

# U7/U8 Systems of Play

(4v4)



1-2-1

# Basic Tactical Breakdown

Before we get started, it's important to establish that, while positions can and should be introduced, children at this stage of development are not ready to focus heavily on team tactics. They are inherently selfish and may not adhere to positions or pass the ball as often as you'd like. Lean into this by focusing your coaching on ball mastery - dribbling and comfort striking the ball.

The 1-2-1 is a basic diamond shape with one defender, two midfielders, and one striker. There are no goal keepers in the 4v4 game and players should never be instructed or allowed to stand in their goals as a method of defending. We want them on the field, in the action, and learning the game on the move.

## Positions:

- 1 Defender
- 2 Midfielders (Left & Right Wingers)
- 1 Striker

**Defending:** The lone Defender in this formation has license to roam anywhere within their own half and should primarily work to protect the goal and give the ball back to the Striker or Midfielders to attack the other team. The Midfielders are expected to help with defending and are asked to police their own sides of the field in support of the Defender. (Remember: don't allow your players to simply stand in the goal.)

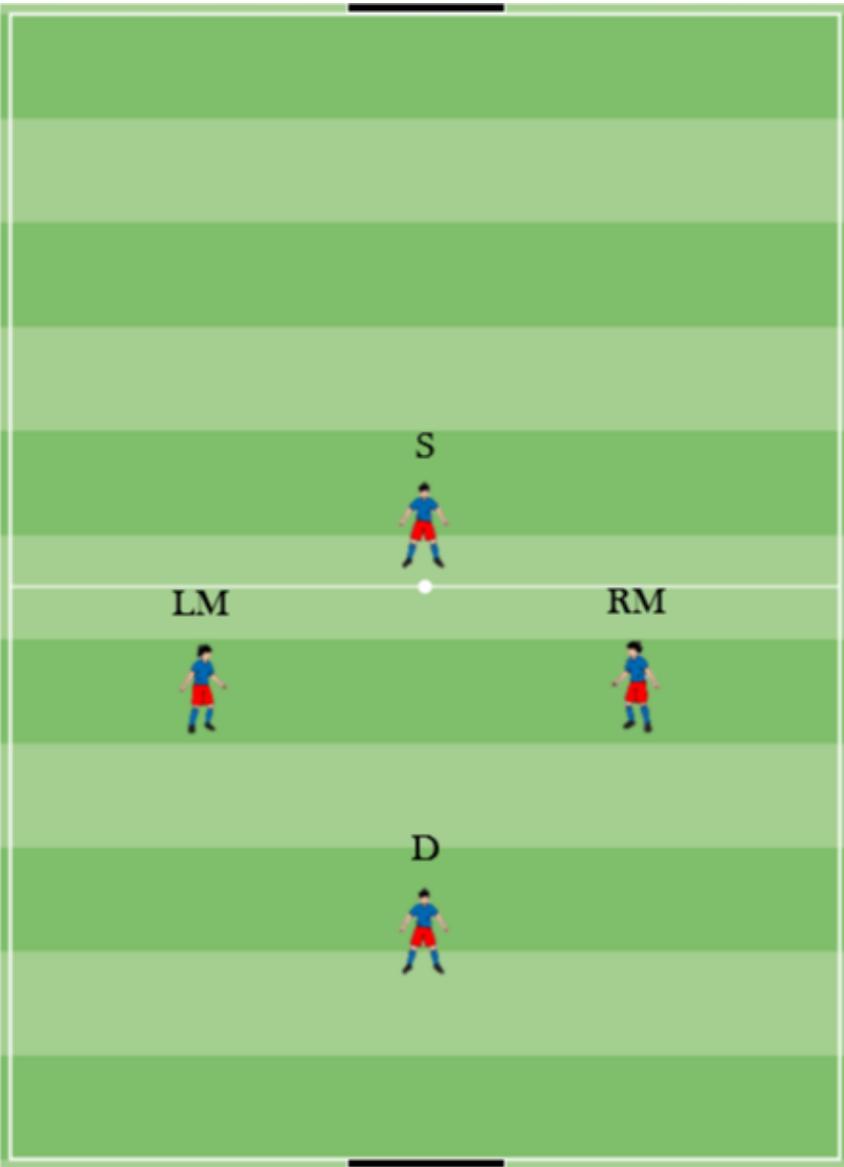
**Attacking:** The lone striker in this formation is asked to stay high up the field at all times, ready to attack the opponent's goal. While the team defends its own goal deep, encourage the Striker to remain high, near midfield, so the team can pass or clear the ball up to them when winning the ball back. The Midfielders will need to move up and support the attack as well.

**Transition:** The transition phase occurs every time the ball changes possession and is critical to all teams. Players must always be prepared to transition from attack to defense or vice versa and know their roles and areas of responsibility. Failure to transition quickly from attacking to defending will provide dangerous attacking chances to your opponent. When transitioning from defense to attack, moving too slowly will allow the opponent to get behind the ball and limit your opportunities to score.

**Shape:** It's important for the team to maintain the general shape of its formation as much as possible throughout games but remember that players at this age may struggle to maintain positional discipline. It's natural and, while coaches should introduce and encourage good positional play, should not be considered a weakness. Remember that ball mastery takes priority at this stage and don't let this become a source of stress to you or the team.



# Basic Starting Positions



**Goal Keeper (0)** - There are no Goal Keepers in the 4v4 game model and players should not be instructed or allowed to stand in the mouth of the goal. We want them on the field, in the action, and learning the game on the move

**Defenders (1)** - The Defender has the job of protecting the team's goal and regaining possession from the opponents. They should roam the entire defensive half and generally avoid joining the attack in favor of protecting their own goal.

**Midfielders (2)** - The left and right Midfielders support both attacking and defensive play. They should cover their sides of the field from end to end.

**Striker (1)** - The Striker's lone job is to attack the other team's goal. While your team is defending deep, they should remain high up the field, ready to start the attack.



# Defender (D)

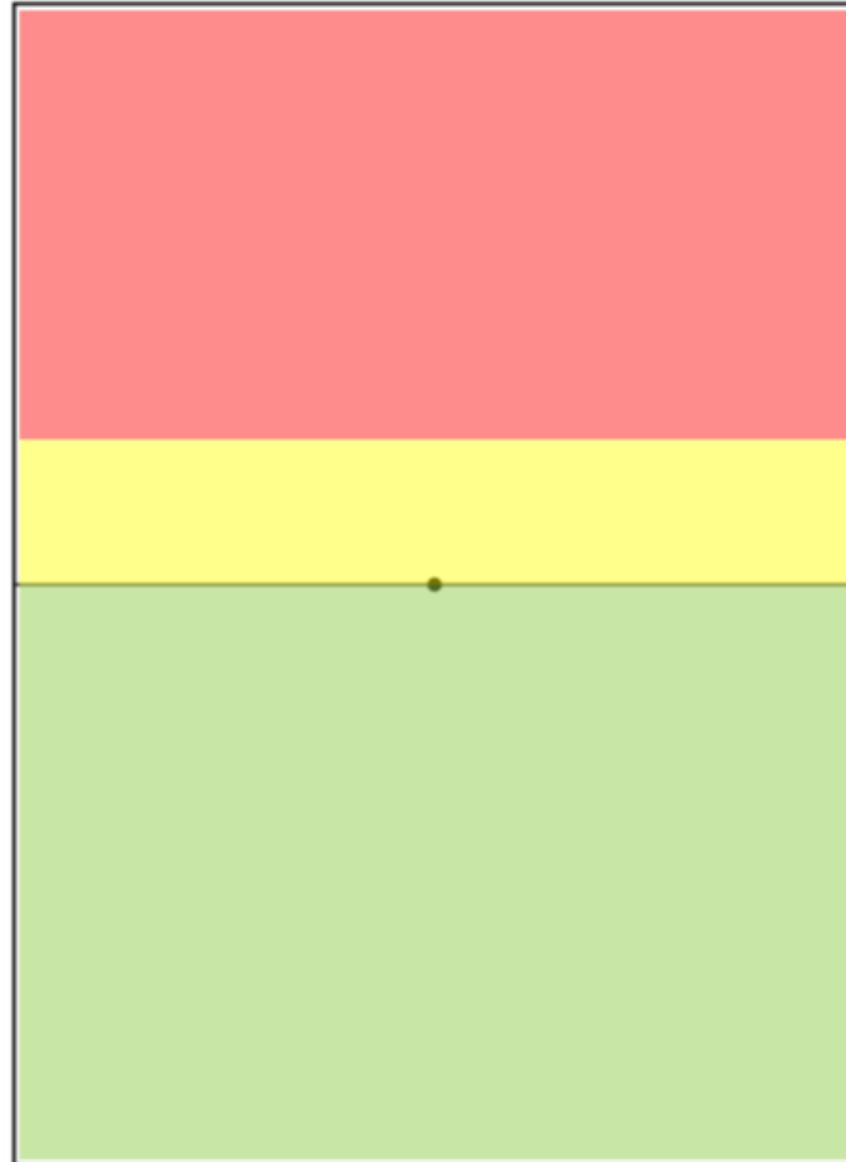
**Team Role:** Protect the goal; slow down the attack; win the ball back; get the ball to their own team's attackers whenever possible.

**Description:** The Defender's #1 mission is to protect the goal and control the defensive half of the field. They must be aggressive and energetic, always fighting to win the ball back. Ideally, defenders will get the ball back to their own team's attackers but, sometimes, they might need to just kick it clear of danger. (Controlling the ball is the best way to protect the goal if possible.) While the team is attacking in the opponent's half, the Defender should be pushed up to about midfield and ready to hold the other team in when they attempt to break out.

**Key Attributes:** Defenders must be comfortable tackling opponents and be able to kick the ball clear of their own goal.

## Games/Drills:

- **Sharks and Minnows** – dribbling and tackling (pg. 12)
- **Soccer Bowling** – kicking strength and accuracy (pg. 13)



# Right Midfield (RM)

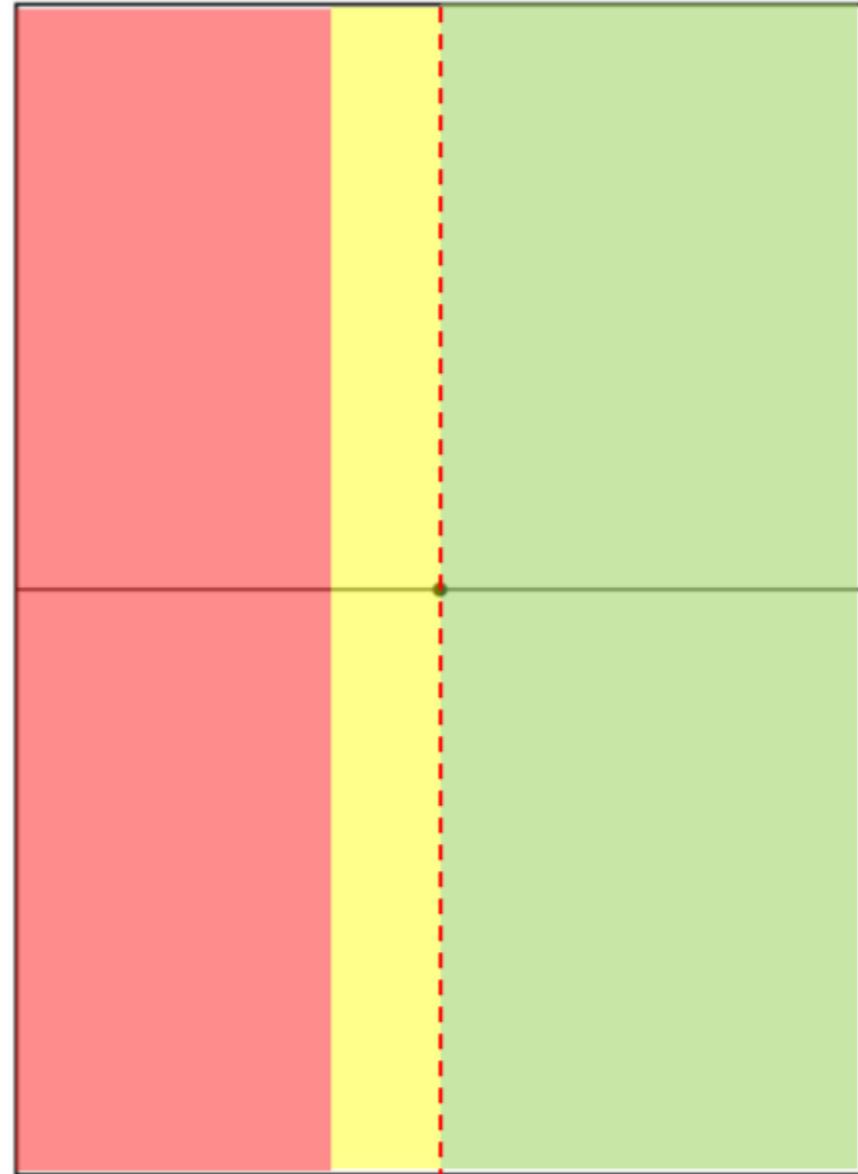
**Team Role:** Provide attacking and defensive support; help create and score goals

**Description:** Midfielders must balance their roles supporting the attack and helping defend. They are responsible for their entire side of the field. In defense, Midfielders will try to win the ball back as high up the field as possible but may need to drop back close to their own goal at times to support the Defender. Once the ball has been won back, Midfielders can either dribble forward or pass to the Striker. On offense, they should help the Striker attack the goal.

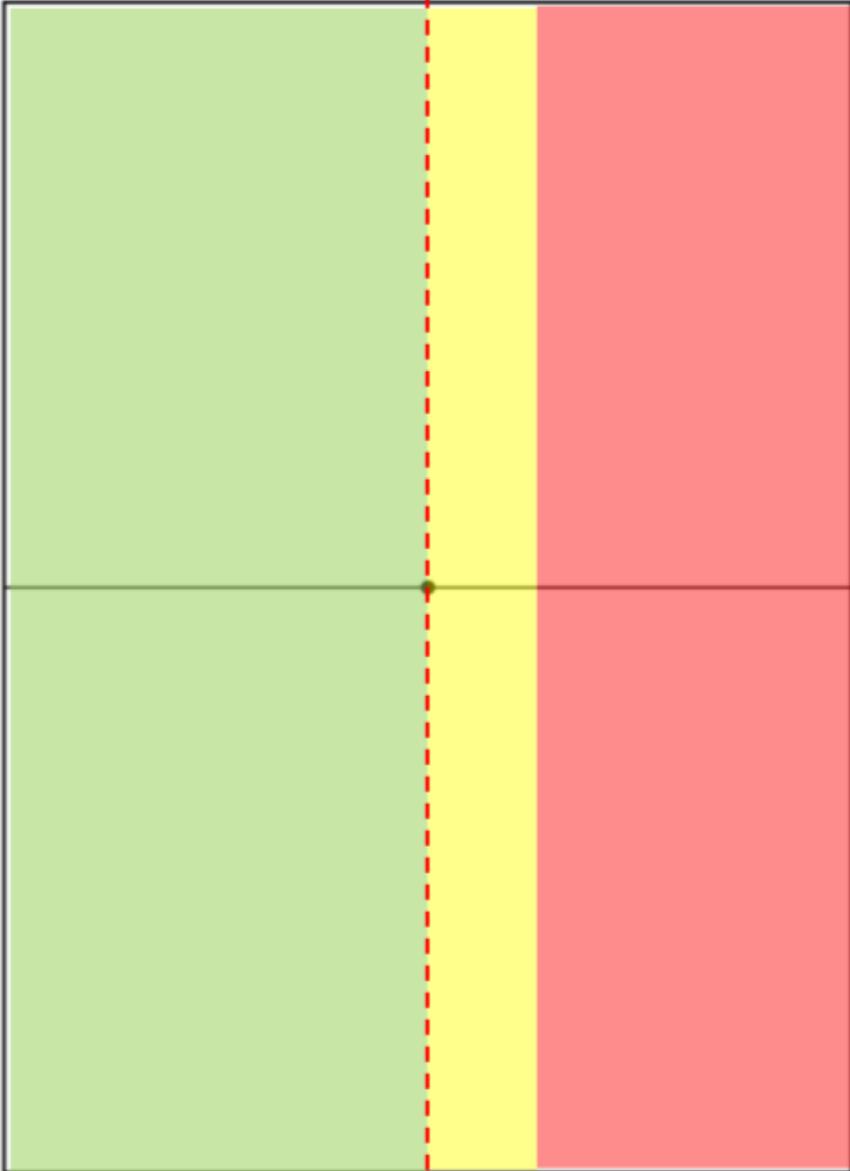
**Key Attributes:** Midfielders must play both ends of the field - attacking and defending.

## Games/Drills:

- **Cops & Robbers** – dribbling & tackling (pg. 14)
- **Big Game Hunter** – kicking strength & accuracy (pg. 15)



# Left Midfield (LM)



**Team Role:** Provide attacking and defensive support; help create and score goals

**Description:** Midfielders must balance their roles supporting the attack and helping defend. They are responsible for their entire side of the field. In defense, Midfielders will try to win the ball back as high up the field as possible but may need to drop back close to their own goal at times to support the Defender. Once the ball has been won back, the midfielders can either dribble forward or pass to the Striker. On offense, they should help the Striker attack the goal.

**Key Attributes:** Midfielders play both ends of the field - attacking and defending.

**Midfield Games/Drills:**

- **By the Numbers** – dribbling & skill moves (pg. 16)
- **Ball Hogs** – shielding & pressuring the ball (pg. 17)



# Striker (S)

**Team Role:** Start the attack; create and score goals

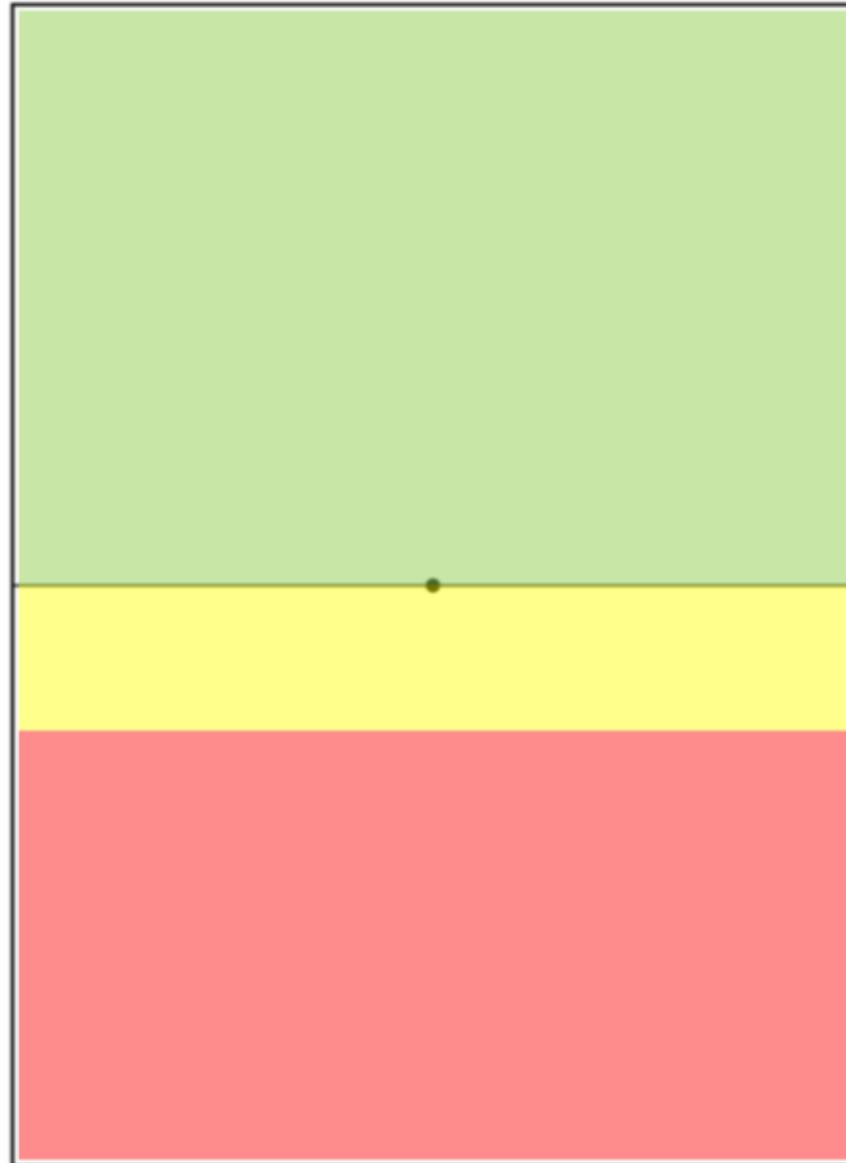
**Description:** The Striker stays high up the field at all times, focused solely on attacking the opponent's goal. They are responsible for attacking in the opponent's half and should try to win the ball back immediately if/when they lose it. When the team is defending in its own half, the Striker should stay close to midfield, ready to start the attack once your team wins the ball back.

**Key Attributes:** Strikers should be comfortable shooting the ball rather than trying to dribble all the way into the goal.

## Games/Drills:

- **Fast Feet Junior Soccer Skills** – basic ball control & coordination

[https://youtu.be/4DjFGrjucpc?list=PLuo\\_y\\_iegZQfoCM5fHCxVxMYDHxsAy0Yd](https://youtu.be/4DjFGrjucpc?list=PLuo_y_iegZQfoCM5fHCxVxMYDHxsAy0Yd)



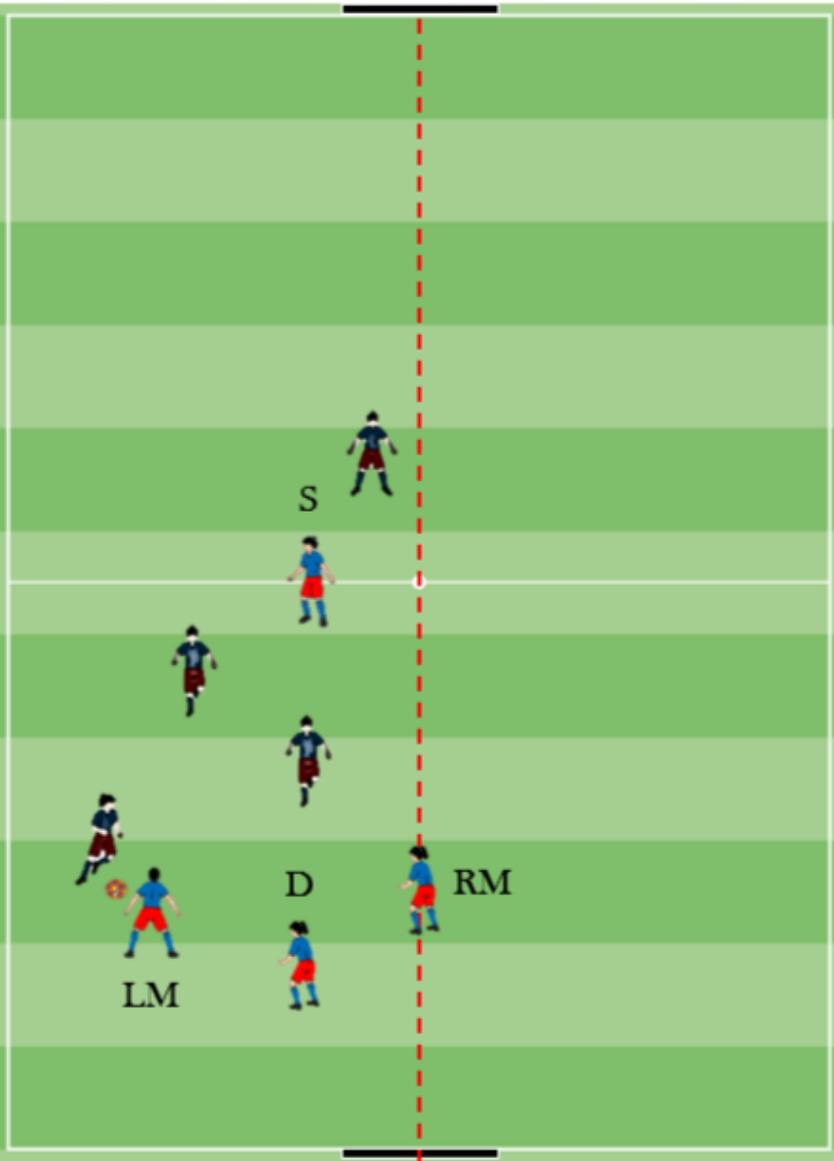
# Positioning Scenario: Defending

## Defending - Ball on the Left Flank

**Contain the Attack** - Note that the D and LM have shifted to block the attacker's path to goal and slow the attack down. They are now in position to tackle the attacker and regain possession. Encourage your players to trust their teammates in defense and take supporting positions nearby rather than bunching up around the ball.

### Positioning Off the Ball

- **Striker**: Holds position high up, near midfield. Once your team regains possession, players should look to get the ball forward to the Striker quickly so they can start the attack.
- **Right Midfielder**: Moves toward the middle of the field and should drop back roughly even with the ball. From here, they're ready to take possession or defend if/when the ball comes to the middle of the field.



# Positioning Scenario: Attacking

## Attacking in the Opponent's Half

**Attacking On the Wing** - Encourage your players to spread out when attacking. In this image, note that the Striker is staying close enough to the RM to give support without bunching around the ball. The RM now has the option to attempt to dribble to goal or pass to a teammate.

### Positioning Off the Ball

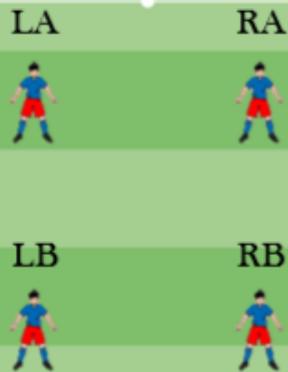
- **Striker:** The Striker should shift toward the ball but avoid bunching around it with the player in possession. If the defense tackles the RM, the Striker should be close enough to help win the ball back. By staying close to the center, though, they'll also be in a good position to attack the goal if/when the ball comes inside.
- **Left Midfielder:** Like the Striker, LM should shift toward the ball while remaining in their own area of the field. This allows the LM to support the attack if the ball comes across the field. Whether it is passed to them or kicked away from their teammate by the defense, the LM is in a great position to pick up the ball and continue the attack.
- **Defender:** While your team is attacking in the opponent's half, the Defender should push up to the midfield line. This will give them the chance to slow down or even stop attacks closer to the opponents' goal and allows teammates time to recover and help defend when needed.



# Alternative Formations

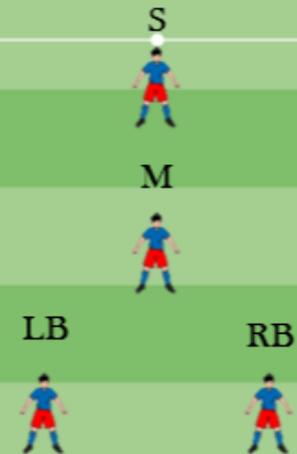
## 2-2

The 2-2 is a very simple, balanced formation. It has a right and left defender each placed behind a right and left attacker. In this formation, the field can be divided into 2 halves – either left/right or attack/defense – allowing for clearly defined roles for each player.



## 2-1-1

The 2-1-1 is a very strong defensive formation. It will require the midfielder to do a lot of running to support the striker on attack and help cover the defenders.



# Closing Comments/Notes

## Age Specific Expectations

Players at this level are 6 and 7 years old and are naturally self-centered. Their first instincts may be to bunch around the ball and dribble without passing to teammates. Physical development is widely varied. Ball mastery is the key focal point of their development. Introduce positions and continue to encourage them but don't get hung up on it. Exercises and drills should be focused on athletic movement and basic ball control. Above all, be patient and praise their efforts constantly.

## Teaching Formations, Positions, and Teamwork

The position-specific slides in this guide are designed so that they can be printed and given to players. Plan which position each player will take at the start of each week and encourage them to look over this information with their parents as a supplement to practices. Make sure they know that a position is not a single point on the field but, rather, an area and set of responsibilities supporting the team.

The attacking and defending scenarios on pages 8-9 are a reference to how the team should position itself ideally in those situations, but don't be discouraged if your players do not play their positions perfectly (or almost at all).

## Plan Ahead

This is easy to say but, as any volunteer can tell you, may not always be as easy to do. Without a plan, coaching can become unnecessarily stressful. Don't let it fool you, though, it doesn't have to be art to keep your team moving and your blood pressure down. Planning your practices, line-ups, and substitutions will make your work on the field 100 times more enjoyable and effective.

## Team Culture

Kids want to win naturally. As coaches, we don't have to create that drive, we just need to support it. Empower your team to try things and take risks (within reason). Challenge them with attainable objectives and *praise every effort*. Your feedback will either fuel their growth or weigh them down. Keep it simple and have fun above all else.



\*Contact club Technical Director Sean Yohe ([sean@ogdensoccer.com](mailto:sean@ogdensoccer.com)) for coaching questions and guidance.

# Sharks & Minnows



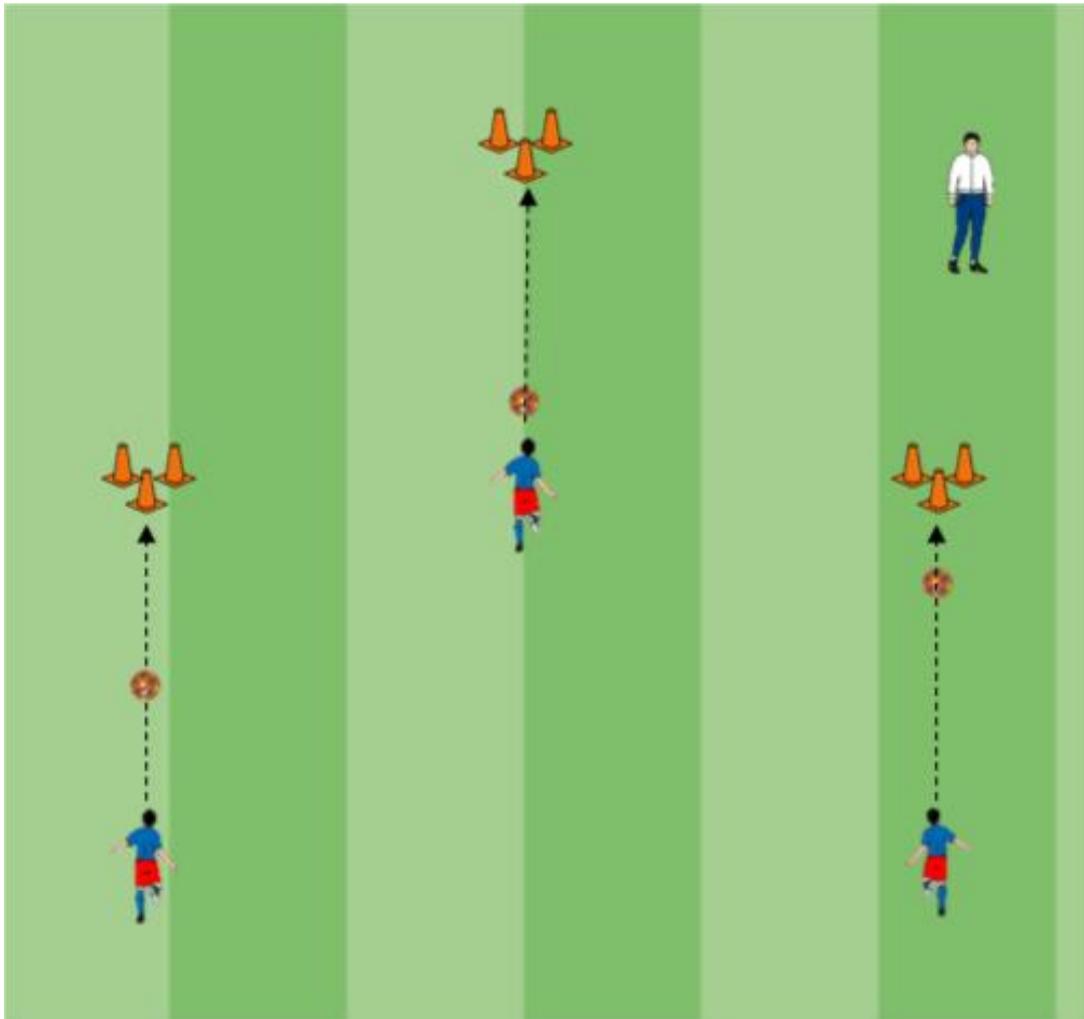
## How to Play:

- Choose a shark to start in the middle with no ball
- All other players (minnows) should line up on one side, each with a ball
- When the coach calls “shark’s in!”, the minnows must dribble across to the other side
- The shark attempts to knock the minnows’ balls away
- If a minnow loses their ball or dribbles out of bounds, they become a shark until all the minnows have been caught
- Continue going back and forth until all of the minnows have been caught
- Let the last minnow to be caught start the next round as the shark

**Set-up:** use 4 or more cones to mark an area of about 15x25 yards (adjust to suit group size)



# Soccer Bowling



**Set-up:** arrange 3 cones like bowling pins 3-5 yards from each player

## How to Play:

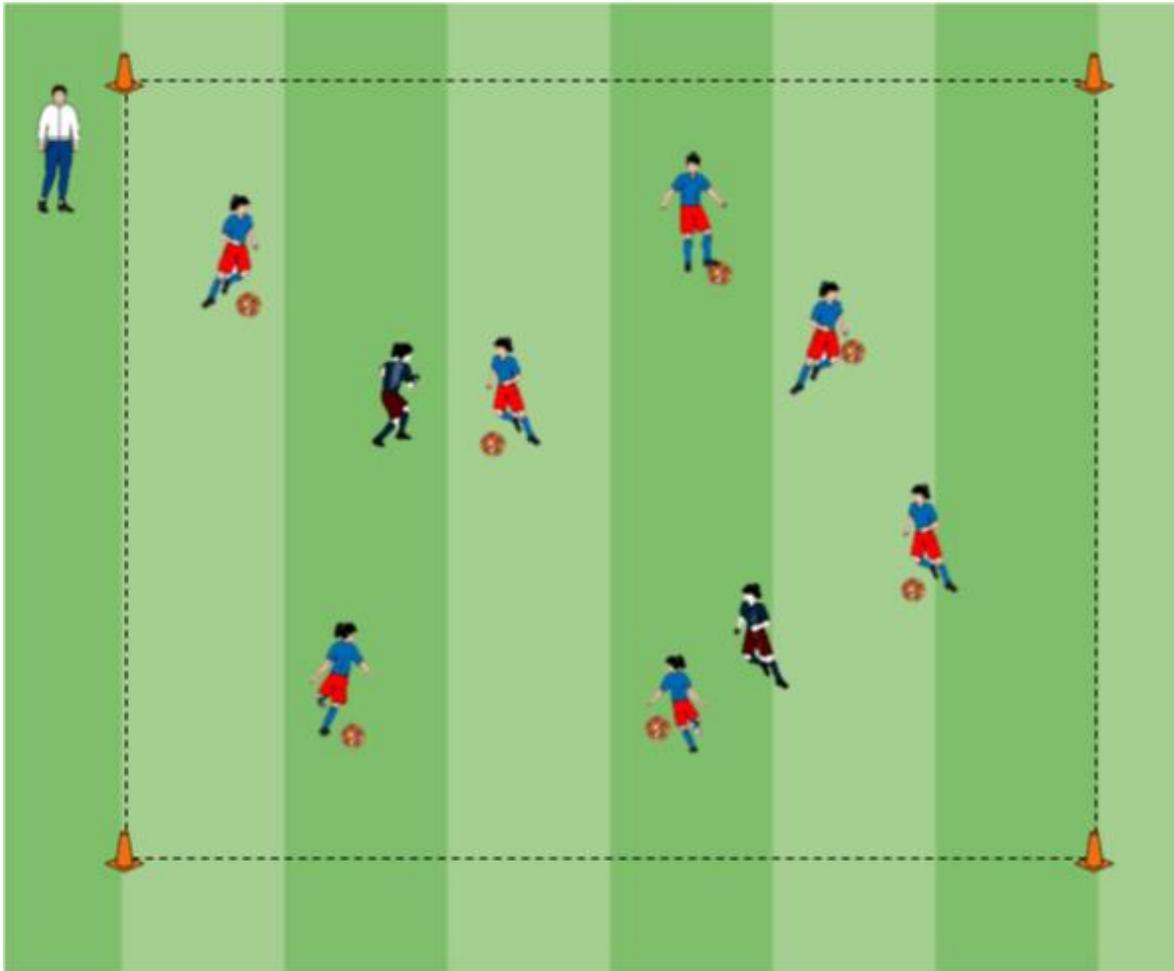
- Standing 3-5 yards back, each player kicks a ball, attempting to hit their cones
- Players try to kick the ball hard enough to knock over all of their cones
- When they knock their cone(s) over, simply stand them back up
- Players should take as many kicks as they can during this exercise. (Involve parents to return balls more quickly if possible.)

## Notes:

- Introduce and encourage proper technique for shooting and passing but the focus of this game is to develop comfort striking the ball and good power. Technique is secondary and should not become a roadblock to the flow of the exercise.
- Remind players to lock their ankle when striking the ball. (Think of the difference between a pool noodle and a baseball bat - which one will hit a ball farther?)



# Cops & Robbers



**Set-up:** use 4 or more cones to mark an area of about 20x20 yards (adjust to suit group size)

## How to Play:

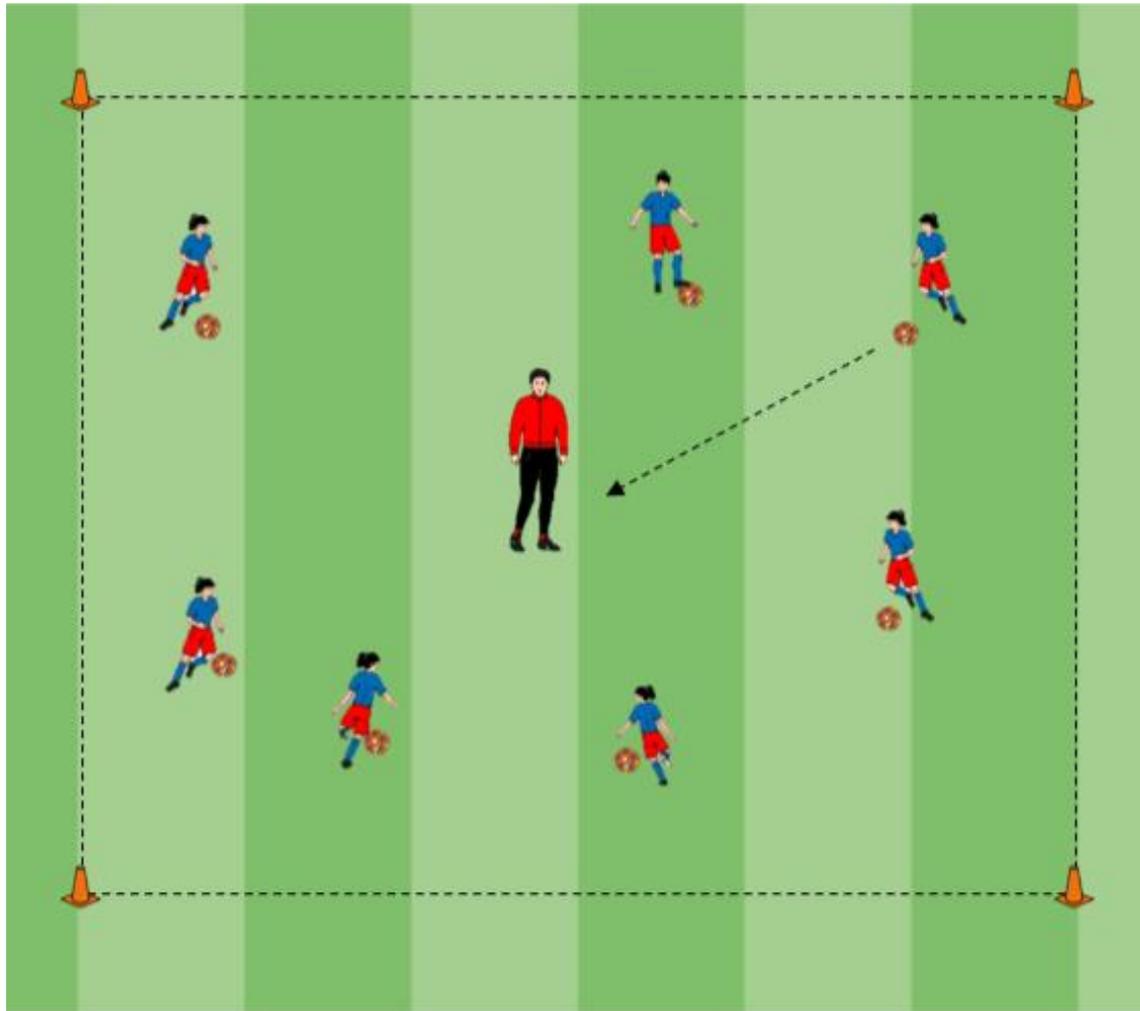
- Choose 1-3 players to be robbers and give a ball to each of the other players (the cops)
- Cops must dribble around, attempting to protect their balls from the robbers
- Robbers attempt to steal the balls from the cops
- When a robber takes the ball away or the forces a cop to put their ball out of bounds, they switch roles
- New robbers must chase another cop rather than the player who's just taken their ball

## Notes:

- Encourage cops to use their moves to protect the ball (shielding, dragbacks, etc.)
- Cops should attempt to keep close control of the ball, using all of the surfaces of their feet



# Big Game Hunter



**Set-up:** use 4 or more cones to mark an area of about 20x20 yards (adjust to suit group size)

## How to Play:

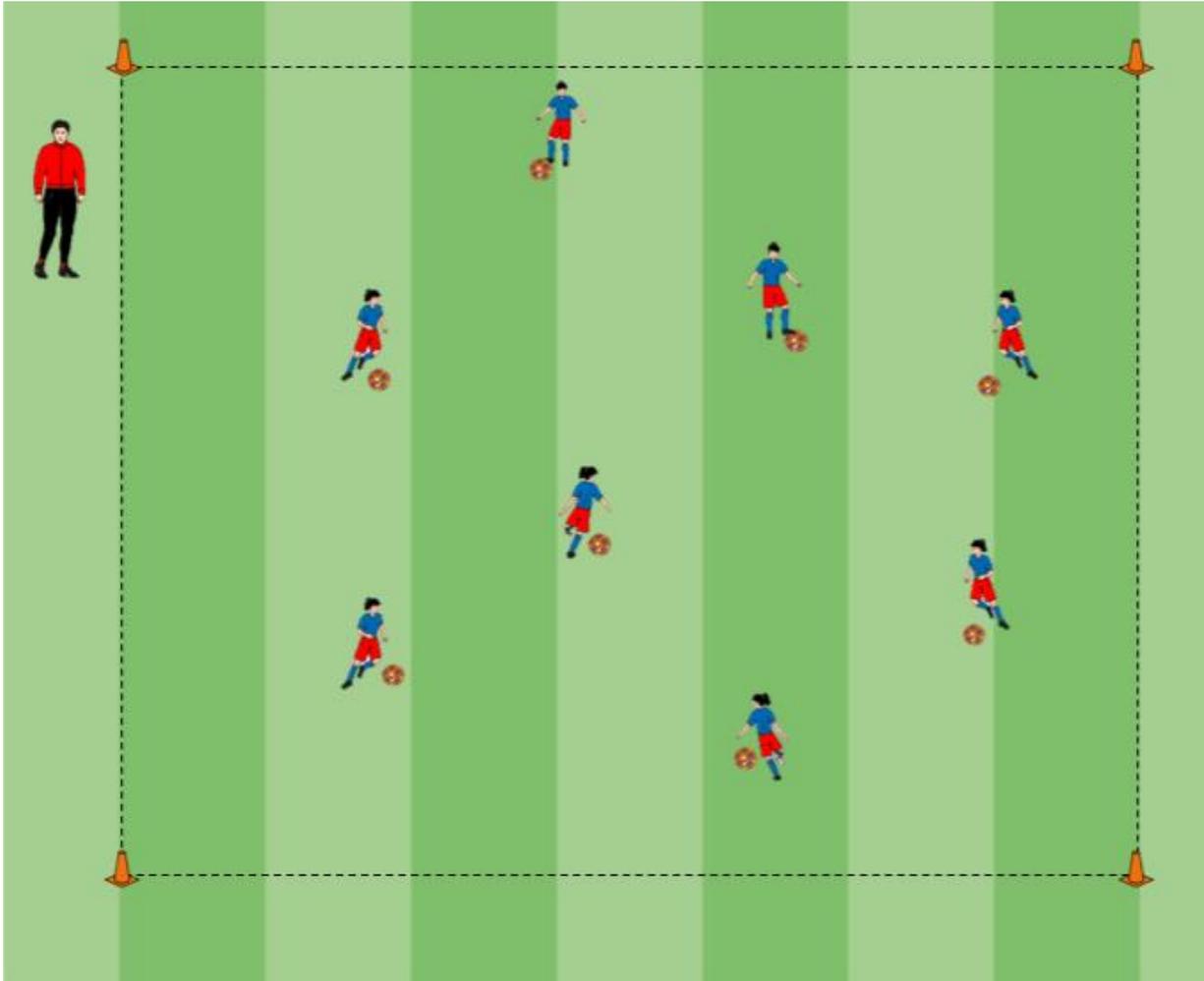
- Coach runs around the grid, trying to dodge shots from the team
- Players dribble around the grid, attempting to kick their ball and hit the coach
- When a player succeeds in hitting the coach, they get to choose an animal for the coach to mimic (briefly)
- **Variation:** Line up on one side of the grid and jog back and forth across their line for stationary kicking practice

## Notes:

- The focus of this game is to develop comfort striking the ball and good power. Technique is secondary and should not become a roadblock to the flow of the exercise.
- Remind players to lock their ankle when striking the ball. (Think of the difference between a pool noodle and a baseball bat – which one will hit a ball farther?)



# By The Numbers



**Set-up:** use 4 or more cones to mark an area of about 20x20 yards (adjust to suit group size)

## How to Play:

- Players dribble freely in the grid at a jog, each seeking space
- The coach calls out numbers, each with an associated skill move (below)
- Players perform the skill move called by the coach and explode out of the move at full speed for a few steps
- Players must remain inside the grid

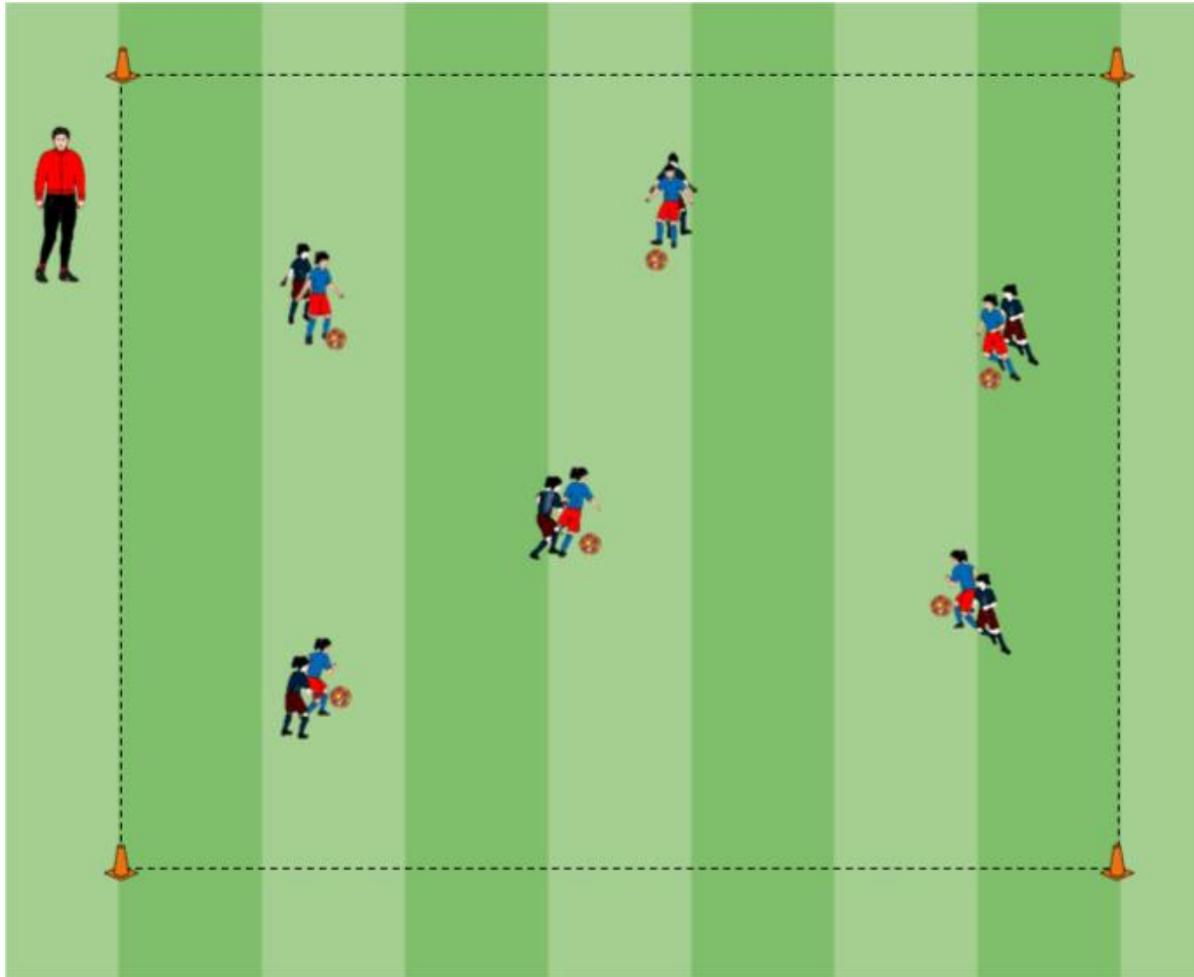
## Suggested Moves:

1. Drag back
2. Scissors
3. Inside of the foot turn (full circle)
4. Outside of the foot turn (full circle)
5. V-turn
6. Step-over

**Note:** Teach players these moves and numbers in advance. This can be an excellent warm-up activity.



# Ball Hogs



**Set-up:** use 4 or more cones to mark an area of about 20x20 yards (adjust to suit group size); mark a goal if desired

## How to Play:

- Split players into pairs with one ball each
- Players in possession attempt to shield the ball from the other player
- Players in possession can move their feet but are not allowed to run away
- Players should switch roles immediately when the ball is won from the player in possession
- **Variation:** (1) add a goal to allow a chance to turn and score (2) add time and/or spatial limits to increase difficulty

## Notes:

- Teach players to keep their bodies between their opponent and the ball
- Instruct defending players to “body up” and prevent opponents from getting comfortable/balanced on the ball
- Warn defenders not to overcommit in one direction

