



The Academy Way  
9v9 Academy Roles  
ABYS



# Numbers

Players must have the opportunity to express themselves during both training and games to master their understanding of the game. To develop youth players in this way we must have a system in place that can create the appropriate environment.

Playing a certain position in soccer is long gone! Players of the modern game must read the game and adopt the best area of the field to occupy in order to exploit weaknesses of the opposition. So rather than give players positions we give them roles. Roles are represented by numbers. Each number has a primary task to be fulfilled but it also allows for creative movement in attack which will make it very difficult for the opposition to defend against.

We start this number system at 4v4 and work through 7v7 and 9v9 before arriving at 11v11. Numbers farthest away are players who start closest to our own goal.

Players must be exposed to all numbers at a young age. Once they arrive at 11v11 certain players will have adopted traits that will characterize them as a certain role; although they may be played in their favored role more often, they must still be exposed others. It is very common for players to move to different positions as they move up in age or play for different coaches in different systems. The Academy is trying to develop players who can drop into any system, for any team. It should also be noted that in the more advanced tactical teams the “defenders” are asked to move forward and score goals and everyone is asked to defend; “defenders” must learn to attack and “attackers” must learn to defend.

It is important to note that this system is for youth development purposes. This is not a professional senior squad so it is not a case where we are placing square pegs into round holes. These players are still in the early stages of their development and exposing them to a high possession, high risk style of play will put them into pressurized situations every time they are on the ball, forcing them to learn how to get out of difficult situations from a very early age.

Another way to look at it is that the system is the song sheet for the jazz band; it starts everyone on the same page but the players are encouraged to be creative and riff off of the basic construct.



# Numbers



# Roles



## Offensive Role

- Support player, ability to maintain possession (always an option)
- Distribution (Correct choice – Short option preferable)
- Transition – recognizing moments to play forward quickly

# 1

Goalkeeper

## Defensive Role

- Organization of defense
- Playing as a sweeper, providing cover and balance
- Starting positions in reference to the movement of the ball, pressure on the ball, athletic ability and movement of players
- Ability to close down player on breakaway, cut down shooting angles
- Range of the goalkeeper in the box to handle crosses and come off of the line

## Technical Requirements:

- Shot stopping and ball handling – on the ground, below the waist, above the waist, diving, tip-overs, parrying
- Crosses – catching, boxing one and two handed, attacking the ball
- Distribution – throwing, bowling, passing, punting, drop kicking
- Break away – technical aspects
- Receiving





## Offensive Role

- Provide an early outlet
- Establish width in attack
- Play as a flank player, wide midfielder or winger in attack; with the ball and without the ball – look to create 2v1 whenever possible
- Provide support behind the ball and beyond the ball
- Maintain team shape in the attack on the side of the ball and the far side
- Play the ball forward immediately upon winning the ball or run with the ball if unopposed
- Ability to switch roles with 7 and 11 respectively

**2 + 3**  
Right + Left Back

## Defensive Role

- Deny penetration on the flanks
- Positional play depending on movement of the ball and players
- Mark opposing wide midfielder
- Pick up opposing forward when they drift into your space
- Provide cover and balance – staying compact
- Tracking and recovery runs
- Ability to adopt 5's role if required

## Technical Requirements:

- Passing: Short, driven, lofted and front foot
- Receiving
- Finishing: Close range and distance
- Crossing: Short, flat, deep
- Dribbling to beat an opponent
- Running with the ball
- Heading
- Tackling





## Offensive Role

- Receiving the ball on the ground and in the air
- Distribution of the ball: Safe , secure, progressive
- Support player – always a outlet
- Win the ball and play forward quickly
- Ability to help switch the point of attack
- Hold team shape
- Influence on set pieces
- Ability to switch roles with 6
- Move up to hold desired line of confrontation

## Defensive Role

- Marking responsibilities
- Starting position in relation to the ball and movement of players
- Denying, containing and winning the ball
- Proper angles of recovery
- Denying space behind
- Providing cover and balance
- Ability to create density in the direct game channel
- Visual cues when to Intercept, spoil or contain
- Defending numbers up and down
- Hold at the line of confrontation

# 5

Center Back

## Technical Requirements:

- Tackling
- Passing: Short, driven, lofted and front foot
- Receiving
- Long range finishing
- Running with the ball
- Shielding
- Heading
- Turning



# Roles



## Offensive Role

- Receiving the ball on the ground and in the air
- Distribution of the ball: Safe , secure, progressive
- Support player – always a outlet
- Win the ball and play forward quickly
- Ability to help switch the point of attack
- Hold team shape
- Ability to switch roles with 10

## Defensive Role

- Organize the players: communication midfielders and forwards
- Provide cover to pressuring defensive players in midfield
- Provide balance in the midfield
- Disrupt the attack
- Delay to attack playing numbers down in defense
- Recovery runs
- Winning the ball in the air and on the ground
- Ability to win 1v1 duels
- Ability to adopt roles 2, 3 and 5

# 6

Holding Midfielder

## Technical Requirements:

- Receiving the ball in the air and on the ground
- Turning in tight spaces
- Passing: Short, driven and lofted
- Long range finishing
- Ability to play 1 or 2 touch
- Execution of combination plays: 1-2, third man run, overlapping run
- Creating space: Triangle rotation, switch roles, Create space for another
- Dribbling
- Improvisation
- Shielding
- Tackling: Winning the ball
- Heading





## Offensive Role

- Receiving the ball on the ground and air
- Show for the ball, secure the ball, shift defenders, slip others in, shoot
- Ability to create space in the box
- Establish depth in the attack
- Ability to penetrate with and without the ball
- Breaking into the box and finish
- Creation and use of space – run off the shoulder, peel and split, diagonal runs to flanks
- Combination play to create numbers up
- Ability to get shots away in a crowded box
- Ability to commit the goalkeeper and finish
- Ability to switch roles with 7, 11 and 10

## Defensive Role

- Direct play wide and in one direction
- Hold high line when defending
- Stay connected with 10, 7 and 11
- Track runners: Set pieces
- Ability to win 1v1 duels
- Ability to adopt role of 10

# 9

Center Forward

## Technical Requirements:

- Receiving the ball in the air and on the ground
- Speed dribbling 1v1
- Passing: breaking lines, maintain possession
- Ability to cross the ball short, flat or deep
- Execution of combination plays: 1-2, third man run, overlapping run
- Creating space: Switch roles, create space for another
- Close range and long range finishing
- Improvisation and creativity
- Lose defender in the box
- Ability to finish in a crowded box
- Ability to hit different areas of the target





# Roles



## Offensive Role

- Receiving the ball on the ground and in the air
- Distribution of the ball: Safe , secure, progressive
- Support player – always a outlet
- Win the ball and play forward quickly
- Ability to help switch the point of attack
- Hold team shape
- Ability to switch roles with 9

# 7 + 11

Wide Forwards

## Defensive Role

- Organize the players: communication midfielders and forwards
- Provide cover to pressuring defensive players in midfield
- Provide balance in the midfield
- Disrupt the attack
- Delay to attack playing numbers down in defense
- Recovery runs
- Winning the ball in the air and on the ground
- Ability to win 1v1 duels
- Ability to adopt roles 2, 3 and 5

## Technical Requirements:

- Receiving the ball in the air and on the ground
- Turning in tight spaces
- Passing: Short, driven and lofted
- Long range finishing
- Ability to play 1 or 2 touch
- Execution of combination plays: 1-2, third man run, overlapping run
- Creating space: Triangle rotation, switch roles, Create space for another
- Dribbling
- Improvisation
- Shielding
- Tackling: Winning the ball
- Heading





## Offensive Role

- Receiving the ball on the ground
- Distribution of the ball: secure, progressive
- Support player – playing between lines
- Win the ball and play forward quickly and break lines
- Ability to help switch the point of attack
- Breaking into the box and finish
- Creation and use of space
- Play 1 or 2 touch
- Combination play to create numbers up
- Creativity in behind 9
- Ability to switch roles with 6 and 9

## Defensive Role

- Connect with 6 when creating density in the middle of the park
- Provide balance in the midfield
- Connect with 9: high pressure if required
- Track runners from central midfield
- Recovery runs
- Ability to win 1v1 duels
- Ability to adopt role of 6

# 10

Attacking Midfielder

## Technical Requirements:

- Receiving the ball in the air and on the ground
- Turning in tight spaces
- Passing: Short, driven and lofted
- Ability to play 1 or 2 touch
- Execution of combination plays: 1-2, third man run, overlapping run
- Creating space: Triangle rotation, switch roles, Create space for another
- Close range and long range finishing
- Dribbling 1v1 in tight spaces
- Improvisation and creativity

