



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.

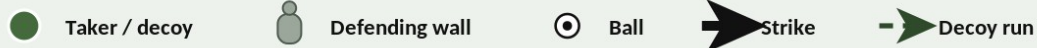
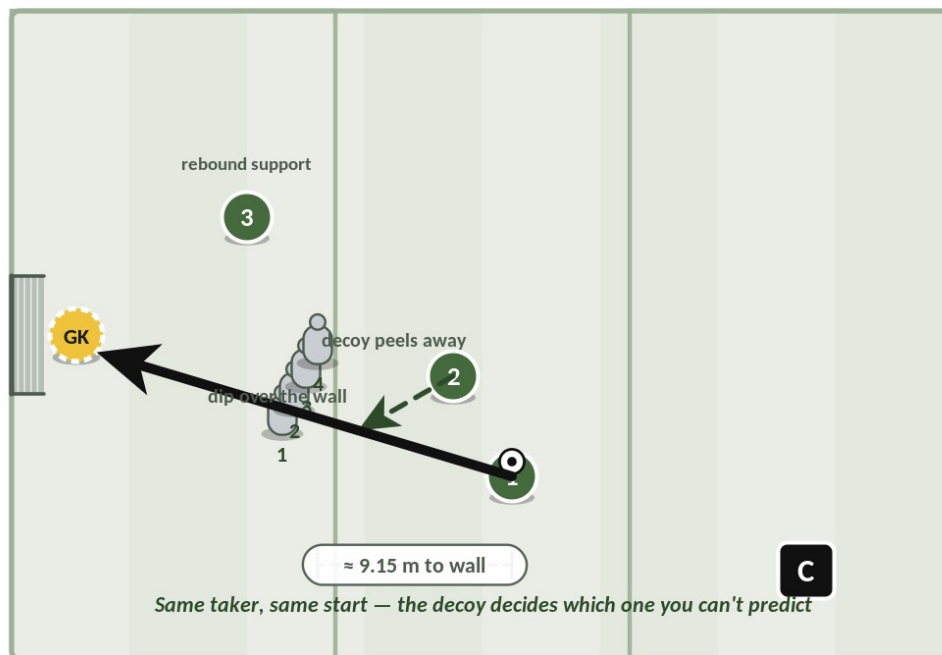
Success indicators:

- 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.

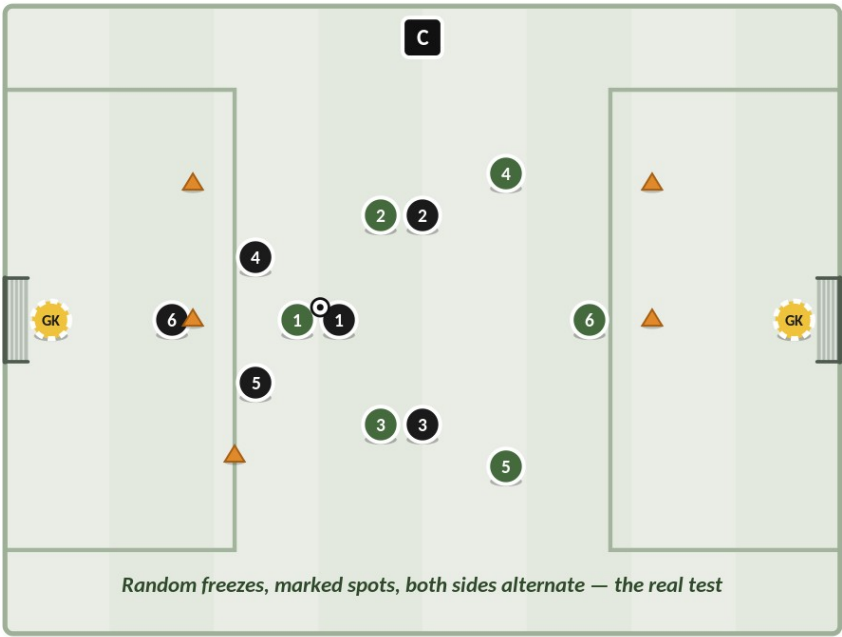
Success indicators:

- 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