



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.

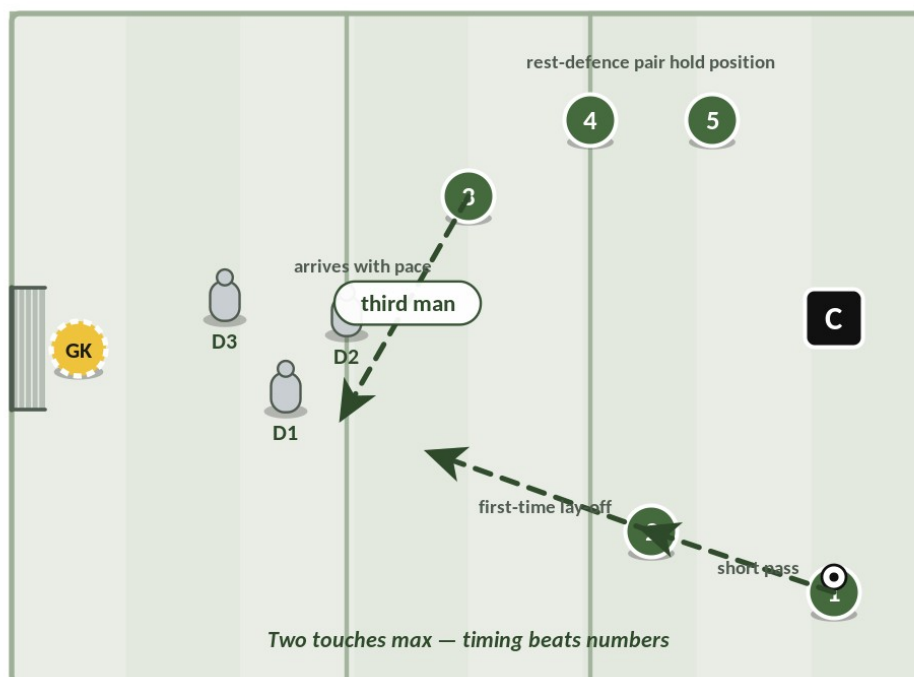
Success indicators:

- 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

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

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.

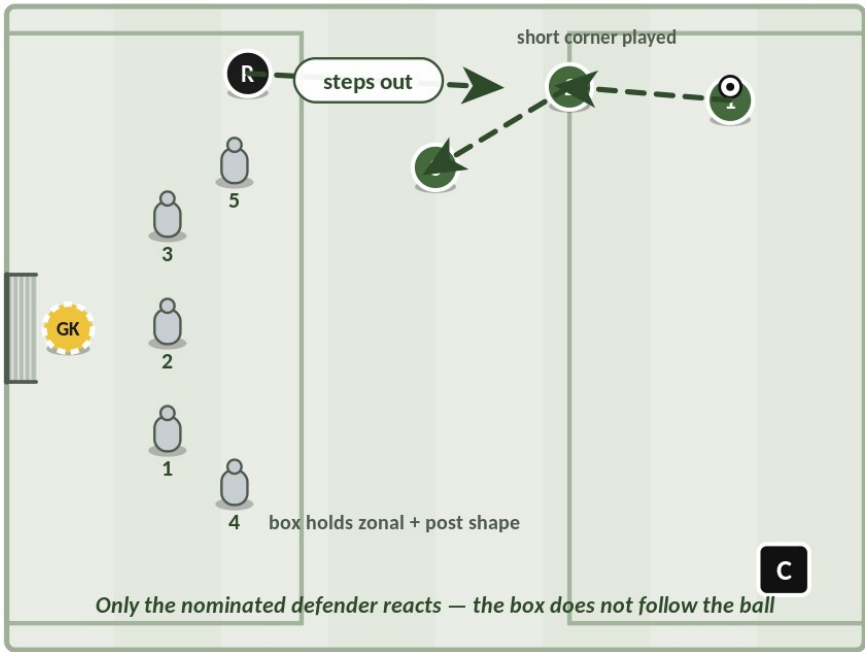
Success indicators:

- 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

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

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.

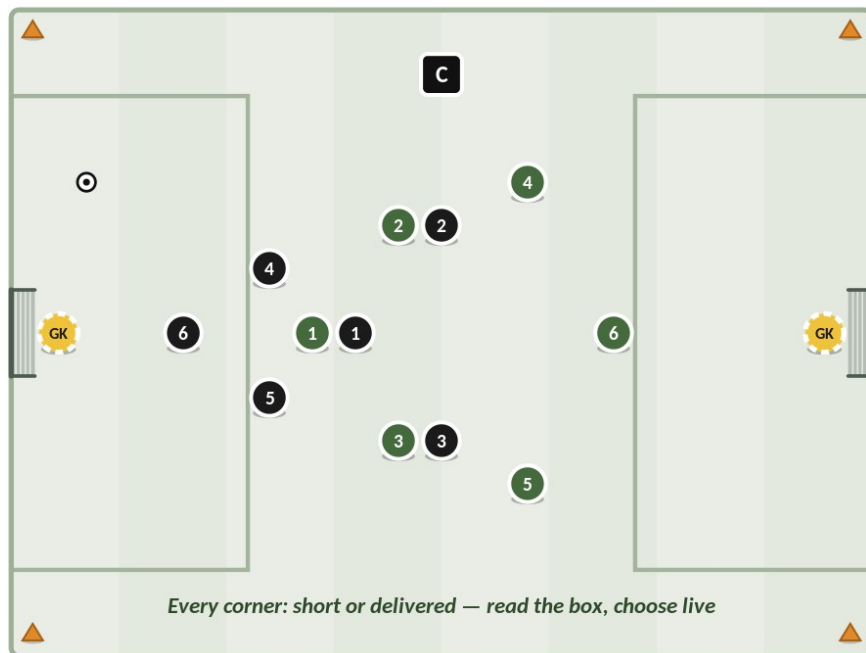
Success indicators:

- 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

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

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