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2010 NCFC Royals

Soccer Terminology

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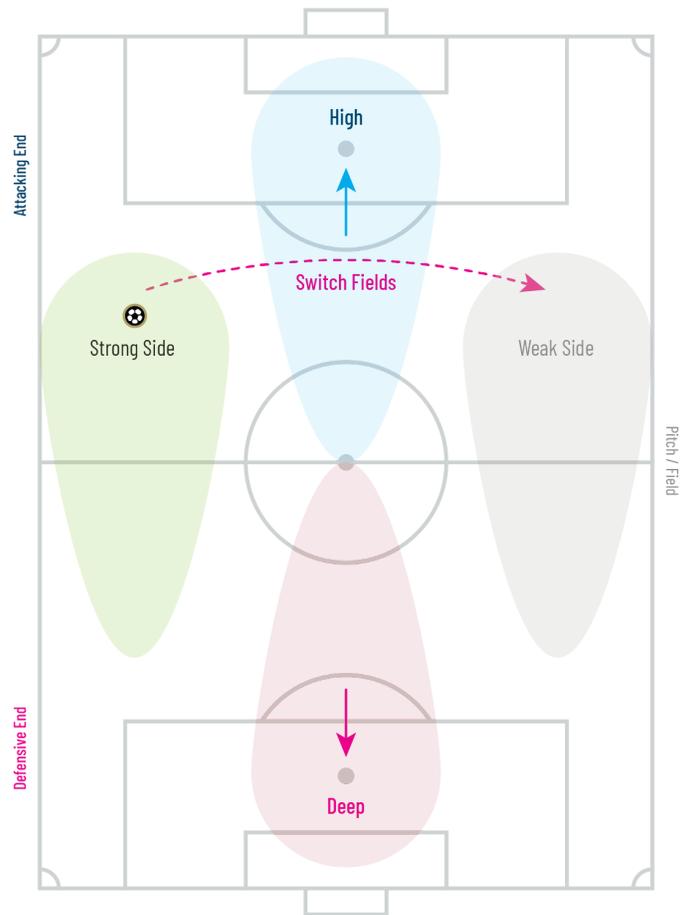
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The pitch or field

Basics

- **Pitch** – another word for “field”.
- **High** – toward our offensive end, relative to the play/action.
- **Deep** – toward our defensive end, relative to the play/action.
- **Strong side** – the side with the ball.
- **Weak side** – the side of the field farthest from the ball (changes sides depending on the ball).
- **Switch fields** – change the point of attack by moving the ball from one side to the other (strong to weak).

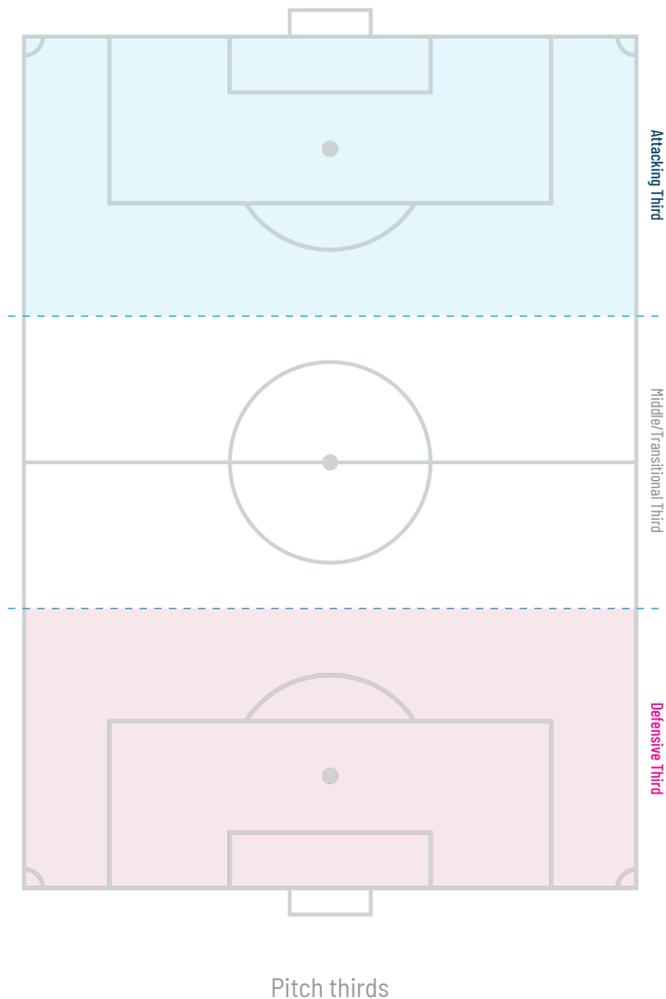


Pitch/field basics

Pitch thirds

The pitch (or field) is divided into 3 horizontal zones, called “thirds”.

1. **Defensive Third** – our defensive end.
2. **Middle Third** – sometimes referred to as the “possession zone” or “transitional zone”.
3. **Attacking Third** – our offensive end, that is sometimes referred to as the “final third”.



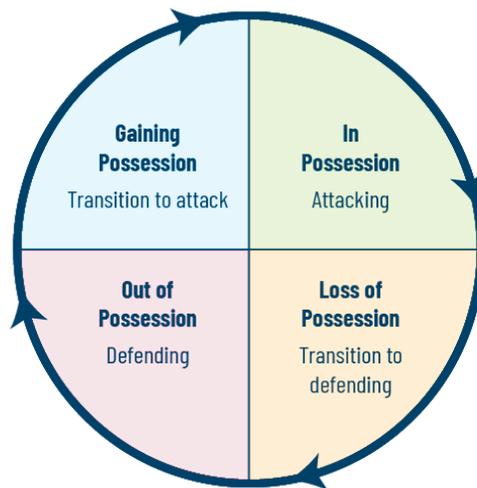
Game model & phases

Learn about how the concepts below relate to our [game model](#).

Phases of play

There are 4 Phases of Play (a.k.a., four moments of the game):

1. **In possession** ^{NEW} – sometimes called “organized attacking”
2. **Loss of possession** ^{NEW} – also called “transition to defending” or “negative transition”
3. **Out of possession** ^{NEW} – sometimes called “organized defending”
4. **Gaining possession** ^{NEW} – also called “transition to attack” or “positive transition”



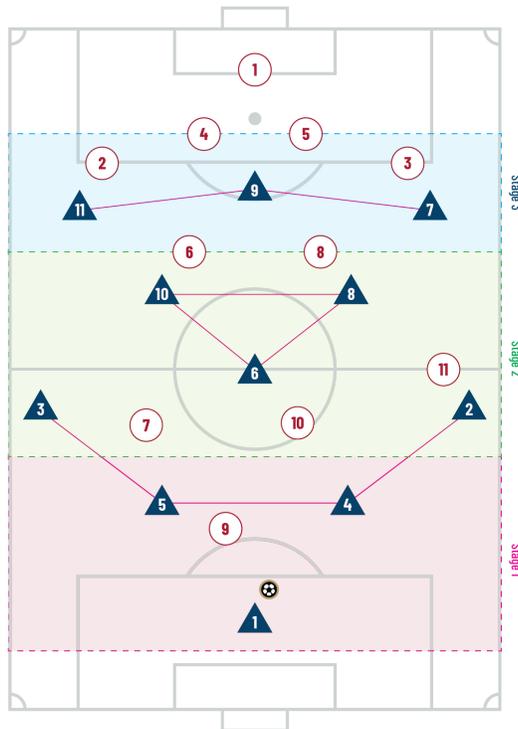
The Four Phases of Play (or moments in a game)

Stages of Possession

he “zones” where the Phases of Play happen are called [Stages of Possession](#) (or “in-possession zones”), and there are three (3) of them. They are somewhat similar to the [Thirds of a Pitch](#), except that they are based on the areas surrounding specific groupings of players relative to the opponents lines of pressure, and are not necessarily fixed on a geographical location of the field.

1. **Stage 1** – the area surrounding the goalkeeper and the center backs, as the first line of build up facing the opponent’s **first line of pressure**.

2. **Stage 2** – the area surrounding the midfield players and any fullbacks that are part of the 2nd line of build up facing the opponent's 2nd of pressure.
3. **Stage 3** – the area surrounding the forwards as the final, attacking line facing the opponent's last line of pressure.



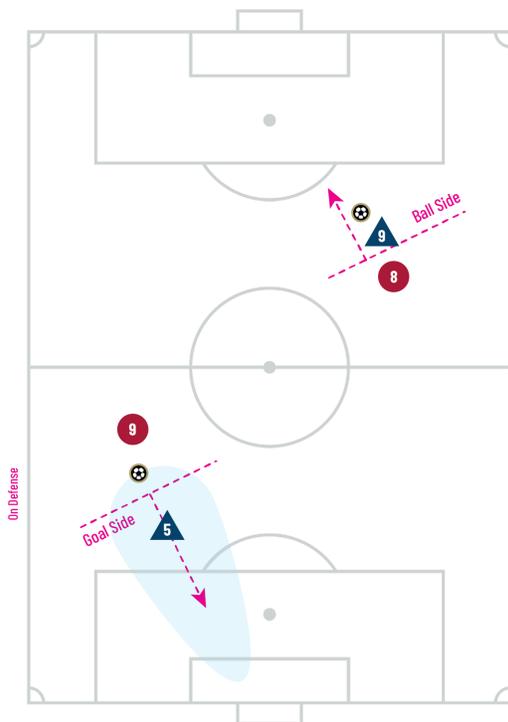
The 3 Phase of Play stages are shown with a 4-3-3 formation

[Learn more about our game model →](#)

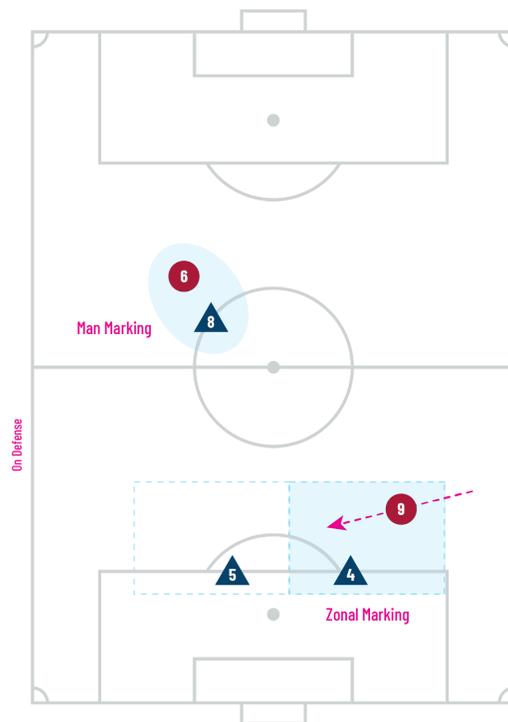
Defending

Positional & marking

- **Ball side** – between the opponent and the ball.
- **Goal side** – between the opponent and our goal (imagine a straight line pointing at our goal).
- **Man marking** or “man-to-man” – marking an opponent directly, one-to-one, on defense wherever they may go. Typically done “goal side.”
- **Zonal marking** – marking a specific area of the pitch, with the defensive responsibility of whoever enters your zone. Requires a lot of communication and awareness.



Goal side and ball side positional marking



Zonal marking and man marking

Pressing

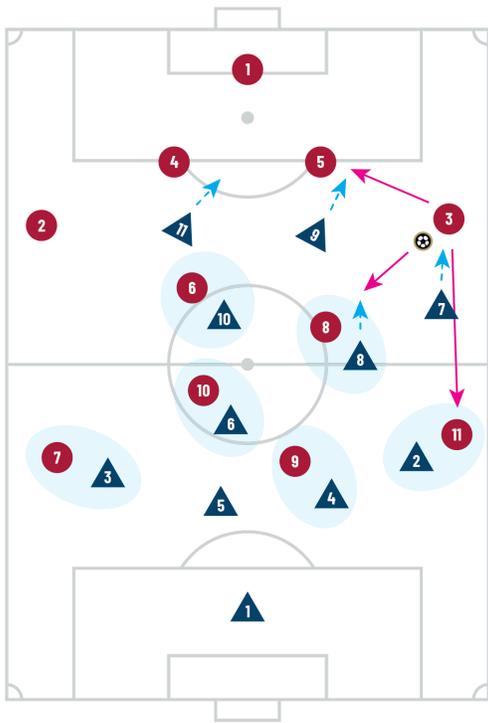
- **Counter-pressing or “Gegenpressing”** – a quick pressing technique immediately after loss of possession (in the first 3-5 seconds), swarming the opponent with the ball—forcing them to make mistakes under pressure. Players pressing should try to block passing lanes with their runs.

You can watch video examples of [gegenpressing from Liverpool game film](#).

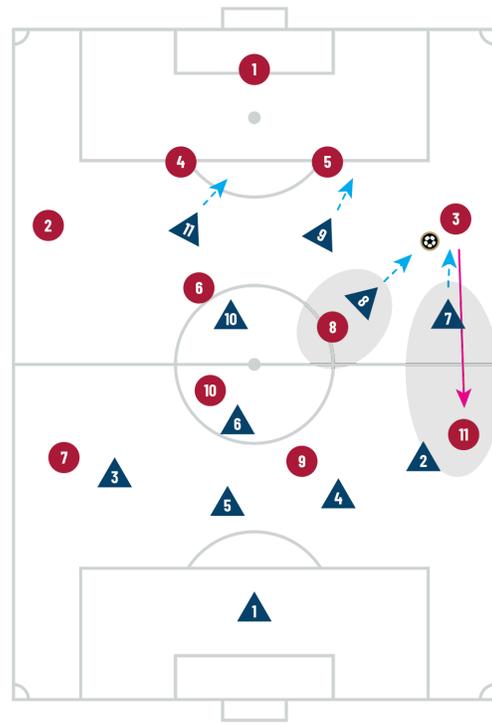
- **Cover shadow** – the area covered directly behind a defending player, where their body position “covers” the opponent behind them, typically through blocking a passing lane.
- **Funnel press** – a coordinated pressing strategy that tries to funnel an opponent into a trap or numerical inferiority, typically down the middle.
- **Pressing** – to apply controlled pressure to an opponent when defending, and trying to cut off passing lanes.

When pressing, we should remember: “there’s an **APP** for that.” Meaning: **Approach, Position, Patience**. Another thing you’ll hear me say is “**high to low, fast to slow**,” which means to make your body posture lower (from high to low) and your speed from fast to slow as you **approach** your opponent, [just like Becky Sauerbrunn](#).

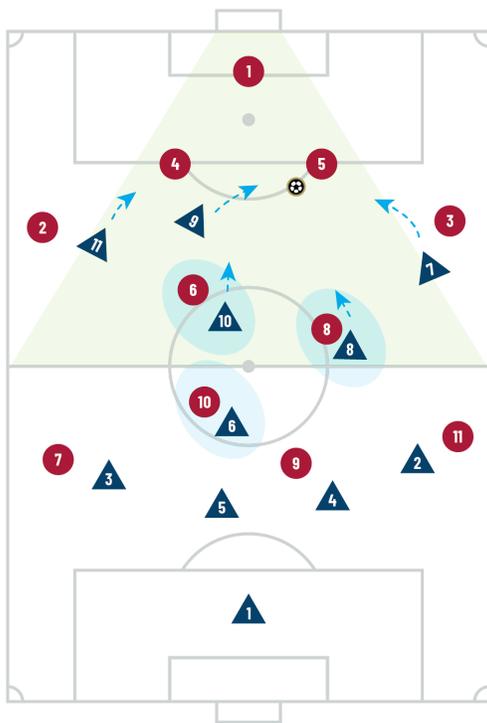
- **Pressing diamond** – a diamond-shaped structure between the 2 wingers, the striker, and the attacking midfielder (behind the striker) that closes the available space centrally and discourages the opposition from building out through their central midfielders—forcing them wide to their fullbacks (as a trap).



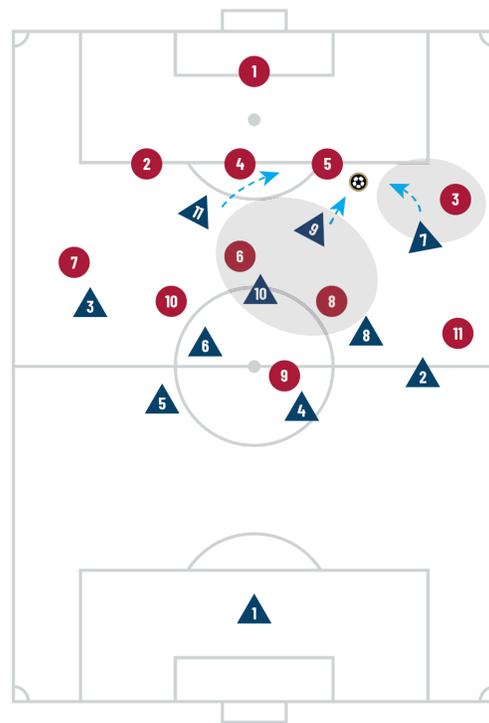
Pressing in a controlled and organized fashion ensures opponents are marked and passing lanes are blocked.



Cover shadow shown where #7's pressing run blocks or covers the opposing #11 behind her. #8's press covers the opposing #8 as well.



Funnel pressing with the center mids man-marking, and the forwards using their runs to block passing lanes.



Gegenpressing or "counter press" where the forwards swarm the player with the ball while blocking passing lanes.

Block line basics

- **Block lines** – lines created by the defending team in order to "block" an opponent's attack. Each line typically consists of the formation's rows (e.g. defense, midfield, forwards).
- **Low block** – also referred to as a "deep block" or "[parking the bus](#)," a low block is a defensive tactic commonly used to frustrate a potentially superior opponent's attack. Essentially it means to sit deep in your defensive third in well organized defensive and midfield block lines in order to limit the available space for the opponent to attack through (especially the central channel).

- **Mid-block** – a defensive tactic that is not quite as reserved as a “low block,” and not as aggressive as a high press. It’s in the middle—a [moderate tactic](#)—with the defensive line attempting to hold a mid point between their penalty area and the midfield line. This tactic can also be an offensive tactic in order to create space behind an opponent’s backline.

Check out [Morocco’s brilliantly cohesive mid-block](#) in the 2022 World Cup against Spain.

- **Rest attack** – As the opposite of a “[rest defense](#)”, a rest attack is part of a team’s defensive organization and shape (often the forwards/strikers) who not only help with the pressing of the opponent’s back line, but are position high enough to provide depth and serve as an outlet for a quick build up combination with the midfield or a fast counter-attack.

Attacking basics

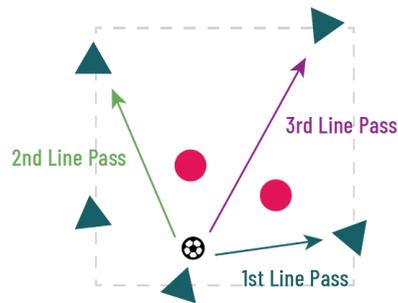
Basics

- **Back foot** and **half-turn** – two separate, related concepts on receiving the ball with an open body posture to the direction of play (i.e., half-turn) with the foot furthest from the passer (i.e., back foot) so that a forward pass can be made. Receiving a pass on a “half-turn” with the “back foot” is an essential, basic skill and “[positional superiority](#)” that is needed to progress the ball forward.
- **Behind and between** – this concept means that a player (especially like a [pivot player](#)) would position themselves behind the line of pressure and between the opposition's defenders. I like to call this space the “pocket,” but it is also related to both “positional superiority” and “third man” concepts as a player who is “behind and between” will likely have achieved both.
- **Box Midfield** – a attacking structure where players move to create a box shape in midfield, with 2 pivots and 2 attacking midfielders. This 4 player midfield provides a numerical

advantage over an opponent with 3 players in midfield (like a 4-3-3), and aids in build up and progression through midfield due to the advantage.

- **Breaking lines** – passes that penetrate or “break” through an [opponent's lines](#). This type of pass is also called a “through ball”. In the diagram below, #6 is making a line-breaking pass to #7, which breaks a total of 2 lines.
- **Direct Attack or Long Ball** – an attacking strategy where the ball is played from your defenders, deep-lying midfielders, or goalkeeper *directly* to your forwards who are making runs. These long passes are usually made “over the top” of your opponent—breaking as many lines as possible—and into the space behind their back line. This should not be conflated with “Boot Ball,” which is an *aimless and reactionary* method of *getting rid* of the ball with the *hope* of creating an offense chance closer to your opponent's goal. Direct attacking is purposefully aimed at runs being made, and is executed **after controlling the ball**. It is not simply “booting it.”
- **Double pivot** – a pair of central midfielders who rotate as the [pivot](#) point in the build up phase of the attack. Having two pivots allows for more protection in front of the defense as well as two potential outlets in the build up to “pivot” around. A double pivot is commonly seen in a 4-2-3-1 formation, where the duo operating behind a #10 (i.e., “attacking mid”). See also [pivot player](#).
- **Dropping out** – To “drop out” means to drop wider and deeper to support the player in possession of the ball.
- **Overload** – an area of the pitch or “zone” with more attacking players than their opponent (i.e., [numerical superiority](#)). For example, a 2v1 or 3v2.
- **Overlap** or **overlapping run** – when a player runs behind and around a teammate (who is in possession of the ball) to the outside, usually wide.
- **Passing lines** – the spaces between players where a pass can be successfully played. There are 3 key passing lines. A 1st Line Pass is a pass to the teammate directly next to you, a 2nd Line Pass is a pass to a player beyond the first line of pressure (often bypassing an adjacent

teammate), and a 3rd Line Pass splits the first line of pressure (i.e., splits the defenders). See also [behind and between](#).

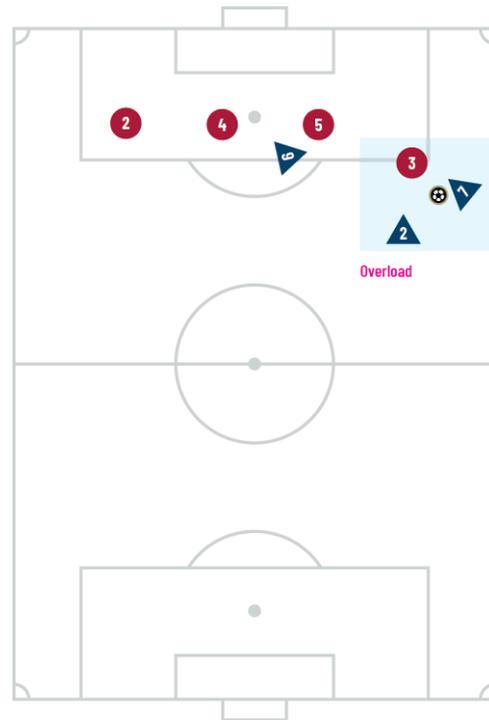


- **Pin** or **pinning a defender** – when a player positions themselves in an area or zone—usually high or wide—that forces a defender to mark them or otherwise risk being exposed.
- **Pivot player** – a central midfield player (i.e., “holding midfielder” or #6) that is positioned at the base of the attacking or midfield triangle and just in front of the center backs, who serves as a central “pivot” and deep-lying playmaker for the build up phase of the attack. This role is usually employed in a 4-3-3 formation, operating behind two #8s or a #8 and #10 (i.e., “box-to-box mid” and “attacking mid”).
- **Scanning** – when a player temporarily directs their attention away from the ball to take in extra information, like potential passing options before they receive the ball, locations of opposing players or pressure, or available space to move into. This is sometimes referred to as “checking your shoulder” or “look before you receive”. [Messi scans all the time](#).
- **Underlap** or **underlapping run** – when a player runs on the inside of their teammate (who is in possession of the ball).
- **Wall pass** or **“give ‘n go”** – a movement in which one player passes the ball to another and sprints forward to receive the quickly played return, and usually around a defender or two.

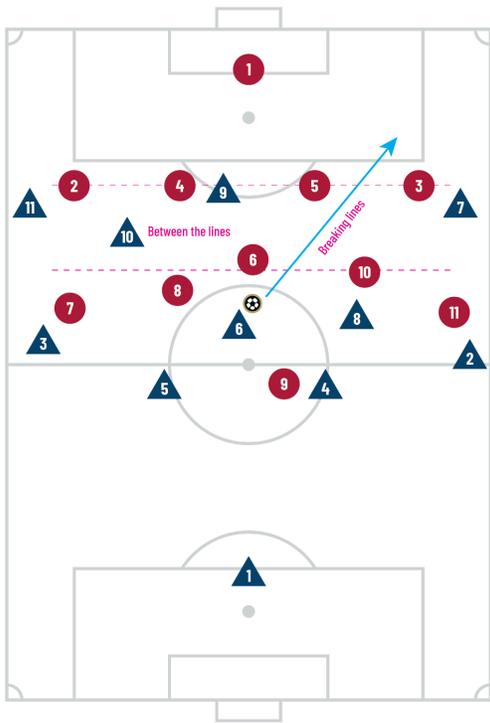
- **Zone 14** – the area of the pitch that is directly on top of the penalty area and the width of the 6 yard box (right where the penalty arc or “D” is located) in the [attacking third](#). This is a particularly important area because it is central, close to the goal, and provides a momentary advantage for getting a quality shot or placing a dangerous ball through and behind the last line of defense.



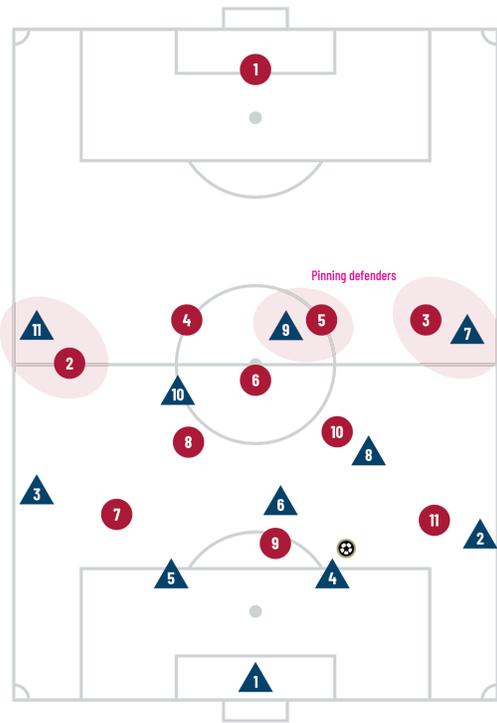
#10 can make an overlapping run or underlapping run



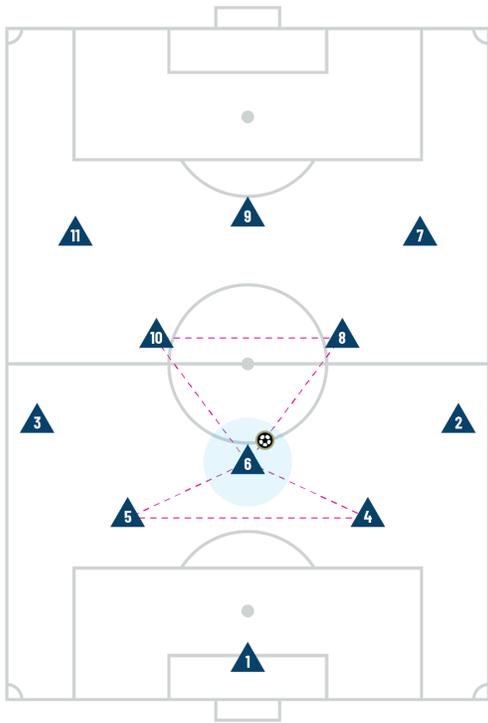
#2 and #7 overload the opponent's left fullback in a 2v1



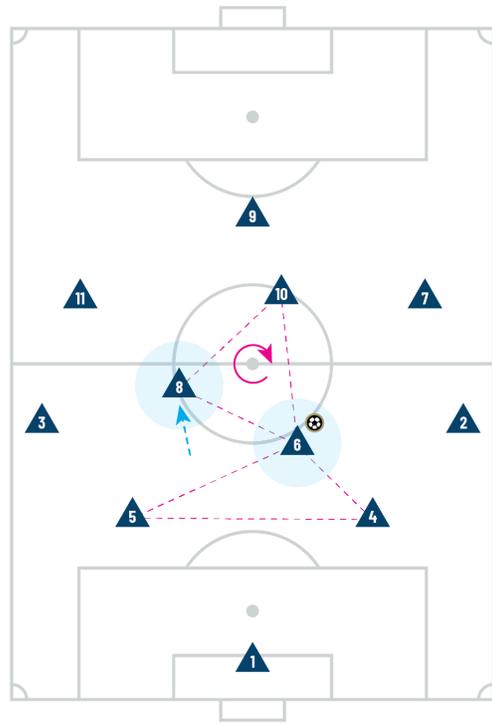
#6 makes a line-breaking pass, while #10 drops between the lines



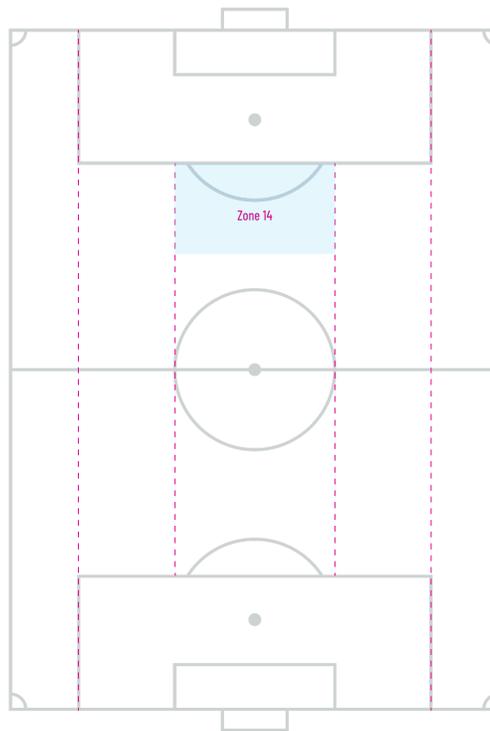
The forwards pin back the defenders marking them, making space for their teammates to build out



A standard 4-3-3 with #6 serving as the pivot player at the base of the midfield triangle.



A 4-2-3-1 formation utilizing a double pivot, Where #8 and #6 rotate around the axis during the build up phase.

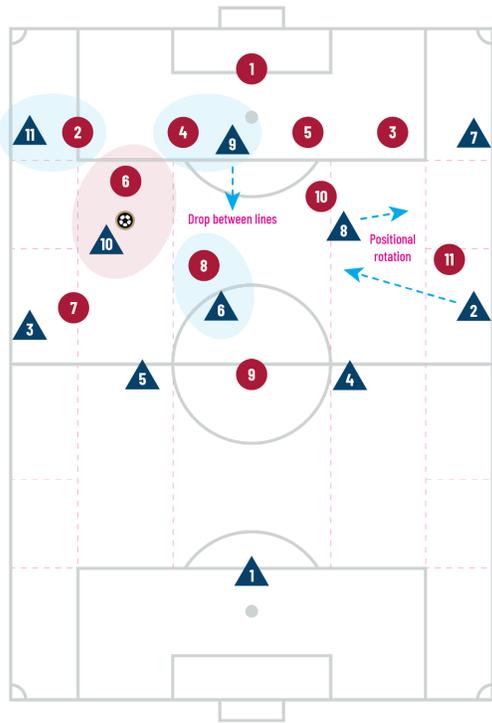


Zone 14

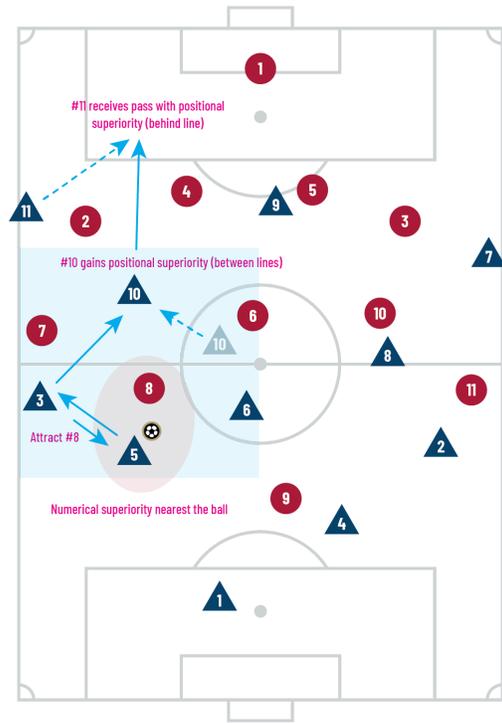
Positional Play concepts

- **Positional Play** – a philosophy, a style of play, and a way of understanding soccer that is built on utilizing structure, possession along with coordinated movements, and creating superiorities in order to score.
- **Third man or free player** – an open player who is free, unmarked and able to receive the ball. This is a key concept in [Positional Play](#).
- **Positional rotation** – when players temporarily swap positions in order to create overloads in certain areas of the pitch or to disrupt our opponent's organization in order to open up passing options by dragging defenders with them and creating space behind them, like a [dropping attacking mid](#).

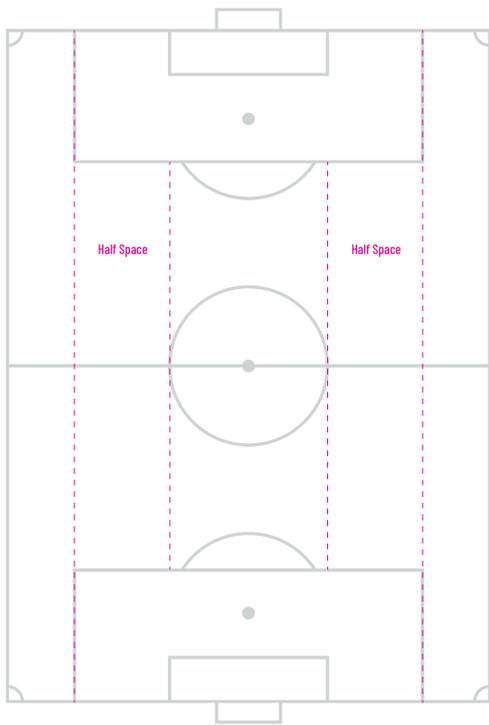
- **Between the lines** – the vertical space between an opponent’s defensive, midfield and offensive “lines”. See “[block lines](#)”. In the diagram below, #s 11, 9 and 7 are between the lines.
- **Half space** – the horizontal space or “channel” between an opponent’s outside back and central back on either side. It’s recognizable by the top corner of the penalty area to the start of its arc. Essentially, these are the spaces that we look to move into in order to draw defenders out of their positions and make gaps (or “holes”) in their defense as well as to find time out of pressure to make passes into the gaps that we’ve created. Watch this helpful [YouTube video on half spaces and lines](#).
- **False 9** – When the #9 drops deep, this is called a “false 9”. In the diagram below, #10 has the ball, and is looking to make a forward pass. With our opponent’s defense sitting in a block line on top of their penalty area, it’s difficult to make a pass through them. In situations like this, if our striker (#9) drops deep between the lines, she can [pull one of the defenders with her](#) creating a small gap behind. This pocket of space leaves room for a pass from #10 to #11 running toward goal.
- **Dual width** – Using possession among both wide players on a side (e.g., right fullback and right wing) to stretch the opposition’s block lines so that there is room in the half space for an attacking mid to operate.
- **Wide Trios** ^{NEW} – Using possession among both wide players on a side (“dual width”) in addition to a pivot player to create a triangle shape, which helps to stretch the opponent’s block lines through numerical superiority.
- **Rest defense** – Part of a team’s attacking shape, which is made up of the players holding positions in the midfield and back line (often the 2 and 3 in a 2-3-5 attacking structure). A rest defense ensures a good transition into defending when a loss of possession occurs, and is there to protect from counter-attacks.
- **Inverted fullback** ^{NEW} – In contrast to traditional fullbacks, inverted fullbacks move inward, alongside the defensive midfielder to act as a second pivot.



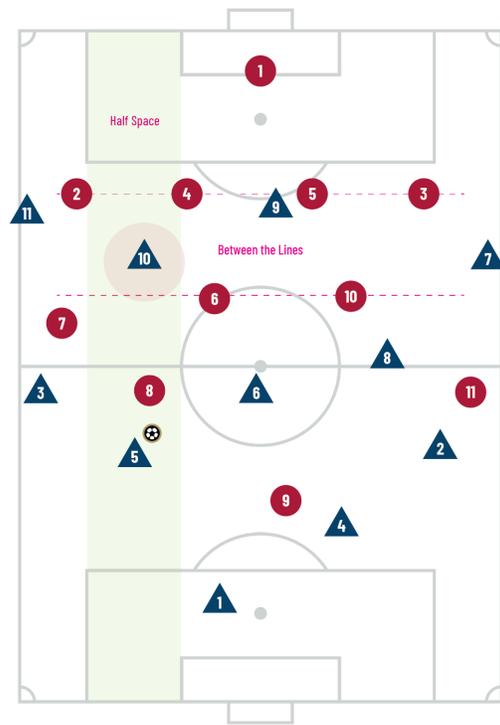
Positional rotation between #2 and #8, while #9 drops between the lines as a "false 9"



#10's movement into space makes her a "free player"



Half spaces



#10 is between the lines, and in the half space.

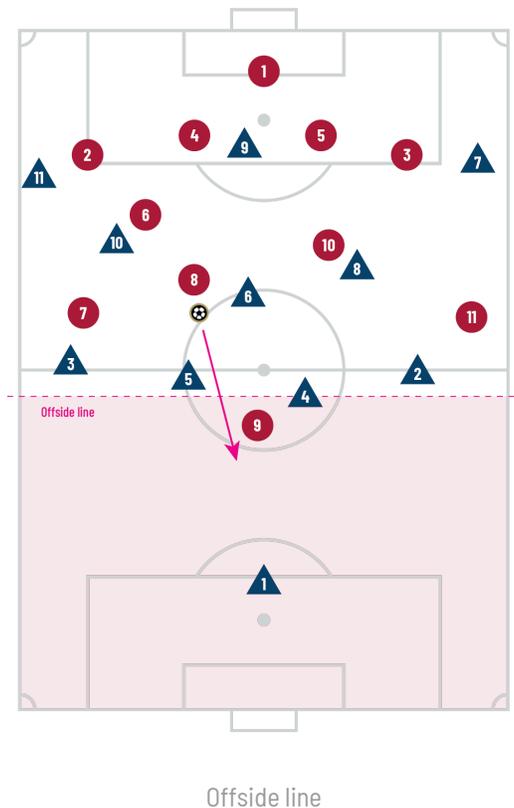
Laws of the Game

Below are just some basic laws and concepts that everyone should be familiar with. For the full set of rules, see the [International Football Association Board's \(IFAB\) Laws of the Game](#).

Basics

- **Offside** – offside is based on the imaginary line across the field level with our “[second to last opponent](#).” When an opponent is past this line **at the time the ball** is played to her, she is offside. If she is onside when the ball is played, she can run in behind the defense immediately after—so timing is critical!

In the example below, #4 is our “second to last defender” (the goalkeeper is technically our last defender in this diagram), and thus #4 is where the offside line is “drawn”. This means that our opponent’s #9 is offside if their #8 passes her the ball.



Referee signals & free kicks

If we understand the basic referee signals and become more aware of the rules, we can use this to our advantage by speeding up the restart of play. That way we can surprise our opponent who might not be ready.



Direct free kick



Indirect free kick



Throw in going this way

- **Direct free kick** – the referee will blow his/her whistle, put their hand up in the direction that the free kick will go, and then quickly put his/her hand down. Therefore, if the ref's hand is down after the whistle, we know it's direct! A direct free kick means we can shoot directly at goal if we're in range.
- **Indirect free kick** – after the whistle, if the referee's hand is straight up in the air (and remains up), we know it's an indirect kick. An indirect kick means it has to touch at least 2 people before it can go in the goal. Doesn't matter who, just 2 touches. Usually we tap the ball to a teammate for a shot. The ref's hand will stay up until the first touch is taken. Good refs will give a subtle gesture with their other hand to signal the direction (but you can ask "which direction?" if you don't know).
- **Throw in** – as soon as the ball goes out of bounds, the assistant referees will point their flag in the direction of the throw in. So, if he/she is pointing where we're attacking, it's our throw in! Take it quick—don't wait for permission.

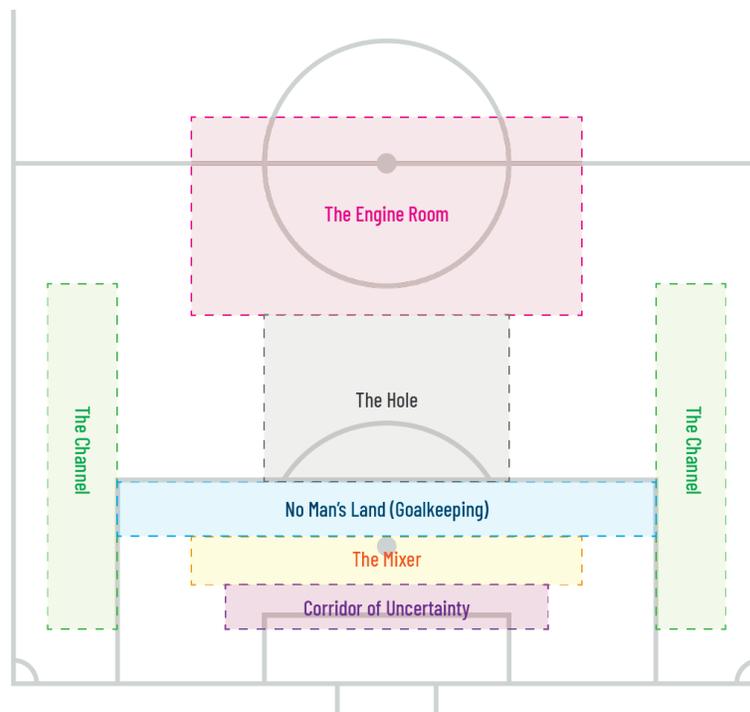
Unless the referee says otherwise, **all free kicks can usually be taken right away**—no need to wait, especially if we can catch our opponent off guard!

Clichés & colloquialisms

Perhaps more than most sports, soccer has developed a lot of clichés and colloquialisms. Some regional. Some global. Knowing these phrases will help you speak the worldwide language of football / soccer. You may even hear Coach Mark use these terms from time to time.

- **Set Piece** ^{NEW} — another term for any play from a “dead ball” situation. This includes goal kicks as well as corner kicks, free kicks or even throw-ins (assuming there’s a planned play).
- **Corridor of Uncertainty** ^{NEW} — originally a phrase used in cricket, it has been repurposed in soccer to describe the part of the pitch straddling the 6 yard line. This particular area is a rather dangerous area of the pitch, where goalkeepers may be reluctant to try to make a save because strikers (and defenders) are crashing toward them. It is an area that “teases and tempts” the defending team.
- **The Mixer** ^{NEW} — the area between the 6 yard line and roughly the penalty spot which is often crowded with players when crossing the ball or whipping in free kicks with the hopes of scoring off a header. It’s called “the Mixer” because almost anything can happen—making it a dangerous place for the defending team.
- **Goalkeeper’s No Man’s Land** ^{NEW} — while the “Corridor of Uncertainty” is a bit of a “no man’s land” for *all* players, the “Goalkeeper’s No Man’s Land” describes the area at the top of the penalty area where a goalkeeper can be caught out of position while under pressure, whether it’s through an errant “hospital pass” back to them or from being overzealous on a cross.
- **The Hole** ^{NEW} — the part of the pitch just above the penalty area and between the [half spaces](#) which is generally the same as “[Zone 14](#)”, but is based on the relative positioning of an attacking player being “[between the lines](#)”. In other words, it’s not necessarily a fixed space, but one that is based on an attacking player’s movement in and around Zone 14. It is called “the Hole” because it is, quite literally, a hole between the opposition’s lines where a [False 9](#) can find open space to operate or a midfielder is able to collect a rebound of a cross (or corner kick) and get an open shot on goal.

- **The Engine Room** ^{NEW} – this term is less of an area of the pitch and more of a nickname for a midfield player or group of midfield players who have a lot of energy, and are able to strongly influence the play through their tireless running. These players are said to have an “engine” and are “the engine” so to speak.
- **The Channel** ^{NEW} – the vertical space in the wide areas of the pitch, where wingers and overlapping fullbacks have the opportunity to shine against their opponent’s fullbacks. This is where the attacking team tries to create a [numerical superiority](#) or isolate the opponent in a [qualitative superiority](#) in order to get behind their last line of defense for a cross or cut into the penalty area. This term can be conflated with the vertical and horizontal “channels” (or spaces) between the opponent’s players (i.e. [half spaces](#) and [between the lines](#)), and isn’t too different when comparing the wide vertical “channels”. However, in context, “the channel” is a geographical location on the pitch (i.e. wide areas) and not relative to the opponent’s players.



Soccer clichés and colloquialisms

“Failure happens all the time. It happens every day in practice.
What makes you better is how you react to it.”

– Mia Hamm, USWNT
