

CASTLEWELLAN TOWN FC

Senior Coaching Curriculum — Coach's Manual

One binder for the season's reference material: philosophy, contingency planning, and the full technical, set-piece and phase-review libraries. The 36 weekly session plans are indexed at the back rather than bound in — see the appendix.

This manual is an index, not new writing: every section from here on is an unchanged copy of a document that already exists on the club site. Nothing here should ever be edited directly — update the source document and rebuild this file.

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Appendix — The 36 Weeks (by code, on the site)

Reference only — not embedded in this manual. Each one is used on its own night through the season, so it stays a separate file on the site rather than adding weight here. Open it from the site, or print it individually if needed.

Code	Title
Week 01	1 Pre-Season — Tue: Reintroduction: ball-based conditioning · Thu: Standards & communication
Week 02	1 — Tue: Building the aerobic base through possession · Thu: Width & depth in small spaces
Week 03	1 — Tue: Pressure–cover–balance introduced · Thu: Compactness as a unit
Week 04	1 — Tue: Transition to attack: first picture · Thu: Transition to defence: first reaction
Week 05	1 (review) — Tue: Four-week consolidation game · Thu: Set-piece foundations (corners)
Week 06	2 Early-Season — Tue: Build-up vs first line of pressure · Thu: Playing around pressure — wide overload
Week 07	2 — Tue: Playing through pressure — central · Thu: Compact mid-block introduced
Week 08	2 — Tue: Collective pressing triggers · Thu: Defensive set pieces
Week 09	2 — Tue: Switching the point of attack · Thu: Free-kick routines (wide)
Week 10	2 — Tue: Rest defence during build-up · Thu: Throw-in patterns
Week 11	2 (review) — Tue: Phase 2 consolidation game · Thu: Set-piece review & confidence finishing
Week 12	3 Collective Understanding — Tue: Unit relationships: back line + first midfield line · Thu: Playing between the lines
Week 13	3 — Tue: Creating overloads — central · Thu: Creating overloads — wide
Week 14	3 — Tue: Final-third combinations · Thu: Arriving in the box with numbers
Week 15	3 — Tue: Defensive shifting as a block · Thu: Pressing a back four
Week 16	3 — Tue: Pressing a back three / three build-up · Thu: Defensive corners & second-phase
Week 17	3 (review) — Tue: Phase 3 consolidation game · Thu: Set-piece review
Week 18	4 Tactical Adaptability — Tue: Changing shape in possession: back four to back three · Thu: Changing shape without the ball: mid-block to low-block
Week 19	4 — Tue: Alternative build-up: 2-3 vs 3-2 · Thu: Alternative build-up: 3-1
Week 20	4 — Tue: One striker vs two: attacking principles · Thu: One striker vs two: defensive principles
Week 21	4 — Tue: High press vs mid-block: choosing · Thu: Low block organisation
Week 22	4 — Tue: Playing against a high press · Thu: Playing against a low block
Week 23	4 (review) — Tue: Phase 4 consolidation game — shape change under pressure · Thu: Set-piece expansion (second option)
Week 24	5 Match Management — Tue: Protecting a lead · Thu: Game management: seeing out the clock
Week 25	5 — Tue: Chasing a game · Thu: Breaking down a deep, organised opponent

Code	Title
Week 26	5 — Tue: Playing with ten players · Thu: Playing against ten players
Week 27	5 — Tue: Managing momentum after scoring / conceding · Thu: Controlling restarts (kick-offs, goal kicks)
Week 28	5 — Tue: Final-five-minutes scenarios (winning) · Thu: Final-five-minutes scenarios (losing)
Week 29	5 (review) — Tue: Phase 5 consolidation game — scripted match states · Thu: Set-piece review & pressure finishing
Week 30	6 Consolidation — Tue: Refining identity: possession principles · Thu: Refining identity: defensive principles
Week 31	6 — Tue: Opposition-specific: direct, physical opponent · Thu: Opposition-specific: possession-based opponent
Week 32	6 — Tue: Opposition-specific: fast counter-attacking opponent · Thu: Set-piece maximisation
Week 33	6 — Tue: Addressing the season's recurring weakness (diagnostic) · Thu: Addressing the season's recurring weakness (solution)
Week 34	6 — Tue: Maintaining intensity — fixture congestion management · Thu: Sharpness & confidence work
Week 35	6 — Tue: Decisive-match preparation: our principles vs this opponent · Thu: Decisive-match set pieces & shape confirmation
Week 36	6 (season review) — Tue: Season-defining match — full expression of identity · Thu: Structured review & individual feedback



Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum

Stage 1: Season Architecture

A nine-month, principle-led programme for two one-hour sessions a week, built around a club identity that survives every change of formation.

Stage 1 only — the architecture. Per the production sequence, this stops here for review before Week 1 is written in full.

0. How to read this document

This curriculum does not build the team around a formation. It builds the team around a set of **principles** that stay constant, and teaches players to express those principles through **whichever formation and structure fit the players available and the opponent in front of them**. Three words are used precisely throughout, and are worth fixing before anything else:

TERM	MEANING
Formation	The nominal shape on the team sheet — 4-3-3, 3-5-2, and so on. What you'd tell a supporter if they asked how the team lines up. It is a label, not an instruction.
Structure	How the team is actually organised, moment to moment, in each phase of the game — the build-up shape, the pressing shape, the shape when defending a set piece. A team can play a 4-3-3 formation and build up in a back three every week.
Principles	The behaviours that stay true regardless of formation or structure — provide width, protect the centre, press with cover behind the presser. These are what is coached. Formation and structure are the vehicles; principles are the content.

A session that "teaches 4-3-3" teaches one team's answer to one problem. A session that teaches *width* teaches every team's answer, in every shape they'll ever play. This curriculum is built entirely on the second kind of session.

1. Club Playing Philosophy

Organised, adaptable, competitive, and brave. A team that knows what it is doing without the ball, that is willing to take risks with it, and that can change its shape without losing its shape of mind.

In possession, the team should be **hard to press**: whoever is playing behind the ball — centre-backs, a dropping midfielder, the goalkeeper — splits and offers passing lines in more than one direction, and somebody is always available short, long and wide. The team goes forward when forward is on, and is patient when it is not; recognising the difference is the actual skill being coached, not the forward pass itself.

Without the ball, the team is **compact and collective**. Nobody presses alone. The team accepts that a well-organised block concedes territory before it concedes chances, and defends the middle of the pitch and the penalty area first.

In both transitions, the team **thinks before it reacts**. Losing the ball does not automatically mean chase it; winning the ball does not automatically mean force it forward. The three or four seconds after the ball changes hands are coached as deliberately as anything else in the programme, because at this level they decide more matches than any set-piece routine will.

Underneath all of it: **players are trusted to make decisions**. The programme is built on guided discovery and game-based practice rather than rehearsed patterns, because a team that only knows what to do when the picture matches training will not cope with a Saturday, which never quite does.

2. Formation-Neutral Principles of Play

Fourteen principles, grouped under possession, non-possession and the two transitions. Every week of the season is built on one of these as its **primary principle**, with a second reinforced alongside it. None of them describe a formation. All of them describe a job that needs doing regardless of formation, and each is written with the position-free language used consistently for the rest of the programme.

IN POSSESSION

PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS ON THE PITCH
Width & depth	The team occupies the full pitch — touchline to touchline, box to box — so the opposition cannot compress the game into a small area. Width can come from a full-back, a winger, or a midfielder who drifts wide; depth from a striker, a runner from midfield, or a goalkeeper stepping up. Who provides it changes with the shape; that it is provided does not.
Support & passing angles	Every player in possession has at least two team-mates offering a different angle — one who can be found under pressure, one who progresses the play. Support means distance and angle, not proximity; standing next to the ball-carrier removes an option rather than adding one.
Progression — through, around or over	The team has three ways to break a defensive line: a pass into space between opponents (through), a pass around the outside (around), and a longer pass or switch that skips a line altogether (over). A team that can only progress one way is solved the moment the opposition removes it.
Overloads & rest defence	The team creates a numbers or positional advantage where the ball is, while leaving enough players behind it to defend the counter if possession is lost. Rest defence is not "who's left over" — it is planned, and it is coached as carefully as the attack itself.
Switching the point of attack	When the ball side becomes congested, the team moves it to the far side before pressure arrives there, rather than after.

OUT OF POSSESSION

PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS ON THE PITCH
Protect the centre, then the box	Central areas and the penalty area are defended first; width is conceded before central compactness is.
Compactness — vertical and horizontal	The distance between the front and back of the defensive block, and between its widest players, stays small enough that no pass can be threaded through it without an opponent needing two touches to do it.
Pressure, cover, balance	The player closest to the ball pressures it; the next player covers the space and the pass behind the presser; the rest of the team balances across the pitch, ready to shift. No pressing action happens without this structure already in place.
Collective pressing triggers	The team presses together, off a shared signal — a poor first touch, a pass played backwards, a full-back forced infield — not off one player's individual decision to chase the ball.
Defend the space in behind	The line defends the space behind itself as much as the ball in front of it, particularly against direct or in-behind runners.

TRANSITION TO ATTACK (REGAIN)

PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS ON THE PITCH
Recognise the picture before playing	Not every regain is a green light to go forward immediately. The decision — counter now, find the free player, or secure and reset — is based on space, opponent balance, numbers, and match state, and is coached as a decision, not a reflex.
Exploit the disorganised opponent	When the picture <i>does</i> say go, the team goes early and directly, before the opposition can get goal-side and re-form its shape.

TRANSITION TO DEFENCE (LOSS)

PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS ON THE PITCH
The nearest players react first	The player who loses the ball has an immediate job (delay, foul-stop, or press); the next two players close the pass forward and protect the central lane; players further away recover goal-side rather than chasing the ball.
Counter-press or recover — a team decision, not an individual one	The team either counter-presses collectively within the first few seconds to win the ball back high, or drops together to defend organised — never a mix of one player pressing alone while the rest retreat.

3. Common Coaching Terminology

Consistent language, used identically by every coach and repeated by players, so a one-word call does the job a paragraph would otherwise need. Introduced gradually through the early season and then used without further explanation for the rest of it.

CALL	MEANING
Turn	You have time and space to face forward — do it.
Set	Take a touch and keep it, the picture ahead isn't on yet.
Hold	Keep the ball, don't force the next pass.
Drop	Come short to offer an out-ball.
Squeeze	Close the distance to the ball as a unit, right now.
Screen	Block the pass or the shooting line without diving into a tackle.
Lock	Mark tight — this runner is your job and nobody else's.
Travel	Carry the ball forward, the space in front is open.
Switch	Move the ball to the far side.
Step	Press forward out of the defensive line.
Cover	Fill the space behind a team-mate who has pressed or been beaten.
Delay	Don't dive in — slow the opponent down and hold your shape.
Inside / Outside	Directs the presser which way to force the ball-carrier.
Time	You have longer than you think — relax the next action.

PLAYER ROLES RATHER THAN FIXED POSITIONS

Positions on the team sheet are labels for selection. **Roles** describe the job a player is doing at a given moment, and the same role is frequently performed by different positions depending on the structure chosen that week.

ROLE	TYPICAL JOB
First-line build-up player	Receives from the goalkeeper or wins first phase possession; usually a centre-back, but a holding midfielder dropping in performs the identical job.
Central progression player	Receives facing forward between the lines and turns defence into attack with the next pass.
Wide outlet	Provides width high up the pitch — full-back, wing-back, winger or an inside forward who has swapped with an overlapping team-mate.
Player between the lines	Finds pockets of space between the opposition's midfield and defensive lines.
Depth runner	Threatens the space behind the last defender.
Support player	Offers an angle close to the ball to keep possession moving.
Balance player	Occupies the side of the pitch away from the ball, ready for the switch.
Rest-defence player	Positioned behind the highest point of the attack specifically to stop the counter.

ROLE	TYPICAL JOB
First presser	Initiates the press — often a striker or winger, occasionally a central midfielder stepping out.
Cover defender	Covers the space and the pass behind the first presser.
Screen	Sits in front of the back line to block the central passing lane.
Box defender	Holds a defensive position inside the penalty area during crosses and set plays.
Transition runner	Makes the first forward run the instant possession is regained.
Target player	Provides an out-ball under pressure who can hold up play and bring others in.
Second-ball player	Positioned to win the loose ball after a duel, long pass, or knockdown.

A full-back can be a wide outlet one week and a first-line build-up player the next. A winger can be a depth runner in one structure and a central progression player, tucked inside, in another. Players are coached to recognise which role the picture in front of them calls for — not to memorise a job description tied to a shirt number.

4. Season Phases

Six phases across 36 weeks. Principles are introduced progressively but are **revisited**, not retired — Phase 4 does not stop coaching compactness because Phase 2 introduced it.

PHASE	WEEKS	FOCUS
1 — Pre-Season Foundation	1–5	Physical readiness through football, team standards, communication language, core principles introduced, honest assessment of the squad's attributes, first look at adaptable structures.
2 — Early-Season Identity	6–11	Build-up principles, progressing through pressure, compactness, collective pressing, transition reactions, set-piece foundations.
3 — Developing Collective Understanding	12–17	Unit relationships, overloads, playing between the lines, final-third combinations, defensive shifting, pressing different opposition shapes.
4 — Tactical Adaptability	18–23	Changing shape in and out of possession, alternative build-up structures, one striker vs two, back four vs back three, mid-block and low-block organisation.
5 — Match Management	24–29	Protecting a lead, chasing a game, playing with/against ten, managing momentum, controlling restarts, the closing minutes.
6 — Performance Consolidation	30–36	Refining identity, fixing recurring weaknesses, opposition-specific preparation, maximising set pieces, sustaining intensity, decisive matches.

5. The 36-Week Overview

Match-day connection describes what a supporter should be able to see on the Saturday that follows each week's training — the observable link between the training ground and the result.

WK	PHASE	TUESDAY THEME	THURSDAY THEME	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE	PHYSICAL EMPHASIS	MATCH-DAY CONNECTION
1	1 Pre-Season	Reintroduction: ball-based conditioning	Standards & communication	Support & passing angles	—	Aerobic base via SSGs	Team sets its own standards before ball one
2	1	Building the aerobic base through possession	Width & depth in small spaces	Width & depth	Support & passing angles	Aerobic base, moderate duel volume	Squad shows early shape without the ball
3	1	Pressure-cover-balance introduced	Compactness as a unit	Pressure, cover, balance	Compactness	Repeated accelerations, moderate	First press-and-recover pattern visible
4	1	Transition to attack: first picture	Transition to defence: first reaction	Recognise the picture before playing	Nearest players react first	Building tolerance to repeat sprints	Fewer aimless forward balls after regains
5	1 (review)	Four-week consolidation game	Set-piece foundations (corners)	All Phase 1 principles	Attacking corners	Moderate-high, pre-season peak load	First fixture-ready attacking corner
6	2 Early-Season	Build-up vs first line of pressure	Playing around pressure — wide overload	Progression: through, around, over	Width & depth	High-intensity actions rising	Cleaner exits under opposition press
7	2	Playing through pressure — central	Compact mid-block introduced	Progression: through	Compactness	Duel intensity	Fewer turnovers in the build-up third
8	2	Collective pressing triggers	Defensive set pieces	Collective pressing triggers	Defend the space in behind	Repeated high-intensity press actions	Press starts on a shared signal, not a chase
9	2	Switching the point of attack	Free-kick routines (wide)	Switching the point of attack	Support & passing angles	Moderate, tempo-based	Fewer sustained spells trapped on one side
10	2	Rest defence during build-up	Throw-in patterns	Overloads & rest defence	Recognise the picture before playing	Moderate	Fewer clean counters conceded from our own attacks
11	2 (review)	Phase 2 consolidation game	Set-piece review & confidence finishing	All Phase 2 principles	Progression	Moderate-high	Identity recognisable across two structures
12	3 Collective Understanding	Unit relationships: back line + first midfield line	Playing between the lines	Player between the lines	Support & passing angles	Repeated actions, moderate-high	Central receivers turning under less pressure
13	3	Creating overloads — central	Creating overloads — wide	Overloads & rest defence	Width & depth	High-intensity duels	Numbers-up situations converted more often
14	3	Final-third combinations	Arriving in the box with numbers	Progression: through, around, over	Overloads & rest defence	Repeat sprint, high	More players arriving late into the box
15	3	Defensive shifting as a block	Pressing a back four	Compactness	Pressure, cover, balance	Change of direction volume	Block shifts as one unit, not in parts
16	3	Pressing a back three / three build-up	Defensive corners & second-phase	Collective pressing triggers	Defend the space in behind	Moderate-high	Press adapts to opponent shape inside a half

WK	PHASE	TUESDAY THEME	THURSDAY THEME	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE	PHYSICAL EMPHASIS	MATCH-DAY CONNECTION
17	3 (review)	Phase 3 consolidation game	Set-piece review	All Phase 3 principles	Player between the lines	Moderate	Combination play visible in the final third
18	4 Tactical Adaptability	Changing shape in possession: back four to back three	Changing shape without the ball: mid-block to low-block	Structural adaptability (possession)	Compactness	Moderate, decision-density high	Shape change without a stoppage in play
19	4	Alternative build-up: 2-3 vs 3-2	Alternative build-up: 3-1	Progression: through, around, over	Rest defence	Moderate	Build-up unaffected by which shape is used
20	4	One striker vs two: attacking principles	One striker vs two: defensive principles	Width & depth	Overloads & rest defence	Moderate-high	Front players interchange without confusion
21	4	High press vs mid-block: choosing	Low block organisation	Collective pressing triggers	Protect the centre, then the box	High-intensity press bouts	Team defends in more than one block by choice
22	4	Playing against a high press	Playing against a low block	Progression: through, around, over	Switching the point of attack	Moderate-high	Two distinct in-possession solutions on show
23	4 (review)	Phase 4 consolidation game — shape change under pressure	Set-piece expansion (second option)	All Phase 4 principles	Collective pressing triggers	Moderate	Formation changes mid-match without confusion
24	5 Match Management	Protecting a lead	Game management: seeing out the clock	Recognise the picture before playing	Compactness	Moderate, situational intensity	Fewer points dropped from winning positions
25	5	Chasing a game	Breaking down a deep, organised opponent	Progression: through, around, over	Overloads & rest defence	Moderate-high	More territory won in the closing 20 minutes when behind
26	5	Playing with ten players	Playing against ten players	Compactness	Overloads & rest defence	Moderate	Composure and shape maintained after a red card
27	5	Managing momentum after scoring / conceding	Controlling restarts (kick-offs, goal kicks)	Recognise the picture before playing	Nearest players react first	Moderate	Fewer immediate goals conceded after our own goal
28	5	Final-five-minutes scenarios (winning)	Final-five-minutes scenarios (losing)	All transition principles	All possession principles	Moderate-high, match-specific	Composed game management late on
29	5 (review)	Phase 5 consolidation game — scripted match states	Set-piece review & pressure finishing	All Phase 5 principles	Recognise the picture before playing	Moderate	Team controls at least two distinct match states
30	6 Consolidation	Refining identity: possession principles	Refining identity: defensive principles	All possession principles	All non-possession principles	Moderate, maintenance	Recognisable style regardless of opponent
31	6	Opposition-specific: direct, physical opponent	Opposition-specific: possession-based opponent	Compactness	Progression: through, around, over	Duel intensity, moderate	Two clearly different tactical plans delivered

WK	PHASE	TUESDAY THEME	THURSDAY THEME	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE	PHYSICAL EMPHASIS	MATCH-DAY CONNECTION
32	6	Opposition-specific: fast counter-attacking opponent	Set-piece maximisation	Defend the space in behind	Rest defence	Moderate-high	Fewer transition goals conceded
33	6	Addressing the season's recurring weakness (diagnostic)	Addressing the season's recurring weakness (solution)	Coach-selected, season-specific	Coach-selected, season-specific	Moderate	Targeted improvement in the identified area
34	6	Maintaining intensity — fixture congestion management	Sharpness & confidence work	Pressure, cover, balance	Support & passing angles	Reduced volume, high quality	Squad freshness into the run-in
35	6	Decisive-match preparation: our principles vs this opponent	Decisive-match set pieces & shape confirmation	All core principles	Match-specific	Low-moderate, taper	Clear, calm final preparation
36	6 (season review)	Season-defining match — full expression of identity	Structured review & individual feedback	All core principles	All core principles	Low, recovery-oriented	Team recognisable as itself, whatever the shape

Weeks 5, 11, 17, 23, 29 and 36 anchor the four-week and phase-end review cycle described in Section 9. Where a Saturday fixture is postponed, moved to a cup date, or a week carries a rare mid-week match, the coach shifts the Tuesday/Thursday content by a day rather than dropping content — the principle sequence does not reset.

6. The Weekly Cycle — Tuesday and Thursday

Every week is one idea taught twice, from two directions, either side of a Saturday match. The two sessions are never independent topics.

Tuesday is re-entry and construction. Physically, it carries the week's larger stimulus, because players are furthest from Saturday's match and closest to a full recovery window. Tactically, it opens with a short, honest look at what the previous match showed — not a lecture, three or four coaching points — and then introduces or develops the week's primary principle through possession-based and small-to-medium-sided games. Technical execution under match-realistic pressure is coached inside these games, not stripped out into isolated repetition.

Thursday is sharpening and rehearsal. The physical load drops; the technical and tactical quality does not. Thursday confirms team shape, rehearses the specific scenarios and set pieces the weekend is likely to produce, and finishes with something that sends players into the weekend confident — a finishing game, a possession game the team dominates, a shape run-through that clicks. Players should leave a Thursday session sharp and certain, not fatigued and uncertain.

Match-day and post-match close the loop. Saturday's objectives are drawn directly from the week's primary and secondary principles (Section 5 and the weekly Match-Day Objectives template, Section 11). The following Tuesday's review section (Section 8) opens the next cycle with what that match actually showed.

Every week's session plans account for uneven match loads: players who played 90 minutes, players who played a fragment, players returning from injury, and players who missed the match altogether all need a different Tuesday, and the standard session template (Section 11) carries a named field for exactly that adjustment.

7. Physical-Load Progression

Conditioning is delivered through football throughout — there is no stand-alone running block anywhere in the programme. Load is managed as an arc across the season, and as a wave within each week.

Across the season:

- **Weeks 1–5 (Pre-Season):** progressive aerobic base-building through small-sided and medium-sided games, rising duel and repeat-sprint exposure, peaking in intensity by Week 5 ahead of the first competitive fixtures.
- **Weeks 6–23 (Early season through Tactical Adaptability):** a maintained in-season wave — higher relative load on Tuesday, lower on Thursday — modulated week to week by fixture outcomes, cup matches, and individual match minutes.
- **Weeks 24–29 (Match Management):** load stays moderate and increasingly situation-specific; physical themes are expressed through scripted match-state practices rather than generic intensity work.
- **Weeks 30–36 (Consolidation):** a controlled taper toward the season's most significant fixtures — reduced volume, sustained quality, protecting freshness over accumulating more work.

Within each week, and account for players who did not carry a full match load, using the standard adjustments below:

PLAYER GROUP	TUESDAY ADJUSTMENT
Played 75+ minutes Saturday	Standard Tuesday load; emphasis on quality over volume in the first 15 minutes
Played a fragment (under 45 minutes)	Standard-to-elevated Tuesday load; this is a legitimate training stimulus for this group
Returning from injury	Individualised reduced volume, built up according to medical guidance — see the caution below
Missed the match / unused substitute	Elevated Tuesday load; additional targeted conditioning worked into the session's games rather than delivered separately

A caution, stated once and meant throughout the programme: none of the above constitutes medical advice or a return-to-play diagnosis. Any player returning from injury or reporting concussion symptoms is managed according to qualified medical or physiotherapy guidance, not the training plan. Where a club has access to sports-science support (GPS, heart-rate data, a physiotherapist), that guidance takes precedence over anything written here; where it does not, the coach's own observation — set out under Coach's Eye in every session — is the tool available, and it is a real one.

The standard warm-up. Recreational adult players carry a materially higher soft-tissue injury rate than youth players, and the single best-evidenced, lowest-cost protection against it is a structured neuromuscular warm-up run before every session, not an occasional add-on. `Technical/Injury Prevention.md` teaches this in full — light activation running, six paired strength/balance/landing stations, speed and deceleration lanes, and a closing reactive game — and is designed to replace whatever informal warm-up currently opens a session, not to run alongside it.

Teach it properly once, early, then run it as standard for the rest of the season:

- **Weeks 1–5:** install the six stations at Level 1, progressing to Level 2 as technique allows — this is the natural home for it, alongside the phase's own aerobic-base and standards-setting work, and costs the session nothing extra since it *is* that week's warm-up.
- **Weeks 6 onward:** the full circuit runs as the standing pre-session routine, twice a week, all season — by this point it should take close to its full ten minutes and need little coaching intervention. Stations can progress to Level 3 for players ready for it, managed individually rather than as a squad-wide schedule.

This is not a substitute for the concussion protocol in `03 Match Day Safety.md` — the two address different risks and both apply throughout the season, not just in Phase 1.

A note on the goalkeeper. The Player group table above is written for outfield running load and does not map cleanly onto a goalkeeper's own physical profile — short, maximal, explosive efforts (diving, jumping, landing, exploding off the line) rather than sustained distance. `Technical/Goalkeeper Distribution.md` sets out how to read a goalkeeper's load by dive-and-landing repetitions instead, and confirms the Injury Prevention circuit's landing-mechanics stations apply to the goalkeeper as directly as to any outfield player, not as optional extra conditioning.

8. Set-Piece Development Pathway

A small number of reliable routines, taught early and refined all season, rather than a large catalogue introduced once and forgotten. Set pieces get a dedicated slot on Thursdays, building progressively:

PHASE	SET-PIECE WORK
1 (Wk 5)	Foundations: one reliable attacking corner routine, defensive corner organisation, restart discipline (kick-offs, goal kicks).
2 (Wk 8–10)	Add: defensive set-piece structure formalised, one wide free-kick routine, throw-in patterns (defensive and midfield thirds).
3 (Wk 16–17)	Add: second-phase organisation after a corner (rebounds, second balls), a direct free-kick option, attacking throw-ins.
4 (Wk 23)	Expand: a second attacking corner option (near-post variation), refine defensive marking assignments against the season's evidence so far.
5 (Wk 27–29)	Pressure-test: set pieces rehearsed inside match-state scenarios (defending a lead, chasing a goal), penalty protocol confirmed.
6 (Wk 32, 35)	Maximise: opposition-specific set-piece adjustments, final confirmation of routines and personnel ahead of decisive fixtures.

The full routine-by-routine detail (starting positions, blocks and screens compliant with the Laws of the Game, rebound positions, rest defence, alternative options, diagrams and image prompts) is produced with each relevant week in Stage 2 — kept here to a small, deliberately limited set so that what the team executes is well-drilled rather than merely demonstrated once.

9. Monthly (Four-Week) Review Points

A structured review sits at the end of every four-week block — Weeks 5, 11, 17, 23, 29 and a season-closing review after Week 36 (six reviews across the 36-week season, aligned to the phase boundaries rather than a rigid calendar count, so a phase is never cut mid-idea). Each review covers, per the template used throughout the programme: principles covered, evidence of progress, recurring technical and tactical problems, physical observations, communication and leadership development, set-piece progress, match transfer, an individual development focus for any player being tracked individually, and priorities for the next block — plus the four contingency routes (ahead of schedule / behind schedule / inconsistent attendance / results-performance mismatch) detailed in Section 12 below and applied fresh each time.

The individual thread. Each of the five in-season reviews carries a short, named development focus forward for any player worth tracking individually — not a full development plan, one or two things per player, revisited and adjusted at each checkpoint rather than left to a single end-of-season conversation. By Week 36, the "one priority for next season" given in that week's individual feedback conversation should already be familiar to the player, not a fresh guess sprung on them for the first time at the season's close.

10. Visual Diagram Legend

One consistent symbol set for every tactical diagram in the programme, extending the convention already established for the club's youth materials so the two programmes read as one family.

SYMBOL	MEANING
Green player	Team in possession / the team being coached
Black player	Opposition
Yellow player	Goalkeeper (either team)
Orange marker	Equipment — cones, poles, flat markers, gates (never a player)
Solid arrow	Pass
Solid arrow, double line	Dribble / ball carried
Dashed arrow	Player movement without the ball
Dashed arrow, short	Pressing run
Curved dashed arrow	Defensive recovery run
Looping solid arrow	Rotation between two players
● (ball symbol)	Ball starting position
Grey shaded zone	Target zone, channel, or area of emphasis
×	Restart location (free kick, throw-in, corner)
Coach silhouette icon	Coach position
Rectangle, full or dashed outline	Pitch or grid boundary, with dimensions labelled

Diagrams are top-down, use this legend exclusively, and are kept to one clear phase of play per image — a practice with two distinct phases (for example, a build-up pattern followed by a finishing phase) is shown as two linked diagrams rather than one crowded one. Every diagram in Stage 2 is accompanied by its own AI image-generation prompt, specifying this legend, exact player numbers and colours, pitch dimensions, and a clean vector, light-background, coaching-manual style — consistent with the realistic training-ground illustrations that accompany each main practice.

11. Standard Session Template

Every session in Stage 2 (and, eventually, in the club's coaching app) is built from this identical field set, so content stays interchangeable across the season and portable into Markdown, JSON or a database without rewriting.

Week-level fields: Week number · Season phase · Core principle · Secondary principle · Previous match review focus · Weekly tactical problem · Formation-neutral explanation · Example structural applications (at least two shapes) · Match-day objectives (3 team, 3 unit, individual role reminders) · Measurable performance indicators.

Session-level fields: Session number · Week number · Season phase · Training day · Session theme · Short summary · Tags · Primary learning objective · Secondary learning objective · Match connection · Expected tactical outcome · Expected physical load · Recommended intensity · Equipment list (exact quantities) · Player numbers · Goalkeeper requirements · Pitch dimensions · Area layout · Attendance contingencies (low / high) · Restricted-space contingency · Minute-by-minute timeline summing to 60.

Practice-level fields: Practice name · Duration · Training load (Low / Moderate / Moderate-high / High) · Tactical purpose · Organisation (dimensions, numbers, GK involvement, team sizes, neutrals, equipment, starting positions, ball supply, restart location, coach position, rotation method, direction of play) · Practice walkthrough · Rules · Tactical roles (individual / unit / team / transition) · Decision-making triggers · Communication language used · Coaching points (technical / tactical / physical / psychological / communication & leadership) · Guided discovery questions (5–8) · Progressions (3+) · Regressions (3+) · Common problems and corrections · Coach interventions · Success indicators · Coach's eye · Tactical diagram + AI image prompt · Realistic illustration + AI image prompt.

Formation-translation field, attached to every principle-led practice: *Applying This Across Different Shapes* — which roles perform it, what stays the same, what changes, what must not change, the risk each structure carries, and how the opponent's shape should influence the choice.

Stage 1 — Quality-Control Check

- Formation is never treated as the organising idea; principles are. ✓
- Every week names a primary and secondary principle, not a formation. ✓
- The 36-week table sums to 36 weeks / 72 sessions and covers all six phases. ✓
- Physical load is planned as a season arc and a weekly wave, and accounts for uneven

match minutes. ✓

- Set-piece development is a small, progressively built set, not a catalogue. ✓
- Review points are fixed at four-week intervals aligned to phase boundaries. ✓
- Terminology, roles and legend are defined once and used consistently from here on. ✓
- Design and voice match the club's existing (Youth) coaching materials. ✓

This is Stage 1 only. Per the production sequence, Week 1 (full Tuesday and Thursday sessions, diagrams, illustrations, image prompts and coach review) is written next, on approval, and each subsequent week follows one at a time on request.

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum · session design follows the four-corner model used in UEFA coach education (technical, tactical, physical, psychological) and the principle-led, formation-neutral approach set out in modern coach education. An independent club resource, not an official UEFA or Irish FA publication and not endorsed by either.

Castlewellan Town FC — The Club Game Model

What a Castlewellan player looks like, from U6 to the senior team — one page, both sites.

The senior curriculum names the club's identity: **organised, adaptable, competitive, and brave**. A team that knows what it is doing without the ball, is willing to take risks with it, and can change its shape without losing its shape of mind. This page exists to say something the two coaching folders have never said out loud: *the youth sessions build exactly that player*. Every senior principle below has a youth session — usually several — where it is first planted, years before anyone calls it a principle.

None of this changes how a youth session is run. Youth football at this club is about touches, decisions, confidence and enjoyment — the sessions already say so, and the age-group guidance in the youth folder always wins. This page is for the coach who wants to know *why these forty-four sessions and not some other forty-four*: because they are the junior half of one idea.

The four moments, at every age

Moment	The club's way	Seeded in youth	Named in seniors
In possession	Hard to press — always an option short, wide and long; forward when forward is on, patient when it is not	“Support Angles — Three Options, Always” (S14)	Support & passing angles
Out of possession	Compact and collective — nobody presses alone; middle and box defended first	“Press, Cover and Balance” (S25)	Pressure, cover, balance
Won it	Think before you react — counter, find the free player, or keep it	“Counter-Attacking — The Three Seconds After You Win It” (S22)	Recognise the picture before playing
Lost it	The nearest players react first; everyone else recovers goal-side	“Counter-Pressing — The Three Seconds After You Lose It” (S21)	The nearest players react first

Where each senior principle is born

In possession. *Width & depth* starts life as “Width and Depth — Making the Pitch Big” (S13) — the same principle, the same words, seven years earlier. *Support & passing angles* is S14 (“Three Options, Always”). *Progression — through, around or over* is the whole arc of S15–S20: “Playing Forward” teaches when, “Building from the Back”, “Beating the First Press” and “Building Under Real Pressure” teach the three ways out. *Overloads* begin as “The Wall Pass” (S09), “Overlaps and Underlaps” (S10), “The Third-Man Run” (S11) and “Attacking Overloads” (S31). *Switching the point of attack* grows out of S13’s big pitch and S18’s third way out.

Out of possession. *Protect the centre, then the box* is “The Compact Block — Making the Pitch Small” (S26), “Defending the Wide Areas — Where We Send Them” (S27) and “Defending the Box — The Last Thirty Metres” (S28), in that order — the senior priority is literally the youth session sequence. *Pressure, cover, balance* is S25 by name. *Collective pressing triggers* and *defend the space in behind* are the senior-shaped versions of the reading and patience first taught in “The 1v1 Defender” (S07) and “Defending the Wide 1v1” (S08): approach, angle, patience — then, later, together.

Both transitions. The senior programme’s proudest idea — *transition is a decision, not a reflex* — is taught to eleven-year-olds as “Transition Decisions — Nobody Tells You Which One” (S24), flanked by S21–S23. A senior coach inheriting a Castlewellan youth player is inheriting someone who has been asked “counter or keep?” since primary school.

The player underneath it all. Brave in possession starts at “The 1v1 Attacker” (S05) and “The First Touch That Travels” (S02). Trusted to decide starts wherever a coach follows the folder’s standing instruction: *say less than feels comfortable* — the youth method (guided discovery, questions, planned non-intervention) **is** the senior method (“players are trusted to make decisions”), applied to smaller people.

What this asks of coaches

Youth coaches: nothing new. Run the sessions as written, at the age-appropriate format, with the enjoyment-first priorities the folder already states. If it helps, know that S13, S14, S21–S25 are the sessions the senior team will one day thank you for.

Senior coaches: assume the principles have been met before, and coach accordingly — a new signing from the club’s own youth section needs vocabulary connected (“this is the third-man run you know — here’s where it lives in our Tuesday”), not concepts introduced. The “New to the Squad” pathway does this; this page is its map.

Everyone: the formations differ, the pitch sizes differ, the stakes differ. The football is the same football.

*Castlewellan Town FC · one club, one idea · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI.
Session numbers refer to the youth folder; principle names to the senior Season Architecture.*



Coach Reflective Practice Log

A single reusable page for the coach's own development — not the team's.

Every session in this programme already carries a "Coach Review" section, and every phase review carries an "Individual Development Focus" — both are about the players and the team. Nothing in the programme supports the coach's own development, despite the whole project being written from a coach-education standpoint. This page is that missing piece: a short Plan-Do-Review cycle, standard practice on any UEFA coaching course, aimed entirely at how you coach, not what the team learned.

This is one reusable page, not a new page per week — print several copies, or keep a running digital copy, and fill in a row or a short entry after any session worth reflecting on. It doesn't need to be every session.

The three questions

Plan — before the session. Name one specific thing about your own coaching you want to focus on tonight — not a tactical topic, a delivery skill. For example: *asking more and telling less in the guided-discovery moments, letting a practice run longer before intervening, giving the quieter players a specific individual word, keeping transitions between practices under two minutes.*

Do — during and straight after. A brief, honest note on what actually happened with that specific focus — not the session's results, your own delivery of it.

Review — the same evening or the next day, while it's fresh.

- What worked well in *how* you coached tonight?
- What would you change about your own delivery next time?
- What's the one thing about your coaching — not the team's tactics — that carries into next week?

A menu of focuses, if you're not sure where to start

Rotate through these across a season rather than reflecting on everything at once — one focus, held for a few sessions, teaches more than a different focus every night.

AREA	WHAT TO WATCH IN YOURSELF
Intervention timing	Are you stopping practices at the right moments — enough to correct, not so much that play never settles?
Question quality	Are your guided-discovery questions genuinely open, or leading players to the answer you already have in mind?
Tone under pressure	Does your tone change when a practice is going badly, and is that change helping or making it worse?
Session pace	Are transitions between practices tight, or is training time leaking away between activities?
Individual attention	Is the same two or three players getting most of your direct feedback, or is it genuinely spread across the squad?
Plan vs adaptability	Are you running the session as planned even after it's clearly not working, or adjusting live using the regressions/progressions already built into each practice?
Silence	Are you comfortable letting players organise a practice without your voice, even briefly — Week 5 and Week 36's deliberately coach-silent moments are a useful test of this.

Running log

DATE / WEEK	THIS SESSION'S FOCUS	WHAT WORKED	WHAT I'D CHANGE	CARRIES INTO NEXT WEEK
e.g. Wk 6, Tue	Asking more, telling less in guided discovery	Held back for the first two questions — players found their own answer	Jumped in too early on question three when the group went quiet	Give a genuine ten-second pause before rescuing a quiet moment

Castlewellan Town FC · Coaching Curriculum (Youth and Senior) · coach reflective-practice log · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI

When the Week Goes Wrong

The 36 weeks assume Tuesday and Thursday happen. This page is for the weeks when they don't.

The season plan is built for two one-hour nights. Amateur football has other ideas: a cup replay lands on a Wednesday, the pitch is closed, half the squad is on a stag weekend, or there's no match on Saturday at all. None of that needs a new plan — it needs a decision about which parts of the existing one to keep. These are the club's defaults. They are defaults, not laws; a coach who knows their squad should overrule them.

1. Only one training night this week

Keep Thursday's session, not Tuesday's. Tuesday teaches the new principle at higher load; Thursday organises the team for Saturday. With one night, preparation beats development — the principle will come around again (every principle recurs across the season by design; the phase reviews sweep up anything missed).

Two refinements: if the lost night means the week's principle is *never* seen (check the current phase's remaining weeks), fold its arrival practice into Thursday's warm-up slot as a taster. And if the team's last match exposed something urgent, Thursday's "Match Review and Weekly Adjustment" section already tells you what to swap in.

2. A midweek match on a training night

The night before the match: don't run the planned session. Take Thursday's *organisation* content — set-piece jobs, the block, match-day objectives — at walk-through intensity, 40 minutes, no contact. Physical load is the enemy the night before a game; clarity is the friend.

The night after the match: players who played 60+ minutes get recovery — the movement quality and low-load content the programme keeps in its arrival practices, a rondo at conversation pace, and stretching; done in 45 minutes. Players who didn't play get the planned session's technical practice at full intensity in the remaining space. Never give the whole squad the same night: the two groups had opposite days.

Then: the skipped week's Tuesday content merges its key practice into the next normal Tuesday's warm-up, and the season continues from where the calendar says, not where you left off. Do not try to run two weeks in one — the plan recovers better from a missed lesson than from a rushed one.

3. No pitch (closed, waterlogged, double-booked)

The senior equivalent of the youth folder's "no pitch tonight" rule. In order of preference: (1) any patch of grass fits the week's technical practice — every Practice 2 in the

programme works in a 30 × 20 m space or scales down with the restricted-space contingency row every week already carries; **(2)** a hall or 3G slot runs the week's arrival + technical practices as futsal-tempo work, skill intact, load managed; **(3)** no facility at all — run the week's video/board content instead: the Formation Translation section and the match-day objectives take 40 minutes in a clubhouse with a whiteboard and produce a visibly better organised Saturday. A talked-through week beats a skipped week.

4. No match on Saturday

A free weekend turns the week on its head: **Tuesday runs as planned; Thursday becomes a second Tuesday.** Take the next week's Tuesday session and pull it forward — development weeks are rare and precious, and organising for a match that doesn't exist wastes one. If fatigue has been accumulating (checkpoints: three matches in nine days, or the phase-review week flags it), make Thursday a genuine down night instead: small-sided games the players pick, 50 minutes, done. Freshness in November is bought in September.

5. Half the squad is missing

Below about 10 players, stop adapting the planned session and switch outright: the **Technical library** (1v1s, Crossing, Finishing, Goalkeeping, Heading) is built for small rotating groups and is the best hour a small turnout can spend. The attendance-contingency rows on every week handle 10–13; single figures is what the standalone sessions are *for*. Record it in the week's Coach Review so the phase review knows what was actually trained.

6. Pre-season didn't happen (late start, late signings)

Weeks 1–5 compress to their Tuesday sessions run in order, two per week if needed at reduced intensity, before joining the calendar at the current week. The identity content (Weeks 1–2) is the part that cannot be skipped — a team that never installed the principles can't revise them. Everything else catches up through the season's built-in recurrence.

The one rule under all of it: when in doubt, protect Thursday's organisation, the players' legs, and the season's sequence — in that order. The plan is a servant. Saturday is the boss.

Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · companion to the 36-week season plan · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI



The Next Opponent

A half-page to fill in after watching them once — or just from last season's memory. Print it, scribble on it, bring it Thursday.

The season plan teaches principles; this page points them at a specific Saturday. Five prompts, deliberately short — a one-pager the whole squad can absorb beats a dossier nobody reads. It pairs with each week's Formation Translation section: once you know their shape, that section already says how this week's principle applies against it.

1. Their shape

Formation on paper: _____ **How they actually build up:** _____

Watch for: back three or back four in build-up? Does the keeper play short or long? Who drops to receive?

2. The one thing they do well

Be specific — "the left winger runs in behind" or "long throws into the box", not "they're decent". This decides the week's defensive emphasis: space in behind → drop the line and defend it (the programme's "defend the space in behind" principle); box deliveries → Thursday's walk-through comes from Defending the Box.

3. The one thing they give away

Where do their goals against come from? A full-back who doesn't recover → overloads and switches (Weeks 6, 32). A high line → in-behind runs at the collective trigger. Slow to re-form after losing it → counter early, exactly as the transition principle says.

4. Their set pieces — both ways

Their delivery threat: near post / far post / short / long throws (circle) **How they defend corners:** zonal / man / mixed — and the space that leaves: _____

Cross-check the attacking routines already installed this phase against that defence — the set-piece library's opposition-cue notes tell you which routine punishes which structure.

5. The message

One sentence for the changing room: _____

One player job that wins us the game: _____

If the team remembers a single thing at 2:55pm, this is it. Keep it about us — "we switch early when their left side presses" travels better than a lecture about them.

6. If there's footage

This section only applies if footage exists — a phone clip from a previous match, a livestream, a training video shared in a group chat. Skip it entirely if it doesn't; the five prompts above stand on their own without it.

From the opponent's footage, three things worth clipping (thirty seconds each, no more):

1. Their build-up under pressure — a clean example of how they actually solve what Section 1 above describes.
2. The one thing they do well (Section 2) — a representative moment, not their best-ever one.
3. Their set-piece delivery or defensive structure (Section 4) — one attacking corner, one defended corner.

From our own team, after a loss, the same three:

1. The moment the match turned — not the goal itself, the three passes or decisions before it.
2. One clear example of the specific problem named in that week's Coach Review.
3. One thing that still worked, even in a loss — worth keeping, not just what to fix.

Keep clips short and specific. A folder of four thirty-second clips the squad will actually watch beats an hour of unwatched full-match footage — show a maximum of three or four in any one session, each tied directly to that week's principle, not a general highlights reel.

After the match: thirty seconds — was the read right? The week's Coach Review section asks the same question; this page is its evidence.

Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · match preparation one-pager · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI



Match Day Safety

The protocol two of this folder's own sessions already assume exists. It does now — read this once, then keep it where the kit bag is.

This is not medical advice, and it doesn't replace it. It's the same club-wide "if in doubt, sit them out" standard the Youth curriculum already runs on, adapted for a senior squad: what happens the moment something goes wrong, before a qualified professional takes over. `Technical/Heading.md` and `Set-Pieces/Defending the Box.md` both refer to "the concussion guidance in the club's match-day material" — this page is that material.

1. Concussion — if in doubt, sit them out

This follows the UK Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite (Grassroots) Sport and the Irish FA's own concussion guidance, which apply identically to adult grassroots players — there is no lighter version of this protocol for seniors than for youth.

- **Any suspected head injury comes off immediately** — no "play to the whistle," no "see how they feel in five minutes." The player does not return to the pitch that day, even if symptoms appear to clear.
- **No return to any football activity within 24 hours** of the incident, and the player should be seen by a healthcare professional (GP or emergency department, depending on severity) within that same 24 hours.
- **No return to contact training or competition before 21 days** from the day of injury, and only once fully symptom-free — this is a floor, not a target; some players need longer.
- **Symptoms lasting more than 28 days** need assessment and management by a healthcare professional (typically a GP) before any further return-to-play steps.
- **Log it the same evening** — who, what happened, what was observed, who they were told to see. Tell the team captain or club safety contact (below) before the next session, not after.
- A team-mate, not just the player themselves, can and should flag a suspected knock — head injuries are the one situation where a player's own read of their symptoms is deliberately not the final word.

Any player who takes a blow to the head in training comes off and stays off, exactly as on a Saturday — this applies to every heading and set-piece session in this folder, not just match day.

2. Before you travel

- Confirm the ground's **what3words** or full address before leaving, and know the **nearest defibrillator** location if it isn't the ground's own.
- Check **vehicle access** for an ambulance at an unfamiliar ground — which gate, which side.
- Nominate **two people** (not just the manager) who know this protocol and where the first-aid kit and defibrillator are, in case the manager is the one who needs attention.
- Confirm **phone signal** at the ground — some pitches have dead spots; know which of the group has signal if it matters.
- Bring a **printed contact card**: club safety contact, nearest ED, and this page's protocol summary, in the kit bag — not just on a phone that might be flat or lost.

3. Pre-match pitch check

- Goals anchored and stable.
- Pitch clear of glass, debris, and obvious hazards.
- First-aid kit and ice packs present and in date.
- A weather call made and communicated before players travel, not on arrival — lightning and waterlogged pitches are the coach's call to make early.

4. During the match

- The decision to remove a player for a suspected head injury is **not overruled by the scoreline, the stage of the match, or the player's own protest**. It is made once and it stands.
- Any club official present — not only the manager — can make the call. Waiting for one specific person to be looking at the right moment is how these get missed.
- A player removed for a suspected head injury is **not** eligible to return as a substitute later in the same match.

5. After the match

- The same-evening log (Section 1) happens regardless of how the game went — this is not something to remember tomorrow.
- The player is reminded of the 24-hour and 21-day minimums before they leave, in person, not left to look it up themselves.
- Training that week is adjusted for that player without requiring them to ask — see the individualised-load table in `00 Season Architecture.md` Section 7 for how a returning player's Tuesday load should already flex around exactly this situation.

Club contacts

Fill in and keep current — this table is the one meant to travel in the kit bag, not stay on a laptop.

ROLE	NAME	CONTACT
Club safety contact	_____	_____
Deputy	_____	_____
Nearest ED (home ground)	_____	_____
Defibrillator location (home ground)	_____	_____
Home ground what3words	_____	_____

Always: 999 for any immediate emergency. NHS 111 / GP for next-day assessment guidance if not urgent enough for 999 or an ED visit.

Sources

- Irish FA concussion guidance — [irishfa.com](https://www.irishfa.com)
- UK Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite (Grassroots) Sport (November 2024 update) — sportandrecreation.org.uk
- The FA — "If in Doubt, Sit Them Out" — [thefa.com](https://www.thefa.com/get-involved/fa-concussion-guidelines-if-in-doubt-sit-them-outold)

Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · match-day safety one-pager · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI



Training Load Log

Session-RPE — the zero-cost load signal for a squad with no GPS or heart-rate data.

Section 7 of the Season Architecture builds a deliberate wave into every week — heavier Tuesday, lighter Thursday — and adjusts it further for players returning from injury, carrying a heavy match load, or missing the game altogether. Without hardware, the coach's own eye is the tool available for confirming that wave lands as intended. Session-RPE gives that eye a number to check itself against, for less effort than filling in a team sheet.

How to collect it

Ask every player one question, within 10 minutes of the session ending:

"On a scale of 1 to 10, how hard was that?"

RPE	FEELS LIKE
1-2	Very light — a recovery jog
3-4	Light — comfortable throughout
5-6	Moderate — working, holding a conversation in bursts
7-8	Hard — the session's demanding parts stayed hard
9-10	Maximal — everything left in the tank

Ask it the same way every time, before players scatter — a phone note, a shout-and-remember, a scrap of paper by the gate. It takes one line per player.

Turning it into a number

Session load = RPE × session duration in minutes.

A player who rates a 60-minute Tuesday a 7 carries a session load of 420. That number means nothing alone — it means something the moment it sits next to that player's own last few weeks. A back-to-back of 420s after a run of 250s is the actual signal; the single number is just the input.

Using the tracker

`Seniors/Training Load Tracker.xlsx` does the arithmetic. Three tabs:

- **Squad** — the roster. Add or remove names here; both other tabs read from this list.
- **Session Log** — one row per player per session. Enter the date, Tuesday or Thursday, the player, duration, RPE, and which of the four Section 7 groups they were in that week (played 75+ minutes, played a fragment, returning from injury, missed the match). Session load calculates itself.
- **Weekly Summary** — automatic. Each player's total load for the week, their rolling 4-week average, and a flag when a week runs more than 30% above that average — the low-tech version of the acute:chronic workload ratio used with GPS data, not a clinical measure, just a prompt to go and look.

A flagged week is not an automatic stand-down. It is exactly what Section 7 already asks for: go and look at that player, cross-reference which group they were in, and decide with the same judgement the whole programme is built on.

What this doesn't replace

This is a training-load signal, not a medical tool. It sits alongside the caution in Section 7 — any player returning from injury or reporting concussion symptoms is managed according to qualified medical or physiotherapy guidance, not a spreadsheet — and alongside the return-to-play protocol in `03 Match Day Safety.md`. Where a club has real sports-science support, that takes precedence over this. Where it doesn't, this is a real, if simple, substitute.

Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · training-load one-pager · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI



Nutrition and Hydration

A one-page guide for an adult squad training twice midweek plus a Saturday match — not a diet plan, just the three moments that matter most and what the evidence says about each.

This is guidance, not prescription. Players have different bodies, budgets and schedules, and nobody is being asked to weigh food. The point is three simple habits — fuel before a heavy training night, drink through the session rather than only at the end, and use the hour after a match properly — that cost nothing and are the standard, evidence-based starting point at exactly this level.

1. Before training — the double-training-night problem

Tuesday and Thursday both ask a lot of the same players inside one week, on top of work, family and a Saturday match either side. Turning up under-fuelled makes the heavier Tuesday session (Season Architecture, Section 7) feel harder than it needs to and blunts what it's designed to build.

The simple version: eat a carbohydrate-containing meal or snack 2–3 hours before training — pasta, rice, potatoes, a sandwich, porridge, a banana and toast. If that's not realistic before a 7pm session after a working day, a smaller carbohydrate snack 30–60 minutes before (a banana, a cereal bar, a slice of toast) is a real and useful substitute, not a lesser option.

What to avoid: turning up having skipped food since lunch, or relying on a heavy, high-fat meal immediately before training — both cost energy and comfort during the session itself.

2. During training and matches — hydration

Over a full match, a player can lose more than a litre in sweat, and dehydration measurably reduces concentration, decision-making and physical output well before a player feels thirsty — thirst is a late signal, not an early one.

The simple version: bring a water bottle to every session and match, and drink at every natural break — not just at the final whistle. In hot or humid conditions, or during a double session, this matters more, not less.

Match day specifically: normal water is sufficient for the great majority of amateur matches. A carbohydrate-electrolyte drink is a reasonable option for players who struggle to eat enough beforehand, or in unusually hot conditions, but it is not a requirement for every player, every week.

3. After a match — the recovery window

This is the single highest-value moment in this whole page. The first hour after full time is when the body is most efficient at replacing what the match used, and it is also, inconveniently, exactly when it's easiest to skip food entirely — showered, changed, straight to the car.

The simple version: within roughly an hour of full time, aim for a combination of carbohydrate and protein — a meal if one is genuinely available that quickly, or a practical stand-in: a pint of milk, a yoghurt and a banana, a protein shake with fruit, or a simple sandwich. None of this needs to be exact or measured; the point is doing something in that window rather than nothing.

Rehydrate too: replace fluid losses across the rest of the evening, not just the first hour — plain water is sufficient for the majority of players.

MOMENT	SIMPLE TARGET	PRACTICAL EXAMPLE
Before a heavy training night	A carbohydrate-containing meal or snack 2–3 hours out	Pasta or rice meal; or a banana and toast if time is short
During training/match	Drink at every natural break, don't wait for thirst	A water bottle on the touchline, used at every stoppage
Within ~1 hour of full time	Carbohydrate + protein together	A pint of milk, a yoghurt and a banana, or a simple sandwich

What this doesn't cover

This page is deliberately general — it is not personalised advice, and it does not account for individual medical conditions, allergies, or specific goals (weight management, an underlying health condition). Any player with a specific dietary or medical need should be pointed toward their GP or a registered dietitian rather than this page. This guidance is for adult players; it is deliberately not extended to the Youth curriculum, where dietary guidance sits closer to a parental and, where needed, clinical responsibility than a coaching one.

Sources

Carbohydrate and protein intake ranges drawn from UEFA expert group and International Society of Sports Nutrition (ISSN) position guidance for team-sport athletes; post-match recovery window and hydration figures drawn from peer-reviewed practical recovery guidance for soccer players (*Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition*, "Practical nutritional recovery strategies for elite soccer players when limited time separates repeated matches"). Figures here are simplified deliberately for a recreational, non-elite context — the underlying evidence is written for a higher training load than this squad carries, and has been scaled down accordingly rather than quoted at elite-level intensity.

Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · nutrition and hydration one-pager · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI



Attacking 1v1

Tags: `individual-technical` `standalone` `1v1` `dribbling`

Kicker: Every 1v1 and dribbling reference in the season plan is written from the defender's side — jockeying, delaying, patient pressing. This session teaches the other half of that picture: how to actually beat the player in front of you.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Attacking 1v1 — Approach, Feint and Acceleration
Short summary	Four stages building an attacker's toolkit for beating a defender in isolation: unopposed close control and change of pace, the approach and feint that commits a defender to a false direction, the explosive acceleration that punishes that commitment, and a closing live game that specifically rewards successful take-ons. The season's defensive work has always assumed someone on the other side knows how to attack a jockeying defender — this session makes sure that's true.
Total duration	50 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers can join as defenders in the practices, or as an outlet in the closing game — not central to this session's purpose.
Area layout	A narrow channel for Practices 1-2, widening into a full 1v1-to-goal area for Practices 3-4.
Equipment	Cones marking a start channel, a supply of balls, small goals or end lines for the closing game.
Contingency — lower attendance	Practices 2-3 work in pairs regardless of numbers; the closing game in Practice 4 scales down to a smaller grid with fewer players per side rather than losing the 1v1 emphasis.

PRACTICE 1 — QUICK FEET (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Unopposed close control and change-of-pace repetition — no defender, no decision, purely the footwork and touch that every take-on in this session depends on.

Organisation: Each player has a ball and works individually through a short marked channel, with space to move freely between reps.

Walkthrough: Players dribble through the channel using a variety of touches — inside foot, outside foot, sole rolls — then, on a coach's call, explode into a sharp five-metre burst of pace before settling back into control.

Rules: The ball must stay under close control throughout — this is about touch quality, not speed for its own sake, until the explosive burst is called.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* the ball stays within playing distance on every touch, never so far ahead that control is lost.
- *Physical:* a genuine change of pace on the explosive burst — a jog that speeds up slightly doesn't count.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — SELL IT (APPROACH AND FEINT)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds the approach and feint that commits a jockeying defender to a false direction — the decisive moment in any 1v1 that happens before any acceleration or trick, and the one most players never get taught deliberately.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** narrow channel, roughly 15 x 8 m
- **Players:** paired up, one attacker and one jockeying defender per channel
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** optional — can rotate through as a defender if attending
- **Team sizes:** 1v1 throughout
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** cones marking the channel and a target end line
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at the start of the channel after each attempt
- **Restart:** immediate, next attempt begins as soon as the previous one resolves
- **Coach position:** side-on to the channel, able to see the attacker's body shape and the defender's reaction
- **Rotation method:** attacker and defender swap roles every 4–5 attempts
- **Direction of play:** always down the channel toward the target line

Practice walkthrough: The attacker approaches a jockeying defender at controlled pace and uses body shape, eye contact, or a genuine change of the ball's angle to sell a false direction, aiming to get the defender's weight committed one way before attacking the other. The defender jockeys patiently, exactly as trained elsewhere in the programme, giving the attacker a real, live picture to read and manipulate rather than a passive target.

Rules: The defender must jockey with genuine intent to delay, not simply stand still — this is a real contest of the feint against real defensive shape.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A believable feint — body shape and eyes selling the false direction as convincingly as the ball itself.
Tactical	Reading the defender's set position and weight distribution to find the direction most likely to commit them.
Physical	A controlled approach speed that leaves enough balance to change direction sharply once the feint has worked.
Psychological	Confidence to commit to the feint fully — a half-hearted feint convinces nobody.
Communication & leadership	None required from the attacker in isolation, but the defender's honest jockeying effort is what makes the practice valuable — both roles matter.

Tactical roles: **Attacker** — reads the defender and commits fully to a believable feint. **Defender** — jockeys with genuine, patient intent, exactly as coached elsewhere in the programme.

Decision-making triggers: a defender who is square and balanced needs a genuine feint to create an opening; a defender already off-balance or over-committed one way can sometimes be beaten with a direct, immediate change of direction instead.

Communication language used: none specific — this practice is deliberately quiet, letting the feint itself do the work.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What part of your feint actually committed the defender — your body, your eyes, or the ball?

2. What did it feel like on the attempts where the defender didn't buy the feint?
3. As the defender, what gave the feint away when it didn't work on you?

Progressions:

1. Reduce the channel width, giving the defender less space to recover if beaten.
2. Add a second defender arriving late as cover, testing whether the attacker can beat the first defender quickly enough to exploit it.

Regressions:

1. Slow the defender's jockeying intensity while the feint technique is being learned.
2. Remove the defender briefly and have the attacker rehearse the feint's body shape alone, then reintroduce opposition.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The feint is rushed and unconvincing, and the defender isn't fooled	Impatience to get to the acceleration rather than committing to the feint itself	The defender's weight never actually shifts before the attacker changes direction	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse the feint alone at walking pace, exaggerating the body shape	Resume
The attacker approaches too fast to actually change direction once the feint works	Over-committing to speed before balance is established	The attacker overruns the opening the feint created	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: reduce approach speed and rehearse the balance point	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for an unconvincing feint and for an approach too fast to capitalise on it.

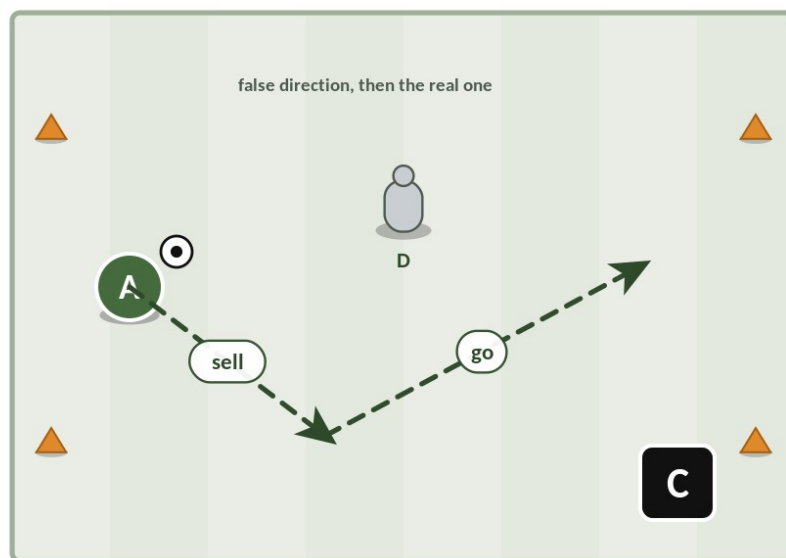
Success indicators:

- The defender's weight visibly shifts in response to the feint on most attempts.
- The attacker's change of direction is sharp and balanced once the feint has worked.
- Both attacker and defender can describe what actually happened in the exchange.

Coach's eye: the quiet version of this practice is deliberate — a feint that relies on speed or noise to work isn't actually reading the defender, and that's the skill worth protecting here.

TC2.2 SELL IT — Approach and Feint

Narrow channel • 1v1 • commit the defender to a false direction • 14 minutes



● Attacker 👤 Jockeying defender ● Ball ➡ Feint then true direction

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Attacking 1v1 (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 3 — EXPLODE (ACCELERATION PAST THE DEFENDER)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Builds the explosive acceleration that actually punishes a committed defender — the second half of the picture Practice 2 set up, and the part that turns a good feint into a genuinely beaten opponent.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** widened channel, roughly 20 x 12 m, opening toward a small target goal or end line
- **Players:** paired up, one attacker and one jockeying defender
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** optional, as a defender or a small-goal outlet
- **Team sizes:** 1v1 throughout
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** small goals or a marked end line as the attacking target
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset after each attempt
- **Restart:** immediate, next attempt begins as soon as the previous one resolves
- **Coach position:** able to see the whole channel, particularly the first two touches after the feint
- **Rotation method:** attacker and defender swap roles every 4–5 attempts
- **Direction of play:** always toward the target goal or end line

Practice walkthrough: Building directly on Practice 2's feint, the attacker now finishes the sequence — the moment the defender's weight commits, the attacker explodes away with the first touch pushed into the space created, accelerating hard for at least three or four strides before bringing the ball back under control to finish at the target. The defender recovers and chases realistically, giving the attacker a genuine reason to accelerate rather than coast.

Rules: The first touch after the feint must push the ball into open space, not keep it close — this is the touch that actually creates the separation the acceleration then protects.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A firm, purposeful first touch that pushes the ball into space rather than under the feet.
Tactical	Accelerating in a straight, direct line toward the target rather than drifting, wasting the separation just created.
Physical	Genuine top-end acceleration over the first few strides, when the advantage over a recovering defender is greatest.
Psychological	Full conviction the instant the defender commits — no hesitation between the feint working and the acceleration starting.
Communication & leadership	None required — this is an individual technical sequence, deliberately isolated from team decision-making.

Tactical roles: **Attacker** — finishes the sequence from Practice 2 with a decisive touch and acceleration. **Defender** — recovers and chases with real effort, giving the practice genuine value.

Decision-making triggers: the instant the defender's weight has committed is the trigger to accelerate — waiting even half a second longer gives the defender time to recover their balance.

Communication language used: none specific — the emphasis stays on the individual technical sequence.

Guided discovery questions:

1. How did the size and direction of your first touch affect how much separation you created?
2. What's the cost of hesitating between the feint working and starting your acceleration?

3. As the defender, what's the hardest part of recovering once you've been beaten cleanly?

Progressions:

1. Add a second recovering defender to test whether the attacker can finish the sequence before help arrives.
2. Reduce the space to the target, sharpening the finishing touch after the acceleration.

Regressions:

1. Remove the defender's recovery chase temporarily, letting the attacker groove the touch-and-accelerate sequence alone.
2. Walk through the full sequence — feint, touch, acceleration — at half pace before adding full intensity.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The first touch after the feint is too heavy, and the attacker loses control while accelerating	Prioritising speed over the quality of the touch that enables it	The ball runs away from the attacker during the acceleration	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: isolate the touch itself before adding the sprint	Resume
The attacker hesitates after the feint works, losing the separation just created	Uncertainty about committing fully to the next phase of the sequence	A visible pause between the defender committing and the attacker accelerating	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse the feint-to-acceleration transition as one continuous action	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for a heavy first touch and for hesitation after a successful feint.

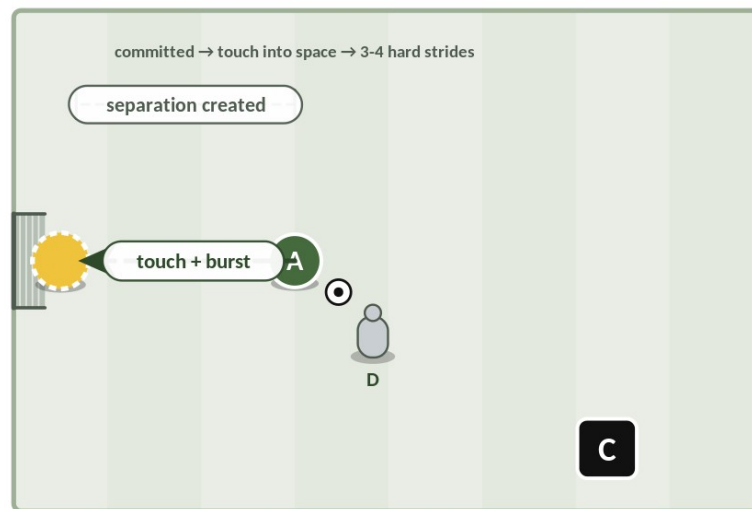
Success indicators:

- The first touch consistently pushes the ball into open space, not under the feet.
- Acceleration begins immediately once the defender is committed, with no hesitation.
- The attacker finishes the sequence with genuine separation maintained to the target.

Coach's eye: watch the gap between the feint and the acceleration closely — that half-second is where most 1v1s that should have been won are actually lost.

TC2.3 EXPLODE — Acceleration Past the Defender

Widened channel to a target goal • first touch into space, then explosive pace • 14 minutes



● Attacker ● Recovering defender ● Ball ➔ First touch + acceleration

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PRACTICE 4 — DUEL POINTS (CLOSING LIVE GAME)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session with a live small-sided game that specifically rewards successful 1v1 take-ons, bringing the feint and acceleration from Practices 2 and 3 together under real, unscripted pressure with a genuine incentive attached.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 30 x 20 m
- **Players:** two teams of 5–6 with goalkeepers if attending
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** can play as an outlet or defender, not central to the session
- **Team sizes:** 5v5 or 6v6
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** standard small-sided game markers
- **Starting positions:** open play
- **Ball supply:** a supply at the halfway line for quick restarts
- **Restart:** standard small-sided game rules
- **Coach position:** mobile, observing 1v1 situations as they arise across the game
- **Rotation method:** roles rotate naturally through open play
- **Direction of play:** both directions, standard small-sided game rules otherwise

Practice walkthrough: A small conditioned game runs normally, with any clearly won 1v1 take-on — beating a defender cleanly in an isolated duel, not simply running past a player who wasn't set — awarded a bonus point in addition to goals, directly rewarding the specific skill this session has built.

Rules: Standard small-sided game rules, plus a bonus point for any clean, clearly won 1v1 take-on as judged by the coach.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	The feint and acceleration technique from Practices 2 and 3 hold up under live, unscripted conditions.
Tactical	Genuine recognition of when a 1v1 opportunity exists, rather than forcing a take-on when a simpler pass was on.
Physical	Explosive acceleration sustained across a longer, more demanding game context.
Psychological	Confidence to attempt a take-on in a live game, with a real cost attached to losing the ball.
Communication & leadership	Teammates providing support after a successful take-on, converting the individual win into a team advantage.

Tactical roles: **Attacker in possession** — recognises and attempts genuine 1v1 opportunities. **Nearby teammates** — provide support to convert a won duel into an attacking advantage. **Defenders** — jockey and contest exactly as coached throughout the rest of the programme.

Decision-making triggers: an isolated defender in a jockeying position, with support arriving to exploit success, is the trigger to attempt a take-on; a well-supported defensive picture favours a pass instead.

Communication language used: none specific — the bonus-point rule itself provides the incentive structure.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What made a 1v1 attempt worth trying tonight, versus a moment where a pass was clearly the better option?
2. What did a successful take-on do for your team's shape in the seconds afterward?
3. What's the risk of forcing a take-on purely to chase the bonus point?

Progressions:

1. Increase the bonus point value to sharpen the incentive further.
2. Add a rule that a won take-on inside the final third is worth double, encouraging attempts where they matter most.

Regressions:

1. Reduce the game to a smaller grid or fewer players if 1v1 opportunities aren't arising naturally.
2. Remove the bonus point temporarily and rely on coach feedback alone if the incentive is distorting decision-making.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players force a 1v1 attempt in situations where a simple pass was clearly better	The bonus point outweighing sound decision-making	Take-ons attempted against well-supported defenders, losing possession in dangerous areas	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "was there a simpler option there?"	Resume
A successful take-on isn't supported by teammates, wasting the advantage created	Teammates not yet reading the moment a duel is won	The attacker who won the duel has no passing options and the advantage is lost	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	A direct reminder to nearby players to anticipate and support a teammate in a live duel	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: reflective questioning for forced take-ons; a direct reminder for unsupported successful duels.

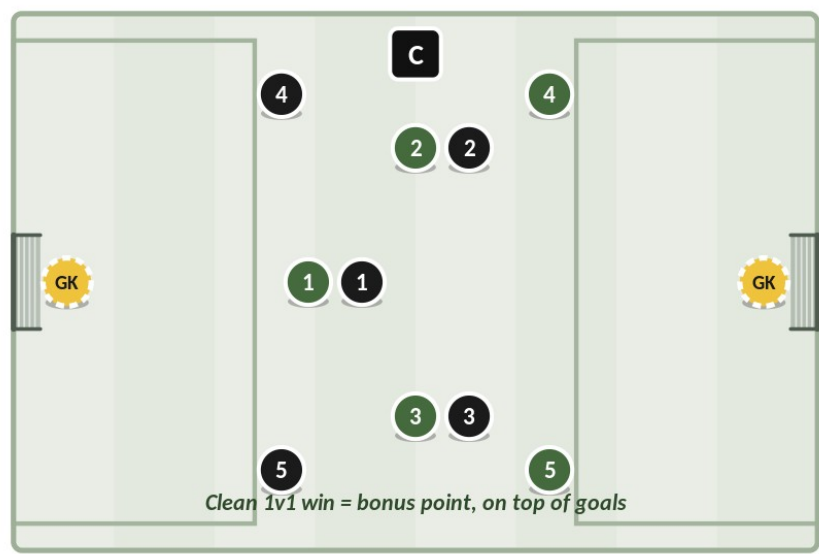
Success indicators:

- Take-ons are attempted in situations that genuinely favour them, not purely to chase the bonus.
- The feint-and-acceleration technique from tonight is visible under live conditions.
- Teammates consistently support a won duel rather than leaving the attacker isolated.

Coach's eye: the real measure of tonight isn't how many take-ons succeed — it's whether players now recognise the moments worth attempting one in the first place.

TC2.4 DUEL POINTS — Closing Live Game

30 x 20 m • 5v5 or 6v6 • every clean 1v1 take-on wins a bonus point • 14 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Attacking 1v1 (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Individual Technical Session



Crossing

Tags: `individual-technical` `standalone` `crossing` `wide-play`

Kicker: Crossing shows up as a byproduct in a handful of weeks — a tool for creating overloads, never a technique in its own right. This session teaches the delivery itself: whipped or driven, and the timing that turns it into a goal.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Crossing — Delivery Technique and Run Timing
Short summary	Four stages building wide delivery from the ground up: unopposed striking technique, the choice and execution of a whipped ball versus a driven ball, syncing an attacking run to the delivery's timing, and a closing live game that rewards a cross-and-finish combination directly. The season's tactical work leans on wide overloads and switches of play constantly — this session makes sure the final ball those patterns are built to create is actually a good one.
Total duration	50 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers should attend, since this session is also genuine live practice for Goalkeeping Practice 3 (commanding the box on crosses) — the two sessions reinforce each other directly.
Area layout	A wide delivery channel for Practices 1–2, opening into a full box for Practices 3–4.
Equipment	A generous supply of balls, cones marking delivery and run-timing positions.
Contingency — lower attendance	Practices 2–3 work fine with a single crosser and a small rotating group in the box; Practice 4's closing game scales down to a smaller grid rather than losing the wide-delivery emphasis.

PRACTICE 1 — STRIKE IT CLEAN (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Unopposed striking-the-ball repetition — no target runner, no defender, purely the technique of making clean contact and controlling the ball's flight before either is tested against a moving picture.

Organisation: Each player has a ball and works individually or in pairs from a wide position, striking crosses into an open target area with no runners to aim at yet.

Walkthrough: Players strike a series of crosses from a wide position using different parts of the foot — the instep for a driven ball, the outside for natural curl — focusing purely on clean contact and consistent flight, retrieving and repeating.

Rules: No target required yet — focus entirely on the quality and consistency of the strike itself.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* a firm, locked ankle at the point of contact, whichever part of the foot is used.
- *Technical:* a consistent plant-foot position alongside the ball, giving the strike a repeatable base every time.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — WHIP OR DRIVE (DELIVERY CHOICE)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds both delivery types — a whipped, curling ball that bends away from the goalkeeper, and a firm, driven ball hit with pace along a flatter line — and the judgement to choose between them based on the picture in the box.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** wide delivery channel opening into a marked box, roughly 30 x 20 m
- **Players:** crosser plus 2–3 target players in the box
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** in goal, reading each delivery type as it's struck
- **Team sizes:** small group receiving crosses, one crosser working through repetitions
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** cones marking two delivery start positions (deeper for a whipped ball, closer to the byline for a driven one)
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at the delivery position after each cross
- **Restart:** next delivery begins as soon as the box is clear
- **Coach position:** able to see both the crosser's technique and the ball's flight into the box
- **Rotation method:** crosser and target players rotate every 4–5 deliveries
- **Direction of play:** always into the same box

Practice walkthrough: The crosser alternates between a whipped delivery — struck with the outside or inside of the foot to curl the ball away from the goalkeeper toward the back post — and a driven delivery — struck firmly and flatter, arriving quickly across the face of goal. Target players adjust their movement to each delivery type, and the crosser is coached to recognise which picture in the box favours which ball.

Rules: The crosser must call which delivery they intend before striking it — "whip" or "drive" — so target players can react accordingly and the coach can judge technique against intention.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A distinctly different technique for each delivery type — genuine curl on the whip, genuine pace and a flatter trajectory on the drive.
Tactical	Reading the box to choose the right delivery — a packed near post favours a whip to the back, a stretched defence favours a fast, driven ball across the face of goal.
Physical	A full, committed strike on both delivery types — a tentative half-strike serves neither picture well.
Psychological	Confidence to call the delivery and commit to it, rather than hedging between the two techniques mid-strike.
Communication & leadership	An early, clear call of "whip" or "drive" that gives target players real information to move on.

Tactical roles: **Crosser** — reads the box and delivers the called technique with full commitment. **Target players** — adjust their movement and timing to the specific delivery type called.

Decision-making triggers: a crowded near post and space at the back favours a whipped ball; a stretched, uncertain defensive line favours a fast, driven ball across the danger area.

Communication language used: *Whip* and *Drive* — the crosser's call before every delivery.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What made a whipped ball the better choice on some deliveries, and a driven ball better on others?
2. What changed about your technique between the two delivery types?
3. As a target player, how did the call change your movement before the ball was even struck?

Progressions:

1. Add a passive defender in the box, giving the crosser a real picture to read rather than an open target.
2. Remove the advance call once both techniques are established, requiring target players to read the delivery in flight instead.

Regressions:

1. Return to Practice 1's unopposed striking if either technique is breaking down under the added decision-making.
2. Reduce to one delivery type at a time until each is technically solid before combining them.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The whipped and driven deliveries look technically identical	The crosser hasn't yet separated the two techniques in their own execution	Both delivery types arrive with similar pace and flight regardless of the call	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: isolate each technique again at walking pace, exaggerating the difference	Resume
The crosser calls one delivery but strikes the other	A gap between the decision and the technical execution	Target players react to the call and are wrong-footed by the actual ball	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: slow down and rehearse committing to the called technique	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for technically indistinct deliveries and for a mismatch between the call and the strike.

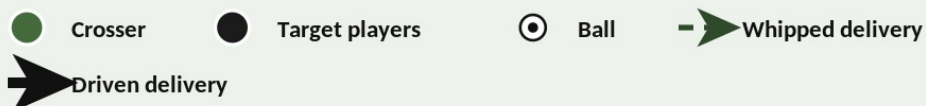
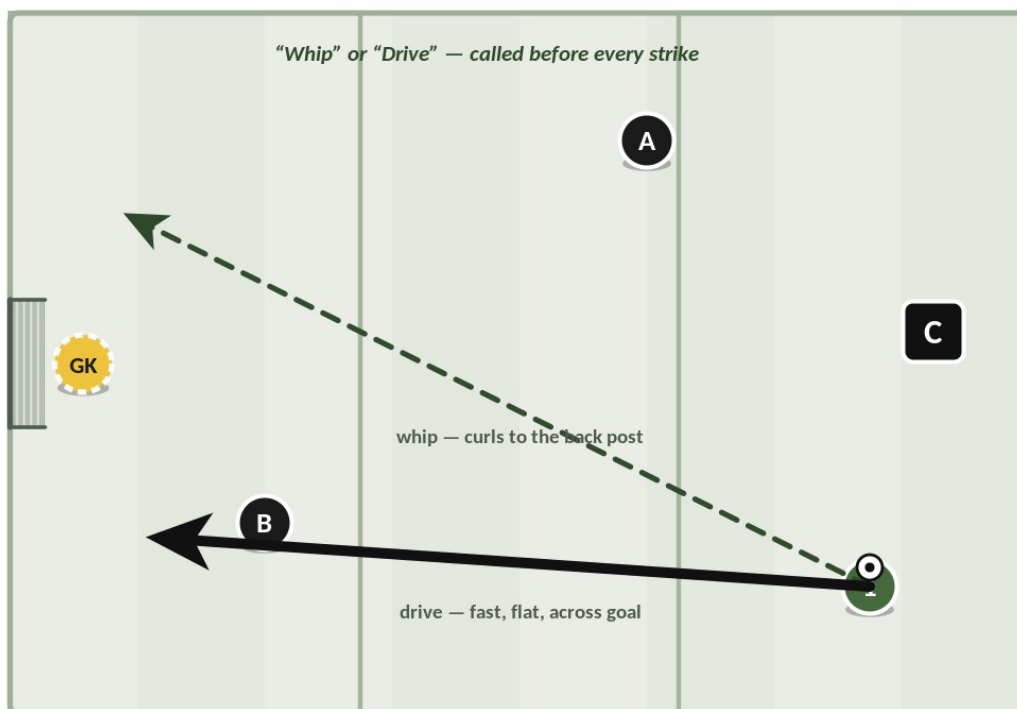
Success indicators:

- The two delivery types are clearly, technically distinct from each other.
- The crosser's choice of delivery reflects the actual picture in the box.
- Target players can read and react to the call before the ball arrives.

Coach's eye: a crosser who can only really produce one type of ball has half a toolkit — protect the time spent building the second technique properly, even if it develops more slowly than the first.

TC3.2 WHIP OR DRIVE — Delivery Choice

Wide channel into the box • two techniques, one judgement call • 14 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Crossing (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 3 — TIME THE RUN (NEAR AND FAR POST)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds the attacking run that actually finishes a cross — timing an arrival at the near post or far post to sync exactly with the ball's flight, rather than arriving too early or too late to convert a good delivery into a chance.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full box with a wide delivery channel
- **Players:** crosser plus 2 target runners (near post and far post) and 1-2 passive or semi-active defenders
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** in goal, reading both the delivery and the timed runs
- **Team sizes:** small group in the box against light or no defensive pressure initially
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** cones marking each runner's starting position, out of the box
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at the delivery position after each cross
- **Restart:** next delivery begins as soon as the box is clear
- **Coach position:** able to see the delivery, both runners' timing, and the point of contact
- **Rotation method:** crosser and runners rotate every 4-5 deliveries
- **Direction of play:** always into the same box

Practice walkthrough: The crosser delivers from a wide position while two runners — one starting deep for a near-post run, one starting wide for a far-post arrival — time their movement so that whichever run matches the delivery arrives to meet the ball at exactly the right moment, not a stride early or late. The crosser and runners are encouraged to develop an understanding of each other's timing across repetitions, exactly as a settled front line would in matches.

Rules: Runners must start outside the box and time their run from a genuine, delayed trigger — no early starts that beat the timing challenge rather than solving it.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A clean connection at the point of arrival, whether that's a near-post flick or a far-post finish.
Tactical	Reading which run — near or far — actually matches the delivery being struck, and committing to the right one.
Physical	A genuinely timed sprint, not a jog that happens to arrive — the run itself must be explosive to beat defensive recovery.
Psychological	Trust between crosser and runner — the runner commits to the run before being certain the delivery will match it.
Communication & leadership	A short call between crosser and runner when the timing isn't quite matching, so it can be corrected across repetitions.

Tactical roles: **Crosser** — delivers with enough consistency that runners can learn to time against it. **Near-post runner** — arrives early and sharp for a flicked or driven near-post ball. **Far-post runner** — arrives late and controlled for a whipped or floated ball to the back.

Decision-making triggers: a driven, flatter delivery favours the near-post run arriving first; a whipped, curling delivery toward the back favours the far-post run.

Communication language used: *Near!* and *Far!* — either player can call which run the delivery favours, refining the shared understanding over repetitions.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What told you which run to make before the ball was even delivered?
2. What happened on the repetitions where your timing was off — too early or too late?
3. How did the crosser and runner's understanding of each other change across the repetitions?

Progressions:

1. Add a live, competing defender for each runner, testing whether the timing holds under real pressure.
2. Remove the advance knowledge of delivery type, requiring runners to read the crosser's body shape and technique in real time.

Regressions:

1. Slow the delivery and allow runners extra time to find their timing before adding full pace.
2. Reduce to one runner at a time until each run type is individually solid.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The runner arrives before the ball, forced to slow down or wait in the box	Anticipation outrunning the actual delivery timing	The runner is stationary or backtracking as the cross arrives	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse the delayed trigger for starting the run	Resume
The runner arrives after the ball has already passed through the danger area	A delayed or hesitant start to the run	The cross arrives and passes through the box before the runner is in position	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: sharpen the trigger and the explosiveness of the first few steps	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for runs that arrive too early and for runs that arrive too late.

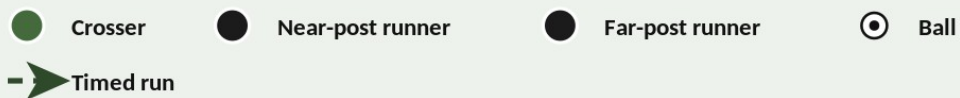
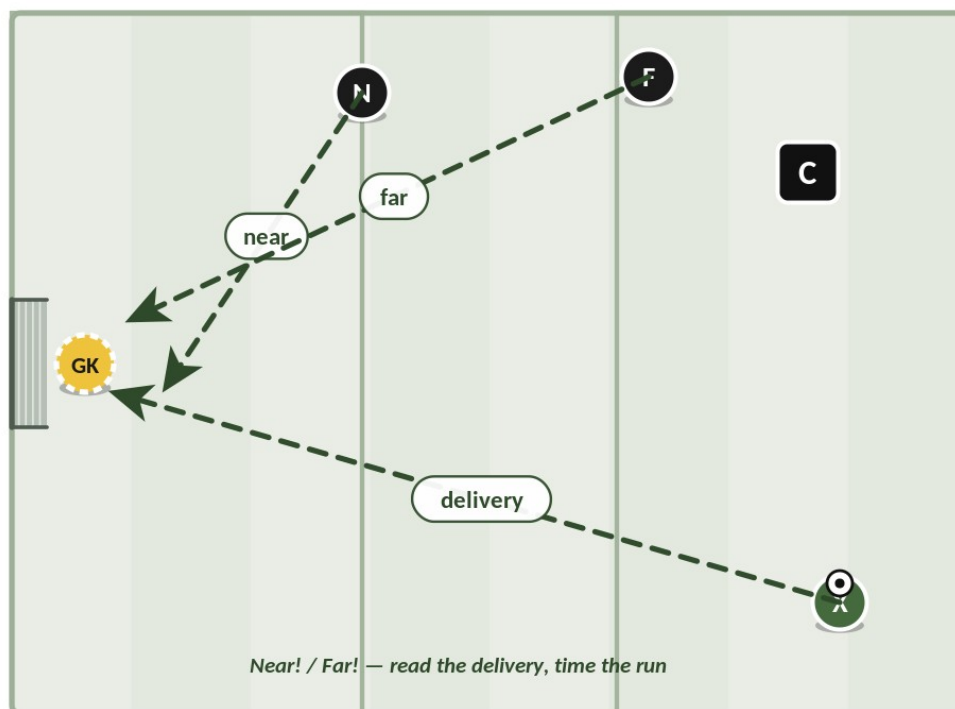
Success indicators:

- Runners consistently arrive to meet the ball at the right moment, not before or after.
- The correct run — near or far — is chosen to match each delivery type.
- Crosser and runners visibly develop a shared understanding of each other's timing across repetitions.

Coach's eye: a technically perfect cross with no one arriving to meet it is wasted — this practice is where the crossing technique from Practice 2 actually becomes a goalscoring threat.

TC3.3 TIME THE RUN — Near and Far Post

Full box • runs timed to meet the delivery, not beat it • 14 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Crossing (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 4 — CROSS AND FINISH (CLOSING LIVE GAME)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session with a live small-sided game that specifically rewards a cross-and-finish combination, bringing delivery technique and run timing together under real, unscripted pressure with a genuine incentive attached.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 30 m working area including a full box
- **Players:** two teams of 6–7 with goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** each keeper defends their own goal, live practice for their Goalkeeping session's Claim It work
- **Team sizes:** 6v6 or 7v7 with goalkeepers
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** none beyond standard small-sided game markers
- **Starting positions:** open play
- **Ball supply:** a supply near the wide areas to remove delay in restarting
- **Restart:** standard small-sided game rules
- **Coach position:** mobile, observing wide delivery and box movement as they arise
- **Rotation method:** roles rotate naturally through open play
- **Direction of play:** both directions, standard small-sided game rules otherwise

Practice walkthrough: A small conditioned game runs normally, with any goal scored directly from a cross — a delivery from a wide area met first-time or with a controlling touch inside the box — worth double, directly rewarding the specific combination this session has built.

Rules: Standard small-sided game rules, plus goals scored directly from a wide delivery count double.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Delivery technique and finishing touch both hold up under live, unscripted conditions.
Tactical	Genuine recognition of when a wide delivery is the right option, rather than forcing a cross when a central option was better.
Physical	Runners sustain explosive, well-timed movement into the box across a longer, more demanding game context.
Psychological	Confidence to commit to a run into the box without certainty the cross is coming.
Communication & leadership	Wide players and box runners communicating in the moment, exactly as built in Practice 3.

Tactical roles: the full set of roles from Practices 2 and 3, now applied inside a live, unpredictable game with a genuine scoring incentive attached.

Decision-making triggers: the same delivery and timing triggers from Practices 2 and 3, now tested under live conditions and the pull of the doubled-goal incentive.

Communication language used: *Whip, Drive, Near!, Far!* — the full shared language from tonight, now used together under match conditions.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Did the bonus for scoring from a cross change decision-making for better or worse tonight?
2. What was the best cross-and-finish combination you saw or were part of — what made it work?
3. What's one thing from tonight you'd want to see more of in a real match?

Progressions:

1. Restrict central shooting for a short period, forcing the team to find width and deliveries.
2. Add a specific bonus for a far-post finish, encouraging the harder of the two delivery-and-run combinations.

Regressions:

1. Remove the doubled-goal incentive temporarily if it's distorting decision-making rather than sharpening it.
2. Widen the pitch further if genuine wide areas aren't being found naturally.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players force crosses from deep, poor-quality positions to chase the bonus	The incentive outweighing sound decision-making about delivery quality	Crosses struck from positions or angles that were never likely to succeed	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "was that really a crossing position?"	Resume
Runners stop making box runs once a cross doesn't arrive a few times in a row	Discouragement after early unrewarded effort	Box runners drifting or standing still as play develops wide	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	A direct reminder that the run matters regardless of whether this specific cross arrives	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: reflective questioning for forced, poor-quality crosses; a direct reminder for runners who stop making the effort.

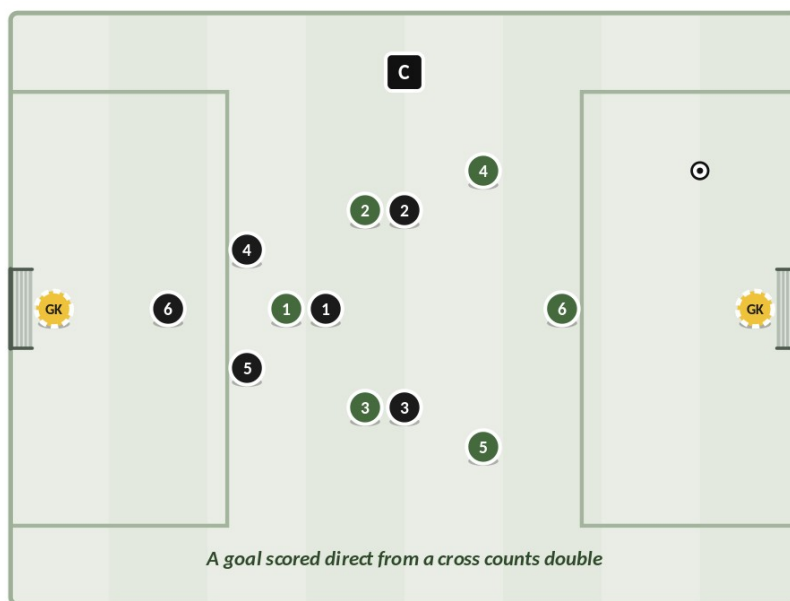
Success indicators:

- Crosses are attempted from positions and angles that genuinely favour them.
- Box runners consistently make the effort to arrive, regardless of whether any individual cross arrives.
- At least some goals in the game come directly from the cross-and-finish combination this session has built.

Coach's eye: the doubled-goal incentive is there to spotlight the combination, not to distort the game — watch for genuine improvement in delivery and timing, not just a chase for the bonus.

TC3.4 CROSS AND FINISH — Closing Live Game

40 x 30 m • 6v6 or 7v7 with keepers • a goal scored direct from a cross counts double • 14 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Crossing (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Individual Technical Session



Finishing

Tags: `individual-technical` `standalone` `finishing` `shooting`

Kicker: Week 33 asks where a player's finishing breaks down. It was never built to teach the technique in the first place — that assumption has to come from somewhere. This is where.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Finishing — Placement, Power and Composure Under Pressure
Short summary	Four stages building finishing technique from the ground up: unopposed striking technique, the choice between placement and power depending on angle and distance, finishing under real time and physical pressure, and a closing live game that rewards clean, clinical finishing directly. This is the progressive technical building block the programme has been missing — Week 33's diagnostic session assumes it, and now it exists.
Total duration	50 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers should attend — this is also genuine live practice for their own Goalkeeping session's Set and Save work.
Area layout	An unopposed striking area for Practice 1, a full box working area for Practices 2–4.
Equipment	A generous supply of balls, cones marking striking positions and angles.
Contingency — lower attendance	Practices 2–3 work fine with a smaller rotating group and a single goalkeeper; Practice 4's closing game scales down to a smaller grid rather than losing the finishing emphasis.

PRACTICE 1 — CLEAN CONTACT (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Unopposed striking repetition — no goalkeeper, no pressure, no decision-making. Purely grooming clean technical contact before either placement or power is added.

Organisation: Each player has a ball and an empty target (a goal, a wall, or a marked zone), working individually with space between them.

Walkthrough: Players strike a series of shots at a consistent target, focusing entirely on a clean, controlled contact through the middle of the ball, alternating between the instep and the side of the foot.

Rules: No goalkeeper opposition yet — this is technique only, at a pace each player controls.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* a locked ankle and a strike through the ball's centre for a driven finish, or the side of the foot for a placed one.
- *Technical:* a settling first touch before the strike where one is needed — most poor finishes start with a poor first touch, not a poor strike.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — PLACE OR POWER (TECHNIQUE CHOICE)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds the judgement between placing a finish precisely and driving it with power, based on angle, distance, and the picture the goalkeeper presents — the decision that separates a clinical finisher from one who only has one gear.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full box with marked striking positions at varying angles and distances
- **Players:** rotating group of finishers, one goalkeeper
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** live and reacting throughout
- **Team sizes:** individual work, one finisher at a time
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** cones marking 4–5 striking positions across different angles and distances
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** a supply at each marked position
- **Restart:** next finisher steps up immediately
- **Coach position:** able to see the finisher's technique and the goalkeeper's position at the moment of the strike
- **Rotation method:** each finisher takes a shot from every marked position before rotating out
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: Finishers work through a series of marked positions — some close and central, some wide and tight-angled, some further out with more time — and choose between a placed finish into a corner or a powerful strike through the goalkeeper, based on what the position and the goalkeeper's set-up actually offer. The coach asks for the decision to be named before or immediately after each strike.

Rules: Each finisher must be able to explain why they chose placement or power on that specific attempt — an unconsidered default to one or the other is corrected even if the shot succeeds.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Clean execution of both techniques — genuine accuracy on placed finishes, genuine pace on powerful ones.
Tactical	A considered choice between placement and power based on the actual angle, distance, and goalkeeper position, not habit.
Physical	A balanced, controlled approach and strike regardless of which technique is chosen.
Psychological	Full commitment to the chosen technique — a finish that tries to do both often does neither well.
Communication & leadership	None required — this is deliberately isolated individual technical work.

Tactical roles: **Finisher** — reads the position and the goalkeeper, and commits fully to the chosen technique. **Goalkeeper** — provides a genuine, live picture to read and react to.

Decision-making triggers: a tight angle or a goalkeeper well-set favours placement into the far corner; a central position with the goalkeeper narrowing the angle favours power through or across them.

Communication language used: none specific — the emphasis is on the finisher's own decision-making process, verbalised to the coach.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What made you choose placement over power on that attempt, or the other way round?

2. What did the goalkeeper's position tell you before you struck the ball?
3. Was there a shot where, looking back, the other technique would have worked better?

Progressions:

1. Reduce the time available before each strike, sharpening the speed of the decision.
2. Add a passive defender providing a partial block, forcing a finish around or through traffic.

Regressions:

1. Remove the goalkeeper again briefly if either technique is breaking down under live opposition.
2. Fix the technique choice in advance (all placement, then all power) until each is individually solid before combining them.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The finisher defaults to the same technique regardless of the position or picture	Comfort with one technique over genuine in-the-moment reading	The same finish type used from clearly different angles and distances	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: ask the finisher to name what the position actually offered	Resume
The finish tries to combine both power and placement and achieves neither	Indecision resolved too late, mid-strike	A weak, central shot that was neither placed accurately nor struck with real pace	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse committing to one technique before the strike begins	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for a habitual, unconsidered technique choice and for an indecisive, half-committed strike.

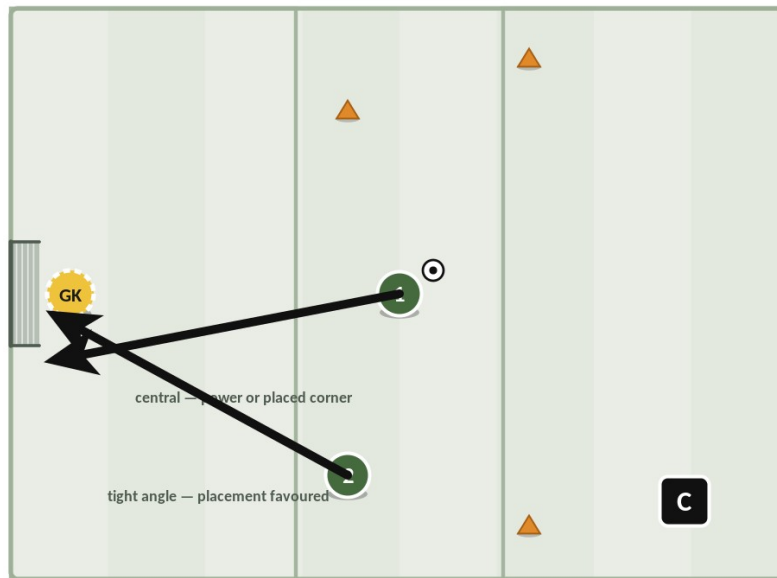
Success indicators:

- Technique choice visibly varies according to the actual position and picture, not habit.
- Both placement and power are executed with genuine technical quality when chosen.
- Finishers can explain their own decision-making after each attempt.

Coach's eye: a player who is technically excellent at placed finishing but never chooses power when it's the better option has half a toolkit — watch for the decision as closely as the strike itself.

TC4.2 PLACE OR POWER — Technique Choice

Box with marked striking positions · read the angle and distance, choose the technique · 14 minutes



● Finisher (rotating positions) ● Ball ➔ Finish on goal ▲ Marked striking position

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PRACTICE 3 — UNDER THE GUN (FINISHING UNDER PRESSURE)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Builds composure and technical reliability on first-time and half-chance finishes under genuine time and physical pressure — the realistic version of a finishing opportunity, which rarely arrives clean and unhurried.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full box
- **Players:** rotating group of finishers, 1–2 chasing defenders, a service player, one goalkeeper
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** live and reacting throughout
- **Team sizes:** finisher against a recovering defender, with a service player feeding the chance
- **Neutrals:** the service player feeds crosses, cutbacks, or knock-downs
- **Equipment:** a supply of balls at the service position
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at the service position after each attempt
- **Restart:** next service begins as soon as the previous attempt resolves
- **Coach position:** able to see the service, the finisher's technique, and the defender's pressure
- **Rotation method:** finisher, defender, and service player rotate every 4–5 attempts
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: A service player delivers a genuine half-chance — a low cross, a cutback, a knock-down — while a defender applies real, chasing pressure and the finisher must strike first-time or with minimal touches under that pressure. The finisher is coached to simplify their technique under pressure rather than trying to force the more elaborate finish they might attempt with time and space.

Rules: The finisher has a maximum of two touches, including the finishing strike itself, reflecting the genuine time pressure of a real half-chance.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A simplified, reliable technique under pressure — a clean connection matters more than power or elaborate placement here.
Tactical	Recognising a half-chance for what it is and adjusting technique accordingly, rather than forcing the Practice 2 approach into a situation that doesn't allow for it.
Physical	Balance and body control maintained despite genuine defensive pressure and limited time.
Psychological	Composure under real physical and time pressure — the core skill this practice exists to build.
Communication & leadership	A clear call from the finisher for service timing, where the practice allows for it.

Tactical roles: **Finisher** — simplifies technique and commits under real pressure. **Defender** — applies genuine, realistic chasing pressure. **Service player** — delivers a realistic half-chance, not an easy set-up.

Decision-making triggers: limited time and defensive pressure is the trigger to simplify — a clean, first-time strike beats an elaborate attempt at placement in this picture almost every time.

Communication language used: none specific — the finisher may call for the service, but the practice is otherwise deliberately quiet, matching a real match moment.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What changed about your technique when you had less time and real pressure behind you?
2. What's the risk of trying to place a finish precisely in this kind of moment?

3. What did the defender's pressure actually take away from you, and how did you adjust?

Progressions:

1. Reduce the finisher's touches to one, sharpening the technical simplification further.
2. Add a second defender, increasing the realism and pressure of the chance.

Regressions:

1. Allow an extra touch while the technique under pressure is still being learned.
2. Reduce the defender's pressure intensity temporarily if technique is breaking down completely.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The finisher tries an elaborate, placed finish that the time and pressure don't allow for	Habit from Practice 2 applied to a situation that doesn't suit it	A rushed, poorly struck attempt at precision that a simpler strike would have beaten	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse the simplified technique this specific picture calls for	Resume
The finisher rushes the touch before the strike, losing control entirely	Panic under the combined time and physical pressure	A heavy touch that takes the ball away from the finisher before any strike is possible	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: slow the service pace temporarily and rebuild composure	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for over-elaborate technique under pressure and for a panicked, heavy touch.

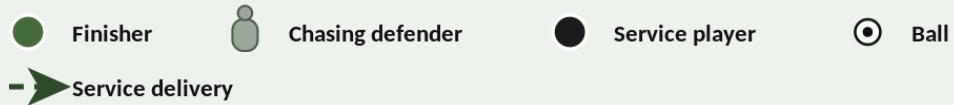
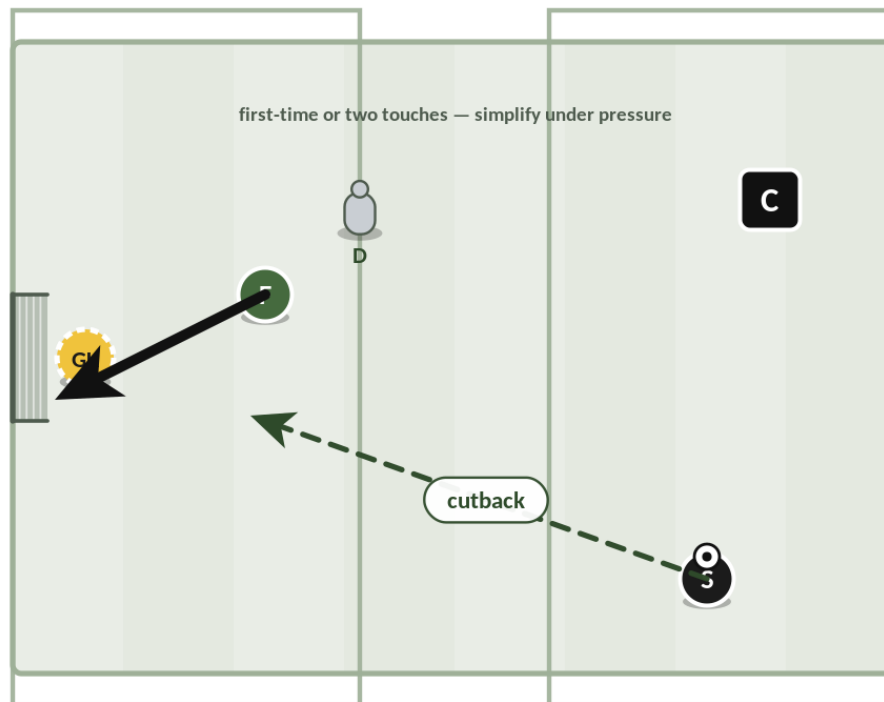
Success indicators:

- Technique visibly simplifies under pressure compared with Practice 2's more considered approach.
- The two-touch limit is met consistently without panic.
- Composure holds even when an attempt doesn't result in a goal.

Coach's eye: the goal is not perfection here — it's a finisher who stays calm and technically reliable when a chance arrives messily, because that's how most real chances actually arrive.

TC4.3 UNDER THE GUN — Finishing Under Pressure

Box • service, defender pressure, two touches max • 14 minutes



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PRACTICE 4 — CLINICAL (CLOSING LIVE GAME)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session with a live small-sided game that specifically rewards clean, clinical finishing, bringing technique choice and composure under pressure together under real, unscripted match conditions.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 30 m working area including a full box
- **Players:** two teams of 6–7 with goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** each keeper defends their own goal, live practice for their Goalkeeping session's Set and Save work
- **Team sizes:** 6v6 or 7v7 with goalkeepers
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** none beyond standard small-sided game markers
- **Starting positions:** open play
- **Ball supply:** a supply near the halfway line for quick restarts
- **Restart:** standard small-sided game rules
- **Coach position:** mobile, observing finishing decisions and technique as they arise
- **Rotation method:** roles rotate naturally through open play
- **Direction of play:** both directions, standard small-sided game rules otherwise

Practice walkthrough: A small conditioned game runs normally, with any goal scored with a first-time finish or inside two touches worth double, directly rewarding the clean, decisive finishing this session has built, without discouraging composed, well-placed finishes taken with more time.

Rules: Standard small-sided game rules, plus goals scored first-time or within two touches count double.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Both the technique choice from Practice 2 and the composure under pressure from Practice 3 hold up under live, unscripted conditions.
Tactical	Genuine recognition of the type of chance presented, and a technique response that matches it.
Physical	Sustained sharpness in the box across a longer, more demanding game context.
Psychological	Full composure in a live, scored game, not just in isolated practice repetitions.
Communication & leadership	Support play and service into the box that creates the chances this session rewards.

Tactical roles: the full set of roles from Practices 2 and 3, now applied inside a live, unpredictable game with a genuine scoring incentive attached.

Decision-making triggers: the same triggers from Practices 2 and 3, now tested under live conditions and the pull of the doubled-goal incentive.

Communication language used: none specific — the incentive structure itself provides the emphasis.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Did the bonus for a quick finish change your decision-making tonight, for better or worse?
2. What was the best finish you saw or were part of tonight, and what made it work?
3. What's one thing from tonight's session you want to take into a match?

Progressions:

1. Increase the bonus value further to sharpen the incentive.
2. Add a specific bonus for a finish taken under genuine defensive pressure, rewarding Practice 3's specific skill directly.

Regressions:

1. Remove the doubled-goal incentive temporarily if it's distorting decision-making rather than sharpening it.
2. Reduce the game intensity if finishing technique is breaking down badly under full pressure.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players rush a finish purely to chase the two-touch bonus, when more time was actually available	The incentive outweighing sound decision-making about the picture in front of them	A rushed, poor finish attempted when a settled touch and placed effort were clearly on	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "did you actually need to rush that one?"	Resume
Composed, well-placed finishes with more time become less common as players chase the bonus	Over-correction toward the incentivised behaviour	A drop-off in Practice 2-style considered finishing compared with earlier in the session	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	A reminder that a good finish with time is just as valuable as a quick one	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: reflective questioning for unnecessarily rushed finishes; a direct reminder that composed finishing still has full value.

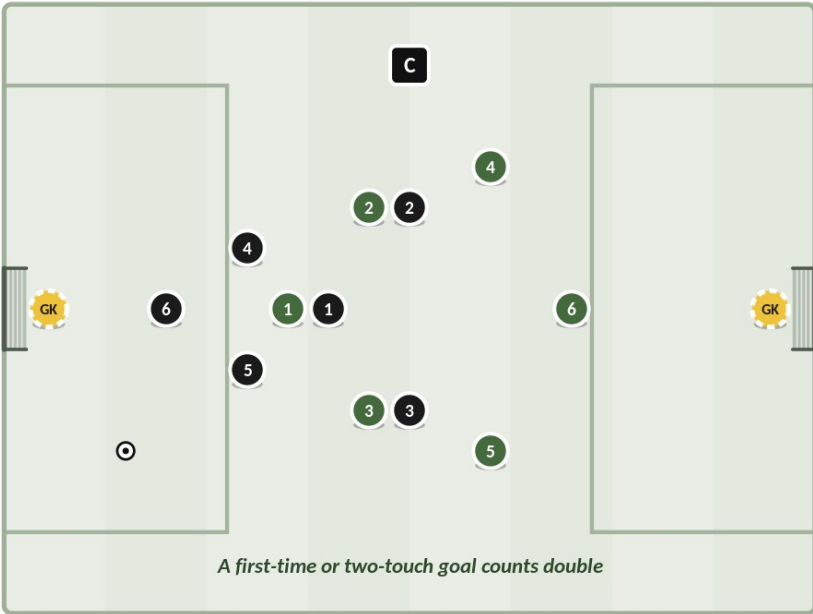
Success indicators:

- Technique choice continues to reflect the actual picture, not just the incentive.
- Composure under pressure from Practice 3 is visible in the live game.
- Genuine goalscoring quality — from both quick and composed finishes — improves visibly over the session.

Coach's eye: the bonus is there to spotlight decisive finishing, not to replace good judgement — watch for the balance between the two holding up as the game goes on.

TC4.4 CLINICAL — Closing Live Game

40 x 30 m • 6v6 or 7v7 with keepers • a first-time or two-touch goal counts double • 14 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Finishing (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Individual Technical Session



Goalkeeping

Tags: `individual-technical` `standalone` `goalkeeper`

Kicker: The goalkeeper appears in every single session this club runs — always as a distribution outlet, splitting the back line, starting the attack. Not one of those sessions ever coaches the goalkeeper. This one does.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Goalkeeping — Shot-Stopping, Handling and Commanding the Box
Short summary	Four stages building the technical foundation no team session can reach: unopposed handling technique, shot-stopping footwork and technique, commanding the box on crosses, and a closing live scenario that puts all three together under real pressure. This is specialist technical work — the goalkeeper's equivalent of every outfield technical session the programme has never quite had room for either.
Total duration	52 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Central to the entire session — ideally both club goalkeepers attend and work through every practice.
Area layout	Goal and penalty-area working space throughout, widening into a fuller area for Practice 3's crosses.
Equipment	A generous supply of balls, cones, a crossing target zone marker.
Contingency — only one goalkeeper attends	Shorten the rep count in each practice to protect their legs across the full session, or split time with an outfield player learning the fundamentals for the second half of each practice.

PRACTICE 1 — HANDS FIRST (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Unopposed handling repetition — no shots, no pressure, no decision-making. Purely grooving clean catching technique and basic footwork before either is tested live.

Organisation: Each goalkeeper works with a serving partner throwing or rolling balls at a gentle, predictable pace from short range.

Walkthrough: The server throws or rolls the ball at a range of heights — chest, head, low to the side — and the goalkeeper catches with a consistent "W" hand shape, absorbing the ball into the body rather than stabbing at it, then returns it and resets.

Rules: No shots — this is catching technique only, at a pace the goalkeeper fully controls.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* a consistent "W" hand shape behind the ball on every catch, absorbing it into the chest rather than catching with hands alone.
- *Psychological:* treating every repetition with full focus, even at walking pace — sloppy habits here become sloppy habits under pressure.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — SET AND SAVE (SHOT-STOPPING)

Duration: 15 minutes • **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds the core shot-stopping technique — set position, footwork into the shot, and diving technique — against strikes of increasing pace and variety, the technical foundation every save depends on.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full goal and penalty-area working space
- **Players:** goalkeeper, a rotation of 3–4 outfield shooters
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** the entire practice is built around them
- **Team sizes:** one goalkeeper working through a queue of shooters
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** a supply of balls at a marked shooting spot
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at the shooting spot after each attempt
- **Restart:** next shooter steps up immediately
- **Coach position:** side-on to the goal, able to see the goalkeeper's set position and footwork on every shot
- **Rotation method:** each shooter takes 5 shots before rotating out; if two goalkeepers attend, they alternate in goal every 10 shots
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: Shooters take turns striking from a marked spot just outside the box, starting with straightforward, central shots and progressing to shots low to either side, then higher into the corners. The goalkeeper resets to a balanced set position before every strike, moves their feet to get their body behind the ball where possible, and uses correct diving technique — leading with the near hand, collapsing rather than jumping — when a save requires it.

Rules: Shooters call out roughly where they intend to place the shot before the first few repetitions, so the goalkeeper can focus purely on technique before decision-making is added; this is removed once technique is established.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A balanced, ready set position before every shot, with correct diving technique — leading hand, collapsing the body — when the ball is out of standing reach.
Tactical	Reading the shooter's body shape and approach for an early cue to likely direction, without committing too early.
Physical	Explosive, controlled footwork to close the distance to the ball rather than a standing, flat-footed save attempt.
Psychological	Recovering instantly after a goal is conceded — the next shot demands exactly the same focus as the first.
Communication & leadership	A clear, calm call to any nearby defender or rebound-covering player about where a parried ball might fall.

Tactical roles: Goalkeeper — resets to a balanced position and reacts to every shot with full technical commitment.

Shooters — provide genuine, varied strikes at increasing difficulty, not just easy service.

Decision-making triggers: a shot standing height and central is a routine, standing save; anything low, wide, or powerful is the trigger to move the feet and commit to a dive.

Communication language used: *Set* (the goalkeeper's own cue to themselves as they reset position), *Away* (called to defenders when a save is parried into a dangerous area).

Guided discovery questions:

1. What did your set position feel like on the shots you saved cleanly, compared with the ones you didn't?
2. What's the difference between diving and collapsing, and why does it matter?
3. What told you which way to move before the shot was even struck?

Progressions:

1. Reduce the shooter's distance from goal, cutting the goalkeeper's reaction time.
2. Add a rebound rule — any parried save must be dealt with again immediately by a second shooter arriving live.

Regressions:

1. Increase the shooter's distance from goal, giving more reaction time while technique is still being grooved.
2. Return to Practice 1's slower, thrown service if diving technique is breaking down under live shooting.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The goalkeeper stands upright and reaches rather than moving their feet to get behind the ball	Comfort with a standing save rather than committing to footwork	Saves made one-handed or off-balance on shots that were reachable with better positioning	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse the footwork pattern in isolation, then reintroduce the shot	Resume
The goalkeeper jumps rather than collapses on low, wide shots	Instinct to gain height rather than cover ground along the floor	The goalkeeper leaves the ground upward on a shot that needed lateral coverage instead	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: demonstrate the collapsing motion at walking pace	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for flat-footed reaching and for jumping instead of collapsing on low shots.

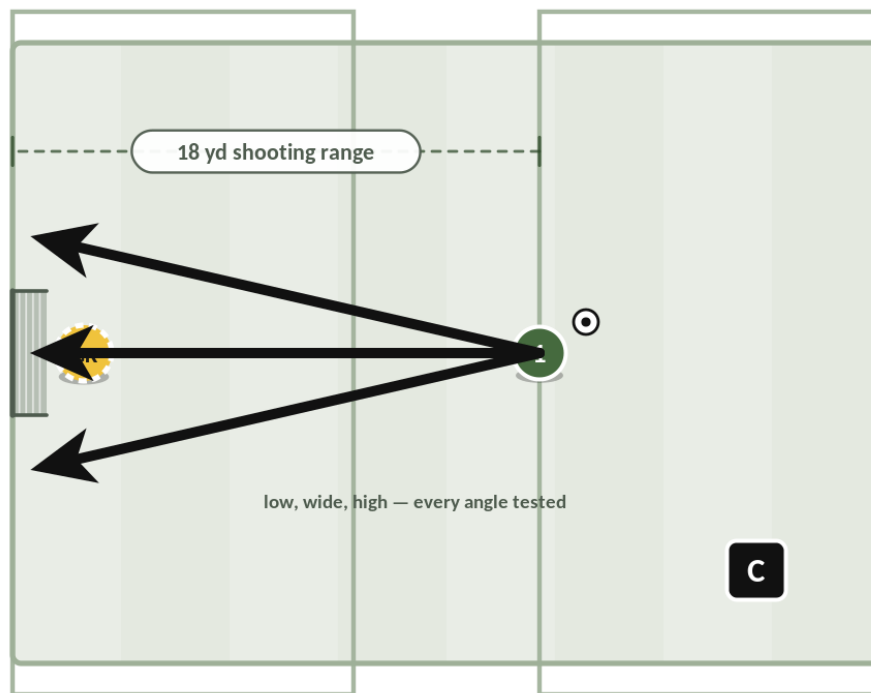
Success indicators:

- A consistent, balanced set position before every single shot.
- Footwork visibly closes distance to the ball before any dive is attempted.
- Diving technique leads with the correct hand and collapses rather than jumps on low shots.

Coach's eye: technique holds up more easily on the first shot of the practice than the twentieth — watch for fatigue-driven shortcuts creeping in as the rep count climbs, and intervene before they become the habit.

TC1.2 SET AND SAVE — Shot-Stopping Technique

Goal and box • footwork and diving technique against varied strikes • 15 minutes



● Shooters (rotating) ● Ball ➔ Strike on goal ▲ Shooting spot

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PRACTICE 3 — CLAIM IT (COMMANDING THE BOX)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds the goalkeeper's ability to read, decide on, and claim crosses into the box — commanding their area with confidence and clear communication, rather than being a passenger while the ball is delivered around them.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full box plus a wide delivery area either side
- **Players:** goalkeeper, 2 crossers (one each side), 3–4 attackers and defenders contesting the box
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** the entire practice is built around their decision-making and claiming technique
- **Team sizes:** small mixed group contesting crosses, goalkeeper working continuously
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** a supply of balls at each crossing position
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at the crossing position after each delivery
- **Restart:** next cross delivered as soon as the box is clear
- **Coach position:** central, able to see the goalkeeper's decision-making and the resulting contest
- **Rotation method:** crossers and box players rotate every 4–5 deliveries; two goalkeepers alternate every 8–10 deliveries
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: Crosses are delivered from both sides at varying heights, pace, and depth into the box, with a small group of attackers and defenders contesting each one. The goalkeeper reads each cross early and decides — come and claim it, come and punch it clear, or stay on the line and let the defence deal with it — communicating that decision loudly and early enough for their own defenders to react to it.

Rules: Once the goalkeeper calls for the ball, no defender may challenge for it — the call must be committed to and backed up by a clean, confident claim.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A confident, two-handed claim at the highest comfortable point, or a firm, two-fisted punch when a claim isn't on.
Tactical	Genuine judgement between coming for the ball and staying — a goalkeeper who comes for everything is as much a liability as one who comes for nothing.
Physical	Strong, decisive take-off through traffic, unafraid of physical contact inside a crowded box.
Psychological	Full commitment once the call is made — a goalkeeper who calls for it and then hesitates is the most dangerous version of this decision.
Communication & leadership	A loud, early, unmistakable call that the whole box can hear and react to in time.

Tactical roles: **Goalkeeper** — reads, decides, and commits with full conviction. **Crossers** — deliver genuine variety in height, pace, and depth. **Box players** — contest realistically without deliberately targeting the goalkeeper unfairly.

Decision-making triggers: a cross the goalkeeper can reach ahead of the nearest attacker, with a clear path, is a claim; heavy traffic or a cross behind the goalkeeper's best reach is a stay-and-cover decision instead.

Communication language used: *Keeper's!* (the claim call), *Away!* (the decision to punch clear rather than catch), *Line!* (the call confirming the goalkeeper is staying and the defence must deal with it).

Guided discovery questions:

1. What made a cross a "come" decision versus a "stay" decision for you?

2. What happened on the cross where you hesitated after calling for it — what would you do differently?
3. How early does the call need to be made for the defence to actually benefit from it?

Progressions:

1. Add a second, near-simultaneous cross from the opposite side to sharpen decision speed.
2. Increase the number of contesting attackers to test claiming confidence under greater traffic.

Regressions:

1. Reduce to one crosser and fewer contesting players while the decision-making habit is being built.
2. Slow the delivery pace to give more decision time before adding full-pace crosses.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The goalkeeper calls for the ball and then hesitates or aborts the claim	Doubt creeping in after committing, often from fear of the physical contact involved	A late flap or a dropped claim after a confident-sounding call	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse full commitment through the claim at reduced pace	Resume
The goalkeeper stays on the line for crosses that were genuinely claimable	Caution outweighing the judgement being trained here	A cross drops in the six-yard box uncontested by the goalkeeper when a claim was clearly on	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: replay the cross and name what made it claimable	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for hesitation after a claim call and for over-cautious staying on the line.

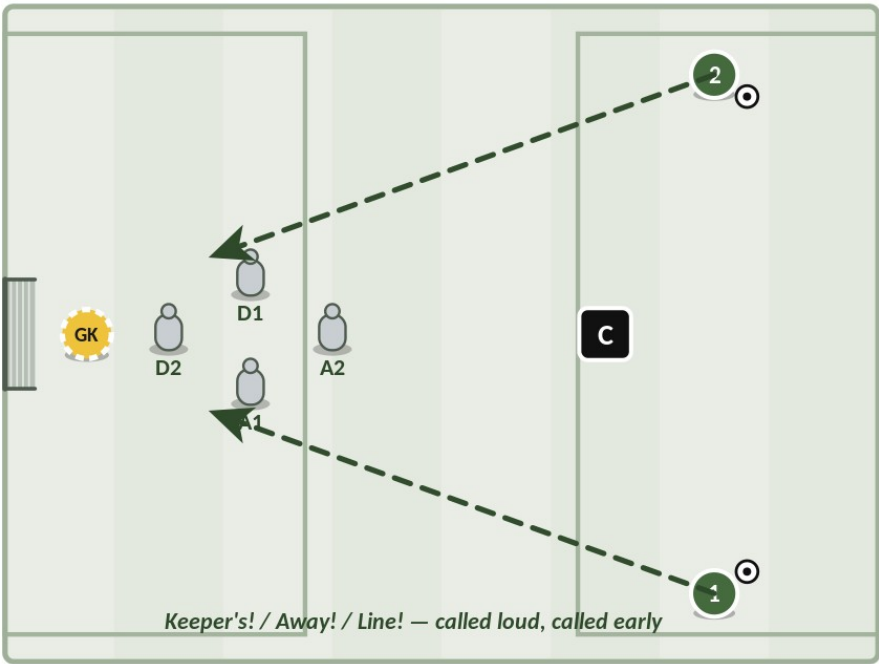
Success indicators:

- Every claim decision is communicated loudly and early enough for the defence to react.
- Claims are committed to fully, with no late hesitation.
- The balance of come-and-claim versus stay-and-cover decisions reflects the actual picture, not a fixed habit either way.

Coach's eye: the technique matters, but the real skill this practice trains is the decision itself — a goalkeeper with perfect technique who reads the situation wrong is still a liability.

TC1.3 CLAIM IT — Commanding the Box

Crosses from both sides • read, decide, communicate • 15 minutes



● Crossers ● Box contest (attack + defence) ● Ball ➡ Cross delivery

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PRACTICE 4 — THE KEEPER'S TEST (CLOSING LIVE SCENARIO)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session with a live, realistic scenario combining shot-stopping, handling, and commanding the box all at once — the true test of whether tonight's technical work holds up under match-like, unpredictable conditions.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full box and surrounding attacking-third area
- **Players:** goalkeeper(s), a rotating group of 6–8 outfield players providing shots, crosses, and phases of play
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** continuously tested throughout, with both keepers rotating through if two attend
- **Team sizes:** small group of attackers working phases against the goalkeeper and any available defenders
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** a full supply of balls positioned around the working area
- **Starting positions:** open, phase-based play building toward goal from varied situations
- **Ball supply:** continuous, restarted immediately after each phase
- **Restart:** a new phase begins immediately after each shot, save, or claim is resolved
- **Coach position:** mobile, observing the goalkeeper's decision-making across every phase type
- **Rotation method:** outfield players rotate roles continuously; goalkeepers alternate every 8–10 phases
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: A continuous sequence of unpredictable attacking phases — a shot from distance, a cross into the box, a one-on-one breakaway, a deflected effort — tests the goalkeeper across every technical element covered tonight, with no advance warning of what's coming next. The goalkeeper must read each situation as it develops and apply the correct technique and decision without a reset between phases.

Rules: Phases run continuously with minimal stoppage, exactly as a real match would present them — no advance signal of what type of phase is coming next.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	All three technical elements — shot-stopping, handling, claiming — hold up under unpredictable, continuous pressure.
Tactical	Correct decision-making across every phase type, applied instantly without a chance to reset first.
Physical	Sustained sharpness and explosiveness across a longer, continuous sequence rather than isolated reps.
Psychological	Full recovery and reset between phases, regardless of the outcome of the one before.
Communication & leadership	Clear, loud communication maintained throughout, including organising the defence during open phases of play.

Tactical roles: **Goalkeeper** — reads and reacts across every phase type with the full technical and decision-making toolkit from tonight. **Outfield players** — provide genuinely varied, realistic phases without artificially targeting weaknesses unfairly.

Decision-making triggers: the same triggers established in Practices 2 and 3, now applied without warning and in rapid succession.

Communication language used: the full set from tonight — *Set, Away, Keeper's!, Line!* — used together under realistic conditions.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Which phase type tested you the most tonight, and why?
2. What did recovering between phases feel like compared with the isolated repetitions earlier?
3. What's one thing from tonight you want to take into your next match?

Progressions:

1. Increase the phase frequency, reducing recovery time between situations.
2. Add a specific defender working alongside the goalkeeper, testing organisation and communication under the same conditions.

Regressions:

1. Slow the phase frequency, allowing a full reset between situations while confidence builds.
2. Return to isolated shot-stopping or crossing reps if a specific technical element is breaking down under the combined pressure.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Technique from earlier practices breaks down under the combined, unpredictable pressure of this practice	The added cognitive load of not knowing what's coming next	A goalkeeper who was technically sound in isolation now reaching rather than moving their feet, or hesitating on claims	Let it flow, address after	A private word after the phase, referencing the specific technique from Practice 2 or 3	Continue
The goalkeeper's communication drops off as fatigue builds	Physical and mental tiredness reducing the energy available for organising others	A goalkeeper who was vocal early in the practice going quiet later on	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	A direct reminder that communication matters most exactly when it's hardest to produce	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a private, delayed conversation for technique breaking down under combined pressure; a direct reminder for fading communication.

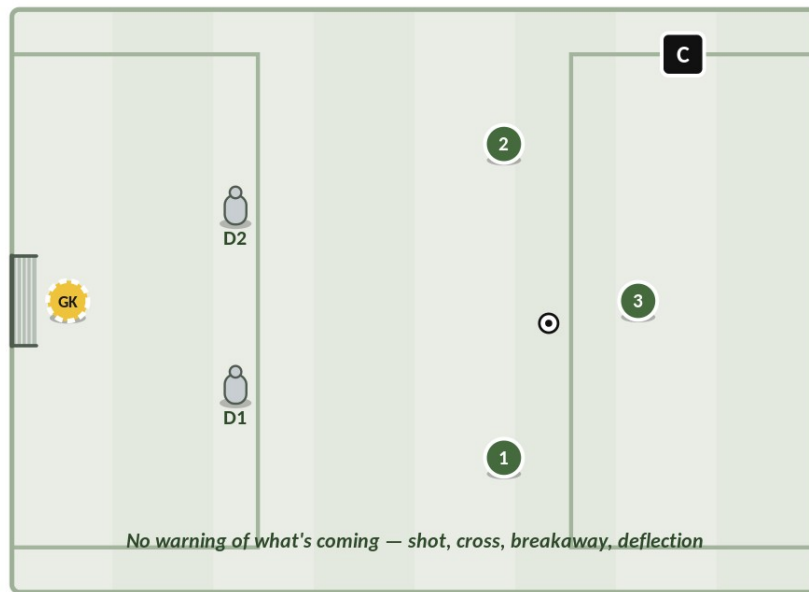
Success indicators:

- Technique from Practices 2 and 3 holds up recognisably under combined, unpredictable pressure.
- Decision-making stays correct and fast across every phase type.
- Communication remains clear and loud throughout, not just in the opening phases.

Coach's eye: this practice is the real answer to the question this whole session exists to ask — not whether the goalkeeper can catch a ball in isolation, but whether tonight's work actually holds up when nothing is predictable.

TC1.4 THE KEEPER'S TEST — Closing Live Scenario

Full attacking third • continuous, unpredictable phases • every element combined • 14 minutes



● Attacking phase players ● Defenders ● Ball

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Goalkeeping (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Individual Technical Session



Heading

Tags: `individual-technical` `standalone` `heading` `aerial` `set-pieces`

Kicker: Ten different weeks install corner and cross routines, and every one of them ends the same way — with somebody attacking a high ball. The programme has trained the delivery all season and never once trained the contact. Both penalty boxes on a Saturday are decided in the air, and this is where that gets built.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Heading — Attacking Headers, Defensive Headers and the Aerial Duel
Short summary	Four stages building heading from the ground up: unopposed technique and confidence at low intensity, the attacking header as a genuine finish, the defensive header and the aerial duel under real opposition, and a closing live game that rewards winning the ball in the air at both ends. Pairs directly with the set-piece library — every routine in it assumes this session's content.
Total duration	50 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers should attend — Practice 3 trains their claim-or-stay decision and command of the area directly, and Practice 4 gives it live conditions.
Area layout	Open paired space for Practice 1, a full box working area for Practices 2–3, a 40 x 30 m game area for Practice 4.
Equipment	A generous supply of balls, cones marking service and attacking positions, two sets of bibs, one full-size goal plus a second goal for Practice 4.
Contingency — lower attendance	Practices 2–3 run fine as small rotating groups with a single goalkeeper; Practice 4 scales to 5v5 without losing the aerial emphasis.
A note on load	Heading volume is managed deliberately even with adults: Practice 1 uses soft, self-paced service; Practices 2–3 cap individual repetitions through rotation rather than queue-free volume. Any player who takes a blow to the head comes off and stays off — the concussion guidance in the club's match-day material applies to training nights exactly as it does to Saturdays.

PRACTICE 1 — SOFT CONTACT (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Grooming the basic contact — forehead, eyes open, mouth closed, neck braced — at a volume and pace each player controls, so confidence is built before any height, speed or opposition arrives.

Organisation: Pairs, one ball per pair, five metres apart, with space between pairs.

Walkthrough: One player serves underarm at head height, the partner returns a controlled header to hands — ten each, then swap. Progress to a gentle two-touch header rally where the pair keeps the ball up between them.

Rules: Underarm service only, at a pace the header can control. The server's job is to make their partner look good, not to test them.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* contact on the forehead, eyes open through the flight, and the ball struck rather than received — the header goes where the forehead points.
- *Physical:* the power comes from the trunk arching and snapping forward, not from the neck alone — the neck stays braced, the body does the work.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — ATTACK THE BALL (ATTACKING HEADERS)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds the attacking header as a genuine finish — a moving player meeting a moving ball and directing it downward, past a live goalkeeper — rather than a standing player letting a cross hit them.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full box, with a wide service position on each side
- **Players:** rotating group of attackers, two wide servers, one goalkeeper
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** live and reacting throughout
- **Team sizes:** individual attacking runs, one attacker at a time
- **Neutrals:** the wide servers deliver crosses by hand-throw first, then by kicked cross
- **Equipment:** a supply of balls at each service position, cones marking the attacker's starting point and the two service positions
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** at each wide service position
- **Restart:** next attacker starts their run as the previous attempt resolves
- **Coach position:** behind the goal, able to see the attacker's run, contact and placement together
- **Rotation method:** each attacker takes alternate services from the left and right before rotating; servers rotate in every few minutes
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: The attacker starts at the penalty spot area, checks away, then attacks the delivery from the wide server, meeting the ball in front of them and heading down toward a corner past the live goalkeeper. Service starts as a sympathetic hand-throw so the timing and contact can be built, and progresses to kicked crosses once the contact is reliable. The movement — check away, then attack the ball's flight — is coached as hard as the header itself.

Rules: The attacker must meet the ball moving forward. A header taken flat-footed, waiting under the flight, doesn't count even when it goes in.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Contact through the top half of the ball, directing the header downward — a header into the ground is hard to save; a header floating upward is a routine catch.
Tactical	Attacking the space in front of the ball's flight, not waiting under it — the attacker who moves toward the delivery beats the defender who stands and jumps.
Physical	Timing the jump off one foot on the move, arriving at the highest point as the ball does.
Psychological	Genuine commitment to the contact — a hesitant header is both less effective and, in a real duel, less safe than a committed one.
Communication & leadership	None required — this is deliberately isolated individual technical work.

Tactical roles: **Attacker** — times the run and the jump, and directs the finish downward. **Servers** — deliver a genuinely attackable ball, progressing the difficulty only as the attacker succeeds. **Goalkeeper** — provides a live picture and reacts to every attempt.

Decision-making triggers: a delivery in front of the attacker is the trigger to attack it early and head down for a corner; a delivery behind or above forces the choice between a glanced redirection and letting it run — recognising which delivery has arrived is the whole judgement.

Communication language used: none specific — the emphasis is on movement and contact.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Where was the ball when you decided to start your run — and was that early enough?
2. What's the difference between the headers the keeper saved and the ones they couldn't reach?
3. When the delivery was behind you, what were your real options?

Progressions:

1. Replace hand-thrown service with kicked crosses from open play positions.
2. Add a passive defender goal-side, so the attacker's movement has to create the free contact before the header can happen.

Regressions:

1. Return to hand-thrown service if the timing of run and jump is breaking down against kicked delivery.
2. Shorten the service distance so the flight is easier to read while confidence builds.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The attacker waits under the flight instead of attacking it	Watching the ball rather than reading where it will arrive	A standing jump from a flat-footed position under the delivery	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: walk the run again — start position, check away, attack the space in front of the flight	Resume
Headers float upward at a comfortable height for the goalkeeper	Contact through the bottom half of the ball, often with the eyes closing at contact	Attempts arriving at the keeper's chest height or over the bar	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse contact through the top half, directing down — return to hand service briefly if needed	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for a flat-footed waiting header and for upward contact.

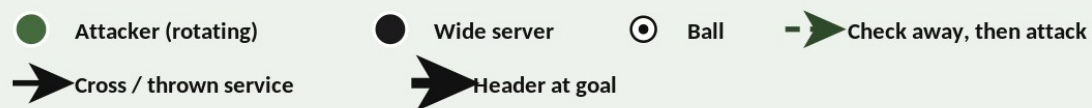
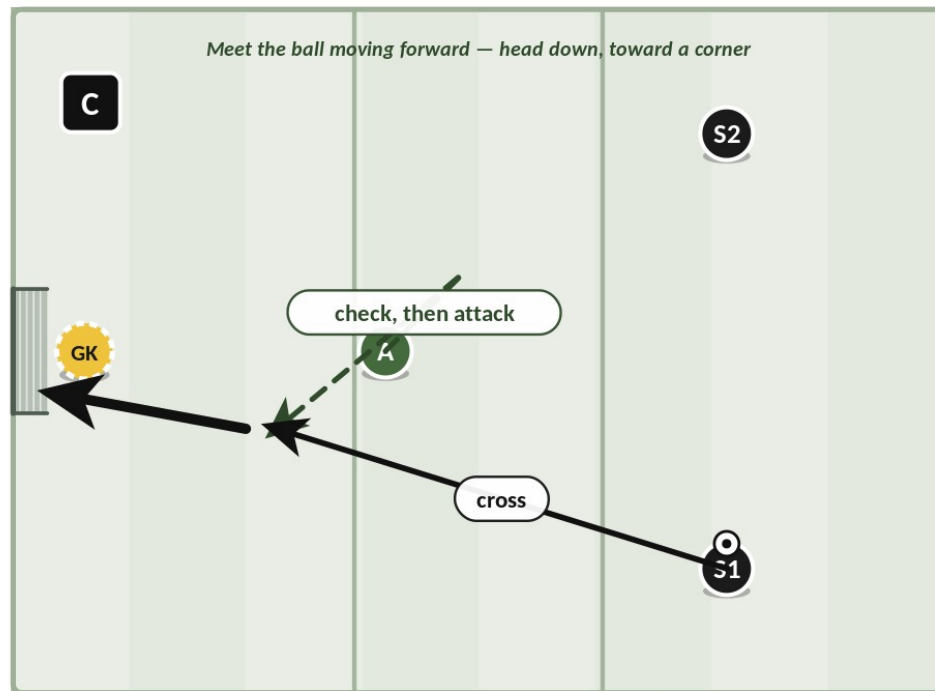
Success indicators:

- Attackers consistently meet the ball moving forward, in front of their body.
- Headers are directed downward toward the corners, not floated centrally.
- Timing holds when the service progresses from thrown to kicked delivery.

Coach's eye: the run matters more than the leap — the players who score headers on a Saturday are rarely the ones who jump highest, they're the ones already moving when the ball leaves the crosser's foot.

TC5.2 ATTACK THE BALL — Attacking Headers

Full box • wide service, checked run, header down past a live keeper • 14 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Heading (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 3 — FIRST TO IT (DEFENSIVE HEADERS AND THE AERIAL DUEL)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Builds the defensive header — high, wide and long, under a genuine opponent — and the goalkeeper's claim-or-stay decision over the top of it, which is where most amateur defending of crosses and set pieces actually breaks down.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full box
- **Players:** rotating pairs of one defender and one attacker, a server, one goalkeeper
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** live throughout — every delivery is also a live claim-or-stay decision, with the keeper's call binding
- **Team sizes:** 1v1 aerial duels under each delivery
- **Neutrals:** the server delivers a high, contested ball into the marked central zone
- **Equipment:** a supply of balls at the service position, a marked central landing zone
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** at the service position
- **Restart:** next delivery once the previous duel resolves
- **Coach position:** side-on to the duel, able to see body positions and the keeper together
- **Rotation method:** defender and attacker swap roles every few deliveries; pairs rotate out to manage heading volume
- **Direction of play:** the defender clears away from goal; the attacker attacks toward it

Practice walkthrough: The server delivers a high ball into the zone in front of goal. The defender's job is first contact — a header directed high, wide and long, never flat across the box. The attacker contests genuinely, looking to head on target as in Practice 2. Over both of them, the goalkeeper makes a live decision on every delivery: come and claim, or stay and command — and when the call is "keeper's", both outfield players clear the path. The duel is coached honestly: body between opponent and ball, jump off one foot with a raised arm for protection, eyes on the flight.

Rules: The keeper's call is absolute — a defender who attacks a ball the keeper has called for gives away the practice's only "goal against" regardless of what happens next. Defensive clearances that go high, wide and long score for the defender; anything flat and central scores for the attack.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Defensive contact through the bottom half of the ball — height first, then width, then distance, in that order of priority.
Tactical	First contact beats clean contact — a defender who gets any touch first controls the moment; the one who waits for a perfect header usually never gets it.
Physical	The duel is won before the jump: body across the opponent, one-footed take-off into the ball's line, arm raised for protection, not for fouling.
Psychological	Bravery with judgement — attack the ball fully or leave it fully on the keeper's call; the half-committed challenge is the worst of the three options.
Communication & leadership	The goalkeeper's early, loud, binding call — "keeper's!" or "away!" — is the single most coachable habit in this practice.

Tactical roles: **Defender** — first contact, high wide and long, and total respect for the keeper's call. **Attacker** — a genuine contest, applying Practice 2's movement under opposition. **Goalkeeper** — an early decision and an unmissable call on every single delivery, then full commitment to it.

Decision-making triggers: a delivery the keeper can attack in front of the six-yard area with a clean path triggers the claim; anything deeper, flatter or through traffic triggers "away!" and the defenders take it. Silence is the one wrong answer.

Communication language used: "keeper's!" and "away!" — early, loud, and binding, matching the language used in the programme's defending-the-box work.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Defender — when you lost the duel, was it the jump you lost, or the position before it?
2. Keeper — what told you to come for that one and stay for the one before it?
3. What happens in a real box when the keeper's call comes late — or doesn't come?

Progressions:

1. Add a second attacker so the defender must defend the ball and the runner beyond it.
2. Deliver from genuine corner and wide free-kick positions, connecting directly to the set-piece library's defensive picture.

Regressions:

1. Reduce the contest to passive attacker pressure while defensive technique is rebuilt.
2. Shorten and soften the service so the flight is easier to judge.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Defensive headers go flat and central — the classic second-ball goal	Contact through the middle of the ball, often from a poor body position under it	Clearances landing at the edge of the box, centrally, at an attacker's feet	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse contact under the ball — height first, wide second, long third	Resume
The keeper calls late, or not at all, and two players go for the same ball	Decision left until the flight is already dropping	Defender and keeper arriving together, or both hesitating and neither attacking it	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: the call is rehearsed at the moment the ball leaves the server, not when it drops	Resume
The defender jumps under the ball rather than through its line	Watching the opponent instead of the flight	Repeatedly out-jumped despite equal or better physical tools	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "where were your eyes when the ball was in the air?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for flat central clearances and for the late or missing keeper's call; reflective questioning for the mistimed duel.

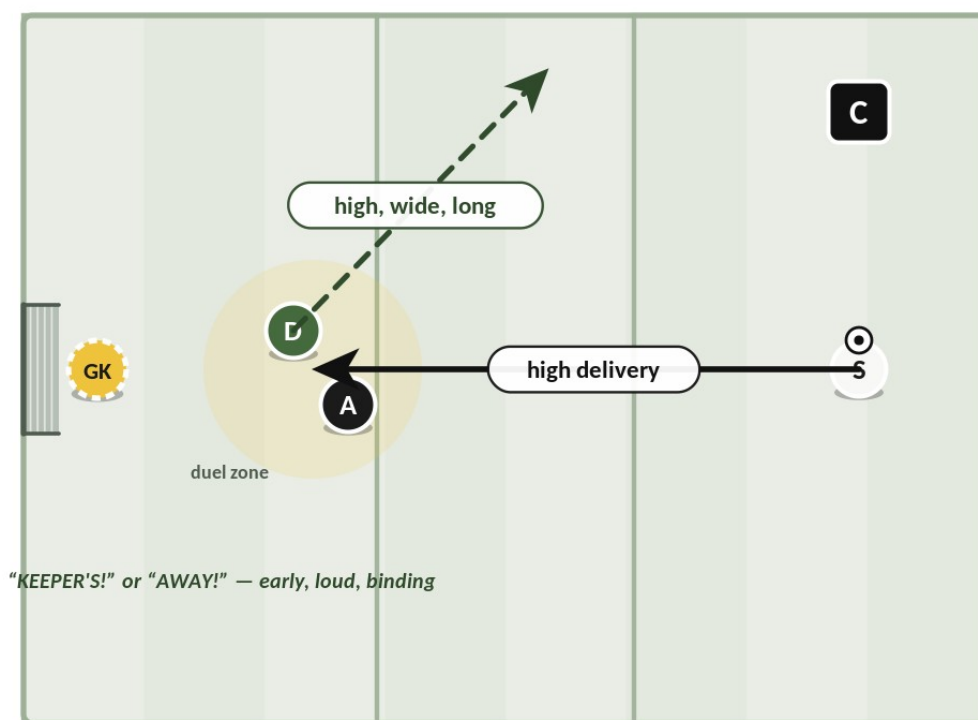
Success indicators:

- Defensive headers go high, wide and long as a habit, not an accident.
- The keeper's call comes early and loud on every delivery, and is respected every time.
- Duels are contested with full commitment and a protected, legal jumping technique.

Coach's eye: watch the moment just before the jump, not the jump itself — the duel is usually already decided by whose body is between opponent and ball when the delivery arrives.

TC5.3 FIRST TO IT — Defensive Headers & the Aerial Duel

Full box • contested high service, keeper's call binding • 14 minutes



- Defender
- Attacker
- Server
- ⊙ High service
- ➡ Defensive clearance — high, wide, long
- Coach

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PRACTICE 4 — WIN BOTH BOXES (CLOSING LIVE GAME)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session with a live game built to produce aerial moments at both ends, so attacking headers, defensive headers and the keeper's command all get tested under real, unscripted conditions.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 30 m with a full-width crossing channel on each side
- **Players:** two teams of 5-6 plus a neutral wide server in each channel, with goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers live, with their claim-or-stay call binding exactly as in Practice 3
- **Team sizes:** 5v5 or 6v6 plus two neutral wide players
- **Neutrals:** one wide server per channel, playing for the team in possession, uncontested in the channel
- **Equipment:** bibs for both teams and the neutrals, a supply of balls, marked channels
- **Starting positions:** open play
- **Ball supply:** near the halfway line for quick restarts
- **Restart:** standard small-sided game rules
- **Coach position:** mobile, watching the boxes rather than the buildup
- **Rotation method:** neutrals swap with outfield players every few minutes to share the aerial load
- **Direction of play:** both directions

Practice walkthrough: A normal game, with one condition shaping it: the wide neutrals cross early and often, and a goal scored with a header counts double. Defensively, a clearance that reaches beyond the channel line — high, wide and long — restarts possession for the defending team rather than conceding the second ball. The keepers call every cross exactly as rehearsed. Everything the session has built now has to survive opposition, fatigue and a score.

Rules: Standard small-sided rules; headed goals count double; a defensive header cleared beyond the channels earns the defending team possession; the keeper's call is binding.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Practice 2's downward attacking contact and Practice 3's high-wide-long defensive contact both holding up in live play.
Tactical	Attackers moving before the cross is struck; defenders taking first contact rather than perfect contact; keepers commanding their area.
Physical	Repeated jumps and duels under fatigue, with technique holding rather than degrading.
Psychological	Commitment in the duel at both ends when it matters to the score.
Communication & leadership	The keeper's call, and defenders organising who attacks the ball and who covers the second contact.

Tactical roles: the full set from Practices 2 and 3, now live — attackers timing runs onto crosses, defenders winning first contact, keepers deciding and calling every delivery.

Decision-making triggers: all triggers from Practices 2 and 3, now arriving unscripted and at game speed.

Communication language used: "keeper's!" / "away!" as rehearsed, plus defensive organisation around who attacks the cross.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Which headed goal tonight was won by movement rather than by jumping — and what does that tell you?
2. Defenders — how many of your clearances would have survived a real second-ball situation?
3. What's the one aerial habit from tonight you want to see on Saturday?

Progressions:

1. Require all attacking play through a channel before a goal can be scored, further increasing crossing volume.
2. Award the double also for a defensive header that directly launches a counter-attack, rewarding the clearance with intent.

Regressions:

1. Let the neutrals deliver by hand if kicked crossing quality is starving the game of genuine aerial moments.
2. Drop the double-goal condition if it's producing hopeful long balls rather than genuine crossing play.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Crosses arrive but nobody attacks them	Movement habits from Practice 2 dissolving under game load	Deliveries dropping in the box with every attacker flat-footed	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "who was moving when the ball left the wide player's foot?"	Resume
Defenders head flat and central under game pressure	Reverting to comfortable contact when tired and contested	Second balls repeatedly falling to the attacking team at the edge of the box	Stop	Short group intervention: re-set the priority order — height, width, distance	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: reflective questioning for static attacking movement; a short group intervention for flat defensive clearances.

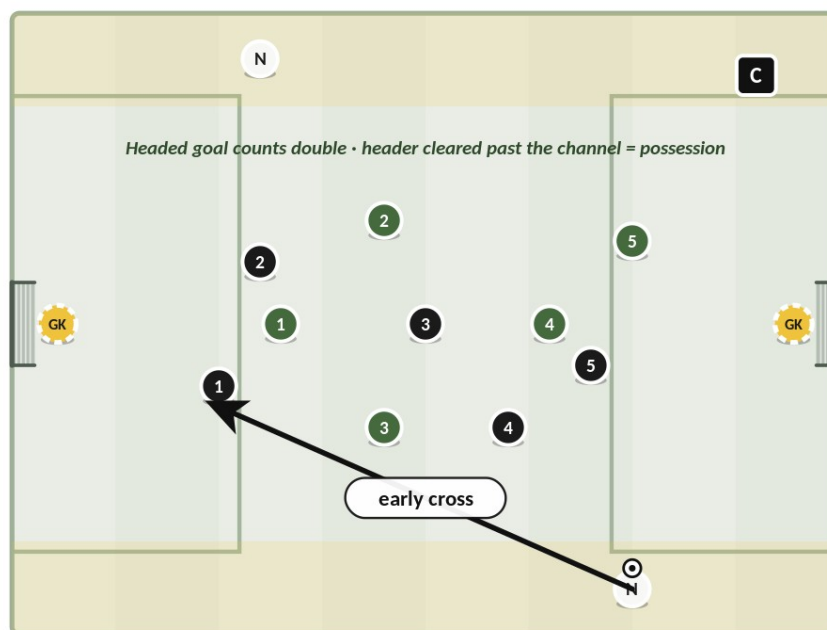
Success indicators:

- Headed chances are created by movement, not hoisted hopefully into a crowd.
- Defensive clearances keep earning the beyond-the-channel possession reward under fatigue.
- Both keepers call every cross, early and audibly, for the full 14 minutes.

Coach's eye: count silent crosses — every delivery that arrives without a keeper's call is the exact moment this session exists to remove, and there should be fewer of them at the end of the game than at the start.

TC5.4 WIN BOTH BOXES — Closing Live Game

40 x 30 m + wide channels • headed goals double, cleared headers earn possession • 14 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Neutral wide server ● Ball ■ Crossing channel

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Heading (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Individual Technical Session



Injury Prevention

Tags: `individual-technical` `standalone` `injury-prevention` `warm-up` `movement-preparation`

Kicker: Every week in this folder assumes fit players. Recreational adult footballers carry a materially higher hamstring, groin and ACL injury rate than youth players do, and the single best-evidenced, cheapest intervention against it is a structured neuromuscular warm-up run before training and matches — not a stand-alone session bolted on once, but a habit installed in the first phase and then run every single week for the rest of the season. This session teaches the habit; Season Architecture Section 7 explains when it runs.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Injury Prevention — Activation, Strength, Balance, Landing and Deceleration Mechanics
Short summary	A structured neuromuscular warm-up in the FIFA 11+ tradition, adapted into the club's own four-practice template: light activation running, six paired strength/balance/landing stations, a set of speed-and-deceleration lanes, and a closing reactive game that asks the whole squad to apply it unscripted. Built to replace whatever informal warm-up currently opens a session, not to run alongside it.
Total duration	50 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers take part fully — the balance, landing and deceleration demands on a goalkeeper diving and re-setting are at least as high as an outfield player's, and this session is one of the few in the folder that trains them identically.
Area layout	Open flat area for Practices 1–2, four full-width lanes for Practice 3, a 20 x 16 m grid for Practice 4.
Equipment	Cones or flat markers for six stations and four lanes, a supply of balls (Practice 4 only — the rest is deliberately ball-free so technique gets full attention).
Contingency — lower attendance	Practice 2's six stations run fine with three or four pairs rotating through faster; Practice 4 scales down to 1v1 pairs working simultaneously across two smaller grids rather than one larger one.
A note on load	This is deliberately not a fitness test. Every station and lane is about quality of movement, not how hard or fast — a tired player doing a station badly gets slower and lighter reps, not louder coaching. The full six-station circuit takes about 10 minutes once grooved; running it in full, twice a week, all season, is the entire point — shortening it under time pressure should be the exception, not the norm.

PRACTICE 1 — MOVE (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Raises heart rate and rehearses the basic movement vocabulary — straight running, hip-out and hip-in running, lateral shuffling, gentle change of direction — at a pace each player controls, before any station work asks for control under load.

Organisation: Two lines of players facing each other 20 metres apart, working in pairs across the gap.

Walkthrough: Jog across; jog back with hips rotated out, then in; shuffle across sideways, leading with each side in turn; jog across with a gentle 90-degree cut at the midpoint; finish with two build-up strides into three-quarter pace. Each pattern there and back, then the next.

Rules: Controlled throughout — this is a warm-up, not a race. Nobody arrives at the far line out of breath.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* tall running posture, relaxed shoulders, full hip rotation on the hip-out/hip-in patterns rather than a stiff-hipped shuffle.
- *Physical:* this is deliberately the lowest-intensity 8 minutes in the session — it prepares the body for Practice 2's stations, it doesn't replace them.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — SIX STATIONS (STRENGTH, BALANCE & LANDING MECHANICS)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Installs the six station families that carry the actual evidence behind this kind of warm-up — core and hip strength, single-leg balance, hamstring strength, squat and jump-landing mechanics — each taught at an introductory level first, with two further levels to progress through across the opening weeks of the season (see Season Architecture Section 7).

Organisation:

- **Area:** open flat space, six marked station zones in two rows of three
- **Players:** pairs at each station, rotating together
- **Equipment:** one marker per station
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Restart:** each station is timed — 60–75 seconds per side/level, then rotate
- **Coach position:** mobile, visiting each station in turn during the first pass to correct technique before speed or repetition count matters at all
- **Rotation method:** pairs move station to station on the coach's signal, completing all six before Practice 3

Practice walkthrough: Six stations, each with a level appropriate to where the season is:

1. **The Bench** — a front plank, held; progresses to alternating leg lifts, then a single leg held throughout.
2. **Sideways Bench** — a side plank, held on each side; progresses to raising and lowering the hip, then a top-leg lift.
3. **Hamstrings** — a kneeling partner-anchored hamstring lower (the Nordic pattern), at a beginner depth first; progresses toward a fuller controlled lower as strength allows.
4. **Single-Leg Stance** — balance on one leg holding a ball still; progresses to throwing and catching a ball with a partner, then to a partner applying gentle unpredictable pushes to test balance recovery.
5. **Squats** — bodyweight squats with a heel raise at the top; progresses to walking lunges, then single-leg squats.
6. **Jumping** — two-footed vertical jumps, landing soft and balanced; progresses to lateral jumps side to side, then a single-leg box-step-down landing.

Rules: Every rep is judged on landing and control, not height, speed, or count. A wobble, a hard heel-strike, or a collapsed knee on landing is the thing being coached out — not the rep total.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Soft, quiet landings with the knee tracking over the foot, not caving inward — this single cue prevents more of the injuries this session exists for than any other coaching point in the folder.
Tactical	Technique first, always — a player ready to progress to the next level of a station is a coaching decision, not a fixed weekly schedule.
Physical	Control under fatigue is the actual target — the last rep at each station should look like the first one.
Psychological	Buy-in from a squad that has never been injured is the hard sell — the coaching point is "this is what keeps you playing in March," not "this is optional fitness work."
Communication & leadership	Partners coach each other's landing and balance out loud — a second pair of eyes on a team-mate's knee catches what their own can't.

Tactical roles: Player A / Player B — each pair alternates who performs and who observes and corrects at every station, so coaching happens continuously, not only when the coach is stood at that station.

Decision-making triggers: a wobble or a hard landing at any station is the trigger to slow that rep down and reset, not push through to the count.

Communication language used: "soft landing," "knee out," "control it" — short, repeatable cues a partner can use without the coach present.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Which station did your landing feel worst on — and was it strength, or was it concentration?
2. What's different about your balance on your weaker leg versus your stronger one?
3. If you could only do one of these six stations all season, which would you choose, and why?

Progressions:

1. Move each station from its Level 1 to Level 2 pattern once technique is consistently clean (the club's own pace, not a fixed week — Season Architecture Section 7 suggests a guide).
2. Add a ball-catch or reactive element to the balance and landing stations once the base pattern is automatic.

Regressions:

1. Drop back a level at any station where technique is breaking down, for that player only — this is never a squad-wide reset for one person's struggle.
2. Reduce hold times or rep counts before removing a station altogether.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Knees collapse inward on landing at the Squats or Jumping stations	Weak hip control, or simply rushing the rep	A visible inward knee movement on landing, worse as fatigue builds	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: slow the rep right down, cue "knee out, land soft," rebuild from a smaller jump	Resume
The Hamstrings station is rushed through with poor depth	Genuine difficulty, or a squad treating it as the "boring" station	Minimal controlled lowering before catching with the hands	Stop	Short group intervention: re-set the standard — a short controlled lower done properly beats a long uncontrolled one	Resume
Single-Leg Stance turns into a competition for who can hold longest	Competitive instinct overriding the actual point of the station	Players adding difficulty (eyes closed, phone distractions) unprompted, form breaking down	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "was that balance, or was that just not falling over yet?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for collapsing knees; a short group intervention for a rushed hamstring station; reflective questioning for competitive balance work losing its technical point.

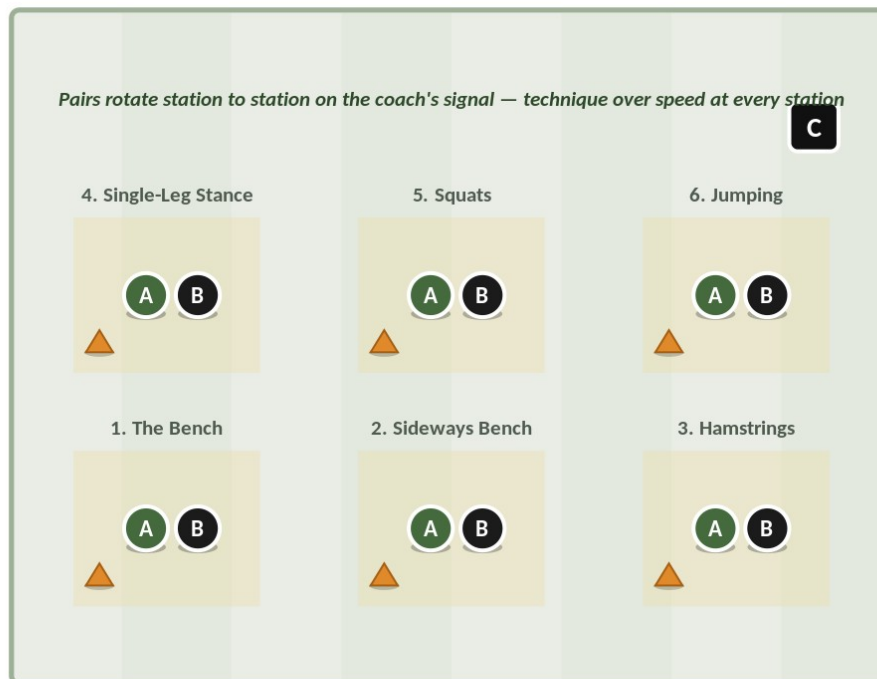
Success indicators:

- Landings are visibly soft and controlled at every station by the end of the circuit, not just the first pass.
- Players can name their own weaker side without being asked.
- The squad treats this as a standing 10 minutes, not something that needs re-selling each week.

Coach's eye: watch the last rep at each station, not the first — technique holding up when a player is starting to tire is the actual thing this circuit is training.

TC6.2 SIX STATIONS — Strength, Balance & Landing Mechanics

Six paired stations, run as a rotating circuit • 14 minutes



● Player ▲ Station marker ■ Station area

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PRACTICE 3 — CUT, LAND, ACCELERATE (SPEED & DECELERATION LANES)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Connects the control built in Practice 2 to the speeds football actually happens at — deceleration, cutting, and re-acceleration are where most non-contact injuries occur, and this practice is the only place in the folder that trains them directly rather than as a byproduct of a tactical picture.

Organisation:

- **Area:** four parallel lanes, each roughly 30 metres long
- **Players:** a small group works through each lane in turn, one lane at a time
- **Equipment:** cone markers at both ends of each lane
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Restart:** next player in the group starts once the previous one has finished the lane and walked back
- **Coach position:** side-on to the lanes, able to see landing and cutting mechanics as they happen
- **Rotation method:** groups rotate through all four lanes across the practice

Practice walkthrough: Four lanes, each isolating one movement quality: a straight sprint at controlled pace; a lateral shuffle weaving between markers without crossing the feet; a cut-and-decelerate that asks the player to accelerate then plant and change direction under control; and a bound-and-land that asks for two controlled bounding strides before returning to a run. Quality over speed at every lane — a player who can't decelerate under control at three-quarter pace has no business doing it at full pace.

Rules: A cut or landing that looks uncontrolled — a wide stance loss, a stumble, a knee that dives inward — is repeated at a lower speed before that player moves on, regardless of how the rest of the group is progressing.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Deceleration steps — short, choppy, low centre of gravity — rather than one long braking stride that loads the knee.
Tactical	These are the exact movement patterns a match actually demands — a striker checking a run, a full-back recovering, a midfielder pressing then re-setting.
Physical	Controlled speed beats uncontrolled speed at every lane, every time — this is trained explicitly, not assumed.
Psychological	Trusting the deceleration technique instead of the instinct to just plant hard and stop.
Communication & leadership	Players waiting their turn watch and give one specific piece of feedback to the player ahead of them in the queue.

Tactical roles: **Lane player** — controls speed and quality through their own rep. **Waiting group** — active observers, not a queue standing idle.

Decision-making triggers: any visible loss of control at a cut or landing is the trigger to repeat that rep slower, not to continue to the next lane.

Communication language used: "short steps," "low and balanced," "control the cut" — matching the landing cues from Practice 2.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Which lane exposed your weakest movement quality — and does that match what you found in Practice 2?
2. What's the difference between decelerating in three steps versus one big stride?
3. Where in an actual match do you make this exact movement?

Progressions:

1. Add a ball to the cut-and-decelerate lane, receiving and turning under the same deceleration mechanics.
2. Run two lanes back to back without a full recovery, testing whether technique holds under accumulated fatigue.

Regressions:

1. Reduce to walking pace through any lane where mechanics are breaking down, rebuilding the pattern before adding speed back.
2. Shorten the lane so the deceleration decision arrives sooner and with less speed to control.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The cut-and-decelerate lane is taken at a flat sprint with a hard, sudden stop	Instinct to go fast rather than controlled, especially competitive players	A visible stumble or a knee driving inward on the plant	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: walk the deceleration steps first, then jog it, before any speed returns	Resume
The lateral shuffle turns into crossing the feet	Fatigue or simply an unfamiliar movement pattern	Feet crossing rather than a true side-step	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what happens to your balance the moment your feet cross?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for an uncontrolled cut; reflective questioning for crossed-foot shuffling.

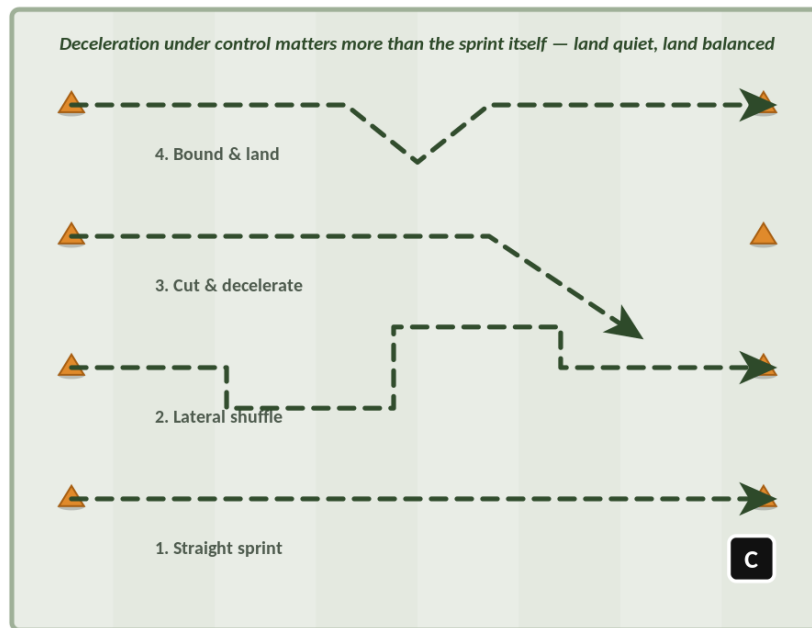
Success indicators:

- Deceleration is visibly stepped, not a single braking stride, by the end of the practice.
- Players can self-correct a bad rep without being told.
- The group's fastest players are also its most controlled — speed and control are not treated as a trade-off.

Coach's eye: watch the plant foot on the cut lane specifically — everything this session is trying to prevent shows up in that single moment more than anywhere else.

TC6.3 CUT, LAND, ACCELERATE — Speed & Deceleration Lanes

Four lanes • straight sprint, lateral shuffle, cut-and-decelerate, bound-and-land • 14 minutes



➡ Movement pattern

▲ Lane markers

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PRACTICE 4 — REACT AND RECOVER (CLOSING LIVE APPLICATION)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Purpose: Closes the session by testing Practice 2 and 3's movement qualities under an unscripted, reactive picture — nobody plants and cuts on cue in a real match, so the last word here is a game that removes the cue.

Organisation:

- **Area:** a 20 x 16 m grid
- **Players:** pairs, one reacting (Player A) and one setting the movement (Player B)
- **Equipment:** cone markers at the grid's four corners
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Restart:** roles swap every 4–5 reps
- **Coach position:** mobile around the grid's edge, watching landing and deceleration quality rather than who "wins" the rep
- **Rotation method:** pairs rotate in and out of the grid every few minutes so nobody accumulates fatigue past the point where technique holds

Practice walkthrough: Player B points suddenly in any direction inside the grid; Player A reacts, decelerates under control, and comes to a balanced stop facing B, ready to react again the instant the next point comes. No ball, no contact — the entire contest is reaction speed plus controlled deceleration, exactly the two qualities Practices 2 and 3 just isolated separately, now demanded together and by surprise.

Rules: The rep is won by control, not speed — arriving fast but off-balance loses to arriving a fraction slower but square and ready to move again immediately.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Practice 2's landing mechanics and Practice 3's deceleration steps, both holding up when the movement is not known in advance.
Tactical	Recognising the cue early and starting the deceleration steps before arriving at the point, not after.
Physical	Repeated reactive efforts — this is the practice that most resembles what a match actually asks of the body.
Psychological	Composure under an unpredictable demand — the point of the whole session, delivered in the last 14 minutes.
Communication & leadership	Player B varies timing and direction deliberately rather than falling into a predictable rhythm — an honest setter makes the practice work.

Tactical roles: **Reactor (A)** — reads the cue and decelerates under control. **Setter (B)** — delivers a genuine, varied, unpredictable cue every time.

Decision-making triggers: the instant B's arm moves is the trigger to start reacting — waiting to see the full direction before moving is already too late, and that gap is exactly what the practice is measuring.

Communication language used: none required — this practice is deliberately non-verbal, testing movement alone.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Did your best reps feel fast, or did they feel controlled — and were those the same reps?
2. What told your body to start decelerating — was it a decision, or had it become automatic?
3. Where does this exact skill show up in a match you've actually played?

Progressions:

1. Widen the grid, demanding a longer deceleration phase before the balanced stop.
2. Add a second setter directing from a different angle, forcing a genuine choice under the reaction.

Regressions:

1. Slow B's cue down and enlarge it (a full arm point, held) while the reaction pattern is still being learned.
2. Shrink the grid so the deceleration distance required is shorter.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players arrive fast but overshoot, off balance	Chasing speed over the actual point of the practice	Repeated stumbles or extra recovery steps after arriving	Stop	Short group intervention: re-set the standard — arriving square and ready beats arriving first	Resume
The setter falls into a predictable left-right-left rhythm	Easier to deliver than genuine unpredictability	The reactor anticipating rather than reacting	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question to B: "was that a fair test, or a rhythm they'd learned?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a short group intervention for overshooting; reflective questioning for a predictable setter.

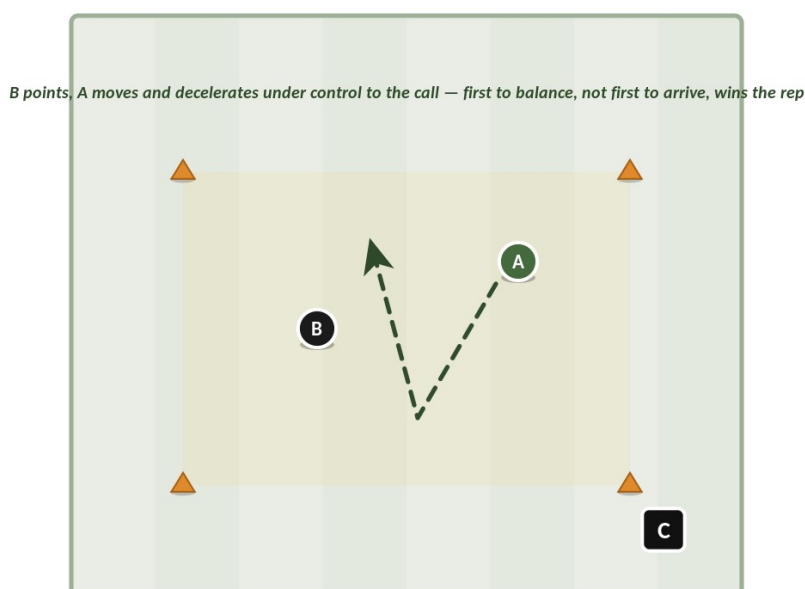
Success indicators:

- Players arrive balanced and ready to move again, not just fast.
- Deceleration technique from Practice 3 is visibly holding up under a genuine reactive demand.
- The squad finishes the session able to explain, in their own words, why this is now a standing part of training.

Coach's eye: count the recovery steps after each arrival — zero or one is the standard this whole session has been building toward; three or four means the technique hasn't transferred yet.

TC6.4 REACT AND RECOVER — Closing Live Application

20 x 16 m grid · reactive 1v1s rewarding controlled deceleration and change of direction · 14 minutes



● Player A (reactor) ● Player B (setter) ▲ Grid markers → Reactive movement

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Goalkeeper Distribution

Tags: `individual-technical` `standalone` `goalkeeper` `distribution` `build-up`

Kicker: Weeks 18 and 19 teach the outfield team four different ways to build past the first line of pressure — a mid-possession switch from a back four to a back three, and three alternative starting shapes (2-3, 3-2, 3-1). Every one of them assumes a goalkeeper who already knows which shape is in front of them and where the ball needs to go. Nothing in the programme has coached that yet. This session does, and closes with the physical-loading picture goalkeeping actually produces — which looks nothing like an outfield player's.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Goalkeeper Distribution — Reading the Build-Up Shape and Picking the Pass
Short summary	Three stages building the goalkeeper into an active build-up participant rather than a passenger who restarts play: recognising and distributing correctly through Week 18's back-four/back-three switch, choosing the right target across Week 19's three build-up shapes (2-3, 3-2, 3-1), and a closing live scenario combining both under match tempo. Pairs directly with `Goalkeeping.md` — that session builds shot-stopping and command of the box; this one builds the goalkeeper's part in the team's own possession structure.
Total duration	48 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Central to the entire session — ideally both club goalkeepers attend and work through every practice.
Area layout	Compact restart zone for Practice 1, a build-up working area matching Week 18/19's own dimensions for Practices 2-3, a fuller half-pitch scenario for Practice 4.
Equipment	A generous supply of balls, flat markers for shape reference positions, bibs marking the two build-up structures.
Contingency — only one goalkeeper attends	Run every practice as planned with the single goalkeeper taking every repetition; shorten Practice 4's phase count to protect their legs.
A note on goalkeeper physical loading	Goalkeeping's physical demand looks nothing like an outfield player's, and Section 7's Tuesday-heavy/Thursday-light wave was written with outfield running volume in mind. A goalkeeper's week is built from short, maximal, explosive efforts — diving, jumping, landing, exploding off the line — not sustained distance, so total minutes trained is a poor proxy for their real load. Use dive-and-landing repetitions as the goalkeeper's own load marker instead: cap live diving-save reps the same way `Goalkeeping.md` Practice 2 already does (5 shots per rotation, not a free-running queue), and make sure `Technical/Injury Prevention.md`'s landing-mechanics stations — Practice 2's single-leg and jumping work especially — are trained by the goalkeeper too, not skipped as "outfield conditioning." Session-RPE in `Training Load Tracker.xlsx` still works for a goalkeeper, but read it against dive-

FIELD	VALUE
	and-impact count for that session, not distance covered — a technically light session can carry a heavy landing load the RPE number alone won't show.

PRACTICE 1 — PLAY THE PICTURE (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Unopposed distribution repetition — rolling, throwing and short passing to a stationary or lightly moving target — grooming clean technique before any picture-reading or pressure is added.

Organisation: Each goalkeeper works with 2–3 outfield targets spread at short range, rotating through rolled, thrown and short-passed distribution.

Walkthrough: The goalkeeper works through each distribution method in turn — underarm roll, overarm throw, short pass along the ground — to a target who checks and receives on the half-turn, then returns the ball and resets.

Rules: No pressure and no decision-making yet — this is technique only, at a pace the goalkeeper fully controls.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* a low, accurate roll along the ground for the shortest options; a flat, driven throw for mid-range; weight and pace matched to the receiver's first touch.
- *Psychological:* treating restart distribution with the same care as any other pass — it is the first pass of the move, not an afterthought.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — READ THE SWITCH (DISTRIBUTION THROUGH A STRUCTURAL CHANGE)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Ties distribution directly to Week 18's back-four/back-three switch — the goalkeeper must recognise which shape the back line is currently building in, including mid-possession, and adjust their own position and distribution target the instant it changes, exactly as Week 18's Session 35 already asks of every outfield player.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 26 m, matching Week 18 Practice 2's own working area
- **Players:** goalkeeper, 4 back-line players (rehearsing the back-four-to-back-three drop), 3 opposition pressers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** the entire practice is built around their recognition and distribution
- **Team sizes:** 5 (goalkeeper + back line) v 3 (pressers)
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers showing the back line's before-and-after positions, matching Week 18's own reference lines
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** coach restarts centrally on any stoppage
- **Coach position:** central, able to see both the structural change and the goalkeeper's response to it
- **Rotation method:** the dropping midfielder role rotates every few minutes; two goalkeepers alternate every 8–10 reps
- **Direction of play:** possession retention, building out from the goalkeeper

Practice walkthrough: The back line builds in a back four, exactly as Week 18 Practice 2 sets up, with the goalkeeper as an active first-line option. On the same cue that triggers the midfielder's drop into the back three, the goalkeeper must recognise the change as it happens — not after it — and immediately adjust: a new distribution angle to the player who has dropped, a different width to offer the widened options, and a body position that keeps every option in the picture rather than committing to the pre-change shape.

Rules: The goalkeeper may not distribute until they have visibly adjusted their position for the new shape — a pass played into the old shape's picture is an immediate stoppage.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Distribution weight and angle matched correctly to whichever shape — back four or back three — is currently in front of the goalkeeper.
Tactical	Recognising the structural change at the moment it happens, not a beat behind it.
Physical	Quick, small repositioning to keep the full picture in view as the shape changes.
Psychological	Composure during the moment of transition, when the picture is briefly less settled — exactly the demand Week 18 places on every outfield player.
Communication & leadership	Calling the shape out loud so the back line knows the goalkeeper has seen the change too.

Tactical roles: **Goalkeeper** — reads the structural change and adjusts distribution accordingly. **Back line** — executes Week 18's coordinated drop exactly as taught there. **Pressers** — apply genuine pressure that makes the picture worth reading correctly.

Decision-making triggers: the back line is still in its back-four shape → distribute along the original lines; the drop has happened → the new deepest, widest option is now the first read.

Communication language used: *Drop, Hold, Time* — the same calls Week 18 already teaches, now used by the goalkeeper too.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What told you the shape had changed, before the ball even arrived?
2. What happens to your distribution options in the half-second right after the drop?
3. How does this connect to Week 18's own teaching — you're now the extra option that shape change creates.

Progressions:

1. Remove the coach's explicit cue, requiring the goalkeeper to recognise the change purely from the back line's own movement.
2. Add a second presser specifically closing down the goalkeeper's most obvious distribution option.

Regressions:

1. Slow the drop down and narrate it while the recognition habit is being built.
2. Reduce the pressers to two.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The goalkeeper distributes into the shape that existed a moment ago, missing the change	Focus on the ball rather than the picture around it	A pass played to where a player used to be, not where they now are	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: replay the moment of the drop and name the new picture	Resume
The goalkeeper adjusts position but distributes too slowly, letting the press reset	Hesitation after recognising the change correctly	The picture is read correctly but the opportunity has closed by the time the pass is played	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse recognise-then-release as one continuous action	Resume

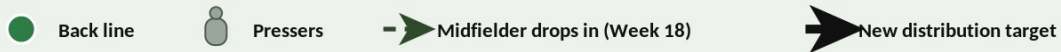
Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for both late recognition and slow release once the change is seen.

Success indicators:

- Distribution is aimed correctly at the current shape, not the previous one.
- The goalkeeper's own position adjusts visibly and promptly as the drop happens.
- The release happens quickly enough to beat the resetting press.

Coach's eye: watch the goalkeeper's feet in the half-second after the drop — a goalkeeper who is already repositioning before the ball reaches them has genuinely read the picture, not just reacted to instruction.

40 x 26 m • goalkeeper adjusts target the instant the back four drops to a back three • 14 minutes



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PRACTICE 3 — THREE SHAPES, ONE PASS (DISTRIBUTION BY BUILD-UP STRUCTURE)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Ties distribution to Week 19's three build-up shapes — a 2-3, a 3-2 and a 3-1 — since each one asks the goalkeeper for a genuinely different first read: width into a 2-3's fuller first line, a choice between two pivots in a 3-2, or the single, tightly-marked pocket of a 3-1.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** three stations of 30 x 20 m, one per shape
- **Players:** goalkeeper rotating through all three, 3-4 back-line/pivot players per shape, 2-3 pressers per shape
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** the entire practice is built around their shape-specific decision-making
- **Team sizes:** varies by shape, matching Week 19's own numbers
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers for each shape's reference positions
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls per station
- **Restart:** coach restarts centrally on any stoppage
- **Coach position:** mobile between the three stations
- **Rotation method:** the goalkeeper moves to a new shape every 4-5 minutes
- **Direction of play:** possession retention and progression, building out from the goalkeeper

Practice walkthrough: The goalkeeper works through all three of Week 19's build-up shapes in turn. In the 2-3, the read is width — a fuller first line gives more short options, and the goalkeeper's job is picking the least-pressured one quickly. In the 3-2, the read is a genuine choice between two pivots, not a default to the same one every time. In the 3-1, the read is the lone pivot's pocket specifically — the same pocket Week 19 Thursday's Practice 2 teaches the pivot to find — and recognising early when that pivot is tightly marked, so the goalkeeper goes around the back three instead of forcing the pass.

Rules: In the 3-1 station specifically, a pass forced into a covered pivot is an immediate stoppage — exactly the discipline Week 19 Thursday asks of the outfield team.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Distribution technique matched to the read — a driven pass into a marked pivot needs different weight than an easy ball into an open wide option.
Tactical	A genuinely different first read in each of the three shapes, not one habit applied regardless of which is in use.
Physical	Quick scanning and positional adjustment moving between shapes.
Psychological	Comfort distributing into the leaner 3-1 shape specifically — trusting a single pivot the way Week 19 Thursday asks the team to.
Communication & leadership	Confirming out loud which shape is in use before releasing the ball, echoing Week 19's own communication language.

Tactical roles: **Goalkeeper** — reads the shape and selects the correct target. **Back line / pivot(s)** — provide the exact picture each shape is built to create. **Pressers** — apply genuine, shape-appropriate pressure.

Decision-making triggers: 2-3 in use → the least-pressured of three short options; 3-2 in use → whichever of the two pivots the press has left open; 3-1 in use → the lone pivot if genuinely open, the back three's outside route if not.

Communication language used: *Hold, Time, Turn* — Week 19's own language, called by the goalkeeper as part of the picture.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What changed about your first read between the 2-3 station and the 3-1 station?
2. What told you the lone pivot was covered, before you'd committed to the pass?
3. How does distributing into a 3-2's double pivot differ from a 3-1's single one?
4. How does this connect to Week 19's own teaching — you're reading exactly the picture the outfield team is trying to create.

Progressions:

1. Remove advance warning of which shape the team has organised into, requiring the goalkeeper to read it from positioning alone.
2. Add a presser specifically assigned to cut off the goalkeeper's most obvious option in each shape.

Regressions:

1. Announce the shape before each rep while the three reads are being learned individually.
2. Reduce to two stations (2-3 and 3-1) if three is too much to build in one session.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The goalkeeper uses the same first read regardless of which shape is in front of them	The three reads haven't yet been separated in the goalkeeper's decision-making	A pass into the "wrong" option for the shape in use — for example defaulting to a wide option inside a 3-1 station	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: name the shape and the read it specifically calls for	Resume
The goalkeeper forces the ball into a covered pivot in the 3-1 station	Over-reliance on the single central option, the same habit Week 19 corrects in the outfield pivot	Passes into the pivot are regularly intercepted despite tight marking	Stop	Short group intervention: "was the pivot really open there?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for the wrong read, short group intervention for forcing the ball into a covered pivot.

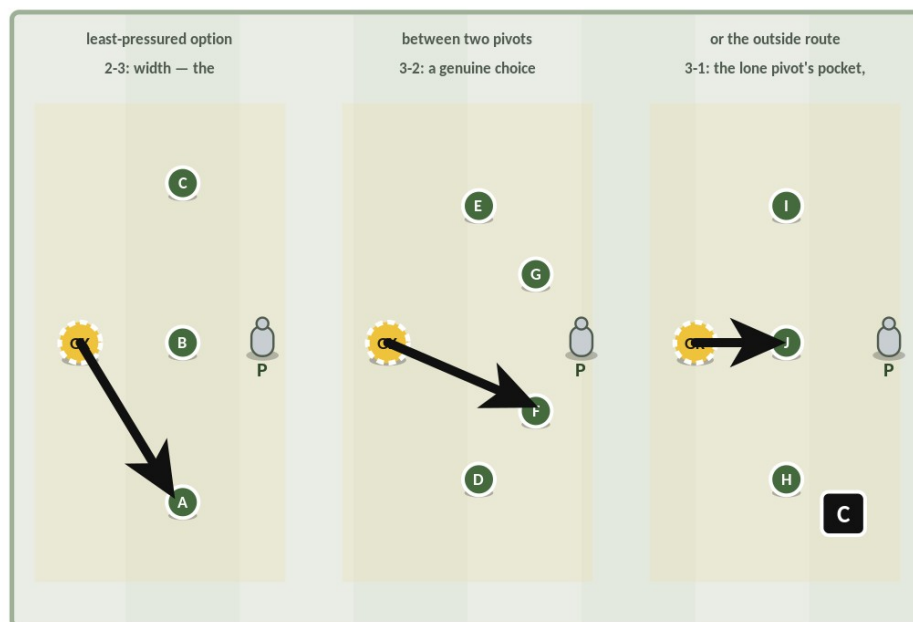
Success indicators:

- A genuinely different first read is visible across all three shapes.
- The 3-1 station's discipline — pivot when open, outside route when not — holds up under real pressure.
- Distribution weight and technique are matched correctly to each shape's specific target.

Coach's eye: watch for the goalkeeper naming the shape before the ball is released — a goalkeeper who can say which of the three pictures they're looking at has done the actual thinking this practice trains.

TC7.3 THREE SHAPES, ONE PASS — Distribution by Build-Up Structure

Three stations, rotating • a different first read for the 2-3, the 3-2 and the 3-1 • 14 minutes



● Back line / pivot(s)



Pressers



Distribution target



Station area

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Goalkeeper Distribution (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 4 — UNDER THE PRESS (CLOSING LIVE SCENARIO)

Duration: 12 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session with a live, unpredictable scenario combining both structural recognition (Practice 2) and shape-specific distribution (Practice 3) at match tempo, with a genuinely varying press — the true test of whether tonight's reading and decision-making holds up when nothing is announced in advance.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 36 m (half pitch), matching Weeks 18–19's own Practice 4 scale
- **Players:** goalkeeper(s), 8 outfield building in a shape that varies rep to rep, 8 pressing
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** continuously tested throughout, with both keepers rotating through if two attend
- **Team sizes:** 8 + GK v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers for each shape's reference positions, corner cones
- **Starting positions:** varies rep to rep between a back-four build-up, a mid-possession drop to back three, and each of the 2-3, 3-2 and 3-1 shapes
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** match-realistic restarts
- **Coach position:** mobile, observing the goalkeeper's recognition and decision-making across every shape and change
- **Rotation method:** goalkeepers alternate every 8–10 phases
- **Direction of play:** standard, building out from the goalkeeper toward the opposite goal

Practice walkthrough: A continuous sequence of build-up phases in which the outfield team varies its shape — sometimes a settled back four, sometimes mid-possession switching to a back three, sometimes starting directly in a 2-3, 3-2 or 3-1 — and the pressing team varies its own numbers and target in response. The goalkeeper must recognise whichever picture is currently in front of them and distribute correctly into it, with no advance signal of what's coming next, exactly as Weeks 18 and 19's own closing conditioned matches ask of the outfield team.

Rules: Phases run continuously with minimal stoppage; no advance signal of which shape or change is coming next.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Distribution technique holds up across every shape under unpredictable, continuous pressure.
Tactical	Correct shape recognition and target selection applied instantly, without a chance to reset first.
Physical	Sustained sharpness in scanning and quick, explosive repositioning across a longer, continuous sequence.
Psychological	Full recovery and reset between phases, regardless of the outcome of the one before.
Communication & leadership	Clear, loud calls naming the shape in use, maintained throughout a demanding sequence.

Tactical roles: Goalkeeper — reads and distributes correctly across every shape and change tonight's session covered.

Outfield players — provide genuinely varied, realistic build-up pictures without artificially telegraphing the shape in advance.

Decision-making triggers: the full set from Practices 2 and 3, now applied without warning and in rapid succession.

Communication language used: the full set from tonight — *Drop, Hold, Time, Turn* — used together under realistic conditions.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Which shape or change tested your reading the most tonight, and why?

2. What's the difference between recognising a shape and recognising a change mid-possession — which is harder?
3. What's one thing from tonight you want to take into Tuesday and Thursday's own build-up work?

Progressions:

1. Increase the frequency of shape changes, reducing the goalkeeper's recovery time between reads.
2. Add a defender working alongside the goalkeeper to organise the back line's own recognition of each shape together.

Regressions:

1. Slow the phase frequency, allowing a full reset between shape changes while confidence builds.
2. Return to Practice 2 or 3 in isolation if a specific shape's distribution is breaking down under combined pressure.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Reading and distribution from Practices 2–3 breaks down under the combined, unpredictable pressure of this practice	The added cognitive load of not knowing which shape is coming next	A goalkeeper who read each shape correctly in isolation now defaulting to one habitual read regardless of the actual picture	Let it flow, address after	A private word after the phase, referencing the specific shape from Practice 2 or 3	Continue
Physical sharpness visibly drops through the practice — slower repositioning, later releases	The genuinely different, explosive-effort loading pattern this session trains, compounding across a longer live sequence	A goalkeeper who was quick to reposition early in the practice becoming a beat slow later on	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	A direct reminder that reading the picture matters most exactly when fatigue makes it hardest	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a private, delayed conversation for reading breaking down under combined pressure; a direct reminder for fading sharpness late in the practice.

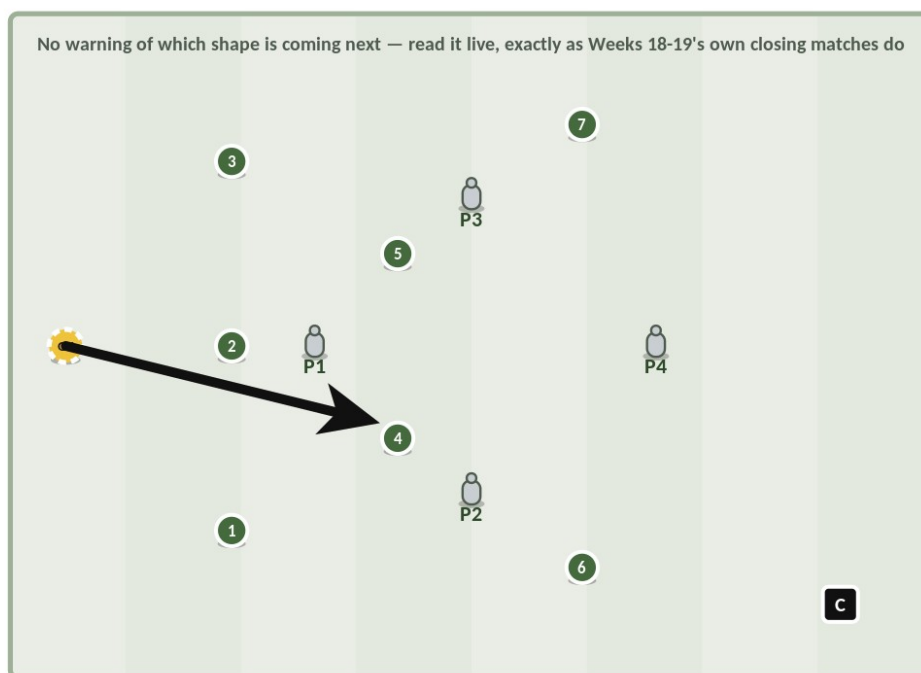
Success indicators:

- Shape recognition and distribution from Practices 2–3 hold up recognisably under combined, unpredictable pressure.
- Decision-making stays correct and fast across every shape and every change.
- Communication remains clear throughout, not just in the opening phases.

Coach's eye: this practice is the real answer to the question tonight exists to ask — not whether the goalkeeper can pick the right pass in a clean, announced picture, but whether that reading survives the pace, fatigue and unpredictability a genuine Saturday actually produces.

TC7.4 UNDER THE PRESS — Closing Live Scenario

50 x 36 m (half pitch) · shape varies rep to rep · read it, then release · 12 minutes



Building team



Pressing team



Distribution under pressure

Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · Goalkeeper Distribution (standalone) · Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC · Standalone Individual Technical Session



Defending the Box

Tags: `set-piece` `standalone` `defending` `dead-ball` `crosses`

Kicker: Week 5 installed the zonal-plus-post structure for corners and Week 16 added the second-phase players — but corners are only one of the deliveries a box has to survive. Wide free-kicks, deep open-play crosses and long throws arrive more often than corners do, and until now nothing in the folder said how the same structure handles them.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Defending the Box — Wide Free-Kicks, Open-Play Crosses and Long Throws
Short summary	Extends the club's established zonal-plus-post defensive structure from corners to every other delivery a penalty area faces: the wide free-kick (line height, a small wall, and the step on the strike), the deep cross from open play (recovering into box-defending jobs while the ball travels), and the long throw with its second-phase scraps. One structure, one vocabulary, every delivery — closing with a live game that serves all three unscripted. Pairs directly with the Heading session's aerial work; this session assumes that contact and coaches the organisation around it.
Total duration	50 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Central to the whole session — start position, the claim-or-stay call, and command of the defensive line are coached in every practice.
Area layout	A defensive third and full penalty area throughout; Practice 4 adds a halfway-line build-up zone.
Equipment	Flat markers for zonal reference positions, cones for delivery stations, a supply of balls, bibs for attack and defence, one full-size goal.
Contingency — lower attendance	The structure scales: with fewer than 14, drop the second-phase players first (as Week 16 defines them), then one out-ball player — the core zonal-plus-post jobs are protected last.
A note on load	Aerial volume is shared by rotating attacking and defending units between practices; the Heading session's guidance on head knocks applies throughout — any player who takes a blow to the head comes off and stays off.

PRACTICE 1 — JOBS BEFORE DELIVERIES (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Rehearses the structure before any ball arrives — every player physically walks their zonal-plus-post job for a corner, then adjusts the same job for a wide free-kick and a deep cross, so the session's whole vocabulary is set while heart rates rise gently.

Organisation: The defending unit in the penalty area, the coach at three delivery stations (corner flag, wide free-kick position, deep wide open-play position), no opposition yet.

Walkthrough: The coach points to a station; the unit moves into its shape for that delivery and calls its jobs aloud — near post, far post, zonal markers, the marker on the most dangerous opponent, out-balls. Then jog, reset, next station. Twice around all three at walking pace, twice at three-quarter pace.

Rules: Every player names their own job out loud on every reset — a player who has to think about it in silence here will be silent on Saturday too.

Coaching points:

- *Tactical:* the jobs do not change between deliveries — what changes is where the line starts and how far the shape slides toward the ball.
- *Communication:* the goalkeeper conducts every reset; nobody settles into position until the keeper has confirmed the picture.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — THE WIDE FREE-KICK (LINE, WALL AND THE STEP)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds the defence of the delivery amateur teams concede from most — the wide free-kick between the touchline and the edge of the box — where the defensive line's height, a small wall, and a collective step on the strike decide more than any duel does.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** defensive third, full penalty area
- **Players:** 8 defenders plus goalkeeper against 6 attackers, one attacking delivery specialist
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** sets the wall, sets the line, makes the claim-or-stay call live on every delivery
- **Team sizes:** 8+GK v 7
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers for the line's reference height, a supply of balls at the delivery station
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** at the wide free-kick station
- **Restart:** reset to the walked shape from Practice 1 after each delivery
- **Coach position:** behind the goal, seeing the line and the flight together
- **Rotation method:** attacking and defending units swap every 4–5 deliveries
- **Direction of play:** deliveries into the box, defence clearing away and out

Practice walkthrough: The attacking specialist delivers wide free-kicks from varying depths. The defence sets: a one- or two-player wall on the ball, the line held deliberately high enough to leave the space behind it for the keeper, the zonal-plus-post jobs from Practice 1 applied inside that line. On the strike, the line steps up together — one collective movement, coached until it is one movement — leaving late runners beyond it, then defends the delivery with the first-contact and clearance standards the Heading session sets: high, wide and long, never flat and central.

Rules: A clearance that goes high, wide and long scores for the defence; any attacking touch inside the six-yard box scores for the attack; a line that steps as individuals rather than together resets the rep regardless of outcome.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	First contact on the delivery, cleared high, wide and long — the Heading session's defensive contact applied inside a structure.
Tactical	The line's height set by the keeper's reach, not by fear — the space behind the line belongs to the goalkeeper, and defending deeper than necessary invites the delivery to be perfect.
Physical	The collective step on the strike — timed off the kicker's approach, together, holding a straight line.
Psychological	Trusting the step — the defender who ducks out of it and drops early plays everyone onside on their own.
Communication & leadership	The keeper owns the wall, the line, and the call; the near-post defender echoes the line's height to the players who can't see the keeper.

Tactical roles: **Goalkeeper** — sets everything, then makes the live claim-or-stay call. **Wall player(s)** — take the direct strike option away and screen the sight-line. **Line** — holds height, steps together on the strike, then defends the box with the Practice 1 jobs. **Out-ball players** — beyond the shape, ready to attack the clearance.

Decision-making triggers: the kicker's run-up beginning is the trigger for the collective step; a delivery dropping in front of the six-yard area with a clean path triggers the keeper's claim; anything deeper or through traffic triggers "away!" and the zonal jobs take it.

Communication language used: "keeper's!" / "away!" as installed across the programme, plus the keeper's line instructions ("up two", "hold") before each delivery.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What told you when to step — the referee's whistle, the kicker's approach, or a call? Which of those is actually reliable?
2. When the line stepped well, where did the delivery have to go to hurt us — and who was there?
3. What does defending two yards deeper than necessary cost, over a whole season of these?

Progressions:

1. Vary the delivery between driven, floated and second-post, forcing the keeper's call to genuinely vary.
2. Add a disguised short option beside the kicker, so the line must hold its discipline against two pictures.

Regressions:

1. Return to Practice 1's walked resets between deliveries if the shape is dissolving under live service.
2. Fix the delivery type for a block of reps so the line can groove the step against a known flight.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The line steps as individuals, leaving a ragged edge that plays runners onside	Players watching the ball's flight instead of feeling the line beside them	Attackers repeatedly arriving onside behind one dropped defender	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: re-set the trigger — the step goes off the kicker's approach, together, every time	Resume
The defence sets too deep, defending the six-yard box before the ball is even struck	Fear of the ball in behind overriding the keeper's ownership of that space	The keeper with no space to attack, and every delivery becoming a contested scramble	Stop	Short group intervention: walk the line up to the keeper's stated height and replay the same delivery	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for the ragged individual step; a short group intervention for a line set too deep.

Success indicators:

- The step happens as one movement on a consistent trigger, every delivery.
- Clearances meet the high-wide-long standard rather than dropping flat and central.
- The keeper's call comes early on every delivery and is never contested.

Coach's eye: watch the line's worst stepper, not its best — on Saturday the line is exactly as good as the defender who trusts the step least.

Defensive third • line height set by the keeper, collective step on the strike • 14 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · **Defending the Box** · page 5 of 11

PRACTICE 3 — CROSS COMING (OPEN-PLAY CROSSES AND THE LONG THROW)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Applies the same box-defending jobs to the deliveries that arrive without a whistle — the deep cross from open play, where the shape must be built *while the ball travels*, and the long throw, where the scrap for the second phase is the whole contest.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** defensive third, full penalty area, with two wide open-play crossing stations and one long-throw station
- **Players:** 8 defenders plus goalkeeper against 7 attackers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** live claim-or-stay call on every delivery; commands the reorganisation as the cross develops
- **Team sizes:** 8+GK v 7
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** a supply of balls at each station, flat markers for the zonal reference positions
- **Starting positions:** the defence starts *disorganised* — jogging back toward goal as the delivery develops, as in a real match
- **Ball supply:** at the wide stations and the throw station
- **Restart:** the coach calls the next station as soon as the previous delivery resolves
- **Coach position:** central, able to call stations and watch the recovery
- **Rotation method:** attacking and defending units swap every 5–6 deliveries; aerial load shared
- **Direction of play:** deliveries into the box, defence clearing away and out

Practice walkthrough: Unlike Practice 2, no delivery here waits for the defence to be ready. On the coach's call, a wide player attacks their station and crosses — deep, driven or cut back — while the defenders recover goal-side and build the Practice 1 jobs on the move: who has near post, who has far, who marks the most dangerous runner, who screens the cutback. The long-throw station adds the third picture: the flick-on zone is attacked by a designated defender, the keeper protects the six-yard line, and everyone else fights for the second phase — because a long throw is rarely defended at the first contact and almost always at the scrap after it.

Rules: The defence concedes a point for any attacking touch inside the six-yard box and earns one for a high-wide-long clearance or a keeper's clean claim; on long throws, winning the *second* contact scores double for either side — that is where those goals actually come from.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	First contact under a moving, contested delivery; the cutback screened by a recovering midfielder, not just the back line.
Tactical	Jobs claimed aloud while the ball travels — a recovering defence that sorts its box in the three seconds of the cross's flight is organised; one that sorts it after the first contact is lucky.
Physical	Repeated recovery runs into duels — the practice deliberately arrives tired, because the real picture does.
Psychological	Calm in the scramble — the second phase after a long throw or a parried cross is won by the side that keeps making decisions.
Communication & leadership	The keeper conducting the recovery ("near post's yours, watch the cutback"), and the nearest defender calling the throw's flick-on zone early.

Tactical roles: **Goalkeeper** — conducts the recovering shape, then owns the claim-or-stay call. **Recovering defenders** — claim the Practice 1 jobs aloud, on the move, before the delivery arrives. **Designated flick-on defender** — attacks the long throw's first contact zone. **Second-phase players** — Week 16's jobs, applied to every delivery type here.

Decision-making triggers: the wide player's head going down to cross is the trigger to stop retreating and set; a throw-taker's long run-up is the trigger to set the flick-on defender and squeeze the second-phase spaces; a parried or half-cleared ball triggers an immediate collective squeeze out, never a flat-footed watch.

Communication language used: "keeper's!" / "away!", plus job claims on the move — "near's mine", "cutback", "second ball".

Guided discovery questions:

1. When the cross beat us, was the delivery unstoppable — or were the jobs still unclaimed when it arrived?
2. On the long throw, where did the danger actually come from: the first contact, or what happened after it?
3. What's the difference between retreating toward goal and recovering into a job?

Progressions:

1. Let the attack choose the station without the coach's call, so the defence reads the real cue — the ball's position — rather than an instruction.
2. Add a midfield runner arriving late at the edge of the box, the cutback threat that punishes a defence that has collapsed too deep.

Regressions:

1. Return to organised starting positions (Practice 2 style) if the recovering shape isn't forming at all.
2. Reduce to one delivery type per block until each picture is individually solid.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Defenders retreat to the goal-line rather than recovering into jobs	Instinct to protect the goal rather than the spaces the delivery will use	Six defenders inside the six-yard box and the cutback zone completely empty	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: replay the same cross with jobs claimed aloud during its flight	Resume
The long throw's second phase is watched, not attacked	Everyone assumes the first contact ends the danger	The ball dropping in the box after a flick-on with no defender moving toward it	Stop	Short group intervention: re-set the double-score rule's point — the second contact <i>is</i> the contest	Resume
The keeper goes quiet once the delivery is airborne	Concentration narrowing onto the catch decision	Defenders glancing back mid-duel because nobody has called	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question to the keeper: "what did your defenders know while that ball was in the air?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for goal-line retreating; a short group intervention for the unattacked second phase; reflective questioning for the quiet keeper.

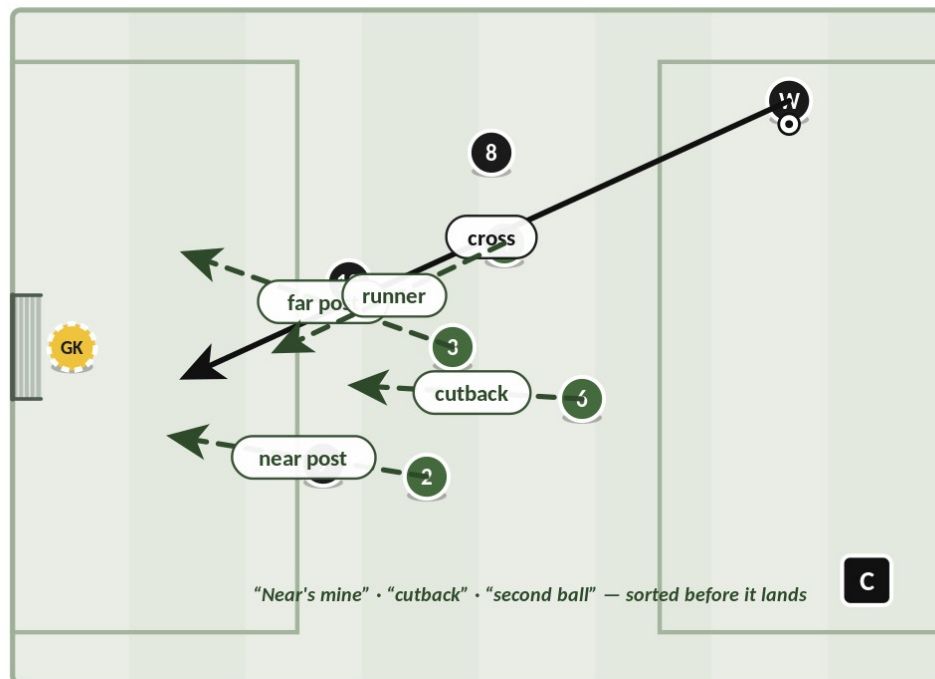
Success indicators:

- Jobs are audibly claimed while the ball travels, not after it lands.
- Second-phase contacts are won more often than lost, on throws and parries alike.
- Cutbacks are screened by a recovering player rather than arriving unopposed.

Coach's eye: ignore the ball for a rep at a time and watch the box instead — an organised box looks organised *before* the delivery arrives, and that's the habit this practice exists to build.

SP5.3 CROSS COMING — Recovering Into Jobs

Open-play cross • jobs claimed aloud while the ball travels • 14 minutes



● Recovering defenders ● Attackers ⊙ Ball ➞ Recovery into a job ➞ Cross
C Coach

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Defending the Box (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 4 — SURVIVE THE SIEGE (CLOSING LIVE GAME)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** High

Purpose: Closes the session with a live, deliberately uncomfortable game in which every restart is a box delivery — corners, wide free-kicks, long throws — so the whole structure is tested at match intensity, under fatigue, with a score attached.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** two-thirds of a pitch, full penalty area at the defended end, a build-out target line at the other
- **Players:** a defending unit of 8 plus goalkeeper against an attacking unit of 8
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** full match role — every call, every claim, every piece of conducting from Practices 2–3, live
- **Team sizes:** 8+GK v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** bibs, a generous supply of balls at the delivery stations, markers for the build-out line
- **Starting positions:** open play from a delivery
- **Ball supply:** stations at both corners, both wide free-kick positions and one throw position
- **Restart:** every restart of any kind becomes the attack's choice of box delivery
- **Coach position:** mobile, watching the defensive shape rather than the ball
- **Rotation method:** units swap halfway; aerial load shared
- **Direction of play:** attack toward the defended goal; the defence scores by clearing and carrying or passing over the build-out line

Practice walkthrough: A game with the normal middle taken out: whenever the ball goes dead, the attacking unit picks any delivery station and the siege continues. The defence lives the real sequence — organised set-piece, scramble, clearance, squeeze out, then a recovering cross arriving before the shape has fully re-formed. Scoring is honest about what defending a box is for: the attack scores goals; the defence scores by winning the ball and playing it controlled over the build-out line — because a clearance that comes straight back was never really a clearance.

Rules: All restarts are box deliveries of the attack's choosing; defence scores for a controlled exit over the build-out line; a goal conceded directly from any delivery restarts the same delivery type immediately — the structure gets its rematch straight away.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	First contacts and clearance quality holding at match intensity, under fatigue, against a free choice of delivery.
Tactical	The same jobs, claimed and filled, across corners, free-kicks, throws and recycled crosses — one structure surviving every picture in sequence.
Physical	Repeated maximal duels and recovery runs — this is deliberately the hardest quarter-hour of the session.
Psychological	Composure across the whole sequence: set-piece, scramble, exit — no switching off after the first contact.
Communication & leadership	The keeper conducting for fourteen unbroken minutes, and outfield leaders re-setting the shape between deliveries without waiting for the coach.

Tactical roles: the complete set from Practices 2 and 3, now sequenced live — plus the exit: the out-ball players and second-phase players turning won balls into controlled possession over the build-out line.

Decision-making triggers: all triggers from Practices 2 and 3, arriving unscripted; a won first contact triggers the collective squeeze out; a controlled possession triggers the exit rather than a hopeful clearance back into traffic.

Communication language used: everything the session has installed, sustained under fatigue — which is precisely when it usually disappears.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Which delivery type hurt us most tonight — and was it the delivery, or the organisation before it?
2. How many of our clearances became controlled exits, and how many came straight back?
3. What does this defending look like in the last ten minutes on Saturday when we're protecting a lead?

Progressions:

1. Award the attack a bonus for scoring within two deliveries of winning a restart, punishing slow defensive resets directly.
2. Play the final four minutes with the defence a player down — the red-card rehearsal every season eventually needs.

Regressions:

1. Limit the attack's choice to one delivery type per phase if the shape is failing against the free choice.
2. Remove the build-out line temporarily and let the defence score on any high-wide-long clearance while exits are rebuilt.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The shape defends the first delivery well and the recycled cross badly	Concentration released after the set-piece moment passes	Goals and chances arriving from the second or third delivery of a sequence, not the first	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "when did that sequence actually end?"	Resume
Clearances go anywhere under fatigue, and come straight back	Tiredness collapsing the high-wide-long standard into panic	The siege never breaking because no clearance reaches the out-balls	Stop	Short group intervention: slow one rep to three-quarter pace, restore the standard, then resume live	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: reflective questioning for sequence concentration; a short group intervention for panicked clearing under fatigue.

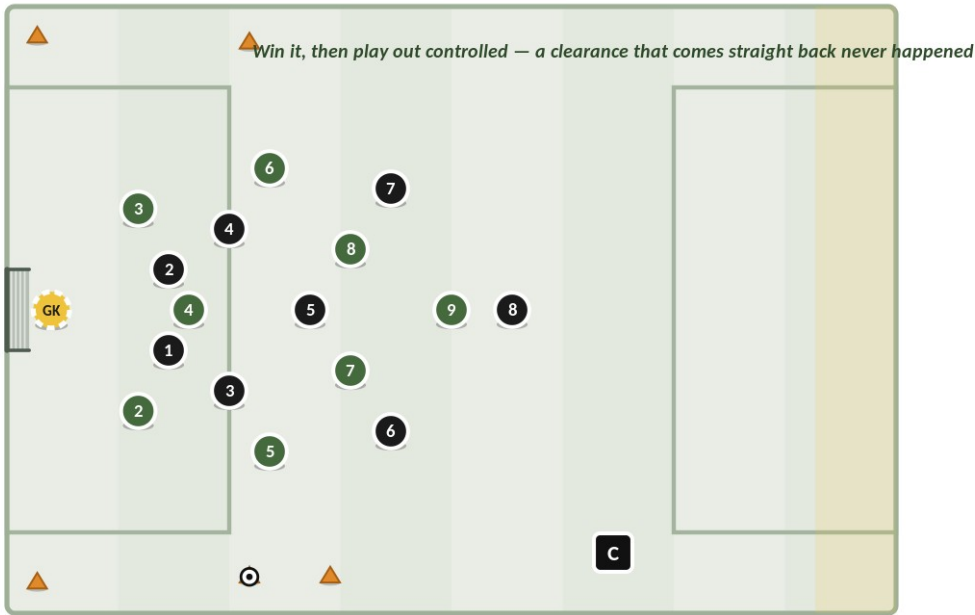
Success indicators:

- No goal conceded on the immediate rematch delivery — the structure corrects itself within one rep.
- Controlled exits outnumber clearances that come straight back by the end of the game.
- The keeper's conducting is still audible in minute fourteen.

Coach's eye: the sequence after the second delivery is the truth of this session — most amateur teams defend the first ball with organisation and the third with hope, and the gap between those two is exactly what this game measures.

SP5.4 SURVIVE THE SIEGE — Closing Live Game

Every restart a box delivery • defence scores by controlled exit over the line • 14 minutes



- Defending unit
- Attacking unit
- ⦿ Ball
- Build-out target line
- ▲ Delivery stations

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Defending the Box (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Set-Piece Session



Direct Free-Kicks

Tags: `set-piece` `standalone` `direct-free-kick` `dead-ball`

Kicker: A genuine shot at goal from a direct free-kick — attacking technique and disguise, and a defensive structure that actually changes with distance and angle instead of a single wall used everywhere.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Direct Free-Kicks — Attack and Defence
Short summary	Everything the club has built around dead balls so far is delivery into the box — corners, wide free-kicks, throw-ins. This session covers the one that's missing: a free-kick close enough to shoot from directly. Two takers get real reps at technique and disguise, the defence learns that a wall isn't a single fixed shape but a decision driven by distance and angle, and a closing game puts both sides together under pressure.
Total duration	55 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Central throughout — both keepers face live strikes in Practice 2 and organise the defensive structure in Practice 3.
Area layout	Edge-of-the-box working area for Practices 1–2; a full penalty-area-and-approach zone for Practices 3–4.
Equipment	A wall of mannequins or portable barriers if available (four to six), cones marking distance bands at 18, 22, and 25 yards, a supply of balls.
Contingency — restricted space	Practices 1 and 2 need only a real goal and a genuine 18–25 yard working distance; they don't need the rest of the pitch. Practice 3 needs a real penalty box.

PRACTICE 1 — STRIKE REPS (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 10 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Individual striking technique before the two practices that depend on it — this is the one arrival in the curriculum where the technique itself, not just a general warm-up, is the point.

Organisation: Pairs at the edge of the penalty area, one ball between two, a target goal with or without a keeper. Both keepers join in — one in goal facing strikes, one rotating through the outfield reps.

Walkthrough: Players rotate through short blocks of technique work — a stationary strike for contact and follow-through, then a short run-up strike for the same, then a strike over a low obstacle (a bag or a mannequin on its side) for the dip a real wall demands.

Rules: Even rotation across all three technical blocks before anyone moves to live shooting.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* clean contact through the lower-mid part of the ball for dip; a full, uninterrupted follow-through.
- *Psychological:* treat the technique work with the same seriousness as the live reps that follow — the two are not separable.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple and technical so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — BEND IT (ATTACKING DIRECT FREE-KICK)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Installs the club's first direct free-kick routine — not just technique in isolation, but a real decision-making structure: which of two or three nominated takers strikes it, which technique they use, and how a decoy run disguises the choice until the last possible moment.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** working area from the edge of the box out to 25 yards, full-size goal
- **Players:** 2–3 nominated takers, a 4-player mannequin or passive wall, a goalkeeper, 2–3 decoy runners
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** central — sets the wall's edge, covers the near-post gap, and faces every live strike
- **Team sizes:** small group rotation; every taker gets repeated attempts from varied distances and angles
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** portable wall or mannequins, cones marking three distance bands (18, 22, 25 yards)
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** a steady supply at the free-kick spot
- **Restart:** reset after every strike, moving the spot through the distance bands
- **Coach position:** behind the wall, able to see both the taker's technique and the keeper's positioning
- **Rotation method:** takers rotate every 4–5 strikes; decoy runners rotate with them
- **Direction of play:** always at the same goal

Practice walkthrough: A nominated taker stands over the ball at one of three marked distances. A decoy runner steps toward the ball as if to strike it, peeling away at the last moment — the genuine taker then strikes. The wall holds its line until the ball is struck. Each taker works through all three distance bands, with the coach and goalkeeper calling out which technique (dip over the wall, curl around it, low and hard under it) suits each specific distance and angle before the strike is taken.

Rules: The decoy run must look like a genuine strike option — a half-hearted one defeats the purpose. The wall may not react to the decoy; it holds until the ball is actually struck.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Clean contact and full follow-through hold up under the added pressure of a real wall and a live keeper.
Tactical	The right technique is chosen for the specific distance and angle, not the taker's favourite regardless of situation.
Physical	Explosive, committed running for the decoy — a jogged run gives the disguise away immediately.
Psychological	Calm, unhurried body language standing over the ball, even though the decision behind it is happening fast.
Communication & leadership	The taker's <i>Set</i> call brings the whole routine — decoy included — under one clear signal.

Tactical roles: **Primary taker** — reads distance and angle, selects technique, strikes. **Decoy runner** — sells the disguise convincingly enough that a real wall would have to respect it. **Support players** — stand in likely rebound positions to convert a parried save.

Decision-making triggers: distance and angle from goal determine technique — closer and central favours dip or curl over the wall; wider angles favour curling around it; anything inside 20 yards and central can go low and hard under a wall that's set too high.

Communication language used: *Set* (the taker calling the wall and decoy into position), *Go* (the decoy's cue to begin their run).

Guided discovery questions:

1. What changed about your technique choice between the 18-yard strike and the 25-yard strike, and why?
2. What made the decoy run genuinely convincing rather than just a formality?
3. If the wall reacts early to the decoy, what does that tell you about how well it's disguised?

Progressions:

1. Add a live, reactive wall that can react (legally, after the ball is struck) to test whether the technique holds under real pressure.
2. Add a second, simultaneous decoy run from the opposite side to further split the wall and goalkeeper's attention.
3. Introduce a shot clock to simulate the real pressure of a match-day free-kick.

Regressions:

1. Remove the decoy entirely while technique is still being grooved.
2. Fix the distance at 20 yards until technique is consistent before varying it.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The decoy run is obviously fake and the "wall" (or a real defence) would never respect it	Insufficient commitment to the disguise, treating it as a formality	Decoy runner slows or signals early that they aren't the real taker	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: have the decoy sprint through as if genuinely striking	Resume
Technique breaks down under the added pressure of the wall or shot clock	The technical work in Practice 1 hasn't yet transferred to a pressured decision	Strikes that were clean in isolation become rushed or mishit	Stop	Reduce the pressure element temporarily, rebuild the technique, then reintroduce it	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for a weak decoy run; a temporary reduction in pressure (removing the shot clock or the reactive wall) if technique degrades, followed by a controlled reintroduction.

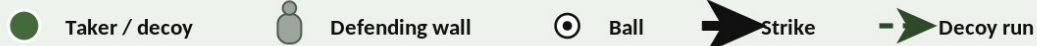
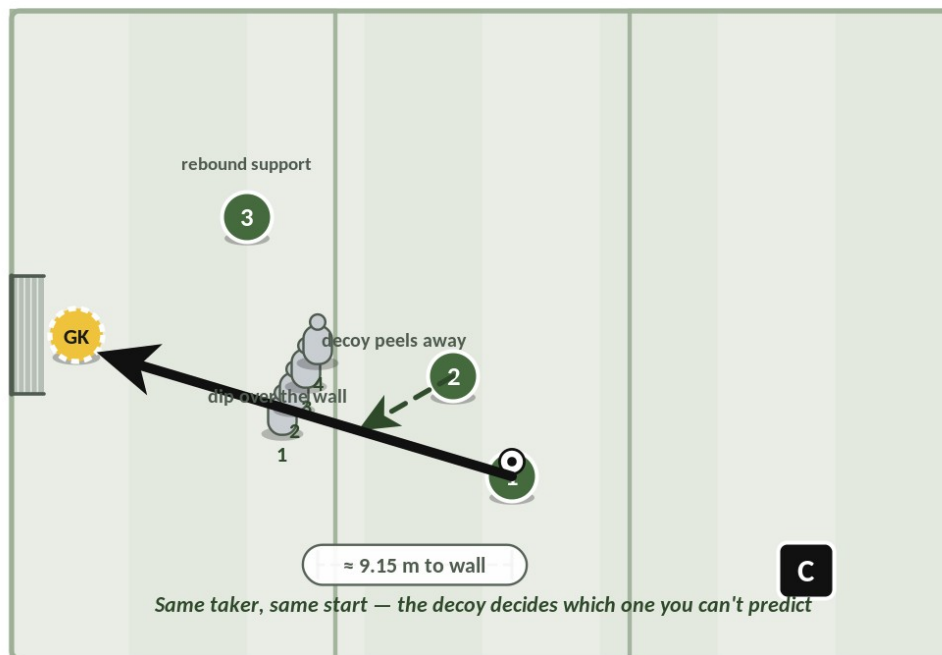
Success indicators:

- Each nominated taker can select an appropriate technique for a given distance and angle without prompting.
- The decoy run is convincing enough that the coach, watching from behind the wall, is genuinely unsure which player will strike until the last moment.
- Strike quality (contact, follow-through, placement) holds steady across all three distance bands.

Coach's eye: this is squad psychology as much as technique — a taker who looks hesitant standing over the ball has already told the goalkeeper something. Calm, unhurried body language is part of the routine, not separate from it.

SP1.2 BEND IT — Attacking Direct Free-Kick

Edge-of-box working area • disguised strike with a decoy run • 15 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Direct Free-Kicks (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 3 — HOLD THE ANGLE (DEFENSIVE ORGANISATION BY DISTANCE AND ANGLE)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Installs the principle that a defensive free-kick structure is a decision, not a default — wall size and shape should change with distance and angle from goal, not stay fixed regardless of where the free-kick is conceded.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full penalty area and the 25-yard approach to it
- **Players:** full back line plus goalkeeper; attacking side sets up free-kicks from marked distance-and-angle combinations
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** central — sets the wall, organises the far-post cover, and makes the final call on wall size
- **Team sizes:** 6–8 defenders against a taker and 2–3 attacking runners
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** cones marking distance-and-angle combinations (central at 18 and 25 yards; wide angle at 20 yards)
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at each marked spot in turn
- **Restart:** fresh free-kick after each defensive setup
- **Coach position:** central, able to see both the wall's shape and the goalkeeper's positioning relative to it
- **Rotation method:** the free-kick's distance and angle changes every 2–3 repetitions; defenders rotate through wall duty
- **Direction of play:** defending the same goal throughout

Practice walkthrough: The attacking side sets a free-kick at one of five marked distance-and-angle combinations. The defending goalkeeper and back line organise a wall sized and positioned for that specific combination — a central free-kick just outside the box gets a full four-to-five player wall covering the near angle, with the keeper covering the far post gap; a wide-angle free-kick gets a much smaller wall (or none at all) with players instead spread to cover runners in the box; a free-kick from 25 yards or beyond gets a minimal wall, since the real danger there is a delivery into a crowded box rather than a direct strike. After each setup, the taker strikes or delivers, and the group reviews whether the structure matched the danger.

Rules: The defending side must set a genuinely different structure for each distance-and-angle combination — repeating the same wall regardless of the free-kick's position is treated as the error under review this practice is built to correct.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	The wall stands square, holds its jump until the ball is struck, and doesn't turn away from a hard strike.
Tactical	Wall size and shape genuinely change with distance and angle, rather than defaulting to one fixed structure.
Physical	Organising the structure quickly enough that the attacking side can't exploit a slow setup.
Psychological	Composure in the wall — flinching or turning away is a habit that has to be corrected early, not tolerated as nerves.
Communication & leadership	The goalkeeper's <i>Wall</i> , <i>Post</i> , and <i>Box</i> calls are heard and acted on by every defender, not just the nearest one.

Tactical roles: **Wall organiser** (usually a central defender or the goalkeeper) — reads distance and angle and calls the wall size. **Wall players** — hold the line exactly where positioned, do not jump early. **Far-post cover** — the player or keeper responsible for the space a wall doesn't reach. **Box markers** — pick up dangerous runners when the free-kick is too wide or too deep to be a direct threat.

Decision-making triggers: central and inside 20 yards means a full wall and near-post cover is the priority; wide angle means the direct shot is a low threat, so bodies move to the box instead; beyond 25 yards, a token wall plus zonal box cover matches the real danger, which is a delivery, not a strike.

Communication language used: *Wall* (the goalkeeper's call for size and position), *Post* (confirming who covers the far post gap), *Box* (redirecting defenders from wall duty to zonal marking when the angle makes a direct shot unlikely).

Guided discovery questions:

1. What specifically changed about the structure between the central 18-yard free-kick and the wide-angle one?
2. Why does a free-kick from 25 yards or more get a smaller wall rather than a bigger one?
3. Who is responsible for the space behind the wall, and how do they know when to be there?

Progressions:

1. Add a live attacking side with real intent to score, not just deliver, testing whether the structure holds under genuine pressure.
2. Reduce the setup time between the free-kick being awarded and the structure being organised, simulating a quickly-taken kick.
3. Combine a central free-kick threat with a genuine decoy run to test whether the defence's attention splits correctly.

Regressions:

1. Walk through each distance-and-angle combination at no pace before adding a live taker.
2. Fix the wall organiser's calls in advance for the first few repetitions until the underlying principle is understood.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The same wall size and shape is used regardless of the free-kick's distance and angle	Habit — defenders default to the shape they know rather than reading the specific situation	A wide-angle free-kick still gets a full central wall, leaving the box under-covered	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: walk through why this specific position demands a different structure	Resume
The far-post gap behind the wall is left uncovered	No single player has been given explicit responsibility for it	A delivery or strike toward the far post finds no defender in position	Stop	Assign the far-post cover role explicitly and repeat	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for a mismatched structure; explicit role assignment when the far-post gap is left open.

Success indicators:

- The defending side visibly organises a different structure for each of the five marked distance-and-angle combinations without being told which one to use.
- The far-post gap is covered in every repetition.
- Players can explain, unprompted, why a given free-kick position calls for the structure they chose.

Coach's eye: watch the goalkeeper's calls specifically — a keeper who's genuinely reading distance and angle sounds different from one reciting the same instruction every time. That's the real marker that the principle has landed, not just the shape of the wall itself.

Full penalty area • the wall's shape is a decision, not a default • 15 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · **Direct Free-Kicks** · page 8 of 11

PRACTICE 4 — FREE-KICK GAUNTLET (CLOSING LIVE GAME)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session by putting both sides of the practice together under genuine competitive pressure — every stoppage in a small conditioned game becomes a direct free-kick from a randomly assigned distance and angle, alternating which side attacks.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 30 m working area including a full penalty box
- **Players:** two teams of 6–7, both goalkeepers involved
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** each keeper defends their own goal for the full practice
- **Team sizes:** 6v6 or 7v7 with goalkeepers
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** cones marking the five distance-and-angle combinations from Practice 3
- **Starting positions:** open play, restarting at a marked free-kick spot after any stoppage inside the working area
- **Ball supply:** a supply at the halfway line for quick restarts between free-kicks
- **Restart:** any foul, or a coach-called "freeze," becomes a direct free-kick from the nearest marked spot
- **Coach position:** mobile, able to call freezes and adjudicate technique and structure
- **Rotation method:** takers and wall organisers rotate every few free-kicks so every player gets a turn in both roles
- **Direction of play:** both directions, standard small-sided game rules otherwise

Practice walkthrough: A small conditioned game runs normally, with the coach periodically calling "freeze" to convert the next restart into a direct free-kick from whichever marked spot is nearest. The attacking side selects a taker and, if they choose, a decoy runner; the defending side organises a structure matched to that specific distance and angle, exactly as rehearsed in Practices 2 and 3. The game resumes immediately after the free-kick is taken, win or lose.

Rules: Standard small-sided game rules, plus: every free-kick must use a genuine technique and structure decision, not a rushed, thoughtless one — the coach may pause and ask either side to explain their choice if it looks arbitrary.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Strike technique and wall discipline both hold up under live, unpredictable conditions.
Tactical	Both sides' decisions still match distance and angle correctly when there's no time to think it through in advance.
Physical	The explosive actions — the decoy run, the wall's hold — don't fade as the game goes on.
Psychological	Composure from both the taker and the wall under a live scoreline, not just in a rehearsed repetition.
Communication & leadership	The full shared language — <i>Set, Go, Wall, Post, Box</i> — is used correctly and quickly under real time pressure.

Tactical roles: the full set from Practices 2 and 3, now applied inside a live, unpredictable game rather than a rehearsed repetition.

Decision-making triggers: the same distance-and-angle triggers from Practices 2 and 3, now under the added pressure of a live scoreline and no advance warning of when the next free-kick will come.

Communication language used: the full set — *Set, Go, Wall, Post, Box* — used together for the first time under live conditions.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What was different about making these decisions inside a live game compared to the rehearsed repetitions?

2. Did the disguise and structure hold up under real time pressure, or did either side revert to habit?
3. Which of tonight's five distance-and-angle combinations came up the most, and does that match how often it happens in a real match?

Progressions:

1. Add a running score specifically for free-kick outcomes, separate from open-play goals, to sharpen focus on this specific moment.
2. Reduce the time allowed to organise a defensive structure after a free-kick is awarded.

Regressions:

1. Reduce the frequency of coach-called freezes if the game is losing its flow.
2. Allow a brief walk-through of the structure before the first few live free-kicks if the group needs it.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Under live pressure, the defending side reverts to one fixed wall shape regardless of distance and angle	The rehearsed principle hasn't yet transferred to unpredictable, live conditions	The same wall size appears for a wide-angle free-kick as for a central one	Stop	Freeze-and-correct, referencing the specific distance-and-angle principle from Practice 3	Resume
The attacking side rushes the free-kick without a real technique or disguise decision	Eagerness to restart the game outweighs the value of the decision	A strike taken with no discernible technique choice or decoy	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what technique did you actually choose there, and why?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for a reverted defensive structure; a reflective question for a rushed attacking decision, allowing play to continue first.

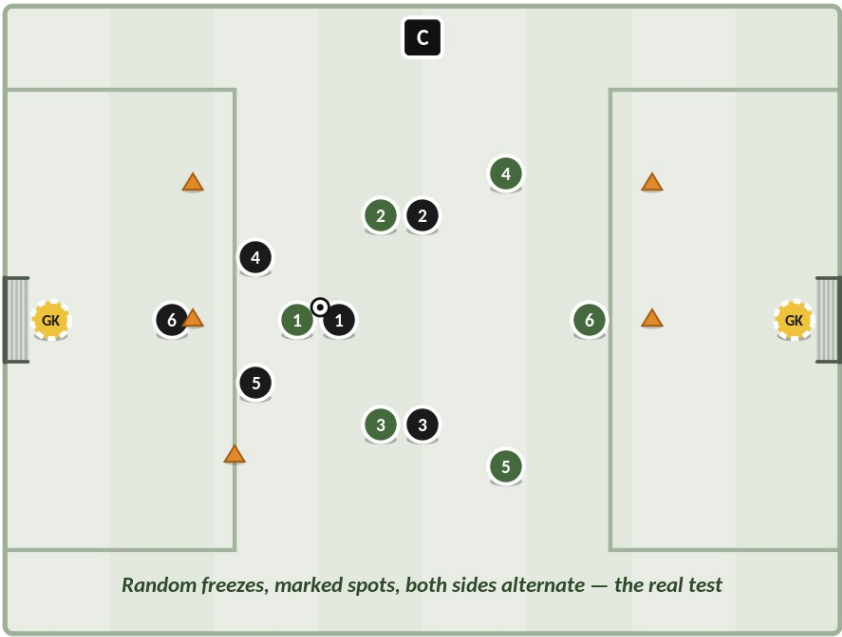
Success indicators:

- Both sides make visibly different decisions for different distance-and-angle combinations, without being reminded.
- The disguise and structure work rehearsed in Practices 2 and 3 is still recognisable under live, unpredictable conditions.
- Players can articulate their decision-making in the moment when asked, not just after the fact.

Coach's eye: this is the genuine test of whether tonight's work will survive a real match — if the decisions look the same here as they did in the rehearsed practices, the session has done its job.

SP1.4 FREE-KICK GAUNTLET — Closing Live Game

40 x 30 m • 6v6 or 7v7 with keepers • every stoppage becomes a direct free-kick • 15 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball ▲ Marked free-kick spot

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Direct Free-Kicks (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Set-Piece Session



Penalties

Tags: `set-piece` `standalone` `penalty` `shootout` `dead-ball`

Kicker: The season plan confirms a taking order before matches that might go to penalties. It has never once trained the technique, the pressure, or the shootout format itself. This session does.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Penalties — Technique and Shootout Preparation
Short summary	Four stages moving from raw technique to full shootout pressure: an unopposed technical arrival, individual placement work against a keeper, a pressure simulation that reproduces the walk and the wait of a real shootout, and a closing competitive shootout between two full squads. The taking order confirmed elsewhere in the programme is used here for the first time — this session is where it gets tested, not just agreed.
Total duration	48 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Two goalkeepers required for Practices 2–4 so both squads can work simultaneously without a queue killing the session's rhythm.
Area layout	A single penalty area and goal for Practices 1–2; two full goals and penalty areas for Practices 3–4 if the pitch allows, otherwise squads alternate on one.
Equipment	A supply of balls, cones marking a walk-up start point 40 m from goal for Practice 3.
Contingency — one goal only	If only one goal is available, run Practices 3–4 with squads alternating rather than working simultaneously — the pressure element is preserved either way.

PRACTICE 1 — SPOT REPS (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 6 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: Unopposed technical repetition — no goalkeeper, no pressure, no consequence. Purely grooving a consistent run-up and clean strike before any decision-making or pressure is added.

Organisation: Each player has a ball at the penalty spot and an empty goal, working individually with plenty of space between spots.

Walkthrough: Each player takes a consistent run-up and strikes low into a corner of their choosing, retrieves the ball, and repeats — focusing entirely on a repeatable technique rather than outcome.

Rules: No goalkeeper opposition; the only rule is a genuinely consistent run-up, struck the same way every time.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* the same run-up length and angle every single time — a penalty taker who changes their approach gives the goalkeeper information for free.
- *Psychological:* treat every repetition exactly the same, whether it's the first strike of the session or the twentieth — this is the habit the shootout later demands.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — PICK YOUR CORNER (INDIVIDUAL TAKER TECHNICAL WORK)

Duration: 12 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Builds genuine placement accuracy and disguise against a live, reacting goalkeeper — the technical foundation every taker needs before pressure is introduced, prioritising placement and disguise over pace of strike.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** single penalty area and goal
- **Players:** takers work in rotation, one goalkeeper
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** live and reacting throughout, genuinely trying to save
- **Team sizes:** individual work, one taker at a time
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** cones marking the two "target corners" inside each side of the goal, used for feedback only, not as a restriction
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** a supply at the penalty spot, reset after each strike
- **Restart:** next taker steps up immediately
- **Coach position:** side-on to the goal, able to see both the taker's technique and the goalkeeper's movement
- **Rotation method:** every taker gets 5 strikes before rotating out
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: Each taker strikes five penalties, alternating their intended corner between strikes, while the coach and goalkeeper watch for the specific tell that gives the taker's intention away before the ball is struck. The goal is genuine placement — low, into a corner the keeper has to travel for — not power for its own sake.

Rules: No stopping to reset technique mid-run-up; a taker who commits to a poor run-up finishes the strike and adjusts on the next one.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A disguised, consistent run-up that gives no early information about direction, finished with a clean strike low into the corner.
Tactical	Genuine variation of corner across the five strikes, rather than a taker who always goes the same way once they find one that works.
Physical	Balance and body shape through the strike — a rushed or off-balance run-up is the single biggest giveaway of intended direction.
Psychological	Full commitment to the chosen corner once the run-up begins — hesitation costs both accuracy and disguise.
Communication & leadership	The goalkeeper gives honest feedback on what, if anything, gave the taker's direction away — this only works if it's delivered constructively.

Tactical roles: **Taker** — commits fully to a disguised, placed strike. **Goalkeeper** — reacts live and reports back honestly on any tells noticed. **Watching players** — observe and learn from every strike, not just their own.

Decision-making triggers: none in the strike itself — the decision (which corner) is made before the run-up begins and is not revised once it starts.

Communication language used: *Committed* (the coach's confirmation that a taker's run-up gave nothing away), *Tell* (used by the goalkeeper to name a specific giveaway observed).

Guided discovery questions:

1. What, if anything, gave away your intended direction before you struck the ball?
2. Why does a consistent run-up matter more than a powerful one?
3. What would you look for if you were the goalkeeper trying to read this taker?

Progressions:

1. Have the goalkeeper attempt to call the corner out loud before the taker strikes, based only on the run-up.
2. Introduce a genuine choice between placement and a harder, more central strike, based on what the goalkeeper's positioning shows.

Regressions:

1. Remove the goalkeeper again briefly if a taker's technique breaks down under live opposition.
2. Reduce to a single fixed corner until the run-up itself is consistent, then reintroduce variation.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The taker's run-up visibly changes depending on which corner they intend to strike	Unconscious technical tells that develop without opposition to expose them	The goalkeeper starts saving strikes at a rate well above chance	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: isolate and demonstrate the specific tell	Resume
The taker rushes the run-up and strikes off-balance	Nerves or impatience under even mild live pressure	The strike lacks placement and often goes straight at the keeper	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: reset the run-up tempo from Practice 1	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for technical tells and for a rushed, off-balance run-up.

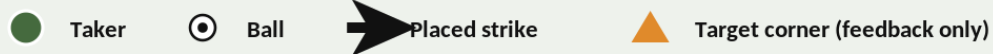
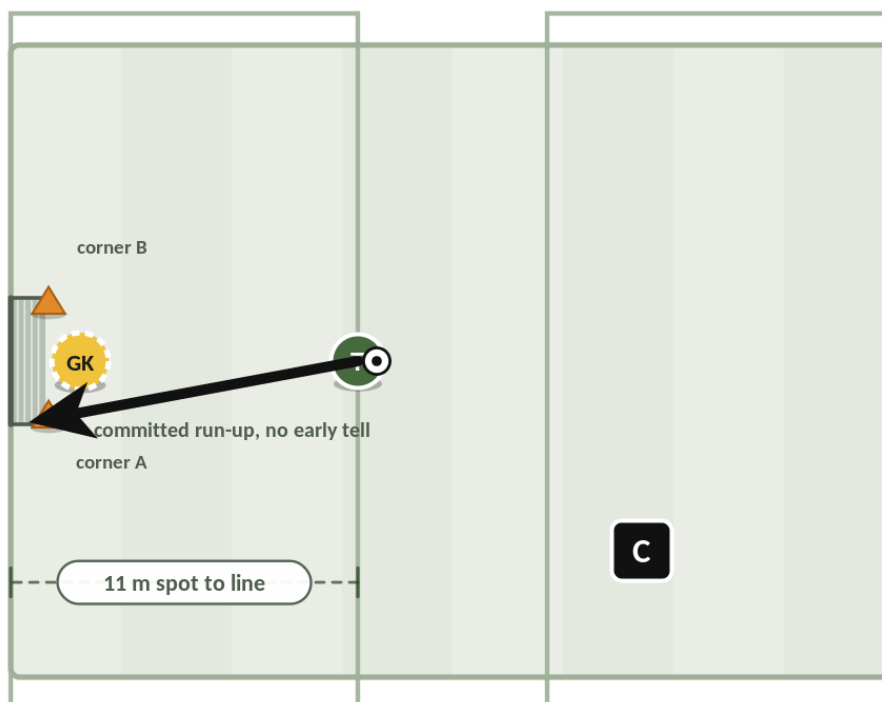
Success indicators:

- The goalkeeper cannot reliably predict direction from the run-up alone.
- Strikes are consistently low and placed into a corner, not central or at height.
- Takers can articulate their own decision-making process when asked.

Coach's eye: the goalkeeper's honest feedback is the single most valuable resource in this practice — protect it by making sure no taker reacts badly to being told their tell.

SP3.2 PICK YOUR CORNER — Individual Taker Technical Work

Penalty area • placement and disguise against a live goalkeeper • 12 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Penalties (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 3 — THE LONG WALK (SHOOTOUT-PRESSURE SIMULATION)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Reproduces the specific psychological demands of a real shootout — the walk from the halfway line, the wait, the isolation of a single opportunity with a real consequence — which technical practice alone cannot train.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full penalty area and goal, plus a marked walk-up start point 40 m out
- **Players:** the full squad in the confirmed taking order, one goalkeeper
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** live and reacting, aware of the taking order and free to use any legitimate gamesmanship a real opponent might
- **Team sizes:** whole squad, one taker at a time
- **Neutrals:** the rest of the squad forms the "watching group," standing together as they would behind the halfway line in a real shootout
- **Equipment:** a cone marking the 40 m walk-up start point
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** placed on the spot before each taker begins their walk
- **Restart:** next taker in the confirmed order begins their walk as soon as the previous strike is resolved
- **Coach position:** near the goal, observing both the taker's walk and the strike itself
- **Rotation method:** the full squad goes once, in the confirmed taking order
- **Direction of play:** toward the same goal throughout

Practice walkthrough: Each player in turn walks the full 40 m from the watching group to the penalty spot alone, exactly as they would in a real shootout, places the ball, waits for the referee's whistle (the coach's call), and strikes. The watching group stays together and is encouraged to generate genuine shootout noise and atmosphere — not hostile, but real. Every strike counts toward a running score the group can see.

Rules: No taker may begin their walk until the previous strike is fully resolved; each taker walks alone, with no support from a teammate accompanying them.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Technique holds up exactly as it did in Practice 2, even after the walk and the wait.
Tactical	Takers stick to their planned corner rather than changing their mind during the walk or at the spot.
Physical	Controlled breathing and a settled body during the walk — arriving at the spot still breathing hard affects the strike.
Psychological	Managing the specific isolation of the walk — this is the core skill this practice exists to train.
Communication & leadership	The watching group's tone — real atmosphere without becoming genuinely destructive to a nervous teammate.

Tactical roles: **Taker** — manages the walk, the wait, and the strike as one continuous sequence. **Goalkeeper** — applies realistic, fair pressure. **Watching group** — generates genuine shootout atmosphere while supporting every teammate regardless of outcome.

Decision-making triggers: none for the taker beyond committing to their practised corner; for the coach, a taker who visibly struggles with the walk is a signal for a private word afterward, not a public correction.

Communication language used: *Ready* (the taker's signal that they're set), the coach's whistle standing in for the referee's.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What was different about striking the ball after the walk compared with Practice 2?
2. What did you do during the walk to manage how you were feeling?
3. How did the group's atmosphere affect you — and how should the group balance realism with support?

Progressions:

1. Add a genuine consequence to the running score (a small, good-natured forfeit for the losing half of the order).
2. Have the goalkeeper announce a save streak out loud as it builds, adding realistic pressure for the takers still to come.

Regressions:

1. Shorten the walk distance for a player visibly overwhelmed by the full version, building back up over future sessions.
2. Remove the running score temporarily if it's undermining confidence rather than building composure.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
A taker's technique breaks down noticeably compared with Practice 2, despite no change in the strike itself	The psychological load of the walk and wait genuinely affects technical execution	A strike well below the standard shown minutes earlier in Practice 2	Let it flow, address after	A private word after the session, not a public correction in the moment	Continue to next taker
The watching group's atmosphere tips from supportive realism into genuine mockery	Enthusiasm outrunning judgement	A teammate visibly rattled by the group's tone rather than focused by it	Stop	A direct, calm reset of the group's tone before continuing	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a private, delayed conversation for pressure-affected technique; an immediate, direct reset if group atmosphere turns unkind.

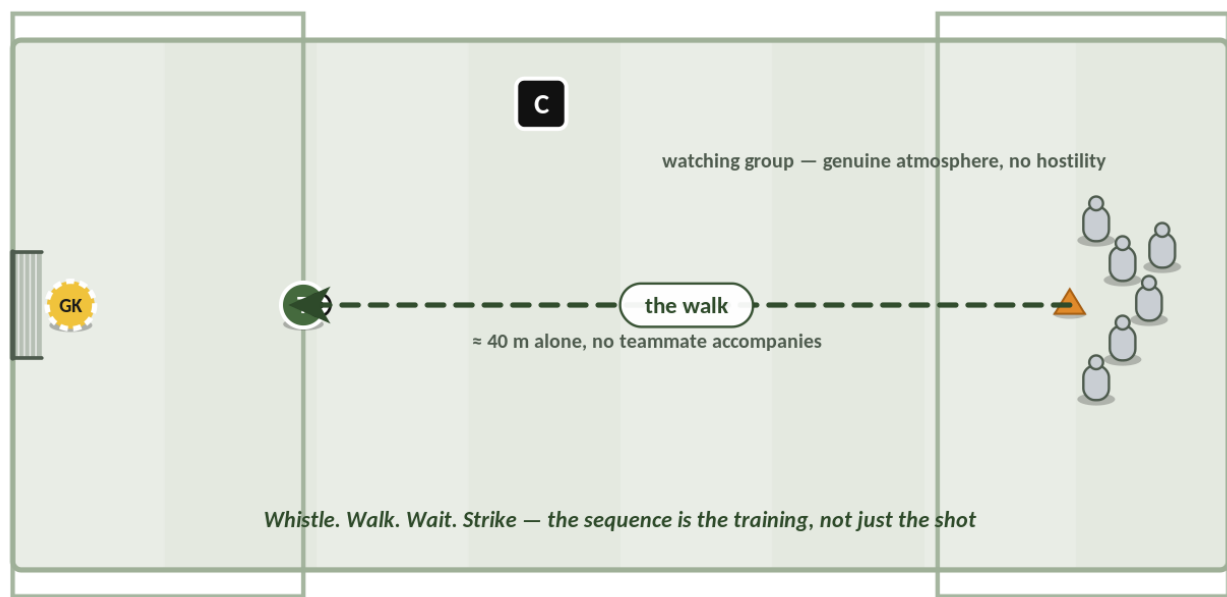
Success indicators:

- Strike quality under the walk is close to Practice 2's standard, even if not identical.
- Every player completes the walk and the strike, regardless of outcome.
- The group's atmosphere stays supportive under scrutiny.

Coach's eye: the score matters far less here than how each player manages the walk — a player who misses but manages the walk well has succeeded at what this practice is actually testing.

SP3.3 THE LONG WALK — Shootout-Pressure Simulation

40 m walk-up to the spot • confirmed taking order • one taker at a time • 15 minutes



- Taker (walking)
- Watching group
- Ball
- 40 m walk-up start

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Penalties (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

PRACTICE 4 — SUDDEN DEATH (CLOSING COMPETITIVE SCENARIO)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session with the full shootout format — five strikes each, sudden death if level — bringing technique, pressure management, and the confirmed taking order together exactly as they would be used in a real match.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** full penalty area and goal, or two if available
- **Players:** full squad split into two shootout teams using the confirmed taking order
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** two goalkeepers if two goals are available, one alternating between ends if not
- **Team sizes:** two full squads
- **Neutrals:** none — every player takes part, either as a taker or in support of their team's takers
- **Equipment:** none beyond standard goals and balls
- **Starting positions:** teams grouped at the halfway line, taking order confirmed before the first strike
- **Ball supply:** placed on the spot before each strike
- **Restart:** standard shootout rules — alternating strikes, sudden death if level after five each
- **Coach position:** central, acting as referee and scorer
- **Rotation method:** the full confirmed order for both teams, sudden death beyond that if required
- **Direction of play:** each team's goalkeeper defends their own goal throughout

Practice walkthrough: A full shootout is played between two squads using the exact format a real match would demand — five strikes each in the confirmed order, sudden death if level. Every element from the earlier practices is live at once: technique, the walk, the wait, and now a genuine team result at stake.

Rules: Standard shootout rules throughout, refereed strictly by the coach exactly as a match official would.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Technique holds up under the combined weight of a live shootout, not just an individual walk.
Tactical	The confirmed taking order is followed exactly, with no late changes based on nerves.
Physical	Recovery between strikes — a taker who's just watched a big miss or a big save needs to reset before their own turn.
Psychological	Full composure under the highest-pressure version of this session — this is the standard the whole session has built toward.
Communication & leadership	Senior players supporting nervous teammates between strikes, and the group's response to both misses and scores.

Tactical roles: the full set of roles from Practice 3, now applied inside a genuine team-versus-team result.

Decision-making triggers: none beyond following the confirmed order — the entire point of this practice is that the decisions were already made calmly, in training, before the pressure arrived.

Communication language used: the full set established across the session — *Ready*, plus genuine team encouragement between strikes.

Guided discovery questions:

1. How did this compare to The Long Walk — what was different about a result actually being at stake?
2. What did your teammates do that helped you between your own strikes?
3. If this were a real match shootout, is there anything about tonight's order or preparation you'd want to revisit?

Progressions:

1. Add a genuine outcome (a small team reward or bragging rights) to sharpen the stakes further.
2. Rotate goalkeepers mid-shootout to test takers against an unfamiliar keeper, as a cup shootout might occasionally demand.

Regressions:

1. Reduce to three strikes each rather than five if the group's composure is fading badly by the end of a long session.
2. Allow a taker who is visibly struggling to swap position in the order with a willing teammate — reflecting a legitimate real-match option.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
A team's composure visibly drops after conceding a big save or miss, affecting the next taker	Momentum and group emotion carrying over between strikes	The next taker rushes their walk or run-up noticeably compared with earlier in the session	Let it flow	A supportive word from the coach or a senior player before the next strike, not a technical correction	Continue
A taker asks to change their planned corner at the very last moment	Nerves overriding the preparation from Practice 2	Visible hesitation or a change of body shape right at the spot	Let it flow, address after	Note it for the post-session conversation rather than interrupting the shootout	Continue

Coach interventions used in this practice: supportive, in-the-moment encouragement rather than technical correction; delayed conversations for anything requiring more than a quick word.

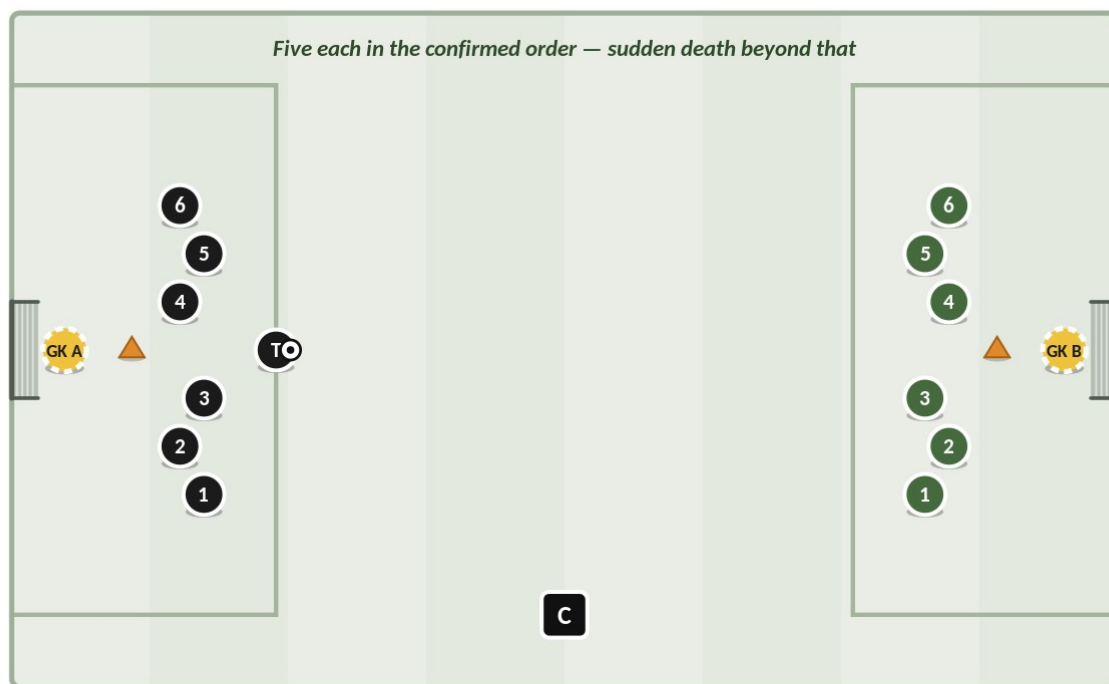
Success indicators:

- The confirmed taking order is used exactly as agreed, with no late disruption.
- Overall strike quality across the full squad stays close to the standard shown in Practice 2, even under full shootout stakes.
- Players visibly support each other between strikes, regardless of scoreline.

Coach's eye: this is the session's real purpose made visible — not just who scores, but whether the calm decisions made in Practice 2 survive contact with a genuine result.

SP3.4 SUDDEN DEATH — Closing Competitive Scenario

Full shootout format • five each, sudden death if level • confirmed order • 15 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball ▲ Halfway grouping point

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Penalties (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Set-Piece Session



Quick Restarts

Tags: `set-piece` `standalone` `quick-restart` `dead-ball`

Kicker: Fast restarts are only ever trained for throw-ins. Every free-kick and corner in the programme assumes the defence is set and organised before the ball is played. This session trains the opposite — catching them before they are.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Quick Restarts — Free-Kicks and Corners
Short summary	Four stages building the specific habit of playing a dead ball before the opposition is organised: a reaction-speed arrival, a quick free-kick routine, a quick corner routine, and a closing live game that rewards every fast restart taken. The emphasis throughout is recognition and decisiveness — most restarts should still be taken normally; this session trains spotting and taking the moments when speed beats setup.
Total duration	48 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Involved throughout, including as the "restarting" side's outlet during transition moments.
Area layout	A reaction-drill grid for Practice 1; a full attacking-third area for Practices 2–4.
Equipment	Cones for the reaction grid, a stopwatch or visible clock the group can see, a supply of balls.
Contingency — group struggling with the reaction habit	Slow the closing game's restart-window down (Practice 4's regression) rather than abandoning the session's core idea — the habit is worth persisting with even if match-speed execution takes longer to arrive.

PRACTICE 1 — BEAT THE WHISTLE (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 6 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: A reaction-speed warm-up with no ball, training the specific mental habit this session is built around — noticing an opportunity and acting on it immediately, before it closes.

Organisation: The full group spread across a marked grid, no ball required.

Walkthrough: Players move freely around the grid; on a random signal from the coach (a whistle, a call, a clap), every player sprints to the nearest cone. The signal is deliberately unpredictable in timing, training reaction rather than anticipation.

Rules: No anticipating the signal — players caught starting early before the whistle are called out and reset.

Coaching points:

- *Physical:* an explosive first step the instant the signal comes, not a half-second of hesitation first.
- *Psychological:* staying alert and ready throughout, even during the unpredictable gaps between signals — this is the exact habit a quick restart demands.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — GONE BEFORE THEY'RE SET (QUICK FREE-KICK ROUTINE)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Installs the specific recognition and technical routine for taking a free-kick before the defence has organised — the moment right after the foul is given, when defenders are still turning around or appealing rather than set in position.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** attacking-third working area, roughly 30 x 20 m
- **Players:** the fouled team (4–5 players) against a defending group that is deliberately slow to react, simulating the moments right after a whistle
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** organises what defensive structure exists, but is also working against the clock
- **Team sizes:** 4–5 attackers against 4–5 defenders
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** none beyond a marked foul spot
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram, defenders scattered and unorganised at the moment of the restart
- **Ball supply:** placed at the foul spot for each repetition
- **Restart:** the fouled player retrieves the ball and restarts as quickly as the rules allow
- **Coach position:** central, able to see both the restarting player's decision and the defence's recovery
- **Rotation method:** roles rotate every 4–5 repetitions
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: A foul is simulated at a marked spot with defenders deliberately out of position — mid-conversation, turned away, or still reacting to the decision. The fouled player has a genuine, brief window to play the restart quickly, either driving forward themselves or releasing a teammate into the space the disorganised defence has left. If that window closes, the routine reverts immediately to a normal, organised free-kick.

Rules: The restart must be taken the instant the ball is available if the window exists — no waiting for a "better" set-up once the defence starts organising; if the window has already closed, the player must recognise this and switch to the standard routine.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A composed first touch and pass or strike, even though the restart is taken at speed and with limited preparation.
Tactical	Genuine recognition of whether the window is actually open — a quick restart into an organised defence wastes the advantage the foul created.
Physical	Explosive urgency in retrieving and playing the ball — seconds matter here more than in almost any other set-piece.
Psychological	Decisiveness — hesitation is the single biggest way this opportunity is lost.
Communication & leadership	A short, clear call from the restarting player to alert a teammate making the run, since there's no time for a lengthy instruction.

Tactical roles: **Restarting player** — reads the window and decides instantly. **Supporting runner** — stays alert for a sudden release into space. **Rest of the attacking unit** — ready to receive if the restarter chooses to keep it simple and short.

Decision-making triggers: a visibly disorganised or distracted defence is the trigger to go quickly; a defence already reset and facing the ball is the trigger to revert to the standard routine.

Communication language used: *Quick* (the restarting player's call confirming they're taking it fast), *Set* (the call to revert to a normal, organised restart).

Guided discovery questions:

1. What specifically told you the window was open — or that it had already closed?
2. What made the decision to go quickly harder than it looks?
3. What's lost if a team takes every free-kick quickly, regardless of whether the defence is actually disorganised?

Progressions:

1. Reduce the window's average length so the recognition-to-action time has to sharpen further.
2. Add a genuine choice between a quick pass to a nearby teammate and a longer ball into space behind a still-recovering defensive line.

Regressions:

1. Call out "window's open" for the first few repetitions while the recognition habit is being built.
2. Walk through the decision without opposition first, then add live defenders.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The restarting player hesitates even when the window is clearly open, and the chance closes	Habit of treating every free-kick as a set-piece to organise, not an opportunity to seize	The defence finishes organising before the ball is played, despite an obvious early window	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: replay the exact moment and name the window that was missed	Resume
The restart is rushed even though the defence is already set and organised	Overcorrecting toward speed regardless of the actual situation	A quick restart played straight into a well-organised defence, losing the ball cheaply	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: reinforce the "Set" recognition trigger	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for missed windows and for restarts taken into an already-organised defence.

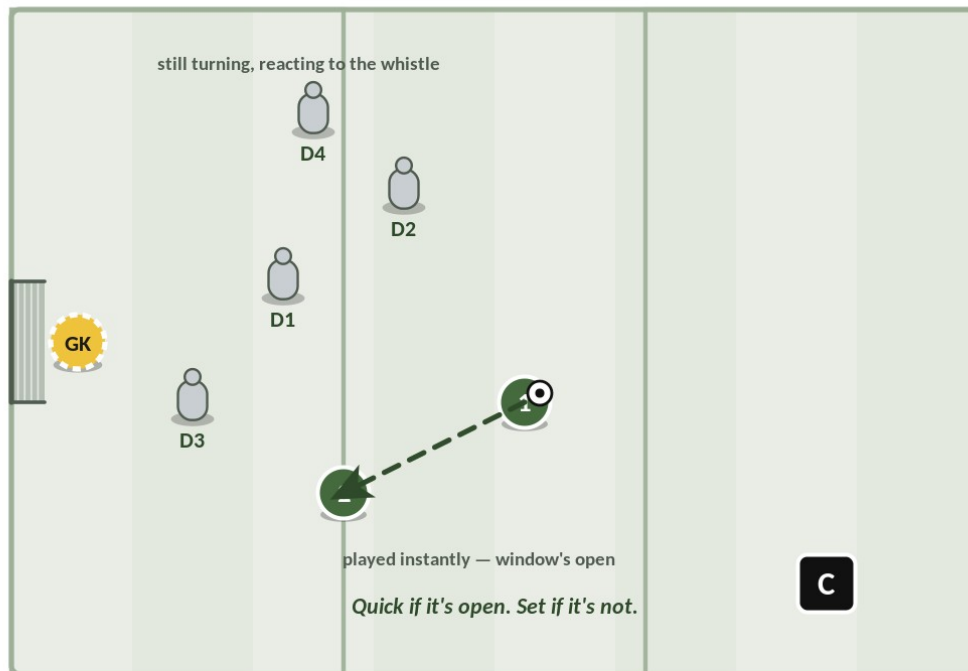
Success indicators:

- Genuinely open windows are taken quickly, almost without exception.
- Genuinely closed windows are recognised and the routine reverts to the standard free-kick without hesitation.
- The supporting runner's timing matches the restarting player's decision.

Coach's eye: the real skill this practice teaches is judgement, not speed — a team that rushes every restart is no better than one that never does; watch for genuine recognition, not blind urgency.

SP4.2 GONE BEFORE THEY'RE SET — Quick Free-Kick Routine

Attacking third • restart taken before the defence organises • 14 minutes



Attacking side



Defenders (still disorganised)



Ball



Quick release



Foul spot

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PRACTICE 3 — FLAG TO FEET (QUICK CORNER ROUTINE)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Installs the equivalent quick-restart habit at a corner — taking it fast while the defence is still setting its zonal-plus-post structure, rather than waiting for every defender to reach their position.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** corner-area working space opening into the box
- **Players:** corner-taker plus 2–3 supporting attackers against a defending group deliberately slow to reach their corner positions
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** organises the defensive reaction against the clock, exactly as in a real disorganised moment
- **Team sizes:** 3–4 attackers against a recovering defensive structure
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** none beyond the established corner setup
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram, defenders still arriving at their zonal positions
- **Ball supply:** reset at the corner flag after each repetition
- **Restart:** fresh corner after every attempt
- **Coach position:** at the edge of the box, able to see both the corner-taker's decision and the defensive structure forming
- **Rotation method:** roles rotate every 4–5 repetitions
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: As soon as the ball is dead and available, defenders begin moving toward their established zonal-plus-post positions — but deliberately not all at once, leaving a genuine early window. The corner-taker reads this and, if the window is real, plays a fast, low ball to a supporting attacker arriving in the gap the not-yet-set defence has left, rather than waiting for a normal delivery. If the window has already closed by the time the ball is retrieved, the corner reverts to the club's standard routine.

Rules: The quick option must be a considered, genuine decision based on what the defence actually shows — not a habitual default taken on every corner regardless of the picture in front of the taker.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A quick, accurate low ball into the gap, played cleanly under real time pressure.
Tactical	Reading the defensive structure's actual state — genuinely unset versus merely still arriving but covering the danger.
Physical	Fast retrieval and a quick take of the corner — no wasted seconds walking to the flag.
Psychological	Trust from the supporting attacker to make the run before being certain the ball is coming — hesitation from either side kills the opportunity.
Communication & leadership	A short, immediate call from the corner-taker alerting the supporting attacker that the quick option is on.

Tactical roles: **Corner-taker** — reads the defensive structure and decides instantly. **Supporting attacker** — stays alert and ready to exploit the gap the moment it's called. **Rest of the attacking group** — hold normal corner positions in case the routine reverts to standard.

Decision-making triggers: defenders still visibly moving into position, especially near-post or the space just in front of goal, is the trigger to go quick; a defence already set in its zonal-plus-post shape is the trigger to take the standard corner.

Communication language used: *Quick* (the corner-taker's call), *Set* (the call to revert to the standard corner routine), reusing the same shared language as Practice 2 so the habit generalises across both restart types.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What specifically made this corner's window open or closed?
2. How is reading a corner's window different from reading a free-kick's window?
3. What's the risk of taking a quick corner into a defence that only looks unset but actually has the danger covered?

Progressions:

1. Reduce how long defenders take to reach their positions, sharpening the recognition window further.
2. Add a second supporting-attacker option so the corner-taker has a genuine choice of which gap to exploit.

Regressions:

1. Call out "window's open" during the first few repetitions while the pattern is being learned.
2. Walk through the decision without defensive pressure before adding live opposition.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The corner-taker takes too long retrieving the ball and setting up, closing a window that was genuinely open	Treating the quick corner as a normal restart out of habit	The defence finishes organising while the corner-taker is still preparing	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse rapid retrieval and an immediate take	Resume
The supporting attacker doesn't move until the ball is already played, arriving too late	Waiting for certainty rather than reading the same picture the corner-taker sees	The pass is played into space the attacker hasn't reached yet	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse the shared recognition trigger between taker and runner	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for slow retrieval and for a late-reacting supporting attacker.

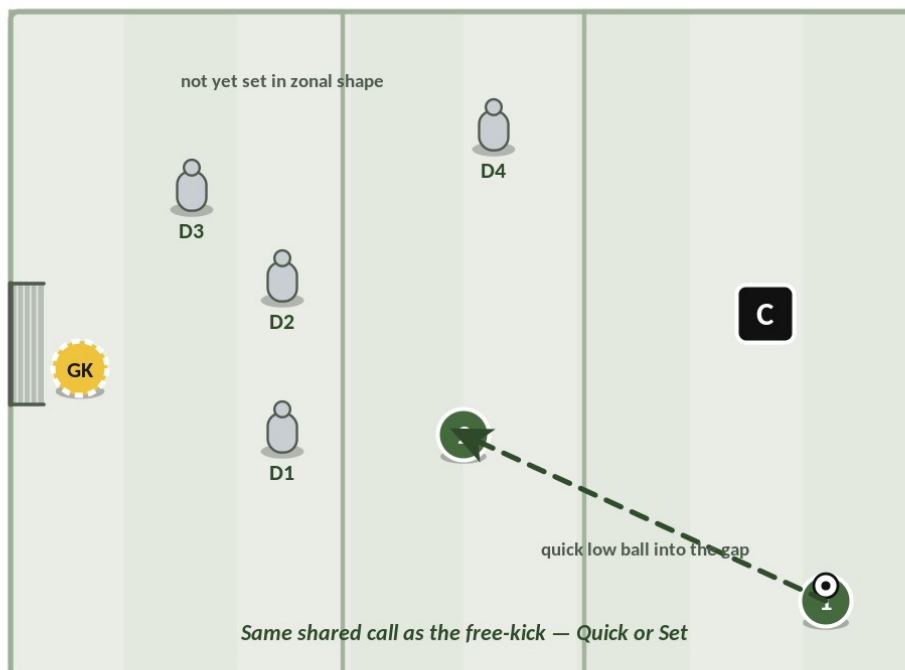
Success indicators:

- The corner-taker's retrieval and take are visibly fast whenever the window is open.
- The supporting attacker's run and the taker's decision are synchronised, not sequential.
- Genuinely closed windows are recognised and the routine reverts cleanly to the standard corner.

Coach's eye: the same judgement standard from Practice 2 applies here — a quick corner taken into real disorganisation is a genuine weapon; one taken out of habit is just a wasted corner.

SP4.3 FLAG TO FEET — Quick Corner Routine

Corner area • fast low ball before the zonal shape is set • 14 minutes



● Attacking side ● Defenders (still arriving) ● Ball ➔ Quick low ball

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PRACTICE 4 — RACE THE RECOVERY (CLOSING LIVE GAME)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session with a live conditioned game that specifically rewards every fast restart taken, bringing the free-kick and corner habits from Practices 2 and 3 together under match conditions with a genuine scoring incentive attached.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 30 m working area including a full box
- **Players:** two teams of 6–7 with goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** each keeper defends their own goal and organises their own team's recovery after conceding a restart opportunity
- **Team sizes:** 6v6 or 7v7 with goalkeepers
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** none beyond standard small-sided game markers
- **Starting positions:** open play, restarting quickly after any free-kick or corner is won
- **Ball supply:** a supply near each likely restart zone to remove any delay in getting the ball back into play
- **Restart:** any free-kick or corner won may be taken quickly if the window is genuinely open; a goal scored from a restart taken within a short defined window (for example, the first 5 seconds after the ball is available) earns bonus recognition
- **Coach position:** mobile, observing both the attacking decision and the defensive recovery speed
- **Rotation method:** roles rotate naturally through open play
- **Direction of play:** both directions, standard small-sided game rules otherwise

Practice walkthrough: A small conditioned game runs normally, with every free-kick and corner won treated as a genuine quick-restart opportunity. The attacking side reads each situation and decides, exactly as in Practices 2 and 3, whether to go quickly or take a standard restart. Goals scored from a fast restart taken inside the defined early window are specifically recognised, reinforcing the value of the habit without punishing sound decisions to slow down when the defence is genuinely set.

Rules: Standard small-sided game rules, plus the defined quick-restart bonus window applied to every free-kick and corner won.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Both restart types hold their technical quality — composed touches and accurate passing — even when taken at speed.
Tactical	The attacking side's choice between quick and standard genuinely reflects the defensive picture, not the presence of a bonus incentive alone.
Physical	Recovery speed from the defending side improves visibly across the game as the habit of racing back into position sharpens.
Psychological	Composure and decisiveness under live, unpredictable conditions, not just in the rehearsed practices.
Communication & leadership	The shared <i>Quick / Set</i> language, now used by both restart types together under real game pressure.

Tactical roles: the full set of roles from Practices 2 and 3, now applied inside a live, unpredictable game with a genuine incentive attached.

Decision-making triggers: the same triggers from Practices 2 and 3, now tested under live conditions and the added pull of the bonus window.

Communication language used: *Quick, Set* — the shared language from both earlier practices, now used interchangeably across free-kicks and corners.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Did the bonus window change how the attacking side made its decisions — for better or worse?
2. What did the defending side do differently by the end of the game compared with the start?
3. Is there a restart moment tonight where the quick option was tempting but the right call was actually to slow down?

Progressions:

1. Shorten the bonus window further to sharpen the recognition-to-action speed required.
2. Add a defensive bonus for a team that fully reorganises within the same short window, rewarding recovery speed as well as attacking speed.

Regressions:

1. Lengthen the bonus window if the group is forcing poor decisions purely to chase the incentive.
2. Remove the bonus window temporarily and rely on coach feedback alone if it's distorting decision-making.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players chase the bonus window by rushing restarts into an already-organised defence	The incentive outweighing the genuine tactical judgement built in Practices 2 and 3	Quick restarts taken repeatedly into a clearly set defence, losing possession cheaply	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "was that window really open?"	Resume
The defending side stops trying to recover quickly, assuming every restart will be slow	Complacency built from a few slow restarts in a row	A defence that is visibly unhurried getting back into position after conceding a foul or a ball behind	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	A direct reminder that any restart could be quick, so recovery speed must be constant	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: reflective questioning for incentive-chasing decisions; a direct reminder for a complacent defensive recovery, both allowing play to continue first.

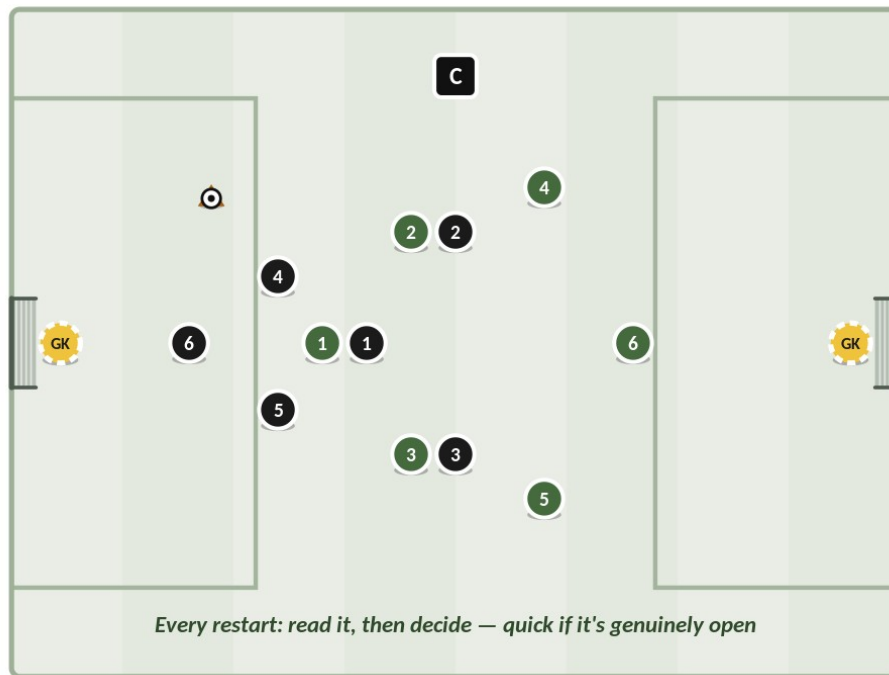
Success indicators:

- The attacking side's decisions stay grounded in genuine picture-reading, not just the bonus incentive.
- Defensive recovery speed improves visibly over the course of the game.
- The shared *Quick / Set* language is used correctly and instinctively by the end of the session.

Coach's eye: this closing game is the real test of whether tonight's judgement — not just tonight's speed — has actually transferred; a team that takes every restart quickly has learned the wrong lesson just as surely as one that never does.

SP4.4 RACE THE RECOVERY — Closing Live Game

40 x 30 m • 6v6 or 7v7 with keepers • bonus recognition for fast restarts • 14 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball ▲ Quick-restart bonus window

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Quick Restarts (standalone) • Diagrams not to scale

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Set-Piece Session



Short Corners

Tags: `set-piece` `standalone` `short-corner` `dead-ball`

Kicker: Every corner routine the club owns assumes a delivery into the box. This is the one that doesn't — a genuine short-corner combination for when the box is well defended, plus the defensive reaction it demands.

Session Overview

FIELD	VALUE
Session theme	Short Corners — Attack and Defence
Short summary	Week 5's note on a short corner "alternative option" has never been built out into a real routine. This session does that: an attacking short-corner combination that creates a genuine crossing or shooting opportunity from a better angle, and the defensive reaction that stops it — recognising the short corner early and adjusting out of the established zonal-plus-post structure without abandoning it altogether.
Total duration	50 minutes across four practices
Goalkeeper requirements	Involved throughout — organises the defensive reaction in Practice 3 and faces both routines in Practice 4.
Area layout	Corner-area working space for Practices 1-3; a full attacking-third area for Practice 4.
Equipment	Cones marking the short-corner receiver's starting position, a supply of balls.
Contingency — restricted space	All four practices work inside a genuine corner-area-and-box space; none require the full pitch.

PRACTICE 1 — THIRD MAN (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

Tactical purpose: A light passing-combination warm-up built around the specific two-touch, third-man movement the short-corner routine depends on — not generic possession, but the exact pattern this session installs.

Organisation: Groups of three near the corner flag, one ball between three, working in a small triangle.

Walkthrough: Player A passes to Player B, who lays it first-time into space for Player C to run onto — the same shape the short-corner routine uses, repeated until it's automatic.

Rules: Two touches maximum for the receiving pass; the lay-off must be genuinely first-time.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* a clean, weighted first-time lay-off that the third player can run onto without breaking stride.
- *Psychological:* timing the run so it arrives after the lay-off, not before it — arriving early gives the defence time to react.

No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.

PRACTICE 2 — THIRD MAN CORNER (ATTACKING SHORT CORNER)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Installs the club's first genuine short-corner routine — a real alternative to a direct delivery, used when the box is well set and a delivery is unlikely to beat it, that creates a better crossing or shooting angle through quick combination play rather than through numbers in the box.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** corner-area working space, roughly 20 x 15 m, opening into the edge of the box
- **Players:** corner-taker, short-corner receiver, a third-man runner, 2–3 opposing defenders reacting live
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** in goal, reading the developing shape as it would in a match
- **Team sizes:** 3 attackers against 2–3 defenders inside the working area
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** a cone marking the receiver's starting position 5–8 m from the corner flag
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at the corner flag after each repetition
- **Restart:** fresh corner after every attempt, live or dead
- **Coach position:** at the edge of the box, able to see the full combination develop
- **Rotation method:** roles rotate every 4–5 repetitions
- **Direction of play:** always toward the same goal

Practice walkthrough: The corner-taker plays short to the receiver standing 5–8 m from the flag, rather than delivering into the box. The receiver takes a controlling touch and lays it first-time into space for the third-man runner, who arrives from deep with genuine pace and either crosses first-time from a better angle or shoots directly if the angle allows. The two original corner-takers who aren't directly involved hold their rest-defence positions exactly as established since Week 5.

Rules: The short pass must be played before any defender closes the receiver down inside 2 m — if it can't be played safely, the corner-taker recognises this and switches to the established delivery routine instead.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	A clean first-time lay-off and a controlling touch under genuine pressure from a reacting defence.
Tactical	Recognising, before the corner is taken, whether the box is set well enough that a short corner is the better option.
Physical	Genuine pace on the third-man run — a jogged arrival gives the defence time to adjust.
Psychological	Composure on the receiver's first touch, even with a defender closing in immediately.
Communication & leadership	The corner-taker's call for "short" has to be heard and understood by the receiver before the ball is played.

Tactical roles: **Corner-taker** — reads the box and decides short or delivered. **Receiver** — controls and lays off first-time. **Third-man runner** — arrives with pace from deep, disguised until the last moment. **Rest-defence pair** — hold position outside the box exactly as in every other corner routine.

Decision-making triggers: a well-set, organised defensive box with no obvious space favours the short option; a box that's disorganised or undermanned favours the established direct delivery instead.

Communication language used: *Short* (the corner-taker's call to switch the receiver on), *Third* (the receiver's call as the lay-off is played, alerting the runner).

Guided discovery questions:

1. What specifically told the corner-taker that a short corner was the better option this time?
2. What made the third-man run hard for the defence to track?
3. If the short pass can't be played safely, what should happen instead — and why does that matter?

Progressions:

1. Add a second, disguised third-man runner from the opposite side to create a genuine decision for the defence.
2. Allow the receiver to shoot directly rather than crossing, if the angle is good enough.
3. Add a defender specifically instructed to press the short option immediately, testing the "switch to delivery" decision.

Regressions:

1. Walk through the combination with no defensive pressure until the timing is automatic.
2. Fix the third-man run's timing and starting position until the pattern is grooved.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The third-man run arrives too early, before the lay-off is played	Anticipation outrunning the pattern's timing	The runner is already in the crossing area before the ball has been laid off	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse the timing at walking pace	Resume
The corner-taker plays short into obvious pressure rather than switching to a delivery	Commitment to the short option regardless of what the defence actually shows	The receiver is closed down before receiving and loses the ball	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: walk through the recognition trigger for switching options	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for mistimed runs and for a short corner played into clear pressure.

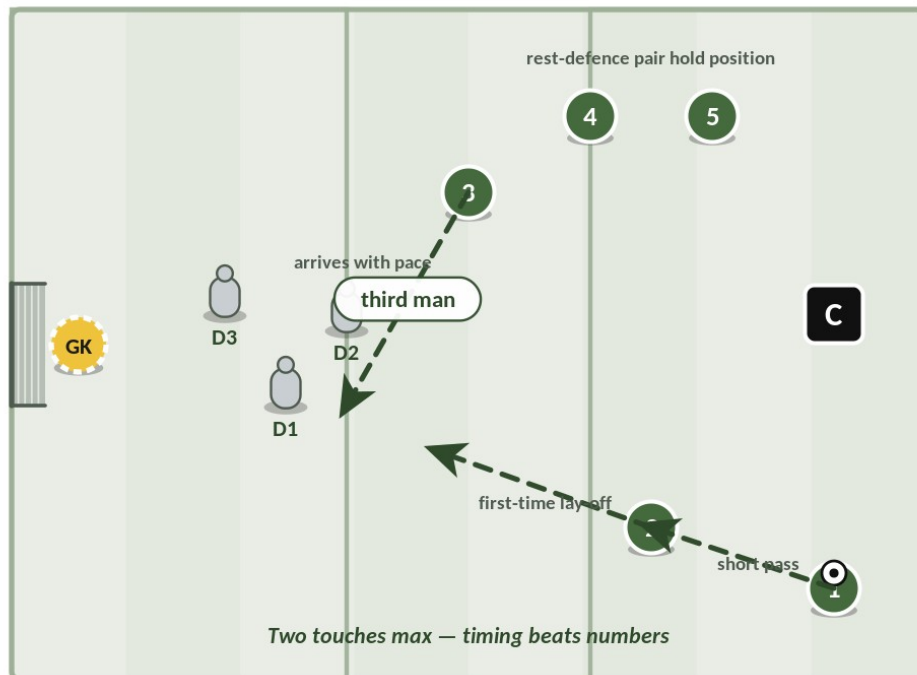
Success indicators:

- The third-man run consistently arrives just after the lay-off, not before it.
- The corner-taker demonstrably chooses between short and delivered based on what the defence actually shows.
- The routine creates a genuinely better crossing or shooting angle than the original corner position offered.

Coach's eye: this routine only earns its place in the programme if it's genuinely used as a situational alternative, not a habit — watch for a corner-taker defaulting to short because it's comfortable, not because the box actually calls for it.

SP2.2 THIRD MAN CORNER — Attacking Short Corner

Corner-area working space • short combination for a better angle • 14 minutes



● Attacking combination



Defenders (reacting)

⊙ Ball

➡ Third-man run

▲ Receiver start marker

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PRACTICE 3 — SQUEEZE THE SHORT SIDE (DEFENDING A SHORT CORNER)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Installs the defensive reaction to a short corner — recognising it early and adjusting out of the established zonal-plus-post structure without abandoning defensive shape altogether, so a short corner is met with organisation rather than confusion.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** corner-area working space opening into the full box
- **Players:** full defensive corner structure (as established since Week 5) plus one player specifically assigned to react to a short corner
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** organises the adjustment, calling the reacting player out to the short side
- **Team sizes:** 3 attackers taking the short corner against the full defensive structure
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** none beyond the established corner setup
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** reset at the corner flag after each repetition
- **Restart:** fresh corner after every attempt
- **Coach position:** central, able to see both the box structure and the short-side reaction
- **Rotation method:** the reacting player rotates every 4–5 repetitions
- **Direction of play:** defending the same goal throughout

Practice walkthrough: The attacking side sets up as if for a normal corner, then plays it short. One nominated defender — pre-briefed on this responsibility — steps out to press the short-side combination the instant it develops, while the rest of the established zonal-plus-post structure holds its shape in the box rather than following. The goalkeeper's voice organises the transition, confirming who has stepped out and who remains responsible for each zone.

Rules: Only the nominated reacting defender steps out to the short side; every other defender holds their established box position regardless of what happens on the short side.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Quick, controlled closing-down speed from the reacting defender — arriving too slowly lets the combination develop unchallenged.
Tactical	The rest of the box holds its shape — a short corner should not be allowed to empty the box of defenders.
Physical	Explosive first few steps from the reacting defender, who has the furthest distance to close in the least time.
Psychological	Trust from the defenders who stay in the box — resisting the urge to also react to the short corner.
Communication & leadership	The goalkeeper's organising voice confirms the adjustment clearly enough that no defender is left guessing their job.

Tactical roles: **Reacting defender** — steps out to press the short combination the instant it develops. **Box defenders** — hold the established zonal-plus-post structure without following the ball out. **Goalkeeper** — organises the adjustment and confirms zone coverage throughout.

Decision-making triggers: the short corner itself is the trigger — the reacting defender steps out the moment the ball is played short, not before, to avoid being dragged out of position by a delivery that was never coming.

Communication language used: *Short* (the goalkeeper's call confirming the short corner has been recognised), *Hold* (the instruction to box defenders to maintain their established positions).

Guided discovery questions:

1. What told the reacting defender the corner was going short before the ball was even played?
2. Why is it important that only one defender reacts, rather than the whole box reorganising?
3. What would happen to the defensive structure if every defender reacted to the short side?

Progressions:

1. Disguise the short corner further, delaying the moment it becomes obvious, to sharpen the reacting defender's recognition.
2. Add a second short-side option (both sides of the corner flag) to test whether the correct defender reacts.

Regressions:

1. Call out "short corner coming" in advance while the recognition habit is being built.
2. Walk through the reacting defender's movement with no live opposition first.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
More than one defender reacts to the short corner, leaving the box under-covered	Uncertainty about whose job the reaction is	Two or more defenders drawn to the short side while the box empties	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: confirm the single nominated reacting defender's role	Resume
The reacting defender arrives too late to prevent the combination developing	Slow reaction to the recognition trigger	The short-side combination completes unchallenged before the defender arrives	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse the recognition-to-movement speed in isolation	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for over-reaction from multiple defenders and for a slow reacting defender.

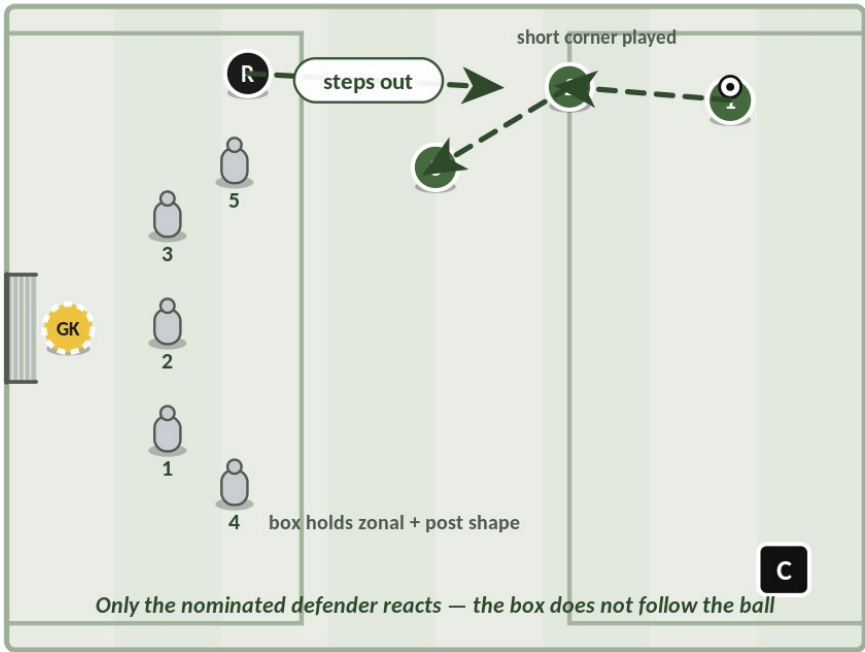
Success indicators:

- Exactly one defender reacts to every short corner, every time.
- The established box structure holds regardless of what happens on the short side.
- The goalkeeper's organising call is heard and acted on before the short-side combination develops fully.

Coach's eye: the real test of this practice isn't whether the short side is defended — it's whether the box discipline built since Week 5 survives being tested by something new.

SP2.3 SQUEEZE THE SHORT SIDE — Defending a Short Corner

Full box • one nominated defender reacts, the rest hold shape • 14 minutes



- Box defenders (hold shape)
- Reacting defender
- Attacking short-corner combination
- Ball

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PRACTICE 4 — READ THE FLAG (CLOSING LIVE GAME)

Duration: 14 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Purpose: Closes the session by putting both the attacking short-corner routine and the defensive reaction together under live conditions — every corner in a small conditioned game can be taken short or delivered, and both sides must read and react in real time.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 30 m working area including a full box
- **Players:** two teams of 6–7 with goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** each keeper defends their own goal and organises their own corner reactions
- **Team sizes:** 6v6 or 7v7 with goalkeepers
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** none beyond standard small-sided game markers
- **Starting positions:** open play, restarting at a corner after any ball goes behind
- **Ball supply:** a supply at the halfway line for quick restarts
- **Restart:** any ball played behind becomes a corner, taken short or delivered at the attacking side's choice
- **Coach position:** mobile, observing both the attacking decision and the defensive reaction
- **Rotation method:** roles rotate naturally through open play
- **Direction of play:** both directions, standard small-sided game rules otherwise

Practice walkthrough: A small conditioned game runs normally. Every corner won is taken as the attacking side sees fit — short, using tonight's routine, or delivered, using the club's established routines — and the defending side must recognise and react correctly to whichever option is chosen. Play continues immediately after each corner, win or lose.

Rules: Standard small-sided game rules, plus: the attacking side must make a genuine, considered choice between short and delivered based on what the defence shows, not a habitual default to one or the other.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Both the short-corner combination and the defensive reaction hold their technical quality under live, unpredictable conditions.
Tactical	The attacking side's choice between short and delivered genuinely reflects what the defensive box shows, not habit.
Physical	The explosive elements — the third-man run, the reacting defender's closing speed — don't fade as the game wears on.
Psychological	Composure from both sides in a live, scored game, not just in a rehearsed repetition.
Communication & leadership	The full shared language — <i>Short, Third, Hold</i> — is used correctly and quickly under real pressure.

Tactical roles: the full set from Practices 2 and 3, now applied inside a live, unpredictable game.

Decision-making triggers: the same triggers from Practices 2 and 3, now under the added pressure of a live scoreline and no advance notice of when the next corner will arrive.

Communication language used: *Short, Third, Hold* — the full set used together for the first time under live conditions.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Did the attacking side's corner decisions look the same under live pressure as they did in the rehearsed practices?
2. What made the defensive reaction harder to organise in a live game than in the rehearsed version?

3. Which option — short or delivered — proved more effective tonight, and does that match what the data from Weeks 5–35 would suggest?

Progressions:

1. Add a running score specifically for corner outcomes, separate from open-play goals.
2. Reduce the time the defending side has to set its structure before a corner is taken.

Regressions:

1. Allow a brief walk-through of both options before the first few live corners if the group needs it.
2. Reduce the frequency of corners (via a modified restart rule) if the game is losing its flow.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Under live pressure, the defending side reverts to reacting with multiple players rather than the single nominated reactor	The rehearsed discipline hasn't yet transferred to unpredictable, live conditions	Two or more defenders drawn to a short side, box coverage lost	Stop	Freeze-and-correct, referencing the specific role discipline from Practice 3	Resume
The attacking side defaults to one option regardless of what the box shows	Habit outweighing the in-the-moment decision	The same choice (short or delivered) is made every single time, regardless of the defensive setup	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what did the box actually show you there?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: freeze-and-correct for defensive over-reaction; a reflective question for a habitual attacking choice, allowing play to continue first.

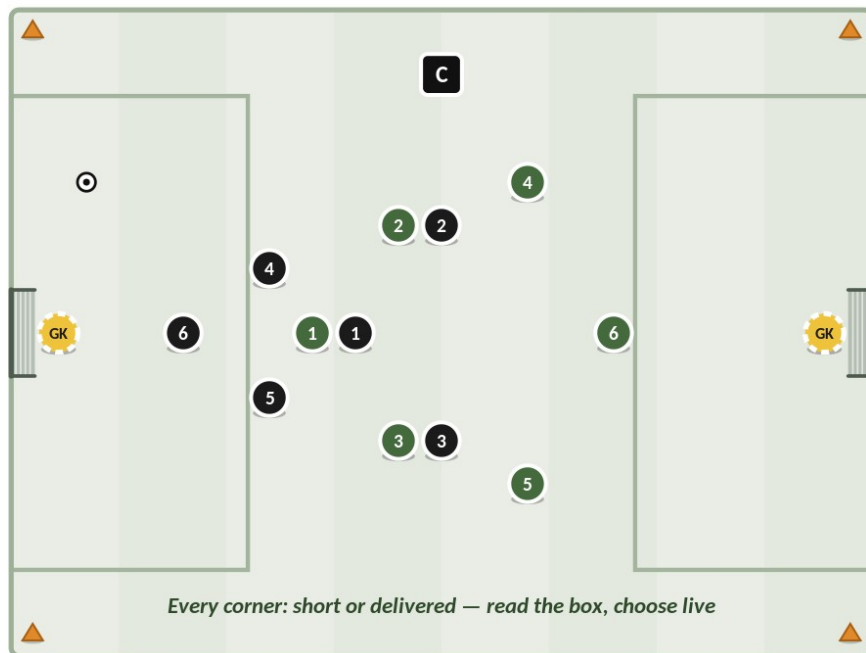
Success indicators:

- Both sides make visibly different decisions depending on what the specific situation shows.
- The technical and organisational standards from Practices 2 and 3 hold up under live, unpredictable conditions.
- Players can explain their decision-making in the moment when asked.

Coach's eye: this is the genuine test of whether the short corner earns a permanent place in the club's programme — if it holds up here, it belongs alongside the other seven routines; if it doesn't, that's worth knowing too.

SP2.4 READ THE FLAG — Closing Live Game

40 x 30 m • 6v6 or 7v7 with keepers • corners taken short or delivered, live • 14 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball ▲ Corner restart

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Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • Castlewellan Town FC • Standalone Set-Piece Session



Four-Week Review — Phase 1: Pre-Season Foundation (Weeks 1–5)

A structured checkpoint, completed by the coach using the evidence gathered across Weeks 1–5, before Phase 2 begins in Week 6.

This review follows the same rhythm every four-to-six-week block will use for the rest of the season (next due after Week 11, then Weeks 17, 23, 29, and the season close after Week 36). Filling it in properly — honestly, with specific examples rather than general impressions — is what makes the next block's coaching decisions evidence-based rather than guesswork.

1. Principles Covered

WEEK	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE
1	Support & passing angles	Communication language & team standards
2	Width & depth	Support & passing angles (revisited)
3	Pressure, cover, balance	Compactness — vertical and horizontal
4	Recognise the picture before playing (transition to attack)	The nearest players react first (transition to defence)
5	All Phase 1 principles, consolidated	Attacking corners (first set-piece routine)

By the end of Phase 1, the squad has been introduced to five of the season's fourteen formation-neutral principles (Season Architecture, Section 2), the season's foundational communication language (fourteen calls: Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze, Step, Cover, Delay, Travel, Switch, plus the set-piece organisation vocabulary from Week 5), and the club's first fixture-ready set-piece routine.

2. Evidence of Progress

(Complete using direct observation from Weeks 1–5, particularly Week 5's "Phase 1 Final" conditioned match, which was deliberately designed as a diagnostic practice.)

- What specific moment, from any of the five weeks, best demonstrated the team playing as this club intends to play? Name the week, the practice, and what happened.
- Compare Week 1's "Third Angle" rondo to Week 5's "Complete Picture" practice — is the same underlying skill (finding and using an angle) visibly stronger?
- Compare Week 3's early pressing work to Week 5's conditioned match — are presses still isolated, or consistently supported?
- Did the team organise its own shape without instruction during Week 5's least structured practices? If so, note who led that.

3. Recurring Technical Problems

(List any technical issue — passing weight, first touch, delivery technique, finishing — that appeared in more than one week's coach review, e.g. the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables in Weeks 1–5. A problem seen once is noise; a problem seen three times across five weeks is signal.)

4. Recurring Tactical Problems

(Same approach — cross-reference the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables and the weekly Coach Review sections. Common candidates to check specifically, given what Phase 1 targeted: isolated pressing reappearing under fatigue, width collapsing under pressure, forced forward passes immediately after a regain, slow or mixed reactions after losing the ball.)

5. Physical Observations

Pre-season load rose across Weeks 1–5 as planned (Season Architecture, Section 7), peaking in Week 5's "Phase 1 Final" session. Record:

- Did the squad tolerate the rising load without signs of excessive fatigue (flat running, technical breakdown late in sessions, dips in communication)?
- Were the attendance-based physical adjustments (players with 75+ match minutes vs. fragments vs. unused vs. returning from injury) applied consistently, and did they seem to matter?
- Any individual players who need a different physical entry point into Phase 2 — either because they've missed significant training, or because they're carrying more load than the group?

(This section is observational, not diagnostic. Any player showing signs of possible injury, overtraining, or a health concern should be referred to qualified medical or sports-science support rather than managed through this review.)

6. Communication Development

Ten pieces of shared language were introduced across Phase 1: *Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze, Step, Cover, Delay, Travel, Switch*.

- Which calls are used accurately and without prompting?
- Which calls are still infrequent or inaccurate?
- Is the language being used *early* (before an action, shaping it) or only *afterward* (describing what already happened)? Early use is the actual goal.

7. Leadership Development

Phase 1 built in small, deliberate opportunities for player ownership: the rotating "adjudicator" role in Week 1's angled-SSG, the goalkeeper's organisational role (introduced Week 1, developed through Weeks 3–5), and the largely coach-silent practices in Week 5.

- Who has stepped into an organisational role without being asked?
- Is it the same one or two players every time, or is leadership beginning to

distribute across the squad?

- What is the specific, concrete opportunity to hand more ownership to players in

Phase 2 (Season Architecture, "Player Leadership" — reducing coach control as understanding improves)?

8. Set-Piece Progress

Phase 1 delivered the pathway's first milestone (Season Architecture, Section 8): one attacking corner routine (*Near Post Front, Far Post Finish*), a defensive corner structure, and restart discipline from Week 1's goal-kick work.

- Was the attacking corner routine executed correctly in Week 5's live practice?
- Did the defensive corner structure hold up, including the non-negotiable rest-defence / out-ball rule?
- Note anything to refine before Phase 2 adds the next layer (defensive set-piece formalisation, a wide free-kick routine, and throw-in patterns, due Weeks 8–10).

9. Match Transfer

(This is the most important section — everything above is only useful if it's changing what happens on a Saturday.)

- Across the pre-season fixtures played during Phase 1, what evidence exists that training content is showing up in matches specifically (not just "the team played well," but a named principle visible in a named moment)?
- Did the Match Review and Weekly Adjustment routes (A/B/C) get used accurately each week — is the record of which route applied, and why, still available for reference?

10. Priorities for the Next Block (Phase 2, Weeks 6–11)

Based on the above, name (in order) the two or three things Phase 2 most needs to address before its own review at Week 11. Phase 2's planned content (build-up principles, progressing through pressure, collective pressing triggers, and further set-piece development) assumes Phase 1's foundations are reasonably secure — if they are not, say so here rather than letting Phase 2 proceed on an assumption that hasn't been tested.

11. Individual Development Focus

A short, carried-forward note for any player worth tracking individually across the season — deliberately light, one or two things per player, not a full development plan. Not every player needs an entry; use it for anyone with a specific, nameable focus. This is the first of five checkpoints (next at Weeks 11, 17, 23, 29) that carry a player's focus forward, arriving at Week 36's individual feedback conversation already knowing each tracked player's arc across the season, not starting cold.

PLAYER	STANDING FOCUS (CARRIED FROM LAST REVIEW)	PROGRESS THIS PHASE	FOCUS FOR NEXT PHASE
e.g. [Name]	— (first review of the season)	e.g. Slow to recognise the picture before playing in Weeks 3–4; improved once named explicitly in Week 5's review moment	e.g. Carry forward — reinforce the same decision-making cue inside Phase 2's build-up practices

Carrying it forward: copy each player's "Focus for next phase" directly into that player's "Standing focus" column at the Week 11 review — this is what turns five isolated checkpoints into one continuous thread rather than five separate snapshots.

Adjusting the Route Into Phase 2

Use whichever of the five scenarios below actually describes the squad — more than one may apply in different areas (e.g., results could be good while a specific principle is still shaky).

IF THE TEAM IS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Increase complexity rather than simply repeating Phase 1 content into Phase 2. This might mean introducing Phase 2's practices at their fuller progressions from the start (e.g., live opposition immediately rather than passive-to-live progressions), combining two principles inside a single practice earlier than Week 12's schedule assumes, or bringing forward a light version of Phase 3 content (unit relationships, overloads) as an extension inside an already-strong week. Do not mistake "ahead of schedule" for "finished" — continue revisiting Phase 1 principles inside Phase 2's practices, as the Season Architecture requires throughout.

IF THE TEAM IS BEHIND SCHEDULE

Identify specifically which Phase 1 principle is weakest (Section 4 above) and give it additional, targeted time inside Phase 2's Tuesday sessions — most Phase 2 practices can absorb an extra five minutes of the relevant Phase 1 idea without abandoning their own week's content, since Phase 2 is explicitly built on Phase 1's foundations. Do not delay Phase 2's start; instead, simplify Phase 2's own practices (using the regressions already written into each one) until the gap closes.

IF ATTENDANCE HAS BEEN INCONSISTENT

Consolidate rather than expand. Phase 2 introduces genuinely new tactical content (build-up structures, collective pressing triggers) that depends on a shared understanding among whoever is present. Where attendance has been patchy, spend Week 6's Tuesday session explicitly re-establishing Phase 1's core language and principles with whichever group shows up, rather than assuming continuity that may not exist. The contingency sections built into every practice (low/high attendance, restricted space) exist precisely for this situation.

IF RESULTS ARE POOR BUT PERFORMANCES ARE IMPROVING

This is a normal, expected pattern in pre-season and early competitive fixtures, and should not trigger panic changes to the season plan. Maintain the players' confidence explicitly — name the specific improvements visible in matches (Section 9), even where results haven't followed yet, and continue the development process as planned. Results tend to follow performance with a lag, not a lead; changing the plan reactively before that lag has played out usually costs more than it gains.

IF RESULTS ARE GOOD BUT PERFORMANCES ARE WEAK

This is the more dangerous pattern, because it invites complacency. Do not let good results in pre-season friendlies (which often carry weaker opposition or unrepresentative conditions) substitute for the honest evidence gathered in Sections 2–8 above. If Week 5's "Phase 1 Final" showed genuine gaps despite good results, address those gaps directly in Phase 2 exactly as planned — the review process exists specifically to catch this pattern before it becomes comfortable.

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum · Phase 1 Review, covering Weeks 1–5. An independent club resource, not an official UEFA or Irish FA publication and not endorsed by either.



Four-Week Review — Phase 2: Early-Season Identity (Weeks 6–11)

A structured checkpoint, completed by the coach using the evidence gathered across Weeks 6–11, before Phase 3 begins in Week 12.

This review follows the same rhythm every four-to-six-week block uses for the rest of the season (next due after Week 17, then Weeks 23, 29, and the season close after Week 36). Filling it in properly — honestly, with specific examples rather than general impressions — is what makes Phase 3's coaching decisions evidence-based rather than guesswork.

1. Principles Covered

WEEK	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE
6	Progression: through, around or over	Width & depth
7	Progression: through (central)	Compactness
8	Collective pressing triggers	Defend the space in behind
9	Switching the point of attack	Support & passing angles
10	Overloads & rest defence	Recognise the picture before playing
11	All Phase 2 principles, consolidated	Progression: through, around or over

By the end of Phase 2, the squad has now been introduced to nine of the season's fourteen formation-neutral principles (Season Architecture, Section 2) — the five from Phase 1 plus this phase's five — and has added three further set-piece routines (a wide free kick, defensive set-piece structure, and two throw-in patterns) to Phase 1's attacking and defensive corners, giving the club a genuine four-routine set-piece programme.

2. Evidence of Progress

(Complete using direct observation from Weeks 6–11, particularly Week 11's "Phase 2 Final" conditioned match, which was deliberately designed as a diagnostic practice run across two different self-organised structures.)

- What specific moment, from any of Weeks 6–10, best demonstrated the team playing as this club intends to play under pressure it hadn't faced in Phase 1? Name the week, the practice, and what happened.
- Compare Week 6's first build-up-against-a-press practice to Week 11's "Two Shapes, One Team" positional practice — is the same underlying skill (progressing under pressure) visibly stronger, and does it hold up in both a back-four and a back-three structure?
- Compare Week 8's isolated trigger-recognition work to Week 11's conditioned match — are presses now genuinely collective and triggered, or still occasionally individual?
- Did the two self-organised structures in Week 11's Tuesday practices produce a noticeably different standard of play, or did the team's identity hold steady across both? Note which, specifically.

3. Recurring Technical Problems

(List any technical issue — passing weight, first touch, delivery technique, throwing technique, finishing — that appeared in more than one week's coach review, e.g. the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables in Weeks 6–11. A problem seen once is noise; a problem seen three or more times across six weeks is signal.)

4. Recurring Tactical Problems

(Same approach — cross-reference the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables and the weekly Coach Review sections. Common candidates to check specifically, given what Phase 2 targeted: the team continuing to work a congested side rather than switching, presses still occasionally individual rather than collective, the rest-defence minimum being breached under match pressure, and either self-organised structure from Week 11 consistently lagging the other.)

5. Physical Observations

The in-season wave described in the Season Architecture (Section 7) — higher relative load on Tuesday, lower on Thursday, modulated by fixture outcomes and individual match minutes — was maintained across Weeks 6–11, with Week 11 carrying the phase's peak physical demand in its Tuesday session. Record:

- Did the squad tolerate the sustained in-season wave without signs of excessive fatigue (flat running, technical breakdown late in sessions, dips in communication)?
- Were the attendance-based physical adjustments (players with 75+ match minutes vs. fragments vs. unused vs. returning from injury) applied consistently across six weeks of competitive fixtures, and did they seem to matter?
- Any individual players who need a different physical entry point into Phase 3 — either because they've missed significant training, or because they're carrying more load than the group?

(This section is observational, not diagnostic. Any player showing signs of possible injury, overtraining, or a health concern should be referred to qualified medical or sports-science support rather than managed through this review.)

6. Communication Development

The full fourteen-call language from the Season Architecture has now been introduced and used across both phases: *Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze, Screen, Lock, Travel, Switch, Step, Cover, Delay, Inside/Outside*, plus each set-piece routine's own specific organisation calls.

- Which calls are used accurately and without prompting, including the newer ones

introduced in Phase 2 (*Screen, Lock*, and the set-piece-specific calls)?

- Which calls are still infrequent or inaccurate?
- Is the language being used *early* (before an action, shaping it) or only

afterward (describing what already happened)? Early use is the actual goal, and should be more consistent now than it was at the Phase 1 review.

7. Leadership Development

Phase 2 continued building deliberate opportunities for player ownership: the goalkeeper's expanded organisational role in Week 8's pressing work and Week 9's switching outlet, the thrower's decision-making role in Week 10's set pieces, and the largely coach-silent "Two Shapes, One Team" practice in Week 11.

- Who has stepped into an organisational role without being asked, and is this the same player(s) identified at the Phase 1 review or has leadership begun to distribute further?
- Did a different leader emerge for the back-three structure than the back-four structure in Week 11's split-group practice? If so, that is worth naming specifically — it may indicate role-specific rather than purely personal leadership qualities.
- What is the specific, concrete opportunity to hand more ownership to players in Phase 3, which introduces unit relationships and will depend heavily on units organising themselves (Season Architecture, Section 6)?

8. Set-Piece Progress

Phase 2 delivered the pathway's second milestone (Season Architecture, Section 8): defensive set-piece structure formalised (Week 8's "The Wall"), one wide free-kick routine (Week 9's "The Wide Routine"), and throw-in patterns for the defensive and midfield thirds (Week 10). Combined with Phase 1's attacking and defensive corners, the club now has four established, rehearsed routines.

- Were the wide free-kick routine and defensive corner both executed correctly under fully live opposition in Week 11's "Two Under Pressure" practice?
- Did the defensive free-kick wall structure from Week 8 hold up, including the non-negotiable rest-defence / transition-protection standard?
- Which of the four routines, if any, showed drift when reviewed in Week 11's "The Full Circuit," and does that change the priority for Phase 3's second-phase set-piece development (due Weeks 16–17)?
- Note anything to refine before Phase 3 adds the next layer (second-phase organisation after a corner, a direct free-kick option, attacking throw-ins).

9. Match Transfer

(This is the most important section — everything above is only useful if it's changing what happens on a Saturday.)

- Across the fixtures played during Phase 2, what evidence exists that training content is showing up in matches specifically (not just "the team played well," but a named principle — a genuinely triggered collective press, an early switch of play, a protected overload — visible in a named moment)?
- Did the Match Review and Weekly Adjustment routes (A/B/C) get used accurately each week — is the record of which route applied, and why, still available for reference?
- Specifically for this phase's named match-day connections (cleaner exits under pressure, fewer turnovers in the build-up third, presses starting on a shared signal, fewer sustained spells trapped on one side, fewer clean counters conceded from our own attacks) — which of the five is most visibly true on a Saturday, and which is least?

10. Priorities for the Next Block (Phase 3, Weeks 12–17)

Based on the above, name (in order) the two or three things Phase 3 most needs to address before its own review at Week 17. Phase 3's planned content (unit relationships, creating overloads centrally and wide, final-third combinations, defensive shifting, and pressing different opposition shapes) assumes Phase 1 and 2's foundations are reasonably secure — if they are not, say so here rather than letting Phase 3 proceed on an assumption that hasn't been tested.

11. Individual Development Focus

Carry forward the "Focus for next phase" column from the Week 5 review for every player being tracked, then update it with this phase's evidence. Not every player needs an entry; use it for anyone with a specific, nameable focus. This is the second of five checkpoints (next at Weeks 17, 23, 29) that carry a player's focus forward, arriving at Week 36's individual feedback conversation already knowing each tracked player's arc across the season, not starting cold.

PLAYER	STANDING FOCUS (CARRIED FROM WEEK 5 REVIEW)	PROGRESS THIS PHASE	FOCUS FOR NEXT PHASE
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Carrying it forward: copy each player's "Focus for next phase" directly into that player's "Standing focus" column at the Week 17 review.

Adjusting the Route Into Phase 3

Use whichever of the five scenarios below actually describes the squad — more than one may apply in different areas (e.g., results could be good while a specific principle is still shaky).

IF THE TEAM IS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Increase complexity rather than simply repeating Phase 2 content into Phase 3. This might mean introducing Phase 3's practices at their fuller progressions from the start (live opposition immediately rather than passive-to-live progressions), combining two principles inside a single practice earlier than Week 12's schedule assumes, or bringing forward a light version of Phase 4 content (structural adaptability) as an extension inside an already-strong week. Do not mistake "ahead of schedule" for "finished" — continue revisiting Phase 1 and 2 principles inside Phase 3's practices, as the Season Architecture requires throughout.

IF THE TEAM IS BEHIND SCHEDULE

Identify specifically which Phase 2 principle is weakest (Section 4 above) and give it additional, targeted time inside Phase 3's Tuesday sessions — most Phase 3 practices can absorb an extra five minutes of the relevant Phase 2 idea without abandoning their own week's content, since Phase 3 is explicitly built on Phase 1 and 2's foundations. Do not delay Phase 3's start; instead, simplify Phase 3's own practices (using the regressions already written into each one) until the gap closes.

IF ATTENDANCE HAS BEEN INCONSISTENT

Consolidate rather than expand. Phase 3 introduces genuinely new tactical content (unit relationships, playing between the lines) that depends on a shared understanding among whoever is present. Where attendance has been patchy, spend Week 12's Tuesday session explicitly re-establishing Phase 2's core language and principles with whichever group shows up, rather than assuming continuity that may not exist. The contingency sections built into every practice (low/high attendance, restricted space) exist precisely for this situation.

IF RESULTS ARE POOR BUT PERFORMANCES ARE IMPROVING

This is a normal, expected pattern in early competitive fixtures, and should not trigger panic changes to the season plan. Maintain the players' confidence explicitly — name the specific improvements visible in matches (Section 9), even where results haven't followed yet, and continue the development process as planned. Results tend to follow performance with a lag, not a lead; changing the plan reactively before that lag has played out usually costs more than it gains.

IF RESULTS ARE GOOD BUT PERFORMANCES ARE WEAK

This is the more dangerous pattern, because it invites complacency. Do not let good results substitute for the honest evidence gathered in Sections 2–8 above. If Week 11's "Phase 2 Final" showed genuine gaps despite good results, address those gaps directly in Phase 3 exactly as planned — the review process exists specifically to catch this pattern before it becomes comfortable.

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Four-Week Review — Phase 3: Developing Collective Understanding (Weeks 12–17)

A structured checkpoint, completed by the coach using the evidence gathered across Weeks 12–17, before Phase 4 begins in Week 18.

This review follows the same rhythm every four-to-six-week block uses for the rest of the season (next due after Week 23, then Weeks 29, and the season close after Week 36). Filling it in properly — honestly, with specific examples rather than general impressions — is what makes Phase 4's coaching decisions evidence-based rather than guesswork.

1. Principles Covered

WEEK	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE
12	Player between the lines	Support & passing angles
13	Overloads & rest defence	Width & depth
14	Progression: through, around or over	Overloads & rest defence
15	Compactness	Pressure, cover, balance
16	Collective pressing triggers	Defend the space in behind
17	All Phase 3 principles, consolidated	Player between the lines

By the end of Phase 3, the squad has now been introduced to all fourteen formation- neutral principles from the Season Architecture (Section 2) at least once — the final principle, playing between the lines as a specifically named role, was formally introduced in Week 12, though every principle continues to be revisited and deepened rather than retired, exactly as the Season Architecture requires. Phase 3 also added a second-phase plan to the defensive corner (Week 16), completing the club's full, six-routine set-piece programme.

2. Evidence of Progress

(Complete using direct observation from Weeks 12–17, particularly Week 17's "Phase 3 Final" conditioned match, which was deliberately designed as a diagnostic practice.)

- What specific moment, from any of Weeks 12–16, best demonstrated the team playing as this club intends to play under pressure it hadn't faced in Phases 1 or 2? Name the week, the practice, and what happened.
- Compare Week 12's isolated connected-lines work to Week 17's largely coach-silent "The Whole Picture" practice — is the back line and midfield line's relationship visibly more stable under live conditions?
- Compare Week 15's isolated block-shifting technical practice to Week 17's conditioned match — does the block now shift as one connected unit without needing the coach to call it?
- Did the team recognise and adapt to a genuinely different opponent build-up shape (back four versus back three) inside the same match at any point during Phase 3's fixtures, echoing Week 16's specific teaching?

3. Recurring Technical Problems

(List any technical issue — passing weight, first touch, delivery technique, finishing — that appeared in more than one week's coach review, e.g. the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables in Weeks 12–17. A problem seen once is noise; a problem seen three or more times across six weeks is signal.)

4. Recurring Tactical Problems

(Same approach — cross-reference the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables and the weekly Coach Review sections. Common candidates to check specifically, given what Phase 3 targeted: the back line and midfield line disconnecting under pressure, overloads created without protecting rest defence, combinations forced against a defence that hasn't genuinely opened up, a block shifting too slowly or too far after a switch, and the press being slow to recognise a change in the opponent's build-up shape.)

5. Physical Observations

The in-season wave described in the Season Architecture (Section 7) was maintained across Weeks 12–17, with Week 17 carrying the phase's peak physical demand in its Tuesday session, similar in weight to Weeks 5 and 11. Record:

- Did the squad tolerate the sustained in-season wave without signs of excessive fatigue (flat running, technical breakdown late in sessions, dips in communication)?
- Were the attendance-based physical adjustments applied consistently across six weeks of competitive fixtures, and did they seem to matter?
- Any individual players who need a different physical entry point into Phase 4 — either because they've missed significant training, or because they're carrying more load than the group?

(This section is observational, not diagnostic. Any player showing signs of possible injury, overtraining, or a health concern should be referred to qualified medical or sports-science support rather than managed through this review.)

6. Communication Development

The full fourteen-call language from the Season Architecture has now been in use for the whole of Phase 3, alongside newer, more specific vocabulary introduced this phase (the overlap/underlap calls from Week 13, the depth calls from Week 14, and the counting language from Week 16).

- Which calls are used accurately and without prompting, including the newer, phase-specific ones?
- Which calls are still infrequent or inaccurate?
- Is the language being used *early* (before an action, shaping it) or only *afterward* (describing what already happened)? Early use is the actual goal, and should be more consistent now than it was at the Phase 2 review.

7. Leadership Development

Phase 3 continued building deliberate opportunities for player ownership: the back-line organiser calling the block's shift in Week 15, the pressing team's recognition-and-call responsibility in Week 16, and the largely coach-silent "The Whole Picture" practice in Week 17.

- Who has stepped into an organisational role without being asked, and is this the same player(s) identified at the Phase 1 and Phase 2 reviews, or has leadership continued to distribute further?
- Did a different leader emerge for defensive shifting (Week 15) than for pressing recognition (Week 16)? If so, that's worth naming specifically — it may indicate role-specific rather than purely personal leadership qualities.
- What is the specific, concrete opportunity to hand more ownership to players in Phase 4, which introduces structural adaptability and will depend heavily on players recognising for themselves when a change of shape is needed (Season Architecture, Section 6)?

8. Set-Piece Progress

Phase 3 delivered the pathway's third milestone (Season Architecture, Section 8): second-phase organisation after a corner (rebounds, second balls), completing the club's full six-routine set-piece programme when combined with Phases 1 and 2's four routines (attacking corner, defensive corner, wide free kick, throw-in patterns) and the defensive free-kick wall from Week 8.

- Was the second-phase plan needed and correctly executed at any point during Phase 3's fixtures?
- Did the defensive corner's original zonal-plus-post structure (Week 5) hold up alongside the new second-phase layer, or did adding the new layer disrupt the original structure?
- Which of the six routines, if any, showed drift when reviewed in Week 17's "The Set-Piece Gallery," and does that change the priority for Phase 4's set-piece expansion (due Week 23, a second attacking corner option and refined marking assignments)?
- Note anything to refine before Phase 4 adds the next layer.

9. Match Transfer

(This is the most important section — everything above is only useful if it's changing what happens on a Saturday.)

- Across the fixtures played during Phase 3, what evidence exists that training content is showing up in matches specifically (not just "the team played well," but a named principle — a genuine central overload, a staggered box arrival, a collective block shift, a correctly adapted press — visible in a named moment)?
- Did the Match Review and Weekly Adjustment routes (A/B/C) get used accurately each week — is the record of which route applied, and why, still available for reference?
- Specifically for this phase's named match-day connections (central receivers turning under less pressure, numbers-up situations converted more often, more players arriving late into the box, the block shifting as one unit, the press adapting to opponent shape inside a half) — which of the five is most visibly true on a Saturday, and which is least?

10. Priorities for the Next Block (Phase 4, Weeks 18–23)

Based on the above, name (in order) the two or three things Phase 4 most needs to address before its own review at Week 23. Phase 4's planned content (changing shape in and out of possession, alternative build-up structures, one striker versus two, and choosing between a high press and a low block) assumes Phases 1, 2 and 3's foundations are reasonably secure — if they are not, say so here rather than letting Phase 4 proceed on an assumption that hasn't been tested.

11. Individual Development Focus

Carry forward the "Focus for next phase" column from the Week 11 review for every player being tracked, then update it with this phase's evidence. Not every player needs an entry; use it for anyone with a specific, nameable focus. This is the third of five checkpoints (next at Weeks 23, 29) that carry a player's focus forward, arriving at Week 36's individual feedback conversation already knowing each tracked player's arc across the season, not starting cold.

PLAYER	STANDING FOCUS (CARRIED FROM WEEK 11 REVIEW)	PROGRESS THIS PHASE	FOCUS FOR NEXT PHASE
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Carrying it forward: copy each player's "Focus for next phase" directly into that player's "Standing focus" column at the Week 23 review.

Adjusting the Route Into Phase 4

Use whichever of the five scenarios below actually describes the squad — more than one may apply in different areas (e.g., results could be good while a specific principle is still shaky).

IF THE TEAM IS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Increase complexity rather than simply repeating Phase 3 content into Phase 4. This might mean introducing Phase 4's practices at their fuller progressions from the start (live opposition immediately rather than passive-to-live progressions), combining two principles inside a single practice earlier than Week 18's schedule assumes, or bringing forward a light version of Phase 5 content (match management) as an extension inside an already-strong week. Do not mistake "ahead of schedule" for "finished" — continue revisiting Phases 1, 2 and 3 principles inside Phase 4's practices, as the Season Architecture requires throughout.

IF THE TEAM IS BEHIND SCHEDULE

Identify specifically which Phase 3 principle is weakest (Section 4 above) and give it additional, targeted time inside Phase 4's Tuesday sessions — most Phase 4 practices can absorb an extra five minutes of the relevant Phase 3 idea without abandoning their own week's content, since Phase 4 is explicitly built on Phases 1, 2 and 3's foundations. Do not delay Phase 4's start; instead, simplify Phase 4's own practices (using the regressions already written into each one) until the gap closes.

IF ATTENDANCE HAS BEEN INCONSISTENT

Consolidate rather than expand. Phase 4 introduces genuinely new tactical content (structural adaptability, changing shape mid-match) that depends on a shared understanding among whoever is present. Where attendance has been patchy, spend Week 18's Tuesday session explicitly re-establishing Phase 3's core language and principles with whichever group shows up, rather than assuming continuity that may not exist. The contingency sections built into every practice (low/high attendance, restricted space) exist precisely for this situation.

IF RESULTS ARE POOR BUT PERFORMANCES ARE IMPROVING

This is a normal, expected pattern, and should not trigger panic changes to the season plan. Maintain the players' confidence explicitly — name the specific improvements visible in matches (Section 9), even where results haven't followed yet, and continue the development process as planned. Results tend to follow performance with a lag, not a lead; changing the plan reactively before that lag has played out usually costs more than it gains.

IF RESULTS ARE GOOD BUT PERFORMANCES ARE WEAK

This is the more dangerous pattern, because it invites complacency. Do not let good results substitute for the honest evidence gathered in Sections 2–8 above. If Week 17's "Phase 3 Final" showed genuine gaps despite good results, address those gaps directly in Phase 4 exactly as planned — the review process exists specifically to catch this pattern before it becomes comfortable.

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Four-Week Review — Phase 4: Tactical Adaptability (Weeks 18–23)

A structured checkpoint, completed by the coach using the evidence gathered across Weeks 18–23, before Phase 5 begins in Week 24.

This review follows the same rhythm every four-to-six-week block uses for the rest of the season (next due after Week 29, then the season close after Week 36). Filling it in properly — honestly, with specific examples rather than general impressions — is what makes Phase 5's coaching decisions evidence-based rather than guesswork.

1. Principles Covered

WEEK	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE
18	Structural adaptability (possession)	Compactness
19	Progression: through, around, over	Rest defence
20	Width & depth	Overloads & rest defence
21	Collective pressing triggers	Protect the centre, then the box
22	Progression: through, around, over	Switching the point of attack
23	All Phase 4 principles, consolidated	Collective pressing triggers

By the end of Phase 4, the squad has now trained the ability to change shape both in and out of possession, build from three distinct starting shapes (2-3, 3-2, 3-1), play with either one striker or two and understand the attacking and defensive demands of each, choose deliberately between a high press and a mid-block, organise a genuine low block, and solve both a high press and a low block with the correct in-possession solution. Phase 4 also expanded the club's set-piece programme with a genuine second attacking corner option (Week 23), giving the team two indistinguishable routines from the same starting picture for the first time.

2. Evidence of Progress

(Complete using direct observation from Weeks 18–22, particularly Week 23's "Adapt or Break" and "Phase 4 Final" practices, which were deliberately designed as diagnostic, minimal-instruction practices.)

- What specific moment, from any of Weeks 18–22, best demonstrated the team changing its own shape or approach without being told, in a way it couldn't have managed before Phase 4? Name the week, the practice, and what happened.
- In Week 23's "Adapt or Break," did the team produce at least one genuinely spontaneous structural adjustment with no coach cue? What was it, and who organised it?
- Compare Week 18's first, coach-led structural change to Week 23's "Phase 4 Final" — is the team's overall comfort with changing shape visibly greater now than it was at the start of the phase?
- Did the team correctly read and respond to a genuinely different opponent picture (a high press versus a low block, or an opponent that changed its own approach mid-match) inside any of Phase 4's fixtures?

3. Recurring Technical Problems

(List any technical issue — passing weight, first touch, delivery technique, finishing — that appeared in more than one week's coach review, e.g. the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables in Weeks 18–23. A problem seen once is noise; a problem seen three or more times across six weeks is signal.)

4. Recurring Tactical Problems

(Same approach — cross-reference the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables and the weekly Coach Review sections. Common candidates to check specifically, given what Phase 4 targeted: the team defaulting to a single, familiar build-up or front-player shape regardless of the picture, slow recognition of a change in the opponent's press or block, switches of play that are too slow or poorly weighted to beat a press, and low-block-breaking combinations forced into covered central lanes rather than patient recycling.)

5. Physical Observations

The in-season wave described in the Season Architecture (Section 7) shifted during Phase 4 — Week 21's high-intensity press-bout theme carried the phase's peak physical demand, while Week 23 (a review week) returns to moderate load ahead of Phase 5's more situation-specific physical profile. Record:

- Did the squad tolerate Week 21's high-intensity pressing work without signs of excessive fatigue carrying into the following days?
- Were the attendance-based physical adjustments applied consistently across six weeks of competitive fixtures, and did they seem to matter?
- Any individual players who need a different physical entry point into Phase 5 — either because they've missed significant training, or because they're carrying more load than the group?

(This section is observational, not diagnostic. Any player showing signs of possible injury, overtraining, or a health concern should be referred to qualified medical or sports-science support rather than managed through this review.)

6. Communication Development

The full season's language has now been in use for the whole of Phase 4, alongside newer, more specific vocabulary introduced this phase (the scenario-recognition language from Week 21, and the switch-of-play calls from Week 22).

- Which calls are used accurately and without prompting, including the newer, phase-specific ones?
- Which calls are still infrequent or inaccurate?
- Is the language being used *early* (before an action, shaping it) or only *afterward* (describing what already happened)? Early use is the actual goal, and should be more consistent now than it was at the Phase 3 review.
- Did players organise a structural change out loud, entirely on their own, at any point during Week 23's minimal-instruction practices?

7. Leadership Development

Phase 4 continued building deliberate opportunities for player ownership: the whole team's shape-change decisions in Weeks 18–19 without a coach's structural instruction, the scenario-recognition responsibility in Week 21, and the almost entirely coach-silent "Adapt or Break" practice in Week 23.

- Who has stepped into an organisational role without being asked, and is this the same player(s) identified at the Phase 1, 2 and 3 reviews, or has leadership continued to distribute further?
- Did a different leader emerge for organising a structural change (Weeks 18–19) than for organising the press or block choice (Week 21)? If so, that's worth naming specifically.
- What is the specific, concrete opportunity to hand more ownership to players in

Phase 5, which introduces match-state management and will depend heavily on players reading a game situation — protecting a lead, chasing a game, playing with or against ten — and making in-game decisions largely for themselves (Season Architecture, Section 6)?

8. Set-Piece Progress

Phase 4 delivered the pathway's fourth milestone (Season Architecture, Section 8): a second attacking corner option (the near-post twist introduced in Week 23) and refined defensive marking assignments, building on Phases 1–3's four routines and second-phase plan.

- Was the second attacking corner option needed and correctly executed at any point during Phase 4's fixtures?
- Did the refined near-post marking assignment from Week 23 hold up against a genuine opponent, or does it need further work before Phase 5?
- Which of the seven routines now in the programme, if any, showed drift when reviewed this phase, and does that change the priority for Phase 5's set-piece work (due Week 27, controlling restarts, and Week 29, a full review with pressure finishing)?
- Note anything to refine before Phase 5 adds its own layer.

9. Match Transfer

(This is the most important section — everything above is only useful if it's changing what happens on a Saturday.)

- Across the fixtures played during Phase 4, what evidence exists that training content is showing up in matches specifically (not just "the team played well," but a named principle — a genuine mid-match shape change, a build-up shape chosen to match the opponent's press, a front-player picture adapted correctly, a block height chosen for the scoreline, a press beaten cleanly, a low block unlocked — visible in a named moment)?
- Did the Match Review and Weekly Adjustment routes (A/B/C) get used accurately each week — is the record of which route applied, and why, still available for reference?
- Specifically for this phase's named match-day connections (shape change without a stoppage in play, build-up unaffected by which shape is used, front players interchange without confusion, the team defends in more than one block by choice, two distinct in-possession solutions on show) — which is most visibly true on a Saturday, and which is least?

10. Priorities for the Next Block (Phase 5, Weeks 24–29)

Based on the above, name (in order) the two or three things Phase 5 most needs to address before its own review at Week 29. Phase 5's planned content (protecting a lead, chasing a game, playing with and against ten players, managing momentum, controlling restarts, and the closing minutes) assumes Phases 1–4's foundations are reasonably secure — if they are not, say so here rather than letting Phase 5 proceed on an assumption that hasn't been tested.

11. Individual Development Focus

Carry forward the "Focus for next phase" column from the Week 17 review for every player being tracked, then update it with this phase's evidence. Not every player needs an entry; use it for anyone with a specific, nameable focus. This is the fourth of five checkpoints (last one at Week 29) that carry a player's focus forward, arriving at Week 36's individual feedback conversation already knowing each tracked player's arc across the season, not starting cold.

PLAYER	STANDING FOCUS (CARRIED FROM WEEK 17 REVIEW)	PROGRESS THIS PHASE	FOCUS FOR NEXT PHASE
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Carrying it forward: copy each player's "Focus for next phase" directly into that player's "Standing focus" column at the Week 29 review.

Adjusting the Route Into Phase 5

Use whichever of the five scenarios below actually describes the squad — more than one may apply in different areas (e.g., results could be good while a specific principle is still shaky).

IF THE TEAM IS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Increase complexity rather than simply repeating Phase 4 content into Phase 5. This might mean introducing Phase 5's scripted match-state practices at their fuller progressions from the start (live, unpredictable scenarios rather than clearly signposted ones), combining two match-state principles inside a single practice earlier than Week 24's schedule assumes, or bringing forward a light version of Phase 6 content (opposition-specific preparation) as an extension inside an already-strong week. Do not mistake "ahead of schedule" for "finished" — continue revisiting Phases 1–4 principles inside Phase 5's practices, as the Season Architecture requires throughout.

IF THE TEAM IS BEHIND SCHEDULE

Identify specifically which Phase 4 principle is weakest (Section 4 above) and give it additional, targeted time inside Phase 5's Tuesday sessions — most Phase 5 practices can absorb an extra five minutes of the relevant Phase 4 idea without abandoning their own week's content, since Phase 5's match-state scenarios depend on the team already being able to change shape and approach on demand. Do not delay Phase 5's start; instead, simplify Phase 5's own practices (using the regressions already written into each one) until the gap closes.

IF ATTENDANCE HAS BEEN INCONSISTENT

Consolidate rather than expand. Phase 5 introduces genuinely new tactical content (match-state management, playing with or against ten players, controlling restarts) that depends on a shared understanding among whoever is present. Where attendance has been patchy, spend Week 24's Tuesday session explicitly re-establishing Phase 4's core shape-change and block-choice language with whichever group shows up, rather than assuming continuity that may not exist. The contingency sections built into every practice (low/high attendance, restricted space) exist precisely for this situation.

IF RESULTS ARE POOR BUT PERFORMANCES ARE IMPROVING

This is a normal, expected pattern, and should not trigger panic changes to the season plan. Maintain the players' confidence explicitly — name the specific improvements visible in matches (Section 9), even where results haven't followed yet, and continue the development process as planned. Results tend to follow performance with a lag, not a lead; changing the plan reactively before that lag has played out usually costs more than it gains.

IF RESULTS ARE GOOD BUT PERFORMANCES ARE WEAK

This is the more dangerous pattern, because it invites complacency. Do not let good results substitute for the honest evidence gathered in Sections 2–8 above. If Week 23's "Adapt or Break" and "Phase 4 Final" showed genuine gaps despite good results, address those gaps directly in Phase 5 exactly as planned — the review process exists specifically to catch this pattern before it becomes comfortable.

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Four-Week Review — Phase 5: Match Management (Weeks 24–29)

A structured checkpoint, completed by the coach using the evidence gathered across Weeks 24–29, before Phase 6 begins in Week 30.

This review follows the same rhythm every four-to-six-week block has used all season (previous reviews after Weeks 5, 11, 17 and 23; the season close follows after Week 36). Filling it in properly — honestly, with specific examples rather than general impressions — is what makes Phase 6's coaching decisions evidence-based rather than guesswork, and Phase 6 is the final block of the season.

1. Principles Covered

WEEK	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE
24	Recognise the picture before playing	Compactness
25	Progression: through, around, over	Overloads & rest defence
26	Compactness	Overloads & rest defence
27	Recognise the picture before playing	Nearest players react first
28	All transition principles	All possession principles
29	All Phase 5 principles, consolidated	Recognise the picture before playing

By the end of Phase 5, the squad has now been introduced to a genuinely new category of coaching content: game-state and game-management skill, layered on top of the formation-neutral tactical principles built across Phases 1–4. The squad can protect a lead, chase a game, reorganise after a red card, use a numerical advantage patiently, manage momentum after any goal, control restarts, and — as of this week — move fluidly between several of these states inside a single, continuous match. The set-piece programme also reached its final Phase 5 milestone: a second attacking corner option pressure-tested inside match-state scenarios, and the club's first confirmed penalty protocol.

2. Evidence of Progress

(Complete using direct observation from Weeks 24–28, particularly Week 29's "Read the State" and "Phase 5 Final" practices, which were deliberately designed as diagnostic, minimal-instruction practices.)

- What specific moment, from any of Weeks 24–28, best demonstrated the team managing a genuine match situation in a way it couldn't have managed before Phase 5? Name the week, the practice, and what happened.
- In Week 29's "Read the State," did the team produce a visibly correct, spontaneous adjustment each time a new match state was called, with no further coaching explanation? Which state transition was smoothest, and which was roughest?
- Compare Week 24's first, heavily-scaffolded lead-protection practice to Week 29's "Phase 5 Final" — is the team's overall composure under a scripted, changing scoreline visibly greater now than it was at the start of the phase?
- Did the team correctly read and respond to a genuine match-state change (a goal scored or conceded, a red card, a real closing-minutes scenario) inside any of Phase 5's actual fixtures?

3. Recurring Technical Problems

(List any technical issue — passing weight, first touch, delivery technique, finishing, dead-ball striking — that appeared in more than one week's coach review, e.g. the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables in Weeks 24–29. A problem seen once is noise; a problem seen three or more times across six weeks is signal.)

4. Recurring Tactical Problems

(Same approach — cross-reference the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables and the weekly Coach Review sections. Common candidates to check specifically, given what Phase 5 targeted: the team defaulting to the same approach regardless of the scoreline or match state, slow or absent reorganisation after a numerical change, committing too many or too few numbers forward when chasing a game, and a lapse in concentration specifically in the minute after either team's goal.)

5. Physical Observations

The in-season wave described in the Season Architecture (Section 7) shifted its character for Phase 5, expressed through scripted match-state practices rather than generic intensity work, with Week 28's genuinely timed, countdown-driven practices carrying the phase's most realistic physical and psychological demand. Record:

- Did the squad tolerate Week 28's genuinely high-pressure, countdown-driven practices without signs of excessive fatigue or a drop in decision-making quality late in each practice?
- Were the attendance-based physical adjustments applied consistently across six weeks of competitive fixtures, and did they seem to matter?
- Any individual players who need a different physical entry point into Phase 6 — either because they've missed significant training, or because they're carrying more load than the group?

(This section is observational, not diagnostic. Any player showing signs of possible injury, overtraining, or a health concern should be referred to qualified medical or sports-science support rather than managed through this review.)

6. Communication Development

The full season's language has now been in use for the whole of Phase 5, alongside newer, more specific vocabulary introduced this phase (the "safe" call from Week 24, the reshape-confirmation call from Week 26, and the state-confirmation habit rehearsed this week).

- Which calls are used accurately and without prompting, including the newer, phase-specific ones?

- Which calls are still infrequent or inaccurate?

- Is the language being used *early* (before an action, shaping it) or only *afterward* (describing what already happened)? Early use is the actual goal, and should be more consistent now than it was at the Phase 4 review.

- Did players confirm a new match state out loud, entirely on their own, at any point during Week 29's minimal-instruction practices?

7. Leadership Development

Phase 5 continued building deliberate opportunities for player ownership: the whole team's scenario-based decision-making across Weeks 24–25 without a coach's explicit instruction, the reshape-confirmation responsibility in Week 26, the momentum- management discipline in Week 27, and the almost entirely coach-silent "Read the State" practice in Week 29.

- Who has stepped into an organisational role without being asked, and is this the same player(s) identified at the Phase 1, 2, 3 and 4 reviews, or has leadership continued to distribute further?
- Did a different leader emerge for organising a reshape after a red card (Week 26) than for confirming the penalty order (Week 29)? If so, that's worth naming specifically — the latter is a genuinely new kind of leadership responsibility for this squad.
- What is the specific, concrete opportunity to hand more ownership to players in

Phase 6, which focuses on refining identity, fixing recurring weaknesses, and opposition-specific preparation, and will depend heavily on players contributing honestly to what the team's real strengths and weaknesses actually are (Season Architecture, Section 6)?

8. Set-Piece Progress

Phase 5 delivered the pathway's fifth milestone (Season Architecture, Section 8): every routine pressure-tested inside genuine match-state scenarios, and the club's first confirmed penalty protocol — an order of takers and techniques established before it's ever needed for real.

- Did the confirmed penalty order hold up as intended, or did the season's evidence since Week 29 suggest it needs revisiting before Phase 6's set-piece maximisation work (due Weeks 32 and 35)?
- Was Week 23's near-post twist used successfully at any point during Phase 5's fixtures, and did the "protecting a lead" framing from Week 29's live rehearsal hold up under genuine match pressure?
- Which of the seven routines, if any, showed drift when reviewed in Week 29's "The Full Set" circuit, and does that change the priority for Phase 6's final set-piece work?
- Note anything to refine before Phase 6 adds its final layer of opposition-specific adjustment.

9. Match Transfer

(This is the most important section — everything above is only useful if it's changing what happens on a Saturday.)

- Across the fixtures played during Phase 5, what evidence exists that training content is showing up in matches specifically (not just "the team played well," but a named principle — a lead genuinely protected, a game genuinely turned around, a red-card reorganisation handled calmly, a numerical advantage used patiently, a goal followed by composed restart control — visible in a named moment)?
- Did the Match Review and Weekly Adjustment routes (A/B/C) get used accurately each week — is the record of which route applied, and why, still available for reference?
- Specifically for this phase's named match-day connections (fewer points dropped from winning positions, more territory won when behind, composure maintained after a red card, fewer immediate goals conceded after our own goal, composed game management late on) — which is most visibly true on a Saturday, and which is least?

10. Priorities for the Next Block (Phase 6, Weeks 30–36)

Based on the above, name (in order) the two or three things Phase 6 most needs to address before the season closes at Week 36. Phase 6's planned content (refining identity, fixing recurring weaknesses, opposition-specific preparation, maximising set pieces, sustaining intensity, and decisive matches) assumes Phases 1–5's foundations are reasonably secure — if they are not, say so here rather than letting the final block of the season proceed on an assumption that hasn't been tested. Since Phase 6 is the season's last block, this section carries particular weight: there is limited remaining time to close any gap identified here.

11. Individual Development Focus

Carry forward the "Focus for next phase" column from the Week 23 review for every player being tracked, then update it with this phase's evidence. Not every player needs an entry; use it for anyone with a specific, nameable focus. This is the fifth and final in-season checkpoint — what goes in the "Focus for next phase" column here is exactly what should arrive, already familiar to the player, at Week 36's individual feedback conversation as their "one priority for next season" starting point.

PLAYER	STANDING FOCUS (CARRIED FROM WEEK 23 REVIEW)	PROGRESS THIS PHASE	FOCUS FOR NEXT PHASE (CARRY INTO WEEK 36)
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Carrying it forward: hand this table directly to whoever leads Week 36's individual feedback conversations — each player's "Focus for next phase" here is the honest, evidence-based starting point for their season-closing conversation, not something to reconstruct from memory five reviews later.

Adjusting the Route Into Phase 6

Use whichever of the five scenarios below actually describes the squad — more than one may apply in different areas (e.g., results could be good while a specific principle is still shaky).

IF THE TEAM IS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Increase complexity rather than simply repeating Phase 5 content into Phase 6. This might mean introducing Phase 6's opposition-specific practices with more demanding, less signposted scouting information from the start, combining refined-identity work with a live, unpredictable match-state scenario earlier than Week 30's schedule assumes, or bringing forward Phase 6's set-piece maximisation content if the programme is already sharp. Do not mistake "ahead of schedule" for "finished" — continue revisiting Phases 1–5 principles inside Phase 6's practices, as the Season Architecture requires throughout, right up to Week 36.

IF THE TEAM IS BEHIND SCHEDULE

Identify specifically which Phase 5 principle is weakest (Section 4 above) and give it additional, targeted time inside Phase 6's Tuesday sessions — most Phase 6 practices can absorb an extra five minutes of the relevant Phase 5 idea without abandoning their own week's content, since Phase 6 is explicitly the season's consolidation block and assumes Phases 1–5's foundations are already secure. Do not delay Phase 6's start; instead, simplify Phase 6's own practices (using the regressions already written into each one) until the gap closes, and be realistic about how much can genuinely change in the season's final seven weeks.

IF ATTENDANCE HAS BEEN INCONSISTENT

Consolidate rather than expand. Phase 6 is specifically about refining what the team already does, which depends on a shared, settled understanding among whoever is present. Where attendance has been patchy, spend Week 30's Tuesday session explicitly re-establishing Phase 5's core match-management language with whichever group shows up, rather than assuming continuity that may not exist. The contingency sections built into every practice (low/high attendance, restricted space) exist precisely for this situation.

IF RESULTS ARE POOR BUT PERFORMANCES ARE IMPROVING

This is a normal, expected pattern, and should not trigger panic changes to the season plan. Maintain the players' confidence explicitly — name the specific improvements visible in matches (Section 9), even where results haven't followed yet, and continue the development process as planned. Results tend to follow performance with a lag, not a lead; changing the plan reactively before that lag has played out usually costs more than it gains, even this late in the season.

IF RESULTS ARE GOOD BUT PERFORMANCES ARE WEAK

This is the more dangerous pattern, because it invites complacency, and there is particularly little time left in the season to correct it if it goes unaddressed. Do not let good results substitute for the honest evidence gathered in Sections 2–8 above. If Week 29's "Read the State" and "Phase 5 Final" showed genuine gaps despite good results, address those gaps directly in Phase 6 exactly as planned — the review process exists specifically to catch this pattern before it becomes comfortable, and Phase 6's decisive-matches content (Weeks 34–36) will test it directly regardless.

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Season-Closing Review — Phase 6: Performance Consolidation (Weeks 30–36)

A structured checkpoint, completed by the coach using the evidence gathered across Weeks 30–36, and the season's sixth and final review — closing the 36-week curriculum as a whole.

This review follows the same rhythm every four-to-six-week block has used all season (previous reviews after Weeks 5, 11, 17, 23 and 29). It is also, deliberately, more than a normal phase review: because Phase 6 is the season's last block, this document closes the loop on the entire 36-week programme, not just the six weeks since the last checkpoint. Filling it in properly — honestly, with specific examples rather than general impressions — is what turns a full season of coaching into a genuine foundation for next season's planning, rather than a story that simply ends.

1. Principles Covered

Phase 6, week by week:

WEEK	TUESDAY THEME / PRINCIPLE	THURSDAY THEME / PRINCIPLE
30	Refining identity: possession principles — all possession principles	Refining identity: defensive principles — all non-possession principles
31	Opposition-specific: direct, physical opponent — compactness	Opposition-specific: possession-based opponent — progression: through, around, over
32	Opposition-specific: fast counter-attacking opponent — defend the space in behind	Set-piece maximisation — rest defence
33	Addressing the season's recurring weakness (diagnostic) — coach-selected	Addressing the season's recurring weakness (solution) — coach-selected
34	Maintaining intensity — fixture congestion management — pressure, cover, balance	Sharpness & confidence work — support & passing angles
35	Decisive-match preparation: our principles vs this opponent — all core principles	Decisive-match set pieces & shape confirmation — match-specific
36	Season-defining match — full expression of identity — all core principles	Structured review & individual feedback — all core principles

Phase 6 taught nothing genuinely new. Its entire purpose was to take everything built across Phases 1–5 and sharpen it: refining the team's own natural identity (Week 30), applying that identity deliberately against three distinct opponent pictures (Weeks 31–32), diagnosing and directly targeting whatever specific weakness the season's real evidence pointed to (Week 33), protecting the squad's freshness through a genuine taper (Weeks 34–35), and finally letting the team simply be itself in its defining fixture before closing the season with honest, individual reflection (Week 36).

The season as a whole:

PHASE	WEEKS	FOCUS
1 — Foundations	1–5	Individual and small-group technical/tactical foundations, first team principles, first set-piece routines.

PHASE	WEEKS	FOCUS
2 — Early-Season	6–11	Building on foundations, unit relationships, pressing structure, first wide free-kick and throw-in routines.
3 — Developing Collective Understanding	12–17	Unit relationships, overloads, playing between the lines, final-third combinations, defensive shifting, second-phase set-piece work.
4 — Tactical Adaptability	18–23	Changing shape in and out of possession, alternative build-up structures, back four vs back three, second attacking corner option.
5 — Match Management	24–29	Protecting a lead, chasing a game, playing with/against ten, managing momentum, controlling restarts, penalty protocol confirmed.
6 — Performance Consolidation	30–36	Refining identity, opposition-specific preparation, fixing the season's recurring weakness, taper, decisive-match preparation, season close.

2. Evidence of Progress

(Complete using direct observation from Weeks 30–35, particularly Week 33's diagnostic-then-solution pair and Week 35's decisive-match preparation, both deliberately designed to produce clear, comparable evidence.)

- Did Week 30's "Our Possession DNA" and "Our Defensive DNA" practices surface a genuinely nameable team identity — can the coaching staff state, in a sentence each, what the team's real possession and defensive identity turned out to be?
- Across Weeks 31–32's three opposition-specific pictures (direct/physical, possession-based, fast counter-attacking), which picture did the team read and respond to most fluently, and which needs further work heading into next season?
- Did Week 33's "Prove the Fix" show a genuine, honest improvement over "Convert or Don't" (or whichever recurring weakness was actually substituted for the worked example) — and did that improvement transfer into the fixtures played since?
- Did the taper in Weeks 34–35 protect squad freshness without a corresponding drop in sharpness — compare the team's performance quality in Week 36's defining fixture against a typical mid-season match.
- What was the actual result and performance of Week 36's season-defining match, and did the team look "recognisable as itself, whatever the shape" — this phase's central, named match-day connection?

3. Recurring Technical Problems (Season-Wide)

(Cross-reference Section 3 of every previous review — Weeks 5, 11, 17, 23, and 29 — alongside Weeks 30–36's own "Common Problems and Corrections" tables. A technical issue appearing in two or three phase reviews across the season is a genuine priority for next pre-season, not a coincidence.)

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4. Recurring Tactical Problems (Season-Wide)

(Same approach — cross-reference every previous review's Section 4. Pay particular attention to whether Week 33's diagnosed recurring weakness matches, or differs from, whatever recurring tactical issues were already flagged at the Phase 1–5 reviews; if it differs, that's worth understanding before next season begins.)

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5. Physical Observations

The in-season wave described in the Season Architecture (Section 7) closed exactly as planned: "Weeks 30–36 — a controlled taper toward the season's most significant fixtures — reduced volume, sustained quality, protecting freshness over accumulating more work." Record:

- Did the individualised load table introduced in Week 34 (based on each player's actual minutes in the preceding fixture) function well in practice across Weeks 34–36, and is it worth carrying into next season's own congested periods?
- Did the squad enter Week 36's defining fixture visibly fresher than a typical mid-season matchday, based on both subjective player feedback and observed match performance?
- Looking back across the whole season, were there any recurring patterns in injury, overtraining, or fatigue that should inform next season's physical-load planning from Week 1, rather than being addressed only inside Phase 6's taper?

(This section is observational, not diagnostic. Any player showing signs of possible injury, overtraining, or a health concern should be referred to qualified medical or sports-science support rather than managed through this review.)

6. Communication Development

Track the full arc across the whole season, not just Phase 6:

- Which pieces of the season's established language (built progressively from Week 1's earliest calls through to Week 29's match-state confirmations and Week 32's "Zonal / Man / Mixed" set-piece reads) are now used fluently, early, and without prompting?
- Which calls, introduced at any point in the season, never fully took hold — and is that because they were genuinely unnecessary for this squad, or because they needed more reinforcement than they received?
- Compare the squad's communication in Week 36's final practices to Week 1's very first sessions — is this difference visible and specific, or only a general impression?

7. Leadership Development

Track the full arc across the whole season:

- Who ended the season occupying a genuine organisational or leadership role, and how does that compare to who was identified at the Phase 1 review? Has leadership distributed more widely across the squad as the season progressed, concentrated further, or shifted to different individuals entirely?
- What specific, concrete leadership opportunities (formal or informal — vice-captaincy, set-piece organisation, mentoring newer or younger players) should be built deliberately into next season's planning from Week 1, based on what emerged organically this season?
- Did Week 36's individual feedback conversations surface any player who is ready for a specific, named leadership responsibility next season that they haven't yet held?

8. Set-Piece Progress — Full Pathway Review

Phase 6 delivered the pathway's sixth and final milestone (Season Architecture, Section 8): opposition-specific set-piece adjustments and final confirmation of routines and personnel ahead of the season's decisive fixtures. The full pathway, reviewed end to end:

MILESTONE	PHASE / WEEKS	DELIVERED
1	Wk 5	One attacking corner routine, defensive corner organisation, restart discipline.
2	Wk 8–10	Defensive set-piece structure formalised, one wide free-kick routine, throw-in patterns.
3	Wk 16–17	Second-phase organisation after a corner, a direct free-kick option, attacking throw-ins.
4	Wk 23	A second attacking corner option (near-post variation), refined defensive marking assignments.
5	Wk 27–29	Set pieces rehearsed inside match-state scenarios, penalty protocol confirmed.
6	Wk 32, 35	Opposition-specific set-piece adjustments, final confirmation of routines and personnel.

- Did the specific routine selected in Week 35 for the season-defining opponent (chosen using Week 32's "Reading Their Setup" process) actually get used in the fixture, and did it function as rehearsed?
- Looking at the full programme built since Week 5, which of the club's seven established routines proved most reliably effective across the season's actual fixtures, and which underperformed relative to how much training time it received?
- Is the confirmed personnel roster and its named contingencies, finalised in Week 32, the right starting point for next season, or does the roster need to be rebuilt in part depending on who is available going forward?

9. Match Transfer

(This is the most important section — everything above is only useful if it changed what happened on a Saturday, across the whole season, not just Phase 6.)

- What is the single clearest example, from anywhere in the season, of training content visibly showing up in a match — name the week, the practice, and the match moment?

- Across Phase 6's fixtures specifically, and especially Week 36's defining match, which of this phase's named match-day connections (two clearly different tactical plans delivered, fewer transition goals conceded, targeted improvement in the identified area, squad freshness into the run-in, clear and calm final preparation, team recognisable as itself whatever the shape) proved most visibly true, and which proved hardest to achieve?

- Looking at the season's full run of match-day connections, from Phase 1 through Phase 6, which recurring theme mattered most to this squad's actual results — and is that the same theme the coaching staff expected it to be at the start of the season?

10. Priorities for Pre-Season and Next Season

Based on the above, name (in order) the three or four things next season's pre-season and early weeks should address first. Unlike every previous review in this programme, there is no next in-season block to hand these priorities to directly — they belong instead to whatever pre-season planning process precedes next season's Week 1. Naming them honestly now, while this season's evidence is still fresh, is significantly more useful than trying to reconstruct it months later.

11. Individual Development Focus — the Season's Full Thread

Five in-season reviews (Weeks 5, 11, 17, 23, 29) each carried a short, named development focus forward for any player being tracked individually. This section closes that thread: pull the Week 29 review's "Focus for next phase" column before Week 36's individual feedback conversations, and use it as the honest, evidence-based starting point for each tracked player's "one priority for next season" — not something reconstructed from memory at the season's final week.

PLAYER	FOCUS CARRIED FROM THE WEEK 29 REVIEW	HOW IT SHOWED UP ACROSS WEEKS 30–36	PRIORITY GIVEN AT WEEK 36 (SHOULD MATCH)
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Closing the loop: if a player's Week 36 priority doesn't resemble what was carried forward from Week 29, that's worth noting honestly here — either the focus was resolved earlier than expected and a genuinely new priority replaced it, or the thread was dropped somewhere across the season and next season's reviews should be more disciplined about maintaining it. Next season's Phase 1 review restarts this same five-checkpoint cycle from Week 5.

Season at a Glance

A one-page summary, useful for handing to committee members, club officers, or next season's coaching staff:

PHASE	WEEKS	WHAT WAS BUILT
1 — Foundations	1–5	Individual and small-group principles, first team shape, first set-piece routines.
2 — Early-Season	6–11	Unit relationships, pressing structure, second wave of set-piece routines.
3 — Developing Collective Understanding	12–17	Overloads, combination play, defensive shifting, second-phase set pieces.
4 — Tactical Adaptability	18–23	Multiple structures, alternative build-ups, a second attacking corner option.
5 — Match Management	24–29	Game-state management, momentum control, penalty protocol.
6 — Performance Consolidation	30–36	Refined identity, opposition-specific preparation, the season's recurring weakness addressed, a genuine taper, and a calm, confident close.

Across 36 weeks, 72 training sessions, and roughly 288 individual practices, the programme never once relied on a fixed formation to define the team. What it built instead — a formation-neutral, principle-led identity, expressed through whichever shape a given week or opponent actually required — is the season's real, lasting product, and the right foundation for whatever comes next.

Looking Ahead — Adjusting Next Season's Route

Use whichever of the five scenarios below actually describes how this season ended — more than one may apply in different areas.

IF THE TEAM FINISHED AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Consider starting next season's Phase 1 at a slightly higher baseline of complexity rather than repeating this season's Week 1 content unchanged — a squad that finished this season fluent in its own identity doesn't need to relearn its very first rondo from a standing start. Still build in the same foundational weeks structurally (a phase is never worth skipping), but calibrate the specific detail and pace to what this squad has already proven it can handle.

IF THE TEAM FINISHED BEHIND SCHEDULE

Identify specifically which phase's foundations were weakest (cross-reference Sections 3–4 across all six reviews) and give that phase proportionally more time at the start of next season, even if it means compressing a later phase slightly. Do not assume next season's squad — even with largely the same players — starts from this season's Week 36 level; some rebuilding of foundational habits at the start of every season is normal and expected.

IF ATTENDANCE WAS INCONSISTENT ACROSS THE SEASON

Review whether the contingency structures built into every practice (low/high attendance, restricted space) were actually sufficient, or whether next season's planning needs a different underlying assumption about typical training numbers. Consider, too, whether specific recurring absences point to a scheduling or communication fix worth making before next season begins, rather than treated as inevitable each week.

IF RESULTS WERE POOR BUT PERFORMANCES IMPROVED ACROSS THE SEASON

This is a normal pattern for a team implementing genuine, principle-led change, and should not be read as evidence the programme failed. Carry the specific, performance-based evidence gathered across all six reviews into any conversation about the season's results — a team that finished playing better than it started, even without matching results, has still built something real and worth continuing next season.

IF RESULTS WERE GOOD BUT PERFORMANCES STAYED INCONSISTENT

Be honest about this in the season's final accounting, even if the results themselves make it tempting not to be. A team that won matches without ever fully settling into a consistent, recognisable identity has a different, and arguably more urgent, starting point for next season than the results alone would suggest — name that honestly here, for whoever plans next season's Phase 1.

Closing Note

This is the final document in the 36-week Castlewellan Town FC senior coaching curriculum. Every week from here forward is a new season's work, built on whatever this document honestly records.

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum · Season-Closing Review, covering Phase 6 (Weeks 30–36) and the season as a whole. An independent club resource, not an official UEFA or Irish FA publication and not endorsed by either.