



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.

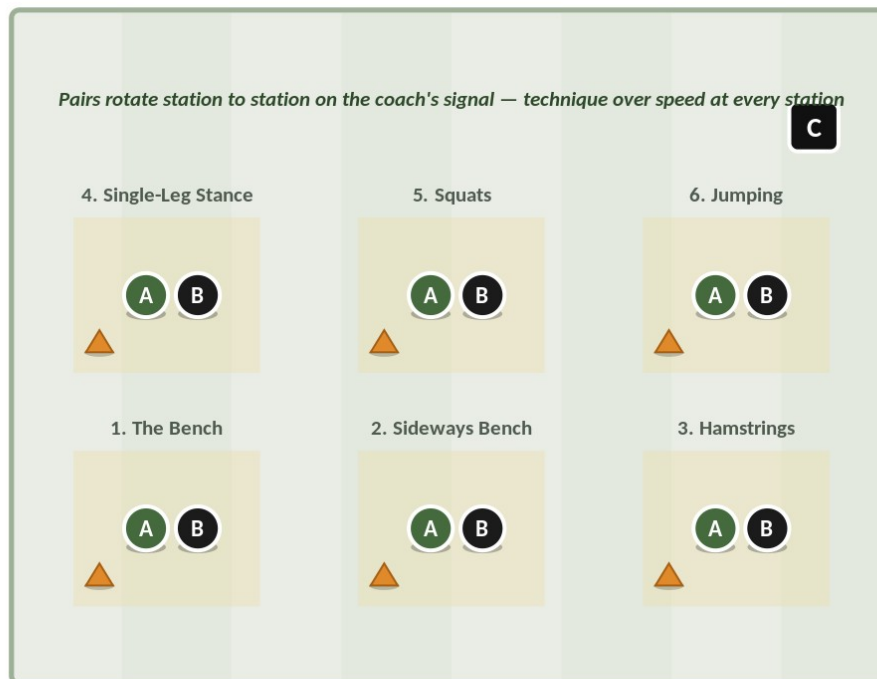
Success indicators:

- 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.

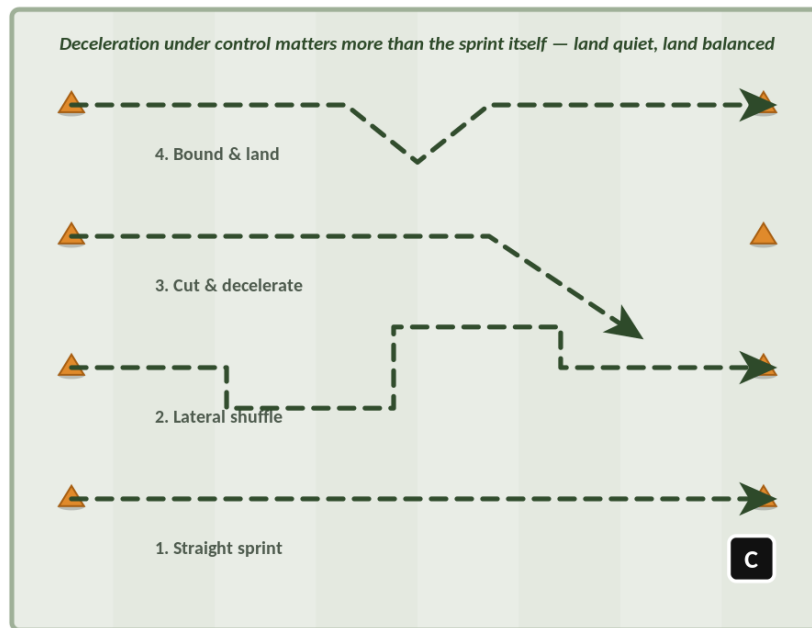
Success indicators:

- 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.

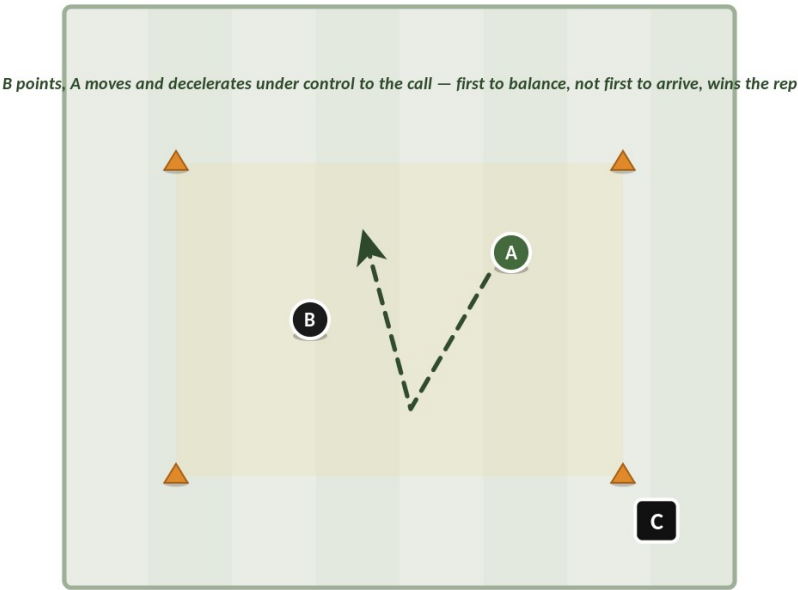
Success indicators:

- 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

