

US YOUTH SOCCER ODP PLAYER MANUAL

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INTRODUCTION

One of the main objectives of the US Youth Soccer ODP 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 US Soccer guidelines. Since all the US Soccer Youth National Teams play 4-3-3 possession soccer, players going through the 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 ODP practice sessions and events are geared towards teaching the players the right principles specific to the possession playing style. 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 ODP is limited compared to club level and most states 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 the learning by providing the players valuable information in addition to the practices 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 each practice. By doing this, you will get more out of the program, become a smarter player, and be able to perform better at practices and events. Don't hesitate to ask your coaches if you have questions.

THE 4-3-3 NUMBERING SYSTEM

We use the same position numbering system throughout the ODP, boys and girls, in accordance with the US Soccer requirements. In diagram 1A below, 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 ODP age group, we play 8v8 and use a similar numbering system in order to facilitate a smooth transition from 8v8 to 11v11. In the 8v8 games, we play out of a 2-3-1-1 formation as shown in diagram 1B. Note in diagram 1B that players 2 and 7 are combined into one position and the same is done with players 3 and 11. Also, players 8 and 10 are combined into one position. Also notice that the 2-3-1-1 formation in 8v8 looks a lot like the 4-3-3 minus 3 players. By doing this, we can teach the players in the 8v8 environment the same behavior, movement, and decisions that they would be expected to know in the 11v11 environment.

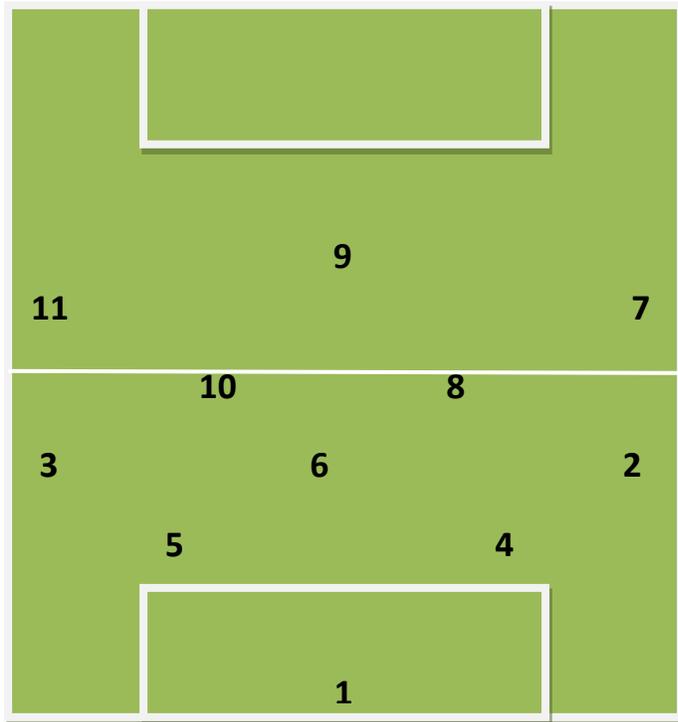


Diagram 1A

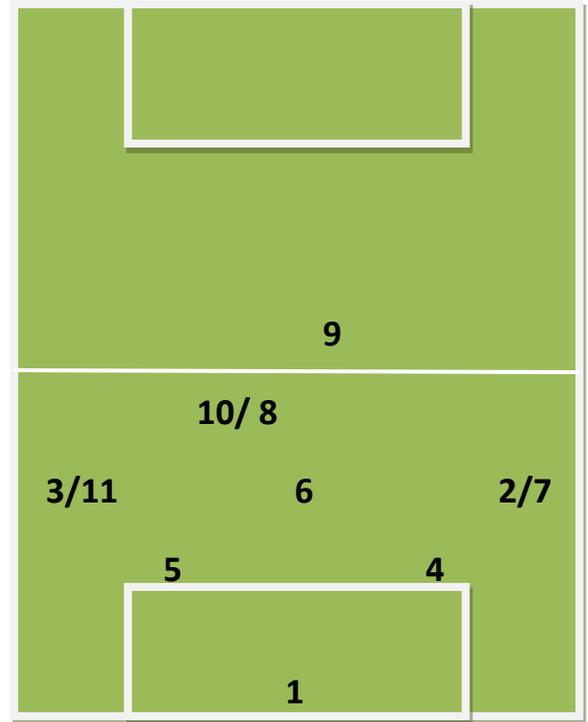


Diagram 1B

THE 10 PRINCIPLES OF POSSESSION SOCCER

The 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. You can think of these as the 10 Commandments 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.

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.

PRINCIPLE 2: PEEL OFF AND OPEN BODY TO THE FIELD

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

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

Diagram 2A:
Player 6 has the ball

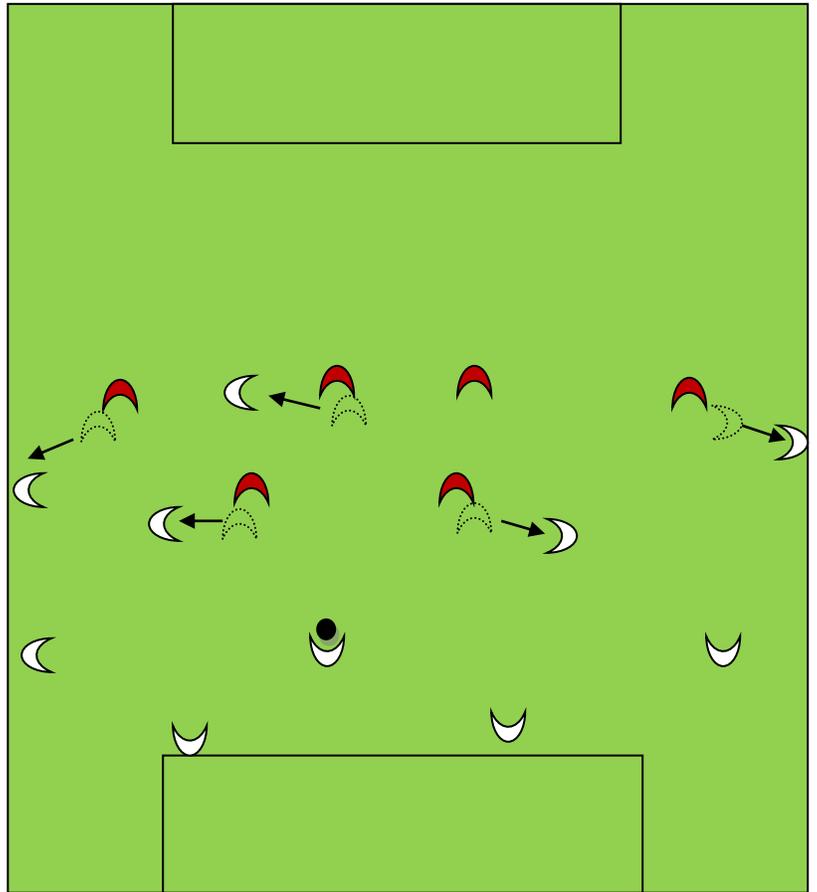
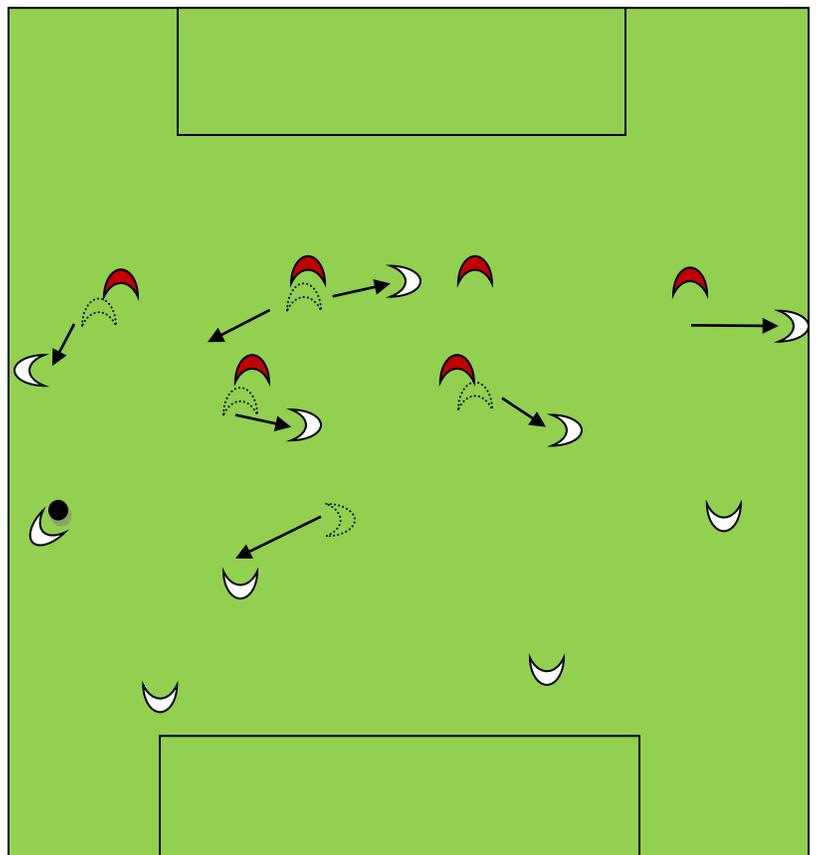


Diagram 2B:
Player 3 has the ball.
Player 9 can either peel off
or check towards ball.



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 below 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 opens his/her body 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 his pass, gives the passer more options and avoids the off-side.

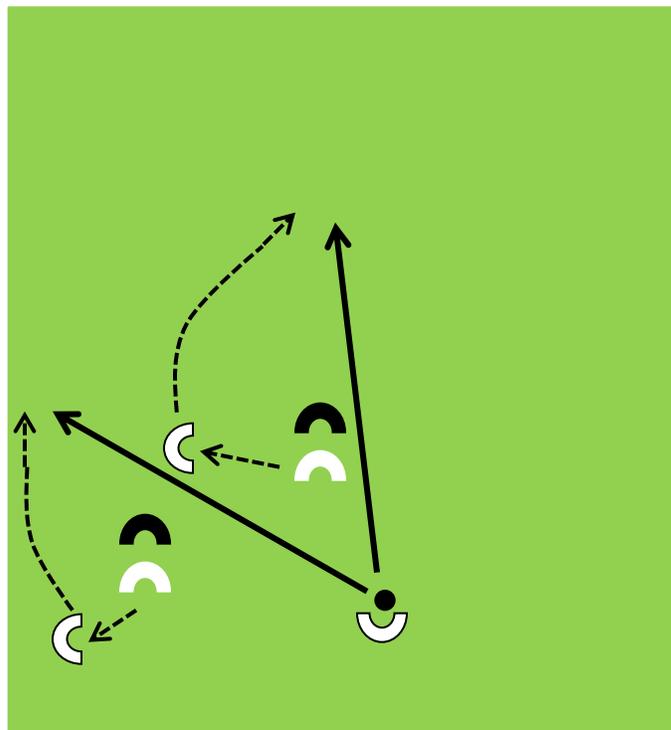


Diagram 3

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 players make the correct runs and will avoid players 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 be constantly looking around you to assess your position in relation to your teammates' positions.

PRINCIPLE 6: EVERY BACK PASS IS 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 below 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.

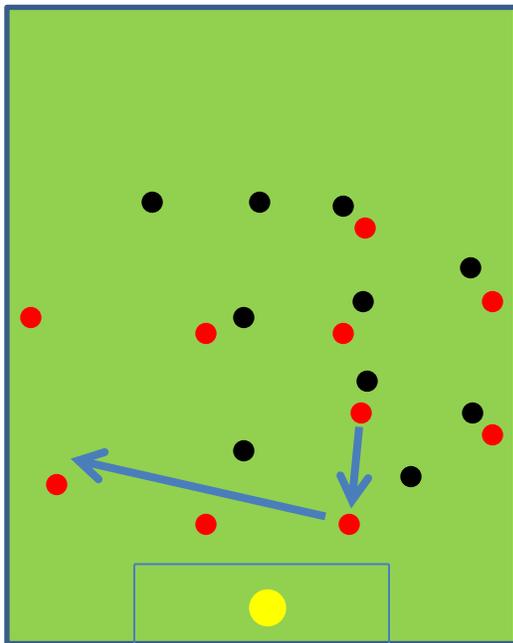


Diagram 6A

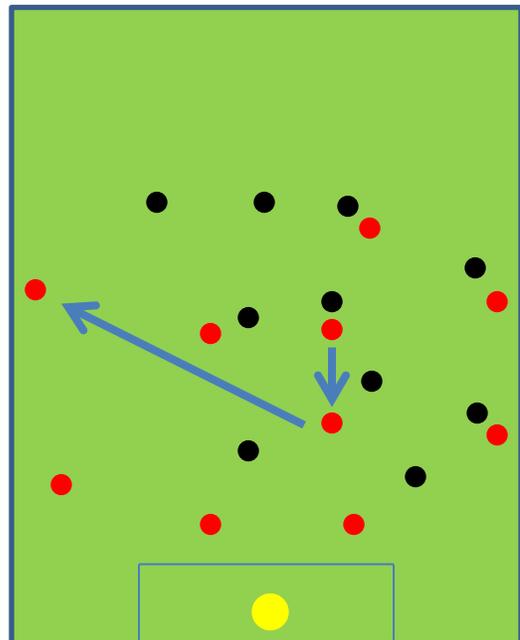


Diagram 6B

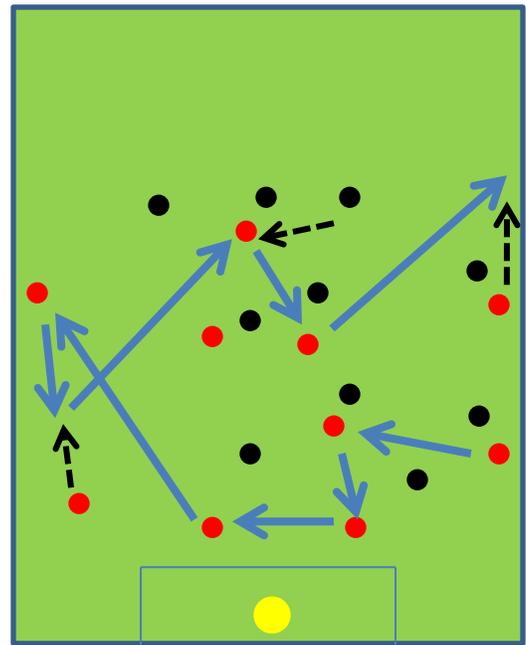
PRINCIPLE 7: THE BALL DOESN'T STAY IN AN AREA FOR LONG

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.

Diagram 7:

Here 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.



PRINCIPLE 8: KEEPERS DISTRIBUTE BALLS, AVOID THE LONG PUNT

Since the emphasis in ODP is to play out of the back, it is important for the keeper 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 kick.

Diagrams 8A and 8B show how the team should be positioned on a goal kick to make the field big and give the keeper 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.

