



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.

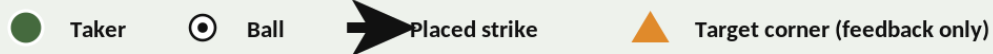
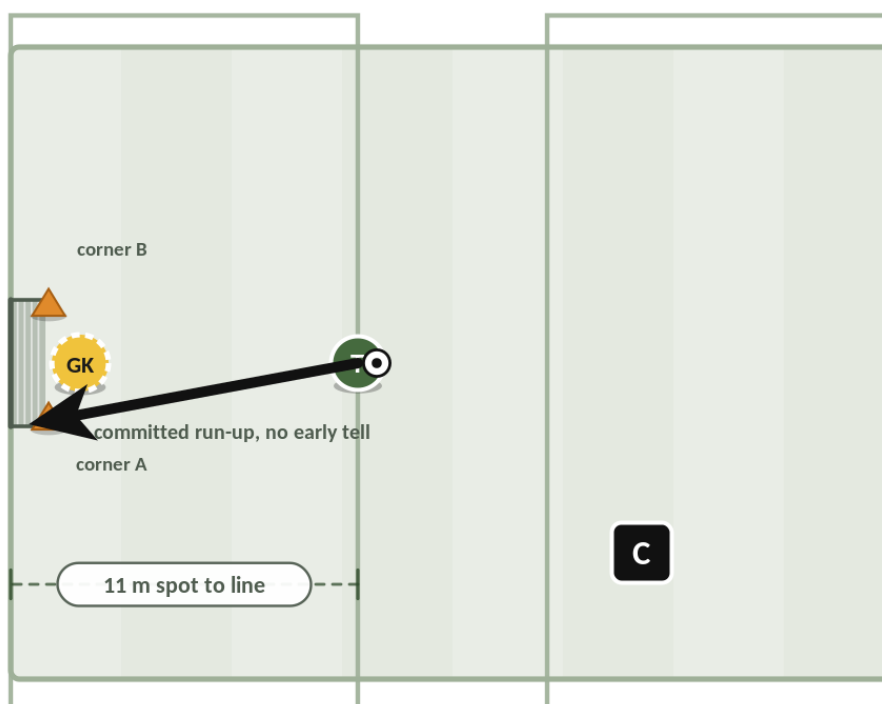
Success indicators:

- 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.

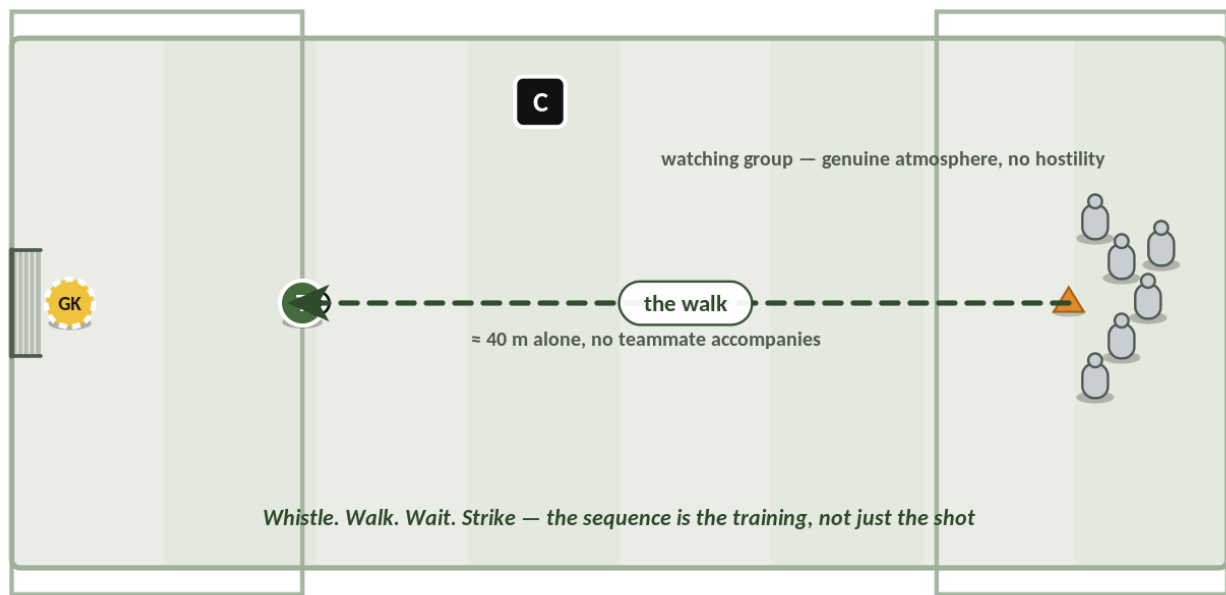
Success indicators:

- 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.

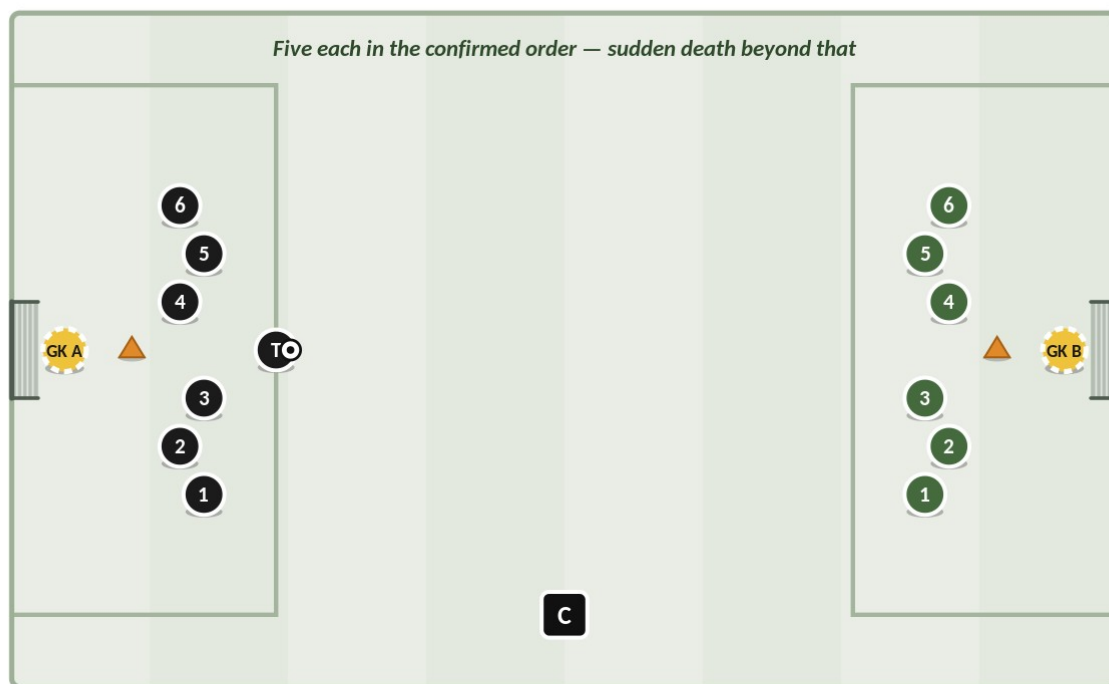
Success indicators:

- 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