

# US Youth Soccer ODP

## Player Manual

*This document was originally published in 2017, but still serves as a valuable learning resource for players*

Train to Develop. Play to Win.™

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the main objectives of the US Youth Soccer Olympic Development Program is to teach the players to play possession soccer and play out of the back within the 4-3-3 system, in accordance with the U.S. Soccer guidelines. Since all U.S. Soccer Youth National Teams play 4-3-3 possession soccer, players going through the US Youth Soccer ODP process will be better prepared if and when invited into a national team camp. Also, players who are comfortable playing possession soccer have a better chance of attracting the attention of college coaches, national scouts, and professional scouts. Most of the top foreign youth academies in the world play 4-3-3, with an emphasis on a possession, attacking playing style.

To that end, all US Youth Soccer ODP training sessions and events are geared toward teaching the players the right principles specific to the possession playing style. US Youth Soccer ODP coaches throughout the country are trained to focus on these principles and follow the official US Youth Soccer ODP Coaching Manual and curriculum.

Since contact time in US Youth Soccer ODP is limited compared to club level and most US Youth Soccer state association and region ODP events are short and spaced out over the year, we are constantly looking at ways to enhance and accelerate the learning process for the players. This manual is another tool we use to speed up learning by providing the players valuable information in addition to the training sessions and events.

We ask that you read this manual carefully and learn the information. You should know the 4-3-3 numbering system and memorize and understand the 10 principles of possession soccer. We recommend that you read the manual a few times and review it before coming to any ODP function. By doing this, you will get more out of the program, become a smarter player, and be able to perform better at training sessions and events. Don't hesitate to ask your coaches if you have questions.

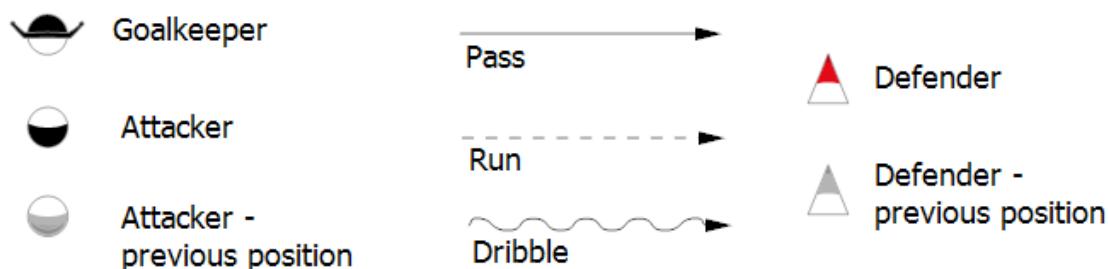


FIGURE 1 KEY TO DIAGRAMS

## **THE 4-3-3 NUMBERING SYSTEM**

We use the same position numbering system throughout US Youth Soccer ODP, boys and girls, in accordance with the U.S. Soccer requirements. In diagram 1A the back line is denoted as players 2-4-5-3, with 2 being the right back and 3 being the left back. The midfield has the defensive midfielder denoted as player 6, and the two attacking midfielders are players 8 and 10. The forwards are right winger 7, left winger 11 and center forward 9. The keeper is of course player 1.

At the youngest US Youth Soccer ODP age group, we play 9 vs. 9 and use a similar numbering system in order to facilitate a smooth transition from 9 vs. 9 to 11 vs. 11. In the 9 vs. 9 games, we play out of a 3-1-1-3 formation as shown in diagram 1B. Note in diagram 1B that players 4 and 5 are combined into one position and the same is done with players 8 and 10. Also notice that the 3-1-1-3 formation in 9 vs. 9 looks a lot like the 4-3-3 minus 2 players. By doing this, we can teach you in the 9 vs. 9 environment the same behavior, movement, and decisions that you would be expected to know in the 11 vs. 11 environment.

## **THE 10 PRINCIPLES OF POSSESSION SOCCER**

The US Youth Soccer ODP coaching staff focuses on teaching the players the team shape, player movements and player decisions on the ball, based on the following 10 principles of possession soccer. In each training session, the coaches will cover a few of these at a time, with the ultimate goal of teaching the players all 10 principles and ingraining the right habits. You are expected to know the 10 principles and use these principles to make decisions on where to move and what to do with the ball.



USA Style of Play ~ Mind – Ball – Body

Speed of Play, Tactical Awareness, Technical Execution, Confident Mentality, Positional Skills & Responsibility, Professional Habits, Ambitious Going Forward and Aggressive in Defense

**PRINCIPLE 1: TEAM SHAPE**

Every time your team has the ball, you must spread out to make the field as big as possible. This is done by player 9 pushing up as high as possible, wingers 7 and 11 getting out as high and wide as possible, the back line dropping back and the midfielders spreading into the space in the middle. The team shape as shown in diagrams 1A and 1B is a good illustration of the right shape that makes the field as big as possible.



DIAGRAM 1A

DIAGRAM 1B



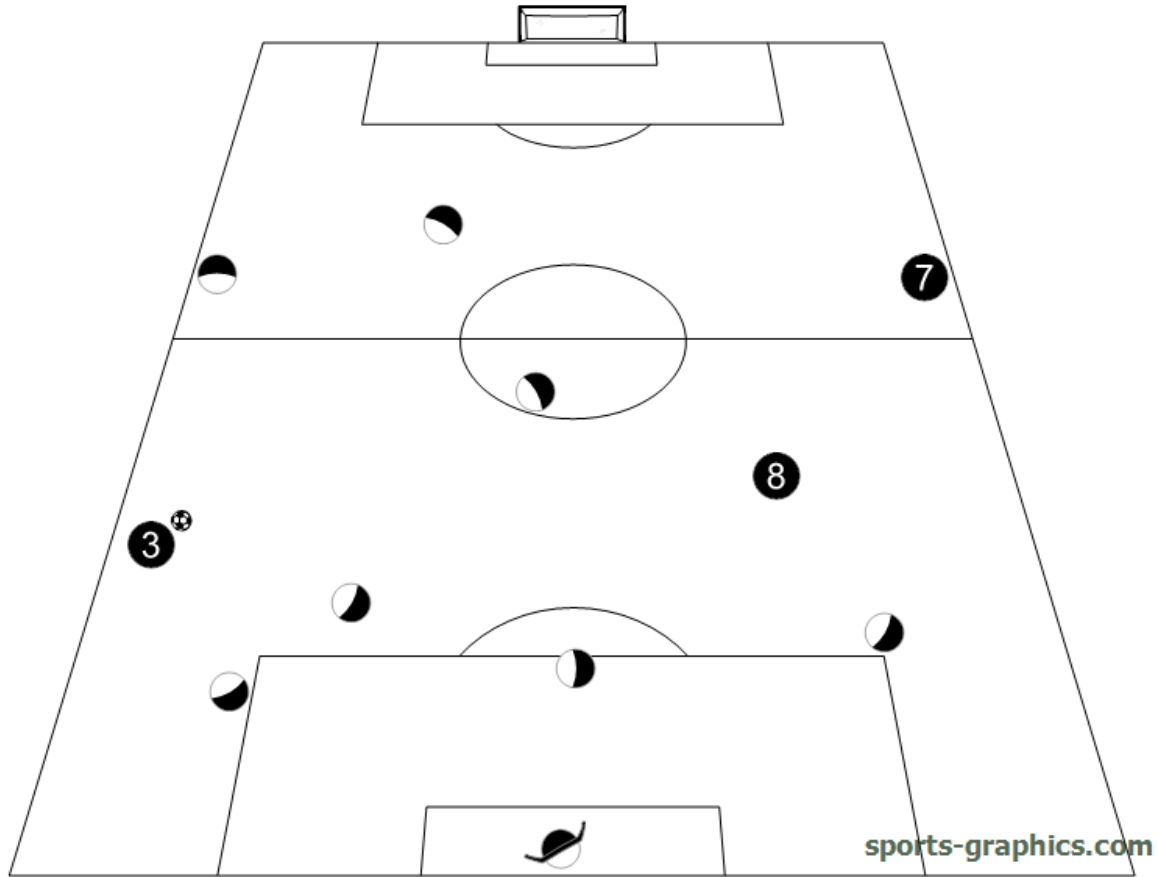


DIAGRAM 1C

In diagram 1C the ball is with the left defender 3. Notice how the winger 7 is still wide and attacking midfielder 8 is still on the right side staying away from the ball and making the field big. Winger 7 and midfielder 8 should resist the temptation to check toward the ball since this will create a congested midfield.

**PRINCIPLE 2: PEEL OFF AND OPEN YOUR BODY TO THE FIELD**

All of the players ahead of the ball should peel off their opponent and open their body so they can receive the ball facing up field. You should avoid receiving the ball with your back to goal if there is pressure on you. Move away from pressure and open your body to at least a sideways-on posture.

Diagrams 2A and 2B illustrate two scenarios and the recommended peeling off movement of all the players ahead of the ball.

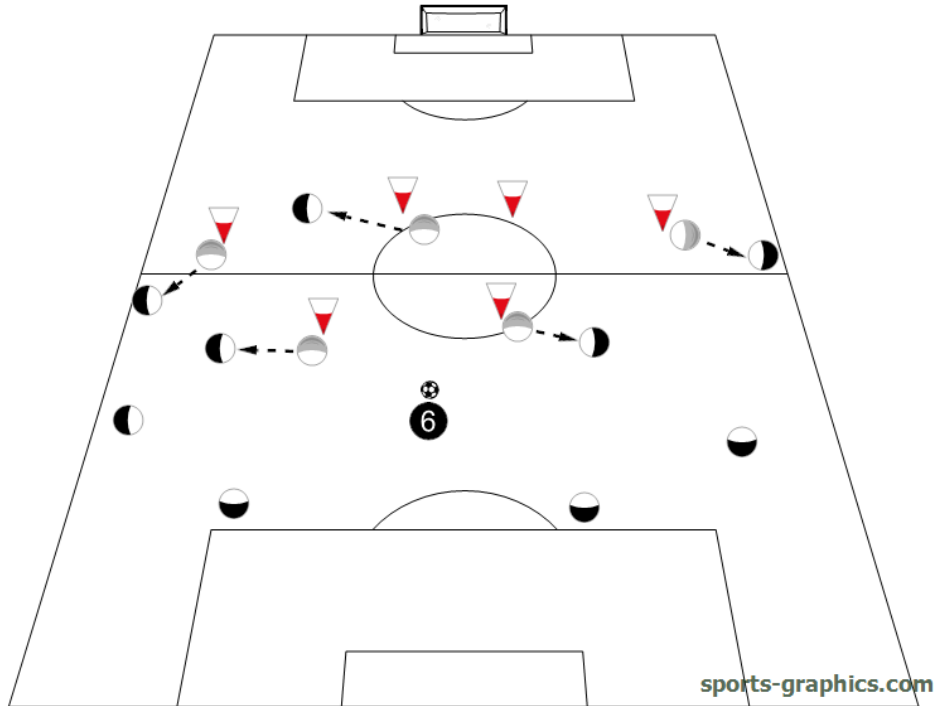


DIAGRAM 2A PLAYER 6 HAS THE BALL

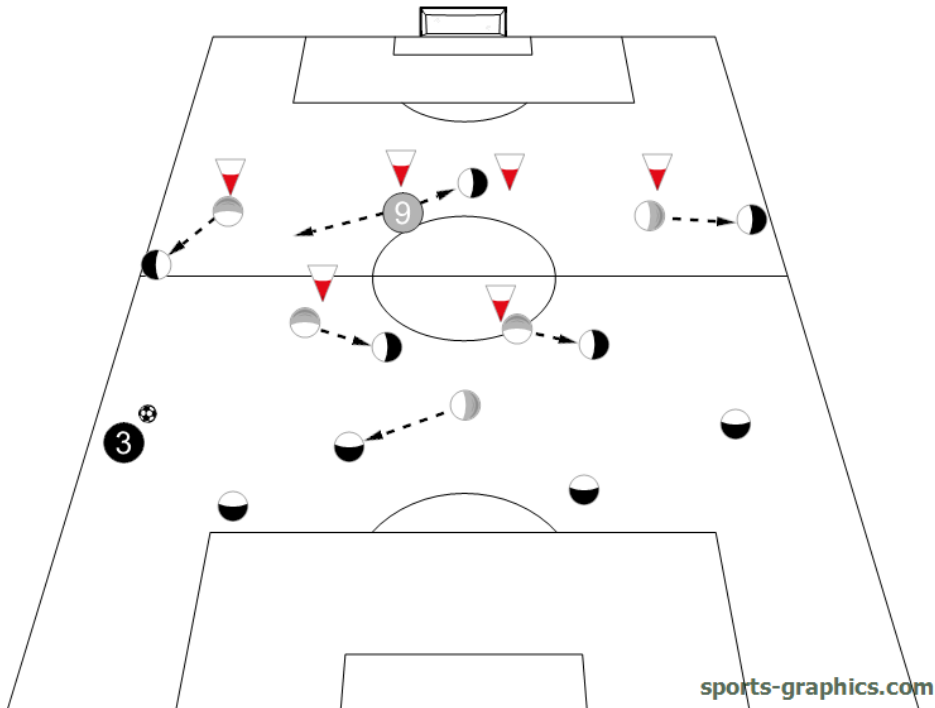


DIAGRAM 2B PLAYER 3 HAS THE BALL. PLAYER 9 CAN EITHER PEEL OFF OR CHECK TOWARDS THE BALL.

**PRINCIPLE 3: BENDING RUNS**

Whenever you make a forward run on the flanks, bend your run towards the outside to create width and separate yourself from your opponent. Whenever you make a forward run in the middle of the field, bend your run to give the passer enough time to judge the pass, to open up a passing lane for a through ball, and to avoid running into off-side.

Diagram 3 shows how the player on the left flank bends his/her run to get even wider. This spreads out the opponents and creates a passing lane into the flank. Also, notice how the player in the middle who is standing with his/her back to goal starts with a flat run and then bends his/her run to get onto a through ball. This flat run gives the passer time to see how the opponents react to the run, allows him/her to judge the pass, gives the passer more options and avoid being off-side.

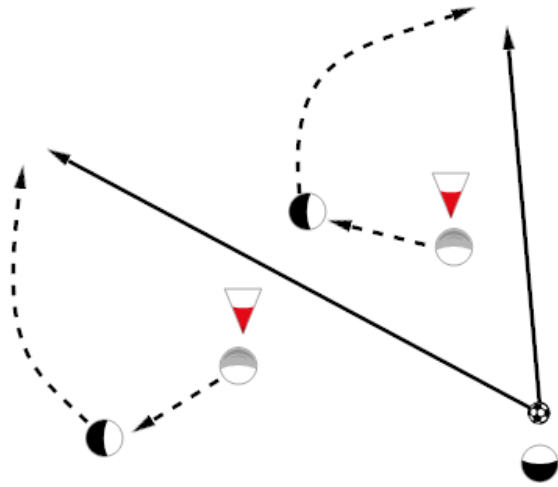


DIAGRAM 3

**PRINCIPLE 4: RUNS TRIGGER RUNS – AWARENESS OF SURROUNDING**

Players need to look around them all the time to see where their teammates and opponents are. This will help you make the correct runs and will avoid teammates duplicating runs or running into the same area. For example, if you are an attacking midfielder and you see that your center forward is making a checking run towards the ball, you might decide to run

into the space created by him/her and run onto a through ball behind the other team's defense. Another example is when a winger runs inside to make room for the fullback to overlap. Runs trigger other runs, but for that to happen you must constantly look around you to assess your position in relation to your teammates' positions.

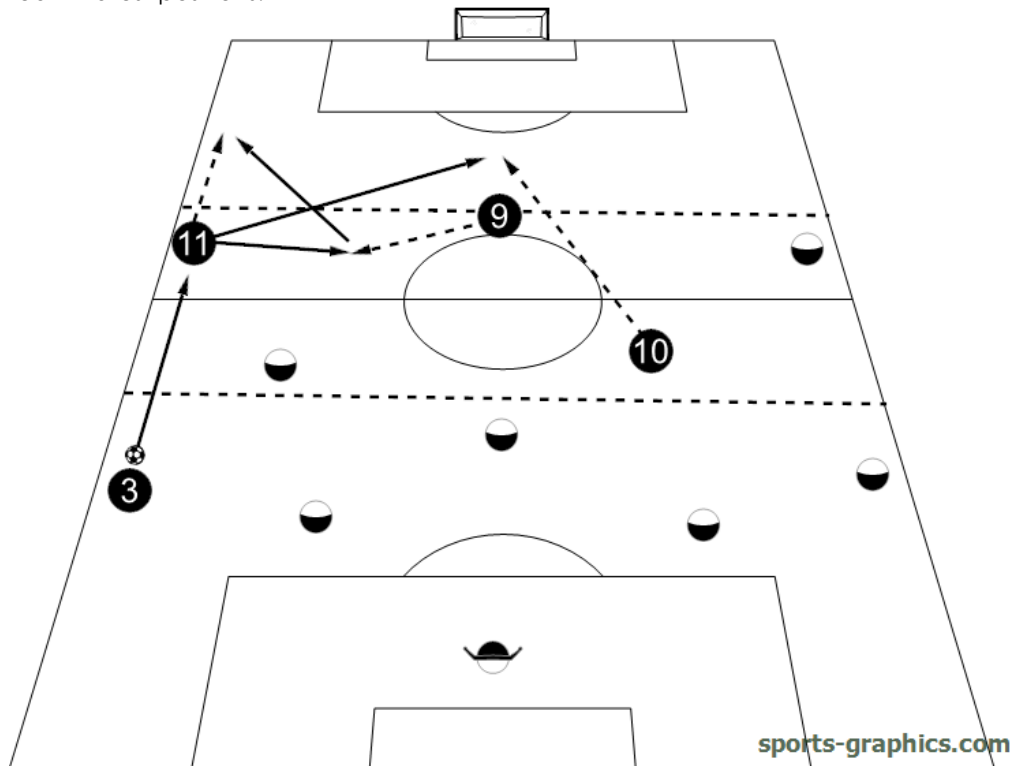


DIAGRAM 4

Diagram 4 shows an example of a run that is triggered by another run. In diagram 4, player 11 receives the ball from player 3. Player 9 checks towards the ball and player 10 sees the field and makes a run behind the back line for a through ball into the space created by player 9's run. You can see how winger 11 has a couple of options: to combine with 9 or to play a through ball for 10.

**PRINCIPLE 5: DIAGONAL PASSES**

Diagonal passes are usually better than vertical passes. A diagonal pass allows the receiver to open his/her body and receive the pass facing up field. A diagonal pass accomplishes both penetration and switching all in one pass. A vertical pass is played into a player who is likely to be facing his/her own goal and have limited vision. If he/she is marked, a vertical pass is difficult to control. Avoid vertical passes to players who are marked tightly and look for the diagonal ball as often as possible.

In Diagram 5, the vertical pass is played to a player who has his/her back to goal and is limited in what he/she can do. The diagonal pass is easier to control because the receiver is in a sideways-on posture and can see the whole field.

*Note:* if you are checking towards the ball with your back to goal, you should already know what you will do with the ball before you get it. Most likely you should make a first time pass to a teammate rather than hold the ball.

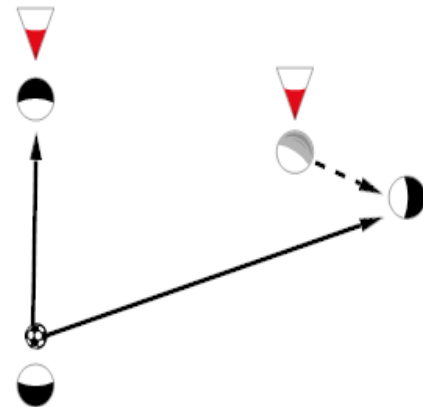


DIAGRAM 5

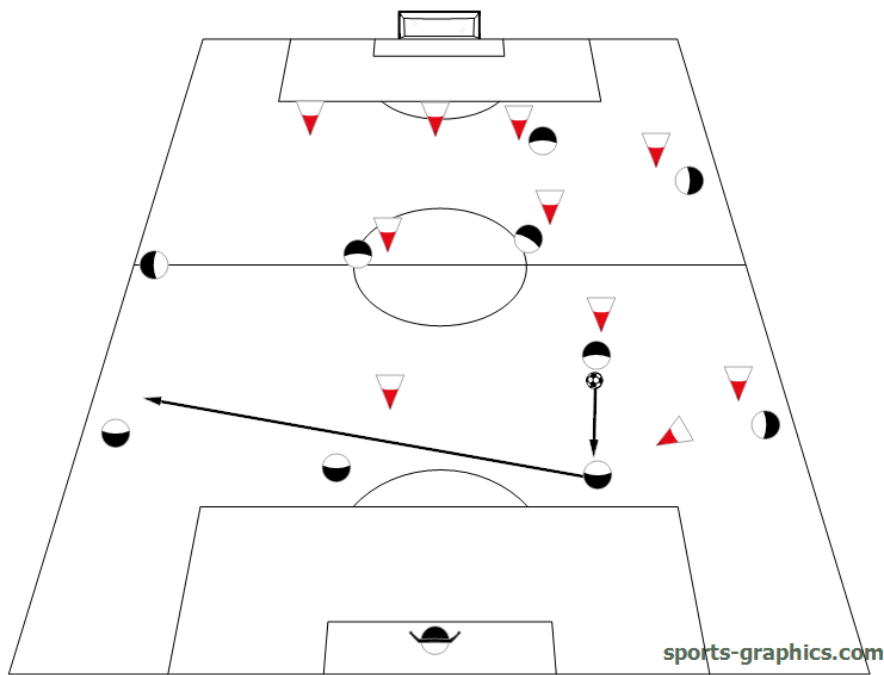


DIAGRAM 6A

**PRINCIPLE 6: BACK PASSES ARE USUALLY FOLLOWED BY A SWITCH**

When a player makes a back pass, he/she is likely doing it because he/she does not see an option to play forward. It usually means that the area in front of the ball is too congested or your team is outnumbered in this area. For this reason, it is usually best to switch the ball into another area of the field. Another reason for a switch following a back pass is to sustain a rhythm of possession and increase the speed of play.

Of course, there are exceptions to this principle. For example, if the back pass is part of a combination play like a wall pass or a back-through passing sequence to penetrate, it is of course ok.

Diagrams 6A and 6B demonstrate the typical scenarios where a back pass should be followed by a switch. The switch can be a square ball or a diagonal ball. Either way, the key is to send the ball into another area of the field where we have a better chance of penetration.

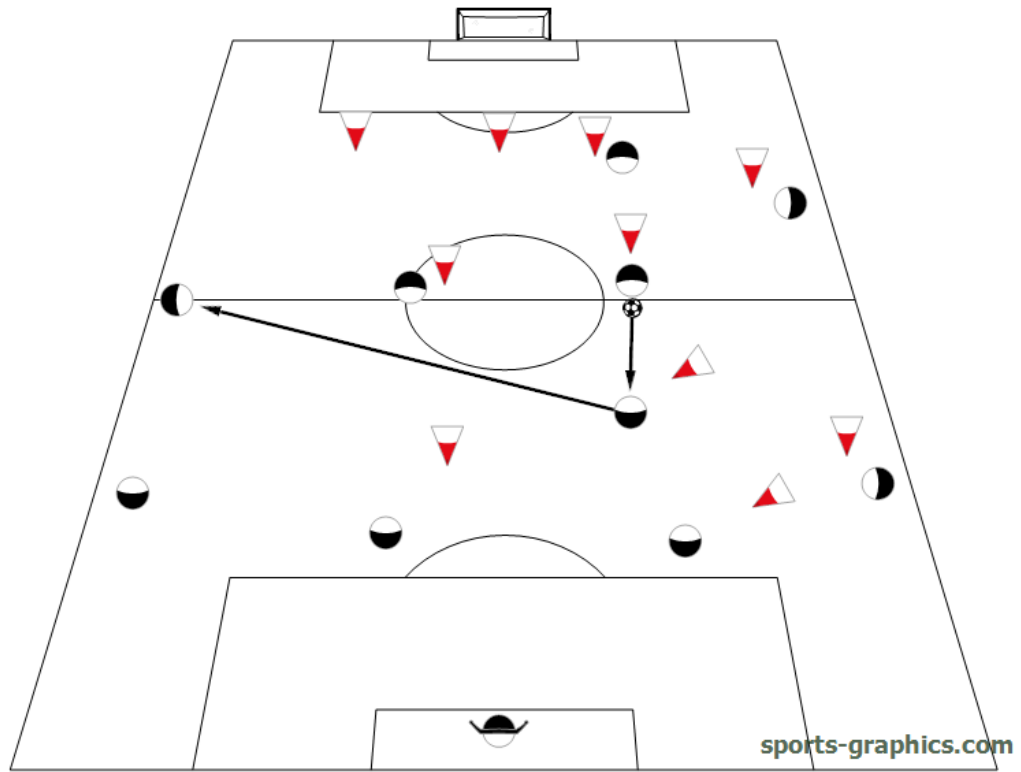


DIAGRAM 6B



**PRINCIPLE 7: THE BALL DOESN'T STAY IN AN AREA FOR LONG**

To maintain possession and not allow the other team to press and win the ball, we have to circulate the ball and move it constantly around the field. This makes us less predictable and it makes it harder for the other team to pin us down and press us with lots of players. As a rule of thumb, after a couple of short passes in one area, the next pass should be played out of the area.

Diagram 7 illustrates how the ball is circulated with a string of mostly diagonal passes from side to side and from back to front, never staying in the same area for too long.

In Diagram 7, the ball starts with right back 2 and by the fourth pass it is with the left winger 11 and by the eighth pass it is back on the right flank for winger 7. The ball doesn't stay in the same place for long, making it hard for the other team to press with numbers.

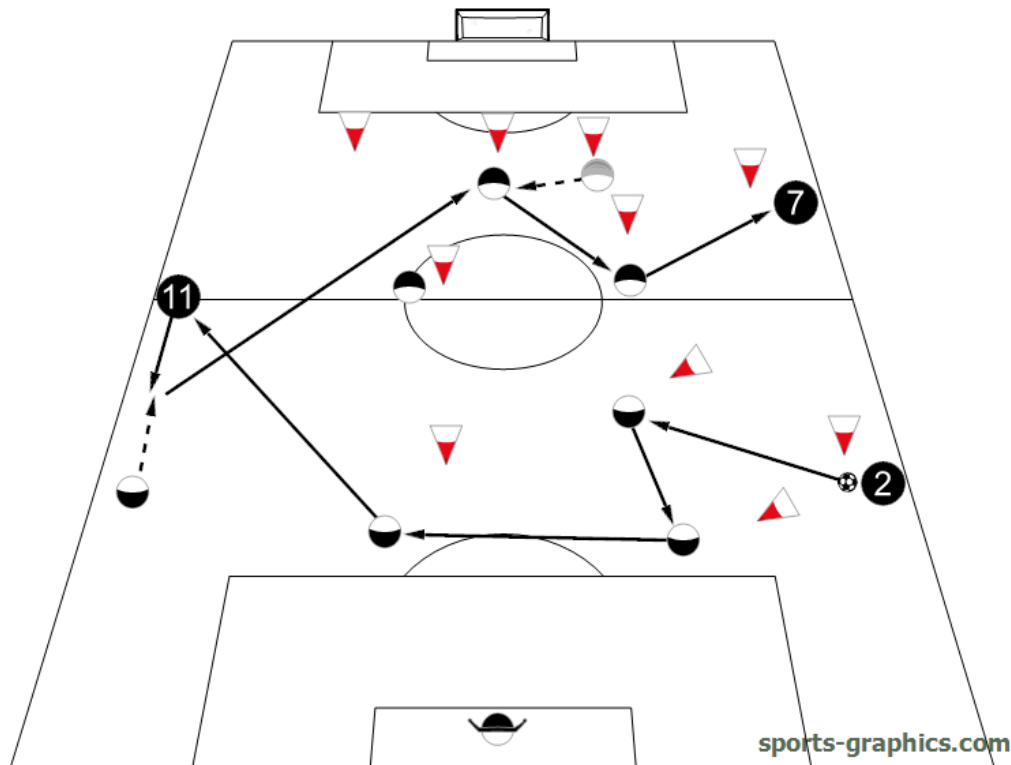


DIAGRAM 7

**PRINCIPLE 8: KEEPERS DISTRIBUTE BALLS, AVOID THE LONG PUNT**

Since the emphasis in US Youth Soccer ODP is to play out of the back, it is important for the goalkeeper and the back line to become comfortable at playing out of the back. When the keeper catches a cross or a shot, the team should spread out quickly so the keeper can throw the ball to a free player. On goal kicks, the keeper should look to play the ball to feet rather than send everyone up and take a long high punt.

Diagrams 8A and 8B show how the team should be positioned on a goal kick to make the field big and give the goalkeeper some options for a pass. Diagram 8A is the preferred shape, with defenders 4 and 5 spread to the corners of the penalty area and the outside backs 2 and 3 pushed up and wide and the rest of the team pushed up. Diagram 8B shows how defenders 4 and 5 can drop down to receive the ball if the other team is pressing them when they are positioned like in diagram 8A.

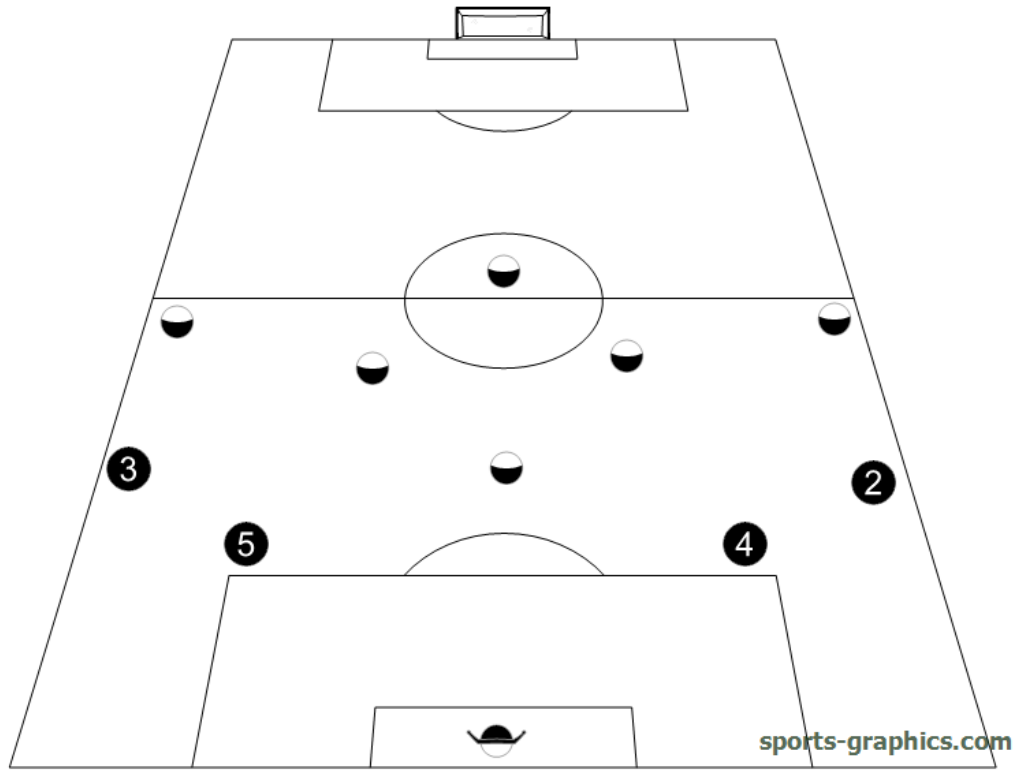


DIAGRAM 8A

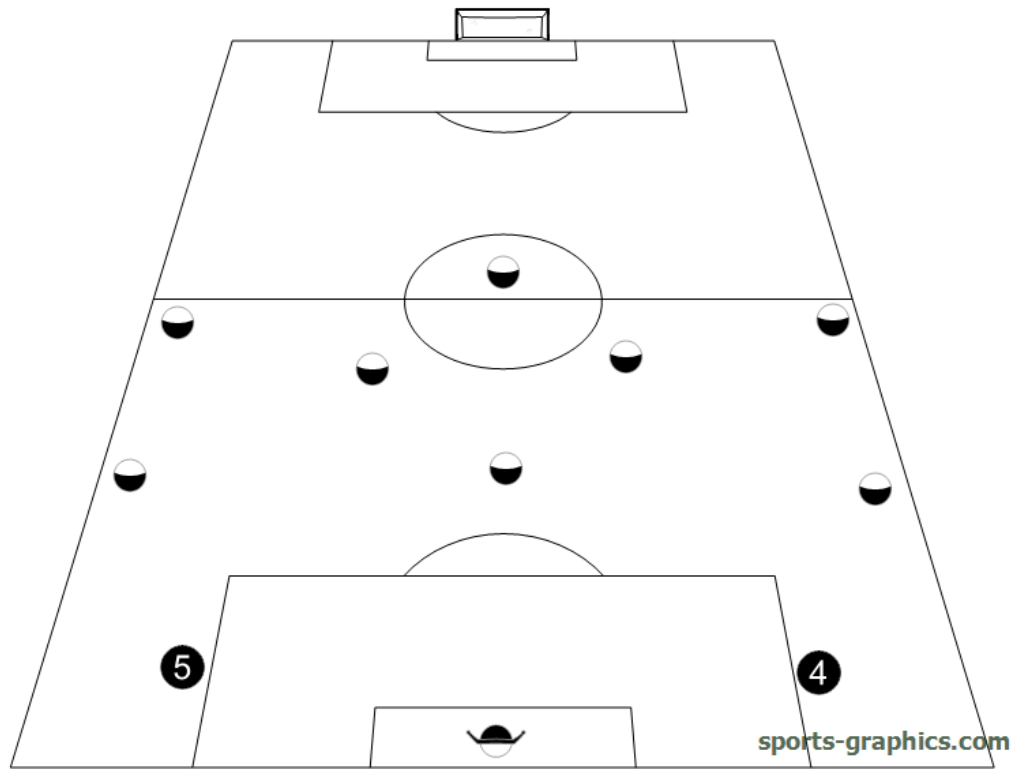


DIAGRAM 8B

**PRINCIPLE 9: USE THROW-INS TO SWITCH THE POINT OF ATTACK**

Use the throw in to switch the point of attack since the opposing team has most of their players squeezed into the area near the throw-in. This means that there is lots of space on the other side of the field. Avoid throwing the ball down the line into a crowd since it usually results in a loss of possession.

Diagram 9 shows how the back line can drop deep to receive the ball and switch it, or the midfielders can check away to create space and then check to the ball to receive it and switch.

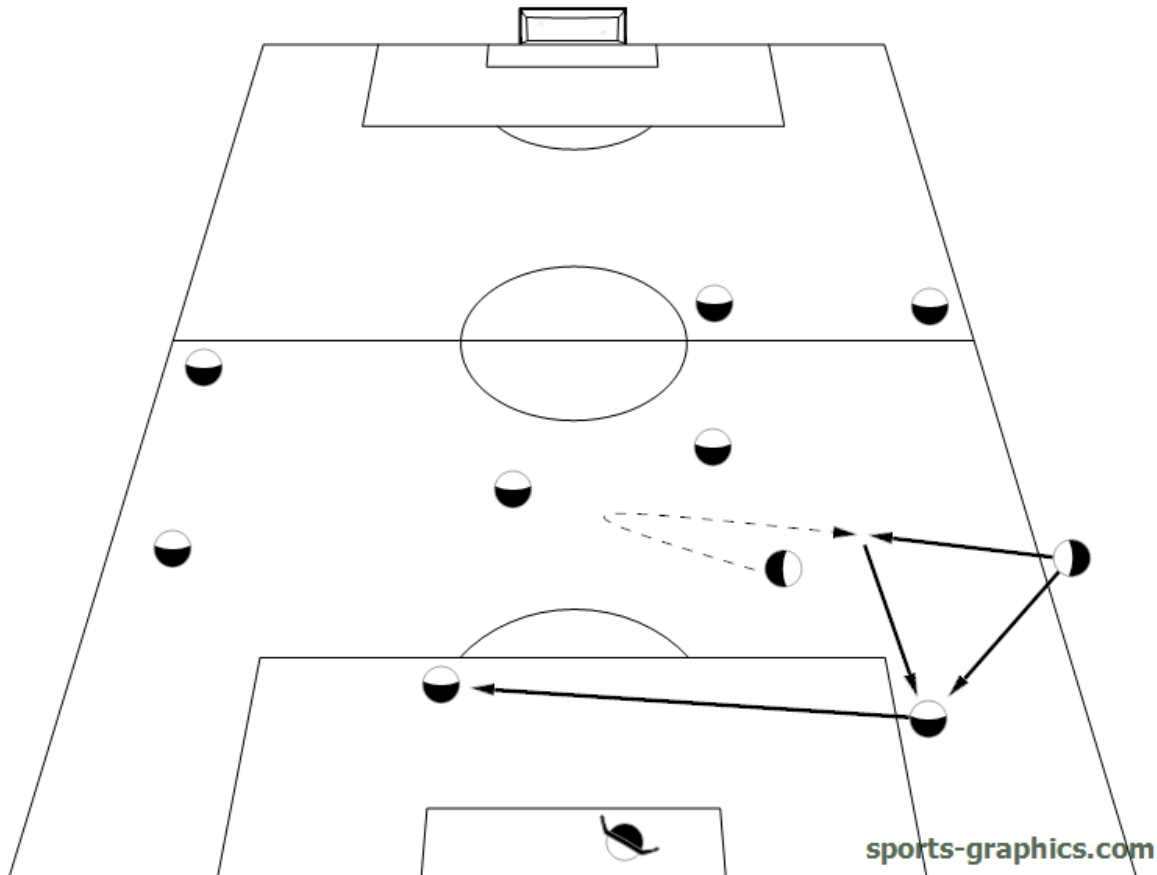


DIAGRAM 9

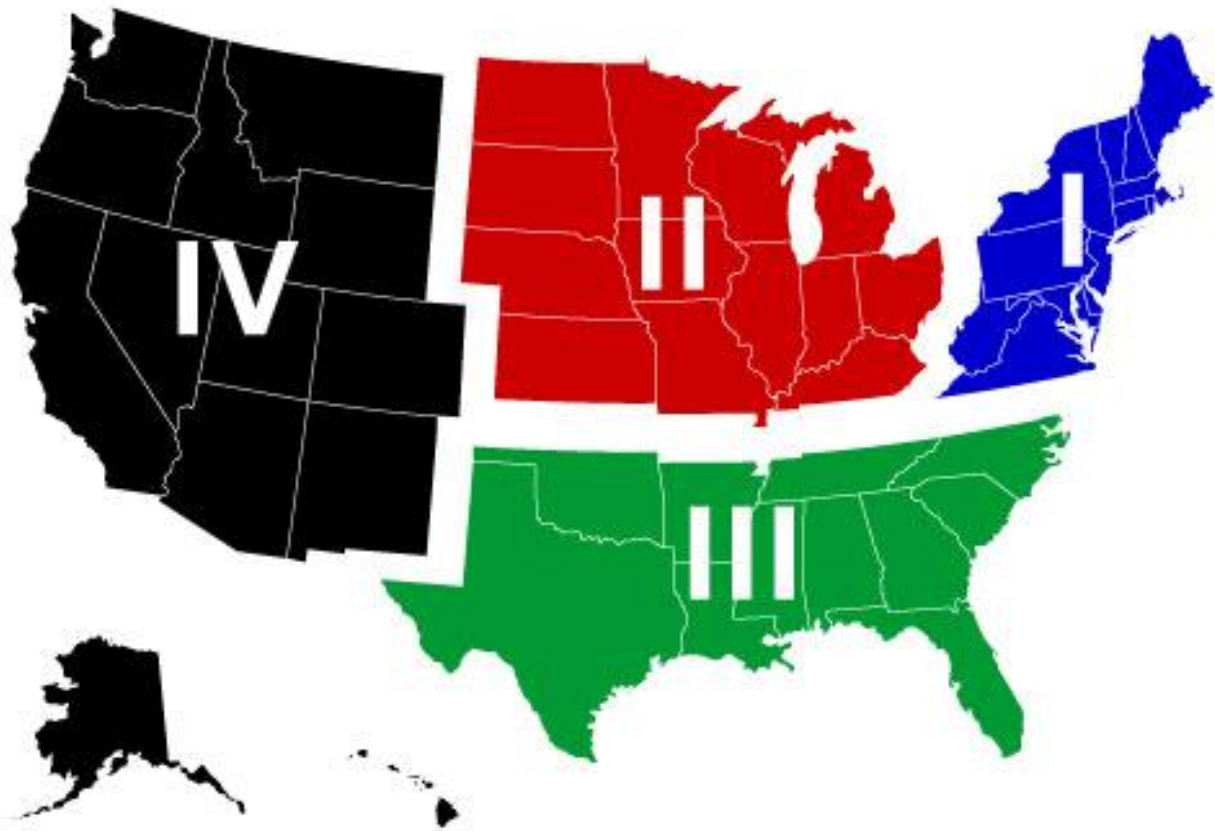
**PRINCIPLE 10: SPEED OF PLAY**

You have to learn to play quickly and keep the ball moving. This requires a lot of one touch and two touch play. This results in a high tempo of possession and makes it difficult for the opponents to keep up with the play. There are some moments when dribbling is appropriate, but for the majority of the time, quick one touch or two touch passing is the best way. If you watch high level soccer on TV, you will see how quickly the ball is passed from one player to the next, with a minimum of fuss and with quick ball movement.

KEEP THE BALL MOVING!

**ODP MOTTO: WORK HARD! PLAY SMART!**

# US Youth Soccer Regions and Region Team Colors



Train to Develop. Play to Win.™

<sup>i</sup> Developed by Jacob Daniel, Technical Director for Georgia Soccer and US Youth Soccer Region III ODP Boys Head Coach.

Players in US Youth Soccer ODP should also participate with their club team in one of the region leagues, the national league and in the national championships series.



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**Mission Statement**

US Youth Soccer is non-profit and educational organization whose mission is to foster the physical, mental and emotional growth and development of America's youth through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition.

