



PLAYING THE 4-2-3-1 AN INTRODUCTION

4-2-3-1 Introduction



- This document is designed to provide a general introduction to playing the 4-2-3-1 formation.
- There are many variations to playing the 4-2-3-1 and this document should not be considered a comprehensive manual.
- Soccer is a fluid game. The areas of responsibility outlined in the slides are meant to show where players should generally be. It does not mean that players can't or shouldn't move out of these areas of responsibility during the course of a game.
- The purpose is to offer an introduction to playing in a 4-2-3-1 formation and allow coaches to build off this foundation to suit their own style of play.

4-2-3-1 Overview

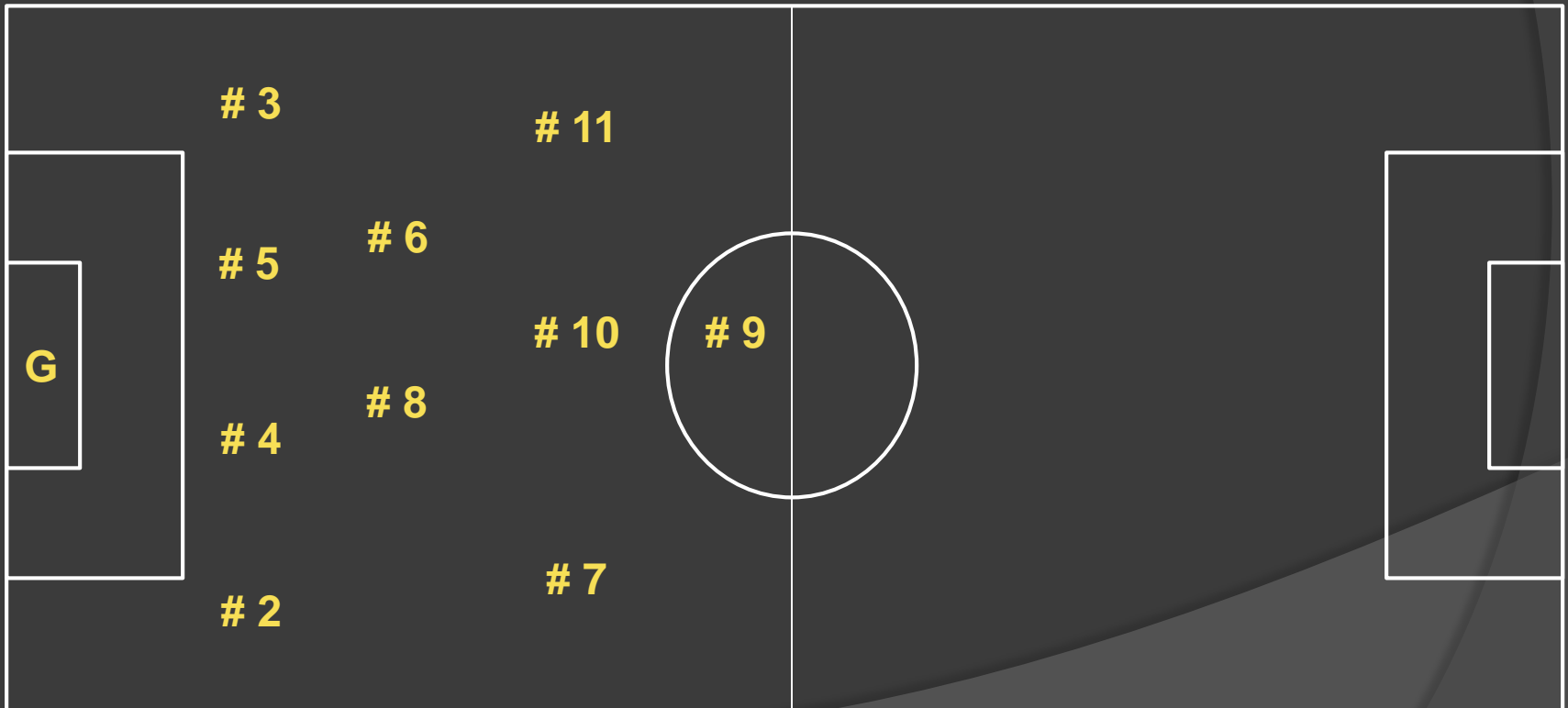


- The 4-2-3-1 is one of the most popular soccer formations in the game today.
- The formation is designed to out-number the opposition in midfield, but have enough flexibility to support both the defense and offense quickly and effectively.
- Player roles are clearly defined. Midfielders, wingers, defenders and strikers all know their default responsibilities and it's a safe formation to use.
- One of our goals will be for every player to understand their role and where they need to be positioned on the field.

4-2-3-1 Formation



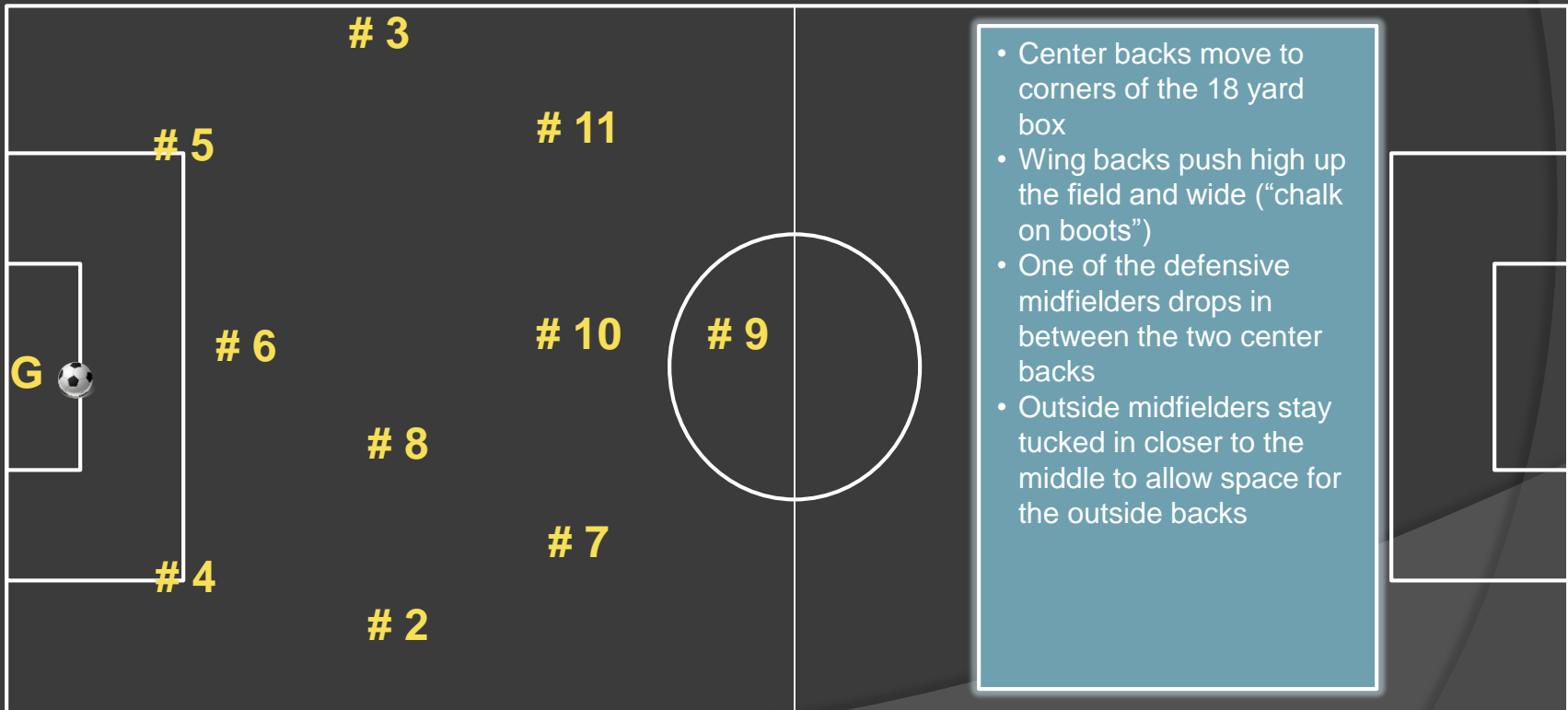
- The formation below uses the traditional numbers for each position.



4-2-3-1 Opening Shape



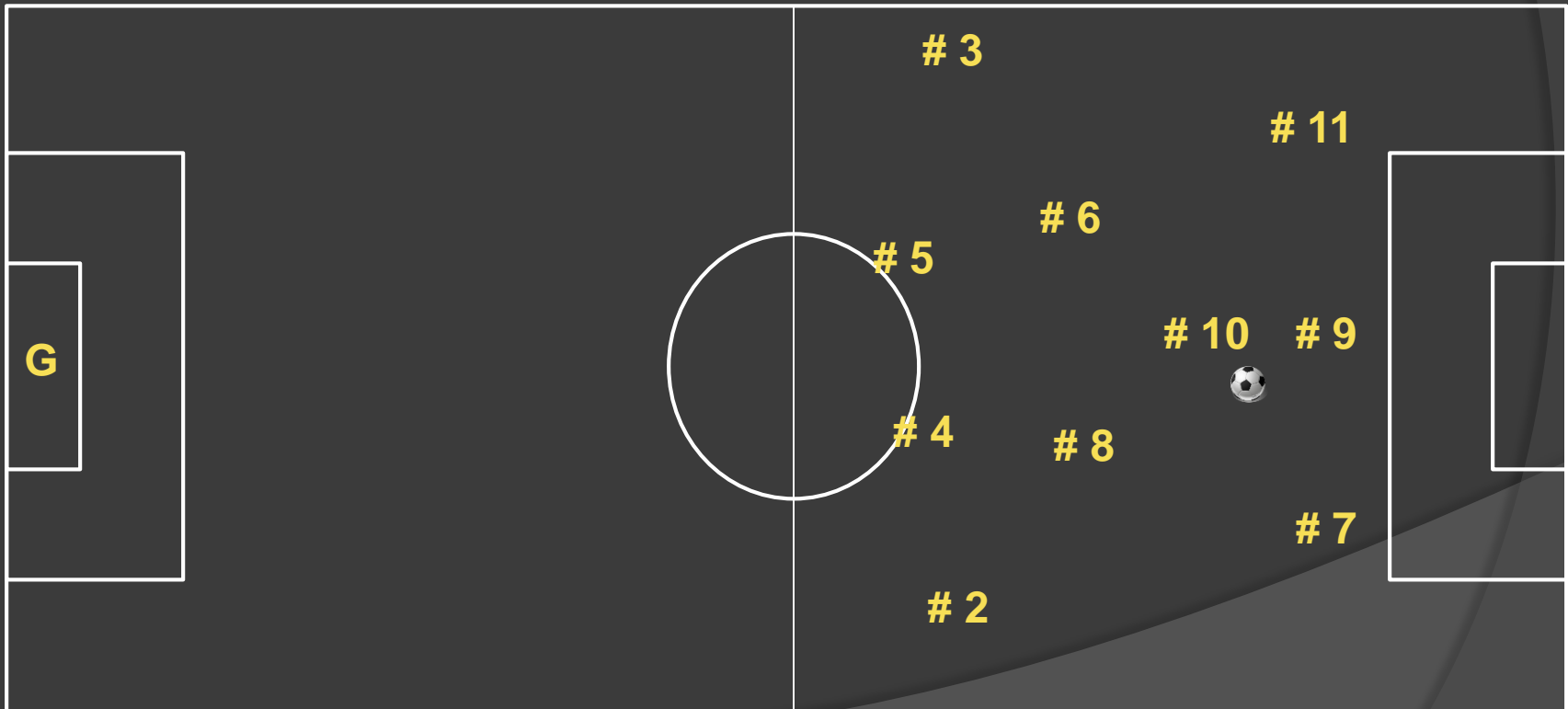
- Playing out from the back, this should be the opening shape when the goalie puts the ball in play.
- The purpose is to make the field as large as possible to play the ball out and create overloads where we have more players in an area of the field than the opposition



4-2-3-1 Attacking Shape



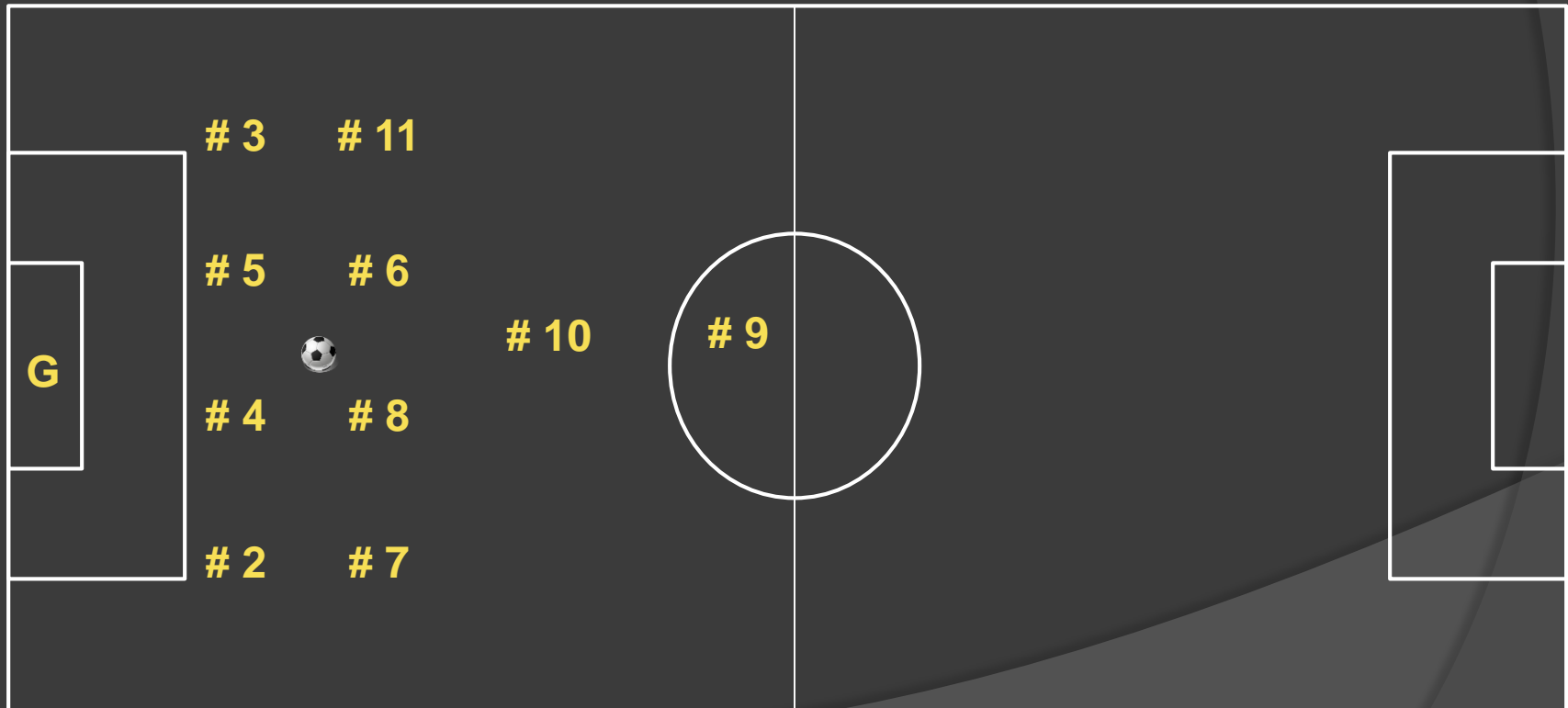
- In the offensive end of the field, the formation should transition to a 4-3-3 or 4-2-1-3
- It is critical that the midfielders quickly join the attack to help provide numbers as most defenses will have four defenders. The lone forward will be stranded without support if midfielders are slow to get into the final third.



4-2-3-1 Defending Shape



- In the defensive half of the field, the formation transitions to a 4-4-1-1. The outside halfbacks drop to form a block of four with the two defensive midfielders
- A strength of the 4-2-3-1 formation is that it is defensively solid. You can essentially form two blocks of four that will be difficult to break down if you can keep your shape defensively and not get stretched out.



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#9 – Central Striker



Player Attributes

- A big strong player who is strong on the ball and can play with his back to the goal **OR**
- A fast player who can exploit spaces between the defense and get behind for through balls and balls over the top
- excellent finishing abilities

Responsibilities

Offense

- Score goals
- Hold the ball with back to goal and pass to attacking midfielders
- Play give and go's with supporting players
- Make runs between defenders for through balls from attacking midfielders

Defense

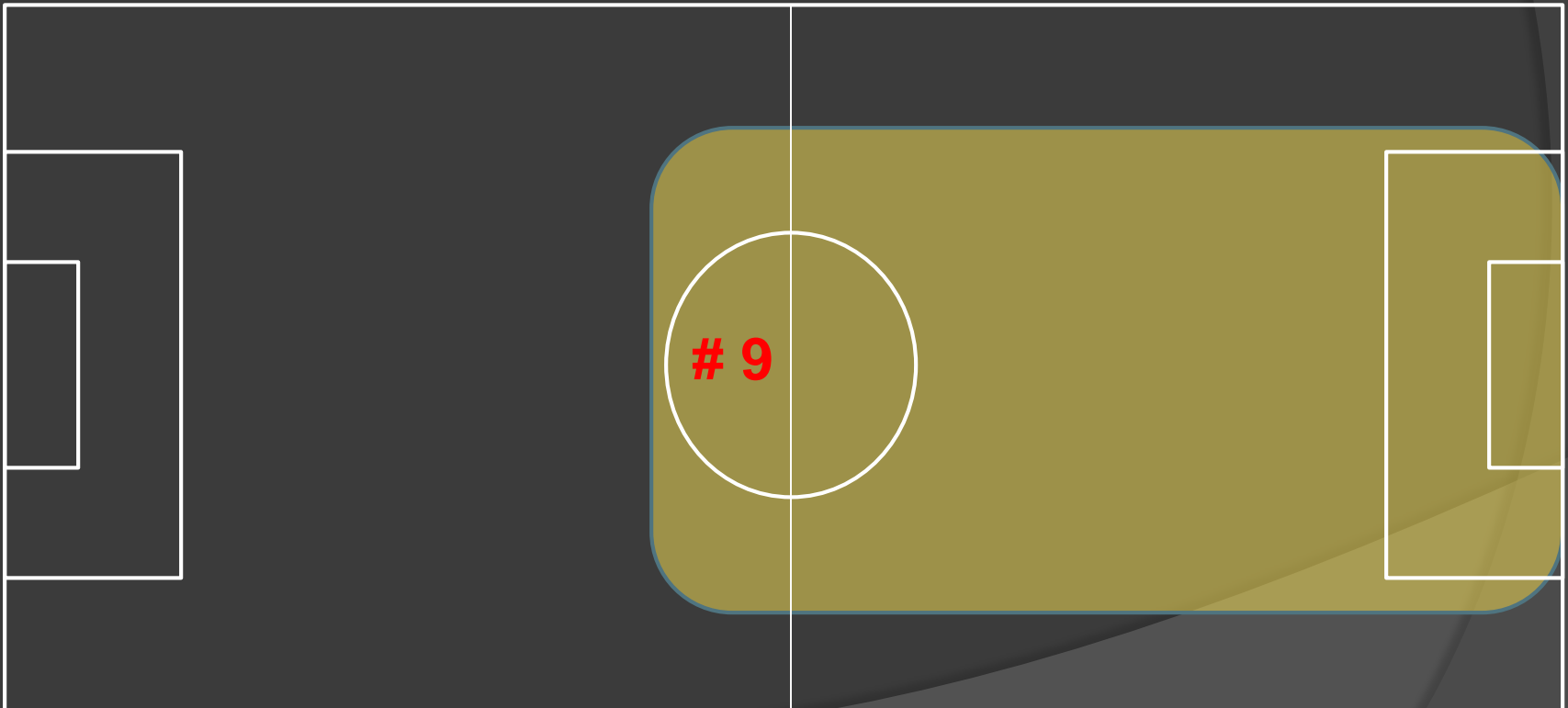
- Pressure defenders with the ball
- Force play to one side of the field to make it easier to defend in the offensive half

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#9 – Central Striker

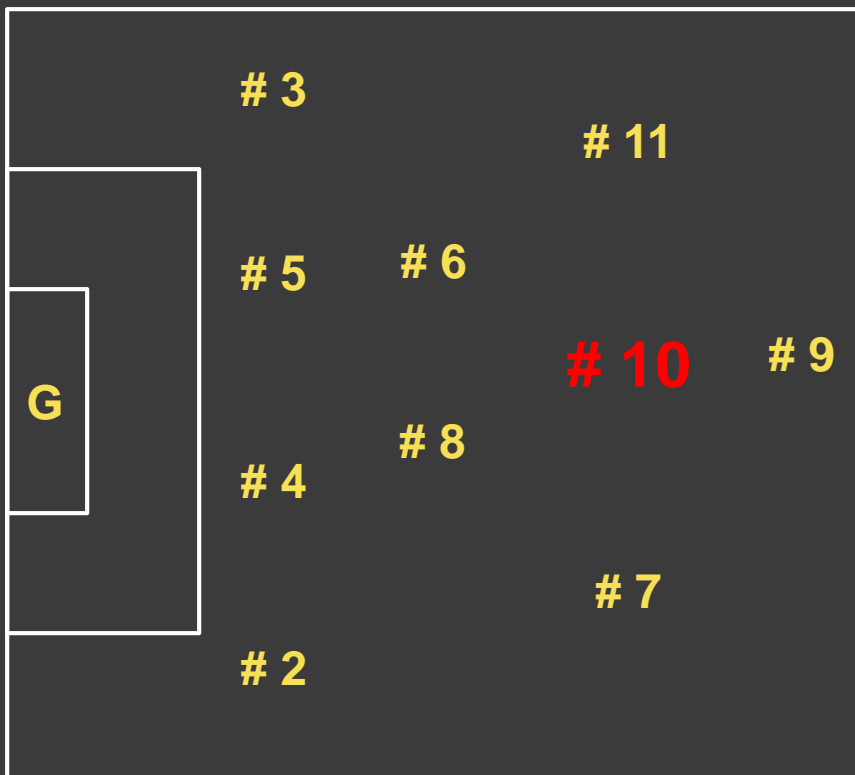
Area of Responsibility: High up the field, usually in the middle



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#10 – Center Attacking Mid



Player Attributes

- Should be technically excellent (passing, dribbling, first touch) and able to play with both feet
- Good vision and reads the game well
- Knows where the ball is going net before it is received

Responsibilities

Offense

- Set up goals with passing
- Play the ball out to #11 and #7
- Play give and go's with #9
- Play through balls between defenders for #9, #11 and #7
- Use #6 and #8 to maintain possession when receiving ball with back to goal.

Defense

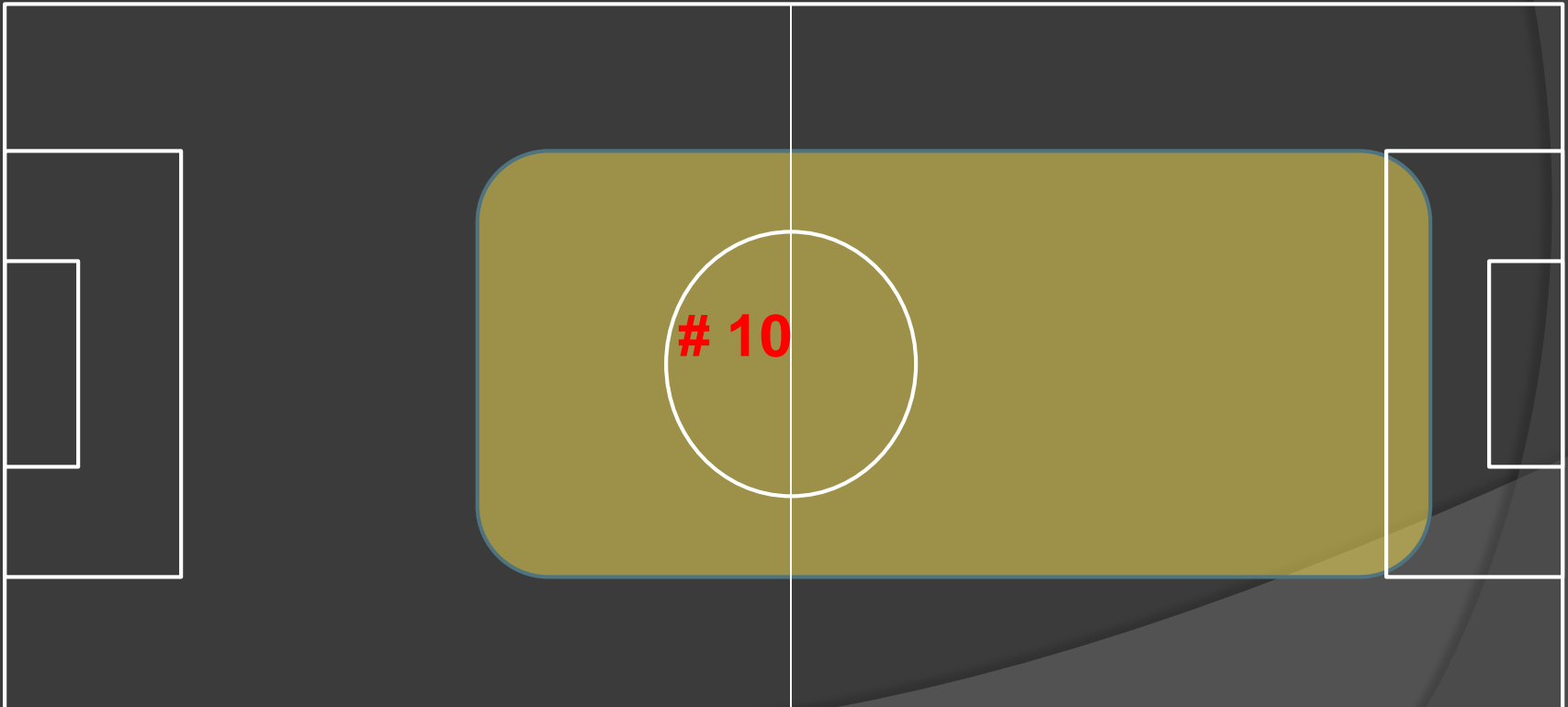
- Pressure defensive midfielder when he has the ball
- Drop centrally to clog middle and force ball out wide

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#10 – Center Attacking Mid

Area of Responsibility: Support defensively but focus on offense



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#11 – Left Attacking Mid



Player Attributes

- Should be technically excellent (passing, dribbling, first touch) and able to play with both feet but preferably right footed
- Fast
- Attacking mindset, willing to take players on in the final third

Responsibilities

Offense

- Stay pinched in closer to the middle and get into attack when ball moves forward
- Play the ball out wide to overlapping #3
- Play give and go's with #9 and #10
- Play through balls between defenders for #9 and #10
- Cut in on right foot to take shots at goal

Defense

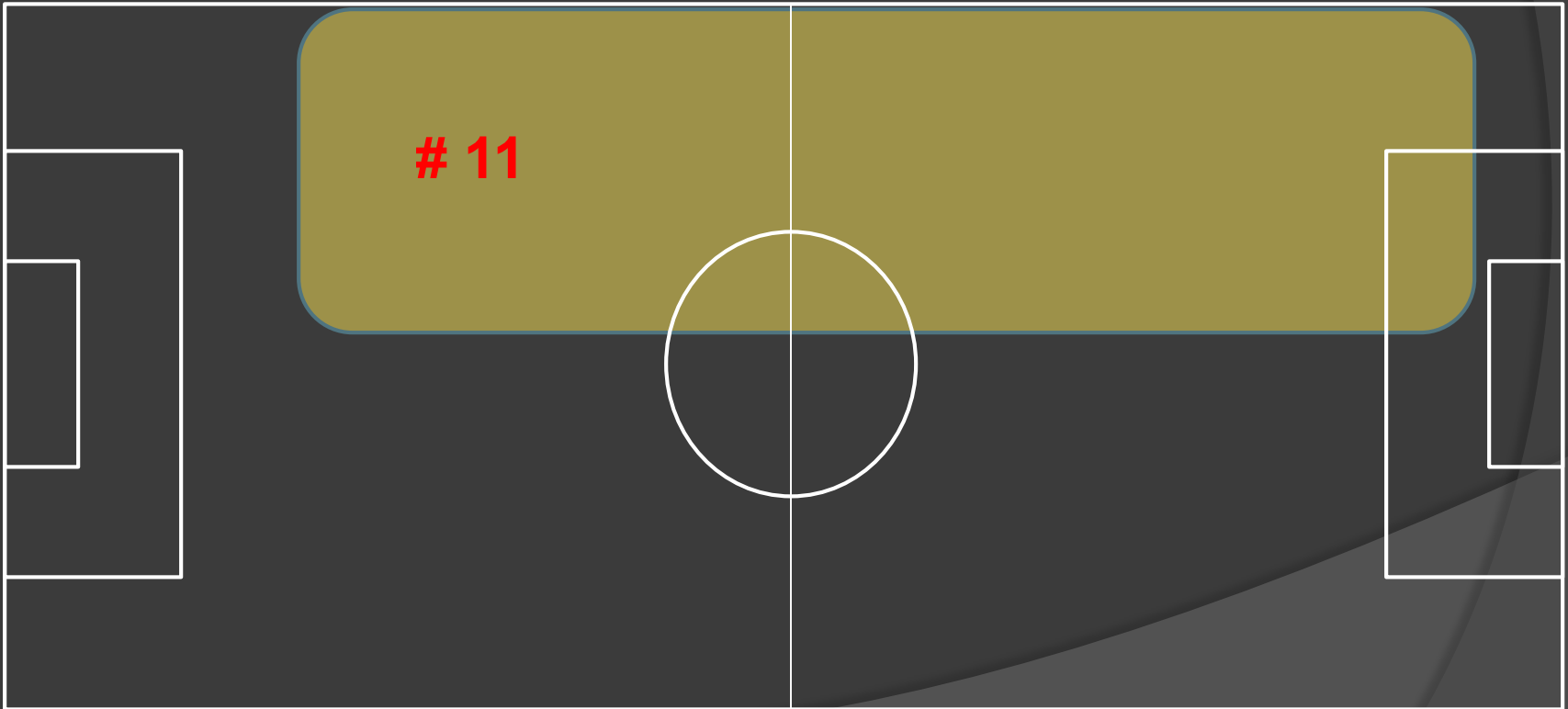
- Pressure outside defensive back when he has the ball
- Force the ball wide towards the sideline
- Covers defensively for #3 when he goes forward on overlapping run

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#11 – Left Attacking Mid

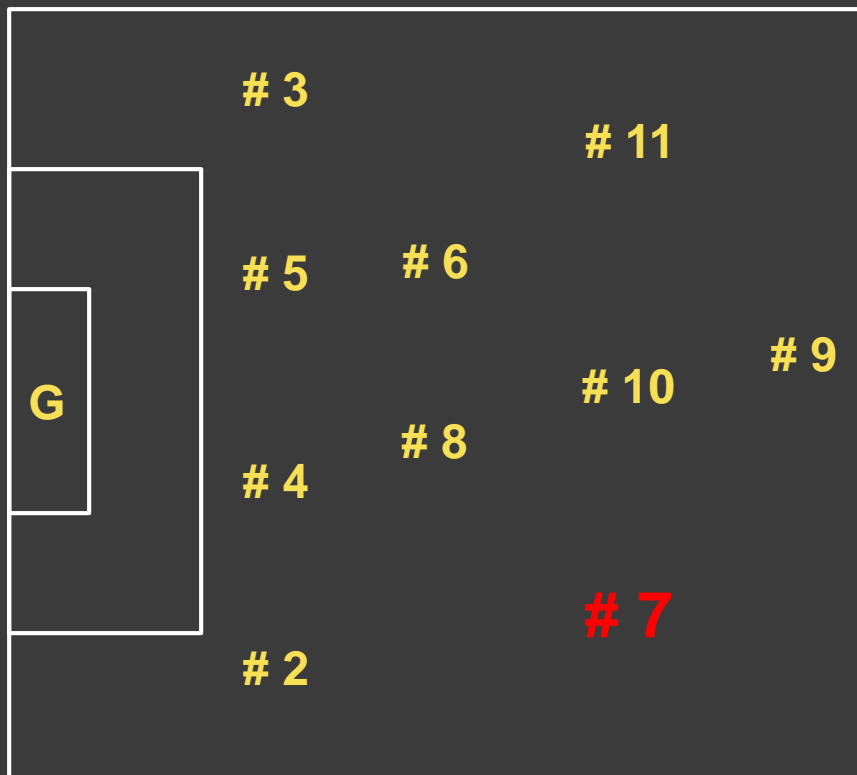
Area of Responsibility: Stay pinched in, support central striker in attack



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#7 – Right Attacking Mid



Player Attributes

- Should be technically excellent (passing, dribbling, first touch) and able to play with both feet but preferably left footed
- Fast
- Attacking mindset, willing to take players on in the final third

Responsibilities

Offense

- Stay pinched in closer to the middle and get into attack when ball moves forward
- Play the ball out wide to overlapping #2
- Play give and go's with #9 and #10
- Play through balls between defenders for #9 and #10
- Cut in on left foot to take shots on goal

Defense

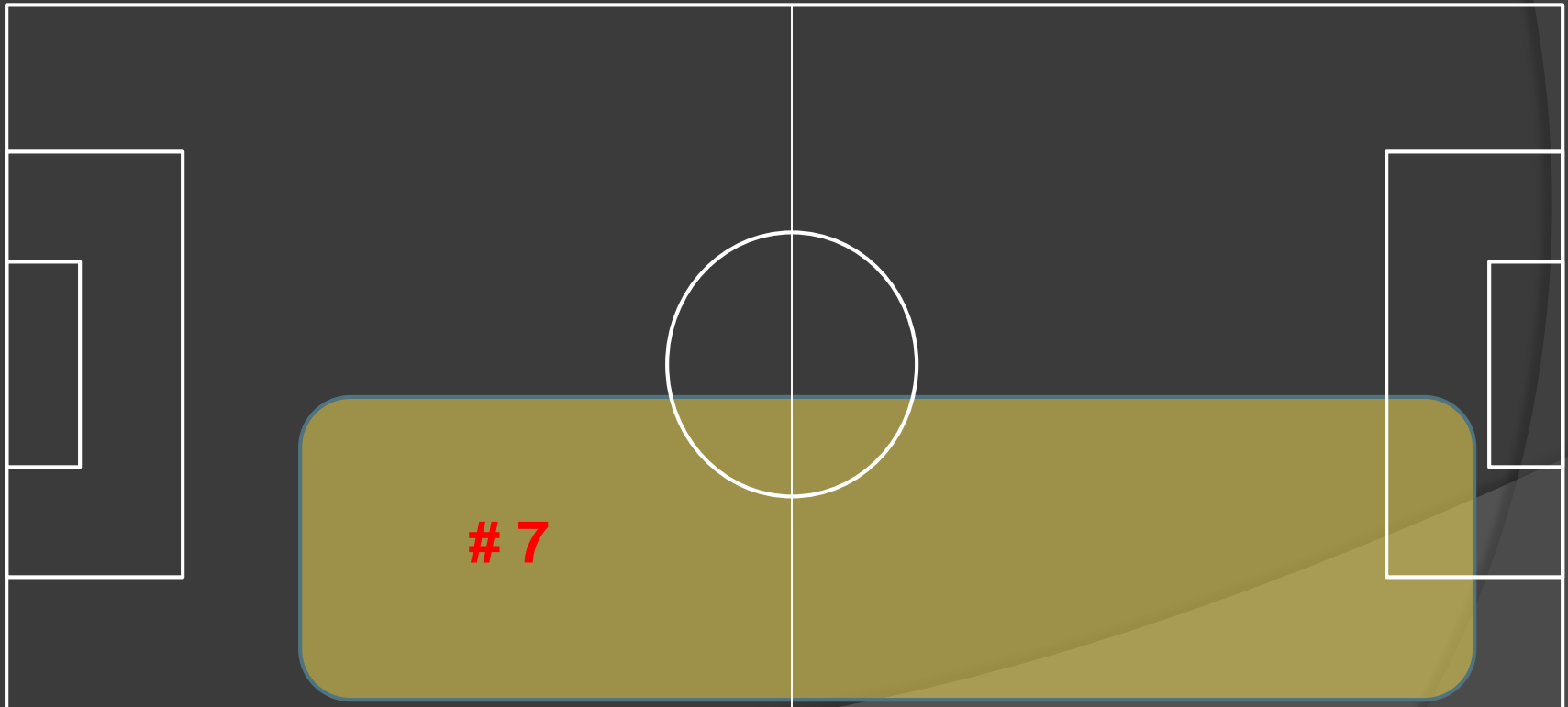
- Pressure outside defensive back when he has the ball
- Force the ball wide towards the sideline
- Covers defensively for #2 when he goes forward on overlapping run

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#11 – Left Attacking Mid

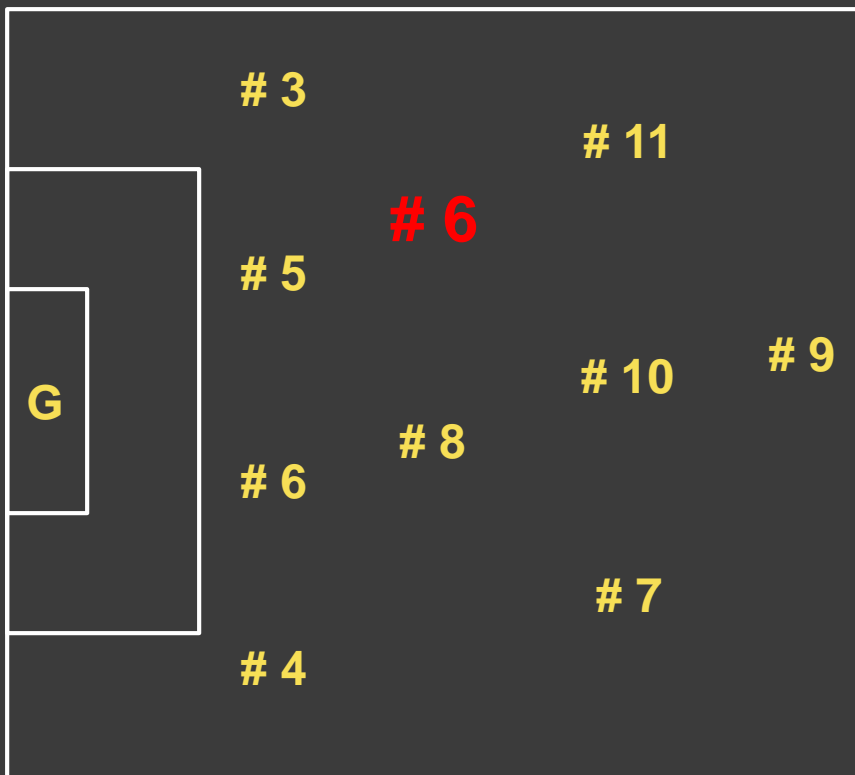
Area of Responsibility: Stay pinched in, support central striker in attack



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#6 – Holding Mid



Player Attributes

- Good defensively, wins 50/50 challenges often
- excellent passing and vision
- Can cover a lot of ground in the midfield – i.e. a ball hawk
- Good spatial awareness

Responsibilities

Offense

- Play the ball wide to #3 on overlaps
- Play give and go's with #11 and #10
- Play balls over the top to #9

Defense

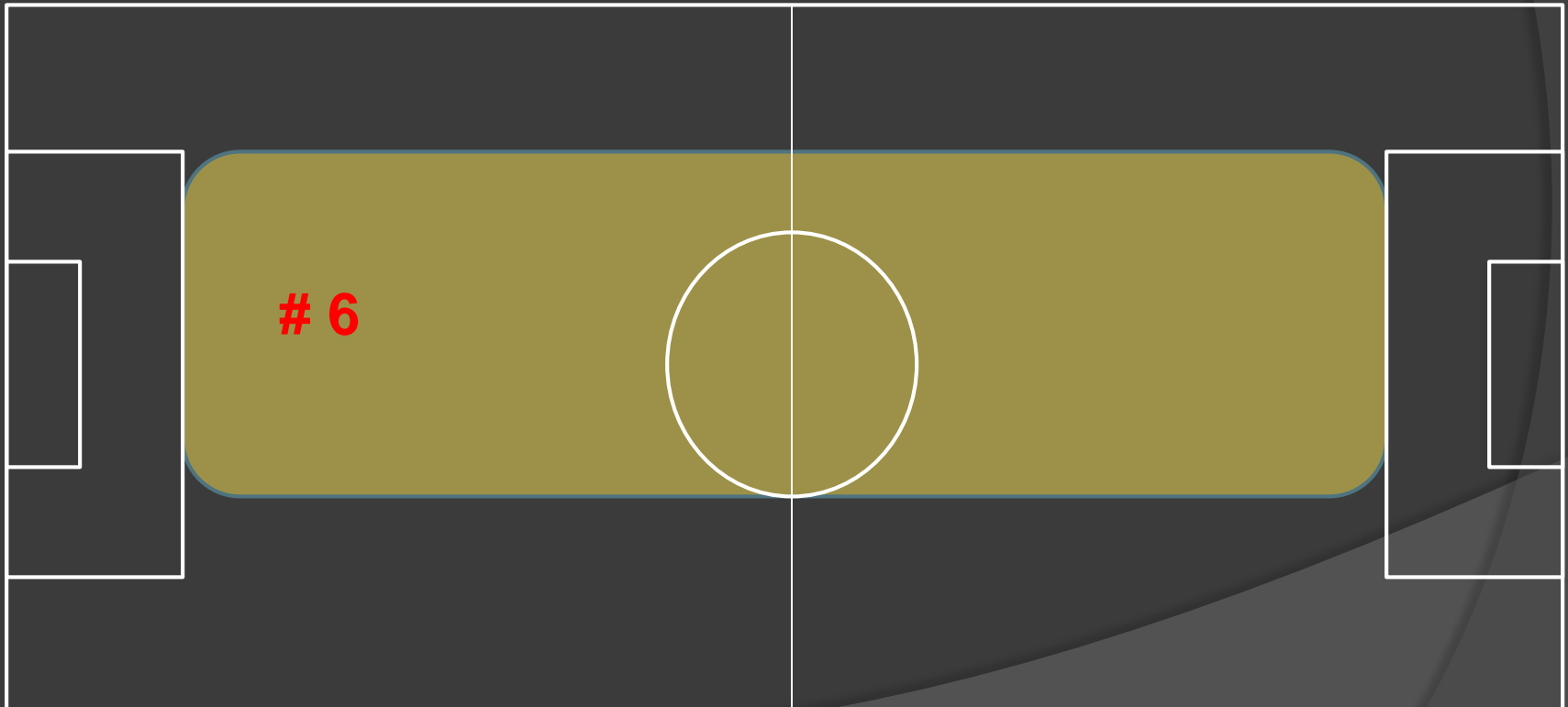
- Cut off passing lanes from opposition midfield to forward
- Close down space on opposition offensive midfielders
- Stays in front of defense to support
- Drops into middle between #5 and #6 when they spread wide to play the ball out of the back

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#6 – Holding Mid

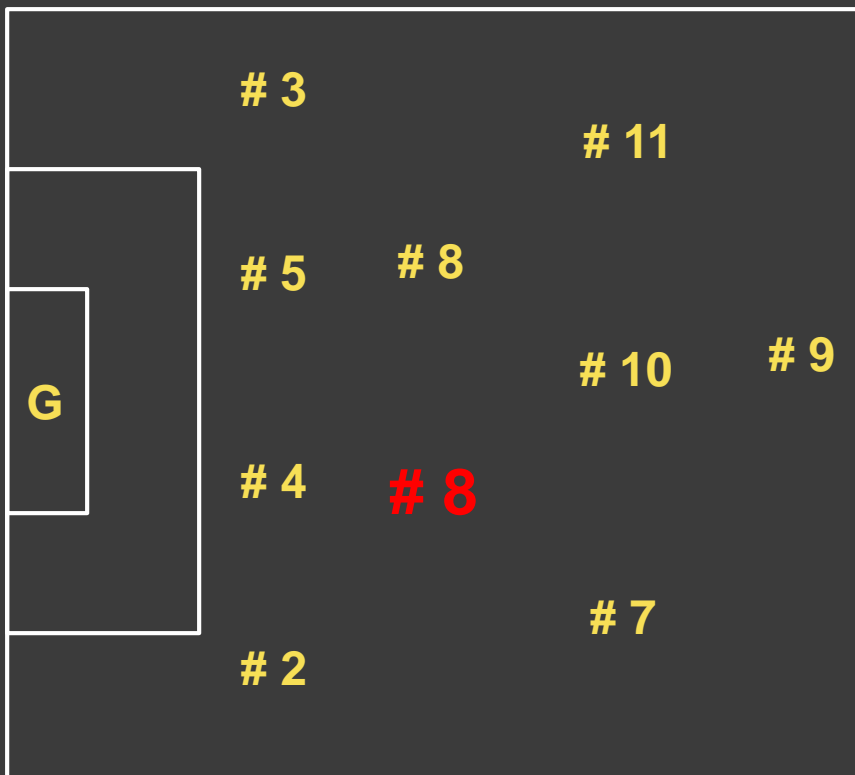
Area of Responsibility: Stay central in front of defenders, win the ball



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#6 – Holding Mid



Player Attributes

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- excellent passing and vision
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Responsibilities

Offense

- Play the ball wide to #2 on overlaps
- Play give and go's with #11 and #10
- Play balls over the top to #9

Defense

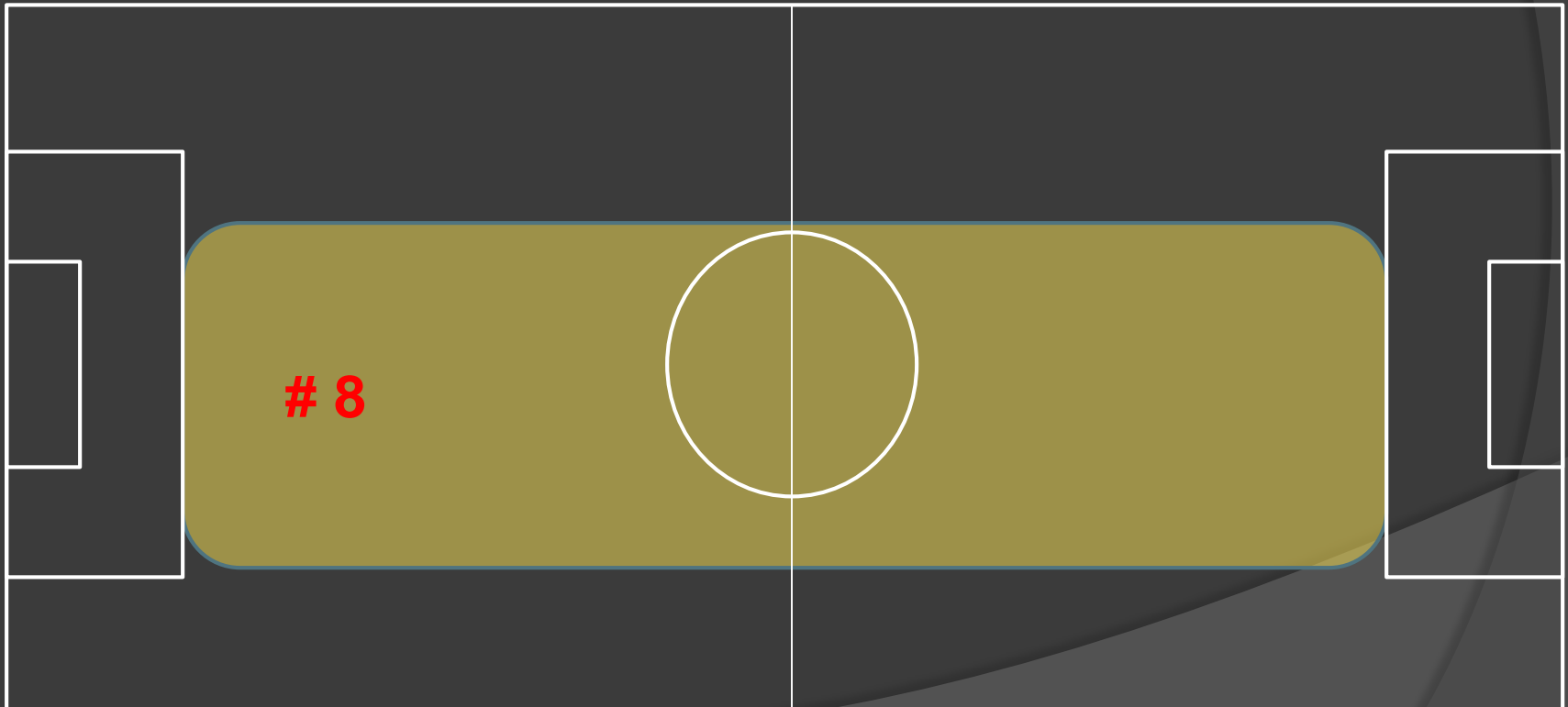
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4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#6 – Holding Mid

Area of Responsibility: Stay central in front of defenders, win the ball



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#2 – Outside Back



Player Attributes

- Good defensively, wins 50/50 challenges often
- excellent dribbling skills
- Fast
- Willingness to run the entire length of the field
- Desire to get into offense on overlaps

Responsibilities

Offense

- Stay wide – “chalk on boots”
- Play ball through #8 and #7
- Overlap, overlap, overlap
- Take ball to end line and cross into #9 or cut back to offensive midfielders

Defense

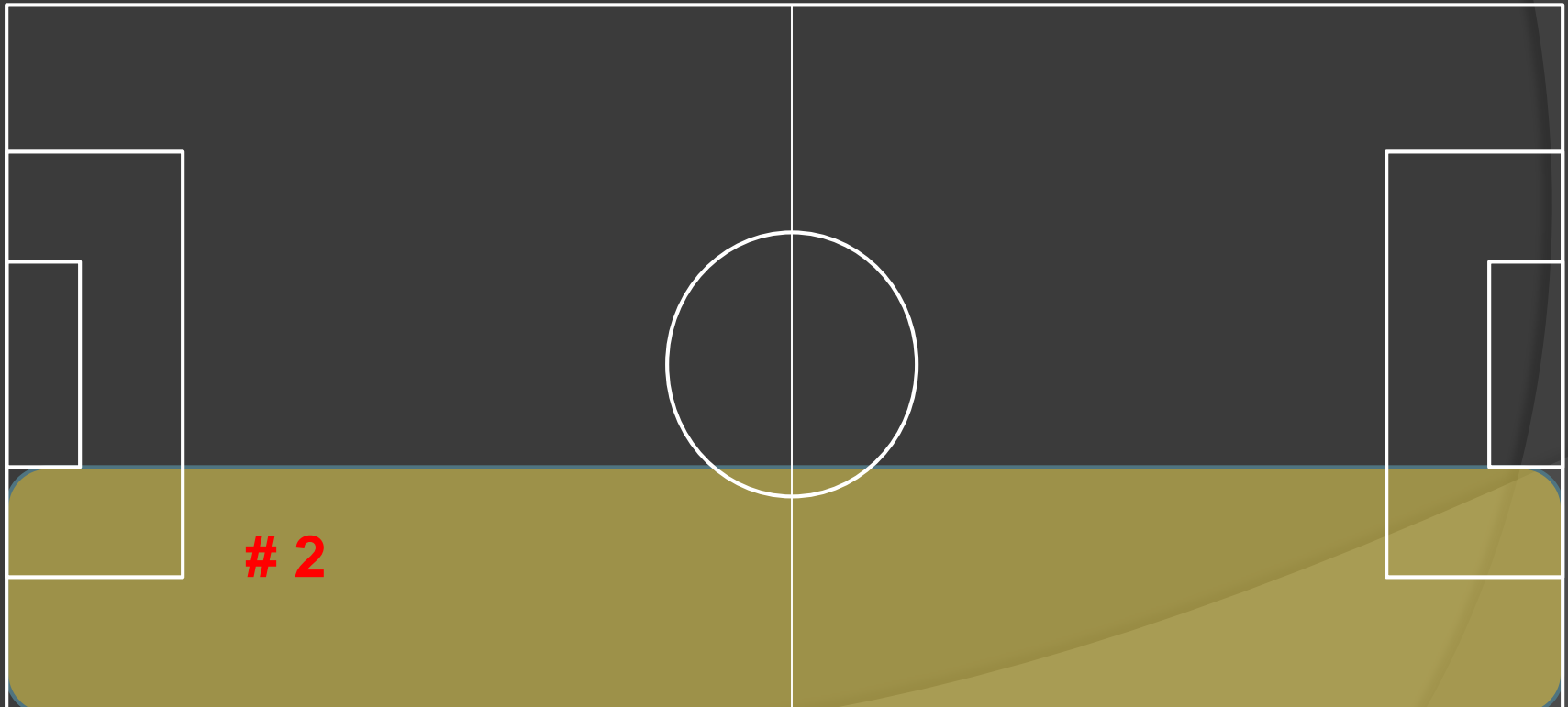
- Mark wingers from other team
- Force play wide towards sideline and prevent crosses from coming in
- Pinch close into #4 when team loses possession

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#2 – Outside Back

Area of Responsibility: Get wide and overlap, force play wide on defense



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#3 – Outside Back



Player Attributes

- Good defensively, wins 50/50 challenges often
- excellent dribbling skills
- Fast
- Willingness to run the entire length of the field
- Desire to get into offense on overlaps

Responsibilities

Offense

- Stay wide – “chalk on boots”
- Play ball through #6 and #11
- Overlap, overlap, overlap
- Take ball to end line and cross into #9 or cut back to offensive midfielders

Defense

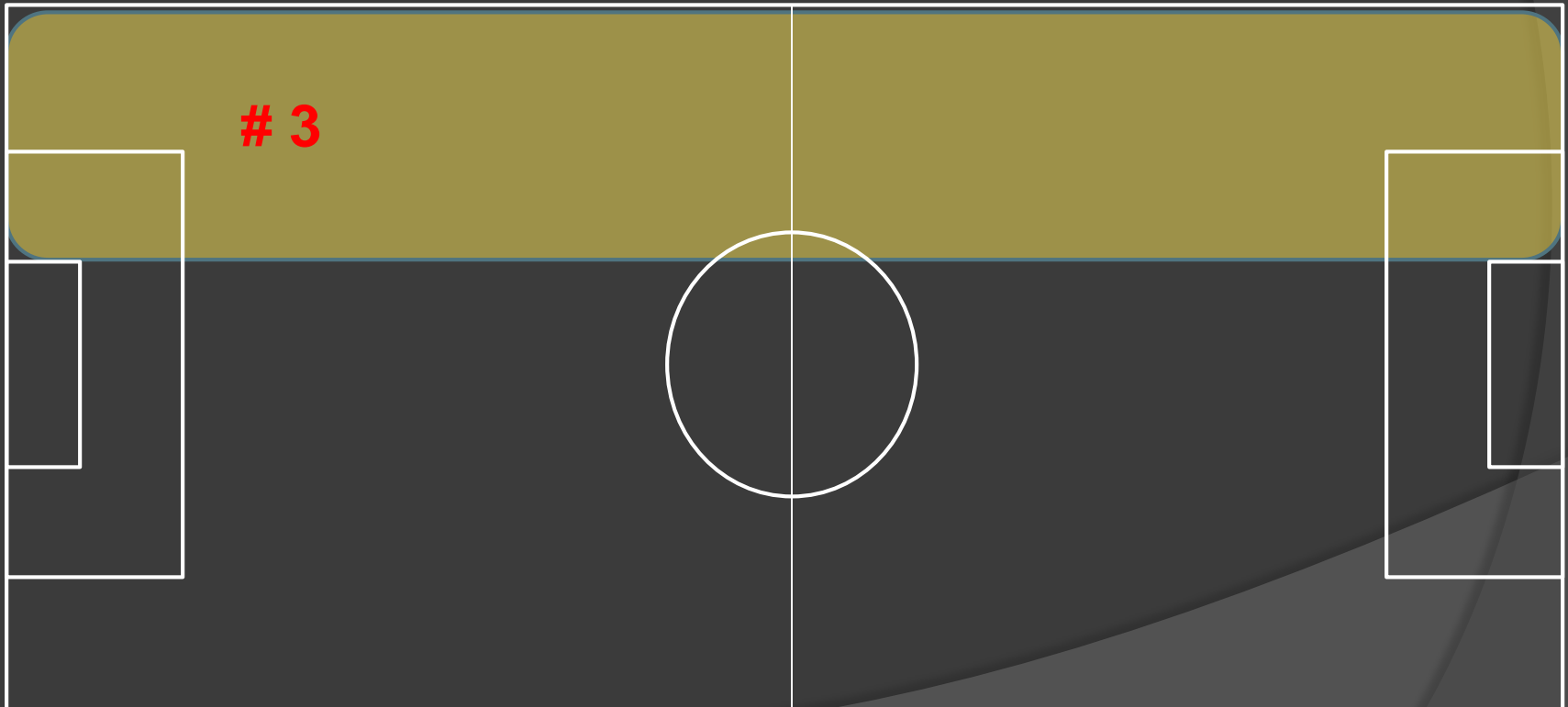
- Mark wingers from other team
- Force play wide towards sideline and prevent crosses from coming in
- Pinch close into #5 when team loses possession

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#3 – Outside Back

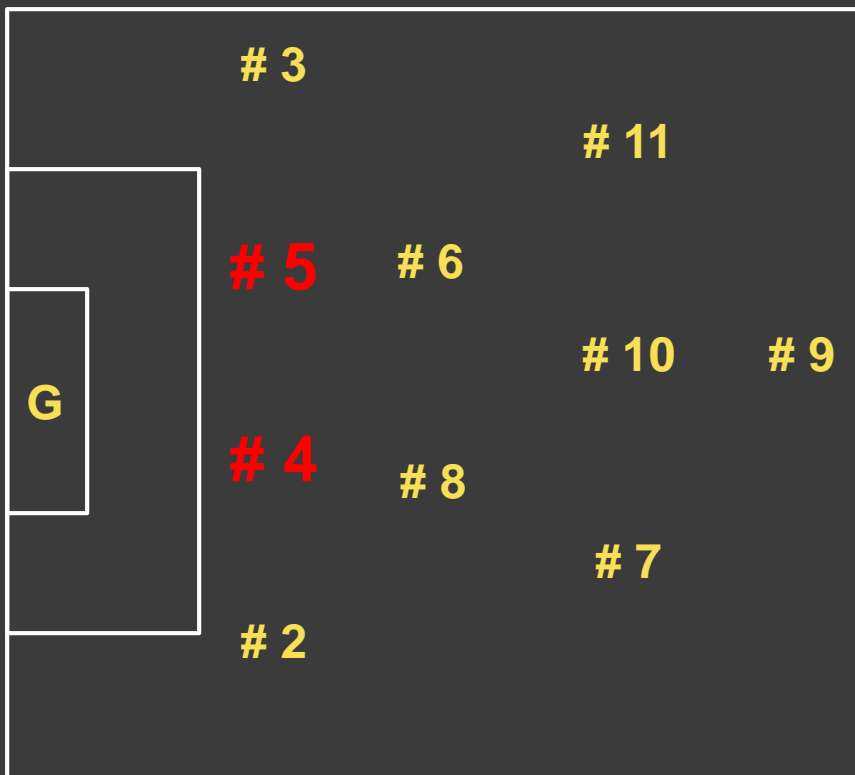
Area of Responsibility: Get wide and overlap, force play wide on defense



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#4 & 5 – Central defense



Player Attributes

- Good defensively
- Strong in the air
- excellent passing skills
- Ability to lead defense and keep defensive shape (compact and organized)

Responsibilities

Offense

- Play the ball wide to #3 and #2
- Play ball through #6 and #8
- Support midfield to maintain possession
- Get to corners of the 18 yard box to begin play from the back.

Defense

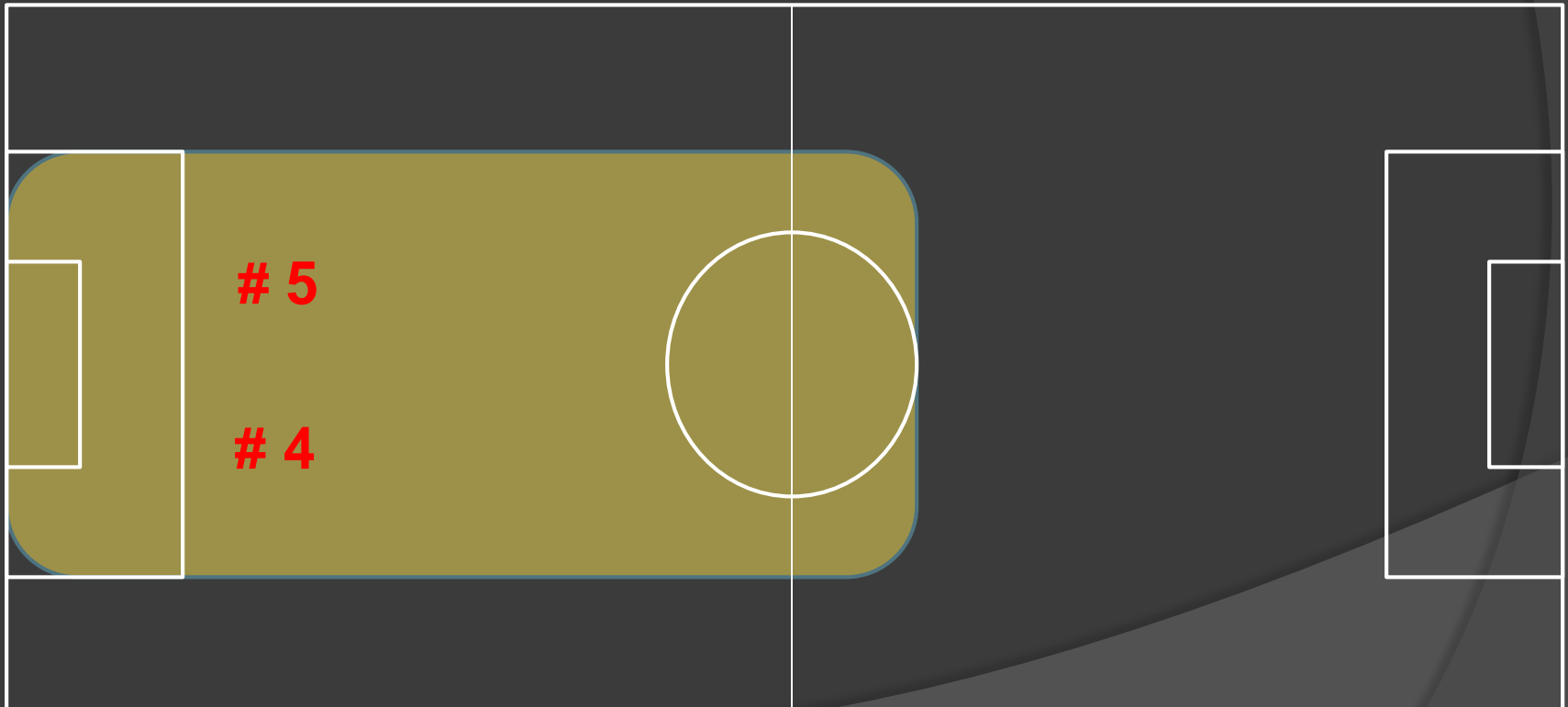
- Mark central strikers from other team
- Win tackles and headers
- Use the goalkeeper to keep possession

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#4 & 5 – Central defense

Area of Responsibility: Stay central and organized, force play wide



4-2-3-1 Position Roles



#G – Goalie



Responsibilities

Offense

- Good distribution to outside backs
- Move to support fullbacks to maintain possession.
- Look to start quick counter attacks when opposition has committed numbers offensively.

Defense

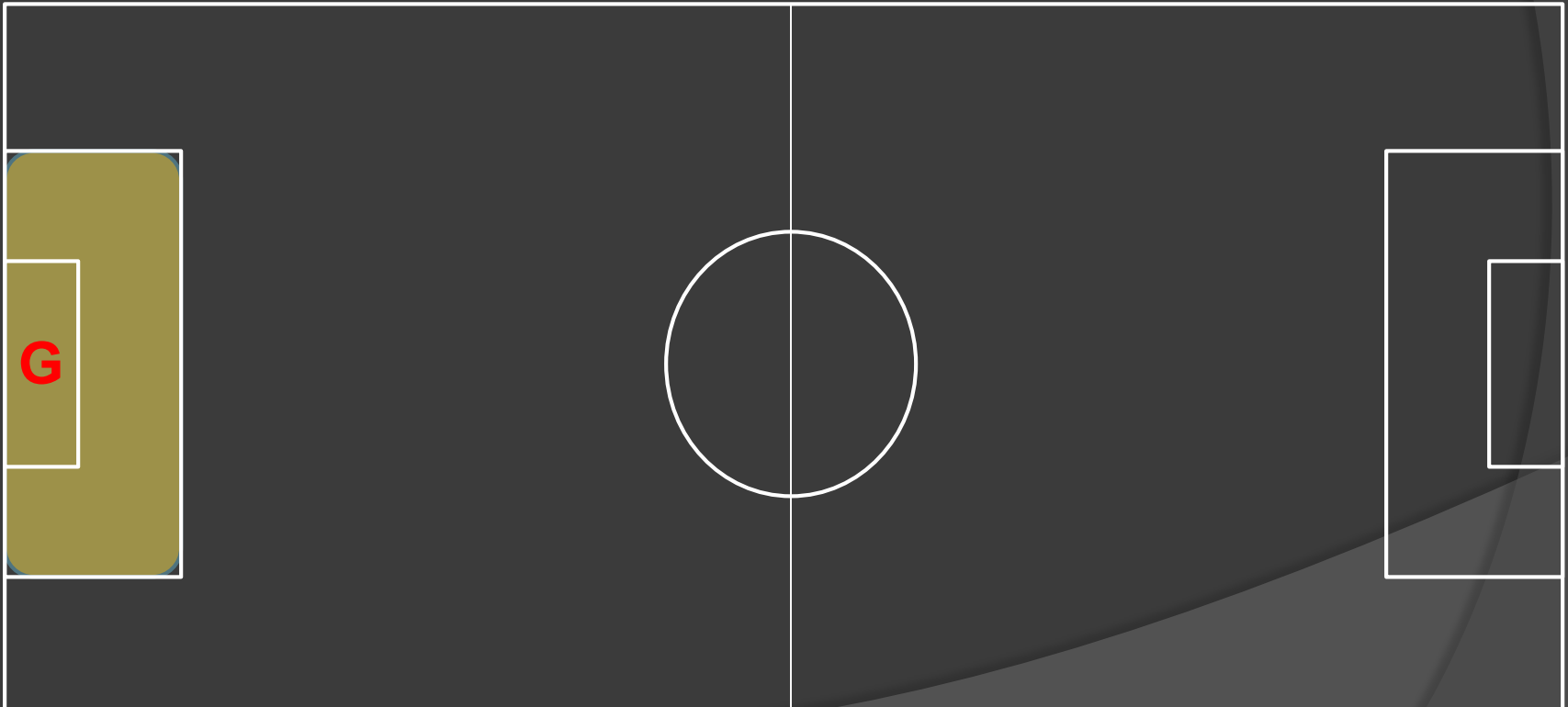
- Stop shots
- Make sure defenders are covering players and staying compact

4-2-3-1 Position Roles



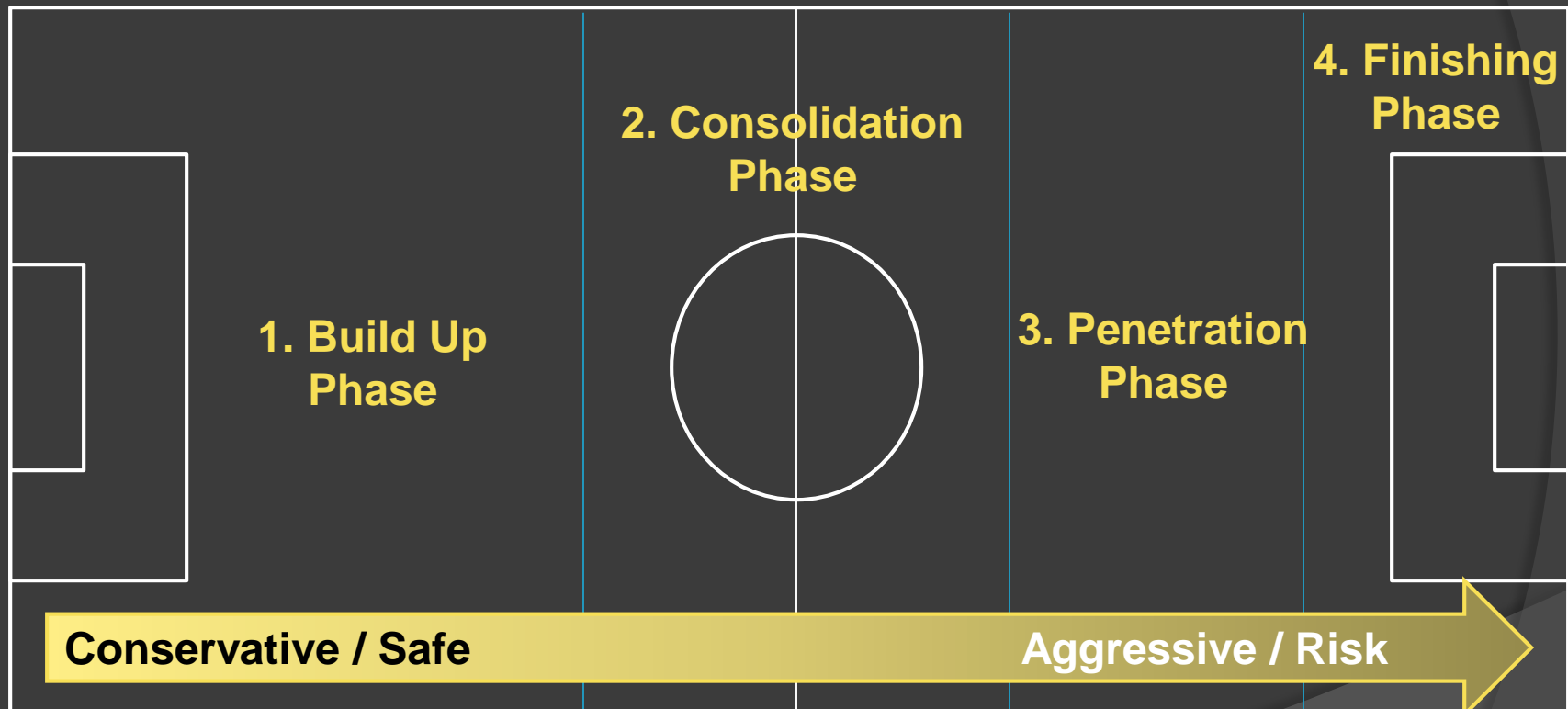
#G – Goalie

Area of Responsibility: Organize defense, start offensive play from back



4-2-3-1 Phases of Possession

There are four phases of possession as we move from offense to defense.



- Build safe possession
- Move ball across defense into consolidation phase via the defensive midfielders

- Continue safe possession
- Play into penetration phase when attacking player can receive ball in dangerous position

- Through balls
- Give & Gos
- 3rd man runs
- Overloads
- Dribbling

- Get into scoring position and FINISH!!
- Take risks, be brave.