



## Week 1 — Pre-Season Foundation

Tags: `pre-season` `possession` `build-up` `unit-work` `full-squad-practice` `conditioning`

### Weekly Overview

| FIELD                           | DETAIL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week number                     | 1 of 36                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Season phase                    | 1 — Pre-Season Foundation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Core principle                  | Support & passing angles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Secondary principle             | Communication language & team standards (foundational — not one of the 14 tactical principles, but the shared vocabulary everything else in the season is built on)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Previous match review focus     | None — Week 1 is the first week of pre-season. There is no fixture to review yet; the week reviews last season's finish only in the sense of naming what the group agrees to do differently, which happens inside Thursday's session.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Weekly tactical problem         | At the start of pre-season, players default to standing close to the ball and passing directly backward or forward. There is no adequate answer to "who else can I use?" This week installs the first, most basic answer: an angled supporting option that isn't in the passing lane the defender is already screening.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Formation-neutral explanation   | Support & passing angles has nothing to do with which formation is printed on the team sheet. Whatever the shape, the player in possession needs at least two team-mates offering <i>different</i> angles — not two players both standing square, both level, or both directly behind. This is coached this week as a picture (a triangle, never a straight line) that every player learns to recognise and re-form continuously, regardless of which position is providing which side of the triangle.                                                                                    |
| Example structural applications | <b>In a back four:</b> the two centre-backs split to create the base angle, the holding midfielder drops slightly off-centre to form the third point, and the ball-side full-back provides a fourth, wider angle. <b>In a back three:</b> the wide centre-back already provides the width the full-back gave in the first example, so the same triangle is built one player narrower, with a wing-back providing the fourth angle higher up. The picture — three or more angles around the ball, never a straight line — is identical in both; only which shirt fills which point changes. |

## Match Review and Weekly Adjustment

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Every week from Week 2 onward opens with this section reviewing the previous Saturday. Week 1 has no match to review, so the three routes are given here in their pre-season form — read them now, because they recur in this shape every week from Week 2.

**Route A — Previous performance was strong.** (*From Week 2 onward.*) Do not simply repeat what worked. Identify the specific behaviour that produced the result, name it to the players, and raise the difficulty of the practice that trains it — tighter space, less time, an added defender — so the standard is protected rather than assumed. Praise the behaviour, not the scoreline.

**Route B — Previous performance exposed a tactical weakness.** (*From Week 2 onward.*) Do not abandon the week's planned principle to chase the weakness in isolation. Instead, address it *through* the planned principle wherever a genuine link exists — a poor week defending crosses, for instance, is partly a rest-defence and compactness problem, both of which live inside this season's principle set. Where no honest link exists, give the weakness one focused practice inside Tuesday's session without discarding the week's primary theme.

**Route C — Attendance, facilities or player availability are disrupted.** (*Live for Week 1.*) Early August is exactly this scenario — holidays, pre-season trials, work rosters not yet settled, evenings still bright enough that some players are finishing other commitments late. Protect the primary learning objective (this week: support and passing angles, expressed as a triangle) and scale everything else around it. A rondo scales to any number from five to eleven without changing its idea. A 15-a-side conditioned game does not — regress it to two smaller games running in parallel rather than one game with mismatched sides. Full contingency detail is given inside each session below.

## Tuesday — Session 1

| FIELD                        | DETAIL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Session number               | 1 of 72                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Week                         | 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Season phase                 | 1 — Pre-Season Foundation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Training day                 | Tuesday                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Session theme                | Reintroduction through the ball: support & passing angles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Short summary                | First session of the season. Builds the aerobic base entirely through possession-based games while installing the season's first principle — creating and recognising a supporting angle — and the first four items of shared communication language.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Tags                         | `pre-season` `possession` `conditioning` `communication`                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Primary learning objective   | Players recognise and occupy an angled supporting position rather than a square or straight one.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Secondary learning objective | Players use "Time" and "Turn" accurately and early.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Match connection             | No fixture this week — the connection is to the club's identity statement (Section 1 of the Season Architecture): a team that is "hard to press" starts with players who can find an angle under no pressure at all, in August, before it matters under real pressure in September.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Expected tactical outcome    | By the end of the session, a receiving player is visibly side-on and has checked their shoulder before the ball arrives more often than not.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Expected physical load       | Moderate-high — first session of pre-season, building the aerobic base through repeated, football-specific movement rather than running.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Recommended intensity        | 6.5–7.5 / 10. Build gradually across the session; do not front-load the hardest work into the first ten minutes of the season.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Equipment list               | 20 footballs · 40 flat markers (mixed colours) · 16 cones (orange) · 2 sets of bibs (2 colours, 10 each) · 4 mini goals · 2 full-size portable goals (or use fixed goals if available) · 1 set of poles (8) — optional, warm-up only                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Player numbers               | Designed for 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers (typical mid-range attendance). Scales 10–22; see contingencies under each practice.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Goalkeeper requirements      | Both goalkeepers train inside the session, not separately. In Practice 3 they play as outfield-eligible targets inside the possession game (receiving and redistributing under the same angled-support principle); in Practice 4 they play their own-goal role behind the conditioned match. Where only one goalkeeper attends, they split their time between both practices at the coach's call rather than staying fixed to one goal. Where no goalkeeper attends, use a squad player in a bibbed "GK" role for Practice 4 only — the diagrams and organisation are unaffected either way. |
| Pitch dimensions             | Full session fits inside a 50 x 36 m area (roughly half a full-size pitch); largest single practice area is 50 x 36 m.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Area layout                  | One end of the pitch divided into three adjoining zones sized to each practice, so the group moves station to station without                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

| FIELD                                                                | DETAIL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                      | resetting the whole area — see each practice's organisation.                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)                               | Drop to 4v4+2 neutrals throughout (rondo becomes 5v2, SSG becomes 4v4+1, conditioned match becomes 5v5+1); reduce all grid dimensions by roughly 20%; both goalkeepers can play outfield throughout if only one is required in goal.               |
| Contingency — higher attendance (20+)                                | Run two parallel grids for Practices 2 and 3 (split the squad, mirror the practice, rotate winners together for Practice 4); do not stretch a single game beyond 8v8 — quality of angle-finding drops sharply beyond that in a practice this size. |
| Contingency — restricted space (e.g. half pitch only, or a 3G strip) | Compress every grid by 25–30% and drop Practice 4 from 8v8 to 6v6; the principle survives smaller spaces better than it survives fewer touches, so protect touches on the ball before protecting pitch size.                                       |

## TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

| TIME      | DURATION | PHASE                                           | COLOUR CODE |
|-----------|----------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 0:00–0:10 | 10 min   | Arrival & warm-up — <i>The Angle Warm-Up</i>    | Light green |
| 0:10–0:25 | 15 min   | Technical practice — <i>The Third Angle</i>     | Club green  |
| 0:25–0:27 | 2 min    | Water break / transition                        | —           |
| 0:27–0:42 | 15 min   | Skill game — <i>Angles to Score</i>             | Dark green  |
| 0:42–0:44 | 2 min    | Water break / transition                        | —           |
| 0:44–0:59 | 15 min   | Conditioned match — <i>Support &amp; Switch</i> | Black       |
| 0:59–1:00 | 1 min    | Reflection                                      | —           |

(10 + 15 + 2 + 15 + 2 + 15 + 1 = 60 minutes. Reflection is condensed to one minute on Tuesdays — the fuller reflection sits inside Thursday's session, where the group is already sitting down for the shape and set-piece work.)

## PRACTICE 1 — THE ANGLE WARM-UP (ARRIVAL)

**Duration:** 10 minutes · **Training load:** Low

**Tactical purpose:** Raises heart rate and prepares the body for the session while placing the very first idea of the day in front of players without stopping them to explain it — every player has a ball, and the final three minutes are a paired passing activation where the receiver must show a foot to the angle they want the ball played to.

**Organisation:** 20 x 16 m grid. One ball per player for the first six minutes (individual ball mastery — turns, changes of direction, both feet); pairs for the final four minutes, each pair with one ball, standing 8–10 m apart, moving continuously inside the grid rather than standing still. No goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join in fully. Coach positioned at the edge, circulating rather than static.

**Walkthrough:** Players arrive, collect a ball each, and move inside the grid performing a coach-led sequence: rolls, drags, inside/outside touches, sole taps, then a change of direction on a whistle. At six minutes, pair up; each pair passes continuously while both players stay moving, and from minute eight the coach calls "show an angle" — the receiving player must move to a position that is not directly in front of or behind the passer before the next pass is played.

**Rules:** Continuous movement throughout — no standing passing. On "show an angle," the next pass must go to wherever the receiver has moved, not to where they started.

### Coaching points:

- *Technical:* both feet, head up between touches.
- *Physical:* gradual build in movement speed across the ten minutes; no maximal sprints yet.
- *Psychological:* first impressions of the season — energy and voice from every player, set by the coach's own tone.

*No diagram, guided discovery questions, or progressions are attached to the arrival activity — it is deliberately kept simple and coach-led so the session's teaching time is protected for the three main practices below.*

## PRACTICE 2 — THE THIRD ANGLE (TECHNICAL PRACTICE)

**Duration:** 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

**Tactical purpose:** This is the week's central idea in its simplest, least pressured form. A rondo isolates support and passing angles from every other variable — there is no direction of play, no goal, nothing to think about except finding the angle. It transfers directly to the match because every possession sequence in a game begins with exactly this picture: a player on the ball, and team-mates deciding where to stand.

### Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 20 x 16 m
- **Players:** 8 outfield (6 possession + 2 defenders), rotating
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through the possession team
- **Team sizes:** 6 v 2
- **Neutrals:** none — six perimeter players share the ball fairly by design
- **Equipment:** 8 flat markers (grid corners + rough perimeter spacing), 2 footballs (one live, one spare)
- **Starting positions:** six possession players spaced around the perimeter of the grid, forming an irregular hexagon rather than a neat circle (a neat circle teaches players to look for the pass directly opposite, which is the opposite of the lesson)
- **Ball supply:** continuous — spare ball at the grid edge with the coach
- **Restart:** any ball out of the grid restarts with the nearest perimeter player
- **Coach position:** grid edge, moving around the outside rather than standing in one spot
- **Rotation method:** defender who forces the error swaps in after 90 seconds regardless, so every defender gets fresh legs and every outfield player defends at least once
- **Direction of play:** none — this is a rondo, not a directional practice

**Practice walkthrough:** Six possession players take up positions around the grid's perimeter, each roughly the same distance from their two neighbours but never in a straight line with the player directly opposite. Two defenders start in the middle. On the coach's signal, the possession team keeps the ball using two-touch play (one-touch allowed once the group is comfortable). Every time the ball is played, at least one off-ball player must adjust their position to open a new angle before the next pass — the coach calls "check your angle" as a reminder cue, not a stoppage. Defenders press in pairs, one showing pressure and one covering the pass in behind, which doubles as an early, incidental introduction to the pressure-cover idea the team will name properly in Week 3.

**Rules:** Two-touch maximum for the possession team. A pass intercepted, or forced out of the grid, swaps that passer in to defend. After every three consecutive completed passes, the coach calls out a number — the next pass must travel to the player wearing that number, forcing a scan rather than an habitual pass.

### Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every possession player is simultaneously a support option and a scanner — there is no passive role in a rondo.
- *Unit:* the six-player group functions as a single shape that reforms after every pass.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale — this is a unit-level practice.
- *Transition:* the two defenders' first job on winning the ball is to keep it for three passes before the practice resets, giving an early flavour of transition-to-attack thinking.

### Decision-making triggers:

- Ball travels to the player on my immediate left or right → I am now a passing option, not a spectator; find my angle.
- A defender steps to press the ball → the next-nearest support player drops or widens to stay available.
- Three consecutive passes have gone the same direction around the grid → the coach's number-call is coming; anticipate by opening a cross-grid angle now.

**Communication language introduced/used:** *Time* (told to a player who has more space than they think), *Turn* (told to a player who can safely face forward).

#### Coaching points:

| CORNER                     | POINT                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical                  | First touch out of feet, away from the nearest defender, not into it.                                                                                      |
| Tactical                   | Receive side-on; the body shape decides how many options are available on the next touch.                                                                  |
| Physical                   | Short, sharp adjustment steps to open the angle — this is the acceleration/deceleration stimulus hiding inside a "technical" practice.                     |
| Psychological              | Composure on the ball under a two-defender press that will, deliberately, force one or two errors early — normalise the error as information, not failure. |
| Communication & leadership | Whoever is furthest from the ball has the clearest picture and the responsibility to call it.                                                              |

#### Guided discovery questions:

1. When the ball was on your left, where were your two best options — and why were they not both level with you?
2. What did the defenders do differently when they pressed together compared to when one chased alone?
3. What told you it was safe to turn rather than to play back the way the ball came?
4. If a third defender were added, what would the possession team need to do differently to keep the same picture working?
5. How does "always offer an angle" look different for a full-back and a central midfielder in a real match, even though the idea is the same?
6. What is the risk of standing exactly opposite your team-mate rather than at an angle?

#### Progressions:

1. Reduce to two-touch → one-touch once the group is consistently finding angles.
2. Add a third defender (6v3), raising the pressure on decision speed.
3. Add a condition: the possession team must complete a pass to a player who has moved at least two metres since their last touch, forcing continuous re-angling rather than settling.

#### Regressions:

1. Allow unlimited touches for the first three minutes to let players find the picture without a technical constraint.
2. Reduce to a single defender (6v1) before introducing the second.
3. Enlarge the grid to 24 x 18 m to give more thinking time per action.

#### Common problems and corrections:

| PROBLEM                                                        | WHY IT HAPPENS                                    | COACH RECOGNISES BY                                                         | STOP OR FLOW?                    | INTERVENTION                                                                                           | RESTART                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Players stand in a neat circle, all equidistant, all square-on | Habit from unstructured possession games          | The picture looks tidy but every pass is directly across, never at an angle | Stop briefly                     | Freeze-and-correct: reshape two players by hand into an offset triangle, ask why it's harder to defend | Resume from the reshaped positions |
| Slow circulation, ball sticking with one player                | Receiver isn't scanning before the ball arrives   | Repeated heavy first touches, head down                                     | Let it flow, use a drive-by call | "Time" called early by the coach to model the language                                                 | Continue without stopping          |
| Isolated pressing — one defender chases alone                  | Not yet taught, this is the first time it is seen | Ball won easily, second defender jogging rather than covering               | Stop                             | Short group intervention with both defenders: show the pressure-and-cover picture                      | Resume with the same two defenders |

**Coach interventions used in this practice:** primarily *drive-by coaching* and *questioning* — the picture changes every few seconds, which suits a coach who talks while the practice runs rather than one who stops it. Reserve *freeze-and-correct* for

the positioning problem above; do not use it more than once or twice in the full 15 minutes, or the practice loses its rhythm.

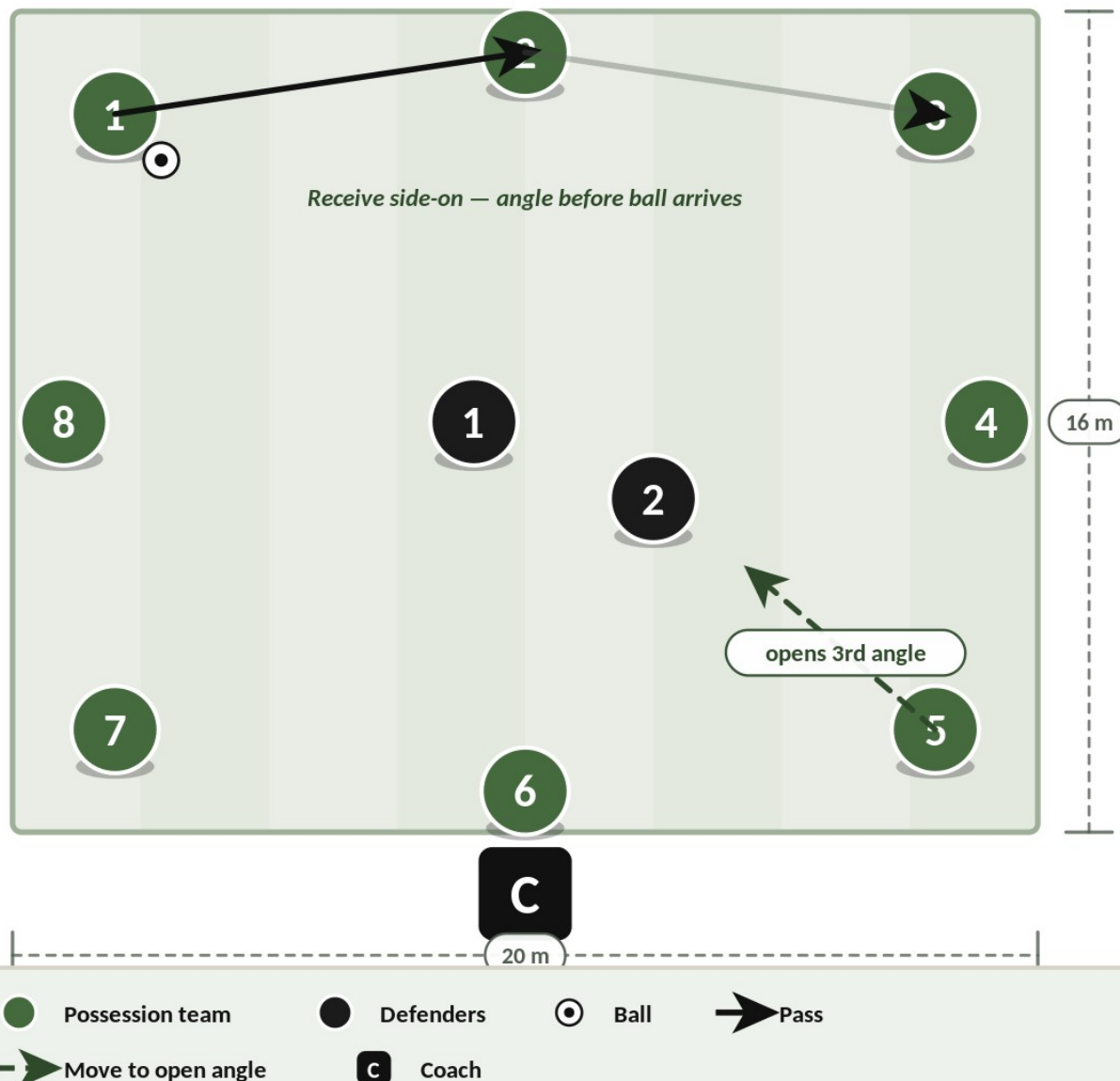
**Success indicators:**

- Off-ball players are moving before the pass arrives, not after.
- At least two of the six perimeter players are never in a straight line with each other at any moment.
- The coach's number-call is answered correctly more often in the second half of the practice than the first.

**Coach's eye:** watch the shape of the six outfield players as a whole rather than the ball — a well-functioning rondo looks like a slowly rotating, uneven polygon; a poorly functioning one looks like a static circle with the ball moving inside it. Watch also for the first signs of who organises the group without being told — note it, it matters for Section on leadership later in the season.

## T1.2 THE THIRD ANGLE — Support & Passing Angles

20 x 16 m • 6 possession vs 2 defenders (+1 floater) • 15 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Week 1 • Diagrams not to scale

**AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram):** "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 20x16 metre grid with dimension labels. Six players in dark green bibs numbered 1-6 positioned in an irregular hexagon around the grid perimeter (not a neat circle). Two players in black bibs numbered 1-2 positioned centrally, one pressing, one covering. A white ball with black panels near player 1. Solid black arrow showing a completed pass between two perimeter players. A second, faded grey solid arrow showing an earlier pass. A dashed green arrow showing an off-ball player moving to open a third angle, labelled 'opens 3rd angle'. Small dark square coach icon with letter C outside the grid. Title text at top: 'THE THIRD ANGLE — Support & Passing Angles'. Subtitle: '20 x 16 m • 6 possession vs 2 defenders • 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom explaining player, ball and arrow symbols. High-resolution, landscape orientation, clear sans-serif typography, no decorative elements, no logos or badges."

**Realistic illustration — description:** An elevated three-quarter sideline view of eight adult amateur players inside a marked grid on a grass training pitch, early evening light, club green bibs on six players forming a wide, offset hexagon shape, two players in black bibs pressing centrally with clear body shape showing one applying pressure and one covering behind, a ball mid-flight between two green-bibbed players, a coach in training kit standing just outside the grid gesturing with one arm, flat orange markers visible at the grid corners, other players warming up blurred in the background.

**AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration):** *"Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. Eight male players in their twenties and thirties, six wearing dark green bibs over grey training kit spaced around a marked 20x16 metre grid in an irregular hexagon (not a circle), two wearing black bibs pressing in the centre — one showing pressure on the ball-carrier, one covering the passing lane behind. A white football mid-air between two green-bibbed players. A coach in a green training jacket and shorts stands just outside the grid, one arm raised, mid-instruction. Flat orange cone markers visible at the grid corners on cut grass. Overcast early-evening natural lighting, realistic shadows, real grass texture, other players softly blurred warming up in the background. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no visible club badges, sponsor logos or identifiable real players."*

## PRACTICE 3 — ANGLES TO SCORE (SKILL GAME)

**Duration:** 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

**Tactical purpose:** Adds opposition, direction and a goal to the same idea, which is the step between an isolated technical picture and a live match problem. The scoring condition — a goal only counts after an angled third-man pass — makes the week's principle worth something rather than merely encouraged.

### Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 30 x 20 m
- **Players:** 12 outfield + 2 neutrals (goalkeepers rotate through the neutral role)
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both goalkeepers play as neutrals, always playing for whichever team is in possession — an explicit, low-pressure introduction to "goalkeeper as an additional player" that will be developed properly later in the season
- **Team sizes:** 5 v 5, plus the 2 neutrals
- **Neutrals:** 2, positioned in the wide end-zones (see diagram), always on the attacking team
- **Equipment:** 2 mini goals, 8 flat markers (end-zones), 4 cones (pitch corners)
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram — teams spread across the width, neutrals in the end-zones
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach at the halfway line for fast restarts
- **Restart location:** ball out of play restarts from the nearest sideline with the non-offending team
- **Coach position:** halfway line, sideline, mobile
- **Rotation method:** goal scored → losing team's furthest-back player becomes a neutral for 90 seconds, keeping numbers honest
- **Direction of play:** either direction — two goals, both teams attack both ways within the game's flow

**Practice walkthrough:** Two teams of five play inside the grid with two neutral end-zone players who always support the team currently in possession. A goal (through either mini goal) only counts if the move that created it included at least one pass to a player who received on a genuinely different angle from the passer — not directly ahead, not directly behind. The coach and a nominated player (rotating captain duty, introduced this week) jointly judge borderline cases in the moment, which is itself part of the week's communication objective. Play is continuous; the coach intervenes with short calls rather than frequent stoppages.

**Rules:** Goals only count following a qualifying angled pass. Neutrals play for the team in possession and are two-touch maximum. Standard small-sided-game restarts apply (kick-in rather than throw-in, to protect ball-rolling time). First to 5 qualifying goals, or most goals at 15 minutes.

### Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every player alternates between provider and receiver of the angled pass; neutrals are specifically the "extra angle" the practice is built to teach players to look for.
- *Unit:* the front two/back two shape of each five-a-side team should mirror the offset triangle taught in Practice 2.
- *Team:* both teams are simultaneously in and out of possession — this is genuinely bidirectional, unlike the rondo.
- *Transition:* on losing the ball, the nearest player's job is an immediate, controlled delay (not a tackle) to slow the counter while team-mates recover — the first live rehearsal of a Season Architecture principle that gets its own dedicated week later (Week 4).

### Decision-making triggers:

- A neutral becomes available in the end-zone → recognise them as the extra angle, not an afterthought.
- The opponent commits two players to press the ball → the wide neutral is very likely free; look early.
- Ball is played backward under pressure → this is a legitimate use of "Hold," not a failure — praise it as loudly as a forward pass.

**Communication language used:** *Time, Turn, Hold* (first live use — a player receiving under pressure who chooses to keep possession rather than force play forward).

## Coaching points:

| CORNER                     | POINT                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical                  | Receiving across the body to open the passing angle immediately, not after a second touch.                                                                                         |
| Tactical                   | Recognising the neutral as a genuine attacking option, not a rule to tolerate.                                                                                                     |
| Physical                   | Repeated short accelerations to support play — the first real repeat-sprint stimulus of the season, delivered inside a game rather than as a running set.                          |
| Psychological              | Handling the ambiguity of a judged scoring condition without frustration — an explicit, deliberate psychological demand this week.                                                 |
| Communication & leadership | The rotating captain's role in adjudicating borderline goals — first, small piece of player ownership in the season (see Section on Player Leadership in the Season Architecture). |

## Guided discovery questions:

1. Where were the neutrals positioned when your team scored — and were they always in the same place?
2. What changed about the opposition's shape in the moment just before you found the angled pass?
3. Why might a coach make the goal conditional on an angle rather than just rewarding any goal?
4. If the neutrals were removed, what would your team need to do to recreate the same picture?
5. What is the difference between a pass that "counts" under today's rule and a pass that would count in a real match — and why?
6. When did you choose to hold possession rather than force the angled pass, and was that the right choice?
7. How would this look different if your team were playing a back three rather than a back four on Saturday?

## Progressions:

1. Remove one neutral, forcing outfield players to create the extra angle themselves.
2. Add a second qualifying condition: the angled pass must break between two defenders, not just reach a free player.
3. Introduce a time pressure — once a team has held the ball for eight seconds without a qualifying pass, possession turns over.

## Regressions:

1. Widen the end-zones so neutrals are easier to find and reach.
2. Allow any completed pass into an end-zone to count as "angled" while the concept beds in.
3. Reduce to 4v4 + 2 neutrals to increase individual involvement and thinking time.

## Common problems and corrections:

| PROBLEM                                                                               | WHY IT HAPPENS                                                        | COACH RECOGNISES BY                                                               | STOP OR FLOW?                    | INTERVENTION                                                                        | RESTART                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Forced, hopeful passes toward the neutral rather than genuine angles                  | Players treat the neutral as a target rather than reading the picture | Passes to neutrals arriving under no pressure but poorly weighted, or intercepted | Let it flow with a drive-by call | "Check the angle before you commit" — verbal cue, no stoppage                       | Continue                                |
| Team drops too deep and narrow, conceding the width the neutrals are there to exploit | Instinct to protect the goal overrides the attacking picture          | Both banks of players compressed into the centre of the grid                      | Stop                             | Natural stoppage at next goal/restart, quick group question: "where was the space?" | Resume with the question answered aloud |
| Excessive coaching dependence — players stop and look at the coach after every pass   | Early in pre-season, players unsure of a new condition                | Repeated glances toward the touchline instead of play continuing                  | Let it flow                      | Step back physically, go quiet for 90 seconds, let errors happen                    | No restart needed                       |



**AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram):** "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 30x20 metre pitch with dimension markings, a small goal at each end. Five players in dark green bibs numbered 1–5 and two players in yellow bibs labelled N (neutrals) positioned in wide end-zones, shown lightly shaded and dashed-outlined. Five players in black bibs numbered 1–5. White-and-black ball near a green player. Black solid arrow showing a completed pass, a second faded grey arrow showing a build-up pass into a neutral, a green dashed arrow labelled 'arrives on the angle' showing a third-man run. Direction-of-play arrow top-left. Small dark coach icon above the pitch. Title: 'ANGLES TO SCORE — Small-Sided Game'. Subtitle: '30 x 20 m · 5v5 + 2 neutrals · two mini goals · 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

**Realistic illustration — description:** Elevated sideline view of a 5v5-plus-neutrals small-sided game on an outdoor grass pitch marked with flat cones, mini goals visible at each end, green-bibbed team building an attack toward a yellow-bibbed neutral standing in a wide channel, black-bibbed opposition compact centrally, a coach on the sideline mid-call, evening light, realistic body shape and spacing.

**AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration):** "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur 5v5 small-sided football game on a grass training pitch, 30x20 metre area marked with flat orange cones, a white mini goal visible at each end. Five players in dark green bibs building an attack toward a player in a yellow bib standing wide in a marked end-zone. Five players in black bibs compact centrally in a defensive shape, one pressing the ball-carrier and others covering. A football mid-pass between two green-bibbed players. A coach in green training kit on the sideline, one hand cupped to their mouth mid-instruction. Late-summer evening light, long shadows on cut grass, realistic amateur adult body types and kit, other training equipment softly visible in the background. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

## PRACTICE 4 — SUPPORT & SWITCH (CONDITIONED MATCH)

**Duration:** 15 minutes · **Training load:** High

**Tactical purpose:** Confirms whether the week's idea survives full-directional, full-goal, close-to-matchplay football. The switch-of-play condition specifically links this week's principle (an angled supporting picture near the ball) to a second, closely related idea the team will need constantly: recognising when the picture has moved to the far side of the pitch.

### Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 36 m (roughly half a full-size pitch)
- **Players:** 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers play their own-goal role, actively encouraged to receive short from the back line as an additional angle — the week's principle applied to the goalkeeper specifically
- **Team sizes:** 8 v 8
- **Neutrals:** 2 fixed wide "wildcard" players, one in each wide channel, who play for whichever team is in possession (see the shaded wide channels on the diagram)
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 8 flat markers marking the wide channels, corner flags/cones
- **Starting positions:** standard shape, split as evenly as the coach judges by ability across the two teams
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** goal kicks, kick-ins from touch, corners and free-kicks all played as they would be in a match, at the level of restart-realism appropriate to pre-season
- **Coach position:** touchline, halfway line, mobile between both halves of the pitch
- **Rotation method:** none required inside the practice; goalkeepers may rotate at the midpoint if two are present and neither has played a full half yet this season
- **Direction of play:** standard — both teams defend one goal, attack the other

**Practice walkthrough:** Two teams of eight play a conditioned match with a wide "wildcard" player in each channel who always plays for the team in possession — in effect guaranteeing the width principle is available to whichever team has the ball, so the coaching focus stays on whether the team *chooses* to use it. A clean switch of play (a pass that travels from one wide channel to the other, changing the point of attack) earns a bonus: the next goal, if scored within 20 seconds of the switch, counts double. This rewards exactly the picture Practice 2 introduced — recognising an angle away from where the pressure currently is — now at full match scale.

**Rules:** Standard match rules with offside relaxed to encourage forward runs in pre-season (coach's discretion depending on squad readiness). Switch-of-play bonus as described. Otherwise scored conventionally; most goals in 15 minutes wins.

### Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* the wide wildcards are a live, low-jeopardy rehearsal of the "wide outlet" functional role named in the Season Architecture — any full-back, winger or midfielder in the squad may occupy it across the practice.
- *Unit:* the back four (or back three, if the coach chooses to trial a shape) is specifically asked to provide the "rest defence" principle — at least two players positioned to prevent an immediate counter whenever the team commits numbers forward.
- *Team:* recognising when the ball side has become congested and choosing to switch rather than force a pass.
- *Transition:* the player who loses the ball has an immediate delay job; the two nearest team-mates protect the central lane while the rest of the team recovers goal-side — the fullest version yet, this week, of the transition-to-defence principle.

### Decision-making triggers:

- Three or more opponents are within 10 m of the ball → this is a switch situation, not a dribble-through situation.
- Our own attack has committed six or more players forward of the halfway line → rest-defence players must be identifiable and named before the next pass forward.
- Possession is lost with team-mates still advanced → nearest player delays, does not chase; team recovers as a unit.

**Communication language used:** *Switch, Squeeze, Drop, Time* — the fullest combination of the week's language used together for the first time.

#### Coaching points:

| CORNER                     | POINT                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical                  | Passing weight on the switch — a ball that is too soft invites the press to arrive before the receiver, defeating the purpose of switching at all. |
| Tactical                   | Rest defence as a named, planned responsibility, not an accident of who is left over.                                                              |
| Physical                   | Repeated high-intensity actions at match-realistic distances — the session's peak physical load, placed deliberately last.                         |
| Psychological              | Accountability after a lost possession — reacting immediately and correctly rather than gesturing at a team-mate.                                  |
| Communication & leadership | Calling "Squeeze" as a defending unit to compress the pitch together after a switch is defended.                                                   |

#### Guided discovery questions:

1. What did the opposition's shape look like in the two or three seconds before you switched play — and how did you know it was the right moment?
2. Who was your team's rest defence during your best attacking move, and were they in the right place before or after the ball went forward?
3. What happened in the first two seconds after we lost the ball just now — and was it the right reaction?
4. If you were playing with a back three instead of a back four today, who would be providing the same rest-defence job?
5. How does a switch of play against a team pressing high differ from a switch against a team sitting deep?
6. What is the cost of forcing the ball through a crowded area instead of switching it?
7. Which of this week's calls did you hear used earliest and most specifically — and what difference did it make?
8. Looking back across the whole session, how is today's idea the same whether the picture involves six players or sixteen?

#### Progressions:

1. Remove the wide wildcards, requiring the team's own shape to provide width.
2. Reduce the switch-of-play bonus window from 20 seconds to 10, raising tempo.
3. Introduce a genuine offside line, adding a realistic timing dimension to depth runs.

#### Regressions:

1. Reduce to 6v6 on a smaller area (40 x 28 m) to raise individual involvement.
2. Extend the double-goal bonus window to 30 seconds, giving more time to exploit a switch.
3. Allow one free (uncontested) switch pass per team per five minutes to reinforce the picture before requiring it under full pressure.

#### Common problems and corrections:

| PROBLEM                                                    | WHY IT HAPPENS                                                     | COACH RECOGNISES BY                                                               | STOP OR FLOW?                         | INTERVENTION                                                                                 | RESTART                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| No protection behind the attack — everyone commits forward | New group, first week, no shared understanding of rest defence yet | A turnover leads directly to a clean opposition break with no defenders goal-side | Stop                                  | Short group intervention with the back line and nearest midfielder: name who stays, who goes | Resume from a goal kick / restart     |
| Slow reaction after losing possession                      | Habit of jogging back rather than reacting immediately             | Several seconds elapse before any defensive shape forms                           | Let it flow initially, then a natural | Question the group: "what should the nearest three players have done?"                       | Resume from the next natural stoppage |

| PROBLEM                                            | WHY IT HAPPENS                                                         | COACH RECOGNISES BY                                           | STOP OR FLOW? | INTERVENTION                             | RESTART  |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------|----------|
|                                                    |                                                                        |                                                               | stoppage      |                                          |          |
| Switch attempted but under-hit, gifting possession | Passing technique breaking down under fatigue this late in the session | Ball intercepted in transit rather than reaching the wildcard | Let it flow   | Drive-by technical cue on weight of pass | Continue |

**Coach interventions used in this practice:** a mix of *unit coaching during play* (the back-line rest-defence conversation) and *drive-by coaching*; save any *post-practice review* comments for the one-minute reflection immediately after, rather than stopping this practice more than once.

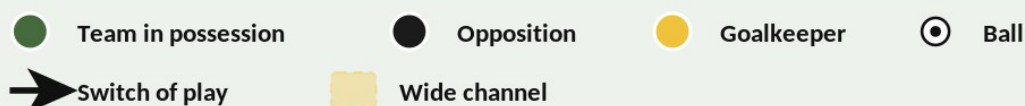
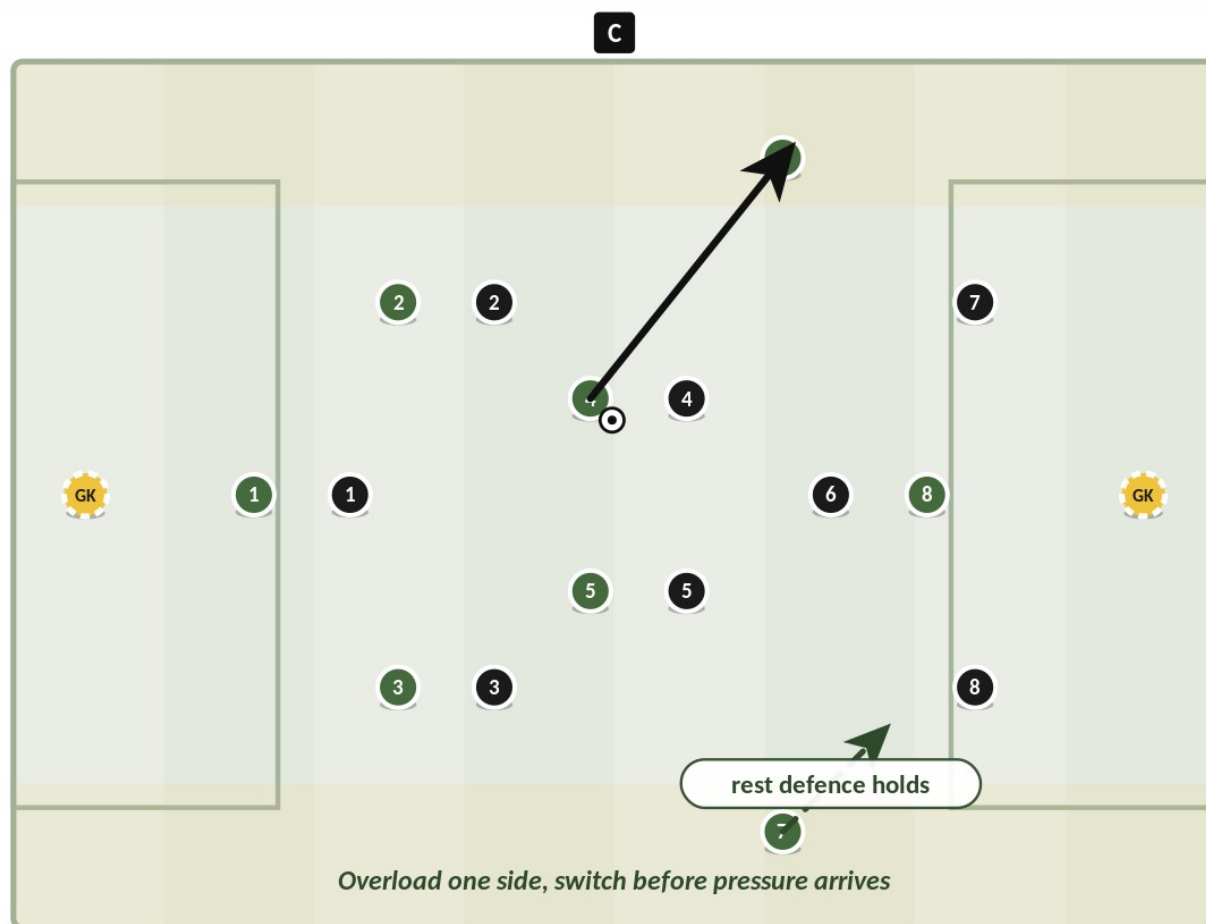
**Success indicators:**

- At least one clearly identifiable switch-of-play bonus goal in the 15 minutes.
- Rest defence visibly holds its position (does not chase the ball forward) during at least half of the team's advanced attacking moves.
- The nearest three players react within a second or two of a lost possession, more often in the second half of the practice than the first.

**Coach's eye:** watch the far side of the pitch, not the ball — the switch principle is only real if a player is already occupying and preparing the space before the ball arrives. Watch also the moment possession is lost: who reacts first, and is it the correct player.

## T1.4 SUPPORT & SWITCH — Conditioned Match

50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + 2 wide wildcards • 2 goals + GKs • 15 minutes



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**AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram):** "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style, showing half of a football pitch, 50x36 metres, with penalty box markings at both ends and a full-size goal at each end with a goalkeeper in yellow at each. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1-8 and eight players in black bibs numbered 1-8 spread across the area in realistic match shape. Two shaded wide channels along the touchlines labelled 'wide channel'. White football near a green player in an advanced central position. Thick black solid arrow showing a long diagonal switch-of-play pass across the pitch. A green dashed arrow labelled 'rest defence holds' showing a defender maintaining position rather than advancing. Title: 'SUPPORT & SWITCH — Conditioned Match'. Subtitle: '50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + 2 wide wildcards • 2 goals + GKs • 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or sponsor logos."

**Realistic illustration — description:** Wide elevated sideline view of a full-scale 8v8 conditioned match on a half-pitch, full-size goals with goalkeepers at each end, green-bibbed team switching play with a long diagonal pass toward a wide player, black-bibbed opposition shifting across to respond, two or three deep green-bibbed players holding a rest-defence line, coach on the touchline near the halfway line, floodlights or early-evening sky, realistic match intensity and spacing.

**AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration):** *"Wide elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur 8v8 conditioned football match on a half-size grass pitch with full-size goals and goalkeepers in yellow at each end. Green-bibbed team mid-way through switching play with a long diagonal pass toward a wide player near the touchline; black-bibbed opposition shifting across the pitch to respond. Two green-bibbed defenders holding a deep line behind the play as rest defence, not advancing. A coach in training kit standing near the halfway line on the touchline, watching intently with arms crossed. Early evening light with long shadows, realistic grass pitch markings, amateur adult players of varied build, training bibs in dark green and black. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."*

### **REFLECTION (1 MINUTE)**

Players sit briefly as a group. One question only, put to the squad rather than any individual: *"In one sentence — what does a good angle look like?"* Two or three answers taken, no more. This is deliberately short on Tuesday; Thursday's reflection is fuller.

## Thursday — Session 2

| FIELD                                  | DETAIL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Session number                         | 2 of 72                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Week                                   | 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Season phase                           | 1 — Pre-Season Foundation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Training day                           | Thursday                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Session theme                          | Team standards & communication                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Short summary                          | Establishes the season's shared communication language in full, introduces basic restart discipline (kick-offs, goal kicks) as a first, light structural idea, and closes pre-season's opening week with a confidence-building possession game and a proper group reflection where the squad sets its own standards.                                                                                                                                                  |
| Tags                                   | `communication` `unit-work` `build-up` `set-pieces` `full-squad-practice`                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Primary learning objective             | Players use the full opening set of communication calls (Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze) accurately and early, not just correctly when asked.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Secondary learning objective           | Players understand the "first-line build-up player" role and can identify who is filling it regardless of formation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Match connection                       | Still pre-season, no fixture — the direct connection is to how every single match this season will restart: kick-offs and goal kicks happen dozens of times a game, and this is the first, simplest version of organising them with intent rather than by accident.                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Expected tactical outcome              | The team can build from a goal kick against light pressure without panicking or immediately going long by default.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Expected physical load                 | Moderate — lower than Tuesday by design; this session sharpens rather than exhausts.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Recommended intensity                  | 5.5–6.5 / 10, rising only in the final game.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Equipment list                         | 16 footballs · 24 flat markers · 12 cones (orange) · 2 sets of bibs (2 colours, 10 each) · 2 full-size or portable goals · 1 set of poles (6)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Player numbers                         | Designed for 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers; scales 10–22, see contingencies.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Goalkeeper requirements                | Central to this session — Practice 3 (restart discipline) is built around the goalkeeper's distribution, and neither goalkeeper should be a passenger in any part of the hour. Where only one goalkeeper attends, they take the full goal-kick and distribution role in Practice 3 and split time with an outfield "GK" for Practice 4. Where none attend, a squad player takes the bibbed GK role for both practices — the shape and coaching points are unaffected. |
| Pitch dimensions                       | Full session fits inside a 44 x 30 m area at its largest (Practice 3).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Area layout                            | Central defensive-third-plus-halfway strip, with a smaller adjoining grid for Practices 1 and 2.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Contingency — lower attendance (10–13) | Practice 3 (restart discipline) drops from 8+GK vs 3 to 6+GK vs 2, keeping the same shape principle at a smaller scale; Practice 4 becomes 5v5 rather than 7v7.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Contingency — higher attendance (20+)  | Run Practice 1 as two parallel rondos; Practice 3 can extend to a                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

| FIELD                          | DETAIL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                | fuller 10+GK vs 4 picture, which is closer to a genuine match scenario and worth using the extra numbers for.                                                                                                                                |
| Contingency — restricted space | Practice 3 is the one most affected by space — if only a small strip is available, compress the build-up zone and coach the picture at reduced scale rather than skipping it; the shape and decision-making transfer even in a smaller area. |

## TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

| TIME      | DURATION               | PHASE                                                    | COLOUR CODE |
|-----------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 0:00–0:08 | 8 min                  | Arrival & warm-up — <i>Move &amp; Greet</i>              | Light green |
| 0:08–0:23 | 15 min                 | Technical practice — <i>Call It</i> (voice rondo)        | Club green  |
| 0:23–0:25 | 2 min                  | Water break / transition                                 | —           |
| 0:25–0:40 | 15 min                 | Unit / tactical practice — <i>Build From the Restart</i> | Dark green  |
| 0:40–0:42 | 2 min                  | Water break / transition                                 | —           |
| 0:42–0:59 | 17 min                 | Small-sided game — <i>Communication Points</i>           | Black       |
| 0:59–1:00 | 1 min → extended below | Reflection                                               | —           |

(8 + 15 + 2 + 15 + 2 + 17 = 59; the final minute is absorbed into a slightly longer, seated reflection immediately after, which runs concurrently with players' own cool-down — see Reflection below. 8 + 15 + 2 + 15 + 2 + 17 + 1 = 60.)

## PRACTICE 1 — MOVE & GREET (ARRIVAL)

**Duration:** 8 minutes · **Training load:** Low

**Tactical purpose:** A shorter, sharper Thursday warm-up that keeps physical load down while quietly reinforcing Tuesday's picture — players move through the grid and, on every pass, must call a team-mate's name before playing to them, an early, informal bridge into tonight's communication focus.

**Organisation:** 16 x 12 m grid, one ball per pair, continuous movement, no goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join fully. Coach circulating.

**Walkthrough:** Dynamic movement for three minutes (rolls, drags, changes of direction), then paired passing for five minutes in which every pass must be preceded by the passer calling the receiver's name. Introduce, verbally only, that tonight's session formalises this into the season's shared calls.

**Rules:** No silent passes. A pass played without a name called is retaken.

### Coaching points:

- *Technical:* clean first touch to keep the tempo of the passing high.
- *Psychological:* using a team-mate's name is a small act of ownership — start the season as it means to continue.

## PRACTICE 2 — CALL IT (VOICE RONDO)

**Duration:** 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

**Tactical purpose:** Installs the season's core communication language properly, inside a practice simple enough that the language — not the football problem — is the entire focus. This is deliberately a smaller, easier rondo than Tuesday's Practice 2; the difficulty this week is verbal, not technical.

### Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 12 x 12 m
- **Players:** 6 outfield (4 possession + 2 defenders)
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through
- **Team sizes:** 4 v 2
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 4 flat markers, 1 ball live + 1 spare
- **Starting positions:** four corners of the grid
- **Ball supply:** spare ball with the coach at the edge
- **Restart:** nearest corner player restarts any stoppage
- **Coach position:** outside the grid, close enough to hear every call
- **Rotation method:** every 2 minutes regardless of outcome, so all players defend and all players receive coaching on their voice, not just their feet
- **Direction of play:** none

**Practice walkthrough:** Four players occupy the corners of a small grid against two defenders. The single rule that matters: no pass may be played until the receiver has called one of five words — *Time*, *Turn*, *Hold*, *Drop*, *Squeeze* — and the call must match the picture (calling "Turn" when a defender is tight behind the receiver is a wrong call, even if the pass technically succeeds). The coach's role this practice is almost entirely about the accuracy and timing of the call, not the technical outcome of the pass.

**Rules:** A pass played without an audible, matching call does not count and restarts immediately with the same player in possession. Two-touch maximum once calls are established (allow unlimited touches for the first two minutes while players adjust to the verbal demand).

**Tactical roles:** every player is a caller; there is no passive role. Defenders are specifically coached to listen for the calls and use them as information about what the possession team intends.

### Decision-making triggers:

- I have genuine space and time → call "Time," not silence.
- I can safely face my own attacking half → call "Turn."
- A defender is touch-tight behind me → call "Hold," and do not attempt to turn regardless of instinct.
- My team-mate on the ball is under pressure → call "Drop" if I am the nearest short option, or move to make the call true.

**Communication language used:** all five of *Time*, *Turn*, *Hold*, *Drop*, *Squeeze* introduced formally for the first time.

### Coaching points:

| CORNER        | POINT                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical     | Receiving on the back foot when "Hold" is called, front foot when "Turn" is called — the call should be visible in the body shape that follows it. |
| Tactical      | The call must precede and match the picture, not follow the pass as a formality.                                                                   |
| Physical      | Short, high-frequency movements — low overall load, but sharp.                                                                                     |
| Psychological | Speaking with conviction under time pressure — many players' first instinct is to stay quiet; this                                                 |

| CORNER                     | POINT                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            | practice makes silence impossible.                                                                                |
| Communication & leadership | Volume and timing matter as much as word choice — a correct call made too late is as unhelpful as no call at all. |

### Guided discovery questions:

1. What happened to the speed of your team's play once every pass required a call first?
2. Which call did you find hardest to make honestly, and why?
3. What is the risk of calling "Turn" when it should have been "Hold"?
4. How did the defenders use your calls against you — and what does that tell you about calling only when it's true?
5. Why might a coach insist on this in a practice this simple, rather than waiting until it matters in a match?

### Progressions:

1. Add a third defender (4v3), raising the pressure on accurate calling.
2. Introduce one-touch play once calls are consistently accurate.
3. Remove the "retake" rule and instead award a point to the defending team for any uncalled or mismatched pass, adding a scoring consequence.

### Regressions:

1. Allow the coach to call on players' behalf for the first minute, modelling the language before requiring it independently.
2. Widen the grid to 15 x 15 m for more thinking time.
3. Reduce to a single defender before introducing the second.

### Common problems and corrections:

| PROBLEM                                         | WHY IT HAPPENS                                          | COACH RECOGNISES BY                                                                                                      | STOP OR FLOW?                                | INTERVENTION                                                                                      | RESTART                      |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Calls made too quietly to be useful             | Self-consciousness, first time using the language aloud | Coach cannot hear the call from outside the grid — if the coach can't hear it, neither can a team-mate under match noise | Stop                                         | Freeze-and-correct: every player repeats their next call at full match volume before play resumes | Resume from the same picture |
| Calls made but not matching the picture         | Players treat it as a ritual rather than information    | "Turn" called with a defender touch-tight behind                                                                         | Let it flow briefly, then a natural stoppage | Question: "was that call true?"                                                                   | Resume                       |
| Over-reliance on the coach to prompt every call | Early in the process                                    | Players glance at the coach before calling rather than reading the picture themselves                                    | Let it flow                                  | Step back, go quiet, let a few mismatched calls happen and get punished by the defence            | No restart needed            |

**Coach interventions used in this practice:** heavy on *questioning* and one deliberate *freeze-and-correct* early for volume; otherwise let the practice flow so the calling becomes habitual rather than performed for the coach.

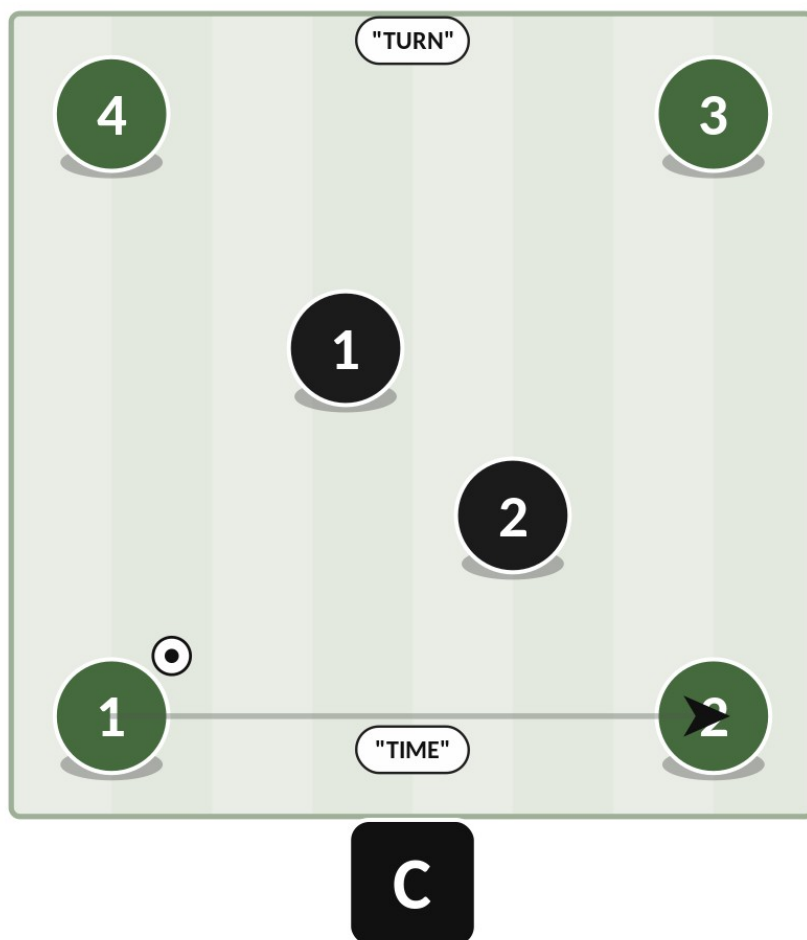
### Success indicators:

- Calls are audible from outside the grid without strain.
- The proportion of calls that genuinely match the picture rises across the 15 minutes.
- Defenders begin visibly reacting to calls (evidence the language is functioning as real information, not noise).

**Coach's eye:** listen before you watch in this practice — close your eyes for ten seconds occasionally and judge the practice on sound alone.

## H1.2 CALL IT — Voice Rondo

12 x 12 m • 4v2 • a call must be made before every pass • 15 minutes



● Possession team    ● Defenders    ● Ball    ➔ Pass

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Week 1 • Diagrams not to scale

**AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram):** "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A small 12x12 metre grid with dimension labels. Four players in dark green bibs numbered 1–4 positioned at the four corners. Two players in black bibs numbered 1–2 positioned centrally. A small white football near player 1. A faded grey solid arrow showing a pass across the grid. Two speech-bubble style text callouts reading '"TIME"' and '"TURN"' positioned near the top and bottom of the grid. Small dark coach icon below the grid. Title: 'CALL IT — Voice Rondo'. Subtitle: '12 x 12 m • 4v2 • a call must be made before every pass • 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

**Realistic illustration — description:** Close elevated view of a small grid on a training pitch, four players in dark green bibs at the corners, two in black bibs pressing centrally, one green-bibbed player with mouth open mid-call gesturing toward a team-mate, ball in flight, coach crouched just outside the grid listening intently.

**AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration):** "Close elevated three-quarter photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football players in a small marked grid on a grass training pitch. Four players in dark green bibs positioned at the

*corners of a 12x12 metre grid, two players in black bibs pressing in the centre. One green-bibbed player has their mouth open, clearly calling out, one arm gesturing toward a team-mate as a football travels toward them. A coach crouches just outside the grid, hand cupped to one ear, listening intently. Early evening light, realistic grass texture and shadows, amateur adult players of varied build in training kit. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."*

## PRACTICE 3 — BUILD FROM THE RESTART (UNIT / TACTICAL PRACTICE)

**Duration:** 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

**Tactical purpose:** The first, deliberately light introduction to structure: how the team organises itself for a goal kick or short free kick under a passive press, using the "first-line build-up player" role named in the Season Architecture. This is not yet about beating a real high press — that arrives properly in Week 6 — it is about giving players a shared, calm picture for the single most common restart in football.

### Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 44 x 30 m (defensive third + halfway)
- **Players:** 8 outfield + 1 goalkeeper building, vs 3 passive pressers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** central — every sequence begins with the goalkeeper, who is coached explicitly as an available short option
- **Team sizes:** 8+GK v 3
- **Neutrals:** none — the three pressers are semi-passive by design (see Rules)
- **Equipment:** 8 flat markers marking the build-up zone, 4 cones
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram — back four/back three (coach's choice this week) split around the goalkeeper, midfield line providing the next angle
- **Ball supply:** goalkeeper always restarts from hands or a goal kick
- **Restart location:** goal kick position
- **Coach position:** central, behind the building team, able to see both the picture forming and the pressers' shape
- **Rotation method:** pressers rotate with tired build-up players every 3 minutes
- **Direction of play:** building team always attacks the same direction, out of their own defensive third

**Practice walkthrough:** The goalkeeper restarts from a goal kick or from hands. The back line splits to create width and an angle either side of the goalkeeper — precisely the picture from Tuesday's Practice 2, now applied specifically to this restart. A midfielder identifies as the additional angle, dropping slightly off the front line of the three pressers rather than standing directly in front of them. The three pressers apply pressure but are instructed to show patience rather than sprint to close down immediately (this is a passive, not a high, press — the difference matters and is named aloud to players). The building team's job is to progress the ball out of the defensive third using the angles created, choosing between the goalkeeper, the split back line, and the dropping midfielder as the picture allows.

**Rules:** Pressers may not engage until the ball has left the goalkeeper's hands or foot (simulating a realistic delay). Once engaged, they press to a genuine, moderate intensity — this is not a walk-through. A clean progression past the three pressers and into the midfield zone scores a point for the building team; a turnover inside the defensive third scores a point for the pressers.

### Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* the goalkeeper and the two widest defenders are coached explicitly in the "first-line build-up player" role; the dropping midfielder in the "central progression player" role.
- *Unit:* the back line's job is to create the same offset-triangle picture from Practice 2 around the goalkeeper specifically.
- *Team:* recognising when to play short through the pressers versus when to go longer and accept a more direct route — both are legitimate, and the choice is coached as a decision, not a preference for one over the other.
- *Transition:* if possession is lost in the build-up zone, the nearest players must recognise the immediate danger (a turnover here is close to the team's own goal) and react with urgency disproportionate to how far the ball has travelled.

### Decision-making triggers:

- A presser commits fully to the goalkeeper or the ball-carrier → the pass goes the other way, through the space just vacated.
- All three pressers are goal-side of the ball and compact → this is very likely the moment to play longer rather than force a short pass into a crowded picture.

- The dropping midfielder is picked up tightly by a presser → a different player (full-back, winger tucking in) becomes the next-best angle instead.

**Communication language used:** *Drop, Time, Squeeze* (the pressers squeeze as a unit; the building team calls Drop and Time to organise the picture).

#### Coaching points:

| CORNER                     | POINT                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical                  | Goalkeeper's distribution — accuracy and pace of pass into feet under a passive presser, not just a big clearance by default.                                                                |
| Tactical                   | The first-line build-up player's job is to be available, not automatically to receive — many good possessions this week will involve them offering the angle without ever touching the ball. |
| Physical                   | Controlled, moderate-intensity pressing actions for the three pressers — a legitimate physical stimulus wrapped inside a tactical practice.                                                  |
| Psychological              | Composure under pressure specifically in the defensive third, where the consequence of an error is highest and the temptation to panic is greatest.                                          |
| Communication & leadership | The goalkeeper is coached this week as an organiser of the picture in front of them, not just a distributor — an early seed of the goalkeeper's wider leadership role in the team.           |

#### Guided discovery questions:

1. What told the goalkeeper it was safe to play short rather than long?
2. When a presser committed to the ball, where was the space that opened up — and who used it?
3. What would change about this picture if the team lined up in a back three rather than a back four?
4. Why might a team choose to play longer even when a short option is technically available?
5. What is the risk to the team if a turnover happens in this zone compared to a turnover in the opposition's half?
6. How did the pressers' patience (not engaging immediately) change the picture compared to if they had sprinted to close down instantly?

#### Progressions:

1. Allow the pressers to engage immediately rather than waiting, raising realism toward a genuine press (a preview of Week 6).
2. Add a fourth presser, testing whether the picture still holds with a numerical disadvantage.
3. Add a live outball target beyond halfway, rewarding a longer, more direct progression as a second legitimate option.

#### Regressions:

1. Reduce to two pressers, giving the building team a clear numerical advantage while they learn the picture.
2. Widen the build-up zone to give more time per decision.
3. Allow the goalkeeper one free, uncontested pass to start the sequence before pressers are live.

#### Common problems and corrections:

| PROBLEM                                                                              | WHY IT HAPPENS                                                      | COACH RECOGNISES BY                                             | STOP OR FLOW?                    | INTERVENTION                                                                      | RESTART                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Goalkeeper defaults to a long clearance regardless of the picture                    | Habit, or lack of confidence in the short option under any pressure | Short options clearly available and unused, repeatedly          | Stop                             | Individual coaching: rehearse the decision once at walking pace, then resume live | Resume from a fresh goal kick |
| Back line splits too narrow, not creating a real angle either side of the goalkeeper | New idea, not yet automatic                                         | Centre-backs standing close together rather than genuinely wide | Let it flow with a drive-by call | "Wider — make the keeper's angle real"                                            | Continue                      |
| Dropping midfielder                                                                  | Team not yet reading                                                | Same player receiving                                           | Stop                             | Short unit intervention: identify                                                 | Resume from                   |



*Four players in dark green bibs numbered 1–4 spread across the back line and a dropping midfielder line. Three players in black bibs numbered 1–3 positioned as passive pressers higher up. White football near the goalkeeper. Black solid arrows showing two connected build-up passes from goalkeeper through the back line. A green dashed arrow labelled 'first-line build-up player steps in' showing a player adjusting position. Title: 'BUILD FROM THE RESTART — Kick-Offs & Goal Kicks'. Subtitle: '44 x 30 m · 8 outfield + GK vs 3 passive pressers · 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."*

**Realistic illustration — description:** Elevated sideline view of a goalkeeper in yellow rolling the ball out to a splitting back line in dark green bibs inside a marked defensive-third zone, three black-bibbed pressers showing patient, mid-distance pressure rather than sprinting in, a midfielder dropping to offer an angle, coach standing centrally behind the play observing the shape.

**AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration):** *"Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. A goalkeeper in a yellow kit rolling the ball out to a splitting back line of four players in dark green bibs inside a marked defensive-third zone on a grass pitch. Three players in black bibs showing patient, mid-distance defensive pressure rather than an aggressive sprint. A green-bibbed midfielder dropping into space to offer a passing angle. A coach in dark training kit standing centrally behind the play, arms folded, observing the shape closely. Overcast evening light, realistic grass pitch markings and shadows, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."*

## PRACTICE 4 — COMMUNICATION POINTS (SMALL-SIDED GAME)

**Duration:** 17 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

**Tactical purpose:** Closes the week with a possession-dominant, confidence-building game that rewards everything taught across both sessions — angled support and clear, early, matching communication — without introducing anything new. Players should leave this practice, and the week, feeling sharp and certain, per the stated purpose of every Thursday session.

### Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 36 x 24 m
- **Players:** 14 outfield + 2 goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers play their own-goal role
- **Team sizes:** 7 v 7
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 6 flat markers, 4 cones
- **Starting positions:** even split across the grid
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** as per small-sided-game convention — fast restarts, kick-ins
- **Coach position:** touchline, mobile
- **Rotation method:** none required at this squad size
- **Direction of play:** standard, both teams attack opposite goals

**Practice walkthrough:** A straightforward 7v7 game with one scoring bonus: any goal preceded by an audible, matching communication call in the buildup (from this week's set — Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze) is worth two goals rather than one. Otherwise the game is played with minimal interruption, allowing players to finish the week's opening session with a high volume of enjoyable, successful play.

**Rules:** Standard small-sided-game rules; communication bonus as described, judged by the coach in the moment.

**Tactical roles:** every principle and role named across the week is available to be used; the coaching focus in this practice is recognition and encouragement rather than new instruction.

**Decision-making triggers:** as established across the week — this practice deliberately asks players to apply the week's triggers without fresh prompting.

**Communication language used:** the full set — *Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze* — used under full game pressure for the first time.

### Coaching points:

| CORNER                     | POINT                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical                  | Finishing with composure inside a possession-heavy game — chances will be fewer and better than in an open game, make them count. |
| Tactical                   | Recognising and rewarding the week's principle in full flow rather than as an isolated drill.                                     |
| Physical                   | The week's second-highest load, appropriately placed at the very end.                                                             |
| Psychological              | Finishing pre-season's first week on a genuine high — this practice is as much about confidence as about football.                |
| Communication & leadership | Players are largely left to organise and encourage each other; coach involvement steps back deliberately.                         |

### Guided discovery questions:

1. What was the difference between a goal your team scored today and one that would have been "worth double"?

2. Which call from this week did you hear most often in this practice — and why do you think that one, specifically?
3. How does it feel differently to play when everyone is talking early compared to when nobody is?
4. What is one thing from this week you want to see the team keep doing on Saturday — if we had a match this weekend?
5. Looking back at both sessions this week, how is Tuesday's idea (the angle) and tonight's idea (the call) actually the same idea, said two different ways?

#### Progressions:

1. Increase the bonus to triple for a call plus an angled pass combined, tying both week's principles together explicitly.
2. Reduce the grid slightly to raise tempo for the closing minutes.
3. Introduce a genuine time constraint (last two minutes = golden goal) to add matchplay-realistic pressure to the finish.

#### Regressions:

1. Widen the grid for more space and a gentler close to the week.
2. Remove the bonus condition in the closing minutes and let the group simply enjoy open, unconditioned play.
3. Reduce to 5v5 if fatigue is visible, protecting quality over quantity in the week's final minutes.

#### Common problems and corrections:

| PROBLEM                                                                                 | WHY IT HAPPENS                              | COACH RECOGNISES BY                                                     | STOP OR FLOW? | INTERVENTION                                                                      | RESTART  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Fatigue reducing communication in the final five minutes                                | First week of pre-season, genuine tiredness | Calls become quieter or stop, technical errors rise                     | Let it flow   | Light-touch encouragement only — this is expected, not a fault                    | Continue |
| Game becomes stretched and open, losing the possession picture from earlier in the week | Natural end-of-session tempo rise           | Fewer sustained possession sequences, more transitional end-to-end play | Let it flow   | None needed — a stretched, high-tempo finish is an acceptable way to end the week | Continue |

**Coach interventions used in this practice:** minimal — mostly encouragement and recognition of good examples of the week's principle, rather than correction.

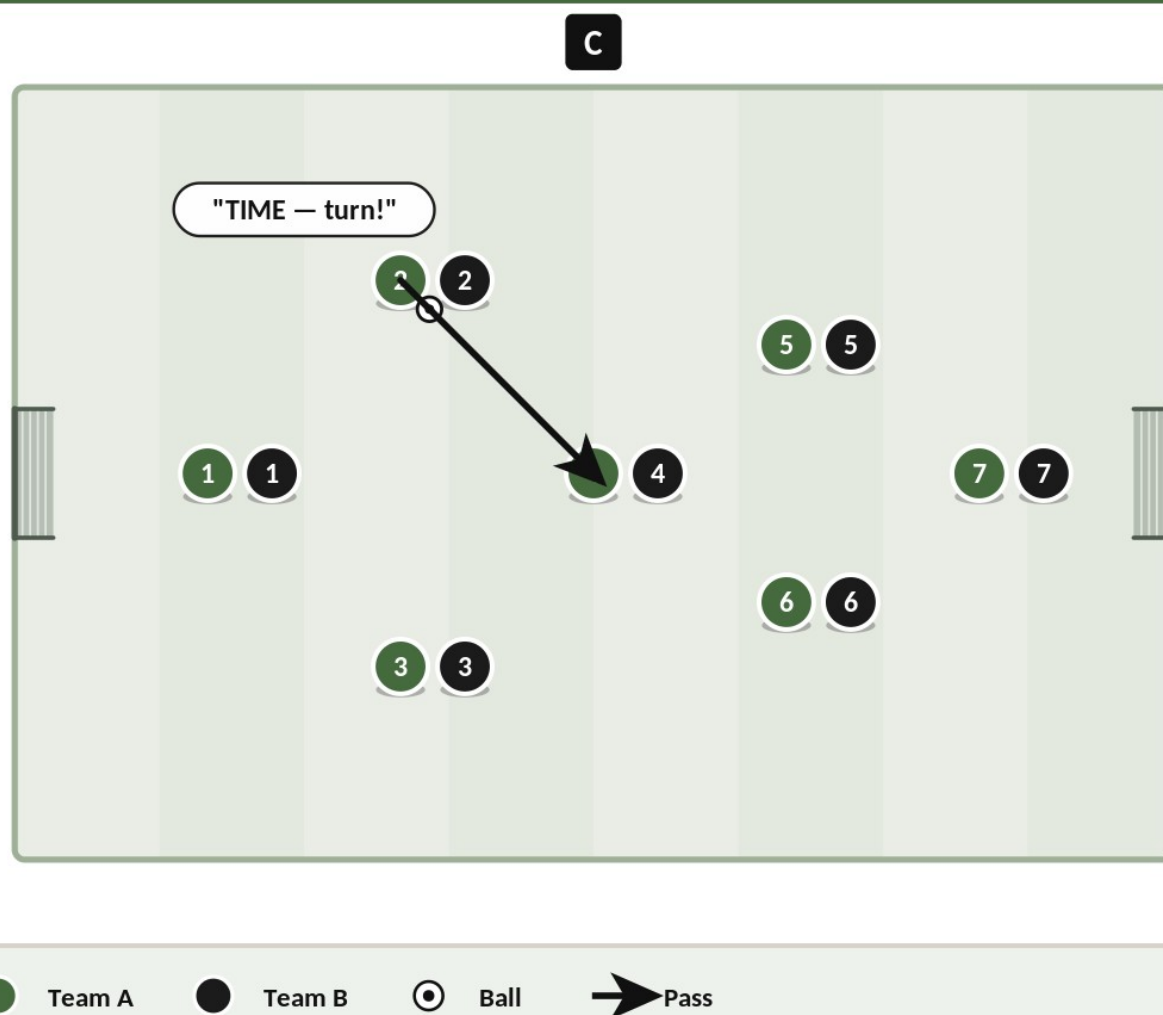
#### Success indicators:

- Multiple bonus goals scored across the practice.
- Visibly high energy and communication continuing into the closing minutes despite fatigue.
- Players leaving the session talking to each other about the game, not just to the coach.

**Coach's eye:** this practice is as much about reading the group's mood as their shape — watch for genuine enjoyment and energy; if it's missing, the week's balance of challenge and confidence needs revisiting before Week 2.

## H1.4 COMMUNICATION POINTS — Confidence Game

36 x 24 m • 7v7 • bonus point for an early, specific call • 17 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Week 1 • Diagrams not to scale

**AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram):** "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style, showing a 36x24 metre pitch with a goal at each end. Six players in dark green bibs numbered 1–6 and six players in black bibs numbered 1–6 spread across the pitch in a small-sided-game shape. White football near a green player in an advanced position. A speech-bubble text callout reading "TIME — turn!" near a green player. A solid black arrow showing a pass toward goal. Title: 'COMMUNICATION POINTS — Confidence Game'. Subtitle: '36 x 24 m • 7v7 • bonus point for an early, specific call • 17 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

**Realistic illustration — description:** Elevated sideline view of a lively 7v7 game at dusk, green-bibbed player calling out mid-action with an arm raised as a ball arrives, black-bibbed opposition reacting, both goals with visible nets in frame, players smiling and communicating, coach on the touchline relaxed, arms loosely folded, clearly at ease compared to earlier, more instructional moments in the week.

**AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration):** "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur 7v7 football game at dusk on a grass pitch with two full-size goals visible. A player in a dark green bib has one arm raised, clearly calling out, as a football arrives at their feet; nearby team-mates in dark green react with energy. Opposition players in black bibs closing down at realistic match intensity. Warm, low evening sunlight, long shadows, genuine energy and visible enjoyment among players. A coach in training kit stands relaxed on the touchline, arms loosely

*folded, watching with a slight smile. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."*

### **REFLECTION (FINAL 3–4 MINUTES, SEATED)**

This is the week's one full reflection, held on Thursday so players go into the weekend with it fresh. Seated as a group, captain(s) present.

#### **Questions put to the group:**

1. What is one standard — about effort, punctuality, or how we speak to each other — that this squad wants to hold itself to all season?
2. What did "a good angle" and "an early call" have in common this week?
3. What is one thing you personally want to be better at by the time Week 5's review comes around?

**Coach's closing input:** name two or three specific, positive examples seen across the week (not generic praise — a specific player, a specific moment), and confirm the standards the group has just set out loud, in their own words, so Week 2 can open by holding the group to language they chose themselves rather than language given to them.

# Match-Day Objectives — Week 1

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*Adapted for pre-season: there is no fixture this week, so these are training-ground objectives the coaching staff wants to see established by the end of the week, written in the same format used for match-day objectives from Week 2 onward.*

## Three team objectives:

1. Every player can recognise and describe an "angled" supporting position, not just a nearby one.
2. The full five-word communication set (Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze) is in active, if imperfect, use by every player.
3. The squad has agreed, in its own words, at least one shared standard for the season.

## Three unit objectives:

- *Defensive unit:* the back line (whichever shape is used) can demonstrate the split-and-angle picture from a goal kick without being told to do it.
- *Midfield unit:* at least one midfielder consistently recognises and fills the "dropping" angle to support the goalkeeper and back line.
- *Attacking unit:* forward players understand and can explain the "wide outlet" and "rest defence" ideas introduced this week, even in a session with no formal attacking-unit practice yet.

## Individual role reminders *(assign according to the shape the coach selects — see Formation Translation below):*

- First-line build-up player: be available before you are needed; your positioning is the coaching point, not just your pass.
- Wide outlet: hold your width; do not drift in "to get on the ball."
- Central progression player: scan before every touch — this week's whole idea depends on it.
- Rest-defence player: your job is named and specific, not leftover.

## Measurable performance indicators:

- Number of clean, angled progressions out of the defensive third during Practice 3 (target: rising trend across the practice, not a fixed number in Week 1).
- Frequency of audible, matching communication calls during Practice 4, judged qualitatively by the coach (a specific number is not meaningful this early in the season; the trend across the week is).
- Squad's own account, given in the closing reflection, of the standard they have set — recorded by the coach for reference at the Week 5 review.

## Formation Translation — Applying This Week Across Different Shapes

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**Principle: Support & passing angles.**

**In a back four (e.g. building toward a 4-3-3 or 4-2-3-1):** the two centre-backs provide the base of the triangle by splitting; the holding midfielder (or, in a 4-2-3-1, either of the two holding players) drops slightly off-centre to form the third point; a full-back steps in as the fourth, wider angle. The goalkeeper is a fifth option behind all of them.

**In a back three (e.g. building toward a 3-4-3 or 3-5-2):** the same triangle is built one player narrower — the two wide centre-backs already provide an angle each without needing to split as far, since the extra defender gives natural width. A wing-back provides the higher, wider angle a full-back gave in the four-at-the-back picture. The goalkeeper's role is identical in both.

**What stays the same:** the picture itself — three or more angles around the ball, never a straight line — and the goalkeeper's availability as an option.

**What changes:** which shirt number fills which point of the triangle, and how far each player has to travel to create it (generally less far in a back three, since the extra central defender narrows the gaps that need covering).

**What must not change:** the habit of checking for an angle before receiving. This is a player behaviour, not a formation-dependent instruction, and it is coached identically regardless of which shape the team lines up in on a given Saturday.

**Risk in each structure:** a back four that fails to split wide enough collapses the whole picture into a straight, easily screened line. A back three that fails to use its wing-backs' extra height loses the natural width advantage the shape is supposed to provide, and ends up narrower than the back four it was meant to improve on.

**Opposition influence:** against a team that presses with one central striker, the back-four picture is usually easier to establish, since only one central passing lane needs screening by the opposition. Against a team that presses with two forwards, the back-three picture often creates the extra body needed to guarantee a spare man in the first line — a connection the team will return to directly in Week 20 (one striker vs. two).

## Coach Review — Week 1

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*(To be completed by the coach after both sessions have run, before Week 2 is delivered. Kept here as a template with guiding prompts; do not pre-fill outcomes that have not yet happened.)*

- **Attendance:** Tuesday \_\_\_\_ / Thursday \_\_\_\_ . Any pattern worth noting for Week 2's contingency planning?
- **Technical/tactical evidence:** did players visibly recognise and occupy an angled position by the end of Tuesday's Practice 4? Note specific examples, not a general impression.
- **Communication evidence:** which of the five calls was used most naturally, and which needs deliberate reinforcement in Week 2?
- **Physical observations:** any players showing signs of excessive fatigue relative to the planned moderate-high load? Cross-reference against the physical-load table in Section 7 of the Season Architecture.
- **Leadership observations:** who organised, spoke up, or adjudicated (e.g. the rotating captain role in Tuesday's Practice 3) without being asked?
- **Standard set by the squad:** record, in the players' own words, what was agreed in Thursday's closing reflection — this is referenced again at the Week 5 review.
- **Priority for Week 2:** based on the above, does Week 2 (build-up vs. first line of pressure) need any adjustment to its planned emphasis, per Route B in the Match Review and Weekly Adjustment framework?

*Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum, Week 1 of 36 · session design follows the four-corner model used in UEFA coach education and the principle-led, formation-neutral approach set out in the Season Architecture (Stage 1). An independent club resource, not an official UEFA or Irish FA publication and not endorsed by either.*