

FORMATIONS & PLAYER ROLES GUIDE FOR COACHES

A practical reference for organizing players and teaching roles

Purpose. Use formations to give players a starting structure and a common picture of the field. The formation is not meant to stay frozen throughout the game. Players should learn the responsibilities of their role and how those responsibilities change the team shape as the ball and game situation change.

1. Formation Is a Starting Picture - Not a Set of Fixed Spots

- When we have the ball, get bigger: create width, depth, support and passing angles.
- When we do not have the ball, get smaller: become compact, protect central areas and defend together.
- In transition, the team may temporarily look different again.
- Teach players how their role relates to teammates instead of telling them to stand on the same patch of grass all game.

Example: A 4-3-3 may look more like a 2-3-5 when attacking and a 4-1-4-1 when defending. The coach did not necessarily change formations. The players' responsibilities changed with the moment.

2. Use Position Numbers as a Common Language

Position numbers are shorthand for roles. They are not jersey-number requirements, and exact numbering can vary. The benefit is that the language transfers when players change positions or formations.

Position Number / Role	Basic Job
1 - Goalkeeper	Start attacks, protect goal, communicate.
2 - Right Back / 3 - Left Back	Defend wide areas; provide width/support when appropriate.
4 / 5 - Center Backs	Protect central space, cover, and build play.
6 - Holding Midfielder	Connect lines and protect central space.
8 - Central Midfielder	Support both directions and connect play.
10 - Attacking Midfielder	Find space between lines and create chances.
7 / 11 - Wide Attackers	Provide width, attack space and recover into team shape.
9 - Center Forward	Provide depth, occupy defenders and finish/create chances.

Why this helps: A player can learn what it means to play as a 6, 8, 10 or 9 even when the formation changes. Instead of memorizing one spot, the player learns the job. With younger teams, pair the number with the position name.

3. Formation Options in the Development Manual

These are suggestions, not required formations. Coaches may use a different shape if it fits their players and teaching objectives. Whatever formation is used, it should still support the GCKA Game Model.

Format	Suggested Options
7v7 - U8-U10	2-3-1 or 3-2-1
9v9 - U11-U12	4-3-1 or 3-3-2
11v11 - U13+	4-3-3, 3-5-2 or 4-2-3-1

The diagrams below are examples only. They use a 2-3-1, 4-3-1 and 4-3-3 because they show a simple progression of roles and position numbers.

4. 7v7 - Teach Spacing and Simple Roles

7v7 Example: 2-3-1

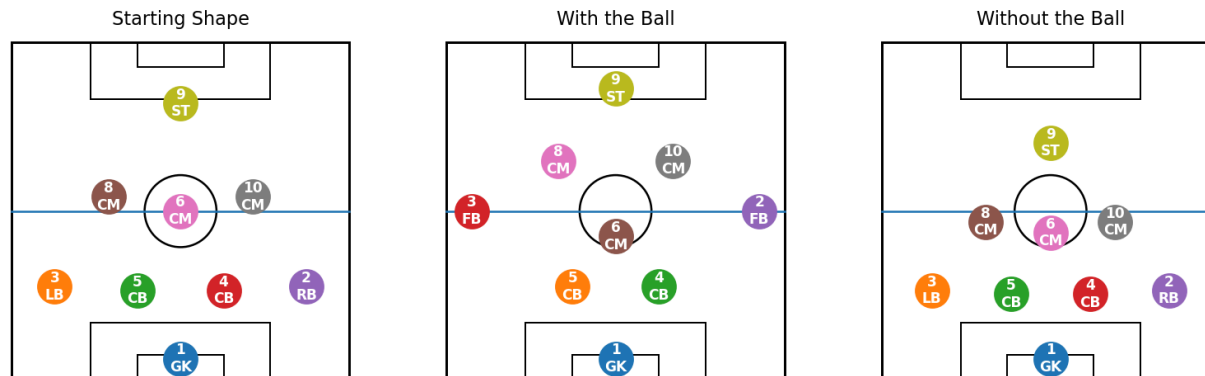


- Backs (2/3): protect the goal, give the goalkeeper options and spread apart with the ball.
- Central midfielder (6/8): support underneath the ball and recover centrally when possession is lost.
- Wide players (7/11): get wide in possession, attack space and recover inside enough to help defend.
- Striker (9): give depth, show for the ball and help start pressure.
- Goalkeeper (1): be part of the build-up, not just a shot stopper.

Look for: Are we spread out with the ball? Are we getting closer together without it? Are players moving to help instead of standing in their starting spot?

5. 9v9 - Add Clearer Relationships

9v9 Example: 4-3-1



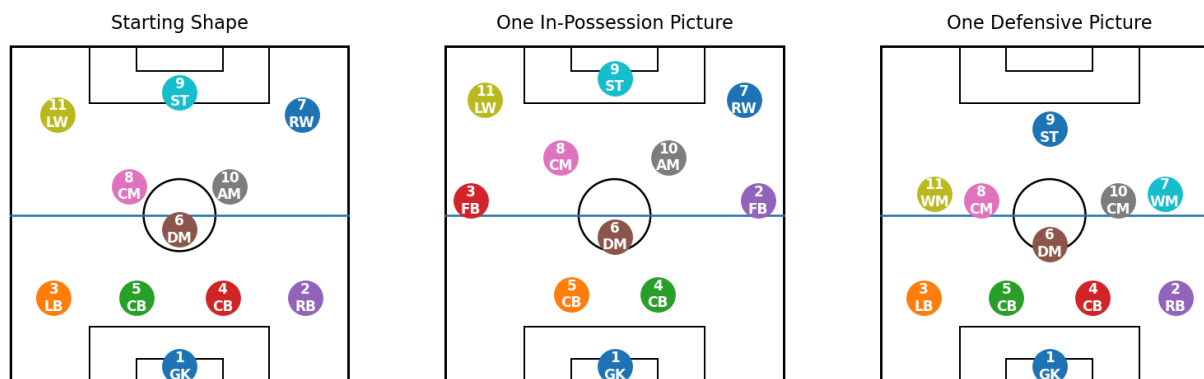
- Back four (2/3/4/5): give a base for build-up, protect central space and recognize when outside backs can move higher.
- 6: support behind the ball, connect the back line to midfield and protect the middle when possession changes.
- 8 and 10: play at different heights, find useful spaces and support the striker.
- 9: provide depth, connect with midfield, occupy defenders and help direct pressure.
- Do not let the midfield three stand in a straight line. Give the ball different angles and heights.

Coaching cues: "Can we make the field bigger?" • "Who is underneath the ball?" • "Are we connected?" • "When we lose it, can we get compact?"

Using a 3-3-2? The same principles still apply. Teach the jobs - width, central support, depth, pressure and cover - rather than asking players to copy a diagram.

6. 11v11 - Roles Drive the Shape

11v11 Example: 4-3-3



- 1 and back four (2/3/4/5): support build-up, protect central space and manage the space behind the team.
- 6: connect the back line and midfield, support underneath the ball and protect central areas.
- 8/10: play at different heights, find space between lines and connect midfield to attack.
- 7/11: provide width or move inside when the situation calls for it; recover into the team shape when defending.
- 9: provide depth, connect attacks, occupy center backs and help set the direction of the press.

The key point: A 4-3-3 does not need to look like a 4-3-3 at every moment. Fullbacks moving higher, the 6 supporting underneath and attackers occupying the front line can create a 2-3-5 picture. When defending, recovering wingers can create a 4-1-4-1 picture. The roles create the shape.

7. Coach the Role, Not the Spot

- Instead of only saying "stay in your position," use responsibilities: "give us width," "support underneath," "protect the middle," or "give us depth."
- Use position numbers to connect the same role across different formations. A 6 is still learning central support and defensive balance whether there is one holding midfielder or two.
- Rotate younger players through different roles. Do not lock a player into one position simply because they are currently successful there.
- A player leaving the starting spot is not automatically out of position. Ask whether the movement helps the team and whether the space is covered.

8. Common Problems and Simple Fixes

What You See	What to Coach
Everyone follows the ball.	Re-establish width, depth and support.
Players stay frozen in starting spots.	Coach the role: support, create space or cover.
Team is stretched when defending.	Get compact and reduce gaps.
Nobody supports behind the ball.	Create a safe option underneath - often the 6/8.
Wide players stay wide when defending.	Recover toward the team and protect central space.
Players are confused after changing shape.	Use role numbers and responsibilities they already know.

9. Common Questions

Do we have to use one of the formations in the Development Manual?

No. They are suggested examples. Use a shape that fits your players and supports the club's playing principles.

Should players stay in their assigned position?

They should understand the responsibility of the position, but they also need to move to solve the game. The goal is good team shape, not fixed dots.

Do position numbers have to match jersey numbers?

No. The number is coaching language for a role. A player wearing jersey 17 can still be your 6.

When should I start using position numbers?

Introduce them lightly at 7v7 and use them more consistently as players get older and can understand the responsibilities.

Should I teach more than one formation?

Yes, when useful and when the players are ready. Start with one shape they understand, then show how the same roles and principles transfer.

Is it okay if the team looks like a different formation during the game?

Yes. The important question is whether the shape fits the moment: big enough in possession, compact enough without the ball, and balanced in transition.

GCKA Formation & Player Role Standard

FORMATION - A starting structure, not fixed spots.

ROLES - Teach the player's responsibility, not just where to stand.

POSITION NUMBERS - Use common language that transfers between formations.

IN POSSESSION - Create width, depth, support and passing angles.

OUT OF POSSESSION - Get compact, protect central space and defend together.

TRANSITION - React quickly and restore balance.

DEVELOPMENT - Rotate younger players and add position-specific detail gradually.