



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.

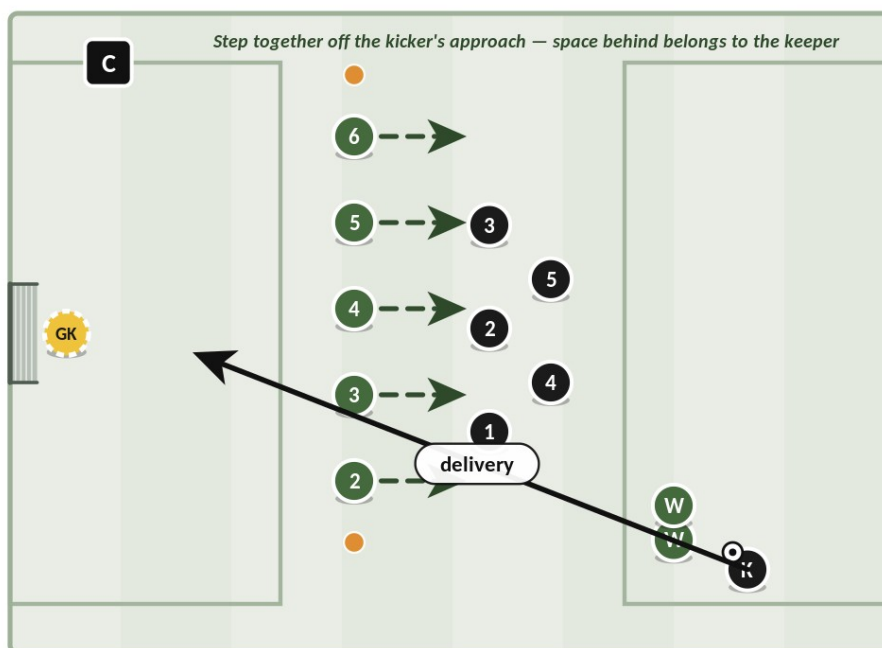
Success indicators:

- 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.

SP5.2 THE WIDE FREE-KICK — Line, Wall and the Step

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



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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.

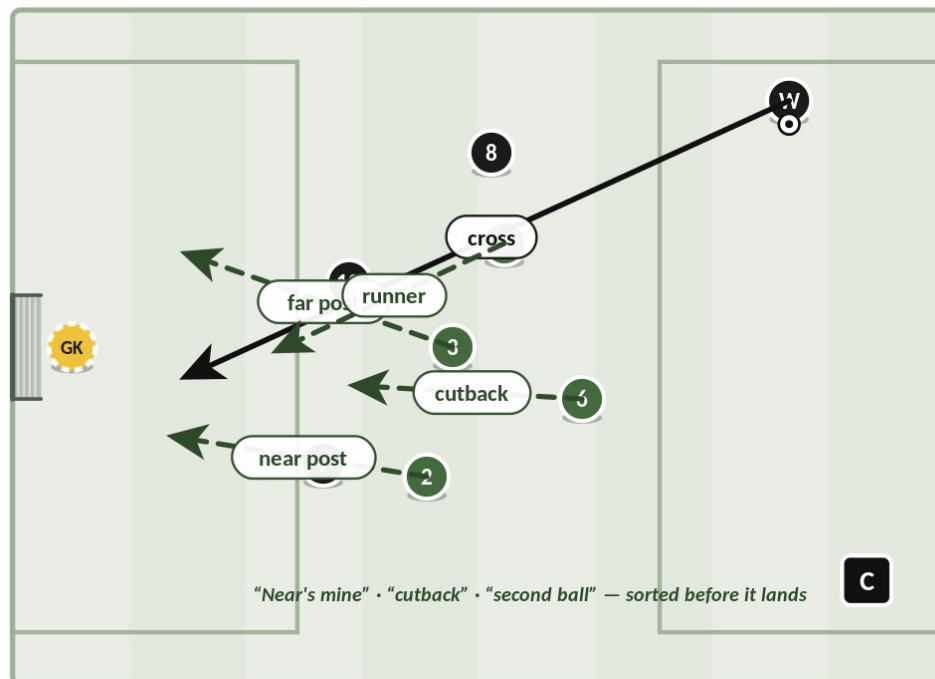
Success indicators:

- 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



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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.

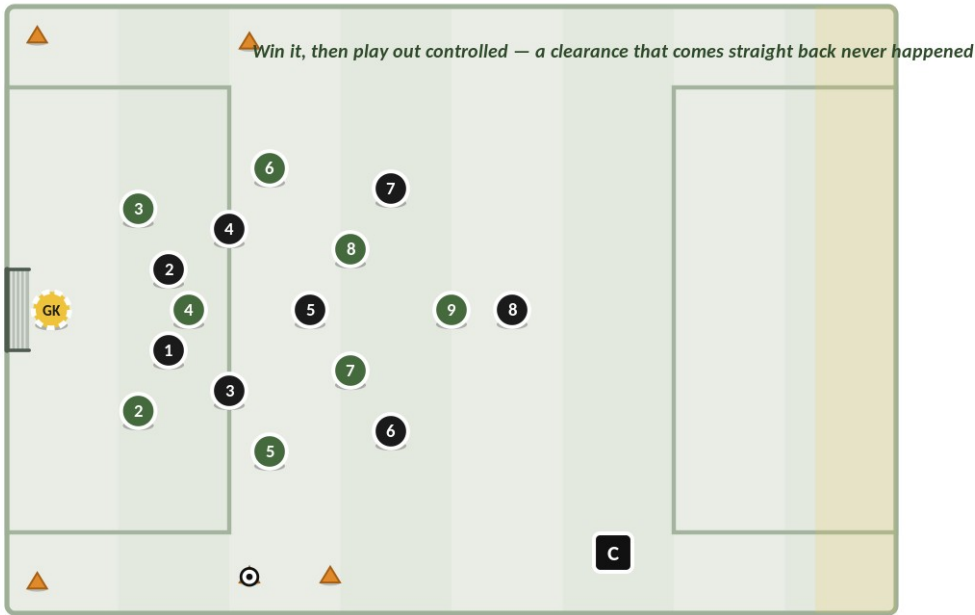
Success indicators:

- 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

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