his dribble as soon as the ball is shot by his teammate.

Finishing From a Wall Pass Against Defenders

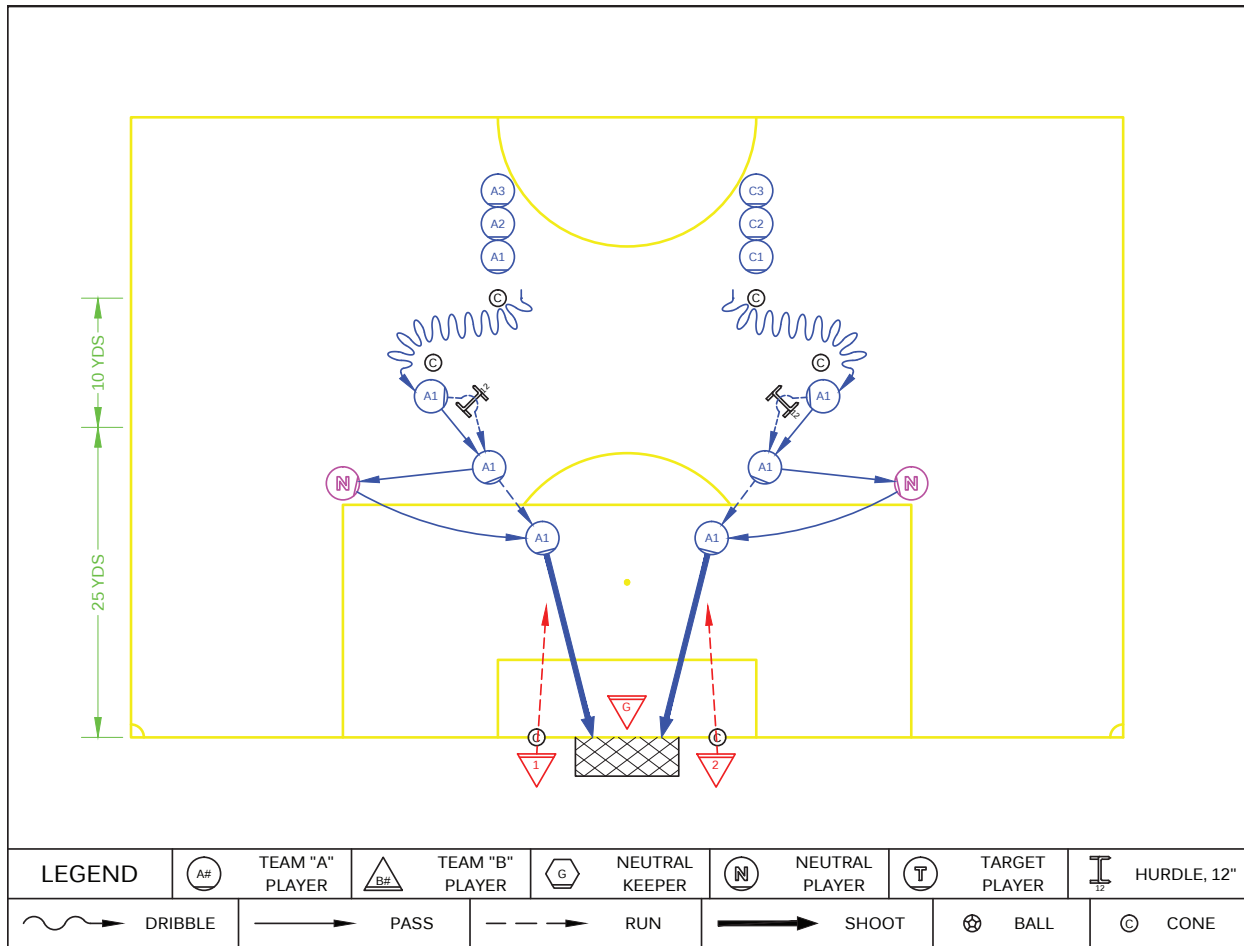


Diagram 47

If the game is not fast enough for the team, have both wide neutrals pinch in after the first attacker gets over the hurdle and allow a pass to each or to either neutral player and back to allow a finish on goal by the player who jumped the hurdle. If time permits, defenders could be added to speed the game up even more. The defenders merely take the ball and pass it back to the keeper who hits the ball up field, wide, to one of the players standing in line as shown in Diagram 47.

CHAPTER 9

Training Theme 9

Small Group Defending—Teaching the roles of the first defender (pressure), the second defender (cover), and the third defender(balance), and other defenders (mark, cut passing lanes).

Small group defending is the art of moving players near the ball during the run of play to work in unison to take the ball from the attacking team quickly yet safely preventing a shot on goal in a dangerous area or preventing a pass forward. The “small group” referred to in this part of the book is usually comprised of four to five players around or near the ball. Each player has a definite role and, unfortunately, if just one defending player does not accomplish his specific role, the first attacker will usually be able to move the ball by dribbling or passing it to a teammate.

Small group defending is successful if the ball is taken by the defending team or if the first attacker is forced to move the ball backwards or sideways, preventing a forward pass or a shot on goal.

Defending as the First Defender, Pressure.

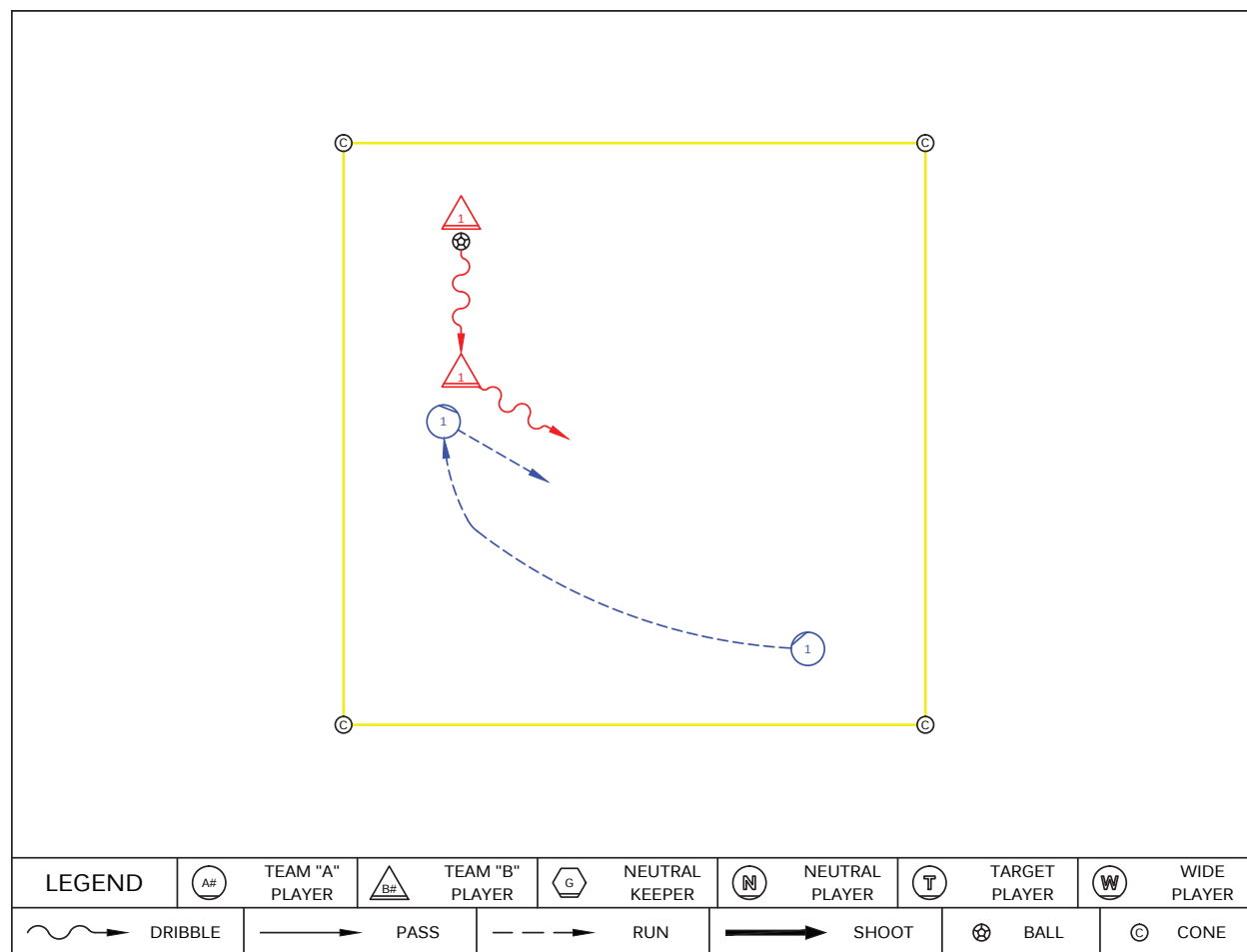


Diagram 48

The first defender has the easiest to understand role in group defending. The first defender is usually the defending teammate closest to the ball and is the player responsible to immediately face up the first attacker and pressure the ball. As shown in Diagram 48, the general principles of defending as the first

defender are quick, slow, sideways, low, as Angela Kelly, the very successful former women's coach at the University of Tennessee, teaches.

The first defender must be quick to close space to the ball:

Teach the first defender to close down space between to the first attacker as quickly as possible. Sprint to the first attacker; eat up space to the first attacker quickly. Usually this first run toward the first attacker will be a curved run so that at the end of the run the first defender will be in a position to shepherd or steer the first attacker in the direction that benefits your team, either into a teammate in order to get help by doubling up to take the ball, or by steering him to the sideline to block the first attacker's passing lanes on one side of the field. A curved, quick run to close down on a first attacker will put the first defender in a position to take the ball so long as his run results in facing the way that he intends to move the first attacker.

The first defender must slow his speed as he gets close to the first attacker:

As the first defender approaches the first attacker, he must slow down. Once the first defender is about a yard or so, an arm's length, from the first attacker, he must slow down so that the first attacker is not able to put an easy move on him to push the ball around or away from him and leave him standing alone on the field. The first defender must slow down on approach so as not to run by the first attacker. Slowing down will also allow the first defender to assess the situation as he approaches the first attacker; to get good body position for balance; and to decide how to dispossess the first attacker of the ball. All of this must happen at the time the first defender is slowing speed on the approach to the first attacker.

The first defender must set up on the first attacker sideways on:

The first defender has accomplished his curved run very quickly toward the first attacker and he has slowed down on approach and is about an arm's length from him ready to steer him one way or the other. As he comes to a stop, team the first defender to set his body low for good balance and sideways on to the first attacker steering him as mentioned above.

To better understand why the first defender should get his body "sideways" on, picture a player coming up quickly on a first attacker who is in the middle of the field and the first defender moves toward him using a straight vertical run. The first attacker now has three good options; he can move the ball back, to the right, or to the left of the first defender. But, if the first defender is sideways on, he can cut a lateral passing lane, one way or the other, eliminating a passing option for the first attacker. The body position of the first defender has taken away one option for the first attacker. As will be seen later, teammates will reduce or eliminate other options.

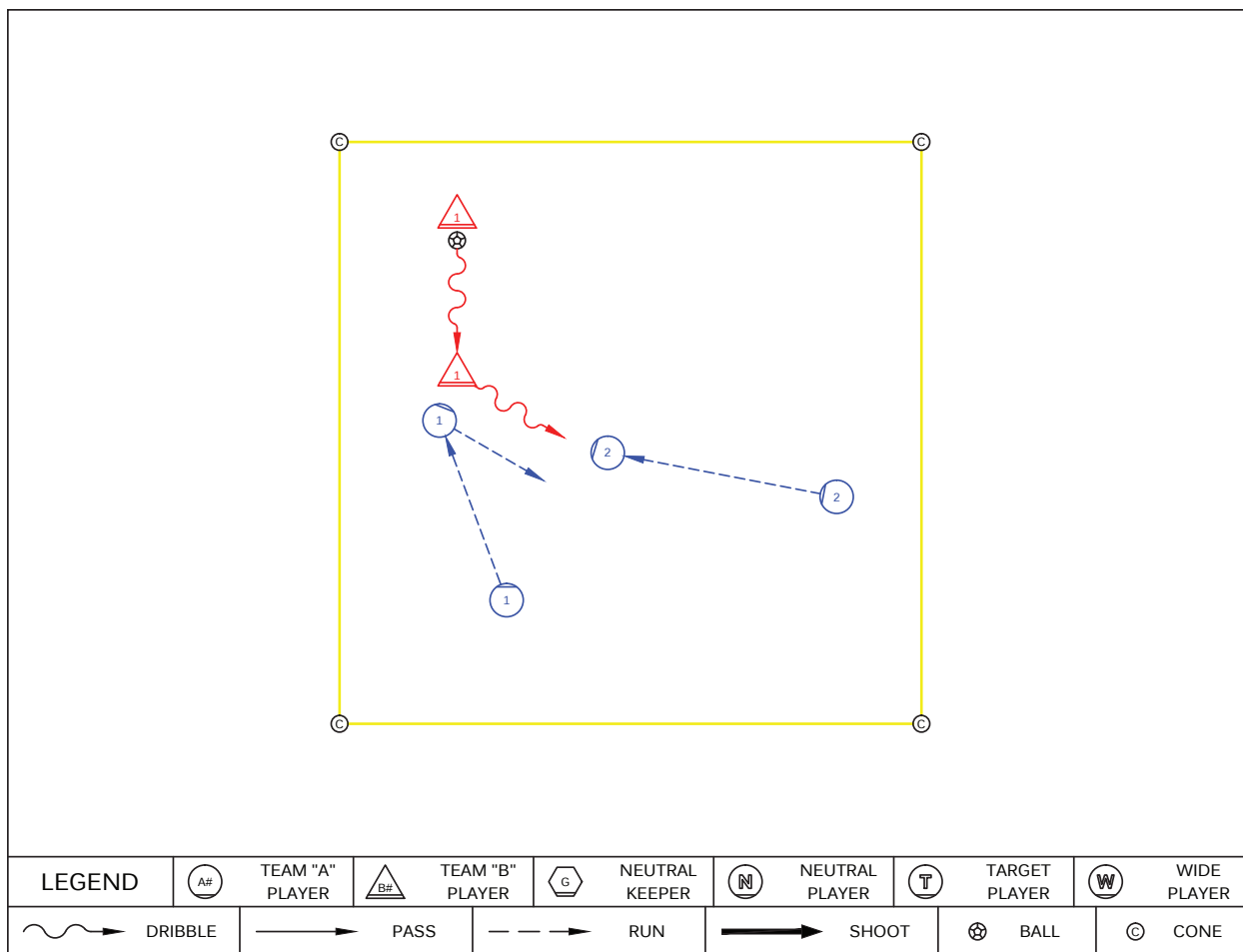


Diagram 49

As shown in Diagram 49, some coaches prefer that the first defender steer the first attacker into a teammate so that the defenders can double up and take the ball using heavy pressure; other coaches prefer that the first attacker is steered toward a sideline to cut that side of the field as a passing option. Younger, less experienced teams usually chose steering toward a sideline because occasionally that teammate is in or near the goal channel, front third of the field, allowing a possible shot on goal, but either technique is effective.

The first defender must set his body position low for good balance:

Why should the body position of the first defender be low when near the first attacker, ready to set up on him? Balance. If the first defender's knees are bent, he has a lower center of gravity allowing quick body movement one way or the other while defending, without losing balance.

Knees bent, arms out, side on, about an arm's length from the first attacker and the first defender is ready to defend. Teach the first defender to use the foot closest to the ball to disrupt it; poke at the ball as soon as the first attacker's foot is off of it.

Defending as the Second Defender, Cover

The role of the second defender is a bit more complicated than that of the first defender from a tactical viewpoint and requires much more communication with teammates than that of the first defender. The

first defender needs quickness, toughness and speed with a technical ability to take the ball when it is off the foot of the first attacker. The second defender who must hold a cover position needs a deep understanding of small group defending.

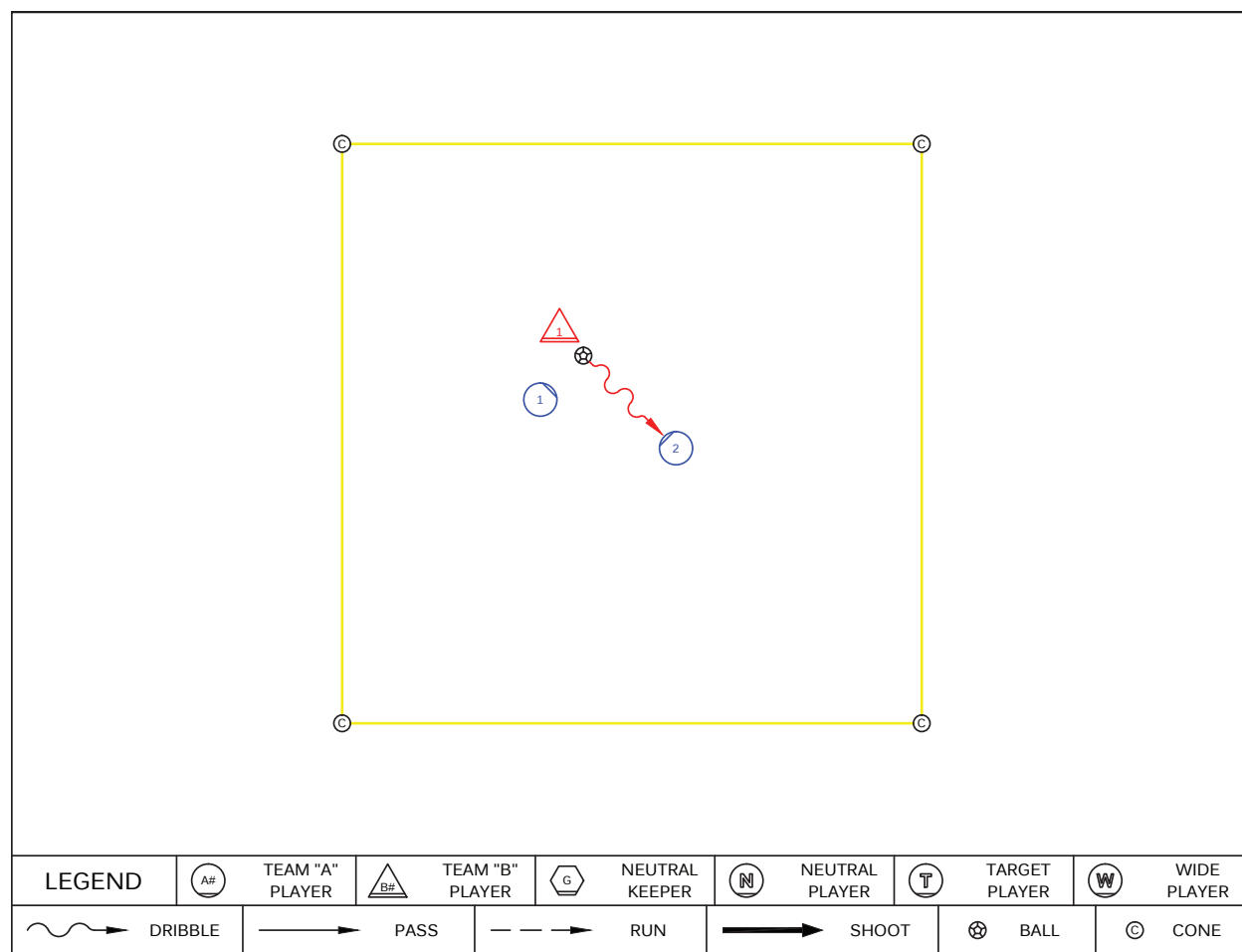


Diagram 50

Cover is a defensive maneuver often confused with the term “support” which is an offensive, second attacker position on the field. As shown in Diagram 50, cover is achieved when a second player on a team holds a position behind and usually goal side (back to the goal) to the first defender. The cover player is in that position in case the first defender gets beat by the first attacker. At that point, the second defender has the opportunity to step and either face up the first attacker to slow the play or to take the ball. The second defender is a safety valve in a small group defending setting which allows the first defender to be bold, step and tackle at the moment the second defender is in place.

When the second defender is in place, he must constantly communicate with the first defender advising him first, that he (the second defender) is in a cover position by yelling “you’ve got cover” and then telling the first defender which direction to steer the first attacker by yelling “steer left” or “steer right” to move the first attacker away from the vital area or into another teammate ready to take the ball. The cover player must understand the system of play really well as he coaches the movement of the first defender in and about the vital area—the most dangerous area on the field.

As the first attacker moves with the ball, it’s fairly obvious how the first defender should move to properly defend him. It is not nearly as obvious for the second defender because his movement is based on the

movement of the first attacker, the movement of the second attacker, the positioning of the keeper if the ball is near the vital area, and, many times during the run of play, the positioning of his teammates. This is why the second defender must have a deep understanding of small group defending and of the system of play used for the game. If the first defender makes a defending mistake, the second defender is in a position to cover for him; if the second defender makes a mistake, there is a good chance that the ball will end up with the keeper or in the back of the net.

The role of the cover player is to be in a position behind the first defender to prevent a shot on goal or forward movement of the ball in case the first defender gets beat by the first attacker. The second

defender's positioning on the field will vary depending on the skill and positioning of the first defender. If the first defender is rarely beat by any first attacker during most games, this gives the cover player confidence to not only play his role as second defender but to move slightly out of position to make a quick adjustment in case a dangerous third man run is accomplished by the opposition or in case slight movement one way or the other will result in cutting a passing lane.

The better the defending skills of the first defender, the more freedom to move out of position by the second defender but, in any event, the second defender must understand how to position himself as the first defender moves in relation to the first attacker. The movement of the second defender requires a multi level analysis all happening in a split second and in a very dynamic environment—during the run of play, a tough job to say the least.

Defending as the Third Defender, Balance

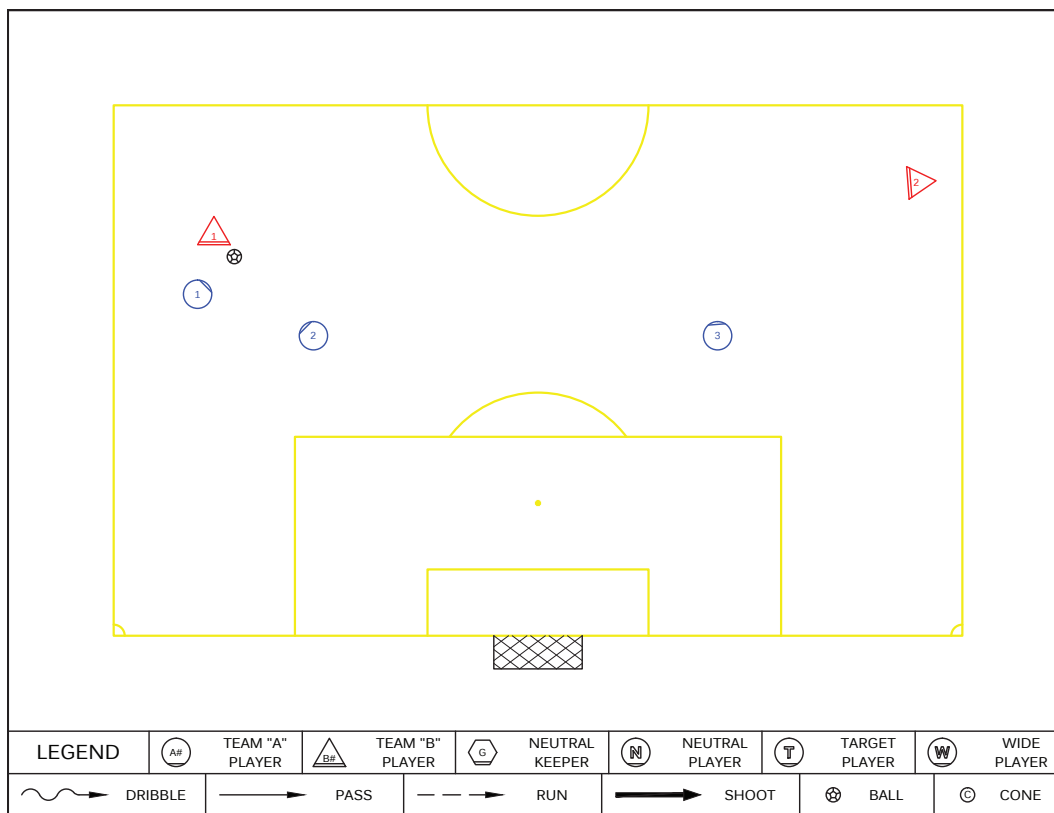


Diagram 51

Though there are fewer variables during the run of play to influence positioning of the third defender as compared to the second defender, the role of the third defender requires a solid understanding of how to defend on the weak side (the side of the field opposite of where the ball is located).

As shown in Diagram 51, if an opponent is on the weak side of the field, wide, for example, the third defender responsible for balance will move inside of that opponent toward the goal channel (compressed) by ten yards or even more to be in a position to either close down that opponent in the event that he gets the ball on a switch; to move with that opponent as the opponent makes a run toward the third defender; or to mark that opponent if he plants himself closer to the goal pinching in toward the strong side (that side of the field where the ball is located); or to cut a passing lane to that wide opponent. To be clear, the third defender is standing about ten yards inside of the player that he is marking who is wide of the third defender.

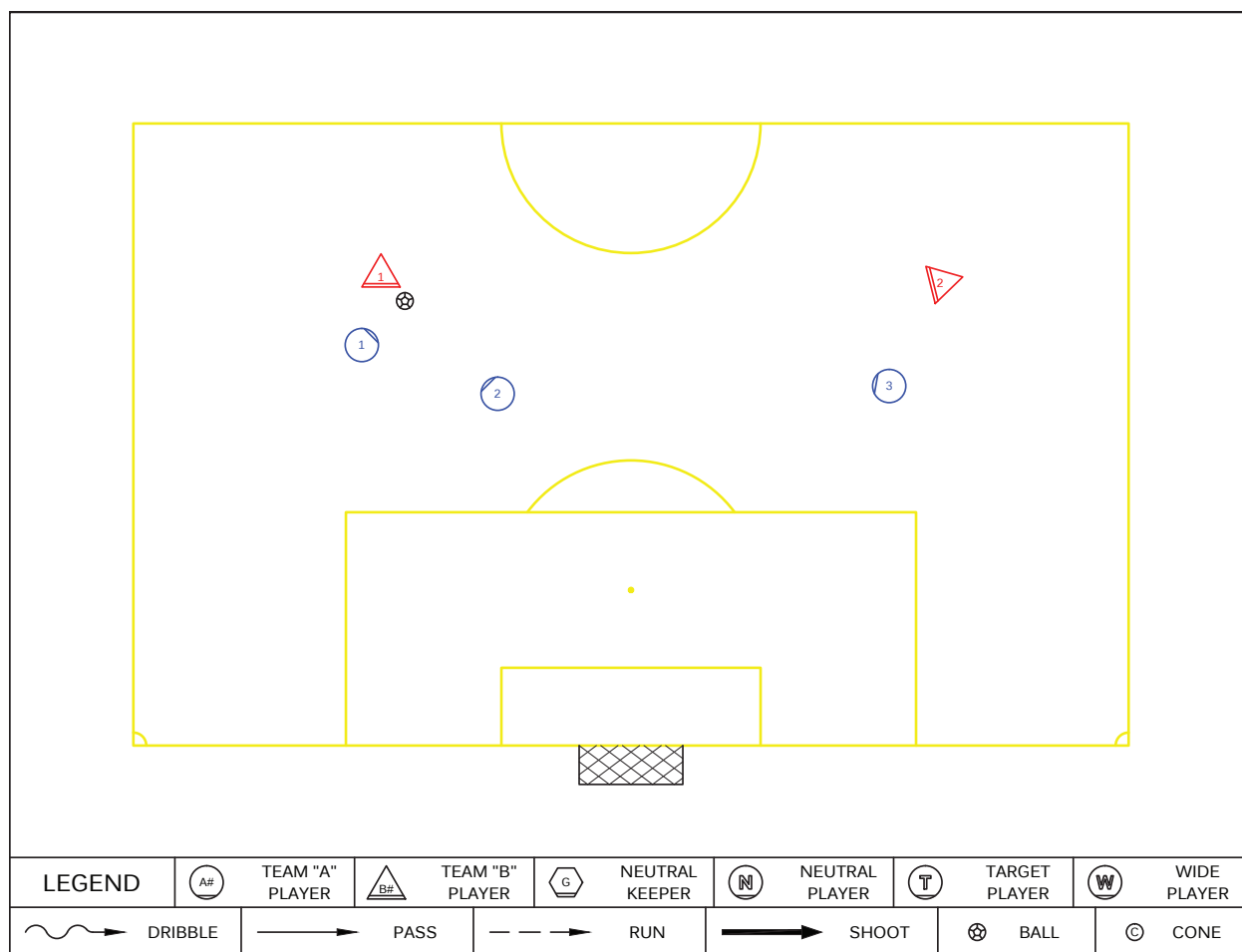


Diagram 52

For lack of a better term, the weak side attacker is out of the play because the ball is on the other side of the field. As shown in Diagram 52, the closer the ball gets to this weak side opponent, the tighter the third defender must mark him. Balance is a concept involving time and space as related to the movement farther away and nearer to the third attacker as the ball moves about the field.

The third defender is in a much less pressurized position than that first or second defender. The third defender has time to analyze the game situation as the play develops but at a much slower pace than the first or second defender on the team because his job is to watch a weak side player who will be away from

the play. The ball has to get to that weak side player by some sort of a switch of the play before the third defender needs to move out of a balancing position. So, the third defender has time as the ball is being switched to make decisions about the position that he wants to take on the field as well as his own body position.

Defending to Mark an Opponent

The role of a defender responsible to mark an opponent requires a good understanding of when an opponent is in a dangerous position on the field and when he is not. For the purpose of this discussion, marking is defined as the stationary positioning of a defender close to an off the ball attacker who has placed himself somewhere on the field for the purpose of facilitating, the attack.

For example, many times an attacking team will leave a forward or striker very high, even with the opponent's line of defense. If that striker stands alone, high, the defending team will put a mark on him, ideally with one skillful player a few yards in front of him and a very fast player behind him. The more skillful player can help to slow or stop an attack using his foot skills to disrupt a player that breaks out of the attacking team's midfield and the faster player can get to a long ball over the top if delivered high toward the back third of the field. Mark using a player with good technical skill in front of this high attacker and a player with good speed behind him. The defending player behind the striker is usually considered the marking player.

Marking is an individual, defensive maneuver performed by one player on a team without much concern about the placement of teammates—man on man, off the ball usually when the defender is away from the play or if the play has stopped for whatever reason. Coach may call, “mark a man” meaning take individual responsibility to get near an opponent who is out of the play to defend him. Teach this player to stay with him; to track him as he moves within the zone which he are responsible and then hand him off to a teammate allowing that teammate to now mark him, assuming the team is playing zonal defending.

Defending to Mark a Man Out of a Game

This is a different concept than described above. Marking a man out of a game means that one player on the defending team stays with the marked player as that player moves around the field. There are various ways to mark a man out of a game. Usually, the defender will mark when the other team has the ball and the player to be marked is on the defender's side of the field. The mark is otherwise dropped. So, upon transition (the defending team is now the attacking team), or if the player to be marked is on his own half of the field, the mark is dropped even if the player to be marked has the ball and the marking player plays the system as if he had no responsibility to mark this player out of the game.

Considering the criteria mentioned above, the marking player does everything possible to make sure that his mark does not touch the ball during the run of play. If he does, the marking player ensures that he never has the ball in a position to shoot it or to make a dangerous pass. The mark is prevented from touching the ball if at all possible and the marker stays on him tight when the other team has possession of the ball on the defender's side of the field.

When both the ball and the mark are on the defender's half of the field, whether or not the mark has the ball, the defender mark's that player out of the game by staying tight on him, always pestering him, disrupting and disturbing him whether or not he has the ball. Marking an opponent out of a game is a man marking concept for the player responsible to hold the mark, not a zonal defending concept which might be applicable to the rest of the team.

Defending To Cut Passing Lanes

All field players on the team are responsible to cut a passing lane as a defensive maneuver at one time or

another during a game. Cutting a passing lane means positioning a defending player between the first attacker and a possible receiver in order to eliminate that passing option during the run of play. If a receiver cannot see the ball, unobstructed by a defender, that passing lane is not open unless the first attacker has the ability to severely bend the ball around the defender obstructing the lane.

When cutting a passing lane, always teach players to cut any lane that advances the ball forward toward goal, first, and then cut lanes that would allow the ball to be passed laterally, and finally look to intercept or stop backward passes. Some systems of play encourage back passes or lateral passes or passes toward one outside channel or the other, so cutting passing lanes is guided by the system used by a coach.

Defending to cut a passing lane requires a keen awareness of attacker's placement around the ball and their possible role in the play. The maneuver is simple, get a defender between the first attacker and a potential receiver so as to deny the first attacker the opportunity to pass the ball to that receiver. The best defenders are able to see the effect of their body position and body placement, two or three passes after cutting a passing lane.

The maneuver, that is, cutting the lane, is simple but knowing which lane to block as a defender if presented with various options is the tough part. What pass creates a more dangerous situation up field analyzing two or three possible passes later in the play (second and third balls)? The basic rules for a defender in this position are to obstruct the passing lane that will allow a forward pass first, a lateral pass second, and a back pass third unless contrary to the chosen system of play. These simple rules do not hold when the ball is in the vital area when a pass in any direction might result in an assist. But, in the back and middle third of the pitch these basic rules apply.

Elements of Small Group Defending

Communication, movement, understanding the system of play, role as the first second or third defender, interpreting visual cues correctly, vision;

Small group defending requires quick and demanding communication;

Synchronized movement of players defending around the ball;

A solid understanding of the chosen system of play;

A deep understanding of individual defending roles creating an atmosphere of total and complete defensive teamwork.

All players defending around the ball must be aware of their surroundings as the ball moves around the pitch and they must react in a way that promotes good defensive tactics. Though difficult to teach, understanding visual cues dictates defensive movement in a small group setting around the ball. Small group defending will fail if the second and third defenders do not understand when to move, how to move and communicate to other teammates around them and this is based on seeing, understanding, and reacting to visual cues provided by offensive and defensive player movement around the field.

mids playing lateral to each other. Put about ten balls in the back of the goal for easy access by the keeper.

Divide the balance of the team into four equal groups. Behind each disk, facing goal, place one line of players, one group per line totaling four groups. At this point, the exercise will be four attackers verses six defenders.

The keeper starts the exercise by punting the ball wide to one of the outside players who is first in line in an outside line at one of the wide cones. As soon as that player collects the ball, the four players first in line attack toward goal. The four attackers have unlimited touches but must pass the ball at least three times before a player on the team takes a shot on goal. The two defensive mids and the four backs on the other team defend. Coach focuses on the defending team, not the attacking team.

The reason for numbers up on the defending team is to allow the defenders time to learn and utilize defensive tactics. Allowing the defenders numbers up will also allow them to defend zonally rather than having to defend man on man. If an attacker takes a shot on goal and the keeper makes a save, the keeper immediately sends the ball wide to the first player in an outside line who is with the next group of four attackers. The attackers on the field quickly exit the field wide and go to the back of the same lines they were previously in.

If a defender takes the ball from an attacker, the defender must make a pass wide to an outside back who must successfully pass the ball to the first player in either wide line of attackers to start the attack with a new set of four attackers.

Basically, four attackers play against six defenders and a keeper with all players having unlimited touches using a three pass minimum restriction for the attackers before a shot on goal can be taken. The widest attackers will start each rotation. This is a fast moving game so players are standing in line waiting for their turn to play for a very short time—usually just enough time to physically recover. Make sure that the attackers clear the field quickly and wide after they have completed their rotation so that the next group of four attackers have room to work in the half field grid.

Coaching Points to Help the First Defender

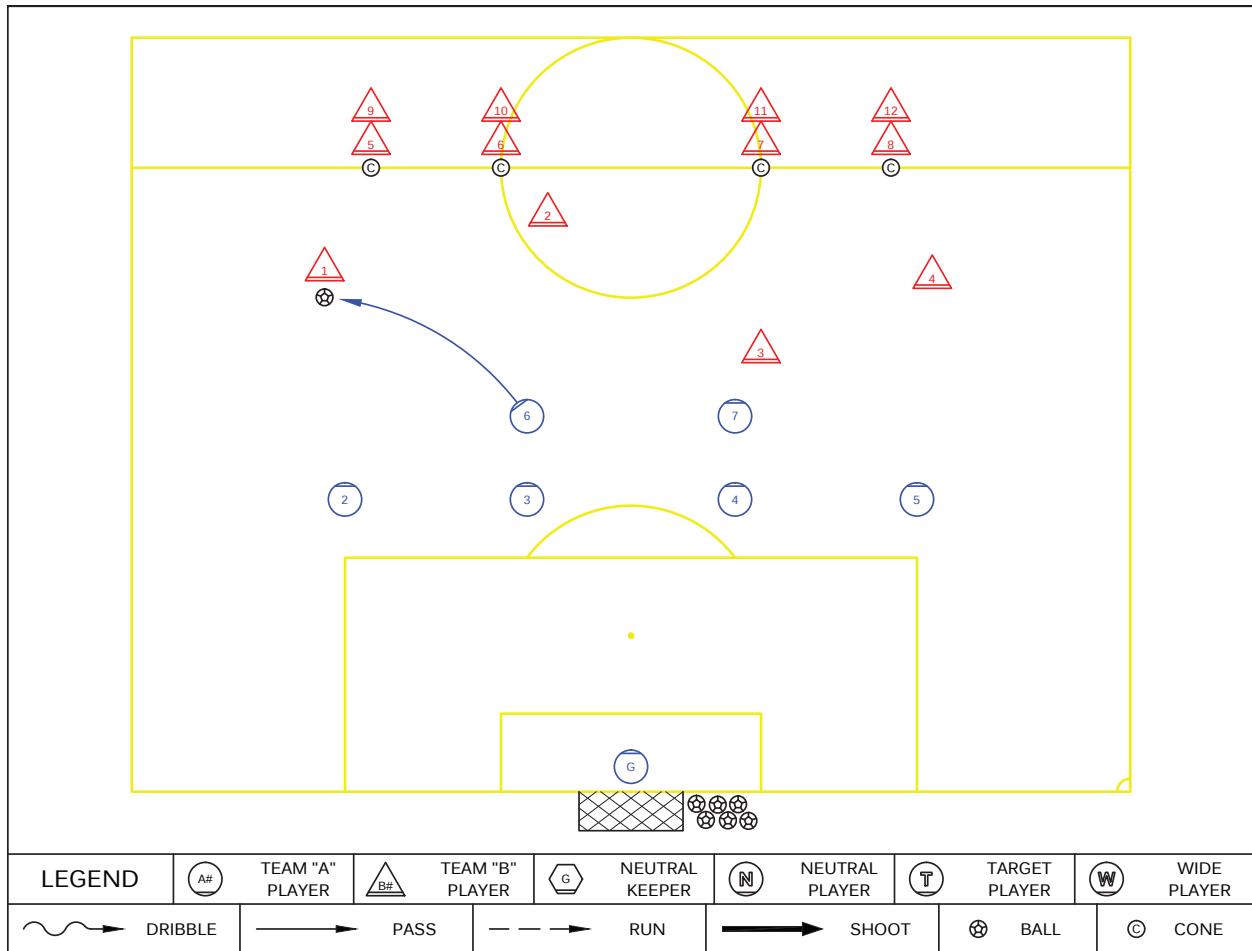


Diagram 54

Pressure. In Exercise 1, the first defender will usually be one of the two mids or an outside back. Look for the first defender to follow the rule, “quick, slow, sideways, low” as described earlier. The run to the first attacker should be curved so that he can steer the first attacker one way or the other when he reaches him. As Diagram 54 shows, a curved run also has the benefit of cutting passing lanes as the first defender is making that run.

The first defender should slow down a few yards from the first attacker so that he could set up on the first attacker when he reaches about an arm’s length from him, knees bent and arms out for balance with his eye on the ball, not on the man. In addition to setting up on the first attacker in a way to take the ball, the first defender should also be in a position to cut a passing lane as shown in Diagram 55.

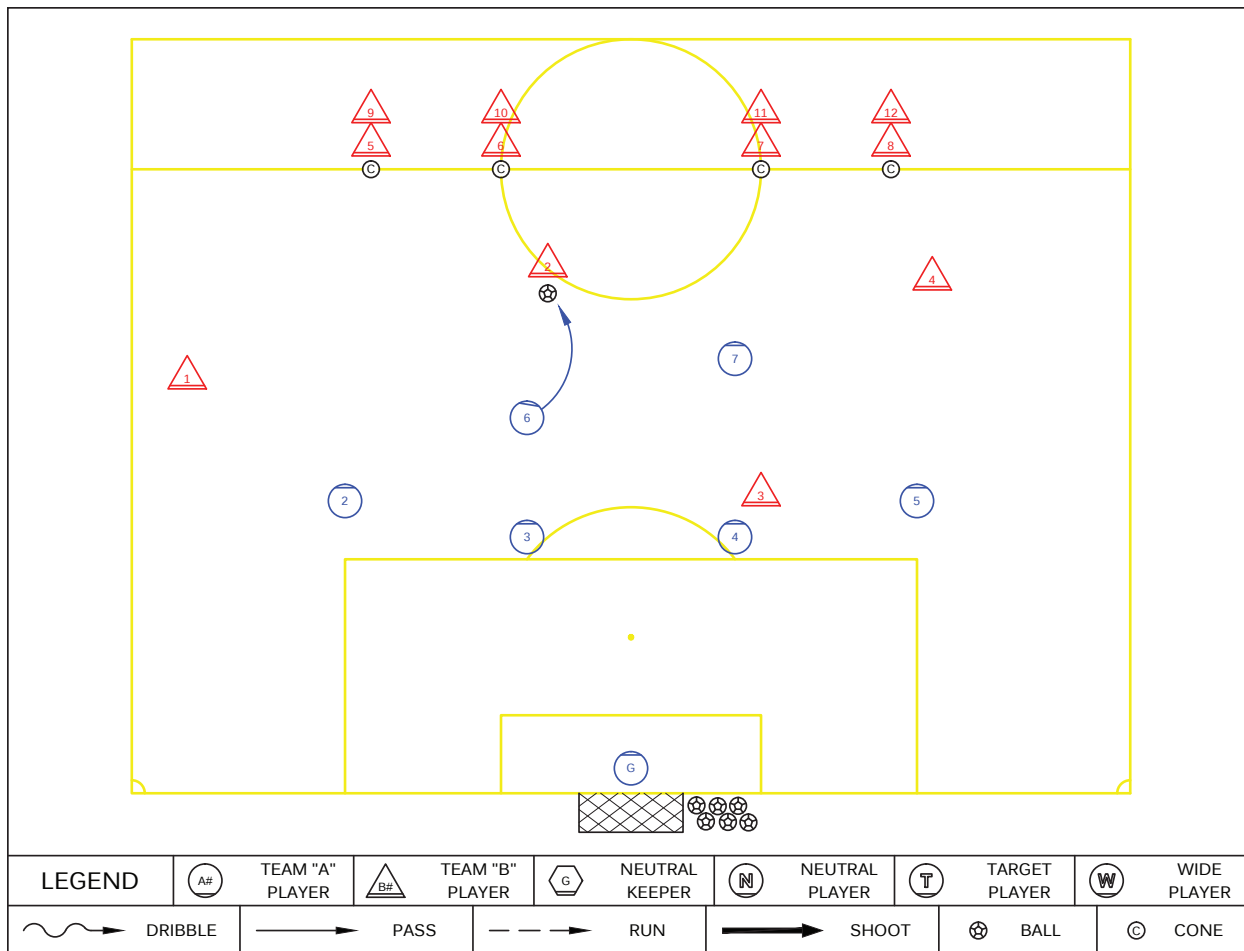


Diagram 55

The first defender should have his eyes on the ball, not on the body movements of the first attacker. The first attacker can feint using his body to trick the first defender to move one way or the other and then at the time the first defender moves, to move the ball in an opposite direction in order to get by the first defender. But, if the first defender watches the ball, not the man, this will not be possible (the ball can't feint, the first attacker can).

Cover. In Exercise 1, the second defender could be any player on the defending team depending on the movement of the ball during the run of play so coach should merely watch the ball as it moves throughout the field to determine if the second defender is following the rules mentioned above.

As shown in Diagram 56, stop the game if the second defender does not have his back to the goal inside (goal side) when he is set up behind the first defender or if he is not communicating with the first defender by telling him which way to steer or move the first attacker.

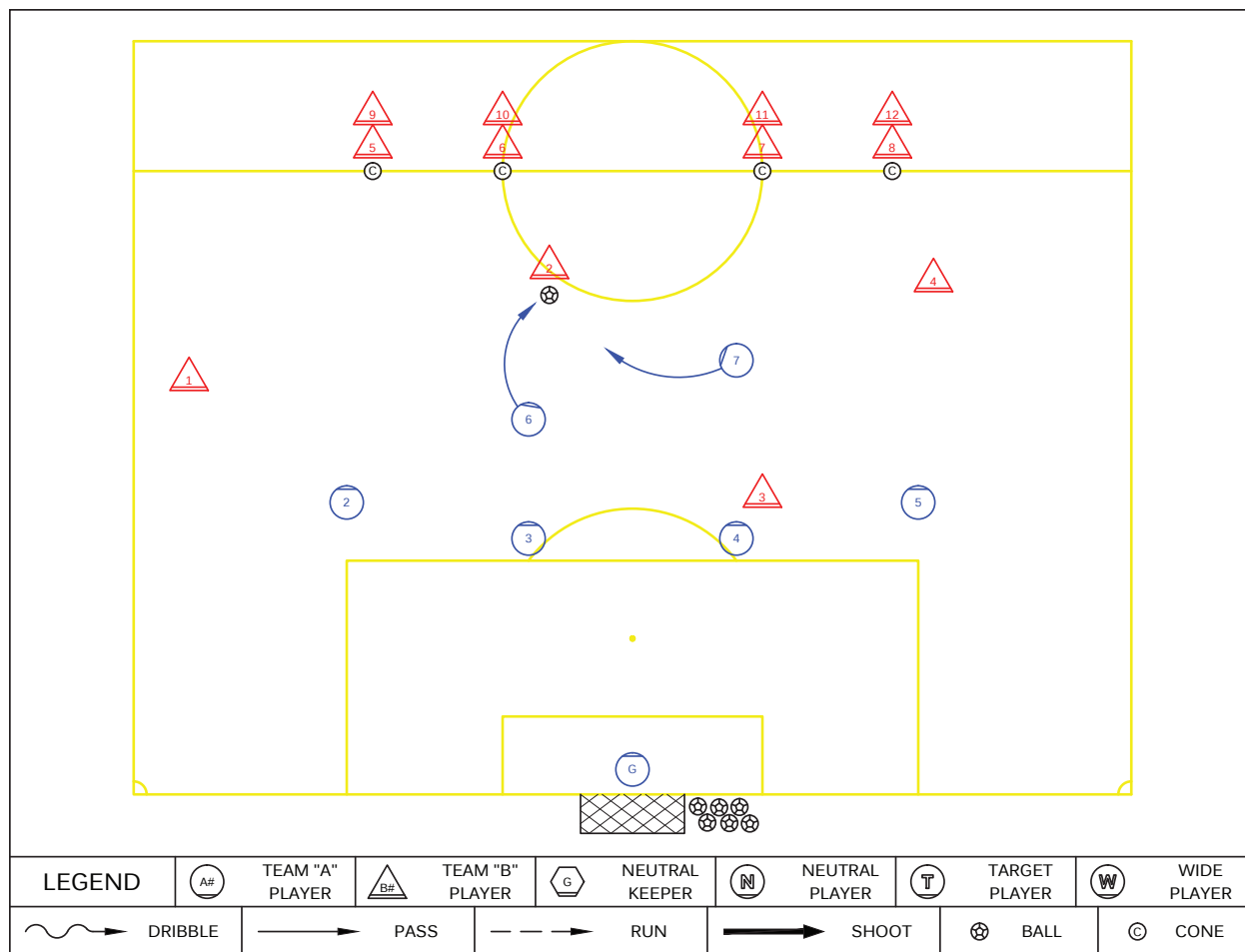


Diagram 56

Coaching Points to Help the Second Defender

The second defender should have his eyes on the first attacker, the first defender, and on the players around him. He must be able to see the first attacker’s movement and body position so that he will know which way to tell the first defender to steer the first attacker (“steer him right”, “steer him left”) based on the system of play and so that he can help the first defender interpret the movements of the first attacker (“he’s passing right”, “he’s dropping it back”, “he’s going wide”, he’s going to turn”).

The second defender will need to see the first defender’s movements to make sure that he is in the right position to stop a dangerous pass or shot on goal; that his body position is correct; and most importantly to let him know that he is going to drop off; or to tell him when it’s safe to dive in or to face the first attacker up (“stand him up” “take the ball now”).

The second defender will need broad vision to be a second set of eyes for the first defender so that the first defender can be told where his teammates are located on the field and if he should move the first attacker right or left. This is similar to the first point above but broader in that the first defender is assessing many players at once rather than just focusing on the first defender.

Coaching Points to Help the Third Defender

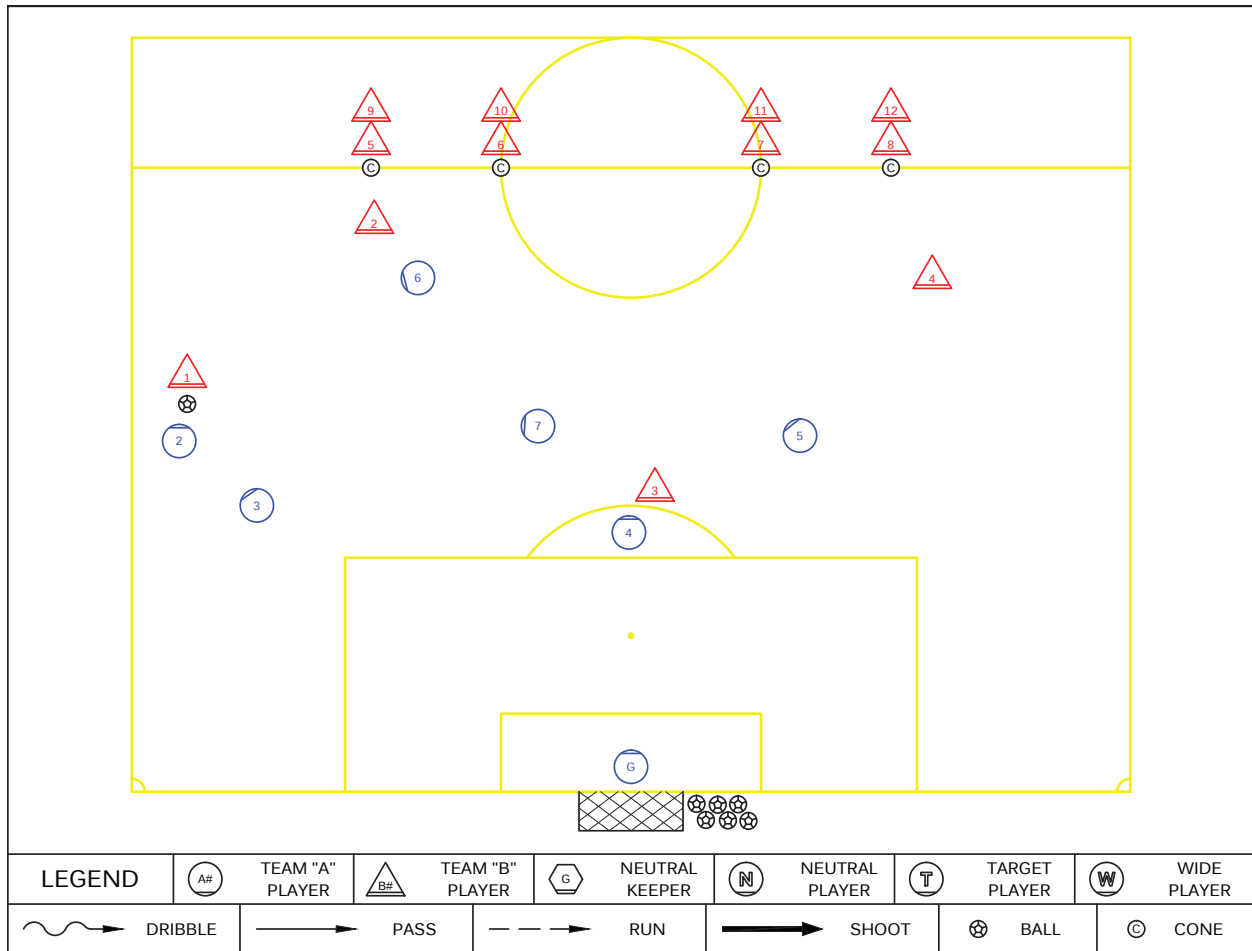


Diagram 57

Balance. In Exercise 1, the third defender will usually be an outside back and that back will always be on the weak side of play (where the ball is not). As shown in Diagram 57, stop the game if the third defender is not holding, inside (goal side), about ten yards from the ball with body positioned to be able to see the wide opponent and the ball at the same time.

The closer the opponent is to goal, the closer the third defender positions himself to that opponent. The third defender moves as the weak side attacker moves. If the weak side attacker moves to a place where he is marked by a teammate, the third defender can then pinch in toward the goal channel or move up field to take the next attacker near him. Body positioning and position on the field relative to the weak side attacker and to the ball are important coaching points which can be evaluated during the run of play.

Coaching Points to Help the Marking Players

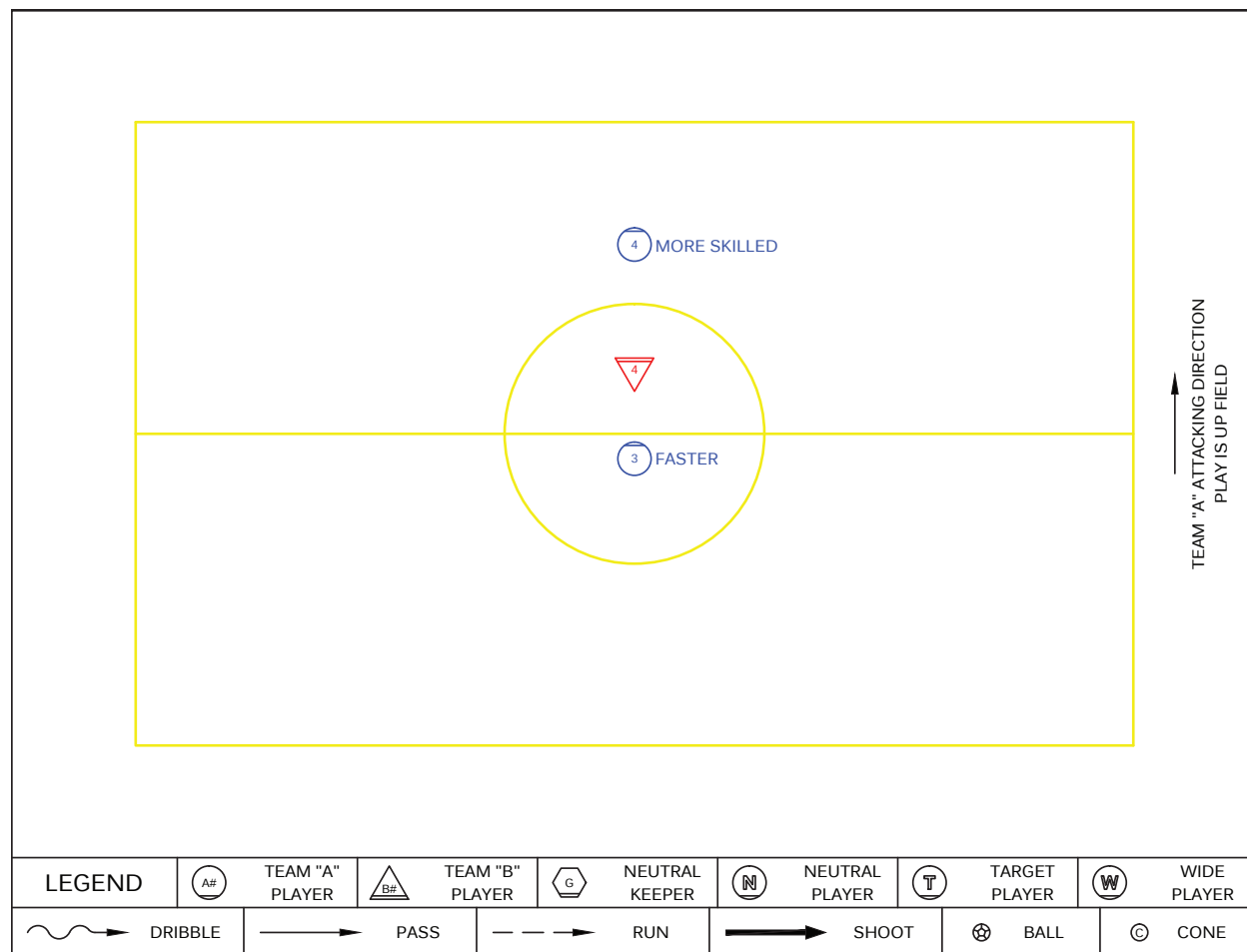


Diagram 58

Mark. In Exercise 1, the marking players will usually be the inside backs. For example, if the attacking team is moving the ball laterally when it first receives it and one attacker stays high up field in a striker position, that striker would be marked by one or two of the inside backs, sandwiching him as shown in Diagram 58, one inside back in front of him and one behind him as the play develops. Having numbers up for the defending team makes this sort of marking possible.

Coach can correct the positioning of these marking players, one up, one back when stationary and, in a zonal defending scenario coach can watch the movement of the defender advanced of the mark to make sure that this defender hands off the mark at the right time as the mark makes his off the ball run into the vital area. The advanced marker must hand off his man and then step up field to mark the next attacker in his zone.

As a general rule, if a defender is marking one attacker, he marks him inside (goal side) and one step behind him. Why? In marking this way, the defender can have a jump on the attacker if the ball goes deep behind him; and is also able to move to a high air ball if the ball goes high; and can make a sprint in front of the attacker if the ball is short.

Coaching Points to Help the Player Marking an Opponent Out of the Game

Man Mark. In this exercise the man marker will usually be one of the defensive mids. Of course, marking a man out of a game may only be necessary if an opponent (team) has a very strong player that coach wants to neutralize during the game. What is described in this section is true man marking.

The man marker very generally follows the rules of the first defender mentioned above even though the opponent being marked is off the ball. Positioning of the marking player is extremely important. The marking player is always attempting to cut a passing lane to the mark but if the mark gets the ball, the marker must set up on him as a first defender. He should be constantly using the poker (the leg closest to the ball) to disrupt his mark. He should not hand his mark off to a teammate. This will allow the mark to be double teamed as he moves throughout the field.

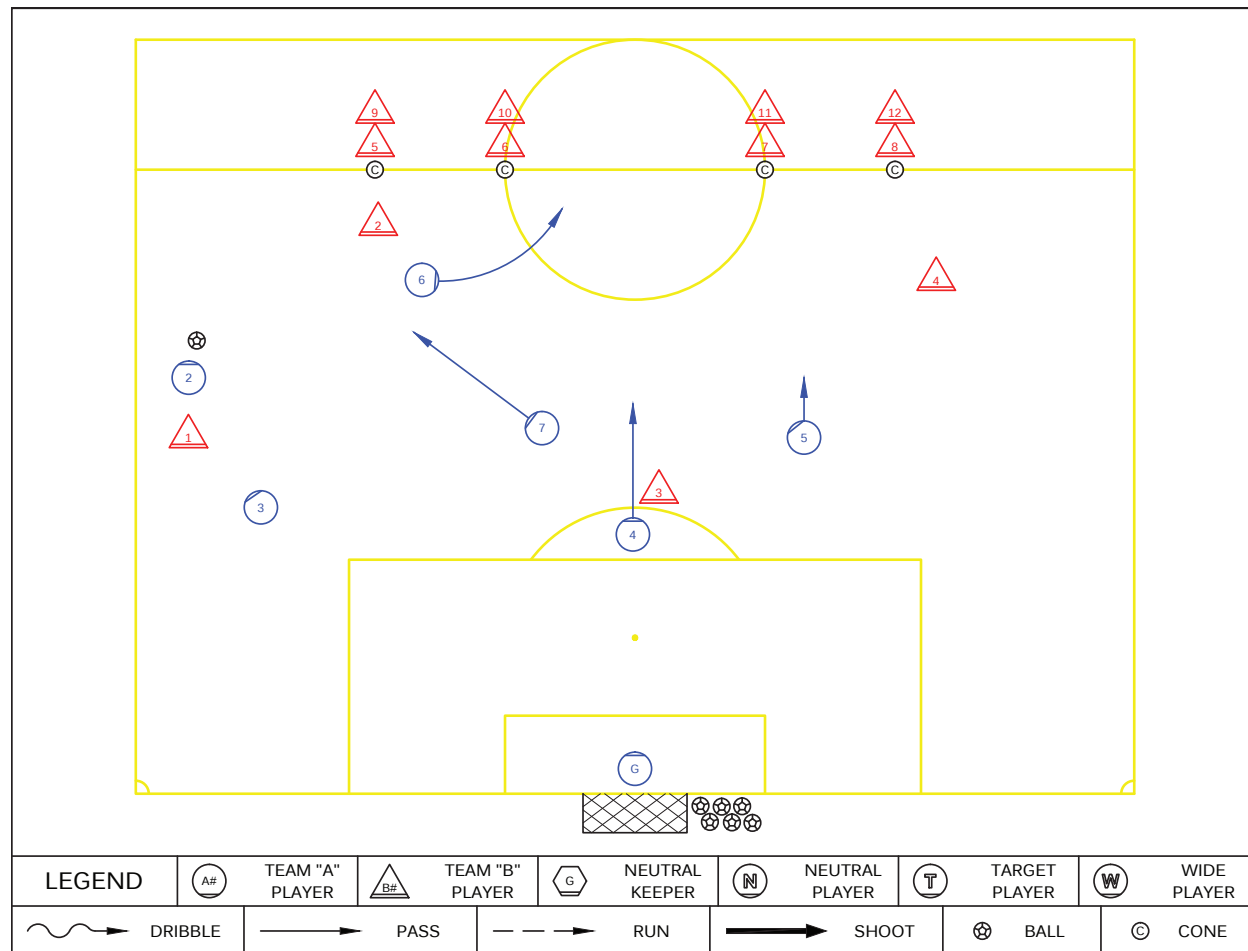


Diagram 59

As shown in Diagram 59, make sure that the mark is dropped if his team is not in possession of the ball or if he is not on the markers side of the field. At that point, the marker should be defending zonally. Finally, when the marker drops his zonal mark to man mark, he should make sure that a teammate takes responsibility for that dropped player.

Coaching Points to Help Players Cut Passing Lanes

Position. In Exercise 1, any player at any given time could be responsible to cut a passing lane. The first defender cuts a lane as he sets up on the first attacker; the second defender may have to cut a lane to stop a possible pass to a player making a through ball run; a third defender may have to cut a lane to the weak

side as the ball is switched; man markers may have to cut a lane as the ball is moved near or around them; and the man marking a player out of the play always needs to cut a lane to his mark.

The key coaching point to teach a player to cut a passing lane is body position and body placement on the field. Body position is the way that a player turns his body in relation to the ball and to a certain player on the field. Body placement is that place on the field where the player decides that he is in the best position to maintain his responsibility when defending.

For those players cutting passing lanes, body position and body placement is fluid, constantly changing in relation to the movement of the ball and movement of players around the defender. Lanes which would allow the first attacker to move the ball into a dangerous area (the vital area, for example) should always be cut first. So, a player cutting a passing lane must constantly evaluate a possible dangerous pass by a first attacker or a dangerous second ball after the attacker makes his pass.

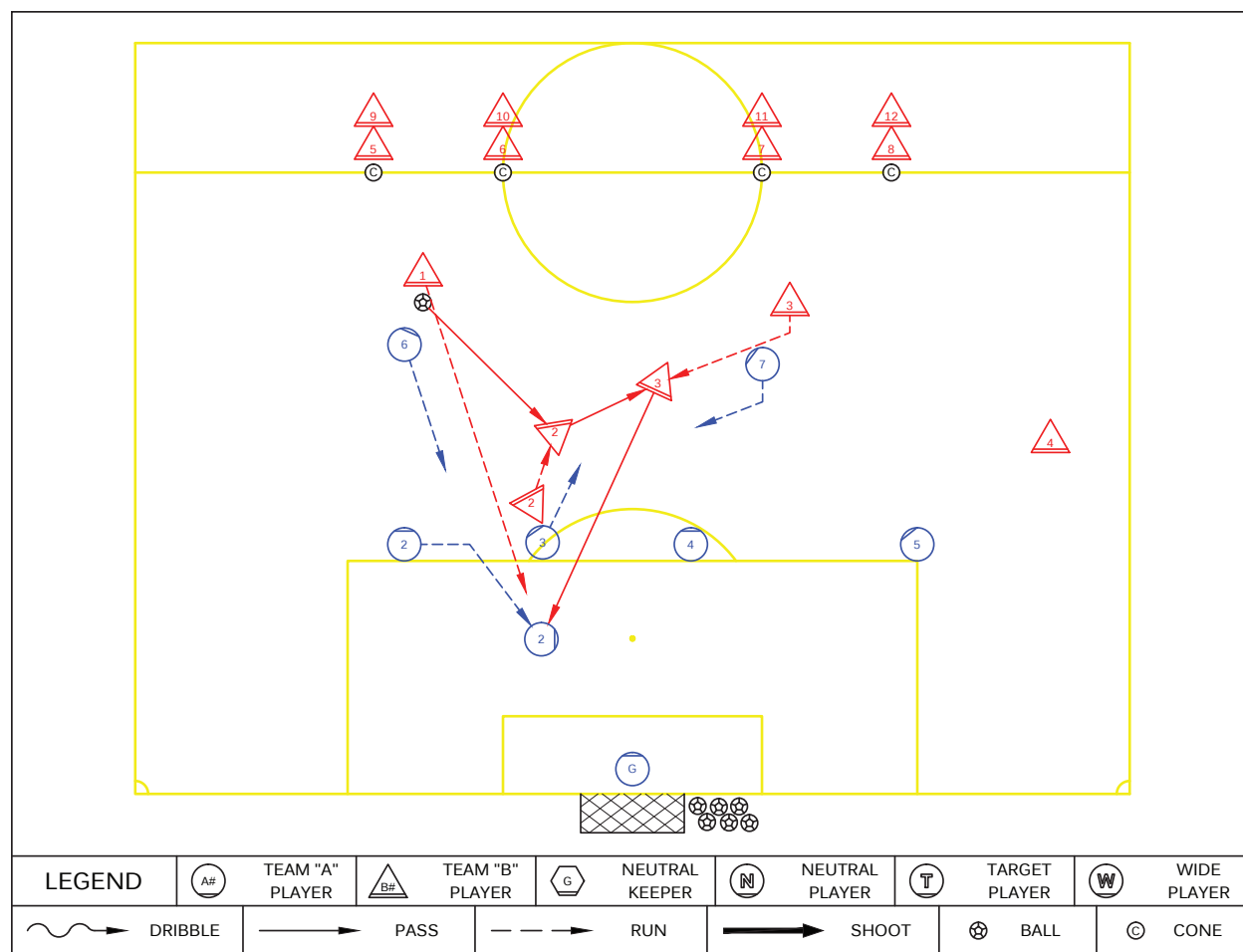


Diagram 60

As a side note, as shown in Diagram 60, in a zonal marking scenario, a tricky component to defending is coverage of the third man runner, especially if that runner starts his run out of the midfield area, deeper than the forwards. An inside mid may be the player to start to track the third man running but, when defending zonally, he may hand the running player to a back, to another mid or to a wide teammate. During Exercise 1, one of the four attackers will always be taking the third man running responsibility. Watch that runner to determine if the defending team is properly tracking the runner and properly setting up on him during the run of play based on the principles mentioned above.

The above small sided game allows a coach to analyze all aspects of small group defending (and, though not the focus, attacking) during each rotation.

SMALL GROUP DEFENDING EXERCISE 2

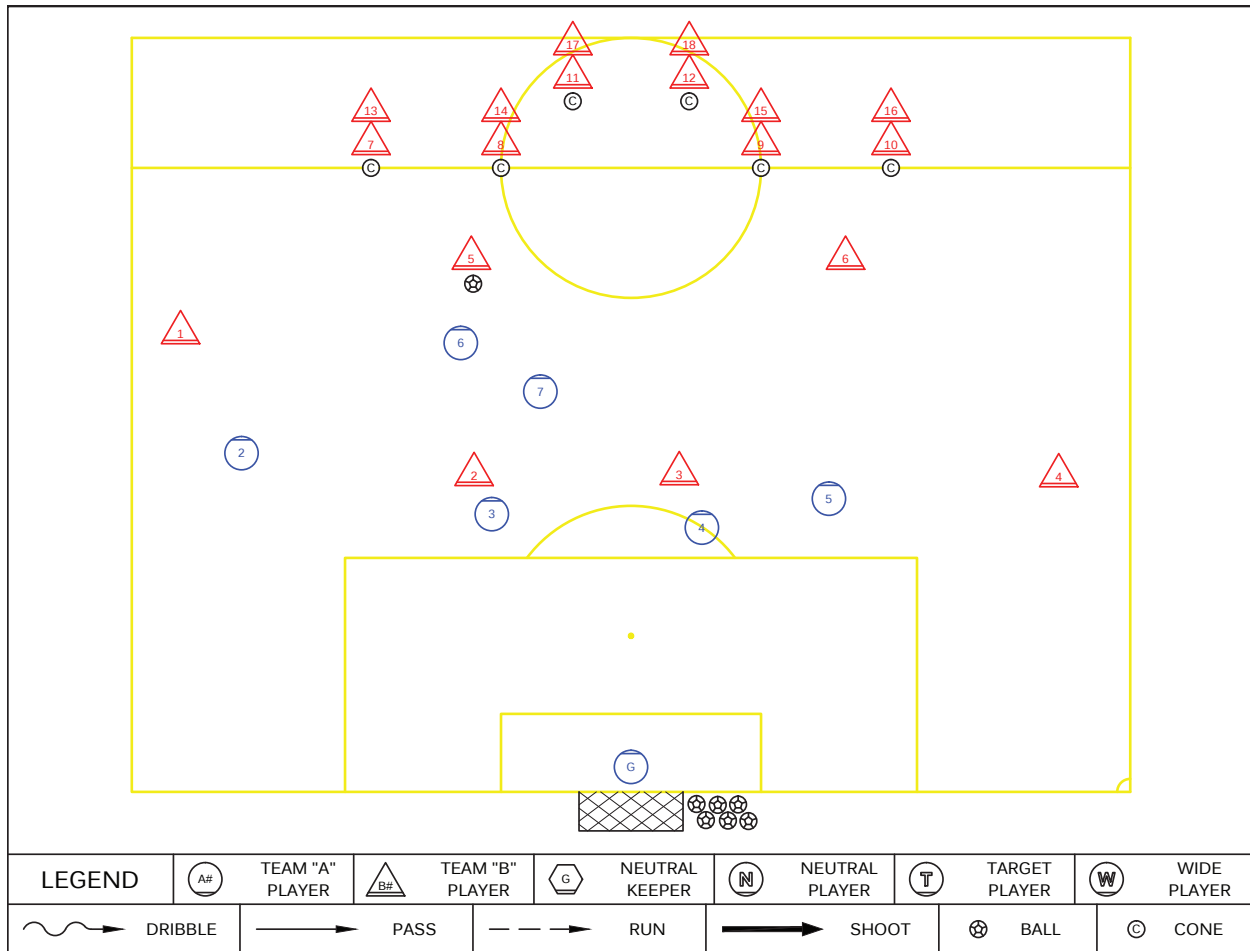


Diagram 61

As shown in Diagram 61, add two additional lines of attackers behind the line of four attackers at the half-way line to play six verses six forcing a mix of man to man and zonal marking by the defenders during the game because numbers of attackers and defenders are now even. Two disks can be put about five yards apart behind the line of four attackers with a line of players added behind each of the two disks. So, now you have a line of four and a line of two attackers all playing on the same team against the same configuration of six defenders as in Exercise 1. The rules of the game remain the same but the coaching points differ.

Coaching Points when Blending Zonal and Man to Man Marking to Defend with Numbers Even

The most important coaching point during Exercise 2 is to ensure that players realize when to stay with their mark, man to man, and when to hand off the mark to a teammate to accomplish zonal defending. Coaching in the game as described above can be used to teach the players the following principles during Exercise 2:

First, if the defending player is one of the higher defenders up field at the time he takes his man, he can stay with him until he is able to hand him off to the next closest defender behind him so long as that defender is not already marking a man. The general rule is, the higher up field that the defender marks an attacker,

the greater likelihood that he could hand him off to a deeper teammate not already occupied marking an attacker. Also, generally, the wider a player on the field during the run of play, the greater chance that the defender nearest him can take that defender and hand him off to a teammate inside of him.

At this point in time, the defenders are defending zonally with numbers even and will continue to do so until all teammates behind the defender are marking a man, the ball is in the back third of the field, and the ball is rattling around in the goal channel, in or near the vital area—otherwise zonal marking will work.

In a numbers even scenario, so long as there is just one attacker up field not requiring a mark, or one attacker very wide on the weak side not requiring an immediate mark, the defenders can mark zonally shifting and moving the attackers from one defender in a zone to another. However, if the attacking team is playing aggressively and attacks with six players deep into or near the vital area requiring that each player take a man, then there is a shift from zonal to man to man marking as soon as the ball reaches near the vital area of the field.

Man to man marking, with the ball in the front third of the field in a six on six situation is no different than defending against a corner kick or free kick near the 18 yard box with each defending player taking a man and staying with him until the play is over. Except for the rigorous physical demands to man mark, it is much easier to mark a man, one on one, and stay with him during the run of play in the back third of the field when numbers are even than to quickly and constantly shift to mark zonally handing off players as they move about the vital area, goal channel.

Two situations change this scenario, first if coach has instructed his defenders to mark zonally under all situations, even if numbers even and second if coach has instructed one of the inside backs to stay free from marking a man in order to remain in a cover position during the run of play, like a sweeper.

Under the first situation, the defenders mark zonally until transition and their team takes the ball. This means the constant and quick handing off of attackers from one defender to another even in the vital area. Defenders do not follow their man in this situation but only stay with him so long as that attacker is in their zonal area.

Under the second situation, using a sweeper, the defenders mark zonally until transition and their team takes the ball but the defenders leave the sweeper open while defending. The sweeper holds in a cover position retracted from the other defenders. The sweeper is usually an inside back. At a point when there is an unmarked attacker high in the vital area, the sweeper may have to step up and take that man so, at that point, every defender will be marking a player but as soon as an attacker gets down field (deep) or wide on the weak side, the other players mark zonally and the sweeper is again free from a mark.

SMALL GROUP DEFENDING EXERCISE 3

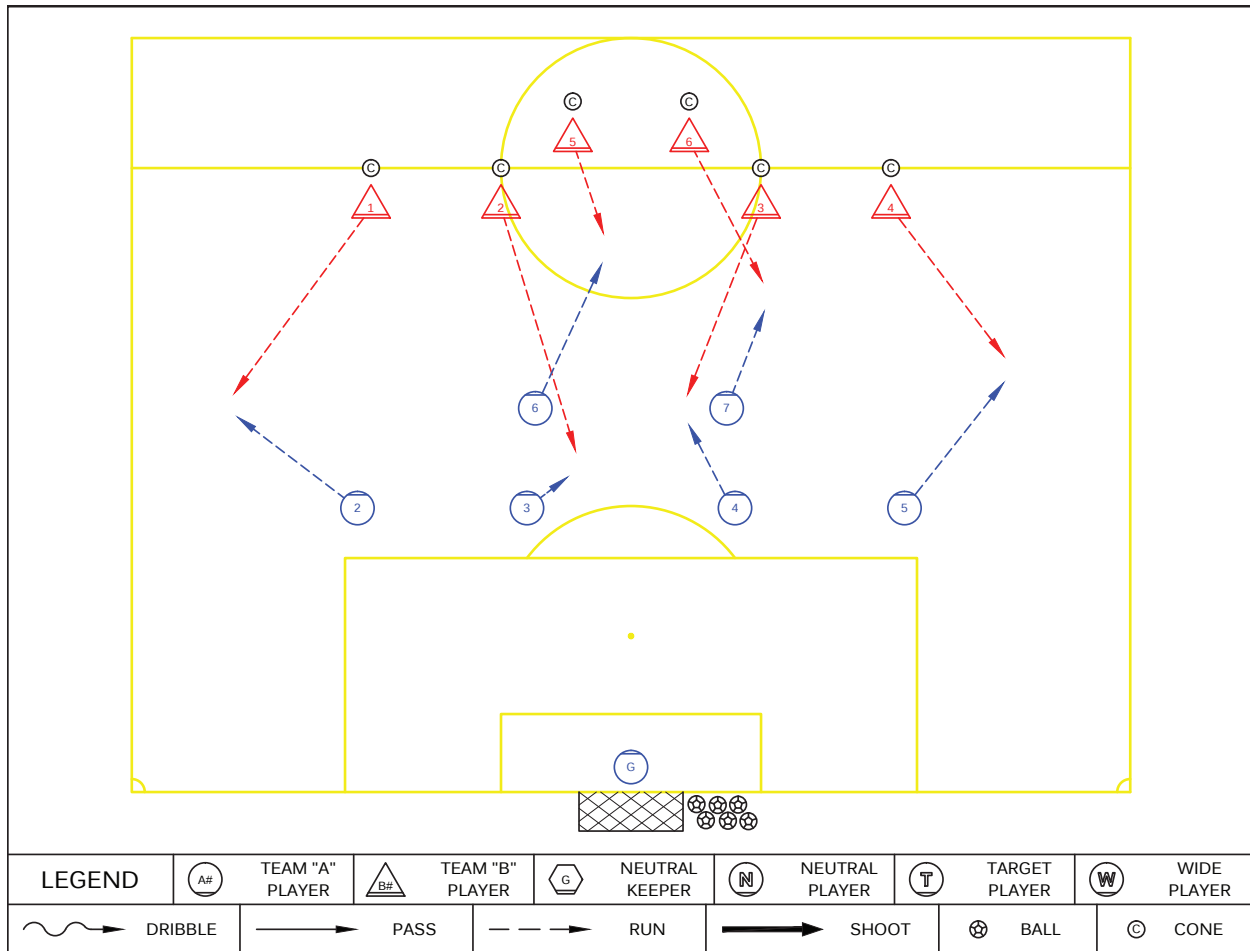


Diagram 62

As shown in Diagram 62, this exercise requires man to man marking in all parts of the field and at all times. Not because man to man marking is any better or worse than zonal marking but merely to get a defending team to understand the demands of man to man marking.

The game is set up the same as the previous exercise, six attackers versus six defenders but from the start of the game, the defenders call out the player who they are to mark and that defender stays with that player as he moves throughout the field during the run of play—man to man. This means that just as the attacking players are starting to move the ball forward, the defending players start to sort out which defender will be taking which attacker—loud and concise communication is a must from the vary time that the ball starts to move.

If a right defensive mid on the defending team takes an attacker lined up for the opponent on the left, he stays with that attacker until the play is complete, that is until transition and the defending team has possession of the ball to end the rotation.

Coaching Points for Man to Man Marking

The body position of defending players marking off the ball attackers is the key thing to watch during this

game. The marking player must position his body so that he is always cutting a passing lane to the off the ball attacker that he is marking. As the attacker moves throughout the field, the defender assigned to mark that player stays with him, moving with him in such a way as to cut a passing lane and also in a way so that he can quickly adjust to use the principles of first defending in the event his mark gets the ball and becomes a first attacker.

Man to man marking usually looks disorganized and chaotic but, irrespective of this, the defender stays with his man until the play is over even if that attacker is moving all over the field of play. If the mark is much faster than the defender marking him, then allow a defender to hand off the mark to a teammate and that teammate becomes his man mark. Stop play using coaching in the game to demonstrate this handoff.

SMALL GROUP DEFENDING EXERCISE 4

Cutting Passing Lanes

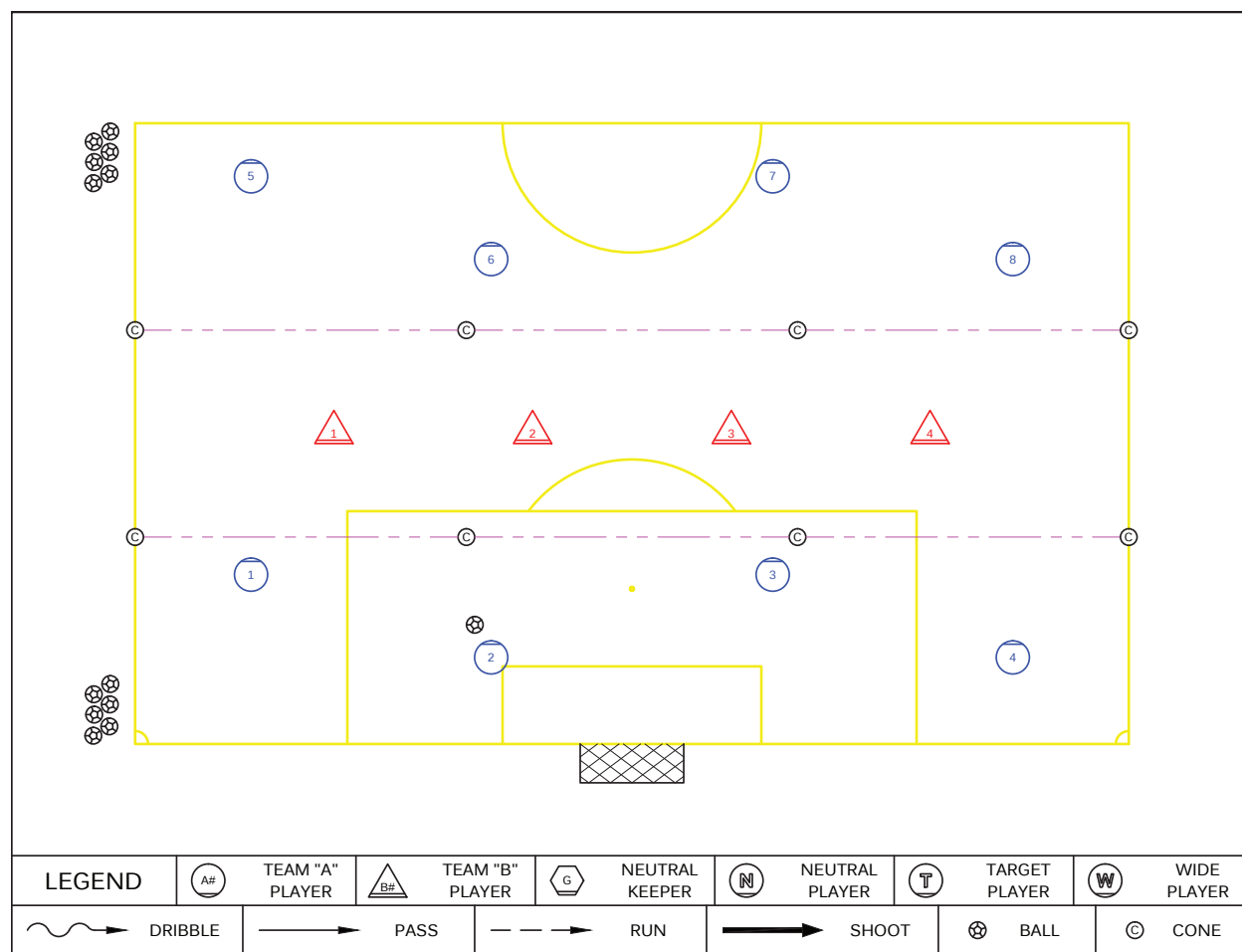


Diagram 63

As shown in Diagram 63, this exercise uses the same half field but with no goal and no keeper. The field is divided into three grids, horizontally, using only three or four disks, placed sideline to sideline to create three equally sized horizontal playing fields, with an equal number of players in each grid, no bibs. The team is divided into three groups, equally, one group per horizontal grid. A good supply of balls are placed just outside of each outside grid; no balls near the middle horizontal grid.

This game starts with a ball passed laterally from one teammate to another in one of the outside grids until the first attacker sees a clear passing lane to the opposite outside grid. The ball is passed on the ground, through the center horizontal grid which is occupied with players from a different team. If the ball is successfully passed to the opposite outside grid, again, on the ground, without it being intercepted by a player in the center grid, then the player who received the ball in that outside grid plays the ball laterally until the first attacker sees an open passing lane to the opposite outside grid and then passes the ball to a receiver in that outside grid.

Start the game allowing unlimited touches and then restrict touches and then later also restrict the number of lateral passes allowed before an attempt to pass to the opposite outside grid. This will speed up

play. Keep in mind that coach is watching the “defenders” in the center grid to determine if they are quickly and properly cutting passing lanes, not the attackers in the outside grids.

If a defender in the middle grid intercepts a pass, then that player merely turns with the ball and passes it to a player in the other outside grid (opposite grid that the ball came from). All players must stay in their respective grids during this entire exercise.

Coaching Points to Cut Passing Lanes

Body position, movement, communication. A first attacker does not have an open lane to pass to a receiver if he cannot see that lane, unobstructed by a defender or, if he does not have the ability to bend a ball (curve the pass) around the defender to the receiver. Coach the defenders to have body position open to the ball and open to the possible intended receiver so as to act as an obstruction and cut the passing lane. Stop the game using coaching in the game if this is not happening correctly.

Make sure that the defenders in the middle grid are constantly moving to obstruct the lane of the first attacker and to obstruct any lane created due to a second or third pass by an attacker in the outside grid. Stop the game if the defenders are not moving to cut lanes.

Encourage the players to communicate during the run of play so that each defender knows where and when to set up on a certain player in order to cut an immediate or secondary passing lane. For the most part, because numbers are even in the inside center grid as in the outside grids, all passing lanes should be obstructed at all times. It should be difficult for a first attacker in an outside grid to bypass the inside center grid with a pass on the ground, the only type of pass allowed in this exercise.

CHAPTER 10

Training Theme 10

Vertical and Horizontal Pressing—Teaching players to shrink the size of the field when defending.

Vertical Pressing When Defending

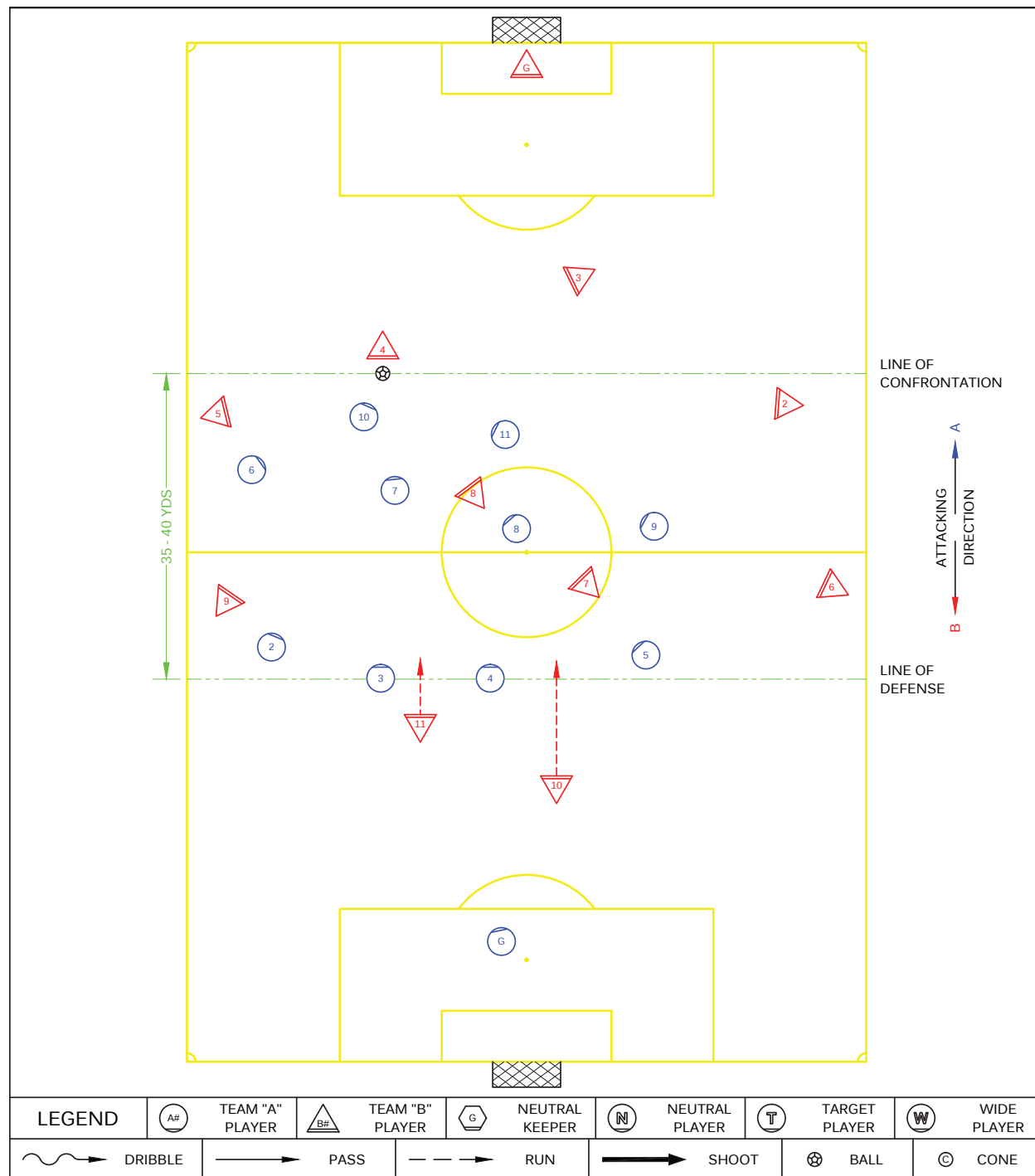


Diagram 64

As shown in Diagram 64, vertical pressing when defending is accomplished when a team's back line pushes up field vertically goal to goal, forcing all other players on the team who are position behind the ball to do likewise in order to shrink the playing space from the pressing team's back line to the ball. Most coaches will vertically compress until the back line is about 35 or 40 yards from the ball but this varies depending on the system of play used by the team.

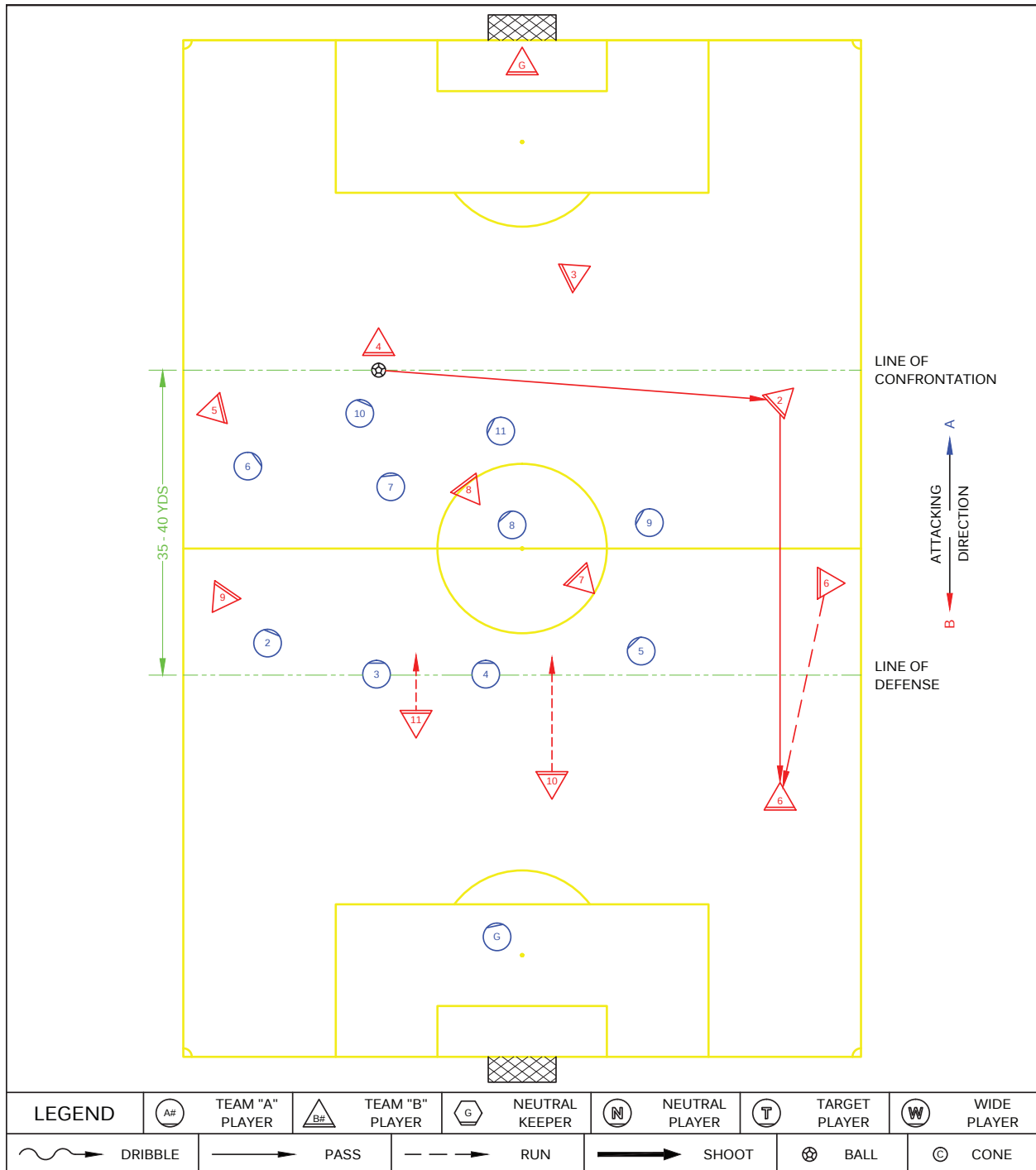


Diagram 65

On defense, the purpose of this maneuver is to move players up field in order to get more defending players near the ball so as to have a better opportunity to take the ball and to deny open space to the attacking team making it more difficult for them to move the ball from teammate to teammate. Every yard that the line of defense moves forward vertically is a yard less space for the attacking team to work. This usually creates a very high line of defense which makes a team vulnerable to a counter attack using quick, wide combination play usually wide in one of the outside channels (see Diagram 65); or a long ball over the top of the back line (see Diagram 66); or a through ball splitting the back line (see Diagram 67).

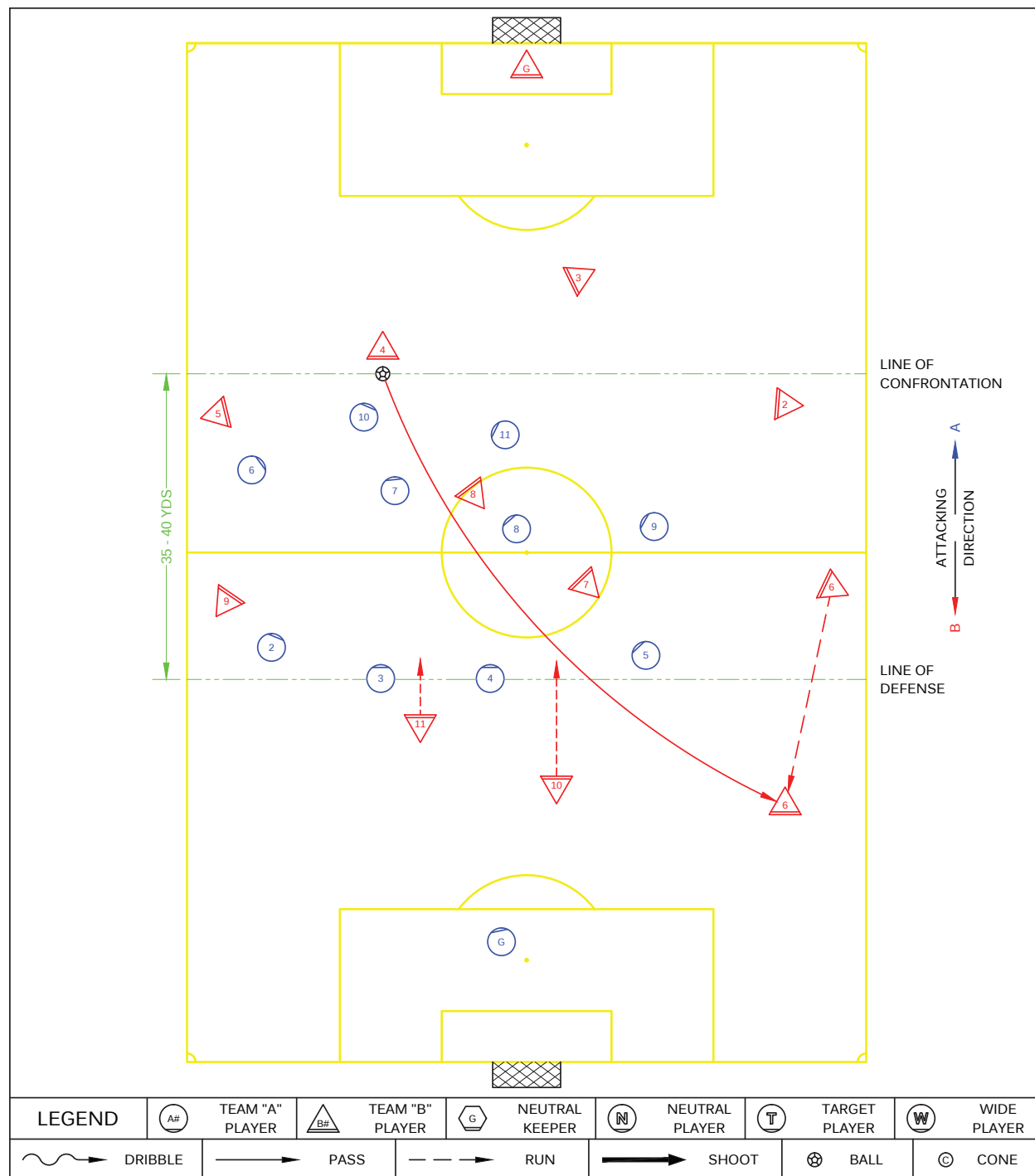


Diagram 66

Once the line of defense is set by the team pushing up field, an inside back can slightly retract to provide depth in defending (see Diagram 68) if that is consistent with the team’s system of play, or, of course, the backs can stay flat to hold a higher line of defense or to play an off side trap. To be clear, a team’s line of defense is the line usually comprised of its backs, established at a time when the ball is not being played by the players in that line. In other words, the line of defense is usually established at a point in time when the players in the line are not involved in the play because that would cause disruption of the line as opposed to a definitively set, clearly distinguishable line.

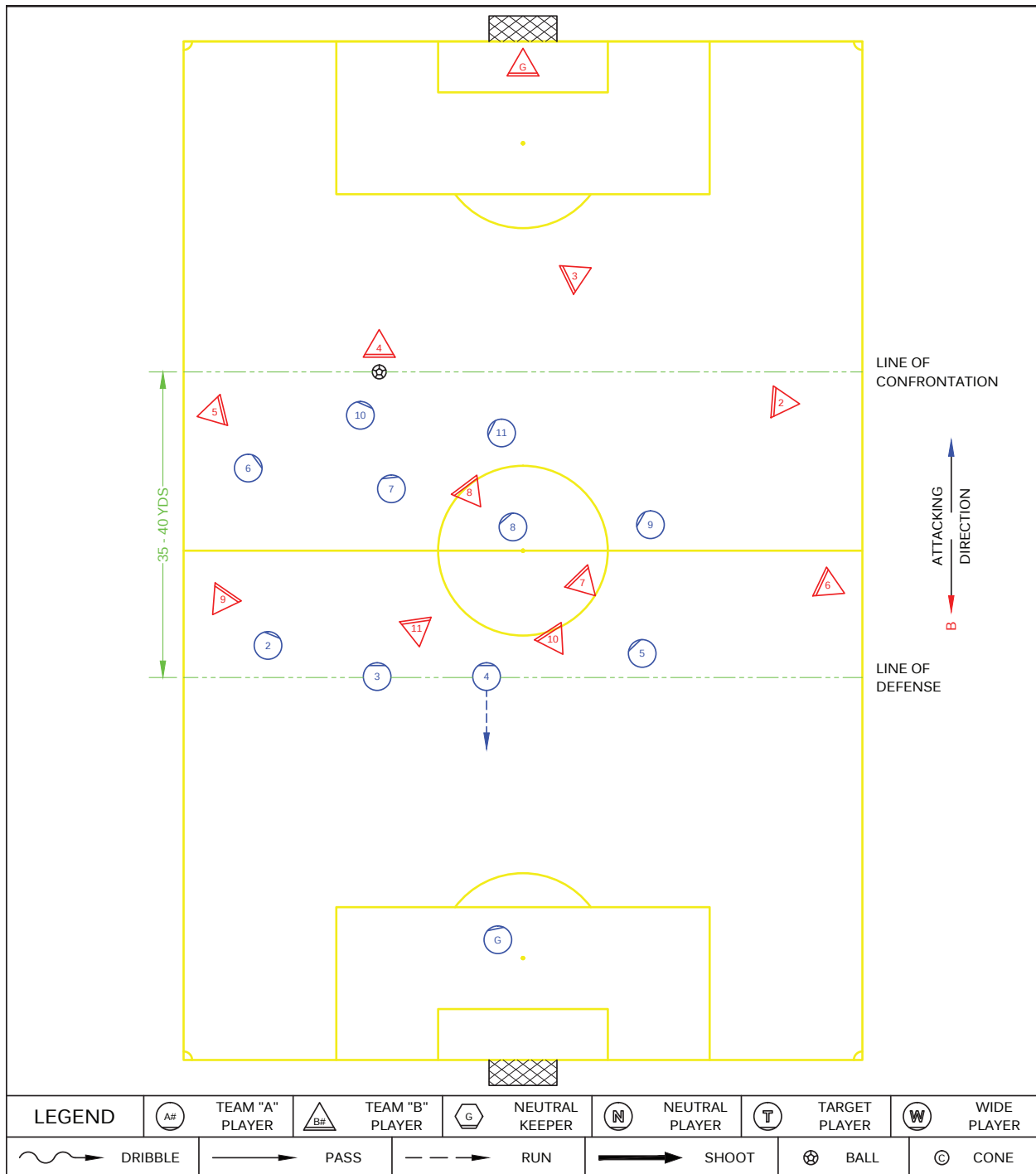


Diagram 68

Vertical Pressing When Attacking

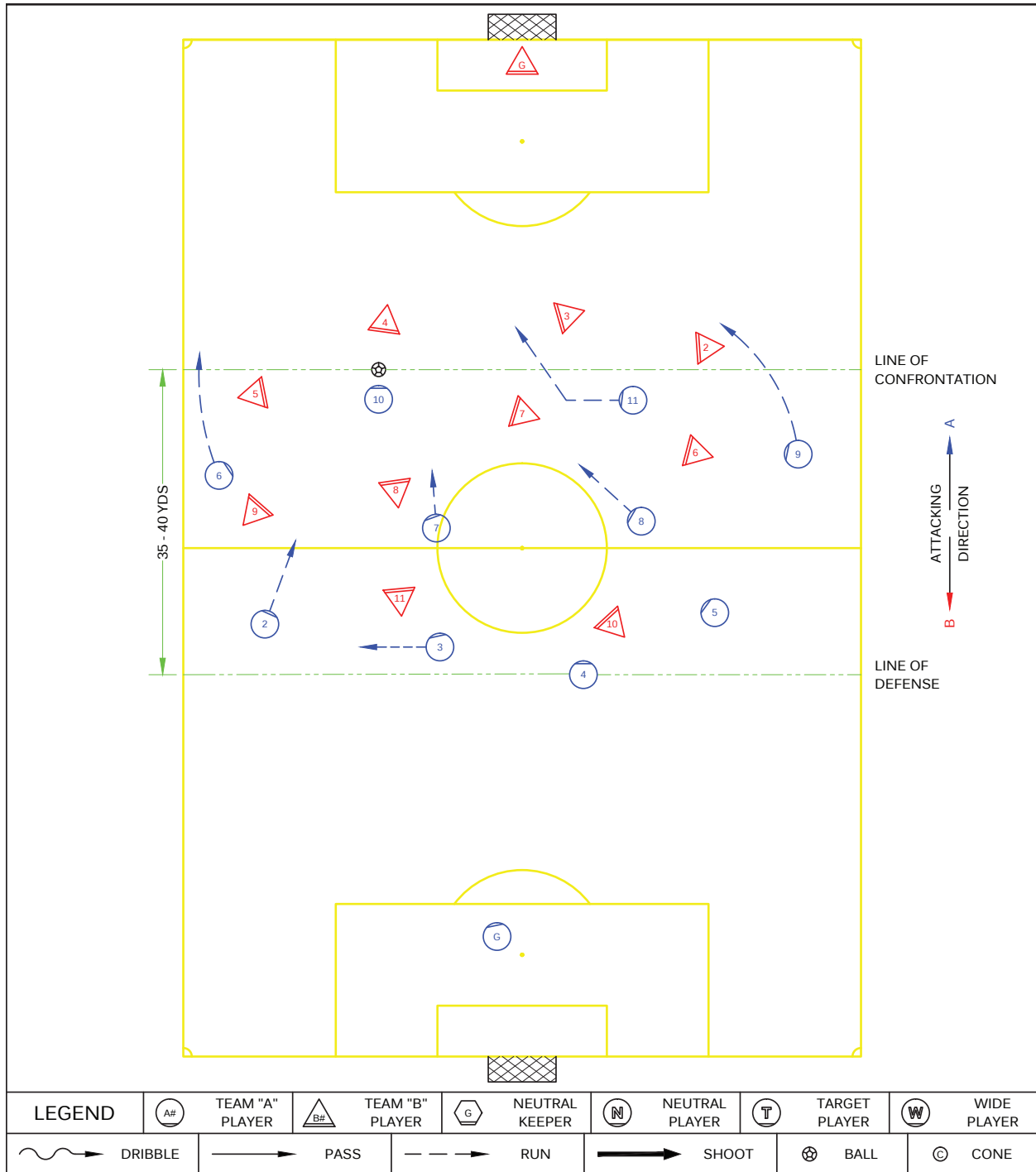


Diagram 69

As shown in Diagram 69, on offense, the purpose of this maneuver, vertical pressing, is to get more players around the ball so as to provide quick combination passing options to the attacking team making it easier for them to move the ball in a direction to set up a scoring opportunity. If a team does not have the technical ability to move the ball in tight space, then holding a lower, deeper line of defense might be more advantageous on attack to create more space rather than less space on attack.

As shown in Diagram 70, vertical pressing on attack is usually accompanied by width, that is, sending a player wide, particularly on the strong side, on order to pull out defenders or to provide passing options wide into space near or in the strong side outside channel.

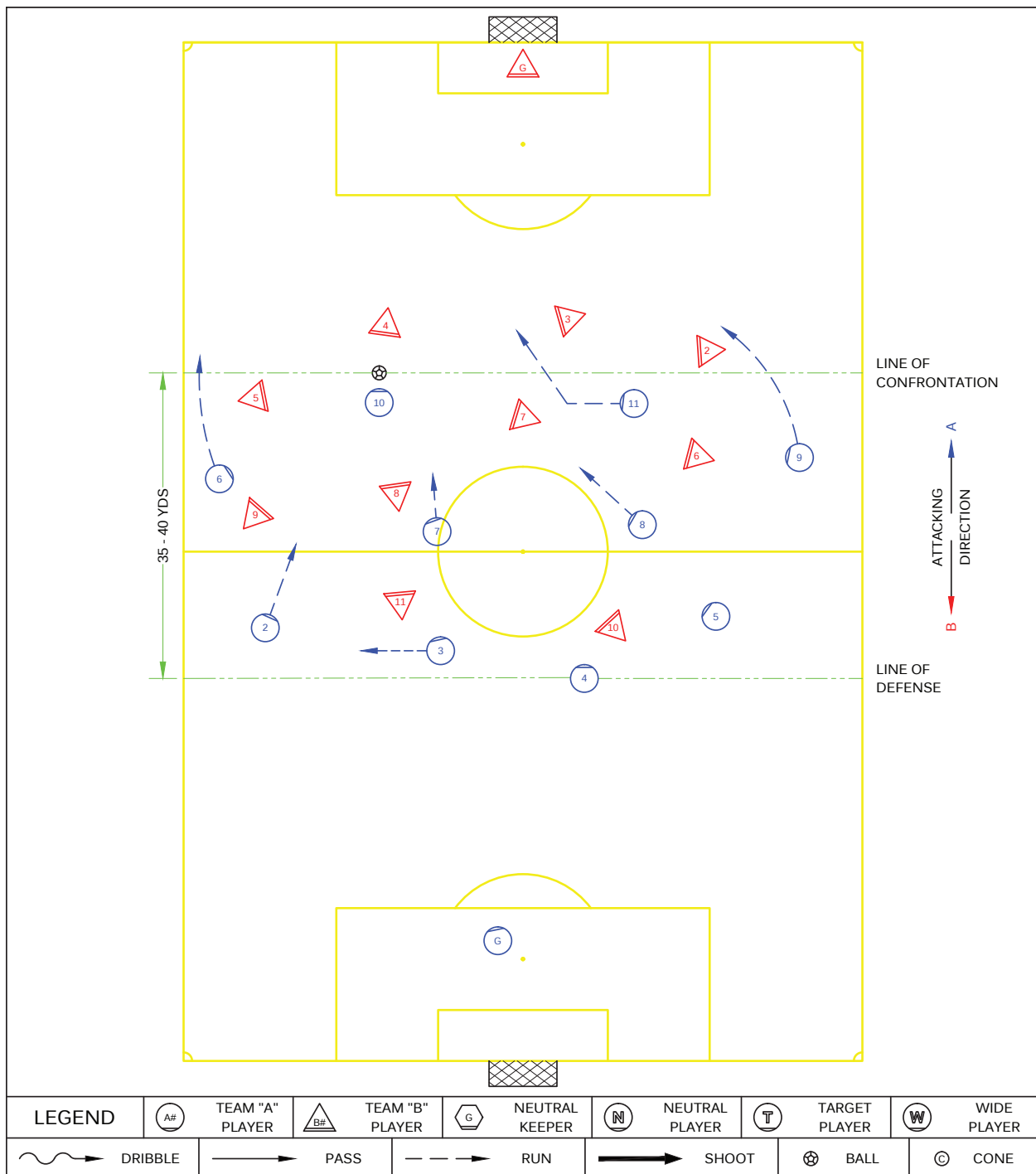


Diagram 70

The concept of opening the field on attack by keeping players wide and high is slightly contradicted by pushing the back line up vertically to get more players around the ball. Some teams prefer to leave the back line deep, send the wingers wide and hold a high striker up top to optimize the amount of space to

move the ball during the run of play; or move the line of defense high, keeping a wide winger and a high striker as a hybrid concept. Neither concept is wrong so long as played to the team's strengths and within the chosen system of play for game day.

A team is vulnerable when vertically pressing because it is exposed to transition and a quick counter attack. The team is exposed because the back line is so high up field which leaves room for the opposition to get behind the line of defense and move quickly to the vital area. See "Attaining Game Offensive and Defensive Balance" Minutillo 2013, *Soccer Coaching International* (UK).

So long as the defending team (the team that just lost the ball) either has speed in the back or a very good defensive mid to slow the attack of the first attacker on transition, the effect of playing a high line of defense on attack related to transition can be mitigated.

The most important mitigating factor to a high line on attack is to get as many players defending behind the ball as possible. This means that not only does the defending team need to be fit, more fit than their opponent, but that they understand how to drop, when to drop, and when to step as a unit once the line of defense is set as mentioned earlier.

Horizontal Pressing When Defending

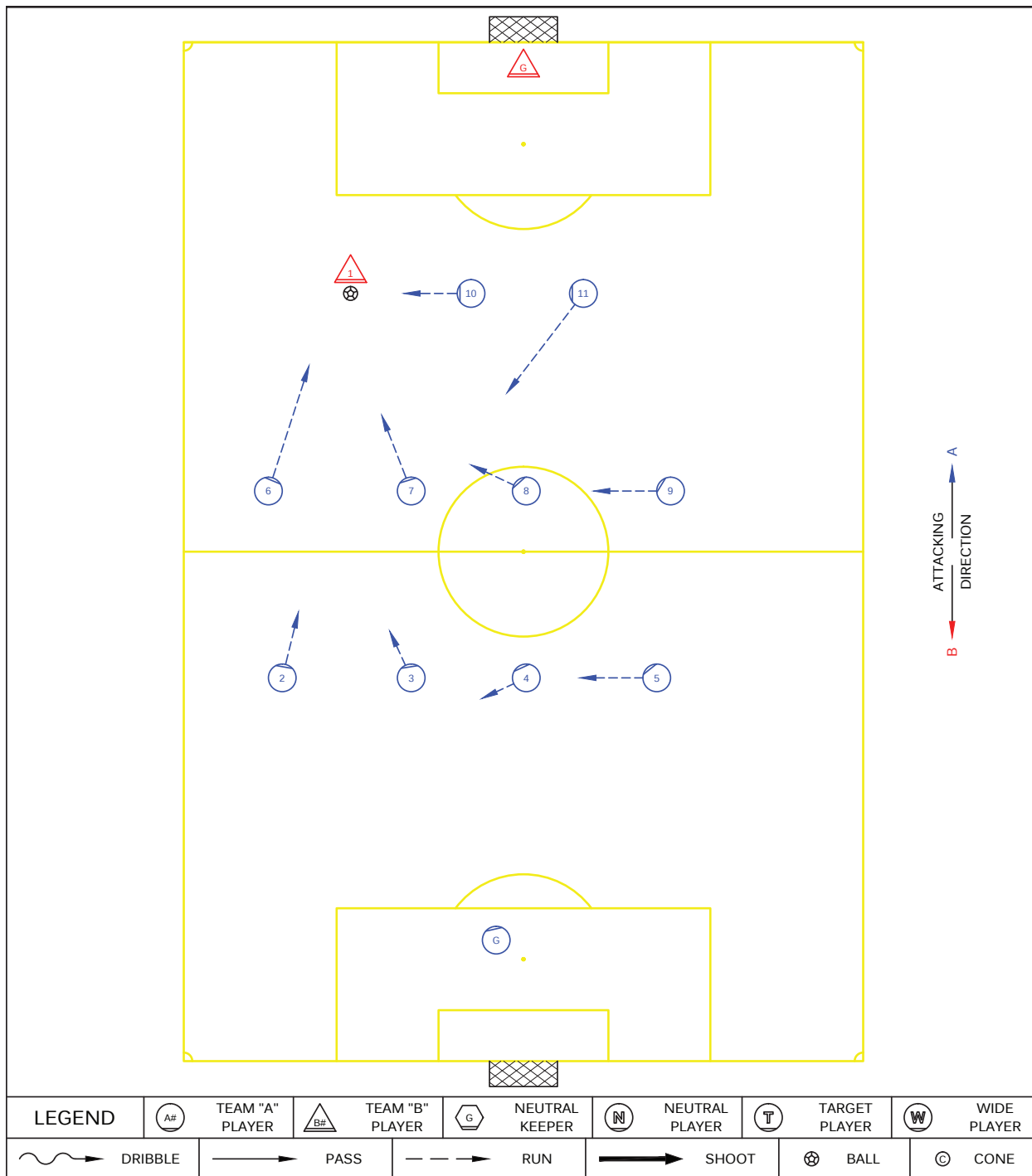


Diagram 71

As shown in Diagram 71, horizontal pressing when defending is accomplished when the weak side outside back and the weak side outside mid compress toward the ball and the balance of the players on the team that is defending, likewise in order to shrink the size of the field horizontally. The defending team is basically moving from one outside channel toward the ball; from the weak side toward the strong side.

The purpose of horizontal pressing when defending is the same as vertical pressing when defending, that is, to shrink the size of the field to minimize the offensive team's passing options by squeezing space during the run of play. The less space available to pass on attack, the easier it is for the defending team to cut passing lanes and intercept the ball. Also, because space is scarce, greater skill is required to complete a pass by the attacking team. Passing in tight space is more difficult than passing when space is available.

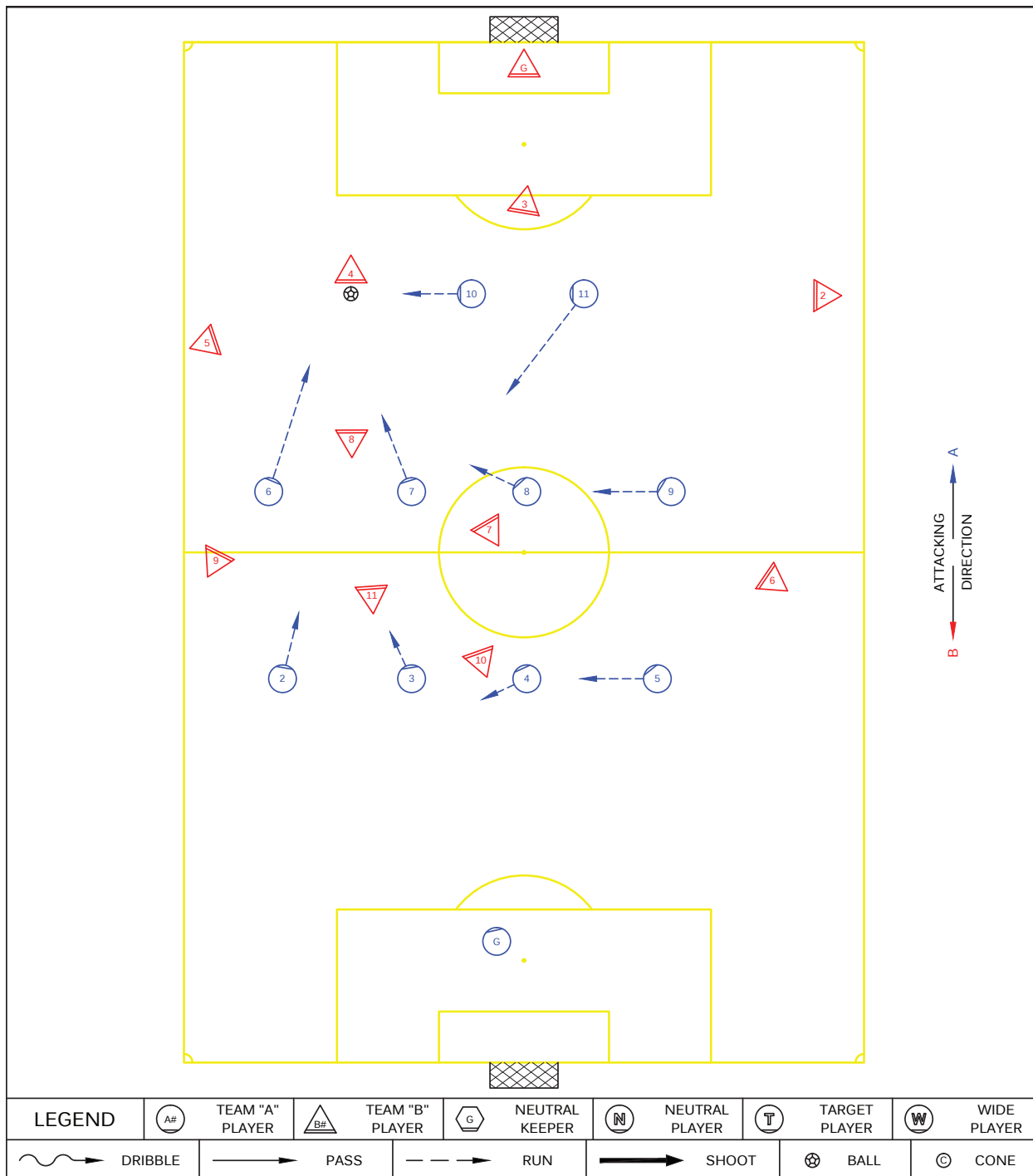


Diagram 72

As shown in Diagram 72, the attacking team will try to open the field of play by leaving an opponent wide on the weak side or by maintaining a deep line of defense allowing for a back pass followed by a switch of play to the weak side. The weak side players on the defending team can either balance off of that wide attacker or continue to compress inside to an opponent, mark that opponent and hand him off to a teammate at the time the ball is switched to his side so that he can then move wide to mark what is now a strong side, wide player. See Diagram 73. In other words, horizontal pressing when defending does not need to expose a team to quick transition or to a dangerous switch of play so long as the weak side players, in a zonal marking system, recognize danger and understand how to deal with it as mentioned above.

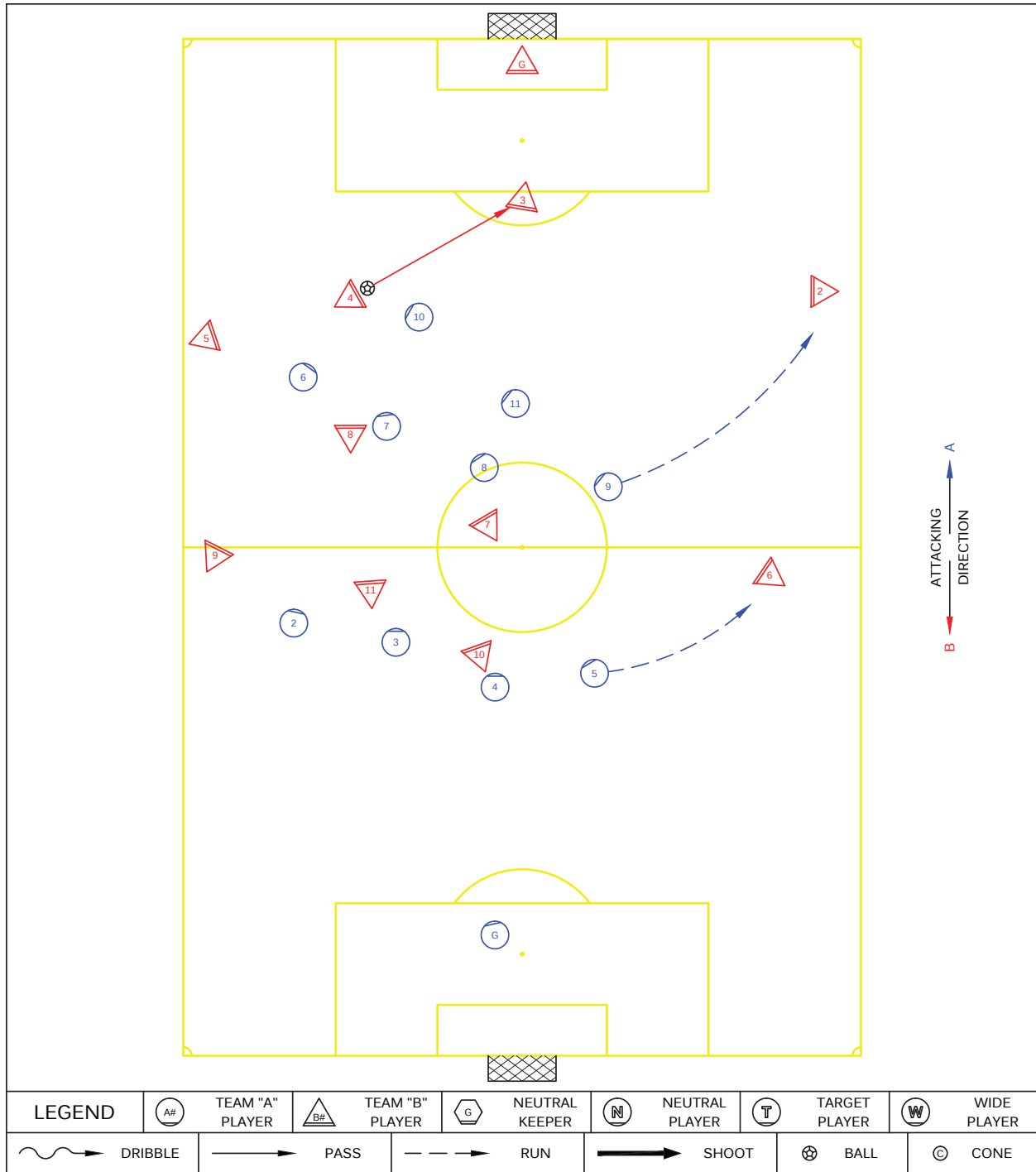


Diagram 73

Many coaches who play a traditional 4-3-3 on attack using the two outside forwards as wingers and holding the striker high, will assume that the defending team will not press horizontally because of the wide winger (forward) holding on the weak side. As shown in Diagram 74, this can be easily countered by the defending team by balancing off of the weak side attacker or having the weak side player who is defending move inside to a man and then move back to his wide position when the ball is switched. The 4-3-3 played by an attacking team does not defeat horizontal pressing by the defending team.

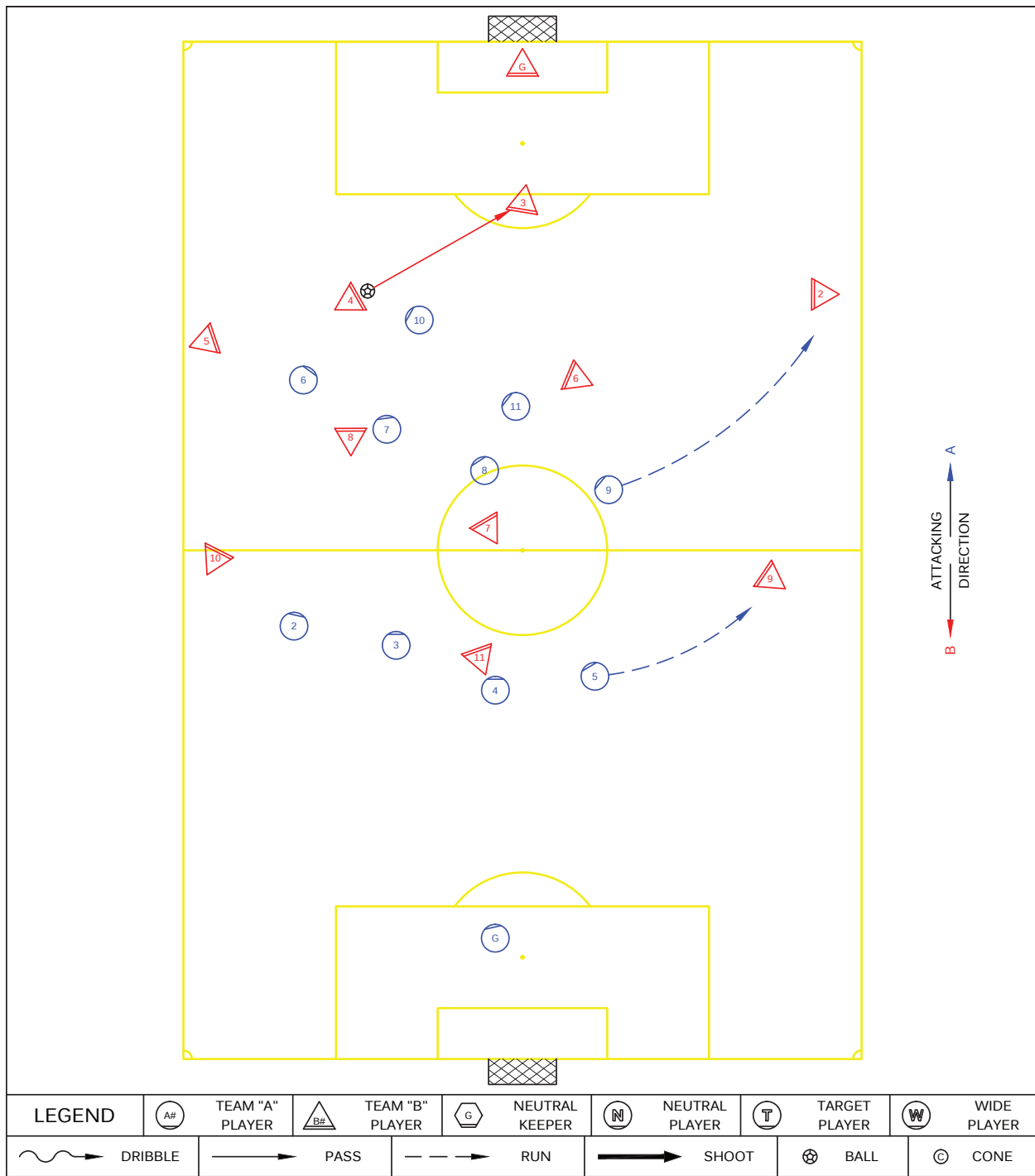


Diagram 74

Horizontal Pressing When Attacking

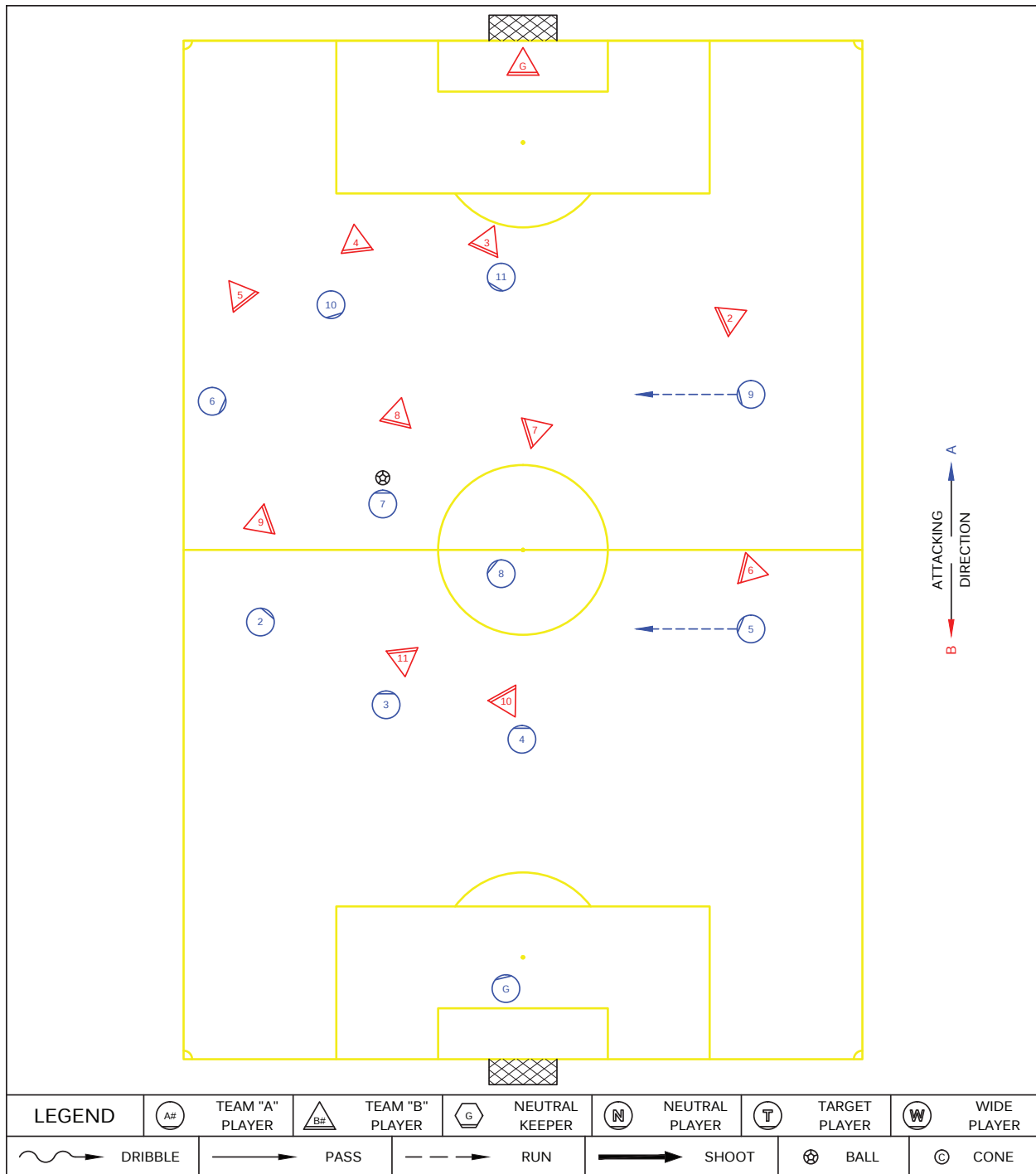


Diagram 75

As shown in Diagram 75, horizontal pressing when attacking is accomplished when the weak side wing players compress inside, toward the strong side to get attacking numbers around the ball. In most cases, the team in possession on transition will immediately attempt to open the field, wide and high, to provide more space for the first attackers and the players in an attacking support position. Opening the field allows the first attacker more time and space on the ball so that he can make good passing decisions.

The opposite is true if horizontal pressing is part of the system of play because players compress, shrinking the field but providing tight passing options, combination play, to advance the ball into dangerous areas on the field. As mentioned earlier, so long as the players on a team have the technical foot skills to play fast in tight space, this tiki-taka way of advancing the ball is effective and dangerous to the opposition.

To be clear, the general rule is to open the field on attack and close the field when defending but pressing provides a different option when attacking so long as that style of play suits the team in possession.

It's important to note horizontal pressing parameters on attack. For example, one system of play when pressing horizontally is to allow only the weak side, outside mid to compress toward the strong side or the weak side outside forward if a three front is used by the team in possession, leaving the other outside weak side players wide to open other parts of the field. The key to successful horizontal compression on attack is to only compress from the weak side inward and to always compress to open space providing a passing option for the first attacker, no matter which player or players on the field participate in pressing horizontally.

Elements of Pressing

When Defending

Be quick. Pressing must happen immediately on transition, your team loses the ball;

If pressing vertically, all players on the defending team must press together as a group;

Once the line of defense is set, consider retracting an inside back to provide depth to the defense unless playing an off side trap then, of course, hold the back line horizontally straight so that the players could move up together in unison to trap the opponent as soon as the first attacker is ready to send a long ball over the top;

If pressing horizontally, press from the weak side to a man, meaning press to an opponent, inside. Once a player presses to an opponent, that is his mark until handed off in a zonal defending system;

The weak side outside mid, for example, will first look up field to determine if there is an opponent in his channel, if so, he balances, if not, he compresses to a man, inside and that opponent becomes his mark until handed off to a teammate;

Consider pressing using all weak side outside players at one time. For example, a weak side back might compress inside and diagonally, up field to the ball, a weak side mid might compress inside and horizontally to the ball, and a weak side forward might compress inside and horizontally down field to the ball;

If only one weak side outside player will call the press and move inside under the chosen system of play, usually the most effective pattern is to have the weak side mid start the press.

When Attacking

Immediately on transition, assess the position of the ball in relation to defenders to determine if more passing options would be provided by placing more players around the ball using lateral and horizontal pressing or if more passing options would be provided by creating more space, to open up. Assess and then react. Should you instruct players to compress or to open the field as a team? Does your team have great speed, if so, opening the field might be the best option. Does your team have great foot skills and passing ability, then getting more players around the ball might be the best option.

If compressing horizontally, compress to space on attack, not to a man. Compression on attack is accomplished to create passing options close to the first attacker. If a compressing player moves close to an op-

ponent, inside, that purpose is defeated.

As an aside, note that there is a difference between horizontal pressing on attack or defense and shifting. Shifting is a small group activity during the run of play where, the backs, mids, or forwards on a team move as a separate unit horizontally from the weak side of the field to the strong side in order to protect or be involved in the play on the strong side. This is an activity of a line not accomplished for the purpose of shrinking the size of the field but for the purpose of protection when defending or involvement in the play when attacking. A shift by a line is different than pressing.

VERTICAL PRESSING EXERCISE 1

Vertical Compression When Defending

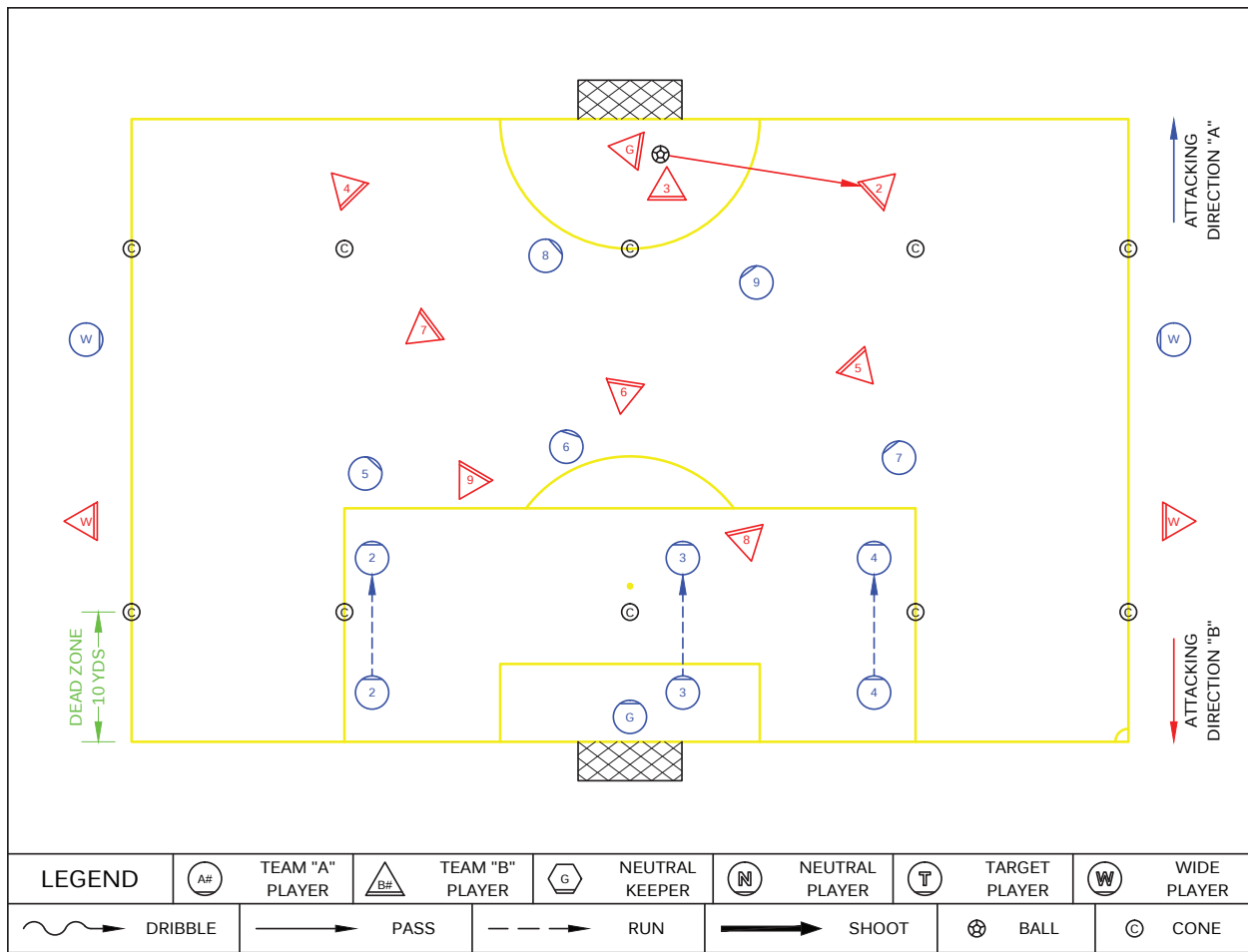


Diagram 76

This game focuses on defending not attacking. Note in advance that the defending team pushes up to clear the “dead zone” during the run of play, not the attacking team.

For Exercise 1 in this chapter, the term “dead zone” refers to that grid just in front of the defending team’s goal keeper. The attacking team (the team in possession) ignores the “dead zone” and plays directional soccer, though, as you will note, the team in possession changes on transition. This will become clear as the exercise is described below.

As shown in Diagram 76, create a half field grid or larger depending on the number of players at the training session; two goals at the end lines, one keeper in each goal. Add a line of a few small disks ten yards away from each end line, horizontally across the field, parallel to the end line. Put about six balls in the back of each net. Divide the team in half in bibs. Take two players from each team and put them wide, just outside the side lines adjacent to their team, one wide player from each team wide of the sidelines, out of the grid. These wide players on each team cannot enter the grid as noted later.

This game is directional so each team attacks a different goal. On transition, the defending team becomes the attacking team. The backs from both teams must start the game lined up about one yard up field from

their keeper. This continues to be the starting place for each rotation, after each shot on goal (restart), the backs line up in the same place. There are no touch restrictions for this game but each team must complete a minimum of six passes before that team is allowed to shoot on goal and two of those six passes must be to a teammate that is a wide player, one pass to a wide player on one side of the field and another to the other wide player.

For this exercise, the team in possession can advance the ball at any time ignoring the disks and can use the space behind the disks as that team sees fit, without restriction. As mentioned later, that is not the case for the defending team. Once six passes are completed by the attacking team, that team can shoot on goal. At all times, the defending team is trying to dispossess the attacking team aided by vertical compression. This is basically a directional scrimmage with restrictions.

The keeper starts the game by rolling the ball wide to the closest back on his team, no matter where that back is positioned on the field. Once that back has the ball, he can play the ball anywhere on the field. The team in possession is the attacking team and the opponent is the defending team.

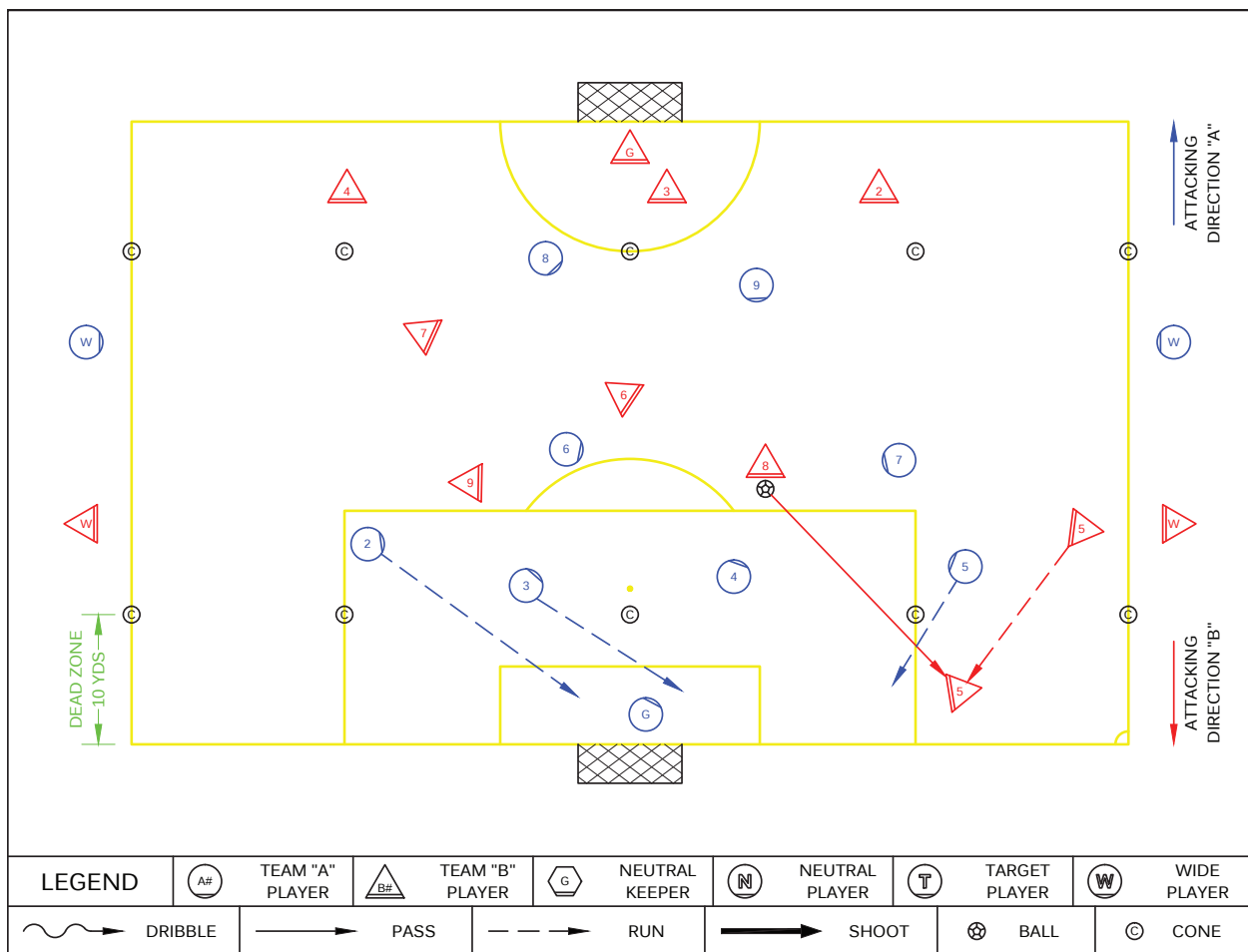


Diagram 77

The wide players on the defending team are idly waiting for transition, they cannot defend. The wide players should try to stay in the midfield area but they are free to roam the side lines up and down the field but they cannot enter the grid; they must play outside of it and they can only attack, not defend. If the ball is passed to a wide player by an attacking teammate, that wide player has one touch to get the ball back into the grid to the attacking team. Only the wide players are allowed outside the grid and the ball cannot be taken from a wide player.

As soon as the ball is rolled by the keeper to an attacking player, an inside back on the defending team must yell “push up” and the back line of the defending team must exit the area they are occupying near the keeper (the “dead zone”) and get up field beyond the line created with disks. When the back yells “push up” all players must immediately get out of the “dead zone” and all defending players must compress vertically, up field.

The defending team is not allowed back into the “dead zone” unless the ball or a player from the attacking team occupies that area. In other words, the defending team must stay pushed up field (vertically compressed) holding a high line of defense until the ball or an opponent from the attacking team occupies this “dead zone” as shown in the Diagram 77. The keeper on the defending team can go into the “dead zone” at any time.

On transition, the team that was attacking is now defending and the same rules as above mentioned apply to that defending team. Only stop the game and reset the back line, as shown in Diagram 78, after a shot on goal. Do not stop the game to move the defending team’s back line into the dead zone on transition by dispossession during the run of play. In that circumstance, allow the game to continue without interruption.

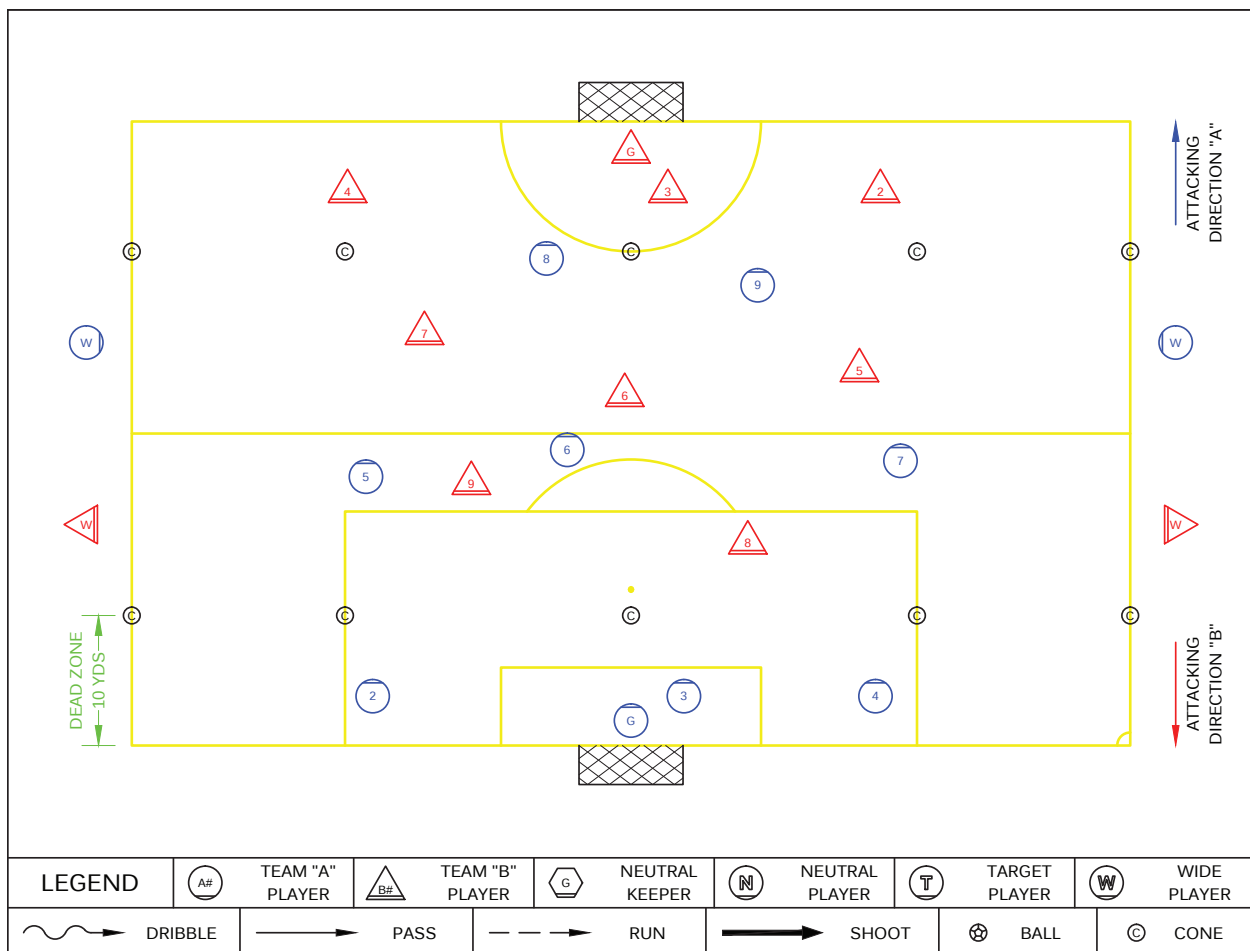


Diagram 78

If there is a shot on goal then reset the game and the players from both teams retreat to their original position near the keeper, basically starting over with the other team now attacking. Pause a second if needed to reset the game after a shot on goal. This exercise forces vertical compression only when defending.

Coaching Points When Pressing Vertically on Defense

As soon as the ball is played by the keeper and collected by the receiver and the ball is played up field, an inside back on the defending team yells “push up”. Look for clear, concise commands by an inside back to push the defending team up field. Make sure that the entire team moves up in unison so no gaps exist between lines. Watch the player movement on the defending team: are they positioning themselves up field to cut passing lanes and to take away space from the attacking team; has the first defender set up on the first attacker in a way to take away a passing lane while still disrupting the first attacker; does the vertical compression seem organized and logical considering the team’s system of play?

VERTICAL PRESSING EXERCISE 2

Vertical Compression When Attacking

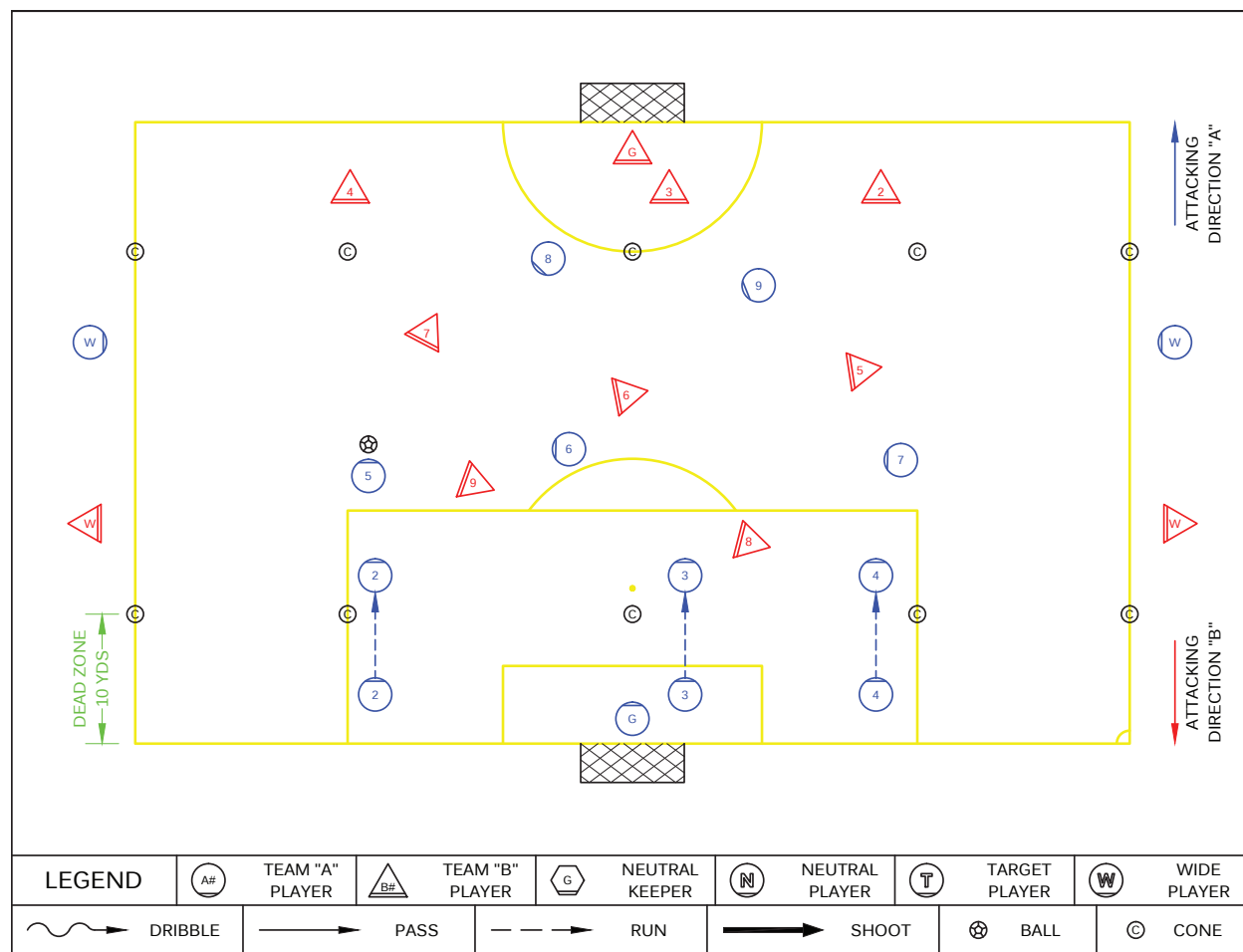


Diagram 79

This exercise focuses on attacking, not defending. This exercise forces vertical compression only when attacking. Note that in this exercise, the attacking team pushes up to clear the “dead zone” during the run of play, not the defending team. The defending team now ignores the “dead zone”.

As shown in Diagram 79, the exact same grid is used as in Exercise 1, but coach now focuses on the attacking team who must push up field out of the “dead zone” which is nearest the attacking team’s keeper as soon as the ball is played out of the “dead zone” up field. The defending team in this exercise does not need to push up to clear the “dead zone” near its keeper. The defending team can occupy any part of the field at any time. We are now focusing only on vertical compression of the attacking team.

The keeper for the attacking team passes the ball to a back in the “dead zone” just in front of him. As soon as the ball crosses the line created by the disks in the back (the ball is out of the “dead zone”), all players on the attacking team must push up to vacate the “dead zone” on command of an inside back yelling to “push up”.

The field players on the attacking team are not allowed back into the “dead zone” unless an opponent goes into that area. As soon as that defending player is out of that area, the “dead zone” must be vacated by all

players on the attacking team. The keeper on the attacking team can go into the “dead zone” at any time.

Coaching Points When Pressing Vertically on Attack

Each attacking player must get to space to provide a passing option for the first attacker. Stop the game and correct player positioning using coaching in the game if passing lanes are obstructed by a defender. If the playing area seems over crowded, look for a player on the attacking team to pass to a player wide; that is the reason the wide players are outside the grid. Look for players to create short passing options on the attacking team created in triangles on the field. Vertical pressing should present these options. If not, stop the game and re-position the attacking players.

HORIZONTAL PRESSING EXERCISE 3

Horizontal Compression When Defending

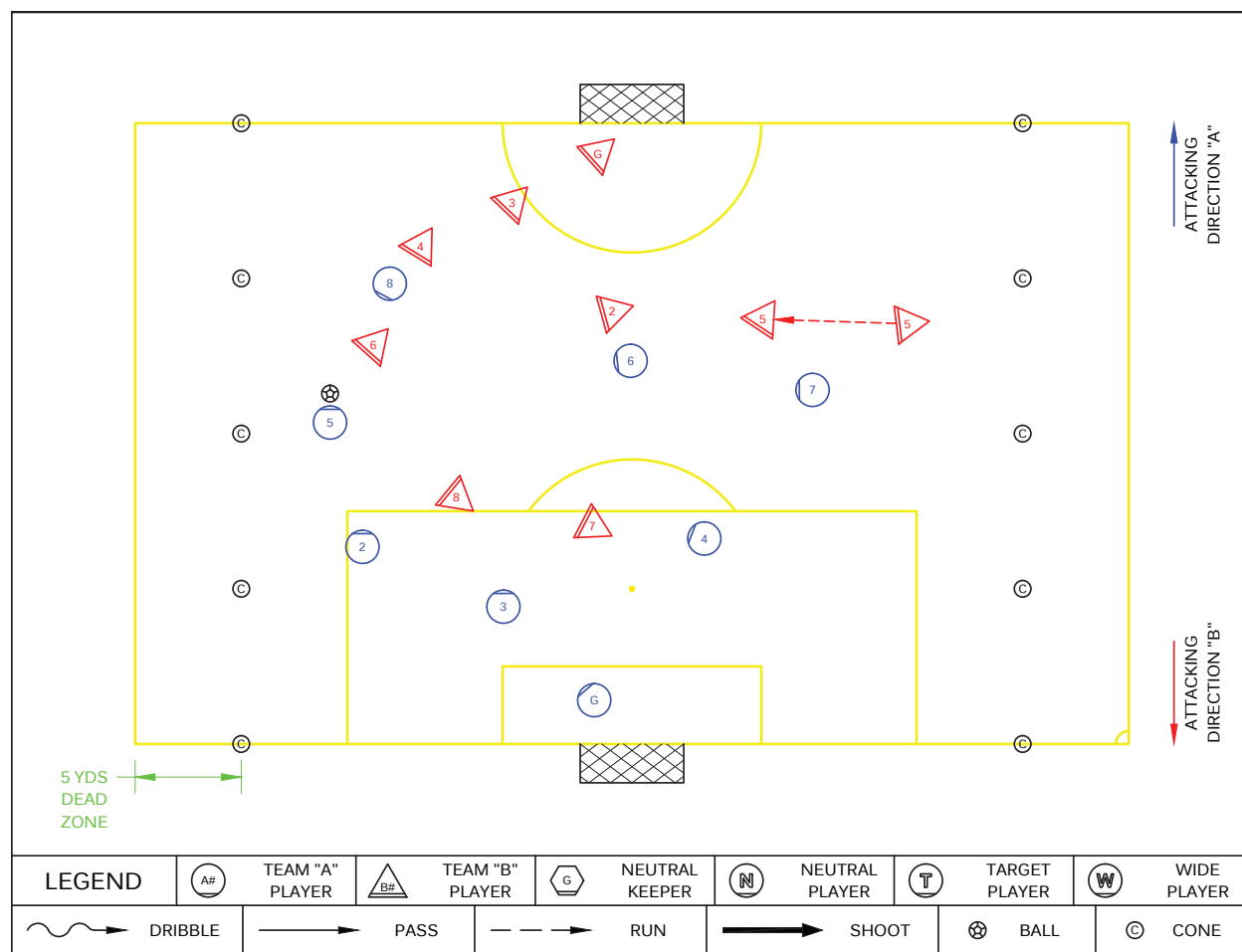


Diagram 80

As shown in Diagram 80, this exercise is basically set up the same as Exercise 1 in this chapter except that the “dead zone” is now vertical, from end line to end line in both outside channels, with the dead zone boundary about five yards parallel to each side line. There are no wide players outside the grid in this exercise. Other than this change in placement of the “dead zone”, the rest of the physical set up, player set up, passing requirements and the way the game is started, remains the same as in Exercise 1.

The game starts with a ball passed from the keeper to a back on the attacking team. During the run of play, the weak side player on the defending team must compress horizontally to a man, mark that man, and then hand him off when appropriate. However, this is only done if that weak side player does not have an opponent in his outside channel up field as shown in Diagram 81.

As the play progresses, a weak side winger, usually a mid, yells “press” and all weak side teammates compress inside toward the ball as a synchronized unit. The weak side winger must compress to a man as noted above. If the ball is switched, then the other winger (now the weak side winger on the other side of the field) yells “press” and the weak side teammates compress inside as a unit. Basically, the weak side players are constantly compressing inside during the run of play, cutting passing lanes, and trying to take the ball by shrinking the attacking team’s playing space. As the ball moves to the other side of the field,

the roles of the wingers changes as shown in Diagram 82.

For the purpose of this exercise, the press is called by the weak side winger when the ball moves into an outside channel (the strong side) created by the line of disks on the grid. That is the visual cue to be used by the weak side outside player calling the press. The weak side winger that called the press is usually the widest man after the press is set and the players are positioned.

Coaching Points When Pressing Horizontally on Defense

Remember that at the time of the press during this exercise, the pressing team is defending. So the wing player calling the press will move to a man, not to space so long as an opponent is not in his channel up field requiring a mark. Stop play and correct using coaching in the game if the weak side winger does not loudly yell “press” when the ball is in the opposite outside channel. Also, make sure that other players on the defending team are following the lead of the weak side winger and are compressing laterally or diagonally to space, inside. The press must be quick with all defending players moving in unison.

HORIZONTAL PRESSING EXERCISE 4

Horizontal Compression When Attacking

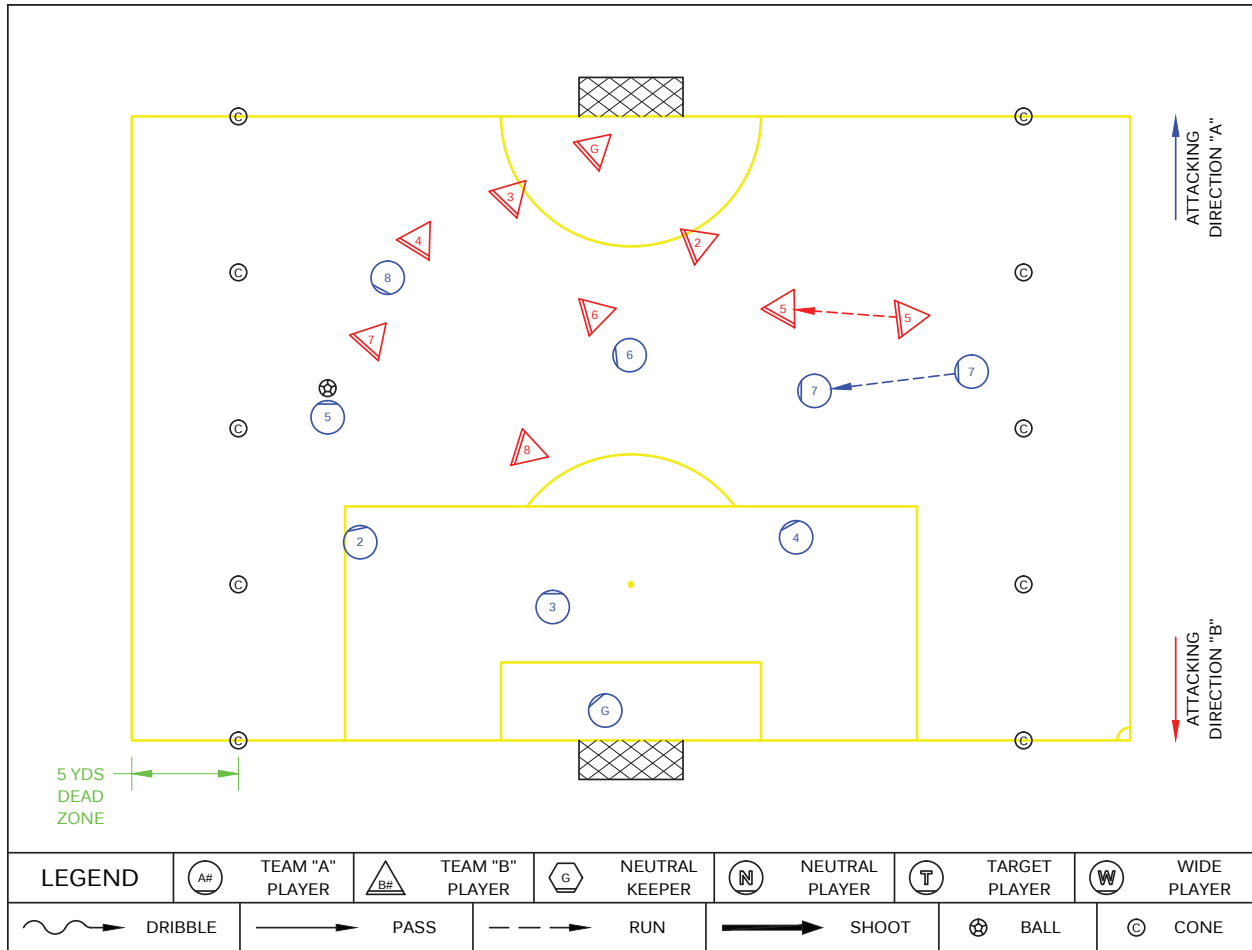


Diagram 81

The focus of this exercise is pressing during the attack in order to get more attacking players around the ball to create tight space, tiki-taka type passing options in triangles for the attacking team.

As shown in Diagram 81, this exercise is set up exactly the same as Exercise 3. In this exercise, the weak side player presses horizontally to space for the purpose of getting closer to the play, that is, to get involved in the play by creating additional passing options for the first attacker.

In this exercise, as soon as the ball reaches an outside channel created by the vertical line of disks, a weak side outside player calls the press as shown in Diagram 82. The weak side players press toward the strong side to create passing options during the run of play. The only difference between this exercise and the previous exercise is the purpose of calling the press.

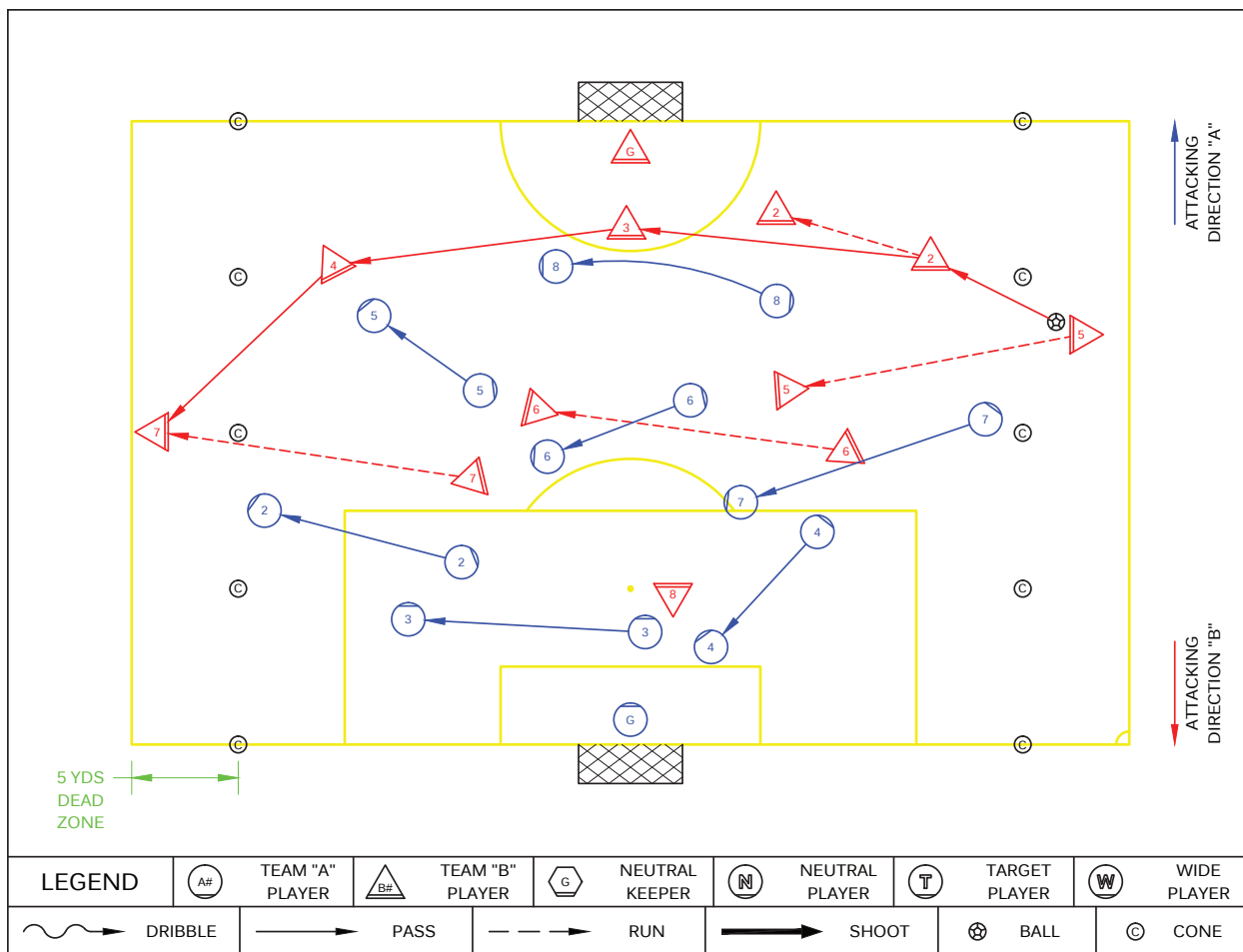


Diagram 82

For Exercises 3 and 4, the strong side vertical lane created by the disks can be used as a playing area at all times; the weak side vertical lane should be totally cleared of all players on the pressing team after the players are positioned on the field after the horizontal press.

Coaching Points When Pressing Horizontally on Attack

Though usually the weak side outside mid wing player calls the press, the weak side wing player whether that be an outside back, outside mid, or a wide forward on the weak side of the play can call the press depending on the placement of the ball at the time a press is used. If a “press” is called the pressing movement of an outside back is usually diagonal and up field; the run of an outside mid is usually horizontal; and the run of an outside forward is usually diagonal and down field toward the strong side.

All runs are from the weak side to the strong side. All runs are to space, ending away from, not near, an opponent creating a passing option for the first attacker.

For both offensive and defensive pressing, always impose the basic rule that a team presses on defense to mark and to cut passing lanes of the attacking team; and on offense to get to space to create passing lanes for the first attacker. Never press too far horizontally on offense or defense to defeat this basic purpose of the press.

CHAPTER 11

Training Theme 11

Combination Play—Teaching players to move the ball on attack in very tight space using give and go passes, wall passes, and basic 1-2 passes during the run of play. The off the ball runners must be available for a pass as triangles are created by these players around and near the first attacker. This chapter covers different concepts than mere possession. This chapter discusses a form of possession involving a small group of players around the ball in which the first attacker makes a pass and is in a position for a pass back combination play. This is an attacking concept.

What is a give and go?

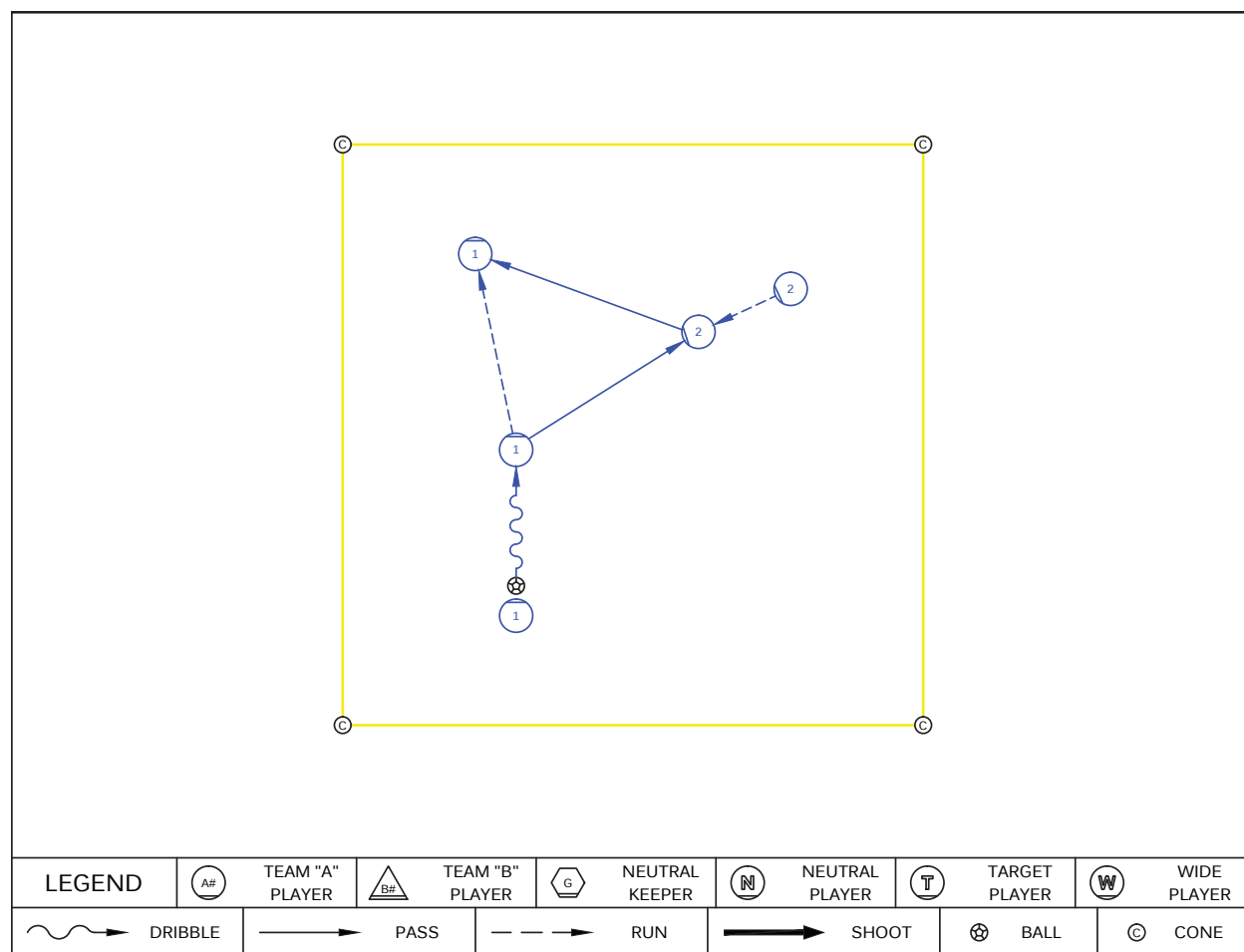


Diagram 83

As shown in Diagram 83, a “give and go” series of passes starts with the first attacker in possession of the ball making a pass to a moving teammate during the run of play and that receiver passes the ball back to the passer. Both players are moving during the passing sequence and the movement is usually forward toward dangerous space.

When the first attacker makes his pass to a supporting receiver, many times an inexperienced defender will follow the ball leaving the passer open for a pass back from the receiver. So long as the first defender chases the ball to the receiver, the passer will be open, in space, for a pass back. A give and go is fluid in

that the passer moves to space, even just few feet, in order to evade any defender nearby, especially to evade a good defender who stays with his man (the passer) rather than chasing the ball.

Because both players in the give and go are usually moving, this is a difficult combination to defend against. A defender's first instinct will be to chase the ball and the first attacker's first instinct will be to move to open space just after his pass. These natural player tendencies favor the attacking team making the give and go a deadly weapon to move the ball into dangerous space.

The pass to the receiver during a give and go must be to space with touch, not to feet with pace. The receiver must be able to run on to the ball as it is moving in space. Both players in the give in go are moving forward. A pass to feet would defeat the purpose of the give and go.

What is a wall pass and how is it different than a give and go?

The wall pass is different than a give and go, technically, though the effect of the wall pass is usually the same as the give and go. During the wall pass, one player, the wall, that is the receiver, is stationary at the time the pass is received. During the give and go, the receiver is moving.

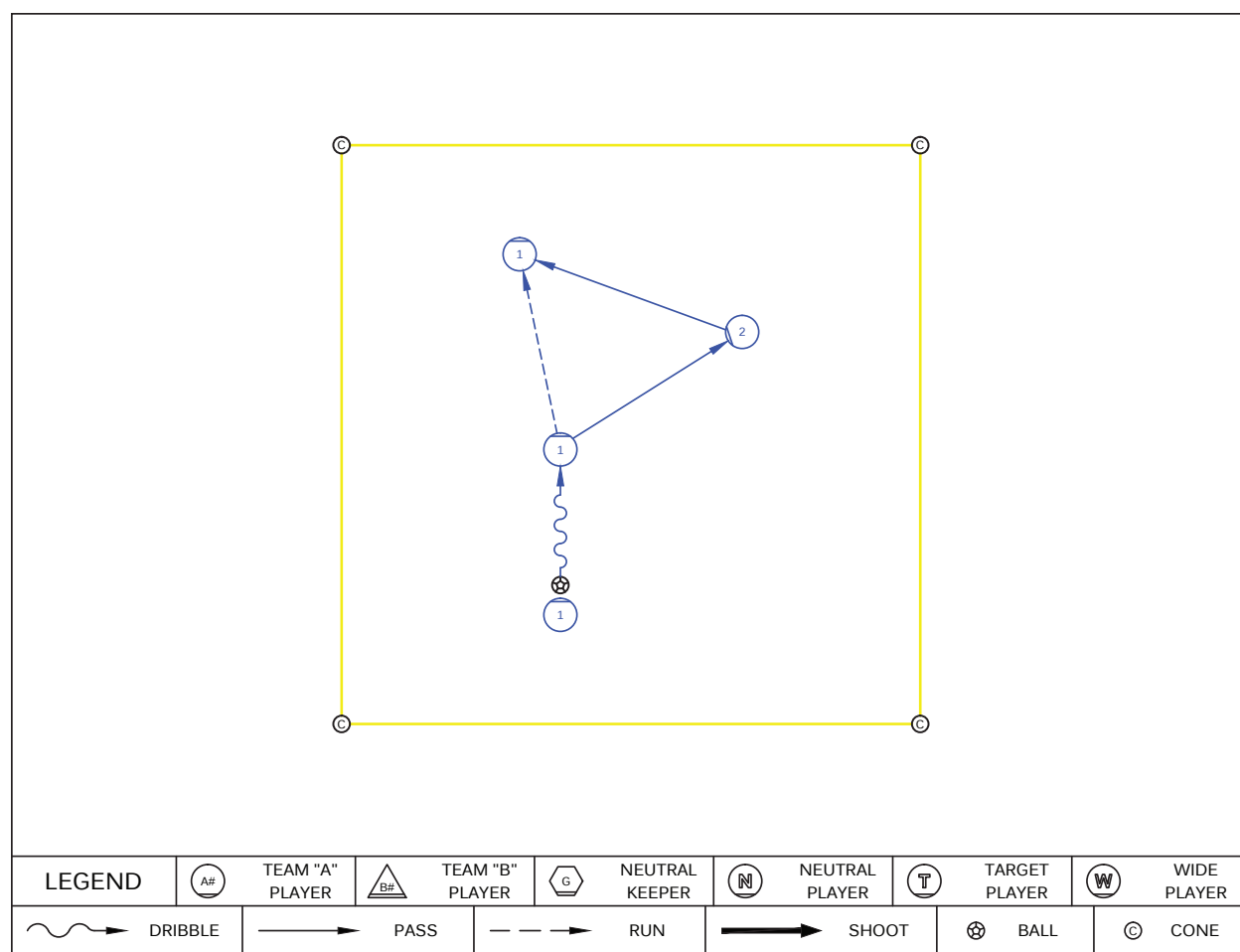


Diagram 84

As shown in Diagram 84, the wall is usually wide of the passer, stationary in open space ready to receive a pass. There is usually more open space wide, out of the goal channel, during the run of play allowing the wall (receiver) to use space to provide a passing option for the first attacker.

The wall, that is the receiver’s body position must, and I repeat must, be open to the passer and to the place where the passer will make his run to receive a pass back from the wall player. If the receiver’s body is not open to the passer and to the place where the passer will make his run, the wall pass will be difficult to accomplish and usually result in an interception. The basic rule for a successful wall pass is to teach players to play the way they are facing.

The wall pass is a one touch combination play because the receiver is stationary and can be stripped of the ball if it is not played quickly, one touch, off of the foot of the receiver, back to the passer. This combination is made easier if the defender on the first attacker follows the ball rather than staying with the passer. The wall is stationary but the first attacker, that is, the passer, moves to space just after the pass is made. The passer must get open to space ready to receive a one touch return pass from the wall.

The pass to the wall must be to feet with pace because the wall is stationary, but, the pass from the wall to the receiver must be to space with touch so that this receiver can run onto the ball as it is moving. The ball to the wall must be with pace but properly weighted so that it is not difficult to pass back. An over weighted ball will result in a bad pass back and an under weighted ball will result in an interception while attempting to accomplish a wall pass.

What is a basic 1-2 pass during the run of play?

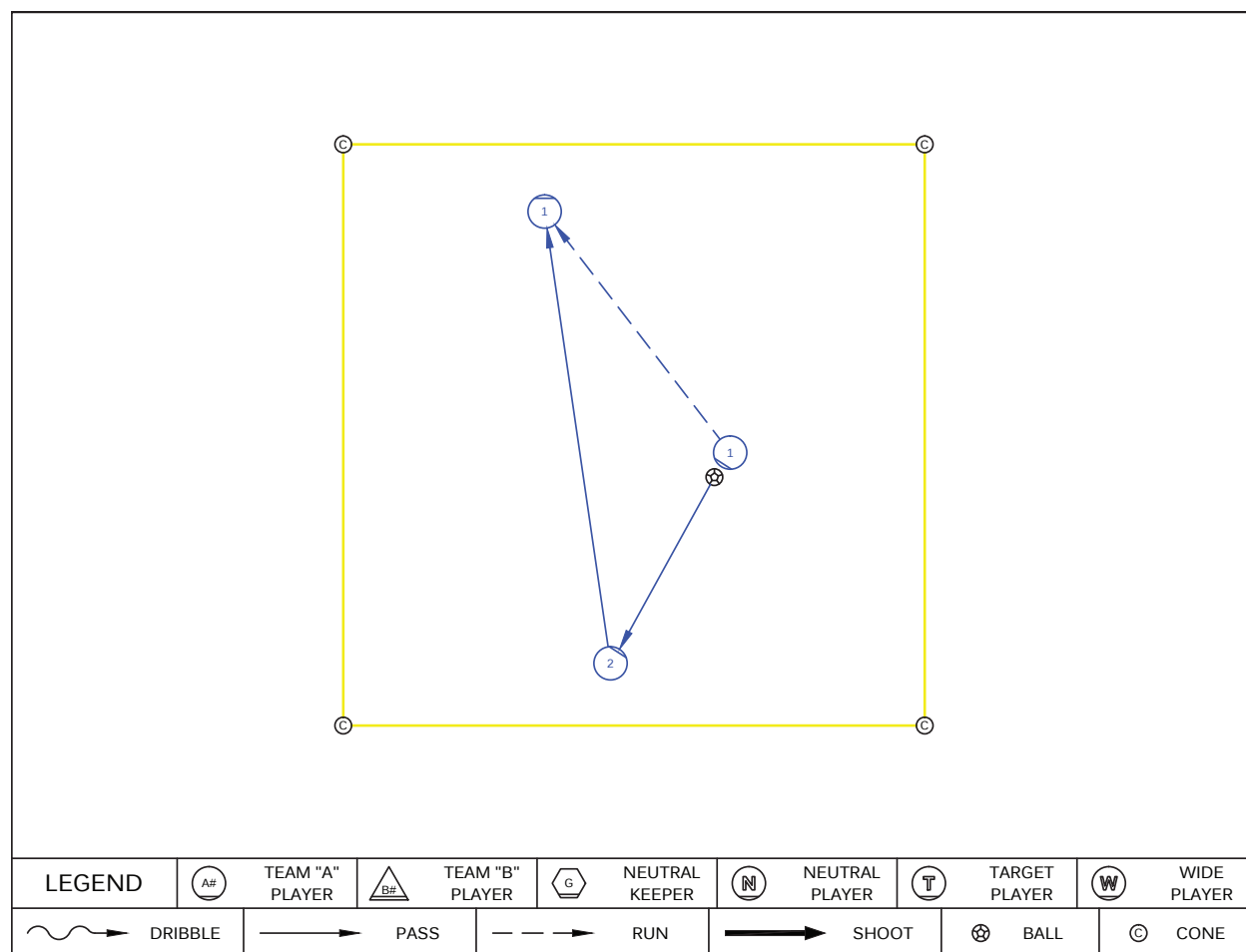


Diagram 85

A basic 1-2 pass covers a give and go, a wall pass, and any other combination of at least two players moving the ball in any direction from passer to receiver and back again, for the sole purpose of maintaining possession of the ball. So a wall pass, for example, is a 1-2 combination but not every 1-2 combination is a wall pass.

In addition to a standard give and go and a standard wall pass, a 1-2 combination could involve two attacking players both stationary at the time of the passes between them. As shown in Diagram 85, a 1-2 could be a “bounce back” pass in which the first attacker, player 1, hits a heavily weighted ball vertically back on the ground to a teammate, player 2, who immediately, one touch, “bounces” (passes) the ball up field and vertical to player 1 usually but not always, in the air (a flighted ball). A bounce back pass is a 1-2 combination used to advance the ball after the ball is passed backwards by player 1. One or both players could be stationary or one or both players could be moving.

The bounce back pass is usually effective as a 1-2 combination because player 2, the receiver, is deeper than player 1, the passer, and there is a good chance that player 2 will be open in space as the play is developing ahead of him. Player 2 will have time to determine how to hit a good ball to player 1 as player 1 runs onto it into open space ahead of him.

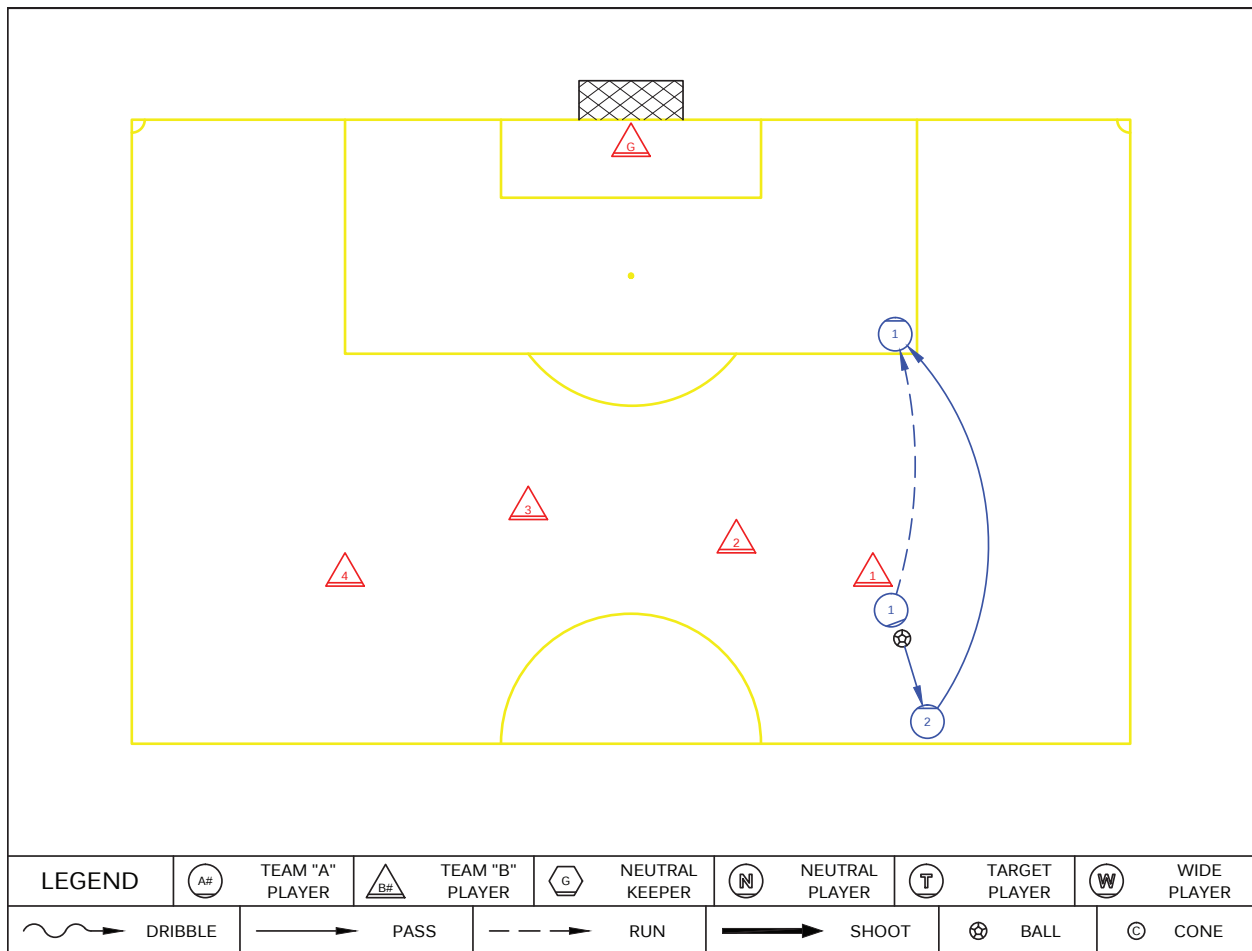


Diagram 86

The bounce back pass can be a flighted ball over the top of the opponent’s line of defense in order to get behind that line (see Diagram 86) or on the ground to one side or the other of player 1 into open space

as a through ball or to split defending players (see Diagram 87) during the run of play. Player 2 will want to accomplish the bounce back pass one touch, and player 1 will want to immediately make a run to open space forward at the time the back pass is made. The bounce back pass is an effective 1-2 to get the ball up field very quickly.

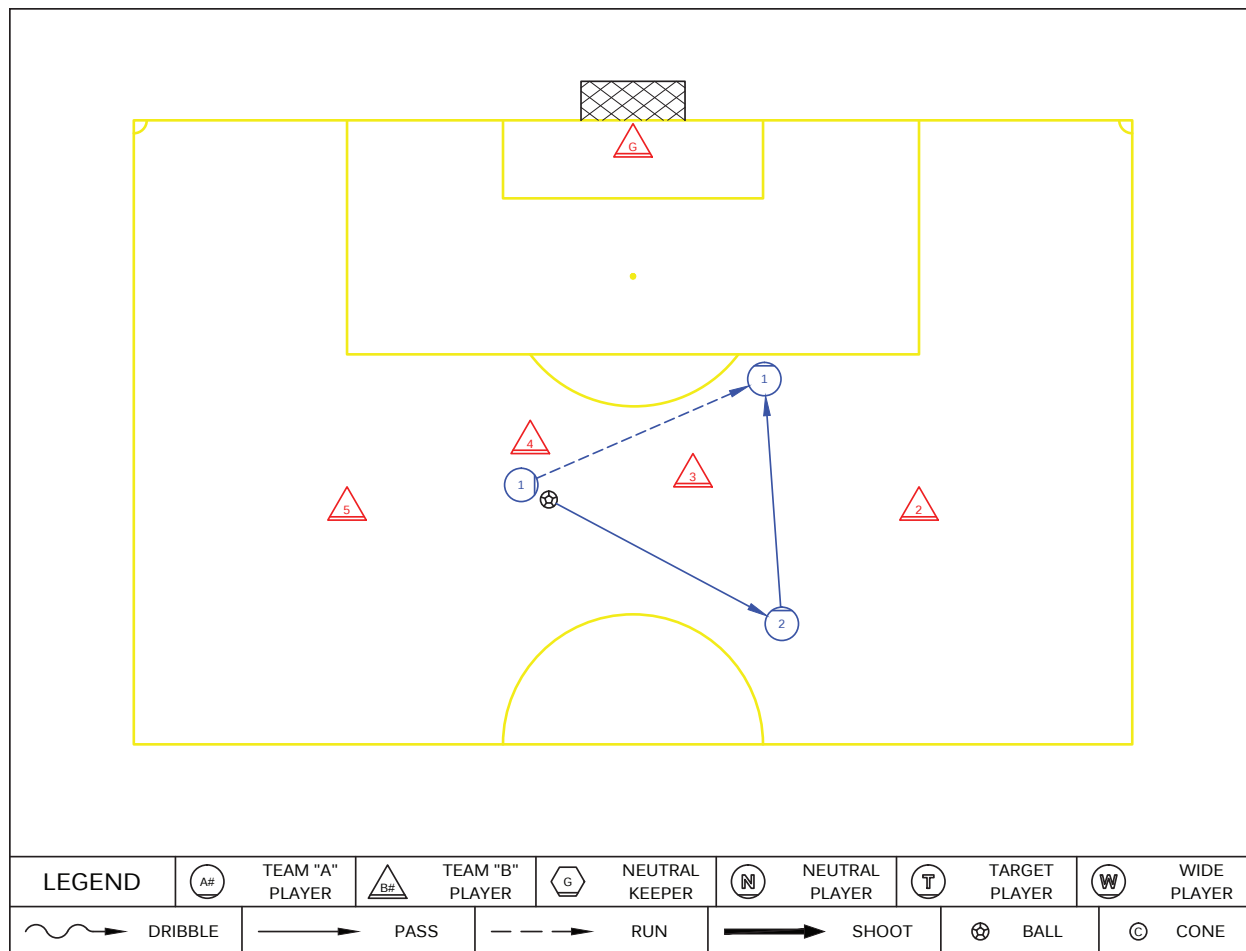


Diagram 87

Elements of Combination Play

If the combination play requires a pass to feet, teach players to pass with pace (heavily weighted ball);

If to space, pass with touch;

The purpose of quick combination passes is to advance the ball, up field as a first option;

If a defender does not chase the pass and follows the passer and is in a position cutting the passing lane to complete the 1-2, instruct players not complete it because the defender might intercept the pass;

The receiver's body positioning must be open to the ball and to the place where he intends to pass the ball on a 1-2;

If the 1-2 is of the type that requires a run to space after the initial pass, that run to space must be made immediately and quickly in order to evade a defender.

COMBINATION PLAY EXERCISE 1

The Wall Pass as a 1-2 Combination

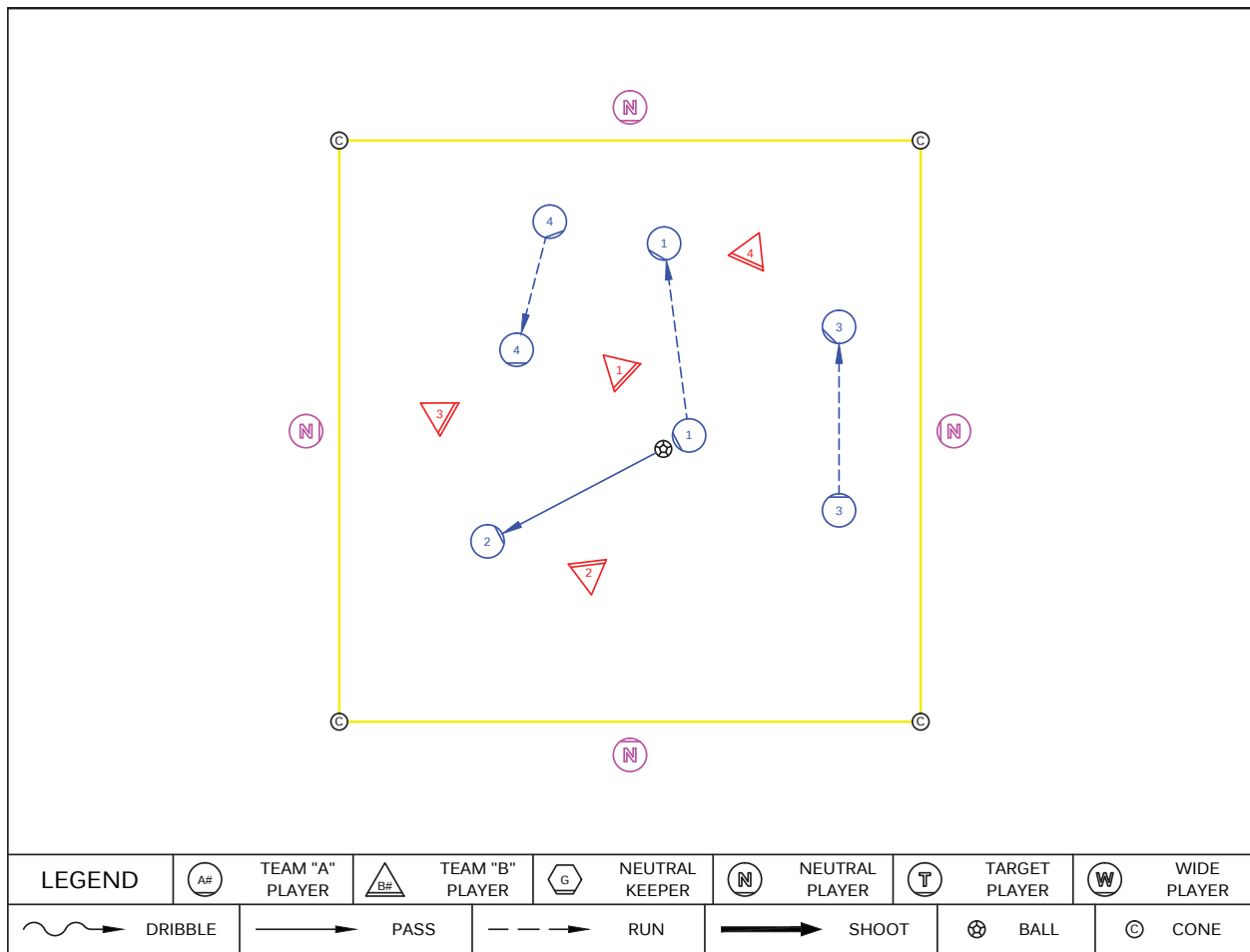


Diagram 88

As shown in Diagram 88, set up a grid of about 30 yards by 30 yards, two teams in bibs except for four neutral players (no bibs). Place one neutral player at each side of the grid with the balance of the players in the center of the grid. There are no touch or pass restrictions for this exercise except for the neutral players who are restricted to only one touch.

In this first exercise, each neutral player is the “wall” in a 1-2 wall pass. The players inside the grid play non directional possession and each time the first attacker is under heavy pressure without passing lanes inside the grid, he can pass the ball outside the grid to a neutral wall player who must pass the ball back to the passer sprinting to space using only one touch. See Diagram 89.

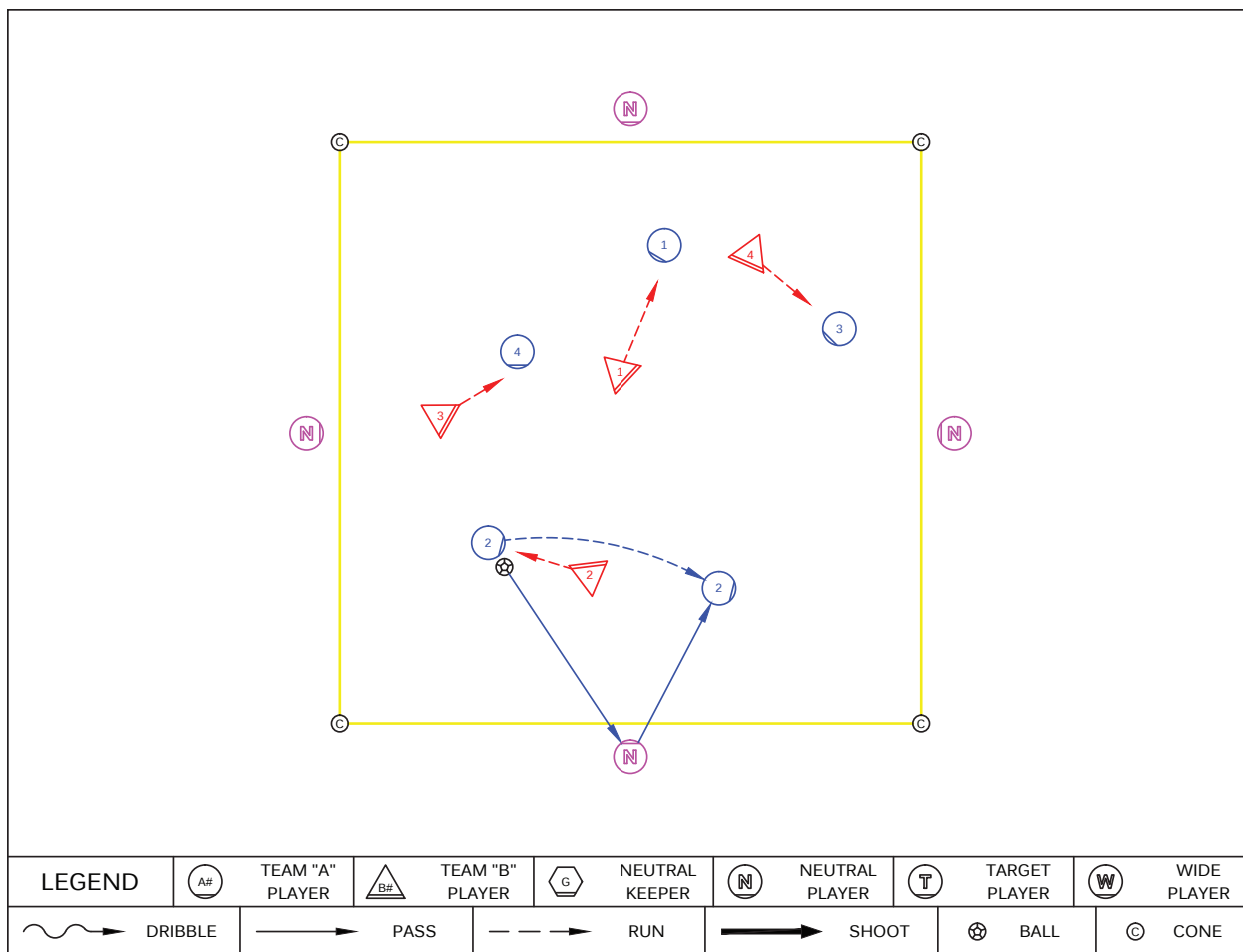


Diagram 89

The first attacker must make the pass to the neutral and then sprint a few yards to open space in the grid. As soon as he collects the pass from the neutral, he can continue possession play in the grid. The opponent team can try to disposes the team in possession at any time by taking the ball as a first defender, cutting passing lanes, etc. The object of this game is to hold possession of the ball using quick passes but also using a neutral for a wall pass if needed to maintain possession. The neutrals cannot enter the grid but they can move laterally up and down the line, outside the grid until they are ready to receive a wall pass at which time they must be stationary. Encourage players on both teams inside the grid to use the neutral players often.

Coaching Points Regarding the Wall Pass as a 1-2 Combination

The player that is passing to the wall must pass with pace to feet and then sprint a few yards to receive the return pass in space. The body position of the receiver must be open to the ball and open to where he will pass the ball. The passer and receiver must keep their head up to see the field. If a defender follows the player passing to the wall, the wall player should not pass back to the passer.

ball and to the place where the ball will be passed. Both players must have their head up at the time of the first pass. The first pass must be to space with touch so that the receiver can run onto the ball without breaking stride. The two players involved in the give and go move before, during, and after the first pass.

COMBINATION PLAY EXERCISE 3

The Bounce Back Pass as a 1-2 Combination

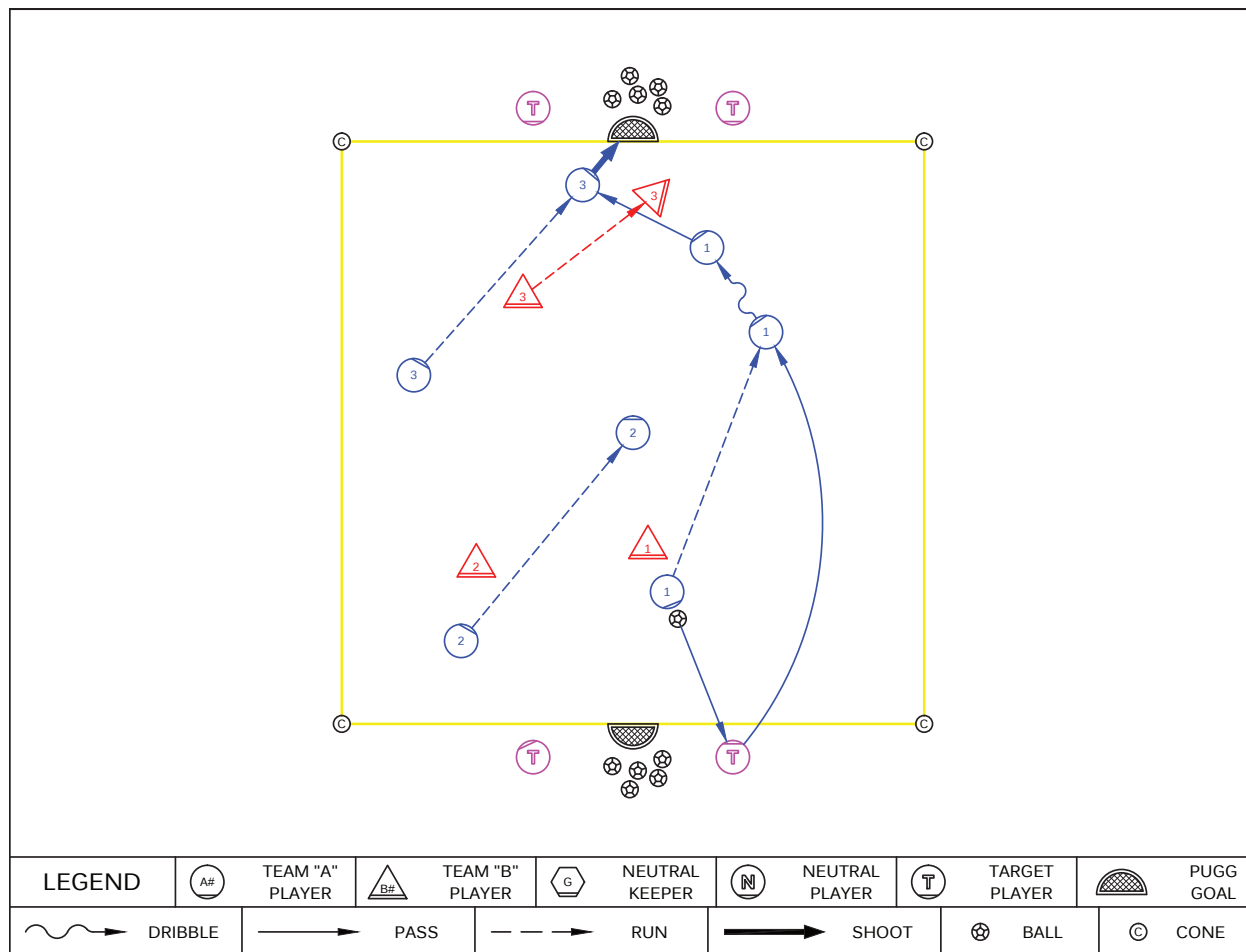


Diagram 91

As shown in Diagram 91, this exercise is set up the same as Exercise 2. However, add an additional target at each end line (two targets per end line, no bibs for the targets) and add a small Pugg type net between the targets at the end lines. Add plenty of balls behind the Pugg nets on both sides of the grid.

The targets are now the receivers of the back pass and they bounce the ball back (pass it, one touch upon receipt) to accomplish a “bounce back” to the passer up field. This game is directional. The team in possession can only score on the goal after accomplishing two bounce back passes and must score after the third bounce back pass without losing possession of the ball. In other words, the team in possession goes to goal, preferably working wall passes and give and goes, for a shot on goal. After a shot on goal, a target passes the ball wide to a back on the other team and the game starts again. If the shot goes in the net, the target uses a new ball. The pass from the target must be quick and one touch so that there is no delay in the game action.

Coaching Points Regarding the Bounce Back Pass as a 1-2 Combination

The pass to the receiver must be with pace to feet. The pass back (the bounce) must be either flighted or on the ground to split defenders, usually flighted. The receiver must start the run up field as soon as the back pass is accomplished. The receiver must collect the ball and then move quickly to work combinations

to move the ball up field for a shot on goal. If possible, the receiver should have his back to the passer as he runs onto the ball after the bounce back pass. See Diagram 92.

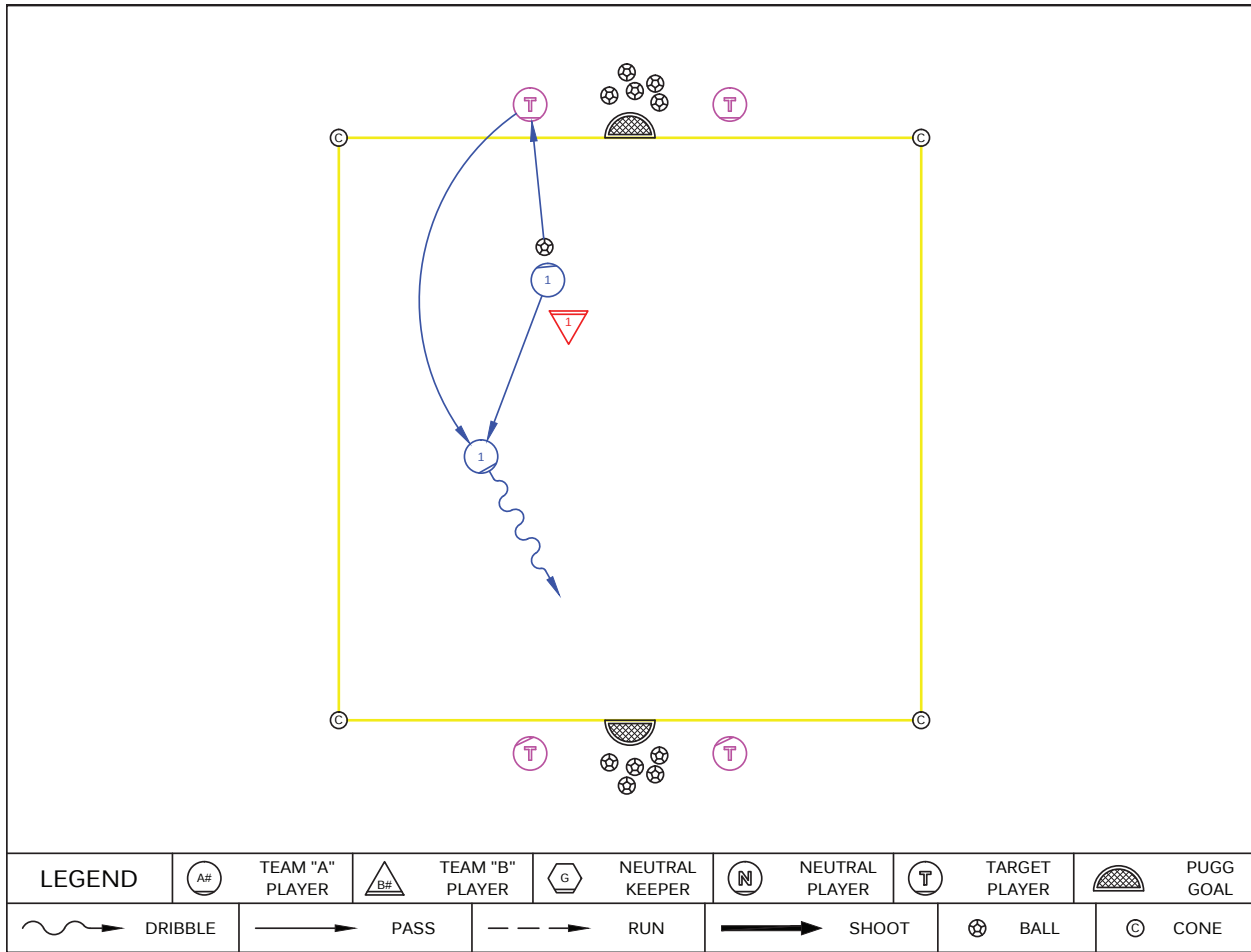


Diagram 92

COMBINATION PLAY EXERCISE 4

The Standard 1-2 Pass as a Combination in Front of Goal

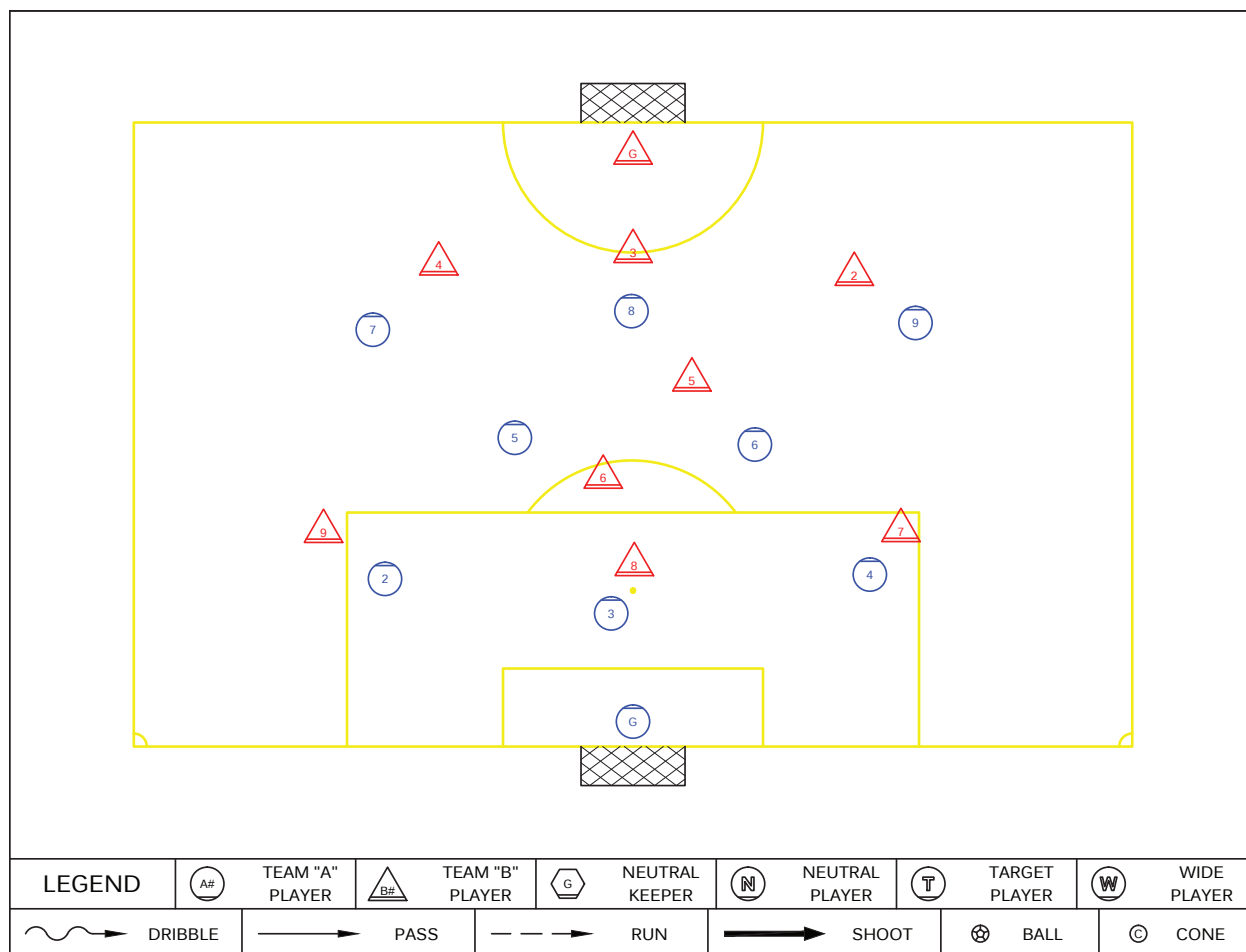


Diagram 93

As shown in Diagram 93, the field set up for this exercise is the same as for Exercise 3 except that full sized goals with keepers are substituted for the small Pugg type nets at each end line, the target players are removed and the game is played on a half field. The players are divided into two teams, in bibs and the game is directional to goals. This is a deviation from the usual morphing because the size of the field must be enlarged.

This game is basically a scrimmage except that all shots must be made by the shooter in the six yard box on one side and from inside the half of the center circle in the grid on the other side; or if you have a half field with two six yard boxes, that would work even better. There is no pass or shot limitation except that the team in possession can only score on the second part of a 1-2 combination. In other words, the last receiver of a 1-2 is allowed to shoot on goal. No other shots on goal are allowed and that receiver must take the shot from within the six yard box or from within that part of the center circle in the half field grid. If a coach needs to visualize this game, it is basically tiki-taka, quick pass and quick movement possession type movement used by teams like Barcelona in the vital area on attack. See Diagram 94 for a visual.

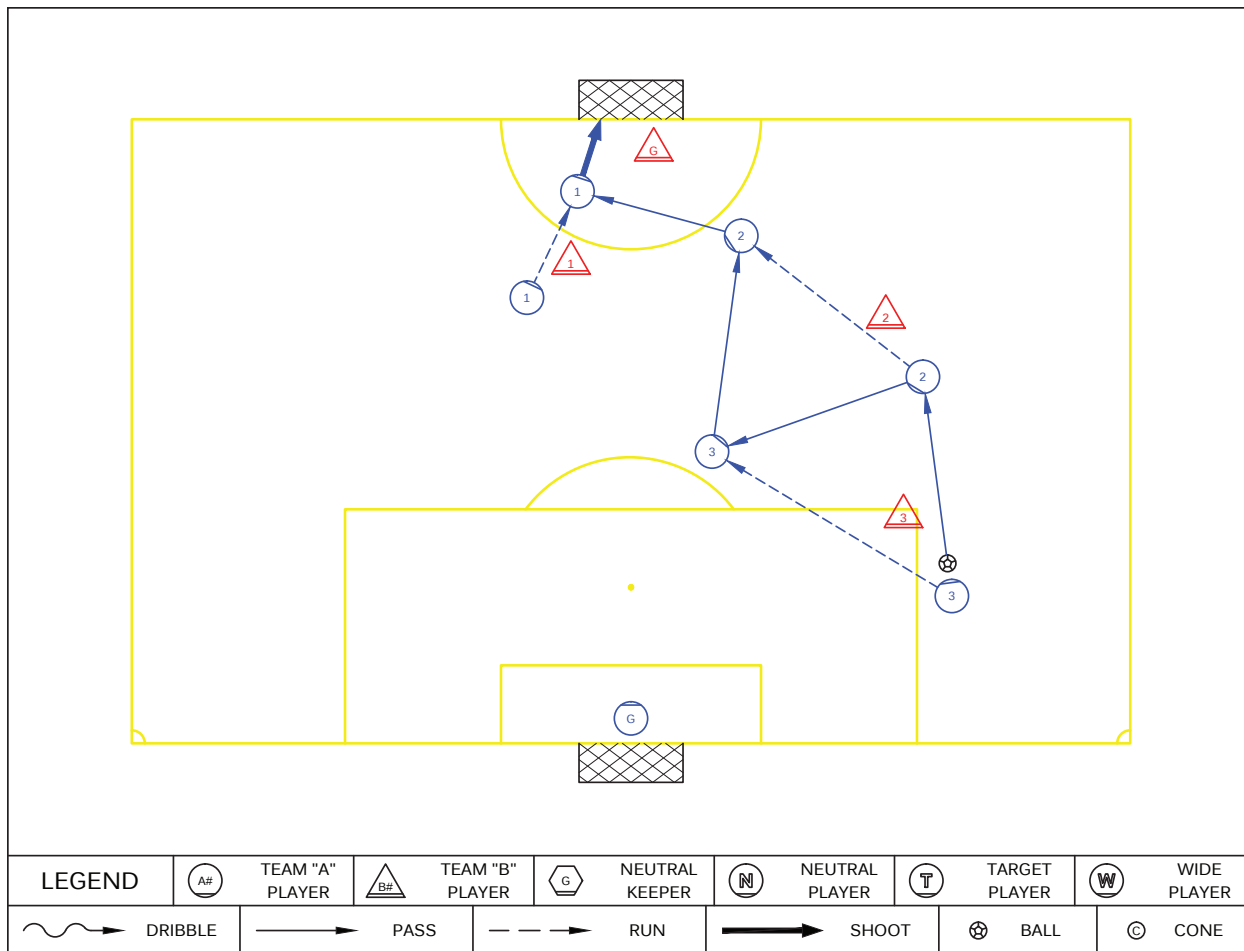


Diagram 94

Coaching Points Regarding the Standard 1-2 Pass as a Combination in Front of Goal

Passes in front of goal to set up a scoring opportunity must be very, very quick, usually to feet because space will be very tight. Off the ball runs by the players using combinations must be quick and short. Watch for players to send short through balls with the receiver holding on sides and then running onto the ball into the vital area for a shot; or passes that split defenders to create a scoring opportunity very near the goal mouth.

CHAPTER 12

Training Theme 12

Check Runs—Teaching when and how to check to the ball, or to check away from the ball, when attacking.

Checking to the Ball

Checking to the ball is more common than checking away from the ball during the run of play on attack. If a defender is tight on the checking player (committed pressure) then the checking player can clear a few extra feet of space for himself by bending his arm into the defender and pushing him back before checking to the ball as shown in Diagram 95. These few extra feet of space created by pushing the defender might make the difference in collecting or not collecting the ball after the check run; every extra foot of space is important before making the check run.

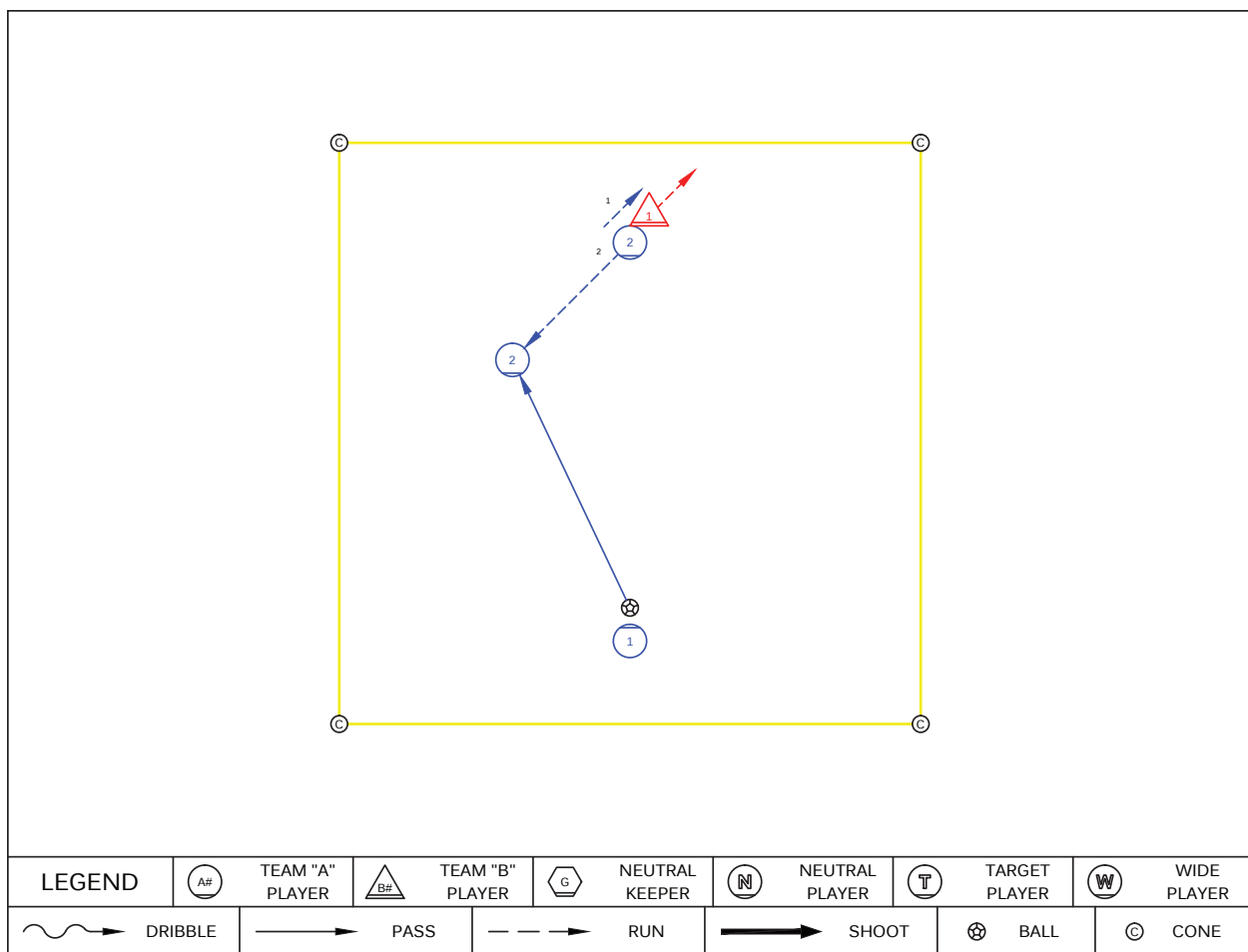


Diagram 95

The rule is simple, have players check away to push the defender back a few feet before they check to if the defender is applying committed pressure. If the checking player does not push the defender off in this way, the defender will have an easy time staying with the checking player making ball collection during the check run more difficult.

If a defender is on the checking player, the run should be made in a way to keep the defender behind or to

the side of the checking player away from the intended path of the ball. The checking player is attempting to avoid or manipulate the defender during the course of the check run. As shown in Diagram 96, evading the defender during the course of a check run might mean that the checking player make a diagonal or a curved run toward the first attacker if necessary to keep the defender out of the intended path of the ball.

If the checking player can get a head start of just a few feet in front of the defender with a slight push back, the check run can be more purposeful because the runner will not have to contend with a bothersome defender trying to intercept the ball or block the first attacker's passing lane.

The visual cues for the checking player when deciding whether to make a curved or diagonal run toward the first attacker to evade the defender are, the body position of the first attacker, the placement of the committed defender, and the placement of other defenders near the playing area.

The first attacker will want to play the ball the way he is facing in order to have a clean view of the checking runner so the most important cue to be digested by the checking runner is the direction that the first attacker is facing. The check run can be straight at the first attacker if the passing lane is open. If not, the check run might need to be diagonal or curved based on the placement of other defenders near the playing area to keep a passing lane open so that the first attacker can play the ball the way that he is facing to the checking runner as shown in Diagram 96.

The checking runner will need to keep the committed defender out of the intended passing lane by beating him with a quick, fast run into that lane or by making a curved run to keep the committed defender out of that lane.

The first attacker will want to play the way he is facing; the checking runner will want to keep passing lanes open for the first attacker by pushing the committed defender away to make a bit of space; and by using curved or diagonal runs in a way to evade other defenders near the playing area. The checking players should show for the ball, left, right, or center using hand gestures as described in an earlier chapter of this book. If all of this can be accomplished quickly, the pass to the checking player will be successful.

Elements of Checking to the Ball on Attack

Teach players to check away before checking to and as checking away;

Push off a committed defender to clear space;

Check in a direction so that the first attacker can play the way he is facing to speed up play;

Show for the ball, left, right or center using hand gestures;

Show for the ball, left, right or center using hand gestures;

Use a diagonal or curved run to open passing lanes for the first attacker. Recognize the visual cues mentioned earlier.

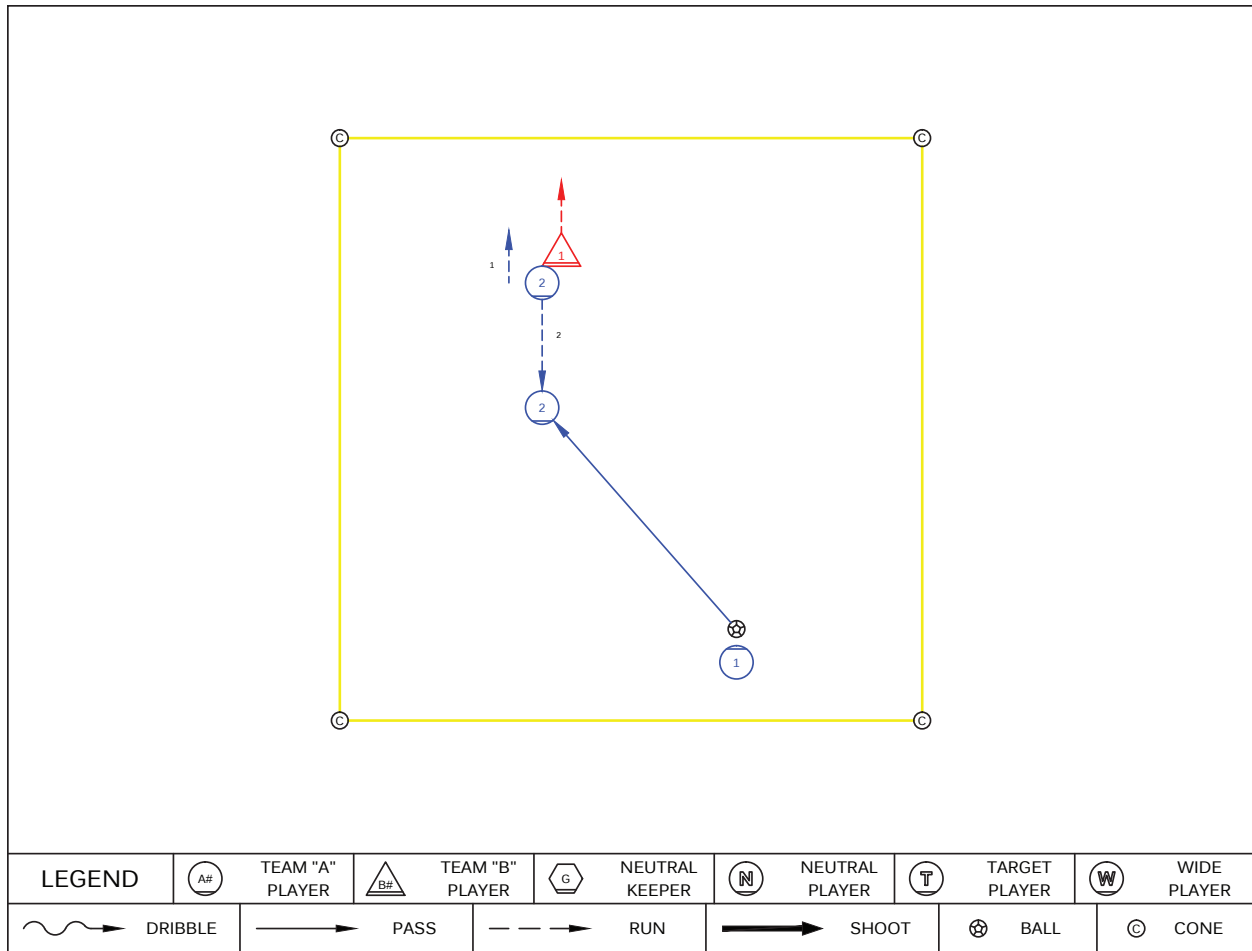


Diagram 96

EXERCISE 1 CHECKING TO THE BALL

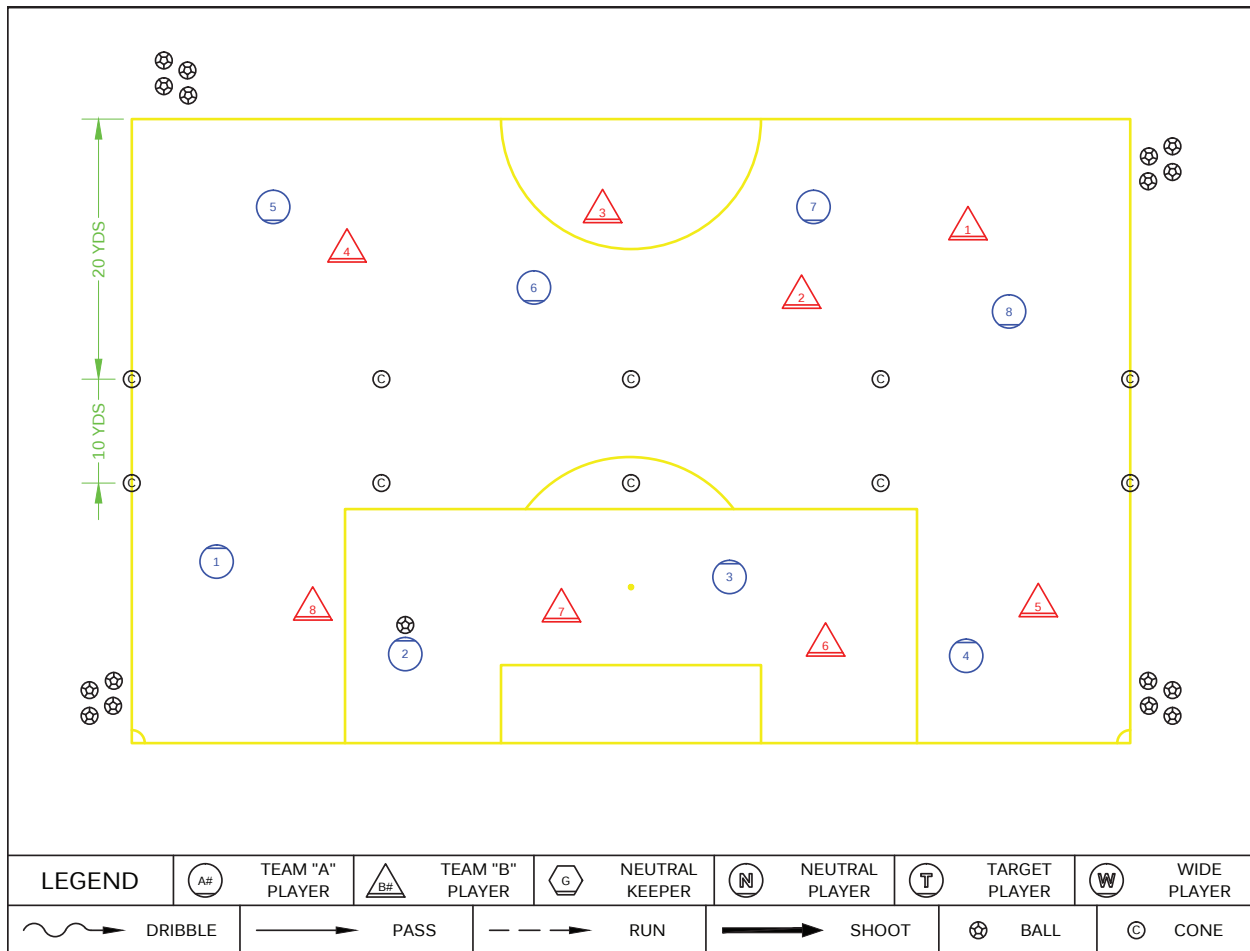


Diagram 97

As shown in Diagram 97, set up a half field grid divided horizontally into three grids using small disks running from side line to side line, no goals. The two outside grids at the end lines should each be 20 yards each and the inside grid should be about ten yards. If more room is available, add size to the two outside grids equally. Put about five balls at each corner, outside the grid.

The players are divided into two equal teams in bibs. An equal number of players from each team occupy the two large grids so that you have an equal number of players opposing each other in the large grids. No players are set up in the smaller, middle grid.

One of the players in one of the large grid takes a ball from the group of balls in the closest corner and passes the ball to a player near the back of the grid. The teams in that grid play possession with the team in possession attempting to hold possession and the other team trying to gain possession. There are no touch limits or passing restrictions.

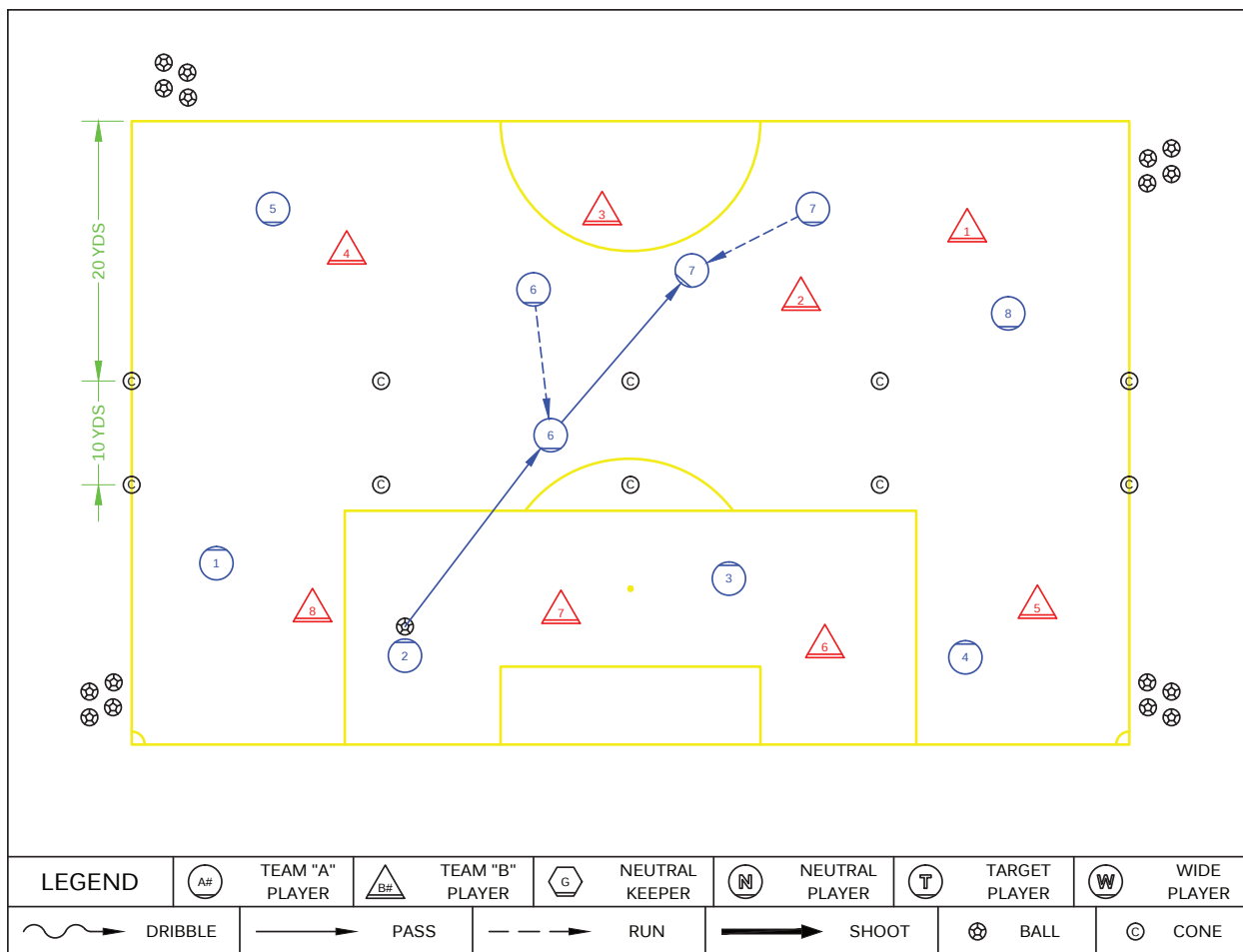


Diagram 98

As shown in Diagram 98, a player from the opposite large grid checks into the small middle grid as soon as one of his teammates from the other grid has possession and, based on the above visual cues, the player with the ball is in a position to pass it to the checking teammate. The checking teammate runs into the small middle grid, shows for the ball and it is passed to him either to feet or to space as directed by his hand gestures to the first attacker—he is the checking runner. The checking runner collects the ball, turns and passes it to a teammate in the opposite grid from where it was passed and the game continues.

Coaching Points to Help the Player that is Checking to the Ball

Check off the defender to create space; push him back. Use diagonal or curved runs to evade defenders. Check to space, not toward or near an opponent. Show for the ball, collect it and pass it.

EXERCISE 2 CHECKING TO THE BALL

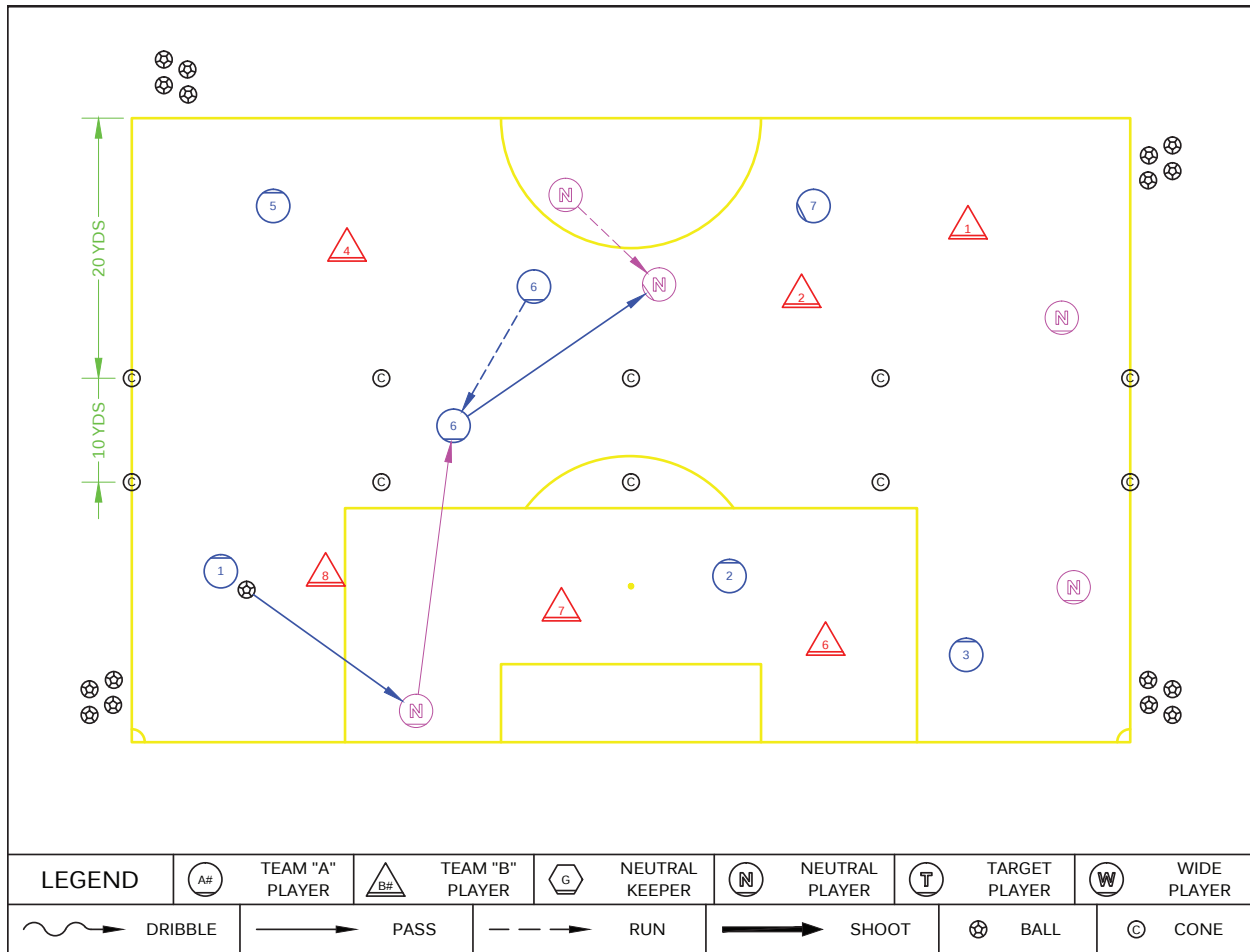


Diagram 99

As shown in Diagram 99, the field set up for Exercise 2 is the same as for Exercise 1 as is the player configuration except that for this exercise two neutral players are used in each large grid, without bibs. There are still two opposing teams of equal numbers in each large grid but each team is reduced by one player as neutrals.

The object of this game is to get the ball to a neutral when that neutral player is in a position facing or so that he can be in a position facing the center grid once this neutral player has the ball. Only a neutral player can pass into the center grid to a checking player from either team. The players in the outside grid not in possession of the ball can only send one player to check to the ball. Once the player in the center grid has the ball, he must turn and attempt to pass the ball to a neutral in his grid and the game continues. Neutrals can only pass to a checking player.

This game adds a number of elements to Exercise 1. The team in possession must now wait for a neutral on the same team to be in a position to accept a ball and send it to a checking player in the center grid. This forces the team with the ball in the grid playing possession to look for visual cues from the neutral player indicating that he is ready to accept a pass and can pass it in the direction of the center grid to a checking player. This also forces the players on the team not in possession to time their check runs so that not more

than one player checks at a time to the center grid and to see that the check run is made at a time when the neutral in the other large grid is ready to pass the ball. This exercise enhances the visual cue elements of checking to the ball.

Checking Away from the Ball

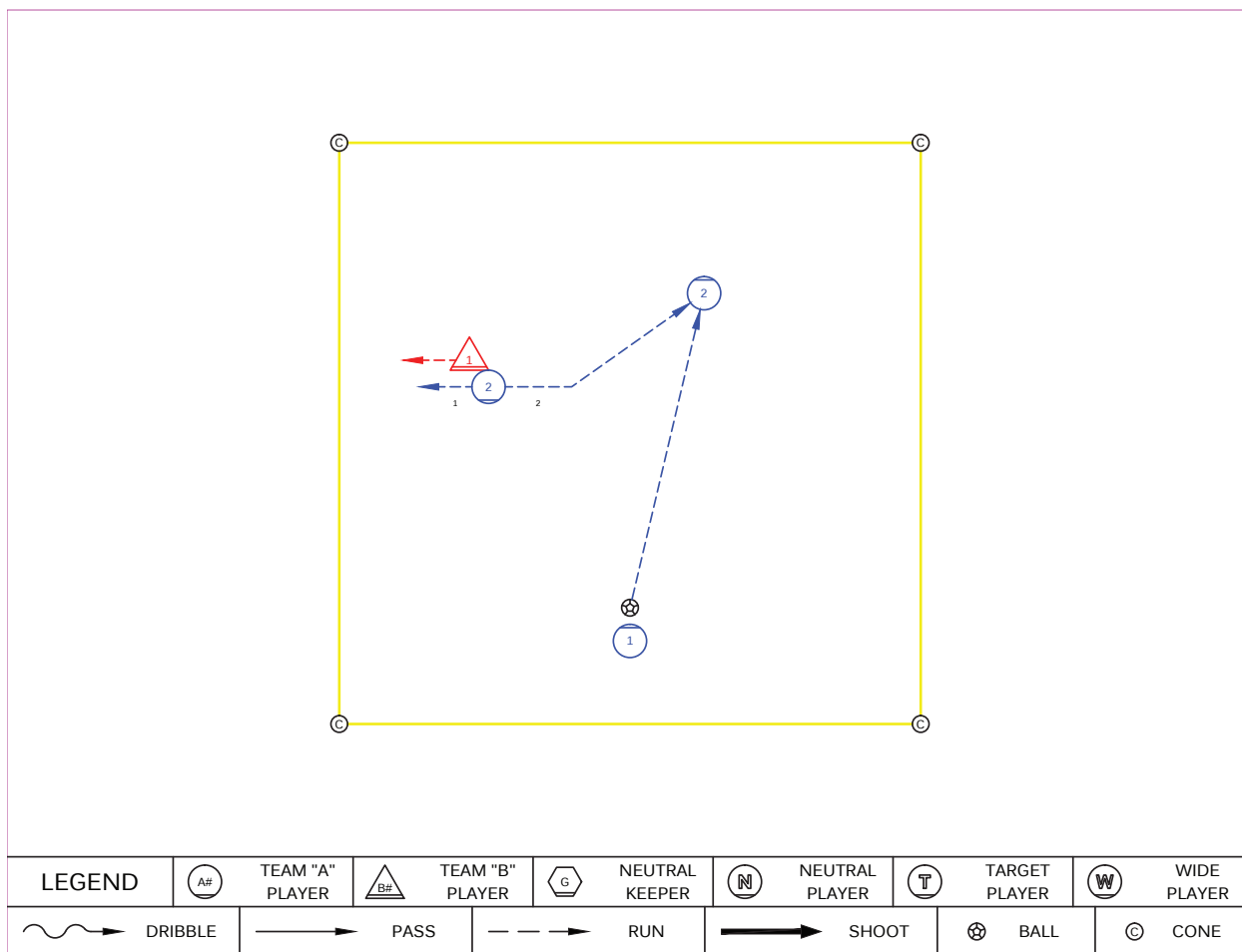


Diagram 100

As mentioned earlier, checking away from the ball is usually used less than checking to the ball during the run of play. As shown in Diagram 100, when checking away, the same concept of first clearing space applies except that the checking player drags a defender toward the ball by making a run toward it and then quickly changes direction checking into space away from the ball. The check away from the ball could be straight, diagonal or curved depending on open space. Many times the checking player will run onto the ball as it is rolling in front of him and he must collect it before a defender occupies available space.

Elements of Checking Away from the Ball on Attack

Teach players to check to the ball before checking away from it to drag a defender to create space;

Use curved or diagonal checking runs;

During the run make sure that the body of the checking player is open to the ball and open to the place that he wants to move the ball;

Check quickly and decisively.

EXERCISE 3 CHECKING AWAY FROM THE BALL

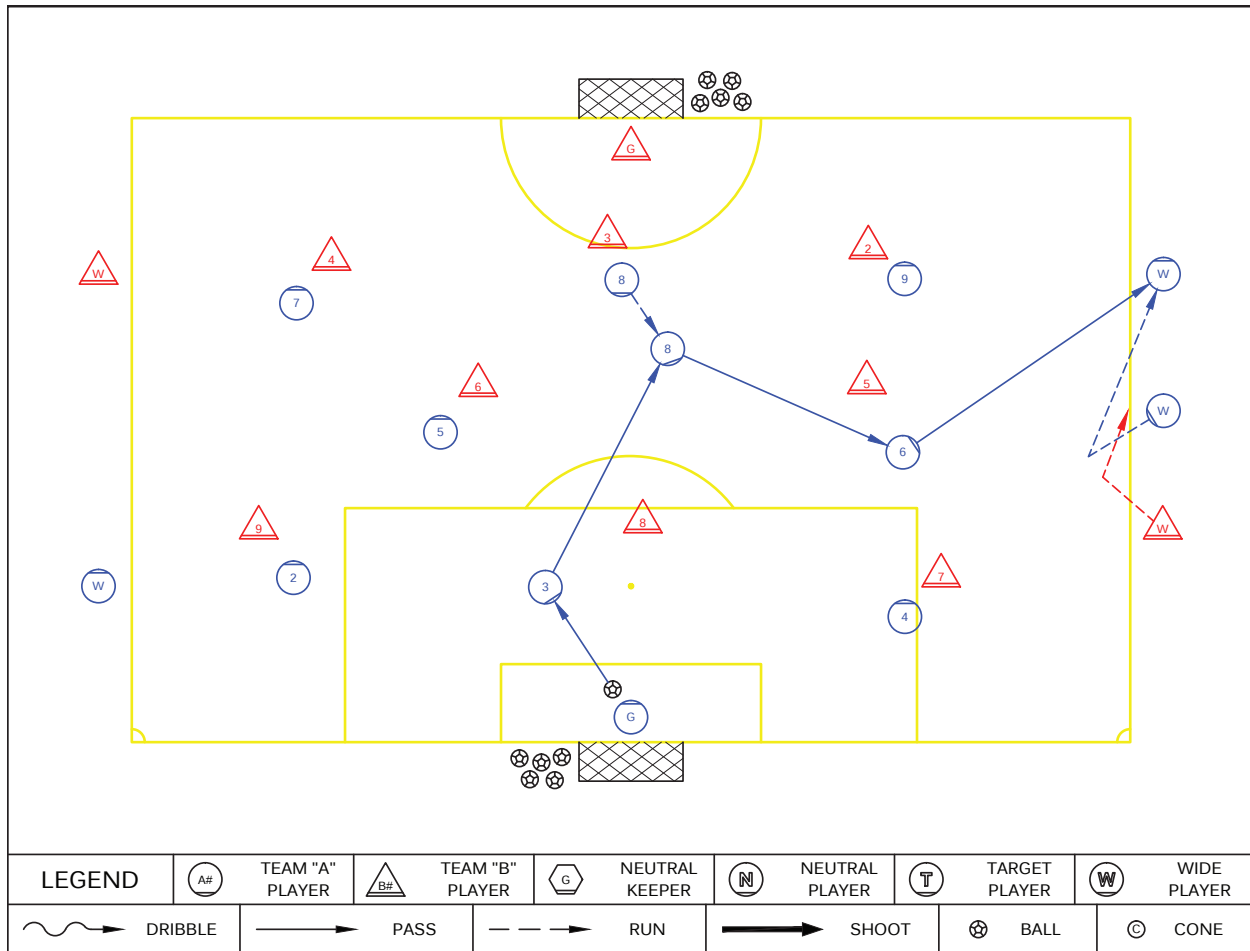


Diagram 101

As shown in Diagram 101, set up a half field grid with two full sized goals with keepers. Divide the players into two teams in bibs who will play directionally to goal. Take four players, two from each team and put them wide of the sidelines with teammates diagonal to each other, that is, the wide player from a team is diagonally across from the other wide player from the same team. Put plenty of balls in the back of each goal.

The teams play directionally to goal and can shoot on goal, no touch restrictions. The game is started by a keeper from one team rolling a ball wide to an inside player on his team. Each team tries to possess the ball and when the ball is in or near an outside channel of the grid and the opportunity presents itself, a wide player from the team in possession checks to the ball inside the grid and then checks away from it to a place outside the grid if possible, wide of the playing field. The opponent outside the grid can follow the player checking to the ball but can only defend inside the grid. So, if the checking player receives the ball inside the grid, the defender can try to take the ball from him but if he receives the ball outside the grid, he is unopposed.

The only player that can defend the checking player during the entire game is the other player from outside the grid from the opposite team, one on one, and only inside the grid. All other players must allow those two players to battle for the ball alone but once the ball is outside the grid, the player with the ball

is unopposed.

Whichever player from outside the grid finally ends up with the ball, that player passes it to a teammate inside the grid and the game continues. The wide players can move anywhere up and down the sideline, vertically. Rotate the wide players using players inside the grid so many players get a chance to make check runs. See Diagram 102 for a full visual of this exercise.

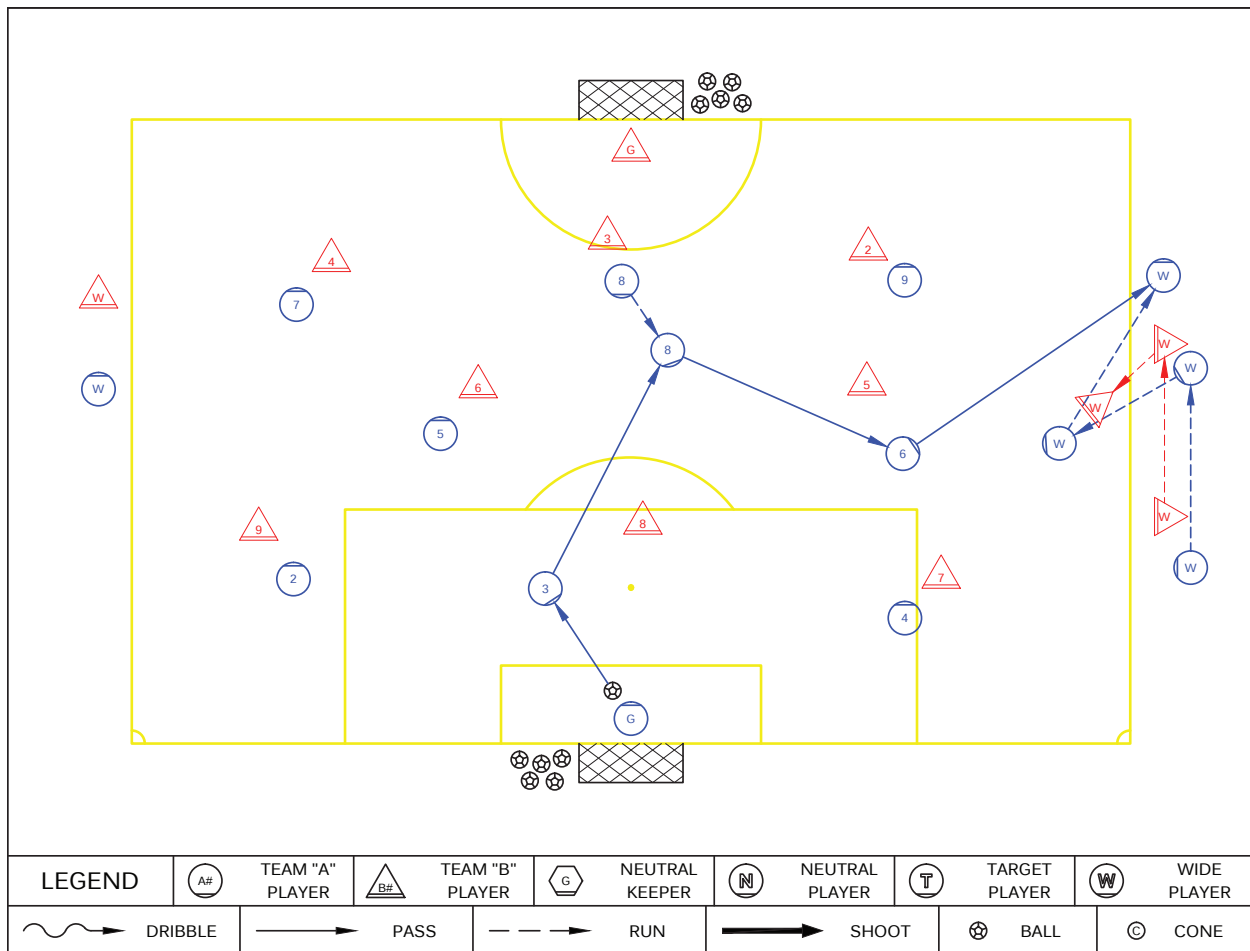


Diagram 102

This exercise allows a checking player to check to the ball and then away from it into guaranteed, un-crowded space which encourages that player to check often. Also, the presence of one defender, will put just enough pressure on the checking player inside the grid to make the game somewhat realistic without discouraging check runs.

Coaching Points to Help the Player that is Checking Away from the Ball

Teach players to check to the ball first to clear space, then check away. Players should make the check run quick and change direction sharply to avoid a defender. Use diagonal and curved runs when checking away to evade the defender. Timing of the check run is important. Check at a time allowing the first attacker to play the way he is facing.

EXERCISE 4 CHECKING AWAY FROM THE BALL

Checking away from the ball

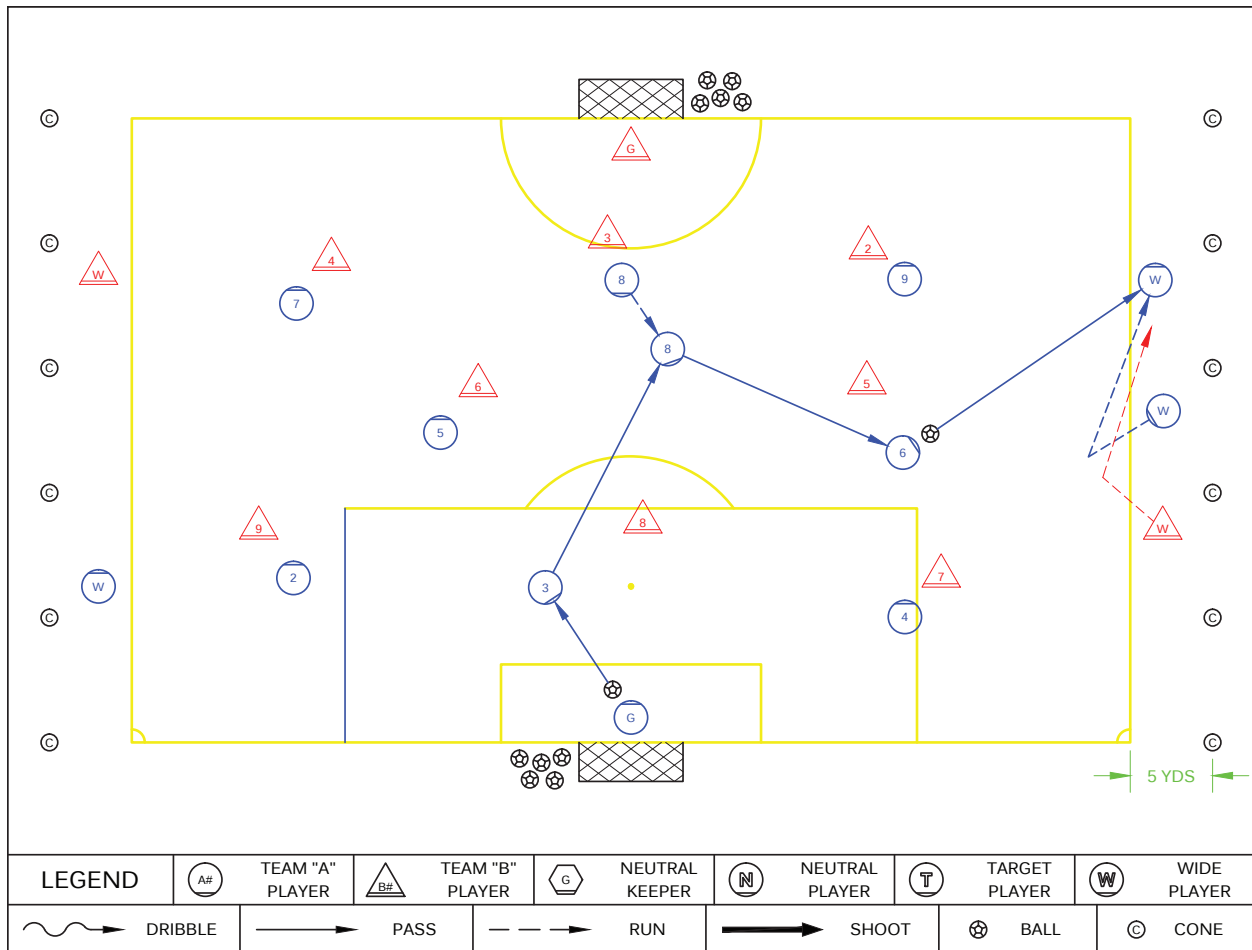


Diagram 103

As shown in Diagram 103, the set up for this exercise is the same as for Exercise 3 except a disk is placed five yards wide of the sidelines as a marker. The checking player follows the same rules as mentioned in Exercise 3 except that in Exercise 4, the wide defender can follow the checking player outside the grid and continue to try to take the ball. So, the wide defender can now attempt to take the ball when it is inside the grid and when it is outside the grid putting more pressure on the checking player. If the ball goes past the disk mentioned above, the play is dead and the game is restarted by the goal keeper from the other team as described in Exercise 3. Diagram 103 provides a full visual of Exercise 4.

CONCLUSION

This book has multiple purposes. First, to help the reader develop a keen sense of efficiency and logical progressions during training sessions in order to get the most out of every session. This is accomplished by providing a concept, morphing, to be used to set up the training field one time per session, and then with only minor changes, step by step, using the same set up for multiple exercises revolving around one theme during the entire session.

Second, each chapter is to be a “one stop shop” for the reader. Each chapter stands alone covering a full training session related to one theme. Each chapter includes an explanation of the elements of each training theme, four theme related small sided games per chapter, pointers and coaching in the game coachable moments—use them during each session. This allows the reader to pick the training theme for the day, learn the technical and tactical elements related to the theme before the training session begins, and then follow the exercises in sequence as morphed quickly from exercise to exercise requiring no more for that training session than what is presented in this book.

The reader is partially utilizing this book if it is used only to learn morphing, or only for its training tips, or only for the training exercises presented by training theme. Each chapter is fully integrated from field set up, to exercises, to elements of, and coaching points for, the training theme of the day. The book should be used to take a team from the start of the training season to the end, training theme by theme, efficiently morphing exercises during a training session from one exercise to the next, seamlessly, so that player imprinting is quick and easy making the job of coaching soccer more satisfying and more fulfilling.

Author Biographies

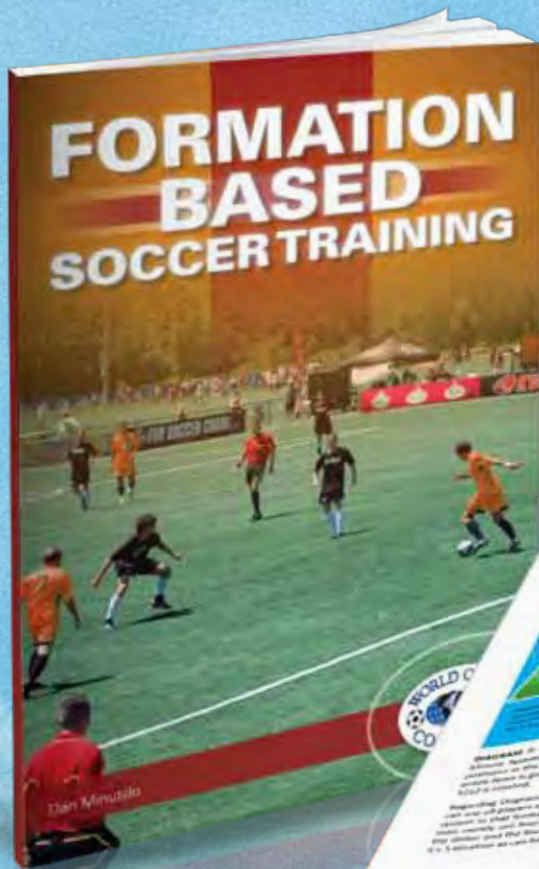
Dan Minutillo has coached soccer for about 23 consecutive years coaching most age groups, male and female through the Academy level. He has coached with National team players Jimmy Conrad, Todd Dunivant, Darlene Del Carmen, and Alejandro Moreno. He is the author of the best seller "Formation Based Soccer Training" and holds an NSCAA National Diploma and various California coaching licenses.

Dan has been published Nationally in separate articles regarding third man runs, plyometrics for soccer players, speed of play for women soccer play, enhancing player motivation, and internationally regarding offensive and defensive game balance. At the time of accepting his present coaching job, head coach of the men's varsity soccer team at Leland High School, Dan held about an 800% win rate overall and did not have a losing season.

Rich Rafloski, creator of the diagrams for this book, has coached soccer for about 20 years. Rich has coached men and women soccer players of numerous ages. In addition to coaching with Dan over the years, Rich was one of the key coaches for the AVYSL Project 40 program, head goal keeper coach for Real San Jose, a semi professional men's soccer team, and he is presently the head varsity goal keeper coach at Leland High School. Rich holds a level 6, NSCAA soccer coaching credential and various California coaching licenses.

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