



Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association

Coach Education Week



Small-Sided Games: A Coaching Gateway to the Fundamentals of the Game

Desired Outcomes:

Gain a deeper understanding of how player behavior changes when we:

- Adjust field size and shape
- Decide how many players should be in the activity
- Choose scoring methods
- Add conditions
- Integrate Goalkeepers into team training



Field Size & Shape



Why Do Field Dimensions Matter?

Your job as a coach is designing the space to encourage the desired behaviors to appear. The 'field becomes the coach,' so players adapt without needing drawn out explanations.

Field size and shape impacts:

- **Speed of Play** – How quickly players make a decision (dribble, pass, shoot).
- **Type of Decision Making** – Action that is taken (dribble, pass, shoot, switch point of attack)
- **Field Spacing** - Spreading out and protecting key areas of the field
- **Tactical Knowledge**– Where to go on the field, key areas of the field and how to support one another.

Field Size & Shape

How Would Designing Small Fields Impact Player Behavior?

On a smaller and shorter field players can:

- Tighter shape (more connected)
- Forces quicker choices
- Learn to play under pressure
- Allows work on turning, shielding, and combining with teammates (Due to the proximity)

What would be the best use scenario?

Field Size & Shape

How Would Designing Large Fields Impact Player Behavior?

On larger and wider fields players can:

- Spread out and find open space
- Try more technical dribbling
- Learn when to pass compared to when to dribble
- Learn transition identifiers
- Develop overall athletic ability

What would be the best use scenario?

Field Size & Shape

How does different Field Shapes Affect Behavior?

Long and Narrow Fields:

- Encourages straight forward dribbling
- Helps developing running long distances (With and without ball)
- Puts an emphasis on defending the middle

Short and Wide Fields:

- More 1v1 wide opportunities
- Encourages switching sides
- Promotes a slower more possession game

Field Size & Shape

Choosing the Right Field for Your Goal

Best Field Type	Session Goal	Why it Works
	Speed of Play	
	Type of Decision Making	
	Field Spacing	
	Tactical Knowledge	

Field Size & Shape

Aydin – Size and shape of field

Choosing the Right Field for Your Goal

Best Field Type	Session Goal	Why it Works
Short and Narrow	Speed of Play	Players are closer together, so they have less time on the ball needing to make a quicker decision.
	Type of Decision Making	
	Field Spacing	
	Tactical Knowledge	

ACTIVITY SPACE CHEAT SHEET



Using the average space provided at each game size – below is a breakdown of available field size to assist you in training activity design

4v4: U5, U6, U7		VERTICAL SPACE	HORIZONTAL SPACE
	1v1	8 yards	5 yards
	2v2	15 yards	10 yards
	3v3	23 yards	15 yards
	4v4	30 yards	20 yards

7v7: U8, U9, U10		VERTICAL SPACE	HORIZONTAL SPACE
	1v1	9 yards	6 yards
	2v2	17 yards	11 yards
	3v3	26 yards	17 yards
	4v4	34 yards	23 yards
	5v5	43 yards	29 yards
	6v6	52 yards	34 yards
	7v7	60 yards	40 yards

9v9: U11, U12		VERTICAL SPACE	HORIZONTAL SPACE
	1v1	8 yards	6 yards
	2v2	17 yards	11 yards
	3v3	25 yards	17 yards
	4v4	33 yards	22 yards
	5v5	42 yards	28 yards
	6v6	50 yards	33 yards
	7v7	58 yards	39 yards
	8v8	67 yards	44 yards
	9v9	75 yards	50 yards

11v11		VERTICAL SPACE	HORIZONTAL SPACE
	1v1	11 yards	7 yards
	2v2	22 yards	14 yards
	3v3	33 yards	21 yards
	4v4	44 yards	28 yards
	5v5	55 yards	35 yards
	6v6	66 yards	42 yards
	7v7	77 yards	49 yards
	8v8	88 yards	56 yards
	9v9	99 yards	63 yards
	10v10	110 yards	70 yards
	11v11	120 yards	77 yards



¹J. Cone and G. Smith, Player development: the holistic method. New York, NY: Routledge, 2022.

Different Number of Players

WHY?



Why Should We Expose Our Players To Play Numbers Up And Numbers Down?

- **Real game situations**
- **Creating autonomous thinkers**
- **Reading & understanding the game**
- **Expose players to different challenges that requires different solutions**

Different Number of Players

Player Behavior

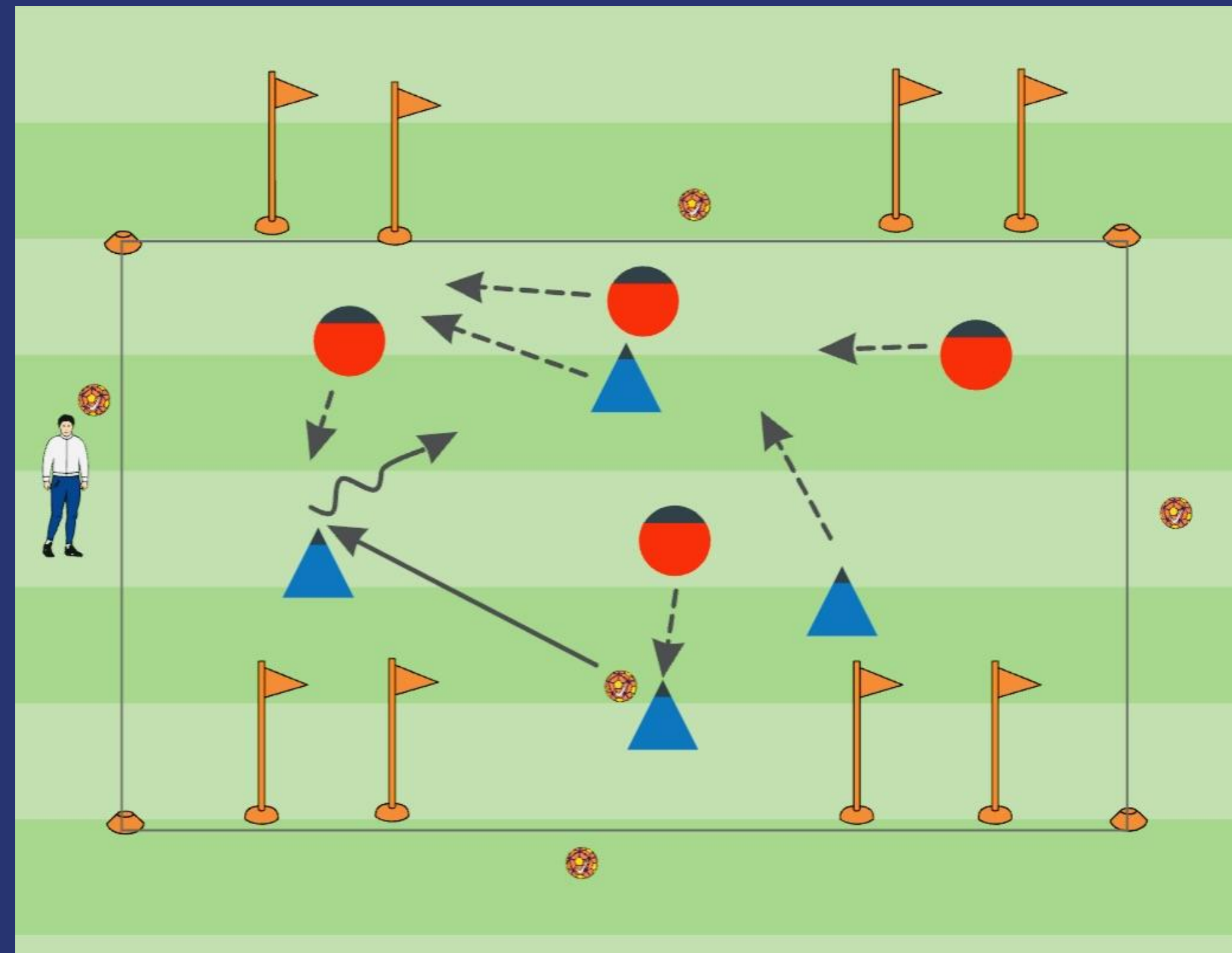
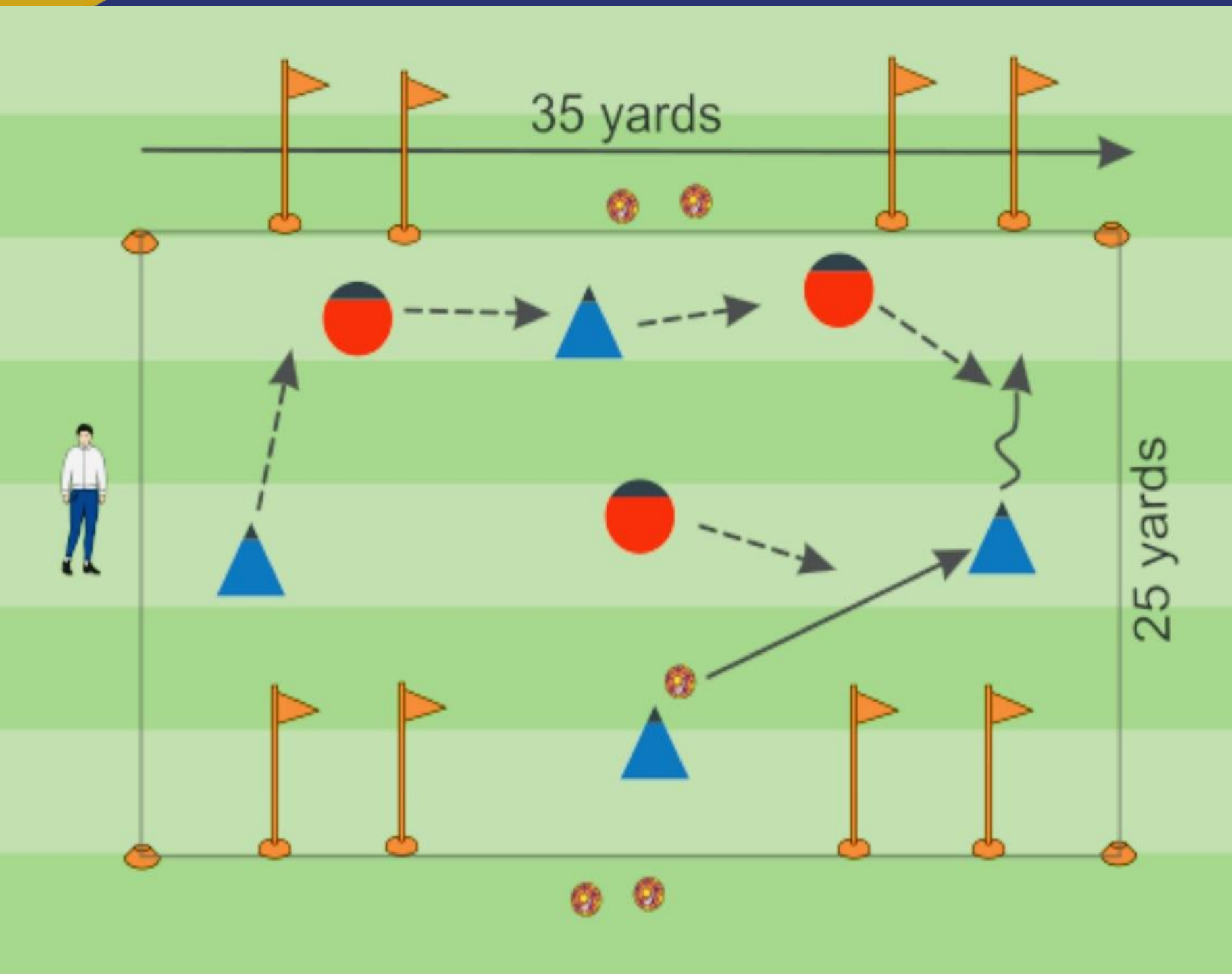
How does being in or out of possession of the ball, with numbers up or down, affect players behavior?

- Opponents
- Space
- Teammates



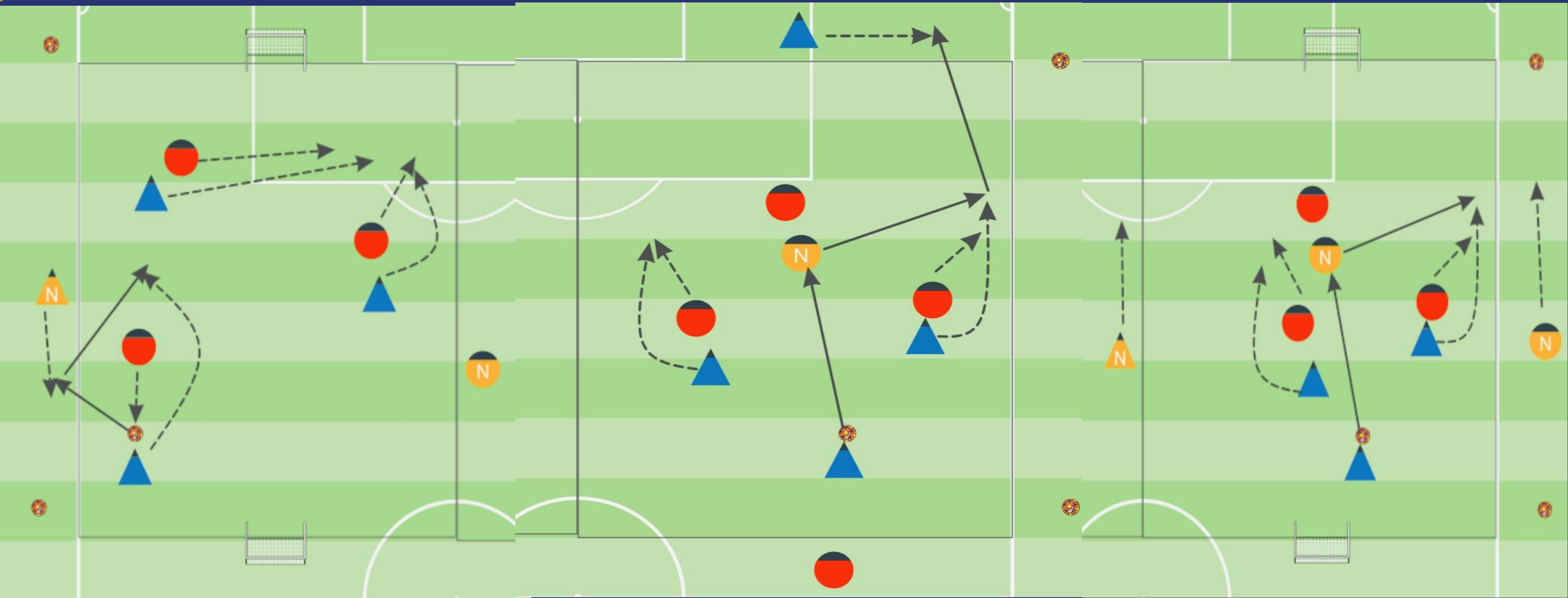
4 v 3 or 4 v 4 Four Goals Game

- What are some player behavior when playing uneven numbers?
- What are some player behavior when playing even numbers?



3 v 3 Variations

- How does a 3 v 3 + 1 (uneven numbers) to Goal with 2 bumpers game affect players behavior?
- How does a 3 v 3 (even numbers) to Goal with 2 bumpers game affect players behavior?



Scoring Methods

How Can Scoring Methods Influence Player Behavior?

Firstly, what *is* a 'scoring method'?

- **End Zones**
- **Targets**
- **Multiple Small Goals**
- **Lopsided # of Goals**
- **Single Goals**
- **What else have you used?**



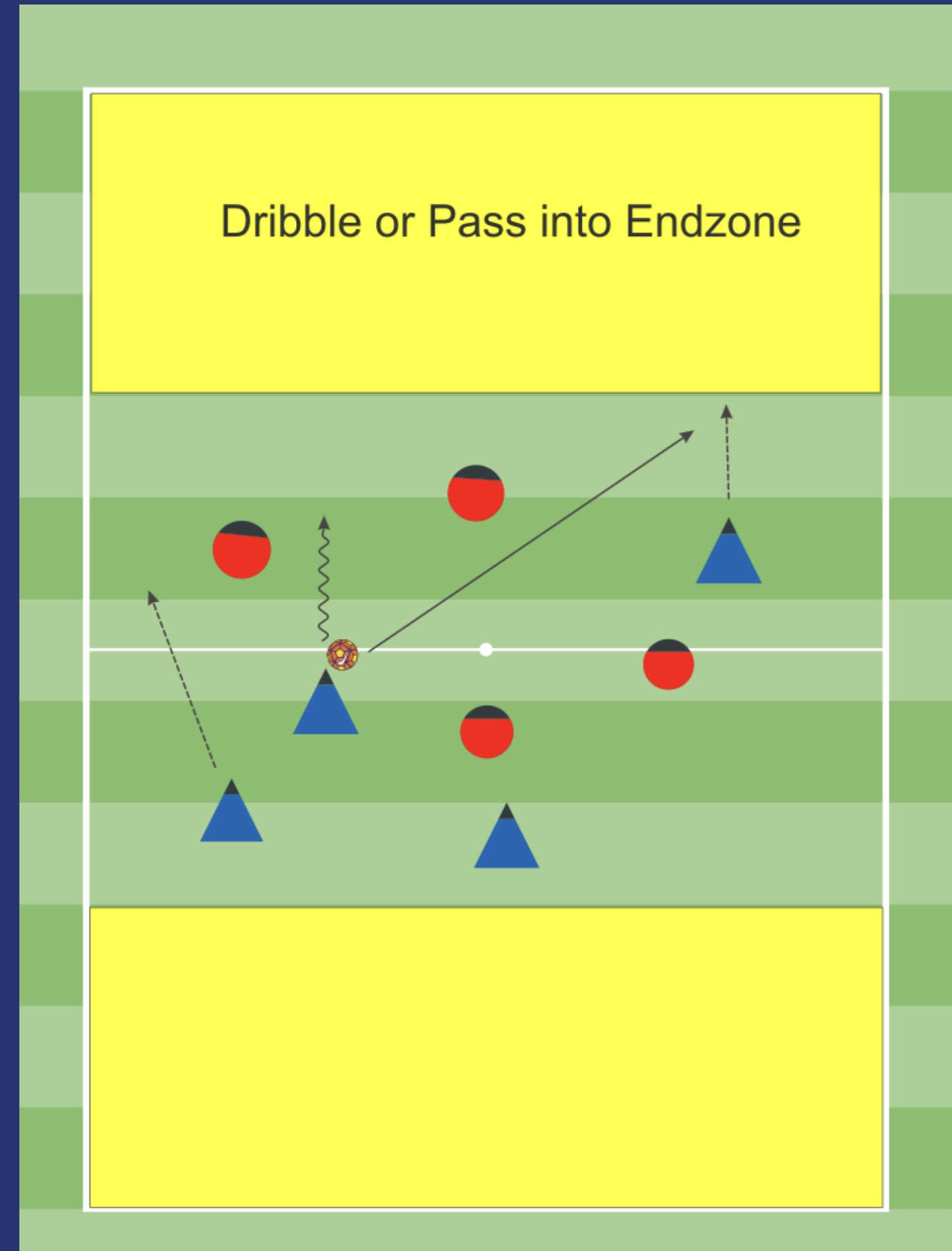
Scoring Methods

- End Zones > large area, easier to score, less complex, more success.
- Targets > as above, but added options w/moving targets > some complexity added.
- Multiple Small Goals > added options to score, more opportunity.
- Lopsided # of Goals > Offers differing themes for each team (defense and attack).
- Single Goals > The game. Most complex.
- All of the Above + Constraints > More complexity.

Scoring Methods

End Zones: Simplest.

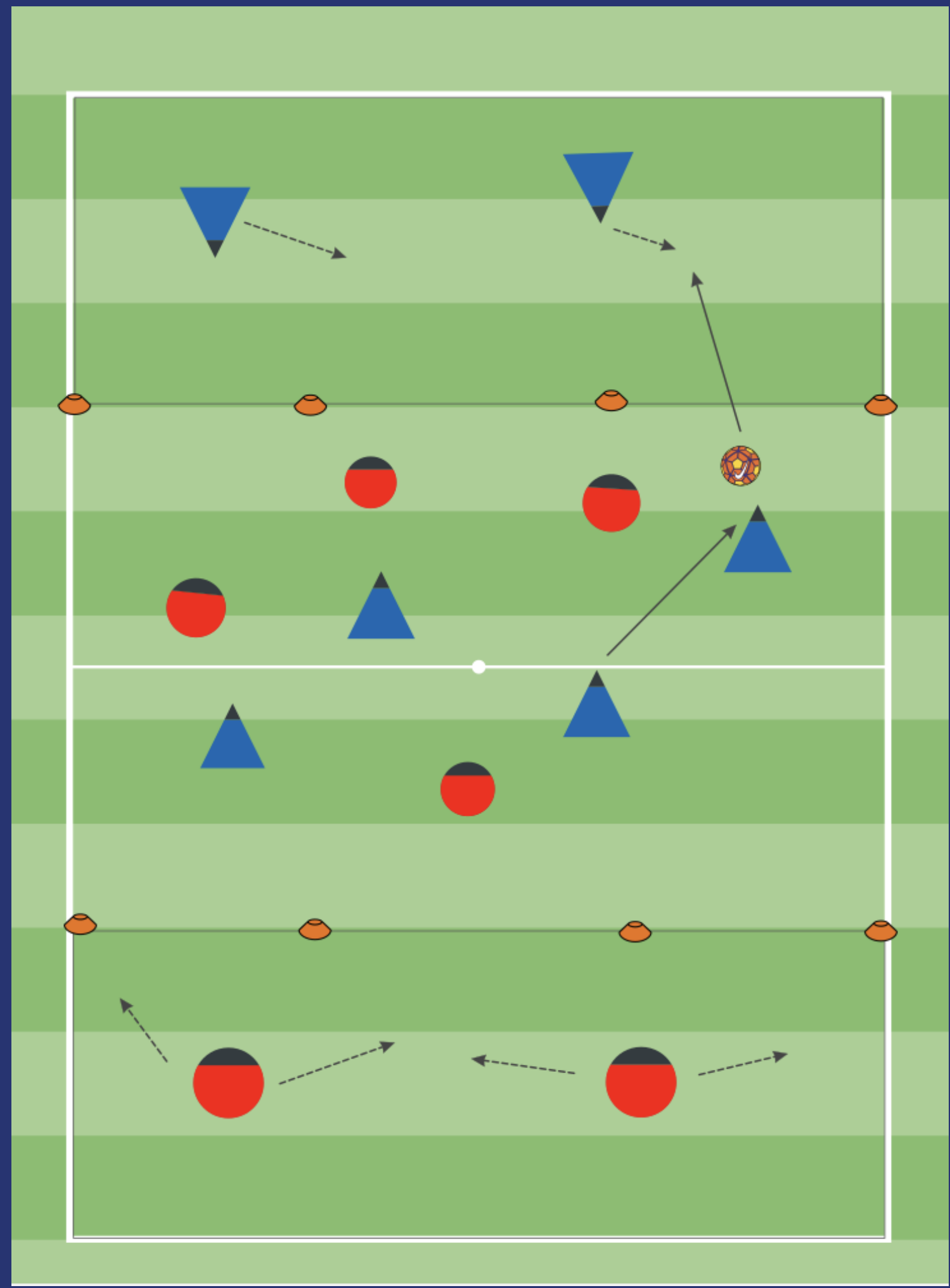
End zones offer the easiest option to achieve a goal = they offer the largest area to score and varying methods: dribbling in or passing to a teammate.



Scoring Methods

Targets: Simple.

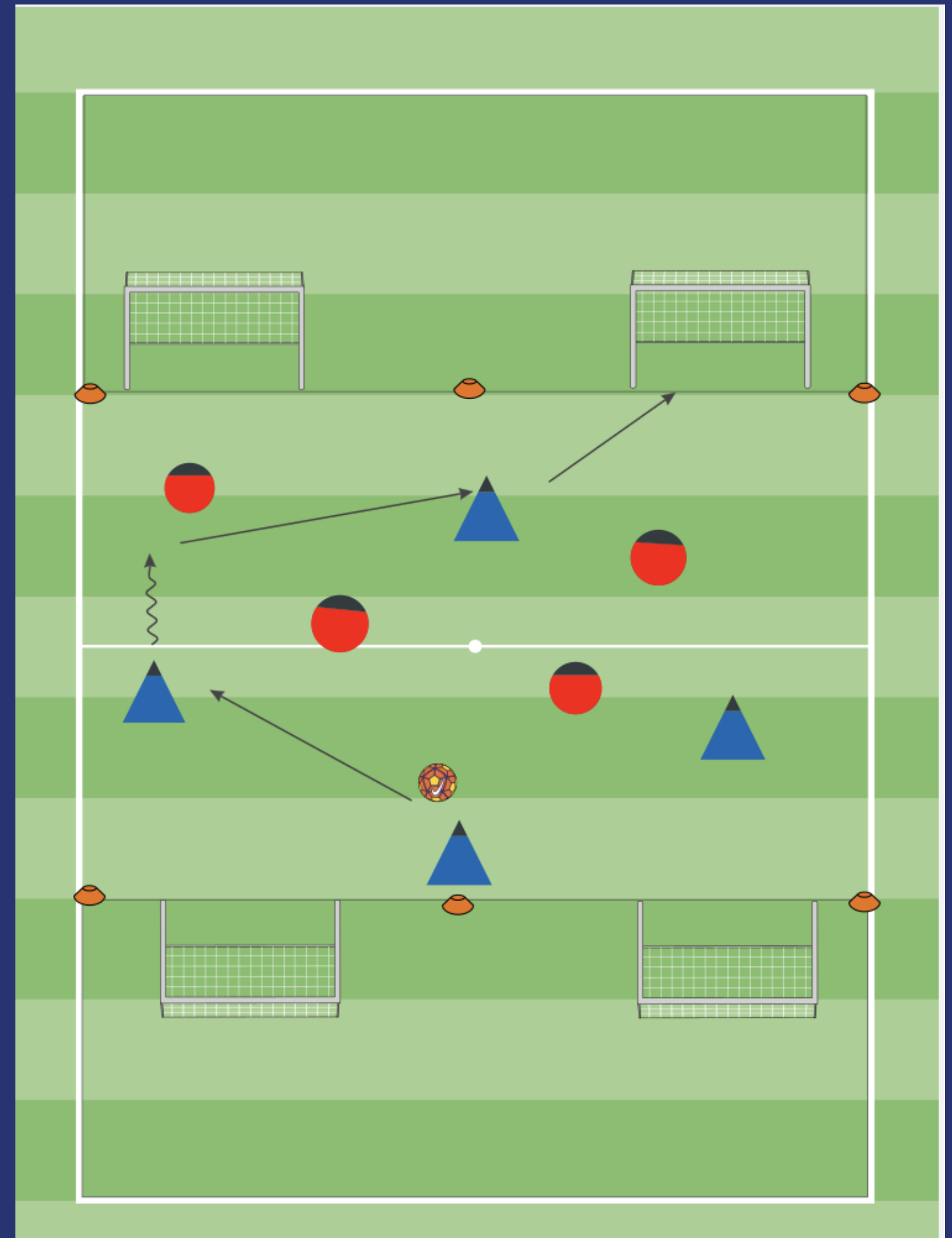
Adding targets (moving) to your end zones now offers another option to achieve a goal. You now have a large area + a (moving & multiple) target(s) to help you score.



Scoring Methods

Multiple Small Goals: More Goals =
More Opportunity.

Having multiple small goals on
each endline increases the number
of opportunities to score &
incentivizes goal scoring and good
decision-making.

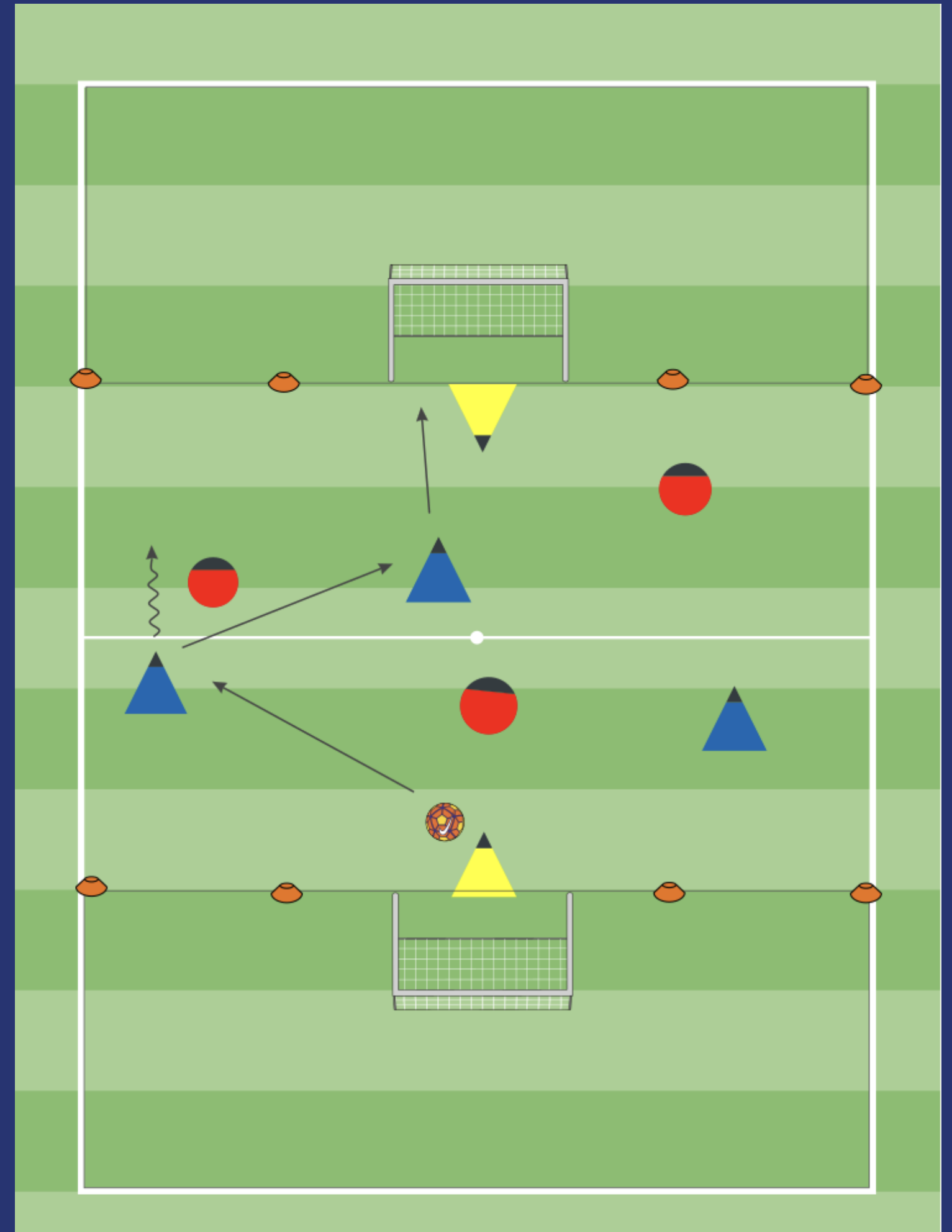


Scoring Methods

Single Goals: The Game:

Challenging.

Single goal training games now mirror the 'real game', introducing more challenge for your players at the appropriate time, but no less fun.



Scoring Methods

All of the above + conditions. For example:

- Limit number of touches for players, ie '2 touch max'
- Add a specific number of passes to achieve before trying to score ie, must connect 3 passes before we try to score
- All players must be in attacking half of field for goal to count, ie, incentivize players to play a high line/stay connected as a team

Utilizing Conditions



WHAT is a 'Condition' In Soccer?

WHEN Would We Use Them?

- In training sessions
- When intensity is low
- When players lack awareness
- When teaching new team tactics (playing out wide, high press)
- When teams are not performing as a unit. ie, disorganized
- To create a 'numbers down' (2 v 3 , 3 v 4) or 'numbers up (5 v 4, 6 v 5) to teach resilience/concentration, delayed defending or numbers up on the attack.

Utilizing Conditions

WHY Do We Use Conditions?



- To manipulate the training environment to expose what needs to be improved
- Improve decision making-technical execution
- Increase physical load
- Forces the team to focus on a specific tactical or technical behavior
- Increase intensity
- When habits need to improve
- Helps to build structure in the moments of the game
- To promote learning and success in the environment

Utilizing Conditions

How Long?

When Do We Change?

- Too challenging
- Not challenging enough
- Physical Challenge



Training Goalkeepers

What does that mean for
WHO we train?
WHY it matters
WHAT age do we start
And HOW?

"The goalkeeper is no longer just a shot-stopper. They are the first defender and the eleventh outfield player" -- Manuel Neuer, Bayern Munich 1st team GK

Training Goalkeepers

Stance: What do you notice?

How can you incorporate this into practices?



Training Goalkeepers

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS

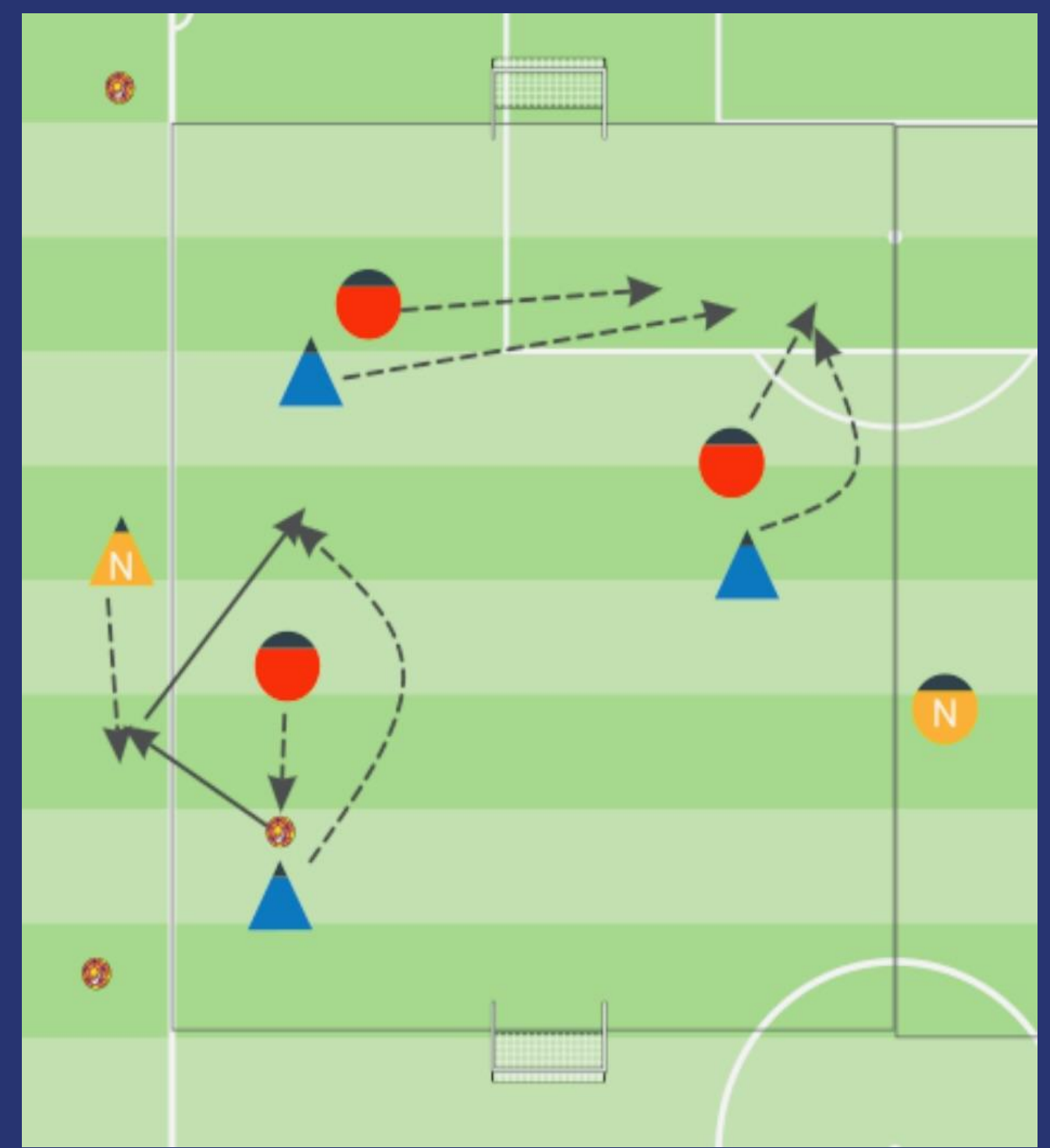
- The Diamond (great for small hands)
- The Basket
- Distribution
- Support (when your team has the ball)
- Coming out to get the ball
- Ball Line



Training Goalkeepers

HOW

- Attention getters
- Partner work
- Throw catch directional game
- Small Sided Games
 - Neutrals
 - Endline/sideline Neutrals
 - Target players
- Run sessions for everyone – whole session plan ideas



Training Goalkeepers

HOW DO YOU AVOID THE FEAR FACTOR?

- **Stay away from going to goal without defenders**
- **Make it focused on catching – not diving**
- **Normalize mistakes**
- **Celebrate effort**
- **Use the proper size goal for the age**
- **Coaches should not strike the ball at young GK with full power**
- **Focus on how they connect to the team, not the mechanics**