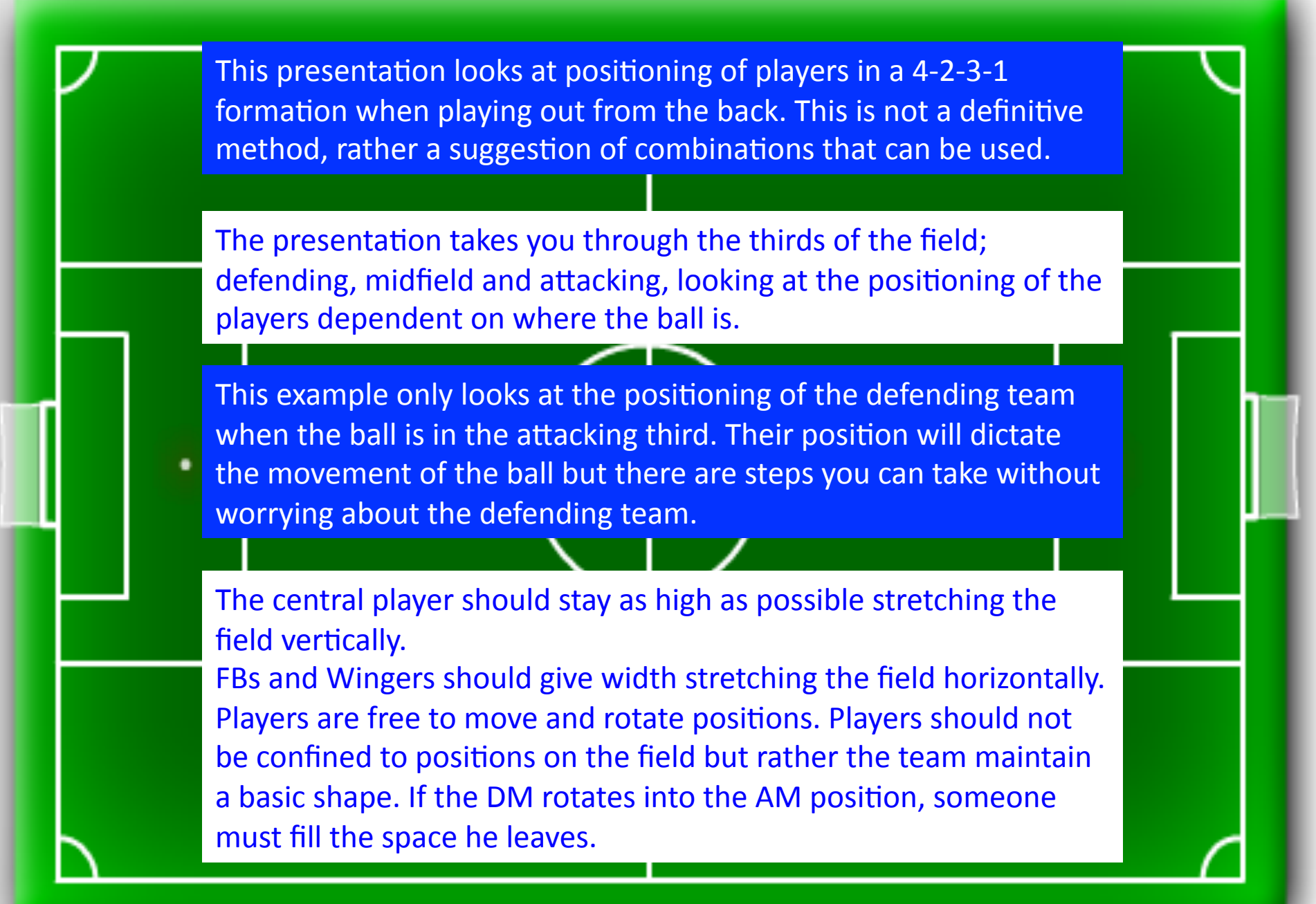


Positioning, Rotation and  
Possession within the 4-2-3-1  
formation.

Neil Cooper  
Lebanon HS Varsity Head Coach



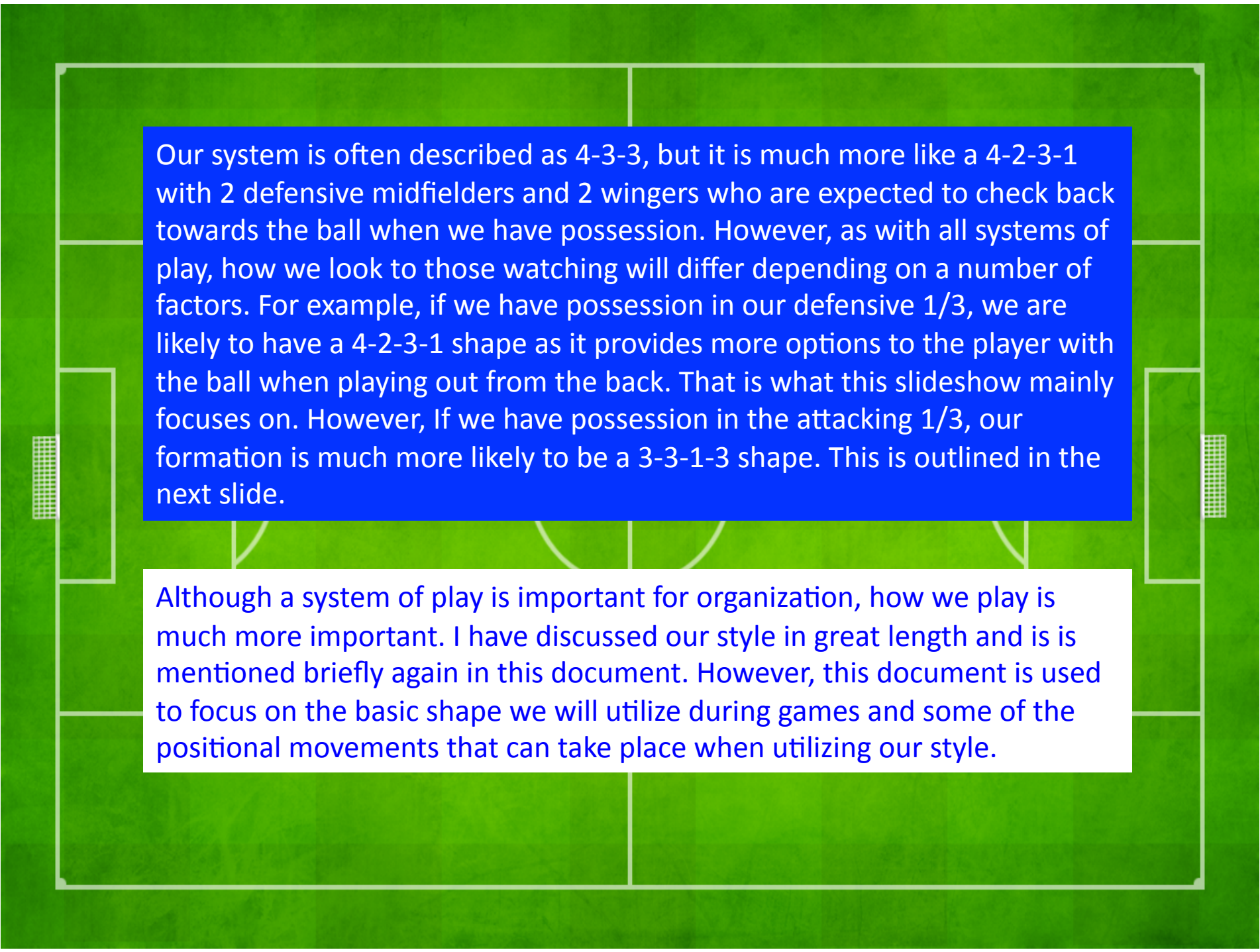


This presentation looks at positioning of players in a 4-2-3-1 formation when playing out from the back. This is not a definitive method, rather a suggestion of combinations that can be used.

The presentation takes you through the thirds of the field; defending, midfield and attacking, looking at the positioning of the players dependent on where the ball is.

This example only looks at the positioning of the defending team when the ball is in the attacking third. Their position will dictate the movement of the ball but there are steps you can take without worrying about the defending team.

The central player should stay as high as possible stretching the field vertically.  
FBs and Wingers should give width stretching the field horizontally.  
Players are free to move and rotate positions. Players should not be confined to positions on the field but rather the team maintain a basic shape. If the DM rotates into the AM position, someone must fill the space he leaves.



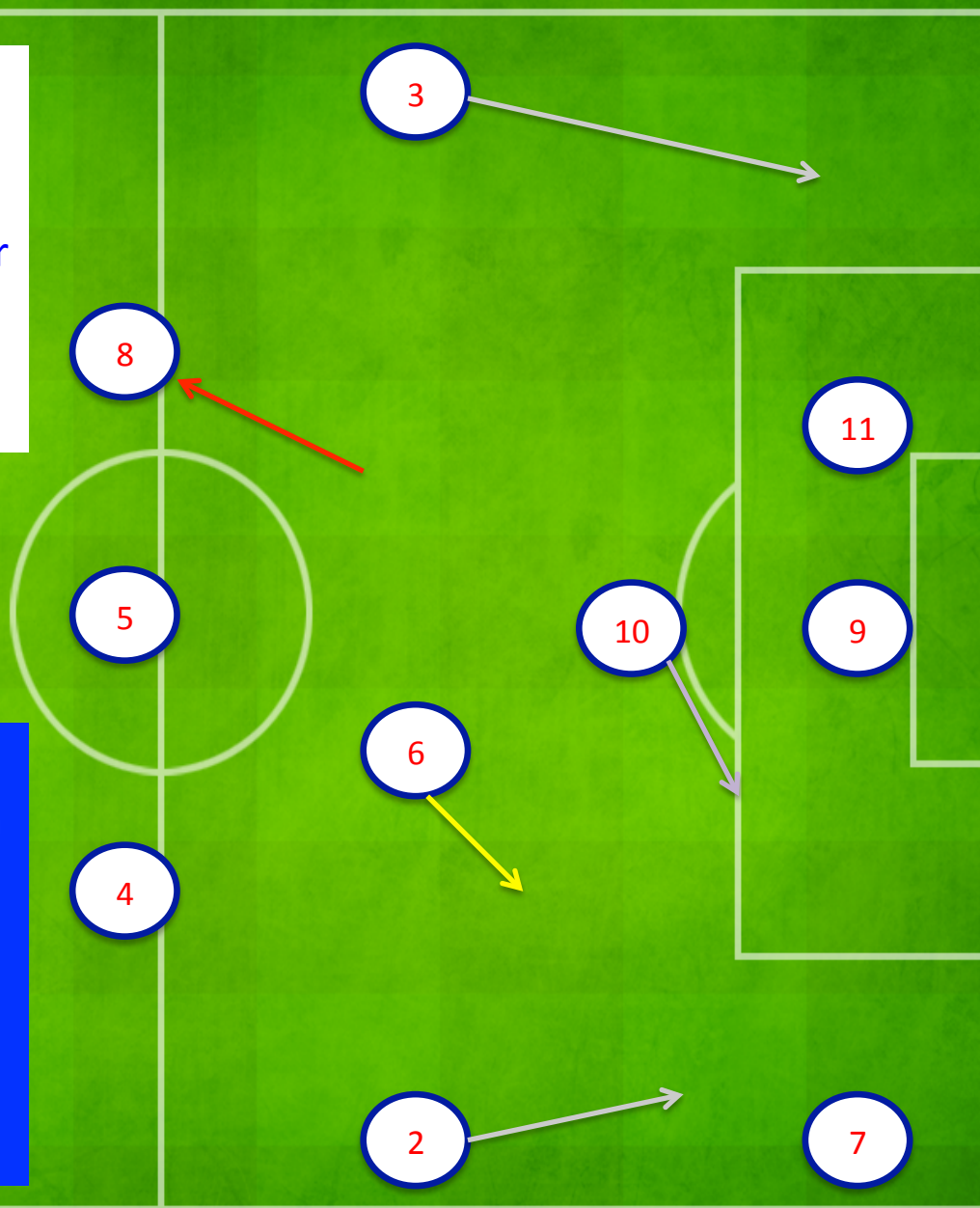
Our system is often described as 4-3-3, but it is much more like a 4-2-3-1 with 2 defensive midfielders and 2 wingers who are expected to check back towards the ball when we have possession. However, as with all systems of play, how we look to those watching will differ depending on a number of factors. For example, if we have possession in our defensive 1/3, we are likely to have a 4-2-3-1 shape as it provides more options to the player with the ball when playing out from the back. That is what this slideshow mainly focuses on. However, if we have possession in the attacking 1/3, our formation is much more likely to be a 3-3-1-3 shape. This is outlined in the next slide.

Although a system of play is important for organization, how we play is much more important. I have discussed our style in great length and is mentioned briefly again in this document. However, this document is used to focus on the basic shape we will utilize during games and some of the positional movements that can take place when utilizing our style.

## The 3-3-1-3 shape we may use when in possession in the attacking 1/3

In this example, the ball is on the right with #7. The #11 is attacking the back post and #9 is central. The arrows indicate possible player movement. Some is to offer support, some is to provide cover/balance defensively.

If #7 plays to #6, they have the opportunity to open up and switch the ball to #8 who will then be pushing forward into the space in front of him. If that does happen, #5 would move across and #6 would drop in between #4 and #5 to keep the 3 at the back.





## A brief mention of style of play within the system

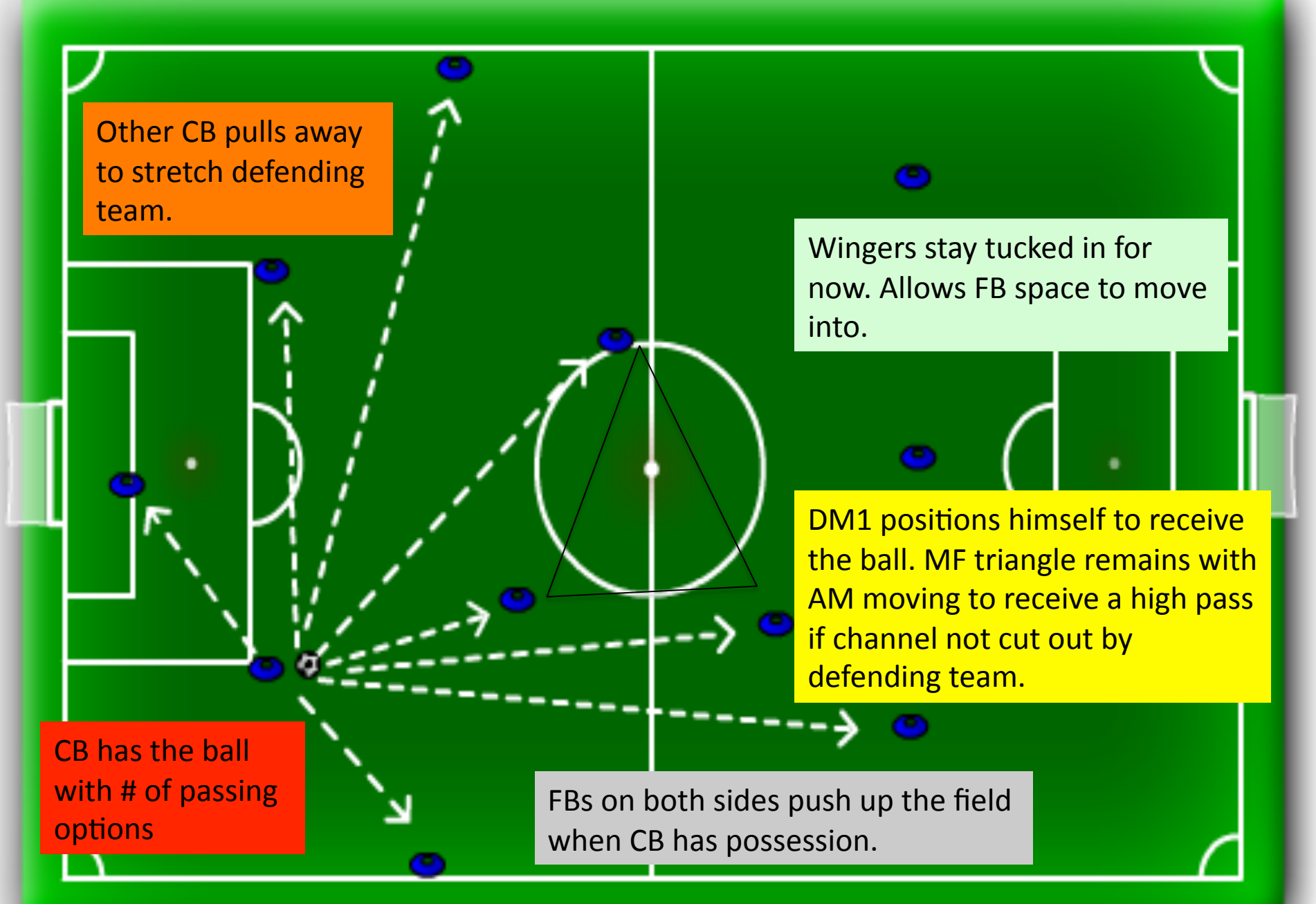
### In Possession (player):

- Be positive – Play forward whenever possible. Balance the risk involved in being positive and maintaining possession.
- Be patient – If you can't play forward, maintain possession by playing side to side across the field and recycling the ball.
- Be penetrative – Look to play in behind the defence to people making runs

### Without Possession (player but team has possession):

- Be a good teammate – Understand your role in the team and where you should be on the field based on where the ball is.
- Be willing – Find space between the lines of defence and look to receive the ball in these areas of the field.
- Be on the move – Make yourself hard to mark by constantly moving. Remember, shape is important and not your "label". As long as someone fills your space, the team maintains shape.





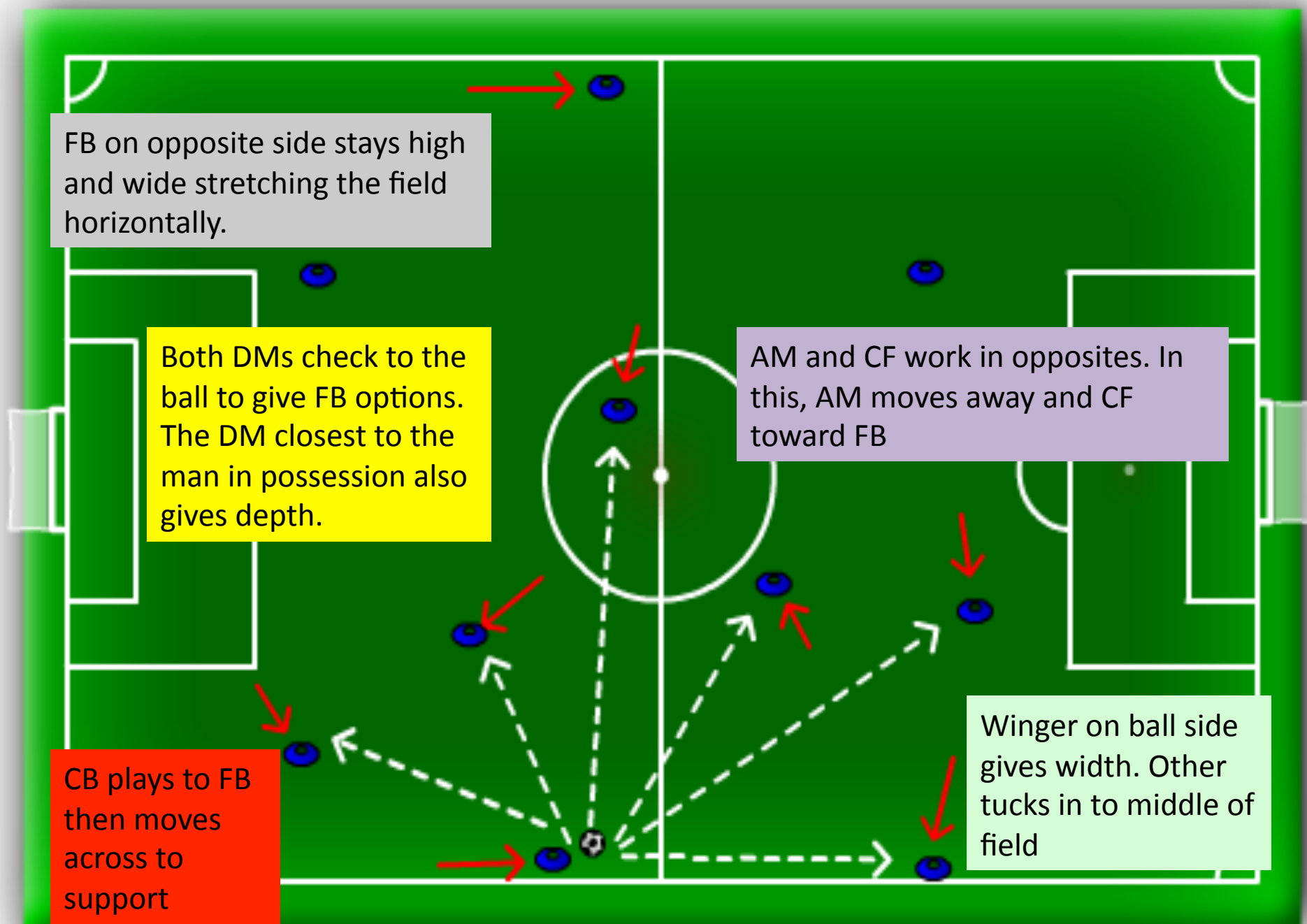
Other CB pulls away to stretch defending team.

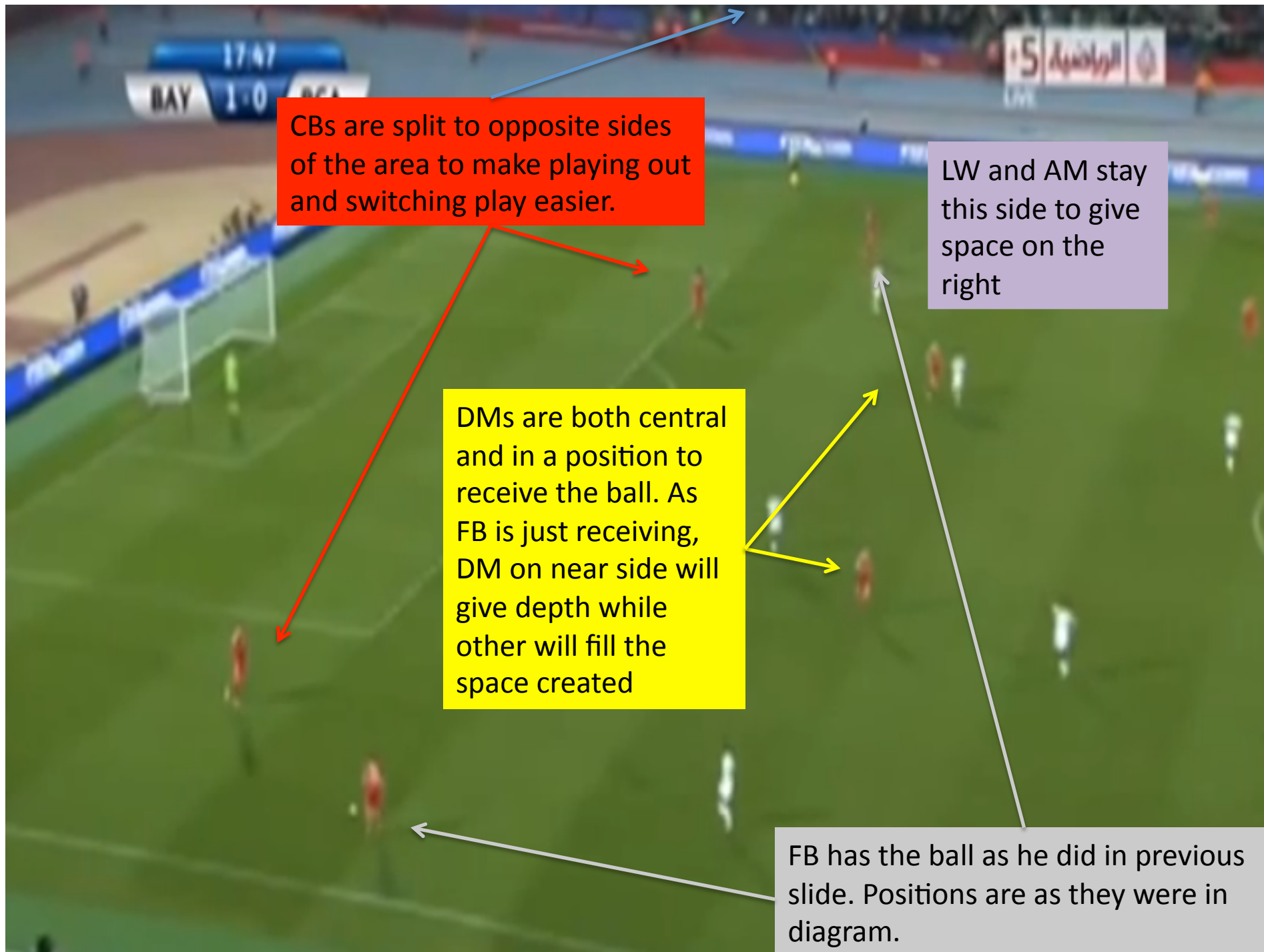
Wingers stay tucked in for now. Allows FB space to move into.

DM1 positions himself to receive the ball. MF triangle remains with AM moving to receive a high pass if channel not cut out by defending team.

CB has the ball with # of passing options

FBs on both sides push up the field when CB has possession.





CBs are split to opposite sides of the area to make playing out and switching play easier.

LW and AM stay this side to give space on the right

DMs are both central and in a position to receive the ball. As FB is just receiving, DM on near side will give depth while other will fill the space created

FB has the ball as he did in previous slide. Positions are as they were in diagram.



FB on non ball side pushes up to allow CB2 space should he receive the ball.

DM2 drops back square with DM1 to make recycling the ball easier.

FB plays inside to DM who will look to play forward or maintain possession by switching point of attack.

CF and AM also move in the same direction of the ball. AM tries to maintain triangle shape in midfield.

As ball travels inside, both wingers move direction ball is going. RW moves inside. LW moves wide.

FB moves higher on ball side to be a further attacking option. Stops RM on defending team from coming in and doubling down on DM2.

Without  
Rotation of CF

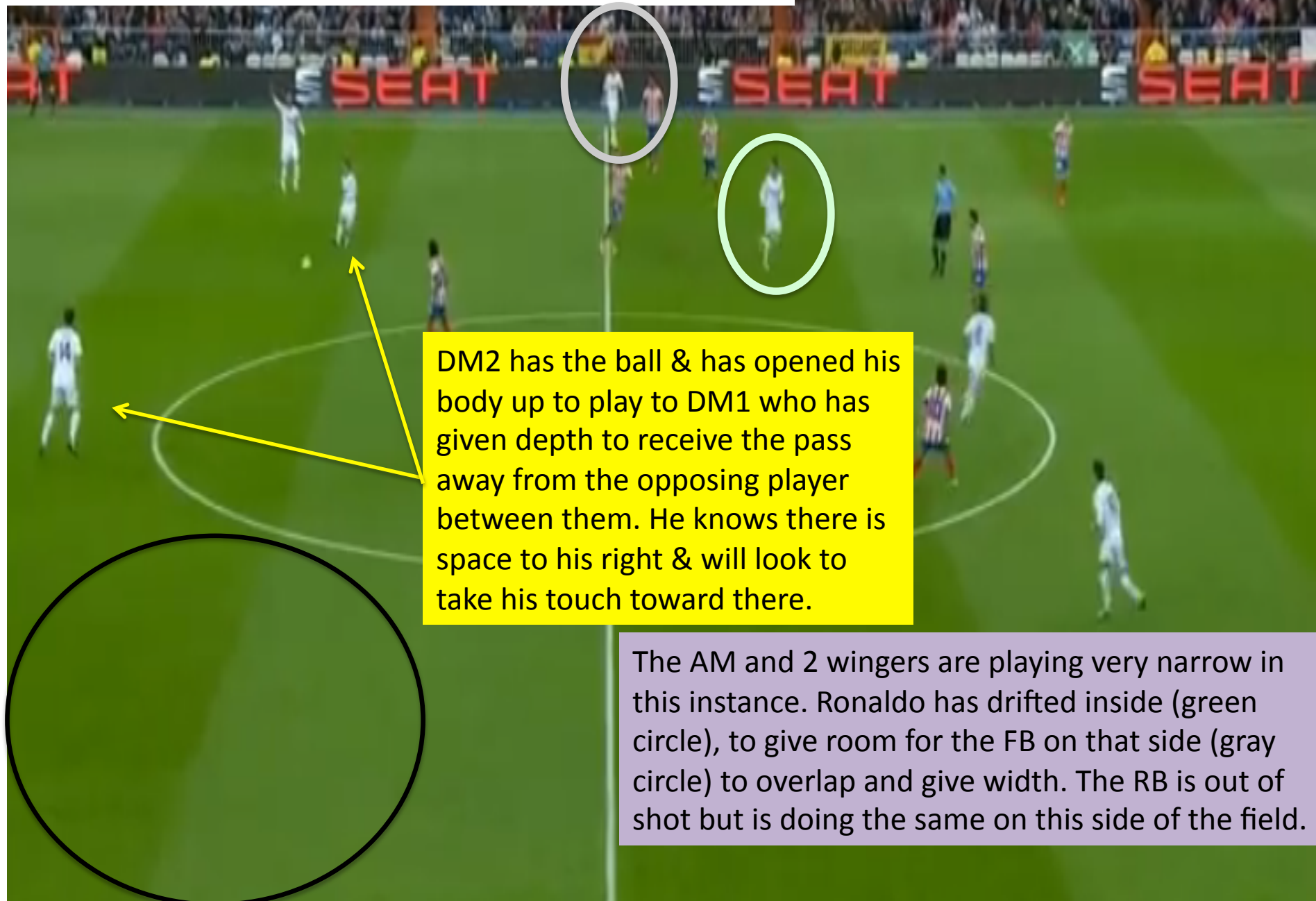
Ball passed from DM1 to DM2 who will look to open up and play wide to the left or high to CF or AM.

AM checks back to the ball and the CF moves to receive the ball to his feet.

As ball travels across the field, CBs also move up and across.

As before, the Winger on the ball side moves out wide and the other inside.

This illustrates the midfield 2-3 in Real Madrid's 4-2-3-1.



FB moves higher on ball side to be a further attacking option. Stops RM on defending team from coming in and doubling down on DM2.

With Rotation of CF

Ball passed from DM1 to DM2 who will look to open up and play wide to the left or high to CF checking to ball.

CF checks back to the ball and the AM moves higher up the field to take his place.

As ball travels across the field, CBs also move up and across.

As before, the Winger on the ball side moves out wide and the other inside.

About 10 seconds later, we can see that Alonso has turned and swung the ball back towards the left. Real are still set up with their 2 DMs (yellow), 2 FBs in wide areas (gray), 2 wingers (green), 1 AM (purple) and 1 CF (black). As you can see, although the shape is the same, players are rotating positions where necessary to try to get open.





Ball is passed in to CF who looks to turn and play forward. If he can't turn, will play back to DMs or wide to FBs to keep possession.

AM continues his vertical run looking for pass behind defence

DMs stay deep to provide cover for FBs and to give CF option to play back and maintain possession.

FBs stay high. FB on non ball side can attack space in front as winger has pulled defending FB inside

Winger on ball side stays wide. Other winger looks to make run behind defence

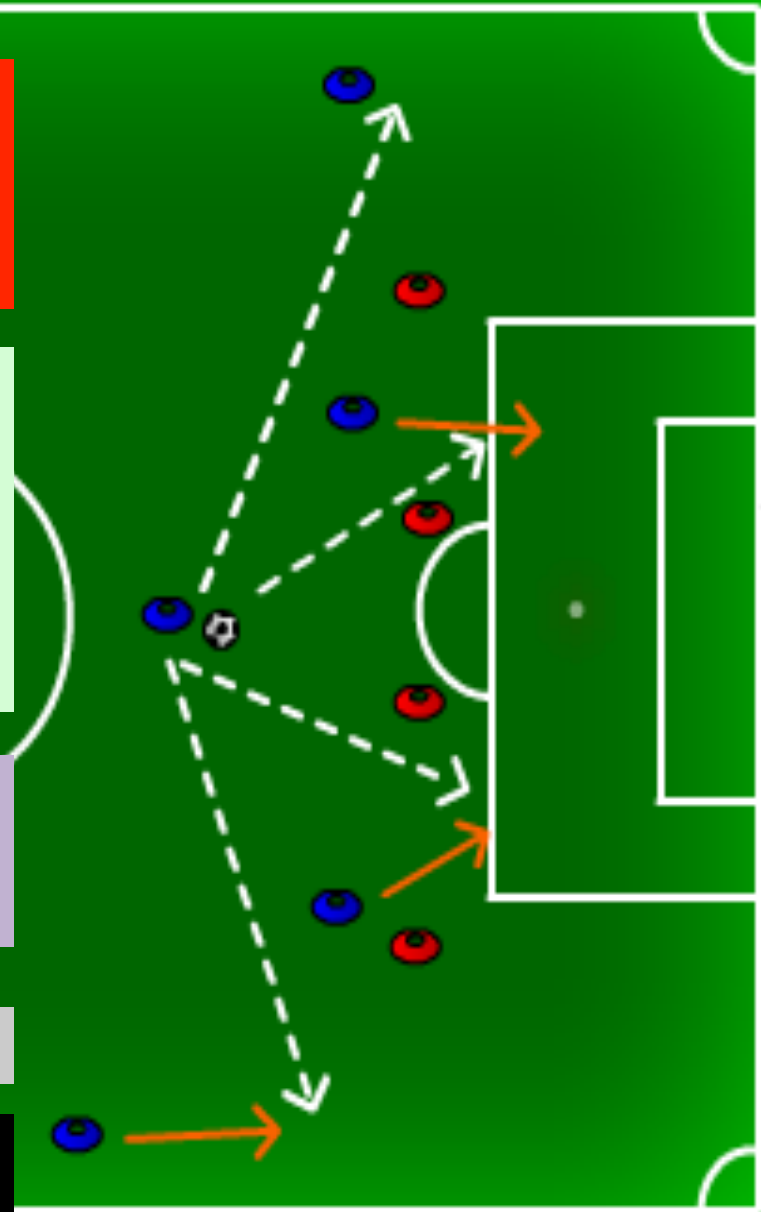
Any player can find themselves in AM spot with rotation. AM should look to play positive, penetrative passes behind the defence.

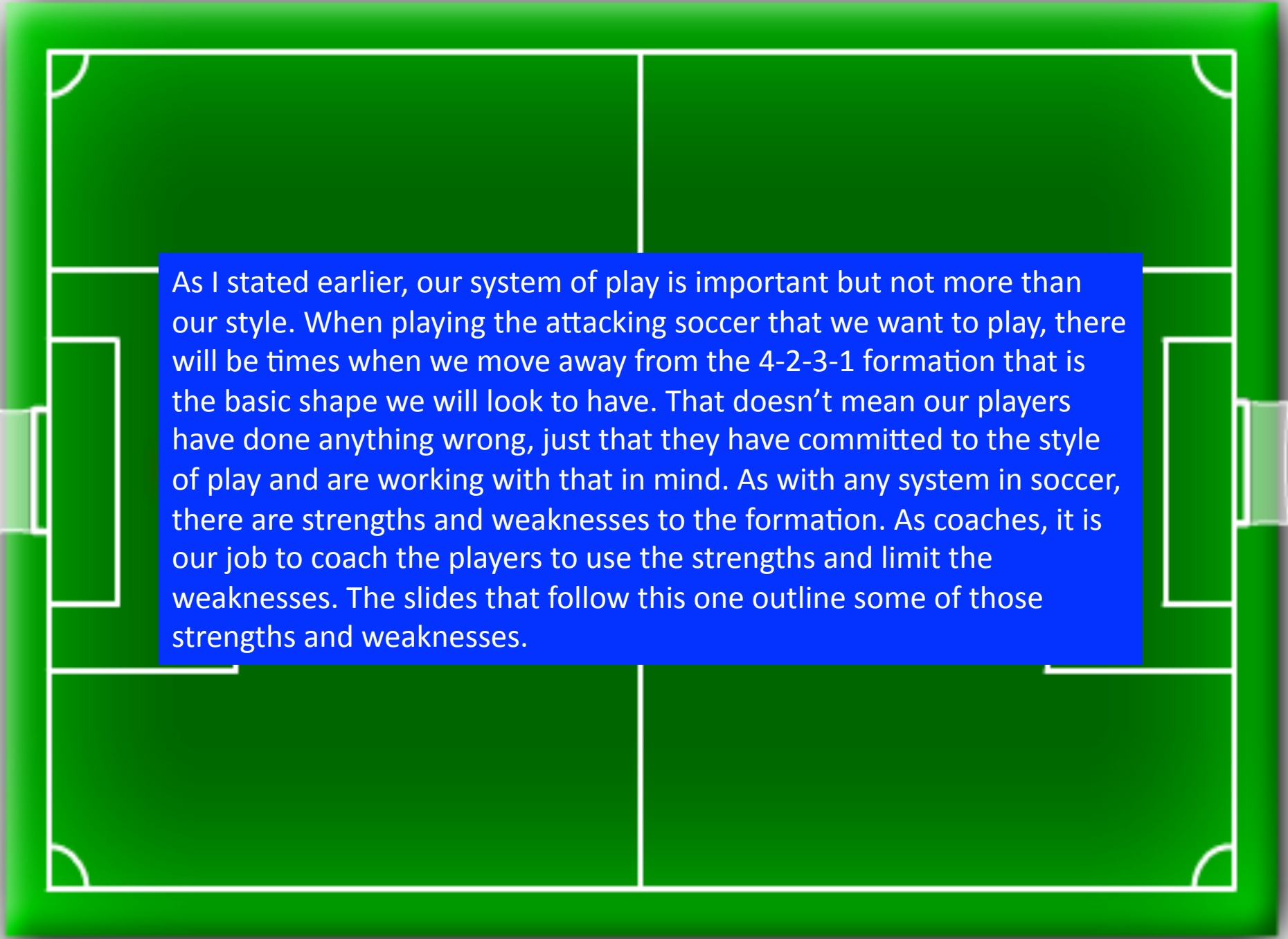
As mentioned on previous slide, winger on ball side should stay wide, other winger should make run inside defending FB. This creates space for his own FB in wide area. Defending FB must now make decision on where he goes.

CF needs his movement to take him into the space between defenders. He can use a variety of techniques to do this.

FB looks to attack space and provide a cross.

Look to play straight passes to diagonal runs and diagonal passes to straight runs.





As I stated earlier, our system of play is important but not more than our style. When playing the attacking soccer that we want to play, there will be times when we move away from the 4-2-3-1 formation that is the basic shape we will look to have. That doesn't mean our players have done anything wrong, just that they have committed to the style of play and are working with that in mind. As with any system in soccer, there are strengths and weaknesses to the formation. As coaches, it is our job to coach the players to use the strengths and limit the weaknesses. The slides that follow this one outline some of those strengths and weaknesses.

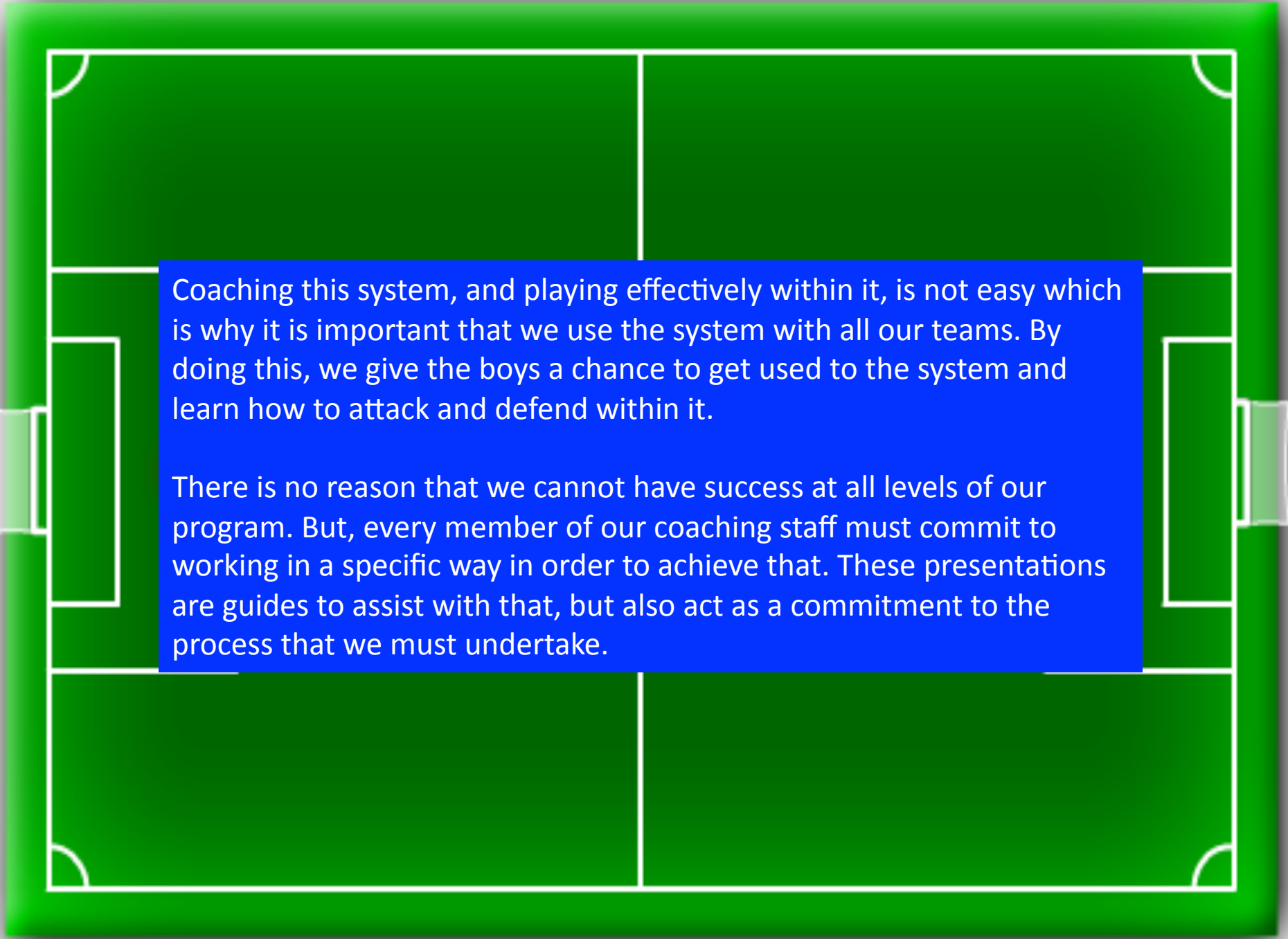


## Strengths

- Able to move the formation to get numbers behind the ball and in support when attacking
- 3 man central midfield should lead to numbers up, or at least even, in the center of the pitch
- 2 DMs provide shield/cover for the back line
- 4 lines of defenders when out of possession
- FBs able to get forward and support Wingers and create overloads knowing DMs will cover
- Numbers in advanced areas to press high up the field
- Players should be able to find space “between the lines” of opposition

## Weaknesses

- Striker can be isolated as they are alone up front
- Space in the wide midfield areas (between FBs and Wingers) can be exploited
- Can be vulnerable to counter attacks in wide areas if FBs are attacking when possession is lost
- AM and Wingers can get lazy defensively



Coaching this system, and playing effectively within it, is not easy which is why it is important that we use the system with all our teams. By doing this, we give the boys a chance to get used to the system and learn how to attack and defend within it.

There is no reason that we cannot have success at all levels of our program. But, every member of our coaching staff must commit to working in a specific way in order to achieve that. These presentations are guides to assist with that, but also act as a commitment to the process that we must undertake.





Further Information:

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