

Coaching Attacking Team Play: Addressing individual function in team attack

There is always more than enough material available to a youth coach when they begin to consider what they want to work on with their team. Current trends often see youth coaches dealing with a lot of tactical issues and neglecting to either establish or reinforce technical capability. If the primary objective of the youth coach is to develop players, both in their enjoyment of the game and in their improved ability to play it then technical issues must always have a place in any training.

The following suggestions look at individual and team tactics, but also remember the technical ability needed to make these tactics effective. Here the focus is “the attack”, not simply “goal scoring”. “The attack” is important to look at currently because so much effort is being directed toward effective defending. Often effective defending is really on the result of inept attack and the ability to defeat well-organized defenses is often not the focus of youth team training.

The approach looked at here relies on a larger group activity, but attempts to zoom in on smaller aspects of that activity in order to establish competencies that will help your team break down an opponent.

Diagram #1 shows a session in which we have taken the midfield four and front two of a team alignment of 4-4-2. These players have been deployed over about 60% of the field, attacking one goal, with a keeper, and defending two counter goals. In this case five defenders have been used to begin, this number could initially be smaller, but will hopefully be increased during the session to establish numbers up for the defense. Fewer defenders at the start will allow for the attackers to have success and establish some rhythm that can then be challenged with more realistic pressure. The server initiates each repetition; this can be a second goalkeeper, injured player, assistant coach etc. Note the position of the coach. Placed here they can have a good angle to view the attacking play and are well positioned to step in and coach. Placing the coach directly behind the attack, or in front of it, may occasionally have some merit, but the diagram suggests an optimum position. Being in the middle of the activity is not generally recommended.

The activity begins with the server introducing the ball to one of the 6 attacking players. The coach may determine where and how the ball is introduced immediately or allow the server to decide to get some repetition and a flow. At some point, however, the coach will want to require that the ball be introduced in such a way and into certain areas so as to illustrate coaching points. Play should continue until the attacking team scores, is dispossessed and then countered on or the keeper gains possession and the ball is sent back to the server.

Clearly no youth training should start with an activity like this and should begin with a significant warm-up and some smaller group activity. Rather than keep away type games, games with direction, e.g. 2v2 to end zones would be recommended. The diagram below suggests a final activity before finishing with a game.

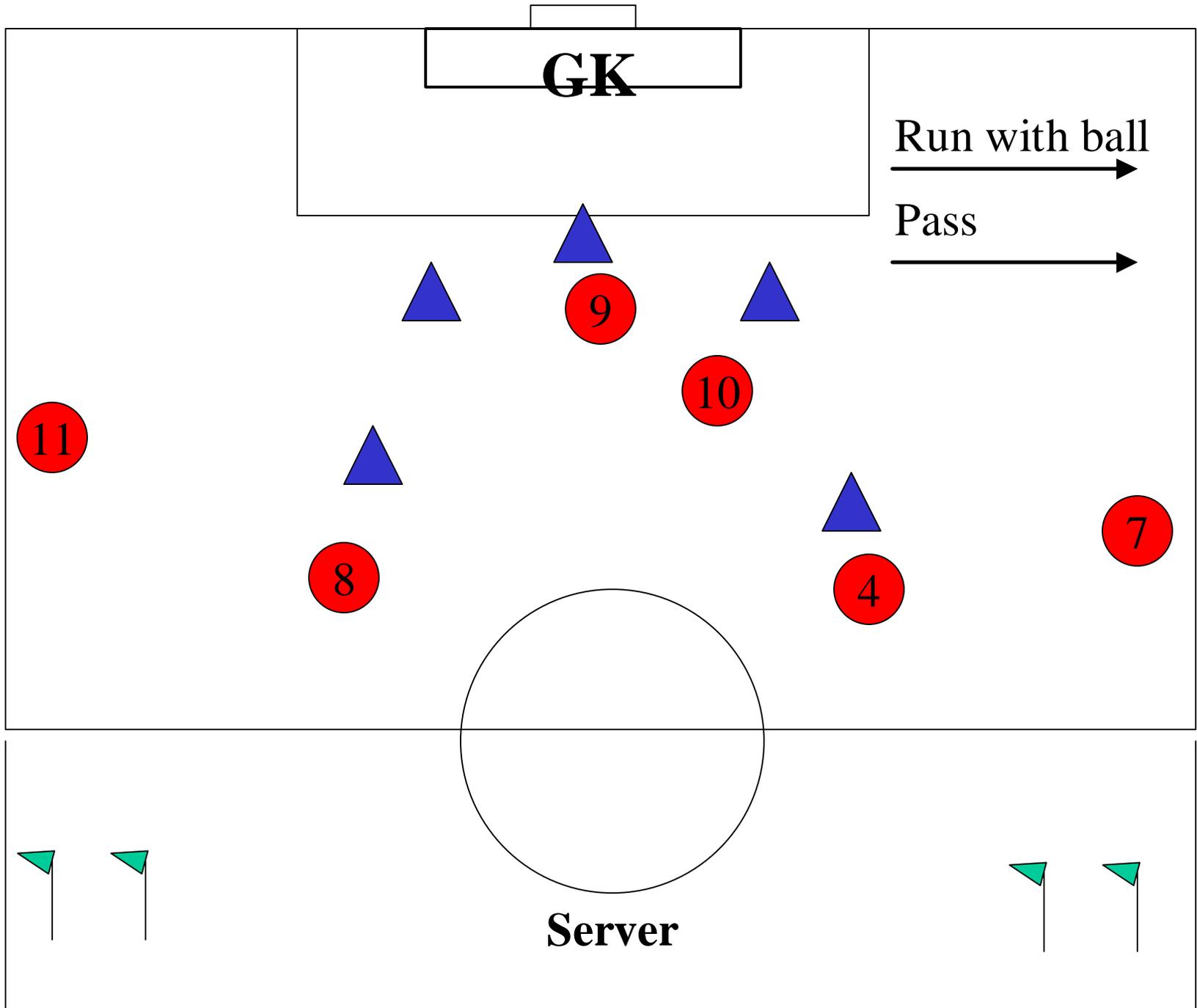


Diagram #2 looks at the choices/decisions available to the wide player. First that player must be encouraged to stay wide and have confidence that his/her team will get them the ball. They must also be aware of the position of their defender. They may look to find their own space away from the defender or allow themselves to be marked and check into space at the moment the ball is sent their way.

Here three choices are suggested,

Take the opponent on to the outside and try to get to the bye line in order to cross from behind the recovering defenders

Take the opponent on to the inside and drive at goal. This allows for a teammate to overlap and pulls defenders out of their starting shape.

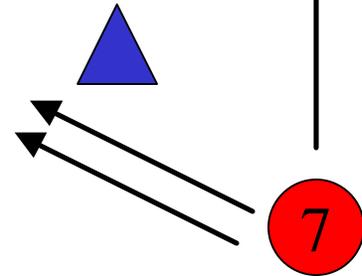
Pass into the feet of the striker and look to move without the ball and combine from there.

These are only three of several possible choices and must be considered in terms of where the player is on the field, the position and ability of both opponents and teammates and the player's ability level. Players in this position should be comfortable taking players on. Going to the outside makes sense if the player can cross the ball well. The ability to play in tight spaces well would help with the option of playing to the striker and combining. The player should only be encouraged to make decisions or choices that they can technically pull off.

Run with ball



Pass



In Diagram #3 the choices of the central striker are considered. It is important to note how the striker is positioned when they receive the ball. If they have their back to goal their decisions will be different than if they can receive it half turned. The portion that the striker comes from in order to receive the ball is also important to look at. Do they come from behind the defender, do they come from off of the defender, do they move from an open space and draw into the defender, etc? The movement of the attacker will cause the defenders to react and what the attacker then does with the ball must be based on how the defender is affected.

Here three choices are suggested,

Turn with the ball and penetrate on the dribble.

Drop the ball to the supporting midfielder and to try to get turned without the ball and be faced up.

Try to get the ball to the wide player and then move to goal ideally by passing into the space behind the defender.

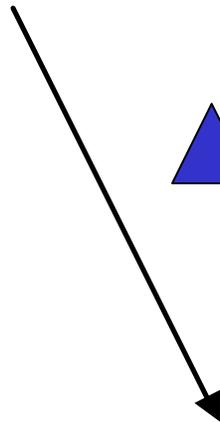
The central striker should be encouraged to be “greedy” at times and to take risks

In the attacking third of the field. Strikers come in all shapes and sizes, some really on speed others height, some on close control and others on more explosive techniques. Be sure that you coach the individual player and acknowledge that the coaching you give is relevant.

Run with ball



Pass



In Diagram #4 the attacking options of the central midfielder are considered. A lot here depends on the balance of the players used in the midfield. The balance of the US Men's Team in the central midfield is different when Reyna and Armas play together as opposed O'Brien and Stewart. The information given to these players will depend on if they play side by side or if they play one high and one deep. If three central midfielders are played together the shape options become more complex.

Here three choices are suggested,

Drive straight at the heart of the defense and look to penetrate on the dribble or draw defenders and combine with the striker.

Pass to the striker and offer support to combine or become free for a long shot.

Get the ball switched out to the wide players to stretch the opponent.

Of these three choices the first is by far the least encouraged or taken. If the training environment is a lot of keep away and limited touches central midfielders are more inclined to pass and less inclined, or comfortable, to drive at opponents. There is a lack of examples in youth soccer of players who are comfortable carrying the ball in the final third and this needs to be addressed. Players need to be trained at running with the ball a lot more and in training be encouraged to take bold risks in the attack.

Run with ball



Pass

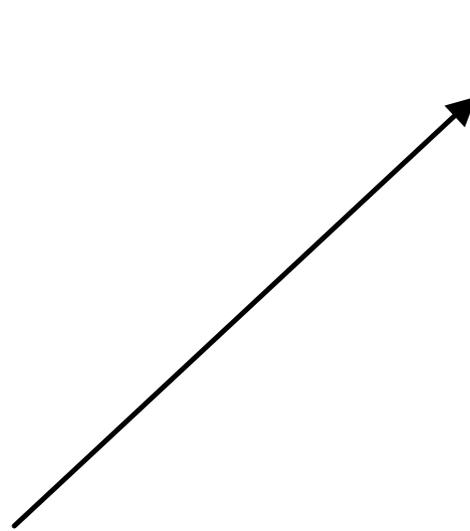
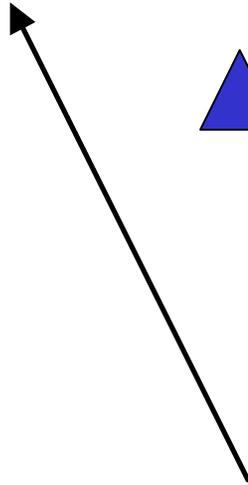
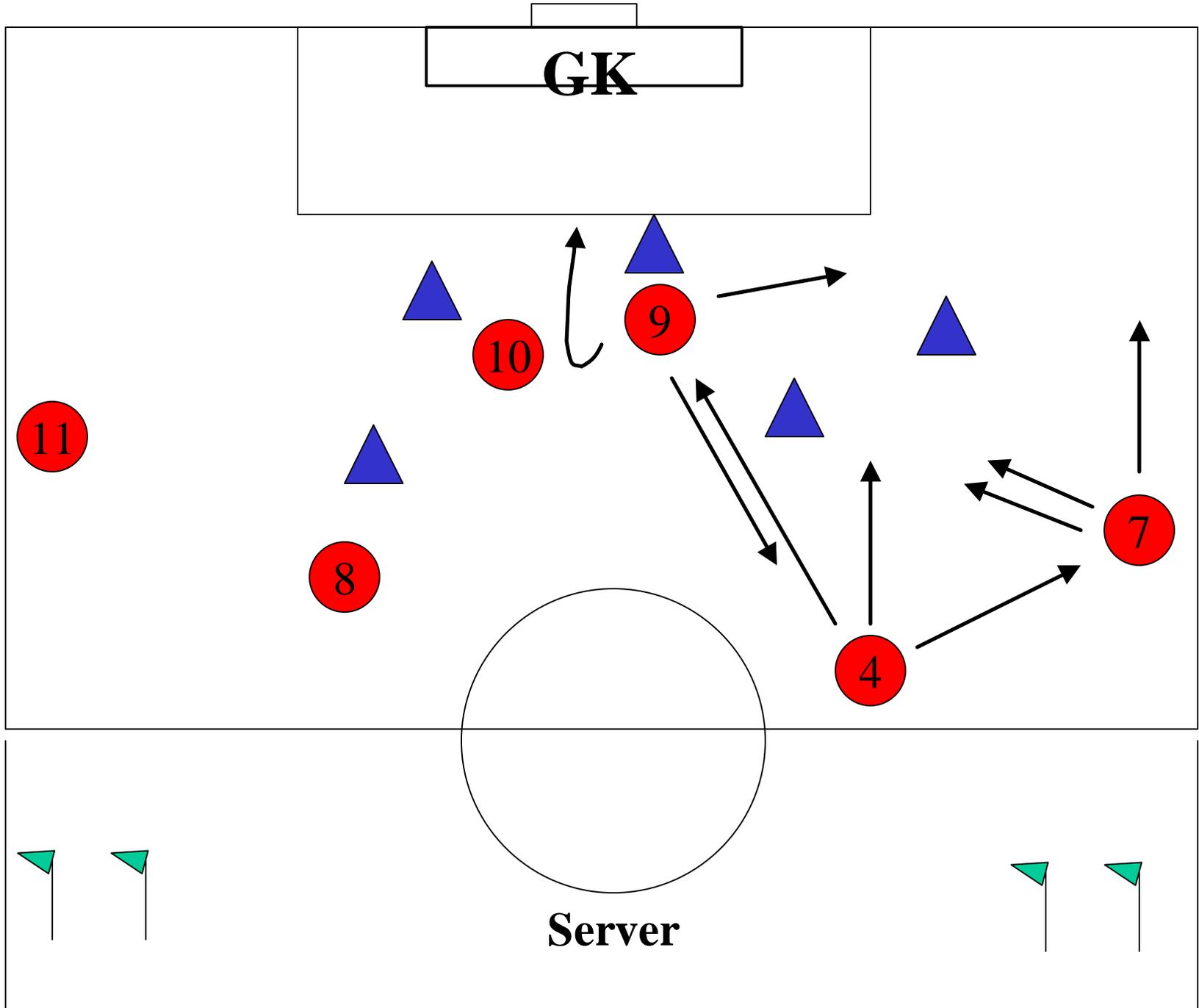


Diagram #5 explodes the smaller interactions and decisions back into the full activity. The coach should look to establish 2-4 “patterns” or situations that the players can rehearse and refine. The activity should then be finished up in free flow to allow for situations and decisions to develop in the run of play.

Attacking play needs a greater emphasis in contemporary youth coaching. It should begin with improving every individual’s comfort with the ball and their ability to penetrate first by shot or on the dribble and then by the pass. Hopefully this Summer’s World Cup will give coaches and players alike a boost of attacking soccer and goals that will create a whole new challenge for contemporary defenses that are well drilled and disciplined.



GK

Coach

Server

11

8

10

9

4

7