

# **INTRODUCTION TO DEFENDING**

This book has been written to introduce you, the coach, to the key coaching points associated with defending. It covers defending from an individual to a team standpoint.

Defending principles can be categorized into a logical process for the coach to follow and implement in training. It can be broken down into the following key points :

1. **PRESSURE**
2. **SUPPORT**
3. **COVER / BALANCE**
4. **RECOVER**
5. **TRACK**
6. **DOUBLE TEAM / TREBLE TEAM**
7. **REGAINS & COMPACTNESS /ADVANCING**

What does this all mean ?

## **PRESSURE**

This is when the individual defender closes a player down on the ball to exert pressure on them to give the ball up. It can result in the player on the ball being pressured into making a bad pass, mis-controlling it, or the defender being able to tackle the player and take it off them either kicking it away from them or challenging and winning possession of the ball. These instances all result in possession being lost by the attacking team due to the pressure exerted by the first defender.

Pressure does not always result in regains of possession immediately and the defender can jockey the attacker to stop their forward momentum and give time to team mates to get into position to help win the ball back. Patience is the key here.

## **SUPPORT**

This is the position taken up by the second defender to act as help for the first defender. The first defender, by his / her stance can show / force the attacker towards the support player (second defender). We will talk later about angles and distances of support and communication with the pressuring player. These are the three essentials that are needed for the support player to use to be effective.

## **COVER / BALANCE**

This is the positions of the next line of players away from these two defenders particularly the third defender who is next closest to the pressure and support players. This player provides a balance (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> defender) behind the pressure and support players. Beyond this third defender you can work with the next closest players and integrate their positioning into your coaching session.

## **RECOVER**

Players in position on the field in front of where the ball is being defended must make it a priority to run back and position behind the ball, if possible between their own goal and the ball that is in the attacking teams possession. They recover back (recovery runs) to help the team by getting more people between the ball and their own goal to make it more difficult for the attacking team to score. They must recover back along the shortest route so they get back as quickly as possible but into a position where they are most effective in terms of the positions of the ball and the opponents.

## **TRACK**

The attacking teams players will make forward runs into dangerous positions on the field and this is where defending players need to follow or track their runs to mark them and prevent them getting free and able to affect the game. Tracking runs can be short or long depending on the distance of the opponents runs.

## **DOUBLE TEAM**

It is possible to help the pressing player win back possession of the ball by closing down the space (pressuring) around the attacking player on the ball from another angle, preferably from the other side to where the first pressuring player is positioned. This is almost closing the player on the ball down from their blind side and can be very effective in regaining possession of the ball due to the fact that the attacker doesn't see this player coming so can't take immediate action to avoid having the ball taken off them as they are focused on the attention from the pressing player. In some circumstances treble teaming can occur where three players all close the player on the ball down simultaneously and this can prove very effective in regaining possession of the ball.

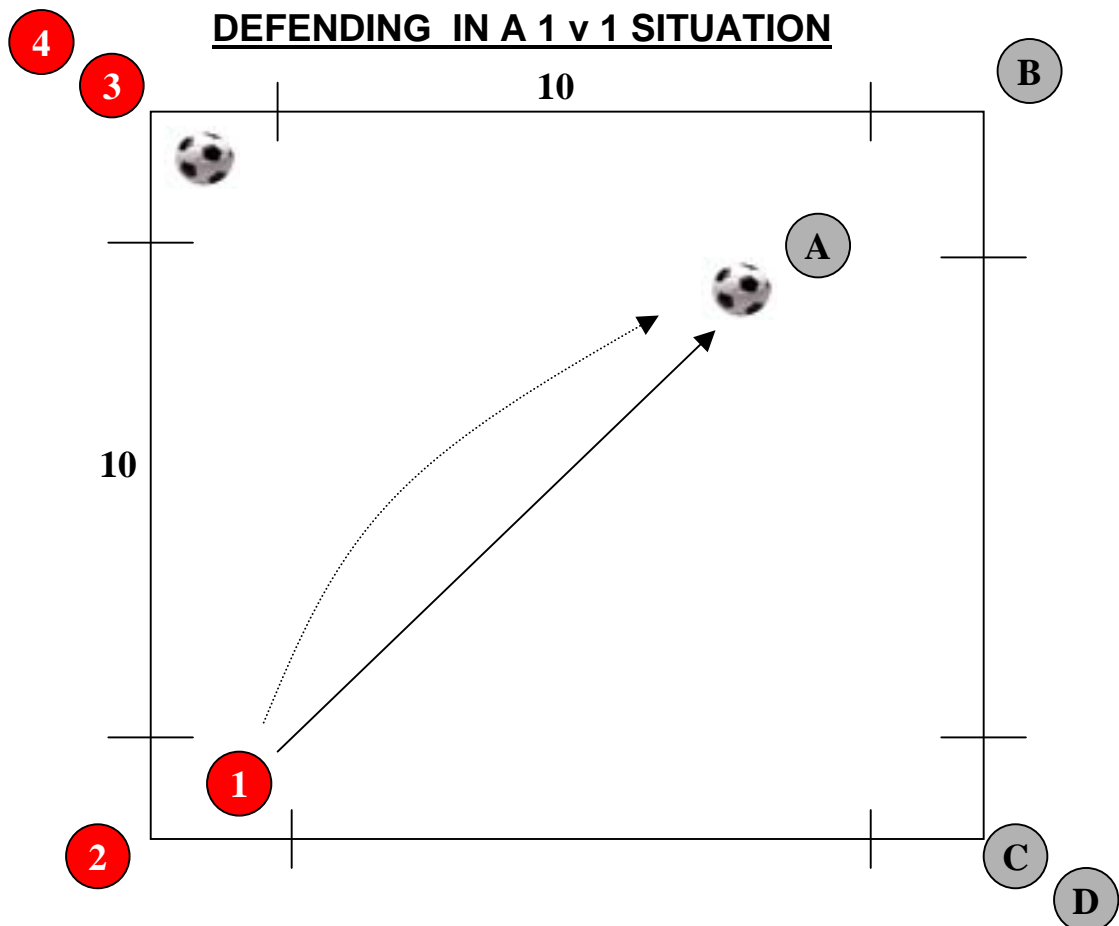
## **REGAIN AND COMPACTNESS**

Here the defending team have won back the ball and are now the attacking team and look to play it forward as soon as possible. As the play is developed up the field it is important the team push up the field to add continued support to the player on the ball, but also to affect the positions of the opponents and take them away from their goal should possession be lost again. The whole team moves forward and this results in the compactness of the players from the back to the front of the team.

# HOW TO DEFEND EFFECTIVELY

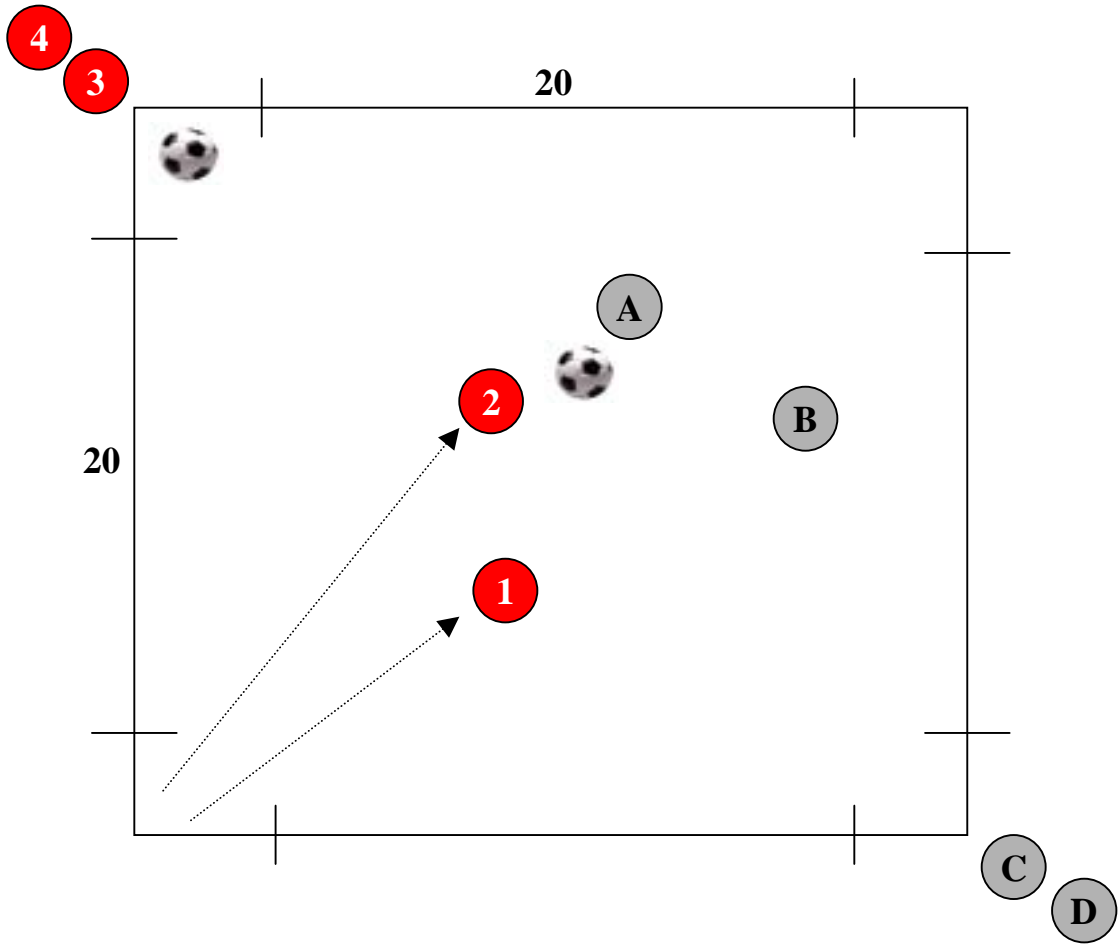
## COACHING POINTS OF INDIVIDUAL DEFENDING – CLOSING DOWN

1. **Travel as fast** as possible as the ball travels to close down opponent.
2. **Close** the opponent down with a curved run forcing the player the way you want them to go (if you have time to do so).
3. **Slow down** the last few yards, get balanced, bend knees, sideways on stance forcing the play your way, slow the attacker up (making play predictable).
4. **Feint to tackle** – use your front foot this forces the opponent to protect the ball and ultimately look down at the ball and away from you the defender (also prevents awareness of where support players are in a game situation). Try to steal with front foot.
5. **Watch the ball** not the player so you aren't thrown by body movement.
6. **Stay on your feet** and be patient, your chance will come to win the ball if you go to ground you give the initiative to the attacker.



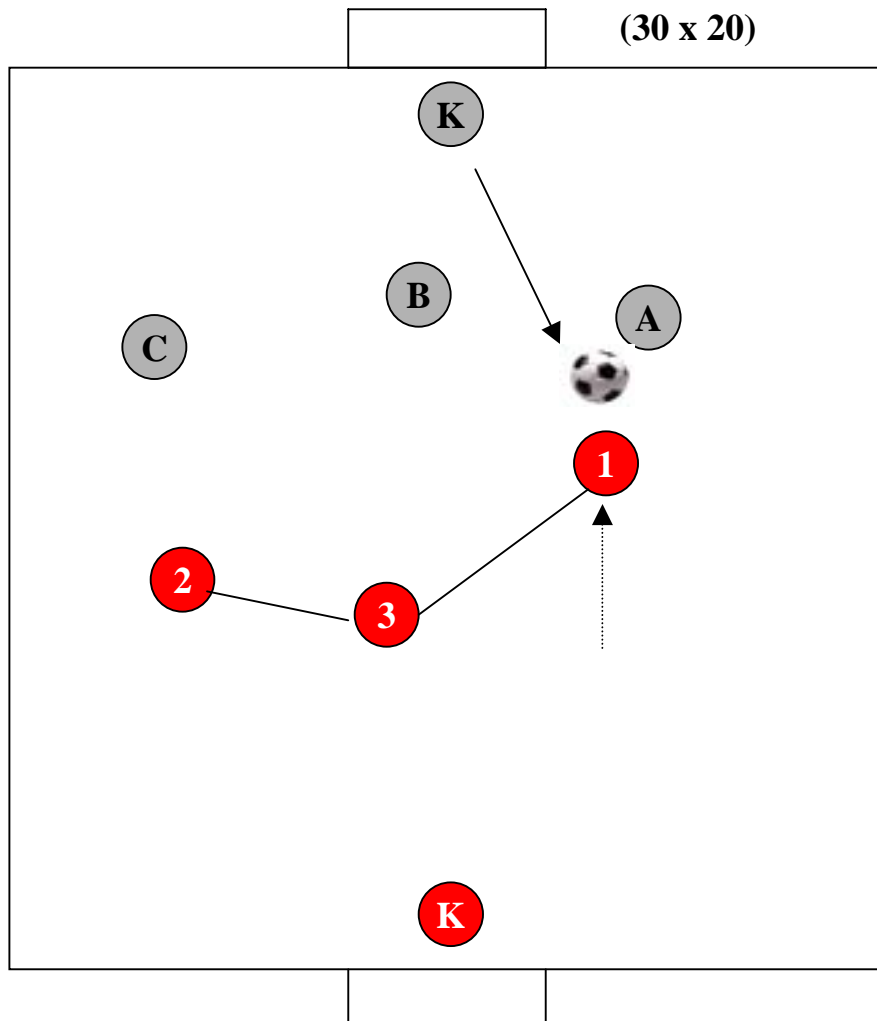
## DEFENDING IN A 2 v 2 SITUATION

### PRESSURE AND SUPPORT



1. **Develop:** 2 v 2 with (B) joining in. In a 2 v 2 show the “piston effect” of support movements as the ball travels. Also consider that the closest player can close down the ball as it travels from player to player (discussed later).
2. (2) closes (A) down and shows **inside** to the support player. (1) supports at a 45 degree angle but is also screening (B). In the 2 v 1 situation (1) only had to think about supporting (2) but now there are two things to consider; supporting (2) and screening the position and movement of (B).
3. Distance of support depends on the position on field and the speed and ability of opponent. The support player can give verbal direction but also can take a position off the way the pressure player shows the attacker to go as previously discussed. It can depend on which happens first, the body position of the pressing player forcing the play one way or the verbal direction of the support player advising forcing the attacker towards their position.

## DEFENDING IN A 3 v 3 + KEEPERS SITUATION



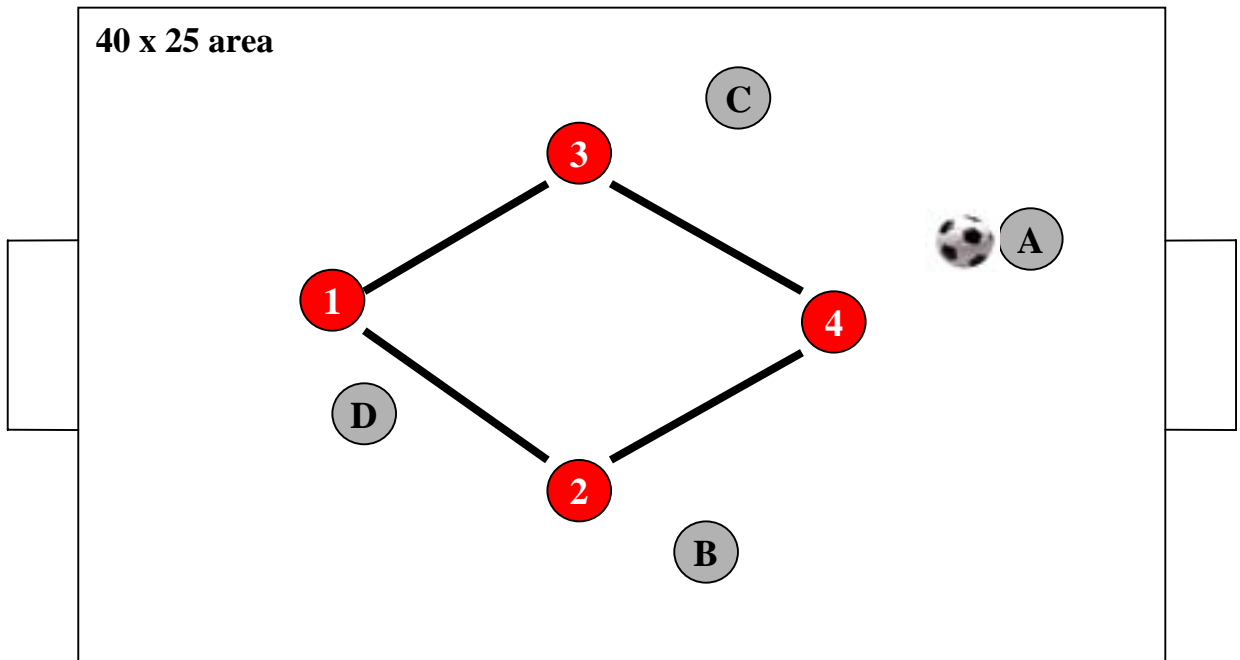
1. Player nearest the ball pressurizes the ball with teammates in support and covering positions depending on the positions of the opposition and the ball.
2. Dealing here with first, second and third defender scenario, looking at pressure, support and cover / balance positions of the defending team. Introducing recovering and tracking principles of defending later.

### Coaching Points :

- a) Mark space (zone play) then **pressing** the ball, (1) closes down (A) quickly.
- b) Making play **predictable** - show the player on the ball inside or outside depending on where the **support** is. If outside then (1) has to be confident of winning the ball because this can result in a 1 v 1 situation.
- c) Shape of the team (**covering / balancing** positions).
- d) **Recovering** and **Tracking** - getting back behind the ball either into space or tracking a run from an opponent.

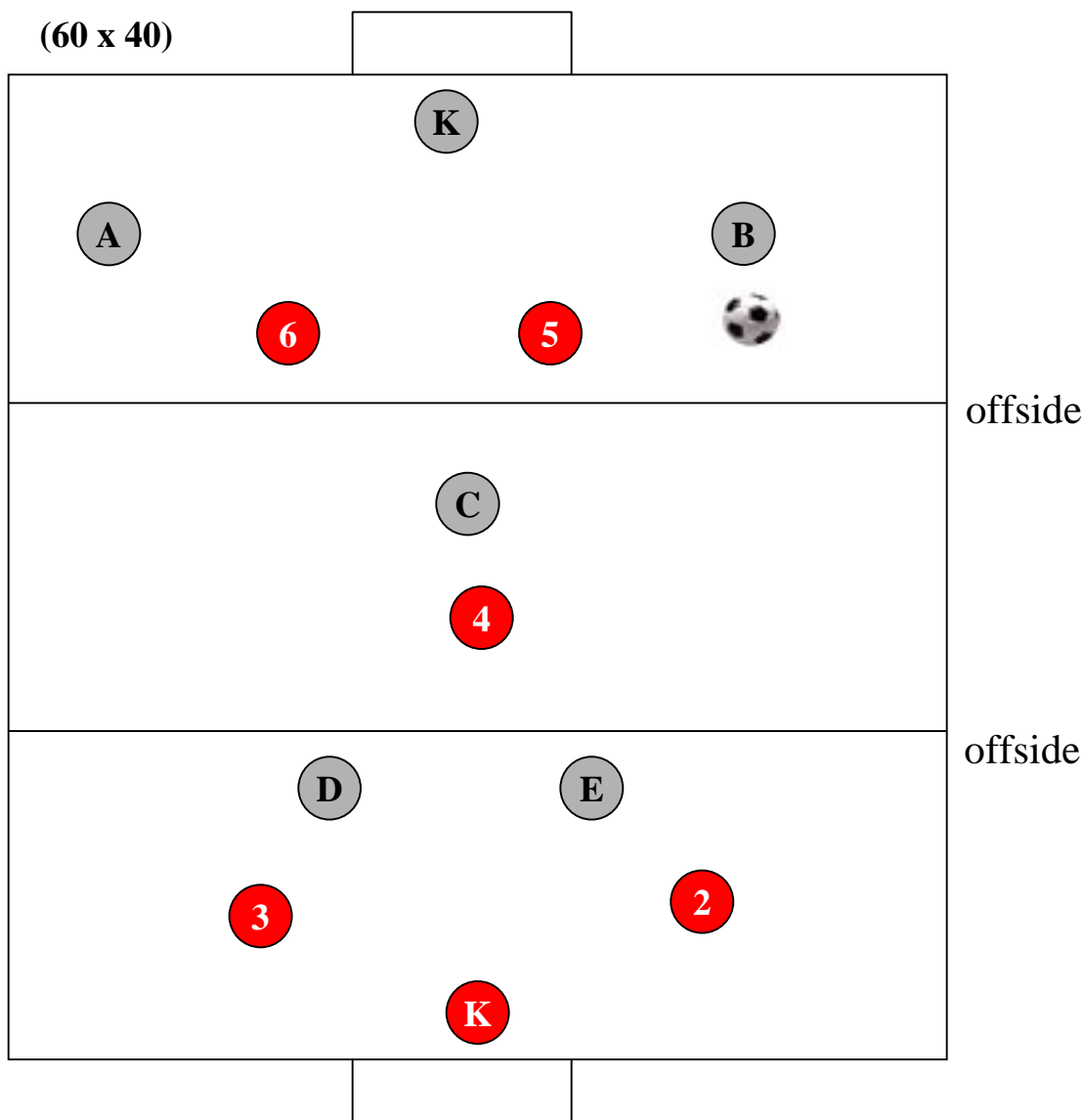
## DEFENDING IN 4 v 4 SITUATION

### 4 v 4 – BASIC DIAMOND / KITE SHAPE



1. The main idea here is for the defending team to **condense** the area the ball can be played into, the defending team become a diamond **within** the opponents attacking diamond. (4) forces (A) one way and the rest of the team adjust their positions off this. (3) protects the **space inside** but can **close down** (C) if the ball is passed, (2) and (1) are the same scenario and this results in the defending diamond being **shorter** and **tighter**.
2. As the opponents move the defending team must move to compensate. Also if any pass is played behind (1), (2) or (3) they should be first to the ball.
3. **Coaching Points**
  - a) **Pressure** – 1 v 1 defending to win the ball, delay or force a bad pass.
  - b) **Support** – position of immediate teammate (angle, distance and communication).
  - c) **Cover / Balance**– positions of teammates beyond the supporting player.
  - d) **Recovering and Tracking** should the ball go past our position, recovery run to goal side of the ball and tracking the run of a player.
  - e) **Double Teaming** – here two players attack the player on the ball from two sides.
  - f) **Compactness** from the back (pushing up as a unit) particularly on **Regaining Possession**.
4. The objectives of defending are to **disrupt** the other teams build up, make play **predictable**, **prevent** forward passes and ultimately **regain** possession of the ball.
5. Techniques include – pressuring, marking, tackling and winning the ball.

## 6 v 6 SMALL SIDED GAME SET UP

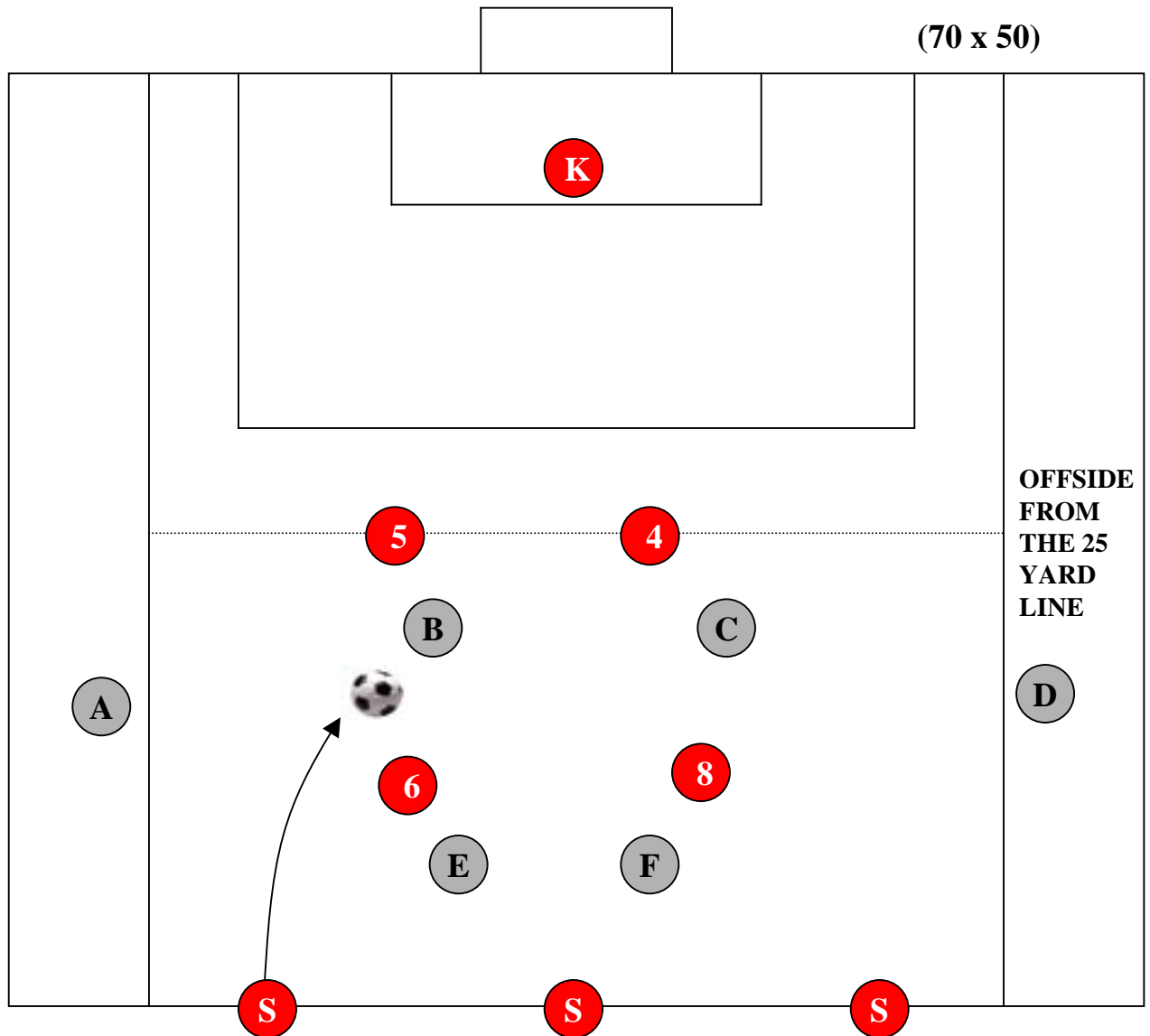


1. The above set up is a 6 v 6 (2-1-2) with the field divided up into thirds for easier points of reference on the field; defending, midfield and attacking thirds.
2. Play offside from the edge of the defending third to keep the game realistic though you could start without this condition to help the players ease into the session then use it as a progression to move onto next.
3. Each stage of the session can be described as a **progression** or **development** from the last one and you can clearly list this in your session plan to help you.



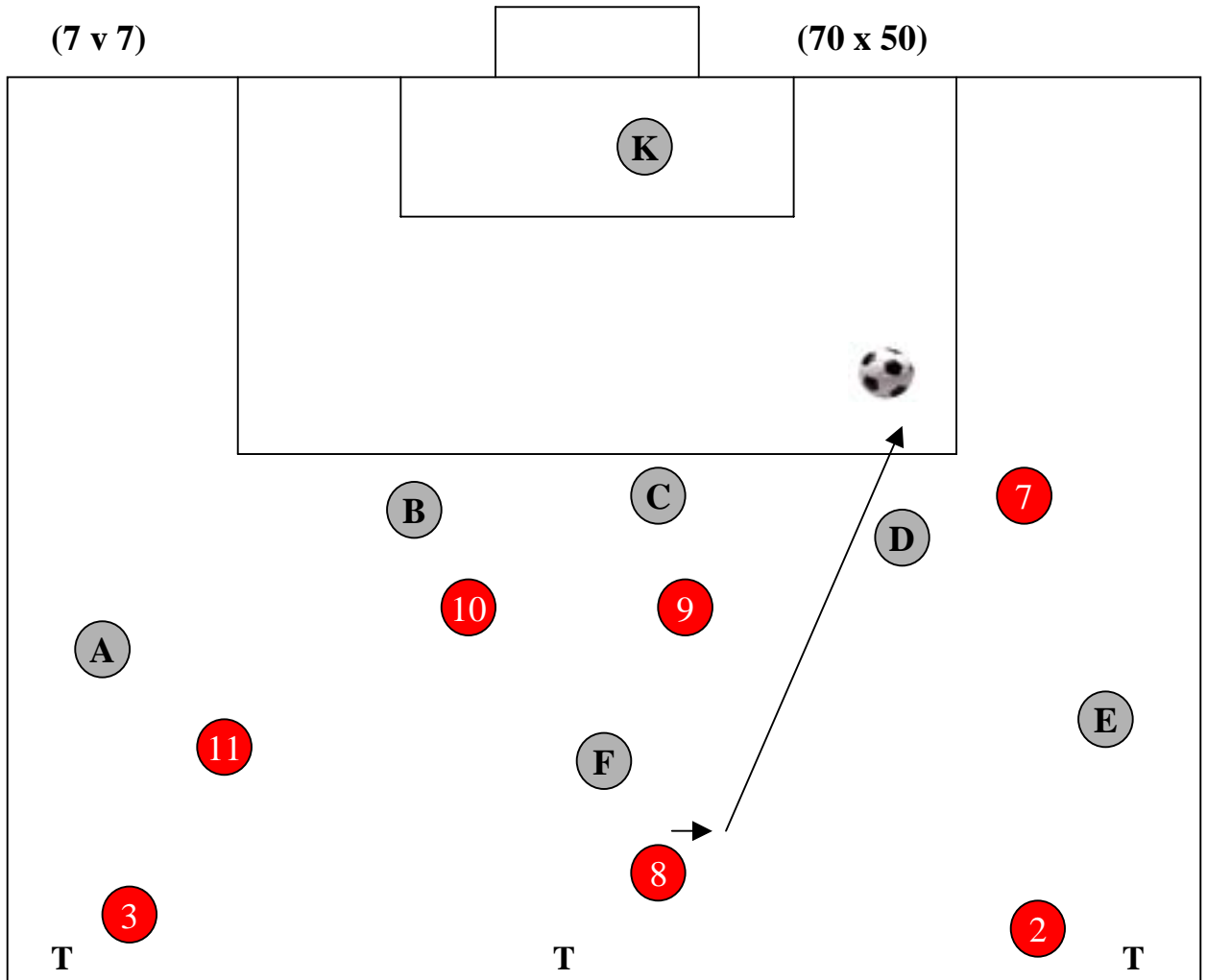
# TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF A FUNCTIONAL SET UP EXPLAINED

## FUNCTION : WORKING CENTER - BACKS TO DEFEND



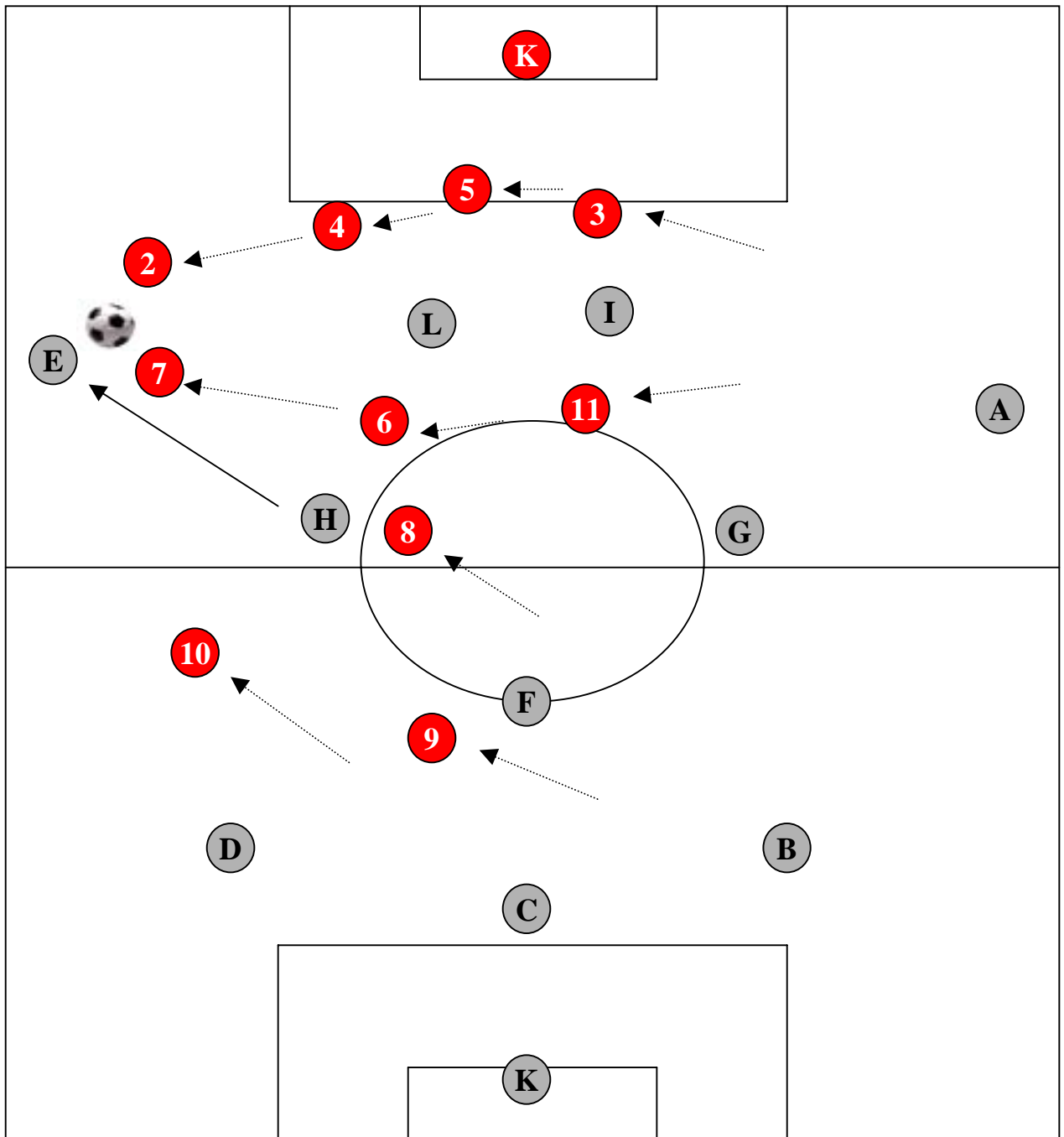
1. Start Position – Have a server play the ball in to a designated player. The coach can be the server if he / she wants to dictate where the ball needs to go at the start though it is better to stay out of the action and just coach the session. We are working with isolated areas on the field and certain players on a small scale.
2. Here we are coaching the two center – backs so most of the action must revolve around their defending skills. The session has been isolated to primarily coaching the two players in question in the area on the field they work in. The other players defending skills need to be affected (coached) too but to a lesser extent.
3. A rough guide would be 75% the center – backs, 25% the midfielders and the keeper. If the session was on defending in central midfield it would be 75% the midfielders and 25% the center – backs and keeper.

## HOW TO BUILD A PHASE PLAY



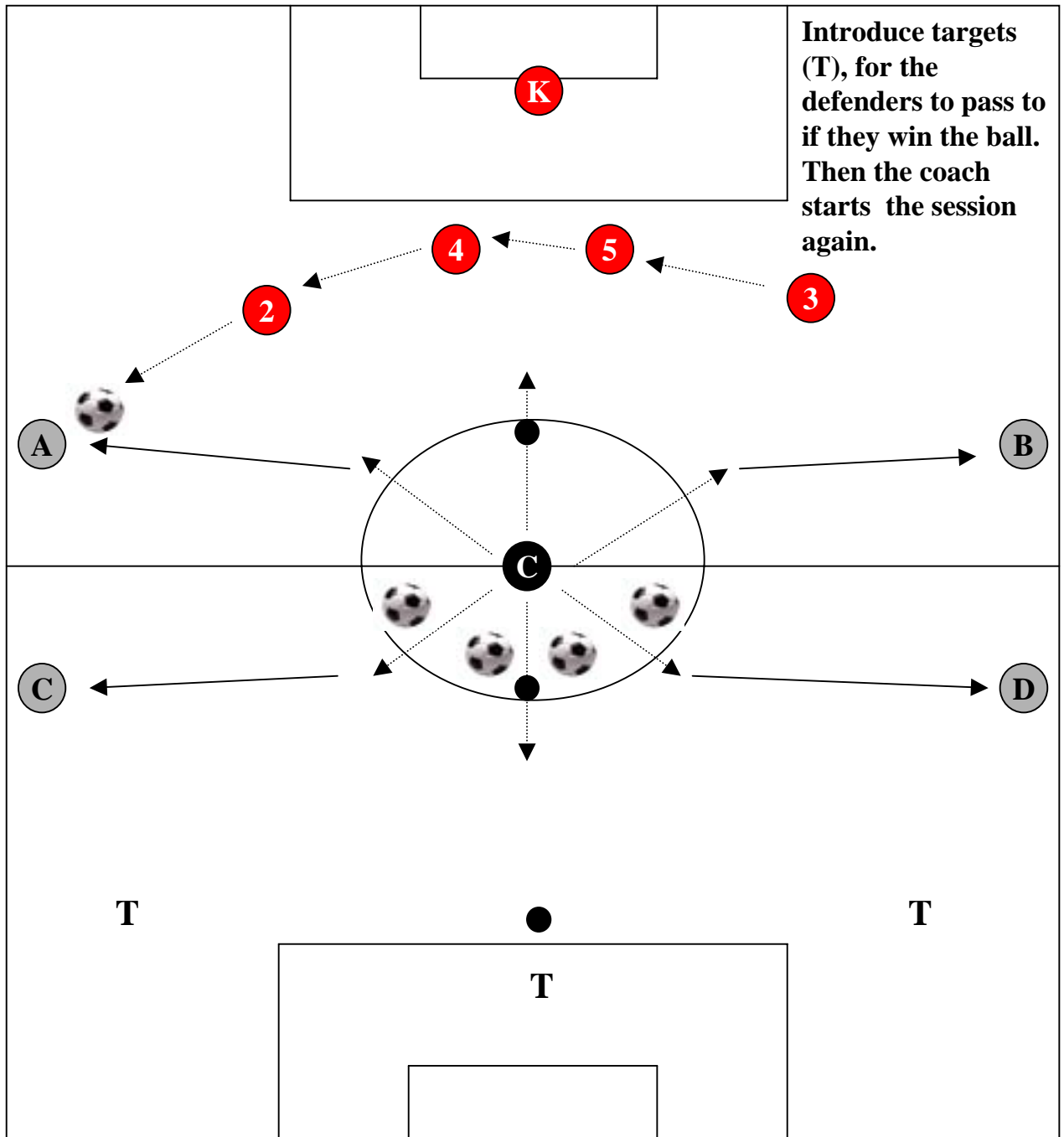
1. The start position is where a player moves the ball firstly on their first touch to simulate open play (as opposed to a set play) and then begins the session by making the required action. This can be a pass to another player or a pass into space or maybe a pass towards an opponent if the session is on regaining possession of the ball.
2. Alternatively the coach may instigate the initial action so that the start of play is how he / she wants it to start.
3. The above example is of a situation where the ball has to be played in behind the opponents defensive line as it may happen in a game and the set up is such that the numbered team you are coaching have to close down player (D) with the help of teammates to try to win the ball back and get a shot at goal to try to score.
4. (9) could be the player to pass the ball to begin the movement, attempting to play the ball behind (D) to get (7) in.
5. The start position is very important and whilst it can appear manufactured it is a necessary tool to use to create a situation you need to work on that would happen in an actual game.

## DEFENDING IN THE DEFENDING THIRD OF THE FIELD



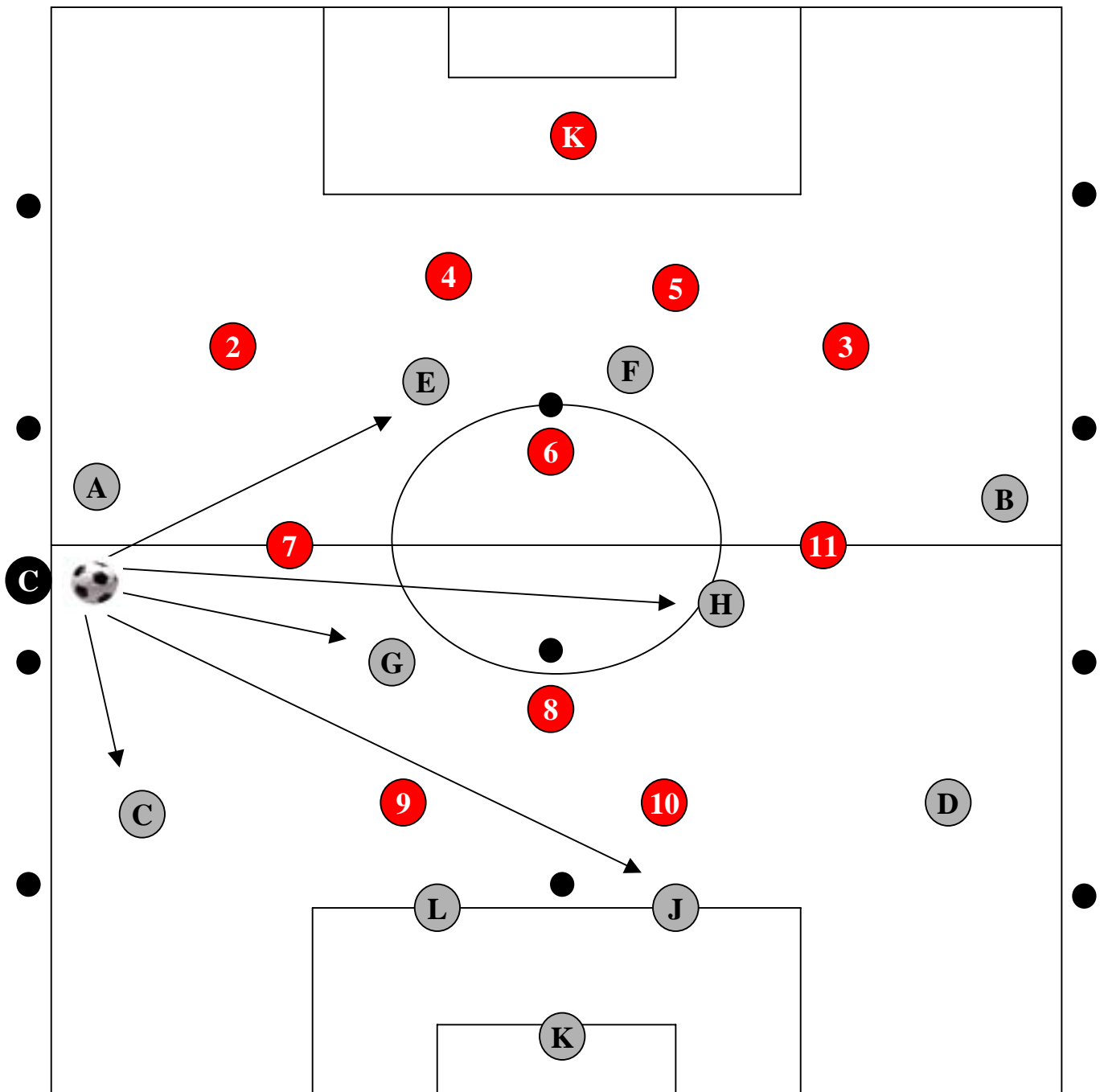
1. This is how the situation looks when the players have made their movements. Observe how the defending team have compacted as a team in terms of width and length on the field.
2. They have filled the spaces close to the ball reducing the room to play in. (3) and (11) who have moved across the field remain focused on the fact that they are responsible for (A) and (G) respectively should the play switch to the other side of the field hence their body stances are open so they can see both the ball and their immediate opponents.

# INTRODUCING OPPONENTS FOR DEFENDERS TO SHADOW



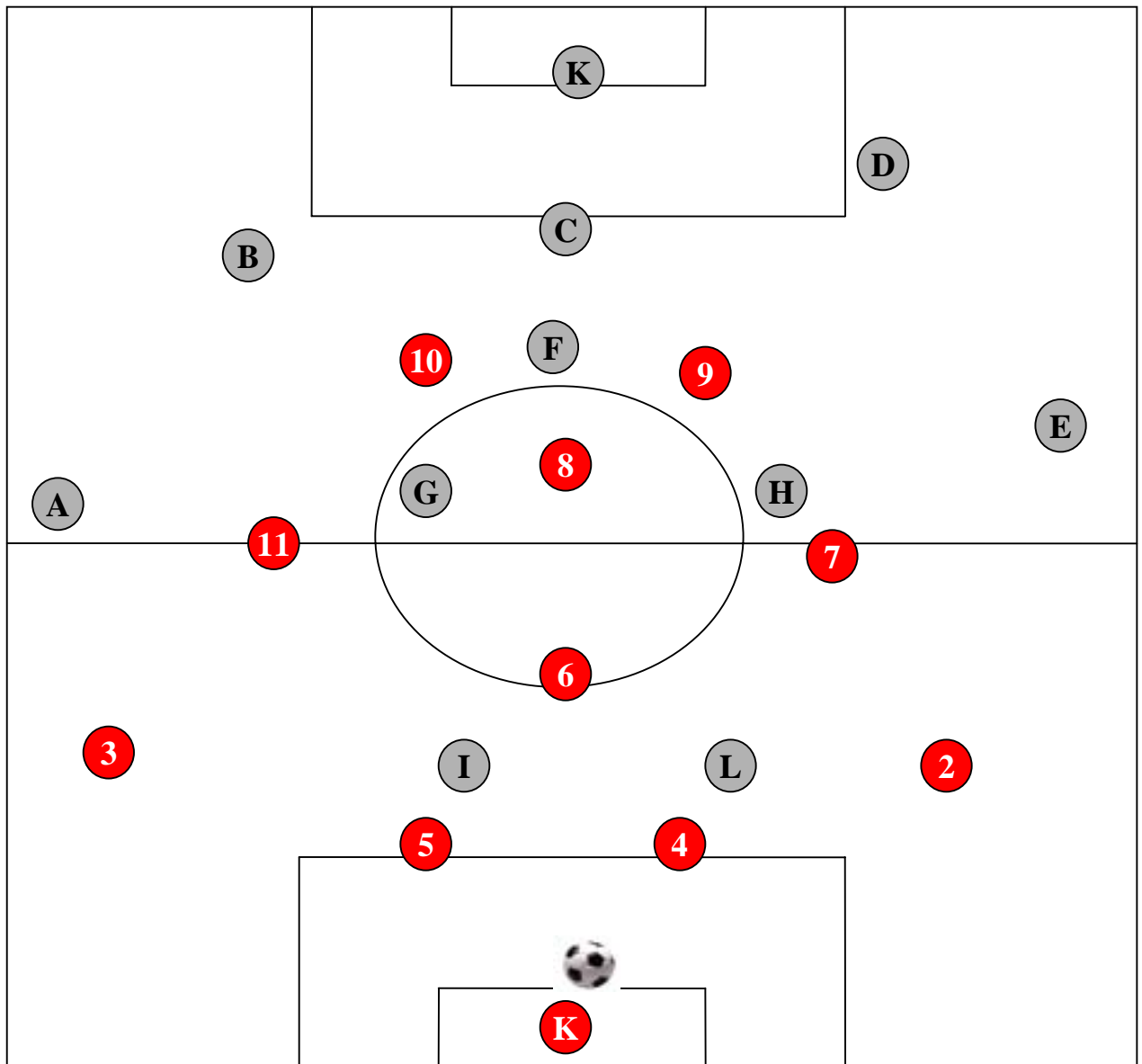
1. The coach now has players to pass the ball to (opponents). These players initially must be in static positions to check the set up. Players maintain an open stance so they can see opponents as well as the ball.
2. When the ball is at (C) or (D) the back four take positions with regard to (A) and (B) and do not get drawn to the ball. Defending team can win back the ball only with **interceptions** of passes not with tackles to allow us to look at the shape they achieve.

## DEFENDING IN AN 11 v 11 SITUATION



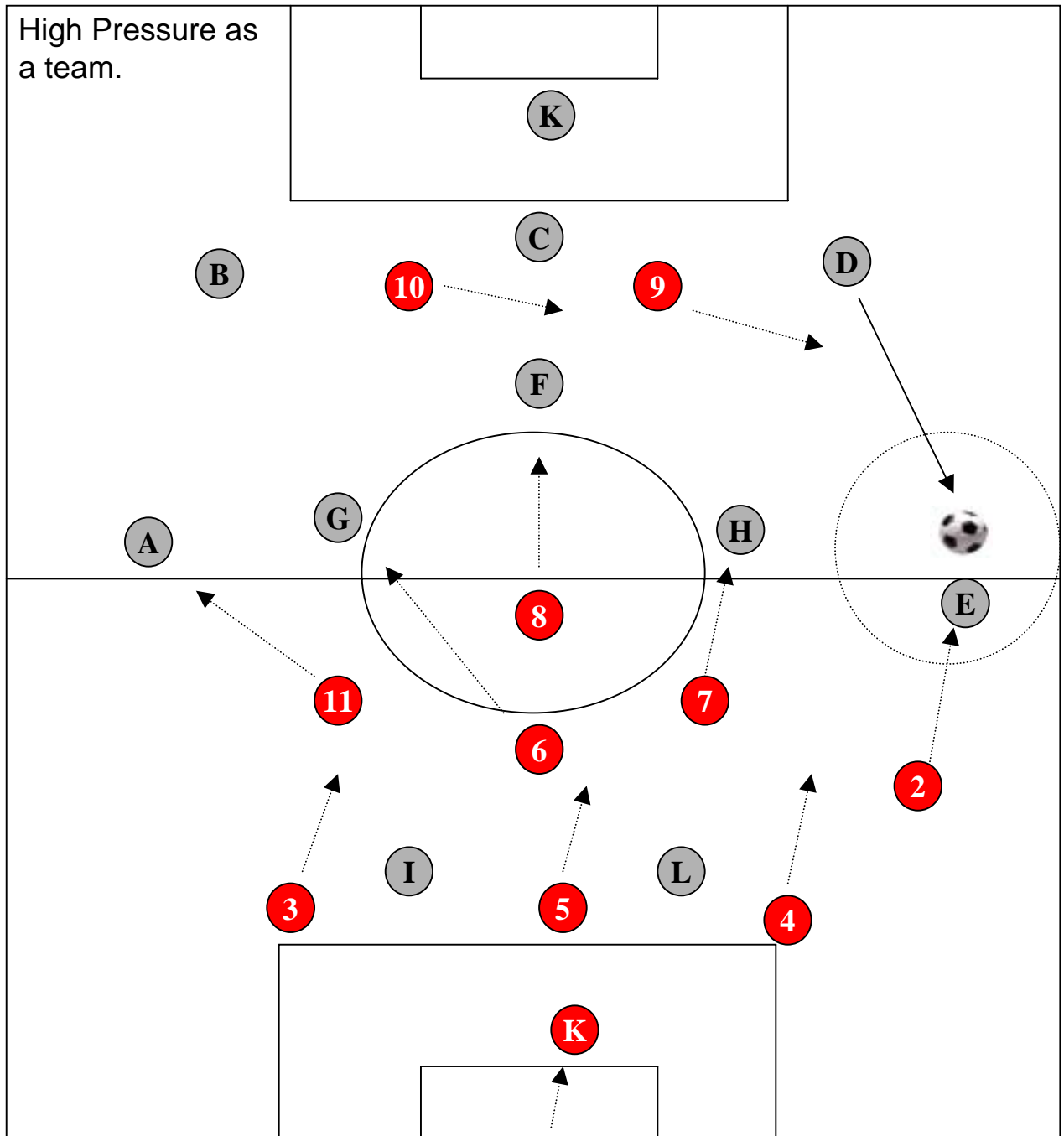
1. Here we have developed the practice into an 11 v 11 game situation, still working with the defending team (numbered team). The coach serves to the opponents in different locations on the field and the team need to try to win the ball back individually and collectively.
2. The target for the defending team when they win the ball could be to just chip the ball into the opponents keeper and the defending team have to win the ball again starting from where the coach serves the ball.

## ONE WORD SIGNALS FOR TEAM MOVEMENT



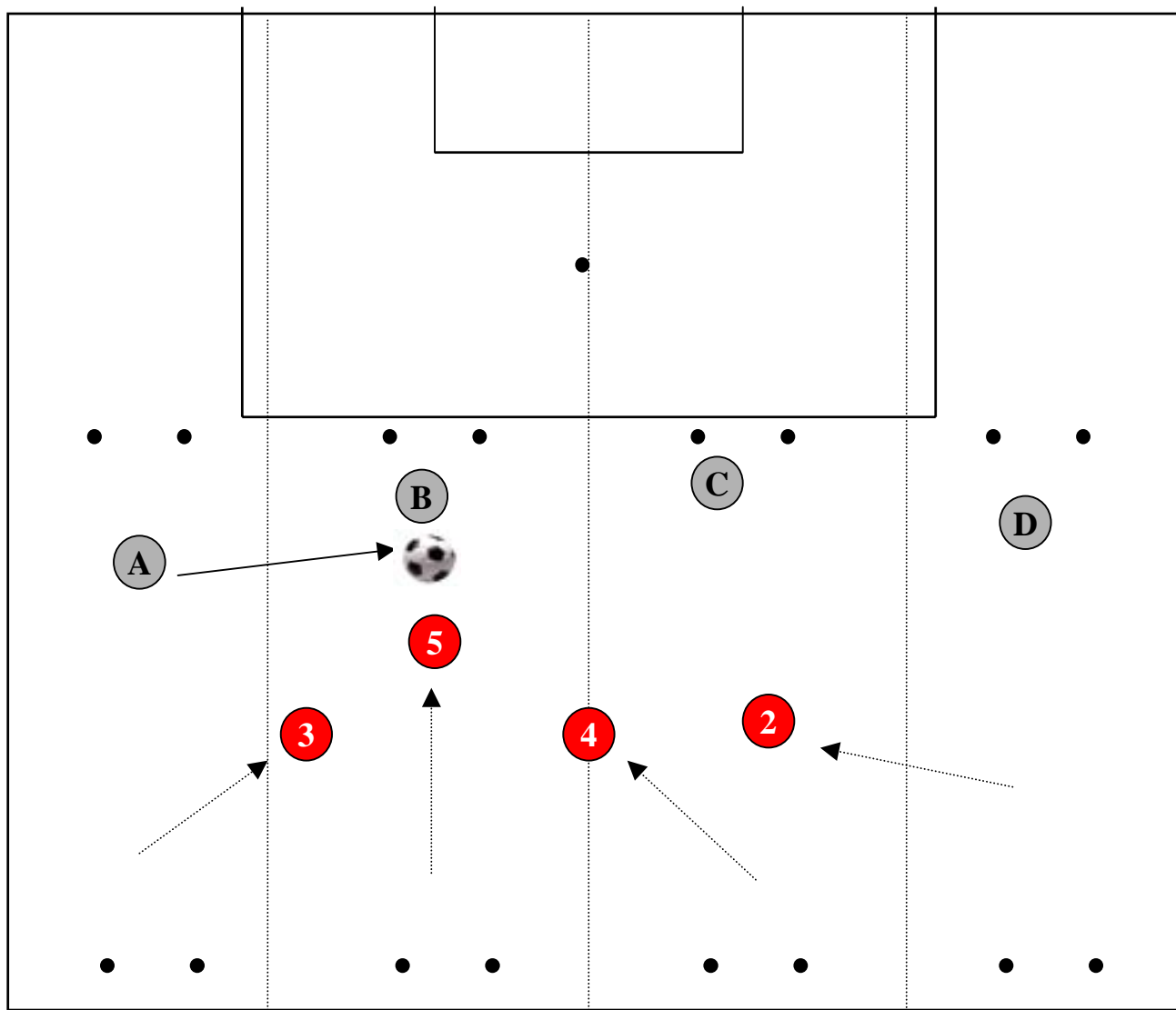
1. Just a **one word** signal can organize a back four defense so everyone knows what to do and reacts together as a **unit**. Also midfield players close by can react off the call too.
2. **One word** calls ensure everyone will know quickly and effectively what they should do as a unit and as a team.
3. Hence the back players (and the keeper) can organize their movement as a unit (and therefore influence those in front of them) from **four, one word** commands.
4. The momentum is triggered from the back and runs forward through the team to the strikers.

## 1 v 1 PRESSING WITH OPPONENT FACING THEIR OWN GOAL



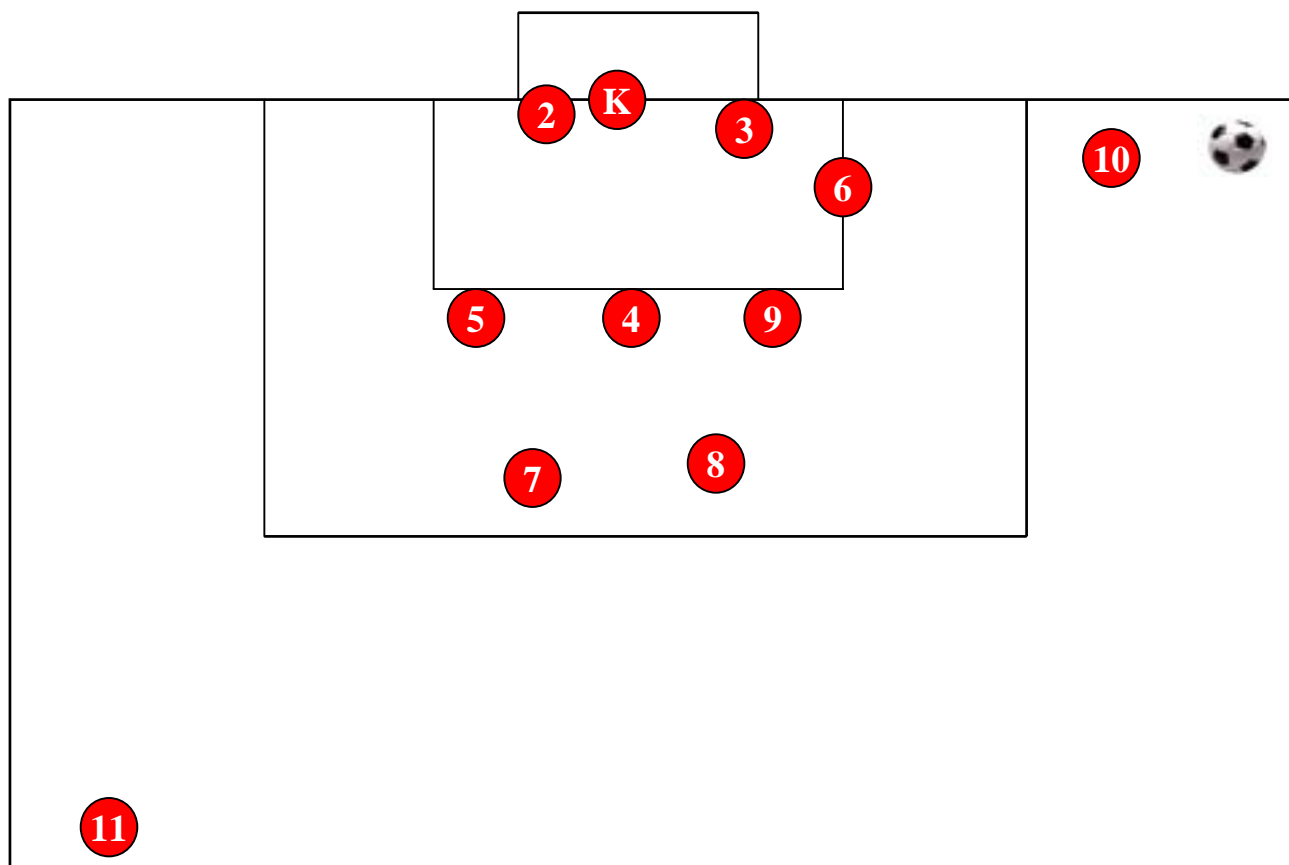
1. 1 v 1 pressing with opponent facing own goal. (D) passes to (E), (2) closes and stops (E) from turning, (2) must be a good defender to allow others to press 1 v 1 on their opposite number.
2. Midfield get tight to their players immediately. Defenders push up in front of the strikers leaving them offside. (9) closes (D) to prevent pass back and (10) supports across. You can condense this into the specific area you are working in using fewer players eg doubling on central midfielder use midfield and strikers only.

## ZONAL DEFENDING IN A 4 v 4



1. The ball is passed to (B) and the defenders adjust accordingly. They squeeze **centrally** behind the ball marking **space** but close enough in distance to **close** their immediate opponent down. For example (2) judges position by where the ball is and where the immediate opponent is so if the ball is passed to (D) there is time to close down and get to that player.
2. Show the **positions** of the **players** in relation to their **own goals**, can the opponent with the ball see the goal and score?
3. As the ball moves each player adjusts to become the pressing player (if its to their immediate opponent) or a support player who judges position from how close they are to the ball. The closer to the ball the more they mark the player the further from the ball the more they mark space.
4. As above (5) is closest, (3) and (4) are next closest and (2) is the furthest away but still close enough to close down as the ball travels. Introduce offside to make it more realistic.

## ZONAL MARKING FOR CORNERS AGAINST



1. Everyone marks **zones** in the box so wherever the ball goes there is a player in the box to attack the ball. The above set – up doesn't have to mean certain numbers are in specific positions for example the actual player who wears (6) may be too small to take up the above position. I'm using numbers for convenience of explanation, height and heading ability are determining factors. If you can tie in positions on the field relating to positions in the box it can help as players will break out straight into their natural positions from a clearance from the opponents corner (eg left and right side).
2. (2) positions inside the post, (3) positions at arms length in front of the near post (if the ball goes beyond this position (3) can drop back onto the line to protect the goal).
3. Position (6) is an important zone to protect as many deliveries arrive there so have a tall player who can head a ball here. (9), (4) and (5) take positions in line with the near post, middle of the goal and far post and attack anything in front of them (don't drop back and try to clear the ball if it goes over them except (5) if this is the last player). (7) and (8) mark **zones** either side of the penalty spot and can close down shots from the edge of the box from secondary possession.
4. (10) positions 10 yards away to **block** the **view** of the corner kick taker, this position changes depending whether it's an out- swinger or in- swinger (get into the line of flight of the ball).