

OJFC Coach Guide - U11/12



A simple guide to help support your team through the transition to 9v9 football.



Purpose

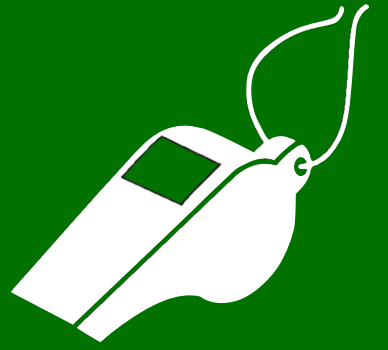
This guide is designed to help all coaches, including those new to coaching, introduce their team to the 9v9 format while keeping football fun and development-focused for U11 and U12 players. At this stage, players are becoming more aware of positioning, teamwork, and game rules, but enjoyment and skill development should remain the priority.

Success at this age isn't about winning—it's about helping players improve their skills, make good decisions on the field, and grow their confidence. Players should be encouraged to try new things, learn from mistakes, and develop an understanding of passing, movement, and teamwork.

If players enjoy the game and feel encouraged, they will stay engaged, keep improving, and continue playing football for years to come!



Key Coaching Principles



Fun

Football should be enjoyable! Young players learn best when they are engaged and having fun. Keep sessions light, positive, and full of energy.

Touches on the Ball

Every player should have as many interactions with the ball as possible. Avoid long lines or waiting time—maximise movement and involvement.

Player-Centred Coaching

Encourage kids to explore and make decisions. Let them try things, make mistakes, and learn through experience rather than constant instruction. Drills will feel ‘messy’ — that’s okay!

What To Expect

More Game Awareness

Players will begin to recognise where their teammates are and how to move into space. Encourage both teamwork between players as well as individual creativity.

Improved Skills and Coordination

Kids are developing better ball control, dribbling, and passing, but mistakes will still happen. Keep instructions simple and focus on praising positive behaviours.

More Structure in the Game

Players will start to understand positions and formations. However, they should still rotate through different roles to become well-rounded footballers



Coach Tip: Avoid over-coaching! Let players discover the game while giving simple guidance to help them understand their roles.

Key Differences

Larger Field and More Players

At this age group, the pitch grows significantly in size. There are also an extra two players on each team. Teach players to spread out and make the most of the expanded space.

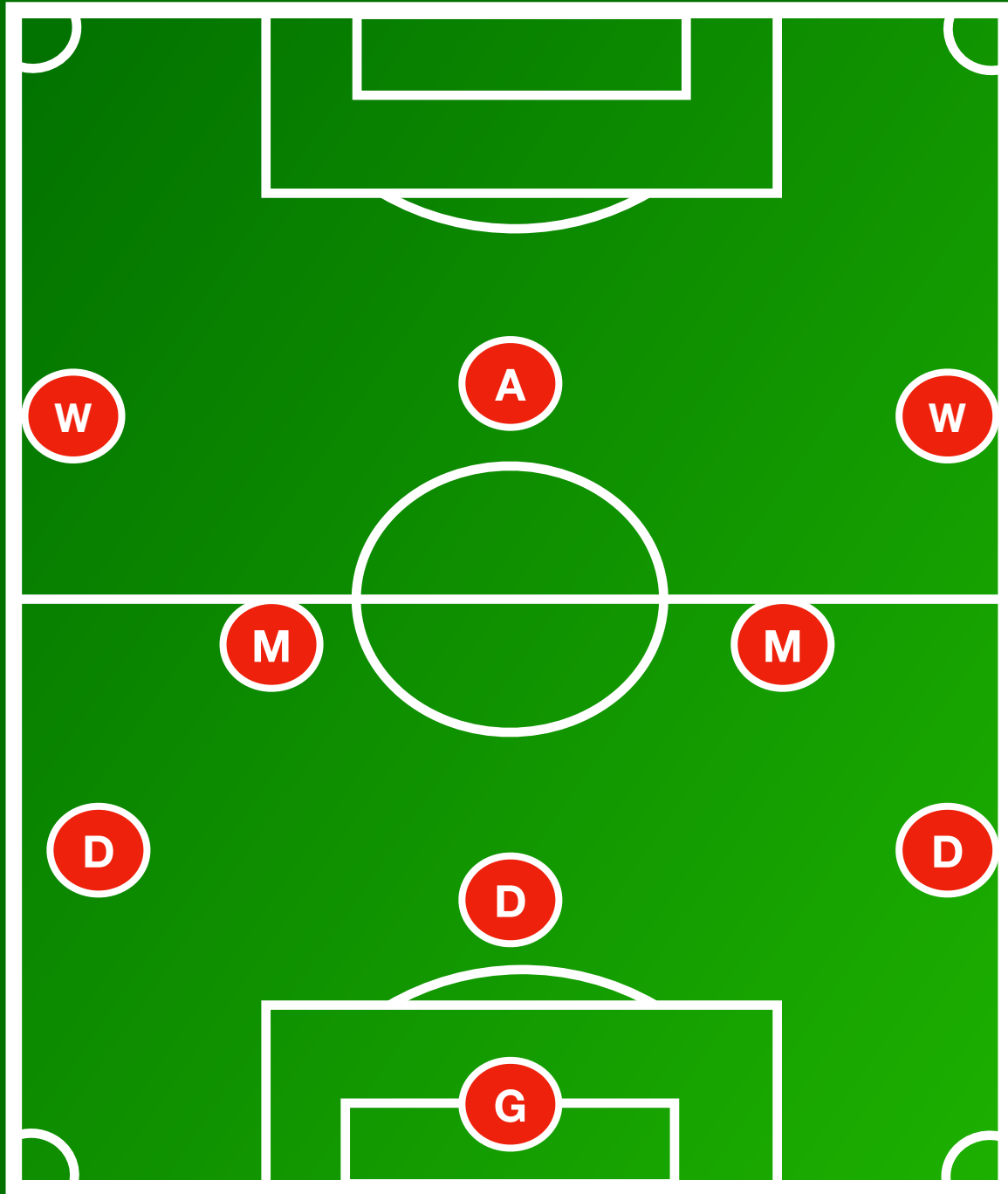
Change in Offside Rule

In 7v7 formats of the game, offsides were only called when players were over the retreat line. At 9v9, this rule changes where offsides now occur from the halfway line.

More Positions to Learn

As players transition to 9v9, they will encounter a wider variety of positions, each with different responsibilities. It's important that they get the opportunity to play in multiple roles rather than being locked into one position too early.

Formations



Formation: 1-3-2-3

For the size of the field and number of players available, the recommended formation you can use is a 1-3-2-3.

This formation consists of a goalkeeper, three defenders, two midfielders, two wingers and one attacker.

This formation allows players to easily spread out and create easy passing options to move the ball forward.



Coach Tip: Players at this should still be rotated through multiple different positions on the field. At this age, every player should be comfortable playing **three different positions on two different lines** (e.g. attacker, winger and midfielder)

Formations



Formation: 1-2-3-2-1

Once your team has understood the 1-3-2-3 formation, you might like to progress to the 1-2-3-2-1 formation.

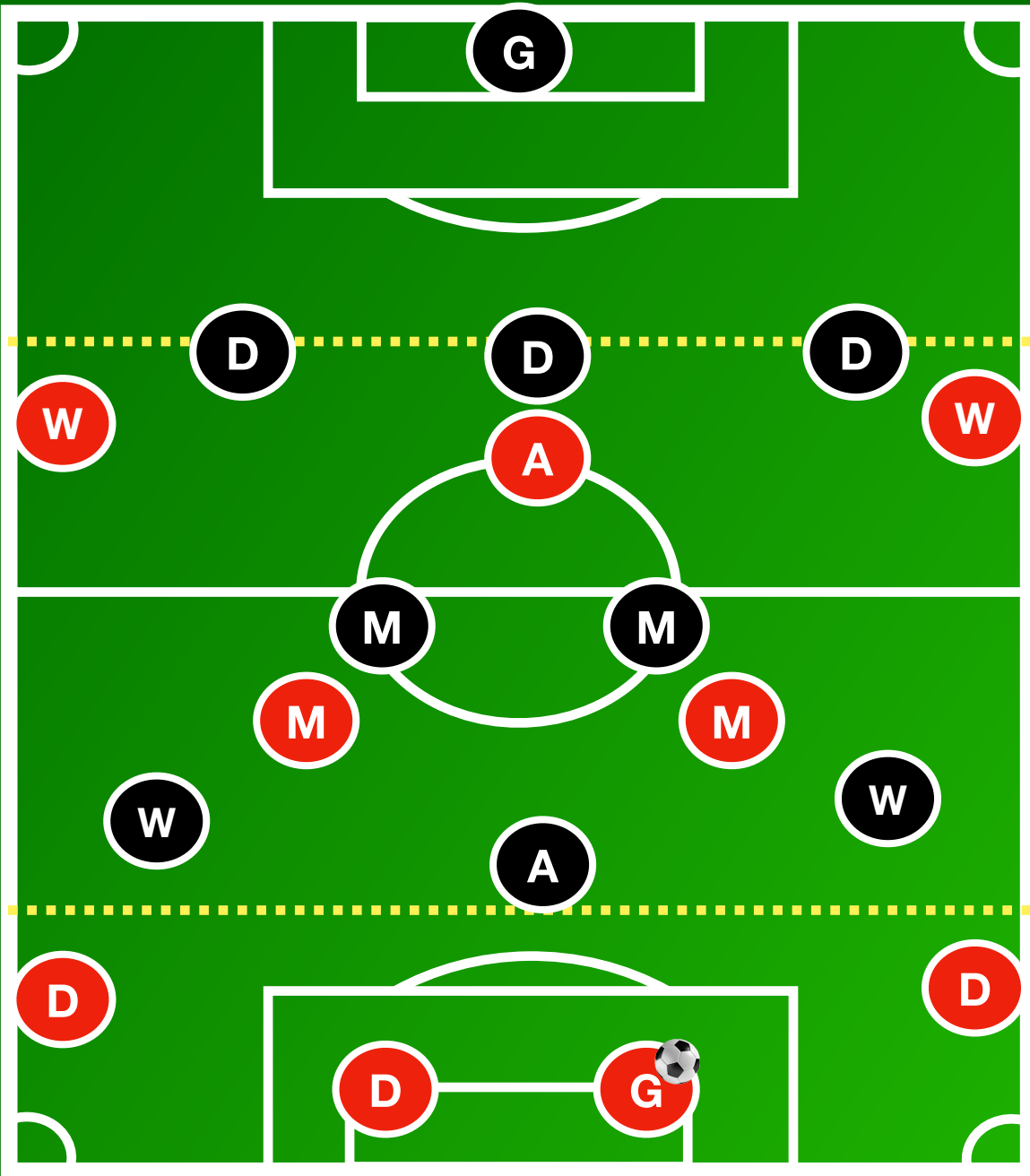
This formation consists of a goalkeeper, two defenders, two wide defenders, three midfielders and one attacker.

This formation allows players to easily spread out and create easy passing options to move the ball forward.



Coach Tip: This formations is very close to the recommended 11v11 formation 1-4-3-3. This makes this an ideal formation to use in preparation for the transition to the full version of the game.

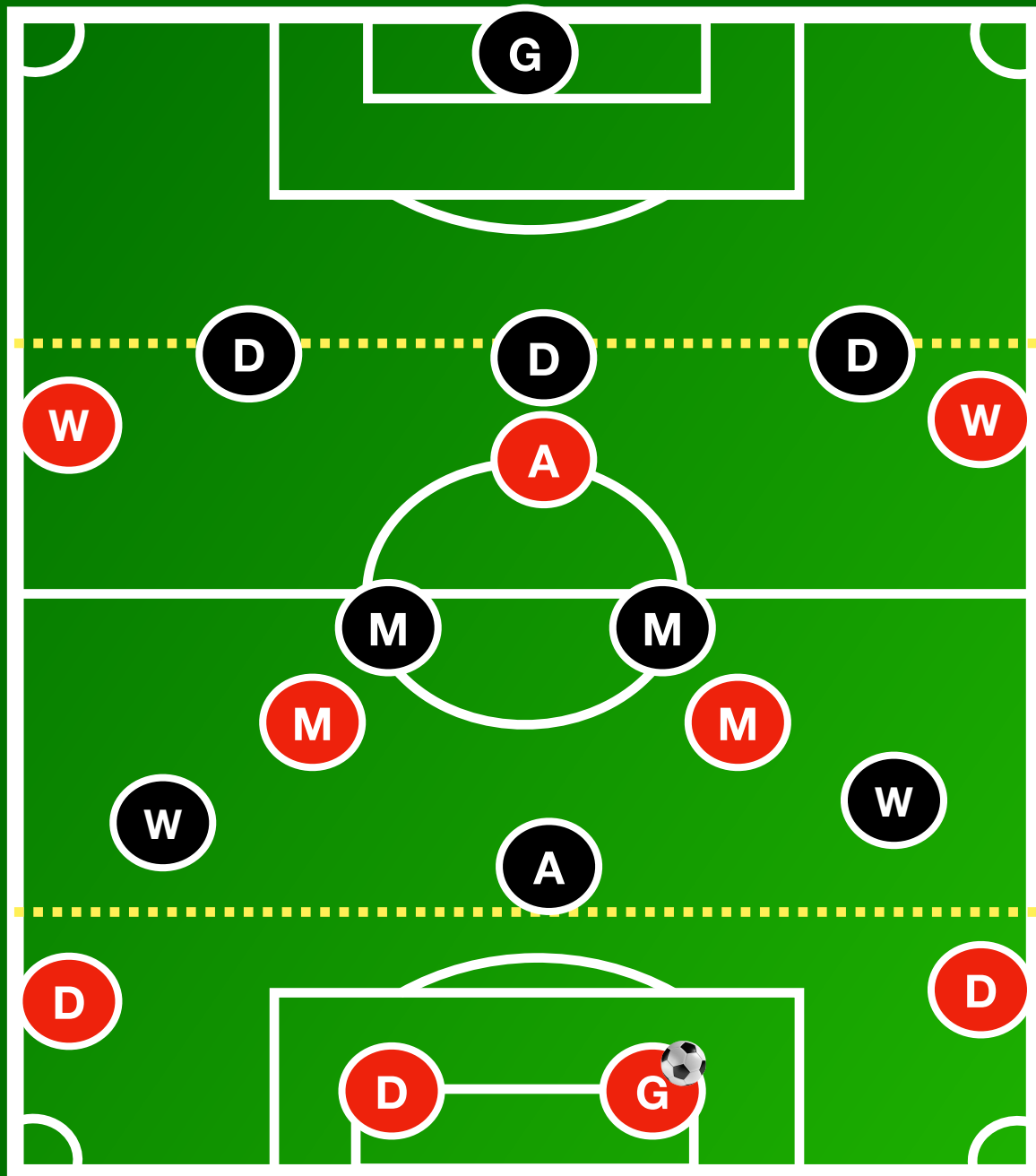
Retreating Line



- ▶ When the goalkeeper has the ball (from a goal kick or in hand), the opposing team must move behind the retreating line (usually the third of the field).
- ▶ The opposition may cross the line once the ball is the defender has touched the ball.
- ▶ This gives the team in possession a chance to play out from the back without immediate pressure.
- ▶ For 9v9 grades, the retreat line no longer acts as the offside line for the attacking team (instead this is from halfway).

For more detailed information on the retreat line, see [this video by New Zealand Football](#).

Goal Kicks



At this age group, players should be building on the basic 'playing out' concepts they have been taught.

Playing out involves taking a short goal kick and trying to move the ball forward with control by passing or dribbling.

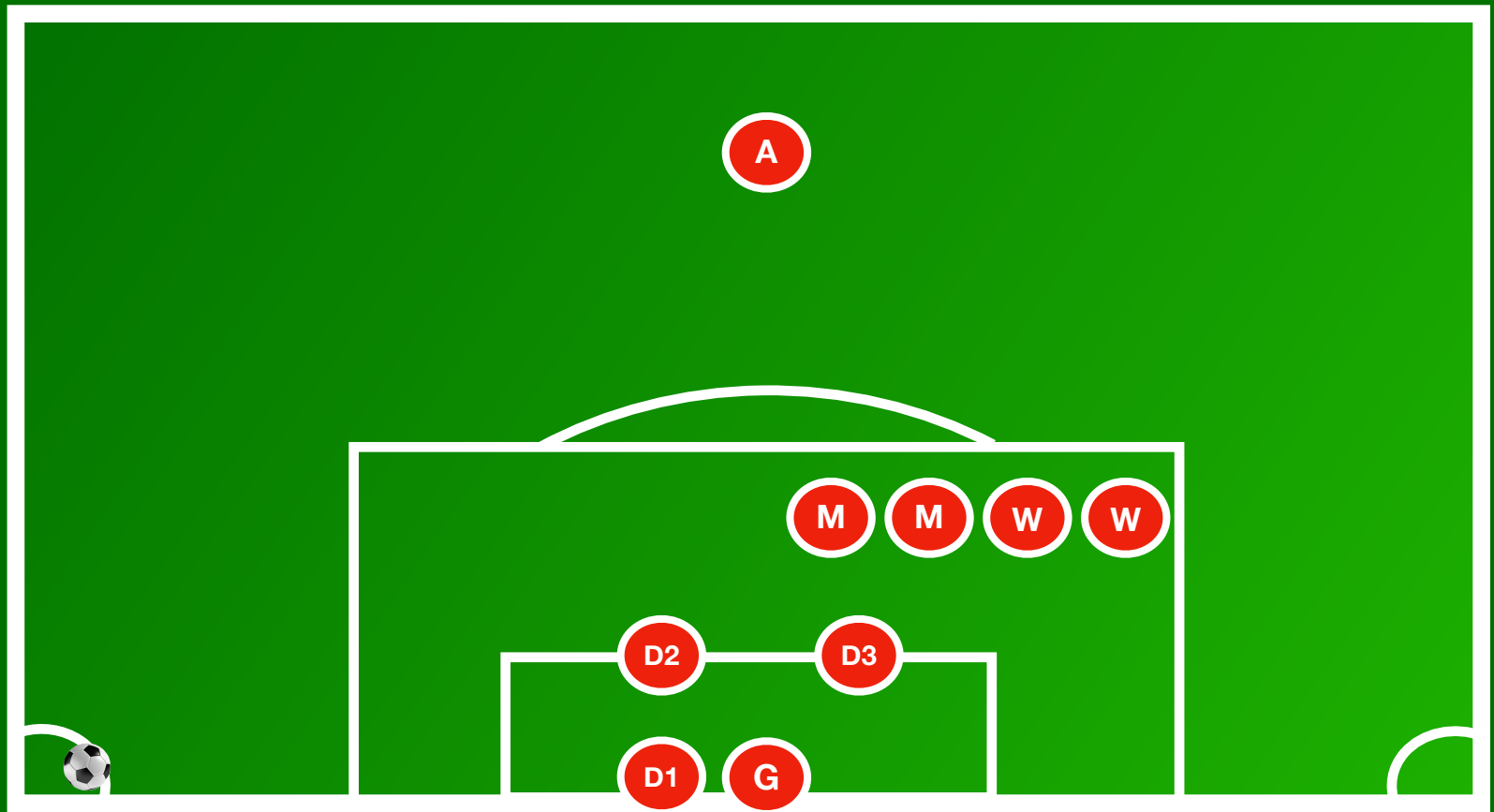
Some key things to remember for goal kicks are:

- ▶ If a player has space on the ball, encourage them to carry the ball forward to move the team further up the pitch.
- ▶ Encourage movement from players away from the ball into space, this will help create passing options for the player with the ball.



Coach Tip: Mistakes will happen! Encourage players to be brave under pressure and passing choices that allow teammates to control the ball.

Corners - Defending



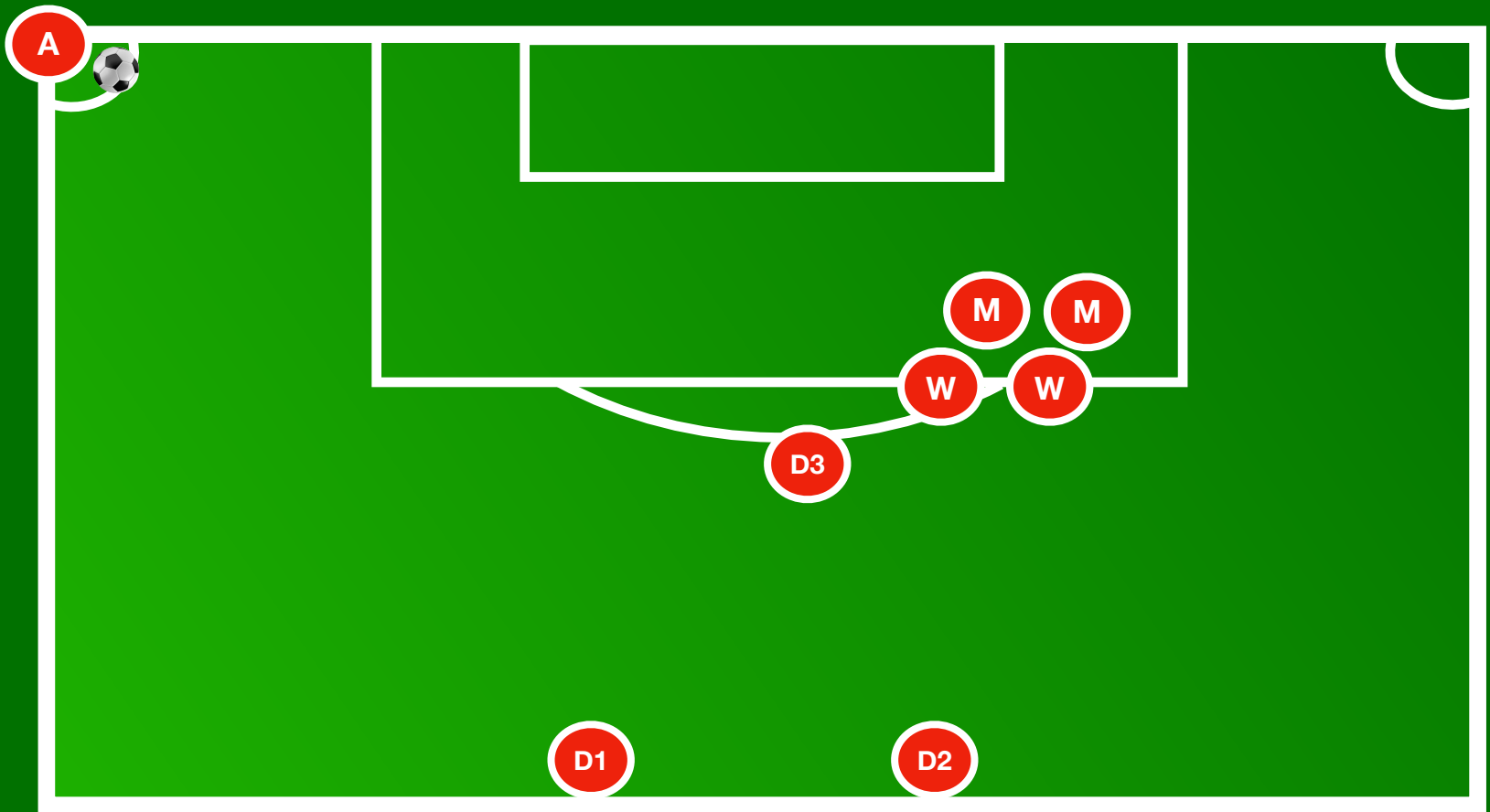
At the U11/12 age group, we can begin to develop players understanding of defensive corners by adding new roles.

We want to continue the emphasis on teaching players to effectively mark opponents, whilst also helping players develop their understanding of zonal defending.

Here are some of the key roles:

- ▶ The **front post** defender (D1) should be positioned within arms reach of the near post. It is their role to clear any cross that comes short or block a shot at that post.
- ▶ The **zonal defenders** (D2, D3) should be positioned about four metres away from the goal in line with the front and back post. These players should look to clear any crosses that fall near their zone.
- ▶ The four **man markers** (M, W) should be marking the opposition attackers 'goal side' to prevent easy shots at goal.
- ▶ The **attacker** (A) should be positioned to receive any clearances and start attacks towards the opponents goal.

Corners - Attacking



At the U11/12 age group, we start to introduce some key concepts for attacking corners.

At this level, the focus should be on keeping things simple—helping players understand movement, timing, and positioning to make the most of these situations.

Here are some of the key roles:

- ▶ The **corner taker (A)**. Encourage a controlled delivery near the goal area, rather than just a powerful kick.
- ▶ The **runners (W, M)** should begin their runs from the edge of the box. They should vary their runs, ensuring players are targeting near and far post. Encourage timing of the runs to arrive as the ball is in front of the goal.
- ▶ The **edge of box attacker (D3)** should be positioned just off the top of the box. This player is responsible for sweeping up any clearances that fall just outside of the box.
- ▶ The **defenders (D1, D2)** should be positioned near halfway marking any opposition attackers that stay forward. We should always aim to have a +1 staying back (e.g. if the opponents leave two attackers forward, we leave three defenders back).