



Week 3 — Pre-Season Foundation

Tags: `pre-season` `defending` `unit-work` `pressing` `full-squad-practice` `conditioning`

Weekly Overview

FIELD	DETAIL
Week number	3 of 36
Season phase	1 — Pre-Season Foundation
Core principle	Pressure, cover, balance
Secondary principle	Compactness — vertical and horizontal
Previous match review focus	The squad's first pre-season fixture falls on the Saturday between Week 2 and Week 3. From this week onward, every week opens with the genuine three-route Match Review below rather than the pre-season placeholder used in Weeks 1-2 — fill in the actual result and observations before delivering this week.
Weekly tactical problem	Up to now, defending has been organised only lightly (Week 2's "Shape Without the Ball"). The real, common problem at this level is the isolated press: one player chases the ball, gets beaten, and there is nobody behind them to deal with the consequence. This week installs the fix as a named shape — pressure, cover, balance — and links it to the compactness the team has already begun to feel.
Formation-neutral explanation	Pressure, cover, balance is a defending shape, not a formation. Whoever is closest to the ball pressures it; whoever is next closest covers the space and the passing lane directly behind the presser; everyone else balances — shifted across the pitch, ready to become the next presser or cover player as the ball moves. This triangle re-forms constantly, all match, regardless of whether the team is playing with a back four or a back three, in a 4-4-2 shape or a 4-1-4-1.
Example structural applications	In a 4-4-2 mid-block: a striker or wide midfielder is usually the first presser, the nearest central or wide midfielder covers, and the back four plus the rest of midfield balance across. In a 5-3-2 mid-block: a striker still presses first, but the covering job more often falls to a central midfielder in the three, with the extra defender in the back five providing a naturally deeper, wider balance than a back four can. The triangle is identical; who fills each corner of it, and how much natural cover the extra defender provides, is not.

Match Review and Weekly Adjustment

(This is the first week the three routes are genuinely live — apply whichever matches what actually happened on Saturday.)

Route A — Previous performance was strong. If the pre-season friendly showed good signs, do not simply repeat what worked. Identify the specific defending behaviour that produced it — most likely, at this early stage, simple effort and organisation rather than the refined shape this week teaches properly — name it to the players, and raise the practices below to their fuller progressions (3v2, then 3v3) rather than starting at the simplest version.

Route B — Previous performance exposed a tactical weakness. If the friendly showed exactly the isolated-press problem this week is built to solve — a player chasing the ball alone, space opening up behind them — say so plainly to the group at the start of Tuesday's session. This is not a coincidence to be quietly corrected; naming the real match evidence that created this week's content is the clearest way to make the principle matter to players who might otherwise treat it as an abstract idea.

Route C — Attendance, facilities or player availability are disrupted. Still realistic in late August. Protect the core shape (pressure, cover, and at least one balance player) even if numbers force a smaller version of every practice below — the three-player relationship is the minimum viable version of this week's idea, and it scales down further than most of the season's other principles.

Tuesday — Session 5

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	5 of 72
Week	3
Season phase	1 — Pre-Season Foundation
Training day	Tuesday
Session theme	Pressure, cover, balance introduced
Short summary	Installs the defending triangle — pressure, cover, balance — as a named shape, building from an isolated 2v1 picture up to a full conditioned match where regains are judged on organisation, not just outcome.
Tags	`defending` `pressing` `unit-work` `conditioning`
Primary learning objective	Players can identify and fill the presser, cover and balance roles without being told which one is theirs in the moment.
Secondary learning objective	The team begins to link pressing actions to maintaining compact distances between units.
Match connection	Directly addresses the Match Review focus above — whichever route applied, this session is the training-ground answer to how the team defends the ball together rather than individually.
Expected tactical outcome	A beaten first presser is followed, most of the time, by a covering player already positioned to deal with the next action — not a scramble.
Expected physical load	Moderate, with a particular emphasis on repeated accelerations and decelerations — pressing actions are short, sharp, and repeated rather than sustained running.
Recommended intensity	7–8 / 10 in bursts; overall session load is moderate because the high-intensity actions are short and interspersed with genuine recovery.
Equipment list	20 footballs · 32 flat markers · 16 cones (orange) · 2 sets of bibs (2 colours, 10 each) · 2 full-size or portable goals
Player numbers	Designed for 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers; scales 10–22, see contingencies.
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers train throughout; in Practice 4 the defending team's goalkeeper is coached as part of the balance picture — frequently the free player who can see the whole defending shape and organise it.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 50 x 36 m (Practice 4).
Area layout	A narrow channel for Practice 2, widening progressively through Practices 3 and 4.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 3 reduces to 5v5; Practice 4 reduces to 6v6 on a 42x30 m area — the triangle shape survives at every one of these scales.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Run two parallel channels for Practice 2; Practice 4 can extend to 9v9.
Contingency — restricted space	Practice 2 is barely affected (it's already a narrow channel); compress Practices 3 and 4 proportionally and keep the coaching focus on the shape rather than the running distance.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:10	10 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>Press & Recover</i>	Light green
0:10–0:25	15 min	Technical practice — <i>Pressure & Cover</i>	Club green
0:25–0:27	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:27–0:42	15 min	Skill game — <i>Press, Cover, Balance</i>	Dark green
0:42–0:44	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:44–0:59	15 min	Conditioned match — <i>First Press</i>	Black
0:59–1:00	1 min	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — PRESS & RECOVER (ARRIVAL)

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

Tactical purpose: Raises heart rate through genuine acceleration/deceleration repetitions — this week's physical theme — while introducing the calls "Step" and "Cover" in a simple, ball-based context before they matter tactically.

Organisation: 20 x 16 m grid, one ball per player for four minutes, then pairs for six. No goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join fully.

Walkthrough: Individual ball work with coach-led sprint-and-stop repetitions (a sharp five-metre acceleration on a whistle, controlled deceleration, repeat) worked into the movement. Pairs then perform a simple pressing rehearsal: player A dribbles toward player B, who must "Step" to press at the right moment — not too early, not too late — while a third, rotating player learns to shout "Cover" and jog into a covering position behind.

Rules: Pressing player may not engage until the dribbler has taken their first touch — this waiting is deliberate, teaching patience before contact rather than a reflexive chase.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* body shape when stepping to press — side-on, low centre of gravity.
- *Physical:* genuine acceleration and controlled deceleration, not a jog.
- *Psychological:* patience — waiting for the right moment to press, rather than pressing on instinct alone.

PRACTICE 2 — PRESSURE & COVER (TECHNICAL PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Isolates the two-player relationship at the heart of this week's principle — one player pressures, the next covers — stripped of every other variable, in the same way Week 1's rondo isolated support and passing angles. This is deliberately simple: the whole week depends on this shape being understood before anything is added to it.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 24 x 12 m channel
- **Players:** 4–6 outfield (2 defenders + 1–2 attackers, rotating)
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through as defenders
- **Team sizes:** 2 v 1, progressing to 2 v 2
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 4 flat markers (channel corners), 2 footballs
- **Starting positions:** attacker(s) at one end with the ball, two defenders starting central within the channel
- **Ball supply:** spare ball with the coach
- **Restart:** attacker restarts from the end line after every outcome
- **Coach position:** side of the channel, able to see both defenders
- **Rotation method:** every 90 seconds, attacker and defenders rotate through
- **Direction of play:** attacker always attacks the same end line

Practice walkthrough: One attacker starts with the ball at one end of a narrow channel, trying to dribble or pass their way to the far end line. Two defenders start central: the nearer one presses (patiently, having learned the "Step" timing from the warm-up), forcing the attacker in a chosen direction — usually away from the most dangerous space — while the second defender reads the press and moves to cover the space and the route directly behind it. Once the two-player picture is secure, add a second attacker (2v2) to test whether the same shape holds when the defending pair must also track a passing option, not just a dribbler.

Rules: Presser may show but not dive into a tackle for the first three seconds of each repetition, rewarding patience. A clean regain, or forcing the attacker out of the channel, is a defensive win; reaching the far end line is an attacking win.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* the presser's job is to force a direction, not necessarily win the ball immediately; the cover player's job is to be positioned for what happens next, not to anticipate a specific outcome.
- *Unit:* the two-player shape is the entire unit at this stage of the practice.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* on a regain, both defenders try to keep the ball for three seconds before the practice resets — an early, small transition-to-attack rehearsal.

Decision-making triggers:

- The attacker's touch is heavy or their head is down → this is the moment to press, not before.
- The presser has committed and been beaten on one side → cover must already be in the space that opens up, not moving into it after the fact.
- A second attacker appears (2v2 progression) → the covering player's job shifts slightly toward also screening the pass to the second attacker, without abandoning the cover position behind the first.

Communication language used: *Step* (the presser engaging), *Cover* (the second defender's call as they move into position).

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Jockeying technique — staying on feet, not diving into a tackle, showing the attacker the direction the defender wants them to go.

CORNER	POINT
Tactical	The relationship between presser and cover — cover position is defined by the presser's position and the direction they're forcing, not fixed in advance.
Physical	Repeated short accelerations and sharp changes of direction — this week's core physical stimulus in its purest form.
Psychological	Patience under the temptation to dive in early — a genuinely difficult discipline for eager defenders.
Communication & leadership	The cover player's voice, telling the presser what's happening behind them ("I'm covering, show him inside").

Guided discovery questions:

1. What told the presser which direction to force the attacker?
2. Where was the cover player positioned relative to the presser — directly behind, or at an angle, and why does that matter?
3. What happened on the reps where the presser dived in early rather than waiting?
4. When the second attacker was added, what changed about the cover player's job?
5. How does this two-player picture scale up to a whole defending team?
6. What is the risk of a presser who never gets support from a cover player, repeated over and over across a match?

Progressions:

1. Add a second attacker (2v2), as described above.
2. Add a target zone or small goal for the attacker to aim for, sharpening the consequence of being beaten.
3. Reduce the channel width, raising the difficulty of the presser's job and the precision required of the cover player's positioning.

Regressions:

1. Widen the channel to give the defending pair more time to organise.
2. Allow the coach to call "cover position!" as a live prompt during the first few reps.
3. Start defenders already correctly shaped (presser engaged, cover positioned) before introducing live reps from a neutral start.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Both defenders press together, leaving no cover	Old instinct — everyone wants to win the ball themselves	Two defenders converge on the ball simultaneously	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: walk the second defender back into a covering position, explain why	Resume from the reshaped positions
Presser dives into a tackle immediately rather than jockeying	Eagerness, or discomfort with delaying	Presser beaten quickly and often, usually by a simple change of direction	Let it flow with a drive-by call	"Show him a way, don't dive"	Continue
Cover player stands still rather than adjusting as the press develops	Treating "cover" as a fixed starting position rather than a continuously adjusting one	Cover player's position doesn't change even as the presser moves	Stop	Short individual intervention, walk through one repetition at reduced pace	Resume live

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *individual coaching during play*, *drive-by coaching*, and one deliberate *freeze-and-correct* for the most common error (both defenders pressing together) — this is foundational enough to warrant more stoppage than most practices.

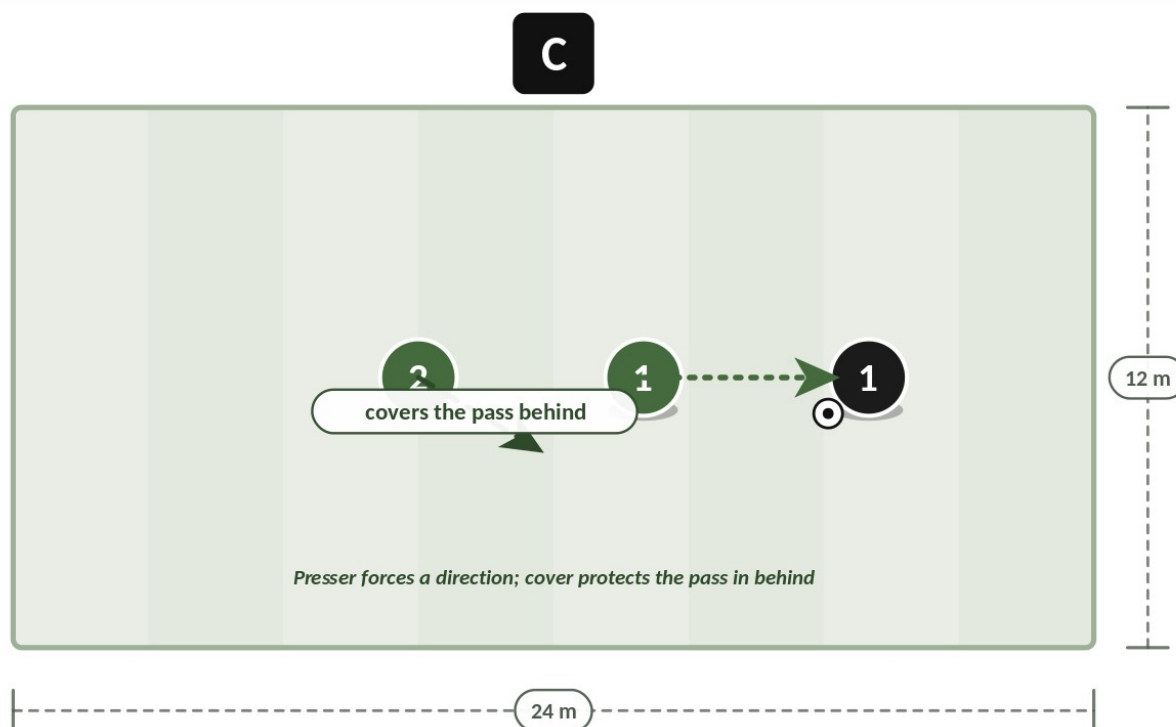
Success indicators:

- The cover player's position visibly changes in response to where the presser forces the attacker.
- Presses increasingly show patience (jockeying) rather than immediate tackles.
- The 2v2 progression, once introduced, does not immediately break the shape established in 2v1.

Coach's eye: watch the angle between presser and cover, not just their distance apart — a cover player standing the correct distance away but at the wrong angle is still failing at the job.

T3.2 PRESSURE & COVER — The Defending Pair

24 x 12 m channel • 2 defenders (press + cover) vs 1-2 attackers • 15 minutes



● Defending team ● Attackers ⊙ Ball ➞ Press ➞ Cover position

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A narrow 24x12 metre channel with dimension labels. One player in black bibs numbered 1 with a white football, positioned centrally. Two players in dark green bibs numbered 1 and 2 to the left, one engaged in a pressing action (shown with a short dotted red press arrow with a chevron arrowhead toward the black player) and one positioned behind at an angle (shown with a green dashed arrow labelled 'covers the pass behind'). Small dark coach icon below the channel. Title: 'PRESSURE & COVER — The Defending Pair'. Subtitle: '24 x 12 m channel • 2 defenders (press + cover) vs 1-2 attackers • 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 view of a narrow marked channel on grass, one player in a black bib dribbling with the ball, one green-bibbed defender in a jockeying stance showing the attacker a direction, a second green-bibbed defender positioned at an angle behind, coach at the channel's edge, evening light.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training in a narrow marked channel on a grass pitch. A player in a black bib dribbling a football under control. A player in a dark green bib in a low, side-on jockeying stance, showing the attacker a direction rather than diving into a tackle. A second player in a dark green bib positioned a few metres behind and at an angle, in a ready athletic stance, clearly covering. A coach standing at the edge of the channel, watching the angle between the two defenders

closely. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 3 — PRESS, COVER, BALANCE (SKILL GAME)

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

Tactical purpose: Extends the two-player relationship into the full three-part shape — pressure, cover, *and* balance — inside a genuine small-sided game, and changes what counts as success: this practice scores the defending team not simply for winning the ball, but for winning it with the shape intact, teaching players that a scrappy regain achieved by abandoning the shape is a worse outcome than it looks.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 30 x 20 m
- **Players:** 12 outfield, rotating who is "defending team" and "attacking team"
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through the defending team
- **Team sizes:** 6 v 6
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 mini goals, 8 flat markers, 4 cones
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** nearest sideline
- **Coach position:** sideline, central, able to judge the defending shape
- **Rotation method:** roles swap at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** attacking team attacks either goal; defending team defends both

Practice walkthrough: Six attackers try to score in either of two mini goals against six defenders. Every regain is judged by the coach (with input from a nominated player-observer, extending Week 1's rotating-captain idea): a regain where a presser, a cover player, and at least one balanced weak-side player can all be identified in roughly correct positions is worth two points; any other regain is worth one. This makes the shape, not just the outcome, the thing players are chasing.

Rules: As above. Attacking team scores normally in either mini goal (worth one point per goal, same scale as an "unorganised" regain, deliberately equating the value of the two things this practice is teaching players to weigh against each other).

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every defending player must be able to recognise, in real time, whether they are currently the presser, the cover, or in a balancing position — and know that the role can change from one pass to the next.
- *Unit:* the six-player defending group is now coached as a genuine unit, not a pair.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale — six-a-side is still a unit-level number.
- *Transition:* an organised (two-point) regain should also produce a cleaner transition to attack, since the ball is won inside a shape that already has support around it — this connection is named explicitly to players.

Decision-making triggers:

- The ball moves away from me and toward a team-mate → I am very likely now the balance player, not the presser or cover.
- My team-mate presses and gets goal-side of the ball → I am now the cover player, whether or not I was a moment ago.
- The ball switches to the far side of the practice area → the whole defending shape shifts, not just the nearest player.

Communication language used: *Step, Cover, Squeeze* — the full set used together for the first time in a game context.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Recovery speed and angle when shifting from balance into cover or press.
Tactical	Recognising role changes in real time as the ball moves — the season's first genuinely fluid tactical demand.
Physical	Repeated high-intensity shifts across the width of the practice area.
Psychological	Valuing shape over outcome — accepting that a "worse-looking" but organised regain is coached as better than a lucky scramble.
Communication & leadership	The nominated player-observer's job judging regains alongside the coach — an early, meaningful piece of tactical ownership.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What was different about the two-point regains compared to the one-point ones?
2. How did your job change during a single defensive sequence — were you always the same role?
3. What happened to the team's ability to attack quickly after an organised regain compared to a scrambled one?
4. If you were playing in a back five instead of a back four, how might the balance job be shared differently?
5. What is the risk of always chasing the ball to be the presser, rather than sometimes accepting the cover or balance job?
6. Why might a coach reward the shape of a regain as highly as a goal?

Progressions:

1. Add a condition that a third successive one-point (unorganised) regain forfeits a goal to the attacking team, raising the stakes on the shape.
2. Reduce the practice area, increasing the frequency of role changes.
3. Add a transition condition: three seconds to counter-attack cleanly after any two-point regain, rewarding the connection between organisation and quick transition.

Regressions:

1. Reduce to 4v4, easing the organisational demand.
2. Widen the practice area for more thinking time per role change.
3. Allow the coach to call out each player's current role for the first few minutes before withdrawing the prompts.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players freeze, unsure which role they currently hold	New, genuinely difficult cognitive demand	Hesitation, players looking at each other rather than moving	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "in that moment, whose job was cover?"	Resume
Balance player drifts too far from the play, disconnecting from the shape	Overcorrecting away from the ball	Balance player isolated on the far side, unable to help if the ball switches suddenly	Stop	Short group intervention on the correct balance distance	Resume
Team chases points rather than playing natural football	The scoring system is new and slightly artificial	Exaggerated, showy positioning rather than genuine defending	Let it flow with a drive-by call	"Defend it properly — the points will follow"	Continue

Coach interventions used in this practice: primarily *questioning* and *drive-by coaching*, with the player-observer sharing some of the judging load — deliberately reducing how much the coach needs to stop play.

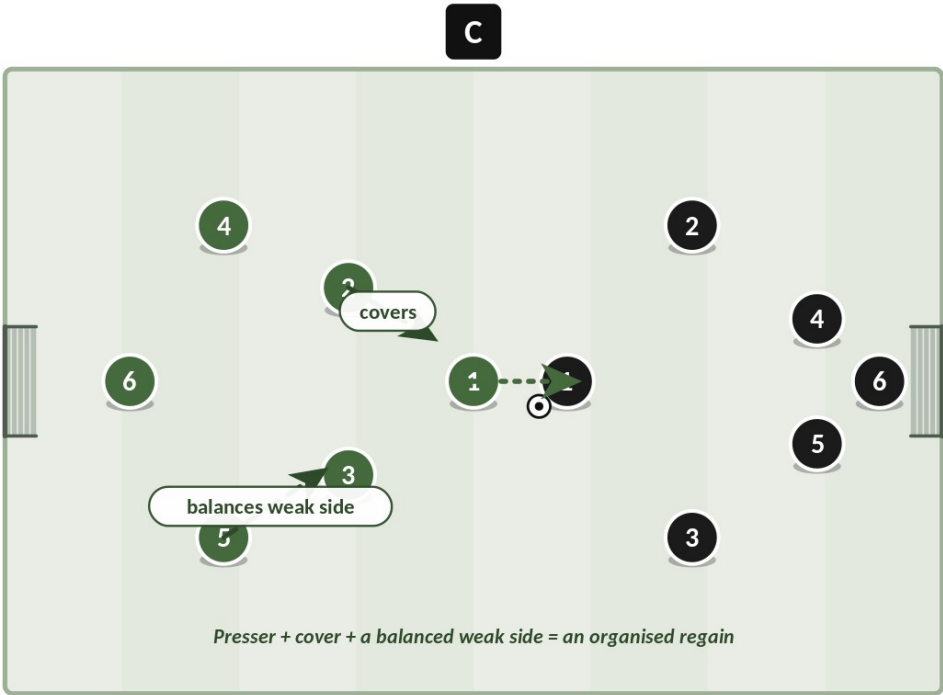
Success indicators:

- The proportion of two-point (organised) regains rises across the practice.
- Players can name their own role immediately after a regain when asked.
- Transitions to attack are visibly quicker and more composed after organised regains.

Coach's eye: watch the whole defending shape as a slowly rotating unit, the same way you watched Week 1's rondo — the ball moves, and the triangle should visibly reform around wherever it goes.

T3.3 PRESS, COVER, BALANCE — Small-Sided Game

30 x 20 m • 6v6 • defending team scored on organised regains, not just regains • 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. A 30x20 metre pitch with a small goal at each end. Six players in dark green bibs numbered 1–6 organised in a press-cover-balance shape and six players in black bibs numbered 1–6 spread across the pitch. White football near a green player. A short dotted red press arrow with a chevron arrowhead toward the ball. A green dashed arrow labelled 'covers' showing the second defender's position. A second green dashed arrow labelled 'balances weak side' showing a defender positioned away from the ball. Title: 'PRESS, COVER, BALANCE — Small-Sided Game'. Subtitle: '30 x 20 m • 6v6 • defending team scored on organised regains, not just regains • 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 6v6 small-sided game, a green-bibbed defender pressing the ball, a second green-bibbed player covering at an angle behind, a third green-bibbed player positioned on the far side of the pitch clearly balancing, black-bibbed attackers probing for space, coach and a player-observer both watching from the touchline with visible focus.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur 6v6 small-sided football game on a grass pitch with two mini goals. A player in a dark green bib pressing the ball-carrier, a second green-bibbed player positioned a few metres behind at an angle covering, and a third green-bibbed player clearly positioned on the far side of the pitch balancing the shape. Players in black bibs probing for space and passing lanes. A coach and a player both stand on the touchline, visibly focused, one gesturing to indicate a position."

Overcast evening light, realistic grass pitch 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 — FIRST PRESS (CONDITIONED MATCH)

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

Tactical purpose: Confirms the week's principle at full match scale, and connects it explicitly backward to Weeks 1 and 2 — a team defending well together, this practice argues, creates exactly the kind of quick, organised regain that Week 1's transition principle and Week 2's rest-defence idea depend on.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 36 m (half pitch)
- **Players:** 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers play their own-goal role; the defending

team's goalkeeper is specifically coached as an organiser, calling the balance player's position from behind the whole picture

- **Team sizes:** 8 v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 8 flat markers, corner cones
- **Starting positions:** standard match shape
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** match-realistic restarts
- **Coach position:** touchline, halfway line, mobile
- **Rotation method:** none required; goalkeepers may split time at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** standard, both teams attack opposite goals

Practice walkthrough: A conditioned 8v8 match in which both teams defend using this week's shape (both benefit from the coaching, since both teams spend roughly half the practice defending). The coach tracks organised regains as in Practice 3, but now at full match scale, with genuine attacking consequence: an organised regain inside the team's own half earns a bonus — the next attack, if it produces a shot within 10 seconds, is worth a double goal. This rewards exactly the link between defending shape and quick, purposeful transition that the practice's tactical purpose describes.

Rules: Standard conditioned-match rules; bonus as described, judged by the coach. Most goals in 15 minutes wins.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* first presser, cover, and balance roles as established across the session, now applied under full match movement and fatigue.
- *Unit:* both banks of the defending team (back line and midfield line) coordinate the shape together, connecting to Week 2's compactness preview.
- *Team:* recognising, as a whole team, when to commit to a press and when the picture calls for patience instead — an early, gentle preview of the "recognise when to press and when to delay" principle the season returns to more fully in Week 8.
- *Transition:* the bonus condition makes the connection between an organised regain and a quick, effective attack explicit and rewarded.

Decision-making triggers:

- An opponent receives with their back to goal or under a heavy touch → this is a good pressing trigger, even at this early, informal stage of the season's pressing content.
- The team's shape is stretched (from an earlier attack) when possession is lost → recovery and re-organisation into the pressure-cover-balance shape takes priority over an immediate, disorganised chase.
- An organised regain has just happened inside the team's own half → the bonus window is open; players should recognise the urgency without needing to be told.

Communication language used: *Step, Cover, Squeeze, Time* — the full defending set alongside the season's earlier attacking language.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Tackling and interception technique inside a real, moving match picture rather than an isolated drill.
Tactical	The link between defensive organisation and attacking transition quality — this week's defining tactical idea.
Physical	The week's peak physical demand — repeated high-intensity pressing actions at match-realistic distances, appropriately placed last.
Psychological	Composure to hold shape rather than chase individually, even under the fatigue of the practice's final minutes.
Communication & leadership	The goalkeeper's organisational voice, now doing real work at match scale rather than in a smaller, quieter practice.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What did the best regains this practice have in common?
2. How quickly did the team convert an organised regain into a genuine attacking opportunity — and what made that possible?
3. What happened to the team's shape in the minutes when fatigue was highest, and how did that affect defending quality?
4. If your team were defending in a back three tonight, who would most often be the balance player, and why?
5. How is this week's idea — pressure, cover, balance — the foundation for something bigger the team will learn later this season (a real, coordinated pressing trigger)?
6. Looking back across the whole session, what is the difference between "defending hard" and "defending well organised" — and are they always the same thing?

Progressions:

1. Reduce the bonus window from 10 seconds to 6, raising the tempo demand of the transition.
2. Add a genuine offside line.
3. Award the bonus only for regains won inside the defensive third specifically, sharpening the zone-based decision-making.

Regressions:

1. Extend the bonus window to 15 seconds.
2. Reduce to 6v6 on a smaller area.
3. Allow the coach to call out "organised!" or "scrambled!" immediately after each regain as an ongoing teaching aid rather than judging silently.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Isolated pressing reappears under fatigue late in the practice	The old habit this week exists to correct is strongest exactly when players are tired	A lone presser chases with no visible cover, more often in the final five minutes	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what's happened to our shape in the last few minutes?"	Resume
Team defends well but fails to use the transition bonus	The defending idea has landed; the attacking follow-through hasn't yet	Organised regains happen but the team resets slowly rather than attacking the bonus window	Stop	Short group intervention connecting the regain to an immediate, purposeful first pass forward	Resume from a fresh regain
Goalkeeper stays passive	Not yet confident in	Little or no vocal input	Let it flow	Direct individual encouragement	Continue

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
rather than organising	the organisational role asked of them this practice	from the goalkeeper despite a clear view of the picture	with a drive-by call	to the goalkeeper between phases	

Coach interventions used in this practice: a balance of *natural stoppages*, *questioning*, and *drive-by coaching*; reserve deeper correction for the one-minute reflection immediately after rather than stopping this practice more than once or twice.

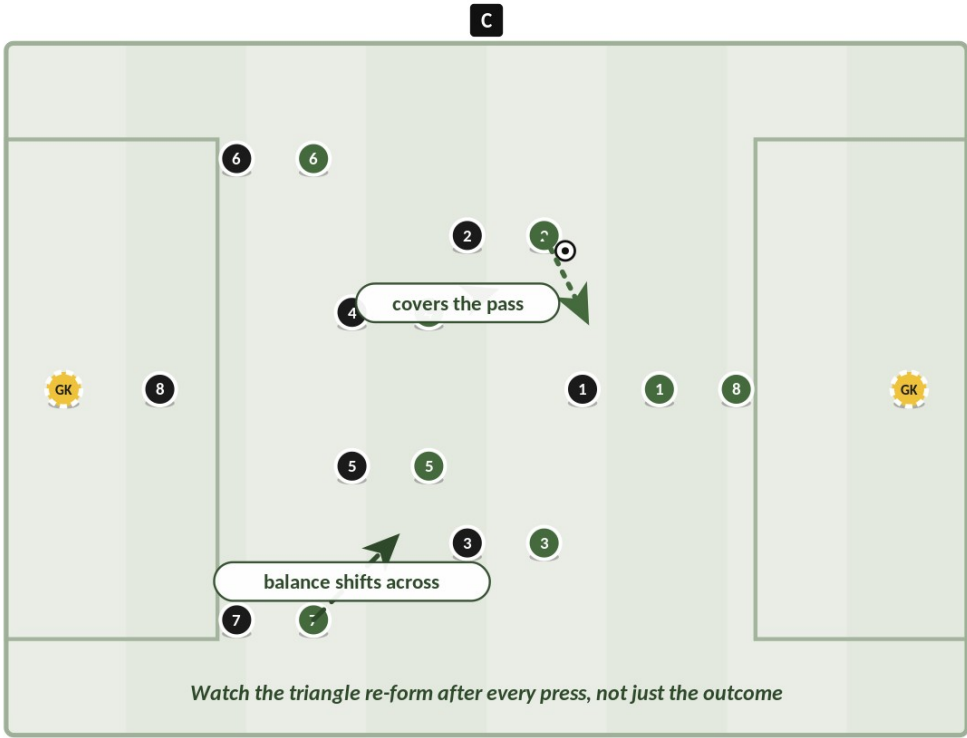
Success indicators:

- Isolated presses become visibly less frequent than at the start of the practice, including in the fatigued closing minutes.
- At least a handful of clear bonus-window attacks are produced from organised regains.
- The goalkeeper is heard organising the defending shape by the end of the practice.

Coach's eye: in the final five minutes specifically, watch whether the shape holds under fatigue — this tells you far more about whether the principle has actually been learned than anything in the fresher opening minutes.

T3.4 FIRST PRESS — Conditioned Match

50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • points for regains won with the triangle intact • 15 minutes



Team in possession (defending vs)

Opposition

Goalkeeper

Ball

Press

Cover / balance shift

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Week 3 • 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 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 match shape. White football near an advanced black player.

A short dotted red press arrow with a chevron arrowhead. A green dashed arrow labelled 'covers the pass' and a second green dashed arrow labelled 'balance shifts across'. Title: 'FIRST PRESS — Conditioned Match'. Subtitle: '50 x 36 m (half pitch) · 8v8 + GKs · points for regains won with the triangle intact · 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Wide elevated view of a full-scale 8v8 conditioned match, a green-bibbed player pressing an opponent receiving under pressure, a second green-bibbed player covering the pass behind, a third visible shifting across to balance, goalkeepers in yellow at each end, coach on the touchline near halfway watching intently.

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. A player in a dark green bib pressing an opponent in a black bib who is receiving the ball under pressure, a second green-bibbed player a few metres behind covering the passing lane, a third green-bibbed player visibly shifting across the pitch to balance the shape. A coach stands near the halfway line on the touchline, arms crossed, watching intently. Early evening light with long shadows, realistic grass pitch markings, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."*

REFLECTION (1 MINUTE)

One question to the group: *"When we won the ball best tonight, whose job was it to press, whose was it to cover, and whose was it to balance — and how quickly could you answer that?"*

Thursday — Session 6

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	6 of 72
Week	3
Season phase	1 — Pre-Season Foundation
Training day	Thursday
Session theme	Compactness as a unit
Short summary	Formalises Week 2's "Shape Without the Ball" preview into the named principle of compactness, teaches the team to manage the gap between its own lines with a measurable reference, and combines it with Tuesday's pressing shape in a genuine phase-of-play practice against a building opponent.
Tags	`defending` `unit-work` `pressing` `set-pieces` `full-squad-practice`
Primary learning objective	The team's back line and midfield line move together, holding a consistent, coachable distance between them.
Secondary learning objective	Pressure, cover and balance (Tuesday's principle) are now combined with compactness against a live, building opponent.
Match connection	This is the week's clearest observable pitch outcome: a compact, connected defensive shape that does not stretch apart under pressure or fatigue.
Expected tactical outcome	The gap between the team's deepest and highest defending lines stays inside a coachable range for longer spells than in Week 2.
Expected physical load	Moderate — lower than Tuesday, as intended for a Thursday, though the lateral shifting demand is real.
Recommended intensity	6–7 / 10, rising only in the closing game.
Equipment list	16 footballs · 28 flat markers · 12 cones (orange) · 2 sets of bibs (2 colours, 10 each) · 2 full-size or portable goals
Player numbers	Designed for 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers; scales 10–22.
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers train throughout; Practice 3 uses one as the defending team's organiser and the other inside the building team, continuing Week 1's build-up work.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 50 x 34 m (Practice 3).
Area layout	A marked corridor for Practice 2, widening into a fuller phase-of-play area for Practice 3.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 3 reduces to 6+GK v 6; Practice 4 becomes 5v5.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 3 can extend toward a fuller 10+GK v 9 picture.
Contingency — restricted space	Compactness is, helpfully, the principle least damaged by a small facility — a smaller pitch naturally encourages tighter distances. Use the opportunity rather than fighting it.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:08	8 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>Squeeze</i>	Light green

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:08–0:23	15 min	Technical / unit practice — <i>The Compact Line</i>	Club green
0:23–0:25	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:25–0:40	15 min	Unit / tactical practice — <i>Press, Cover, Balance vs Build-Up</i>	Dark green
0:40–0:42	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:42–0:59	17 min	Small-sided game — <i>Compact & Confident</i>	Black
0:59–1:00	1 min → extended below	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — SQUEEZE (ARRIVAL)

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

Tactical purpose: A shorter, sharper Thursday warm-up that inverts Week 2's "Stretch the Grid" — the grid shrinks rather than grows, giving players an early, physical feel for this week's idea.

Organisation: Starts as a 26 x 18 m grid, shrinking to 18 x 12 m for the final three minutes. One ball per player, then pairs. No goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join fully.

Walkthrough: Individual ball work in the larger grid, pairs form as it begins to shrink; the coach's only instruction across the eight minutes is "squeeze" as the grid narrows, echoing the call the defending team will use all session.

Rules: Continuous movement; players must adjust their passing distance down as the grid shrinks rather than playing passes that no longer fit the space.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* shorter, sharper passing as space reduces.
- *Physical:* rising work-rate in a shrinking space — a different physical picture from Tuesday's channel work.
- *Psychological:* comfort in a compressed space rather than anxiety about it.

PRACTICE 2 — THE COMPACT LINE (TECHNICAL / UNIT PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Gives the team a genuine, marked reference for what "compact" means in metres, rather than leaving it as a vague instruction — extending Week 2's informal introduction into a properly coached, measurable idea.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 36 x 24 m
- **Players:** 8 outfield (two banks of four) + 3 passive attackers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through the defending banks
- **Team sizes:** 8 v 3
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 8 flat markers marking a corridor, 4 cones
- **Starting positions:** back line of four and midfield line of four, as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** attackers restart from the coach on any stoppage
- **Coach position:** behind the defending shape, able to see both banks and the marked corridor
- **Rotation method:** banks swap jobs (back line/midfield line) at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** attackers work to find a pass between the two banks

Practice walkthrough: Two banks of four defending players are shown a marked corridor — roughly 20–25 m deep — representing the maximum gap the coach wants to see between the team's deepest and highest defending lines. Three passive attackers (walking-pace pressure only) probe for a pass that splits the two banks; the defending team's job is to shift together, as connected units, so that gap never opens up enough to be split. This is deliberately a low-pressure attacking picture — the entire coaching focus is on the defending team's own organisation, not on beating live opposition.

Rules: Attackers may not sprint or tackle — this is a shape-management practice, not a contest. A split pass between the two banks is marked by the coach as a shape failure, regardless of the outcome that follows it.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every defender's first job is to know the position of their own line's team-mates and the far bank's nearest player.
- *Unit:* the two banks move together, connected, whenever the ball moves — this is the entire content of the practice.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* not the focus — kept deliberately simple.

Decision-making triggers:

- The ball moves forward or backward → both banks adjust their depth together, not just the nearer one.
- The gap grows beyond the marked corridor → the coach's whistle marks it immediately, and the team is asked to self-correct before play resumes.
- A team-mate on my line steps out of position → I adjust to protect the connection, even if it means I'm not perfectly positioned relative to the ball myself.

Communication language used: *Squeeze* — the primary and near-exclusive call this practice, deliberately repetitive so it becomes automatic.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Scanning technique — checking team-mates' positions as often as the ball.
Tactical	Understanding compactness as a measurable, coachable distance rather than a vague idea.

CORNER	POINT
Physical	Lateral and vertical shifting in short, repeated bursts.
Psychological	Collective discipline — no individual's positioning decision should break the team shape.
Communication & leadership	Whoever spots the gap first calls "Squeeze" immediately, not after the coach has already blown the whistle.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What told you the gap was growing before the coach's whistle did?
2. How did the two banks need to communicate to move together rather than separately?
3. What is the risk of a back line that holds a perfect line by itself but is disconnected from the midfield line in front of it?
4. How would this picture look different for a team defending in a back three with a five-player midfield?
5. Why might a coach use a marked, visible corridor rather than just saying "stay compact"?

Progressions:

1. Allow attackers to move at three-quarter pace, adding a mild pressure element.
2. Narrow the corridor, raising the standard of compactness required.
3. Add a direction-of-play element, requiring the shape to hold while shifting the length of the pitch.

Regressions:

1. Widen the corridor while the idea beds in.
2. Reduce to one bank of four defending alone against the three attackers, before reintroducing the second bank.
3. Allow the coach to call "squeeze" as an ongoing prompt rather than waiting for players to call it themselves.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
One bank drifts out of sync with the other	Concentration lapse, or a player following the ball individually rather than the unit	Visible separation between the two banks growing over successive phases	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: walk the out-of-sync bank back into the corridor, ask why the gap opened	Resume
Players stare at the ball rather than scanning their own line	Old habit — the ball is more visually compelling than a team-mate's position	Heads consistently turned toward the ball only	Let it flow with a drive-by call	"Check your line, not just the ball"	Continue
Squeeze calls come late, after the gap has already opened	The scanning habit isn't yet automatic	Coach's whistle consistently arrives before any player's call	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "who should have called that, and when?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: heavy on *unit coaching during play* and one or two *freeze-and-correct* moments — this is a foundational, measurable idea and worth the extra stoppage time to install properly.

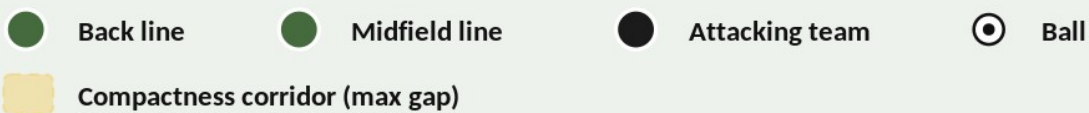
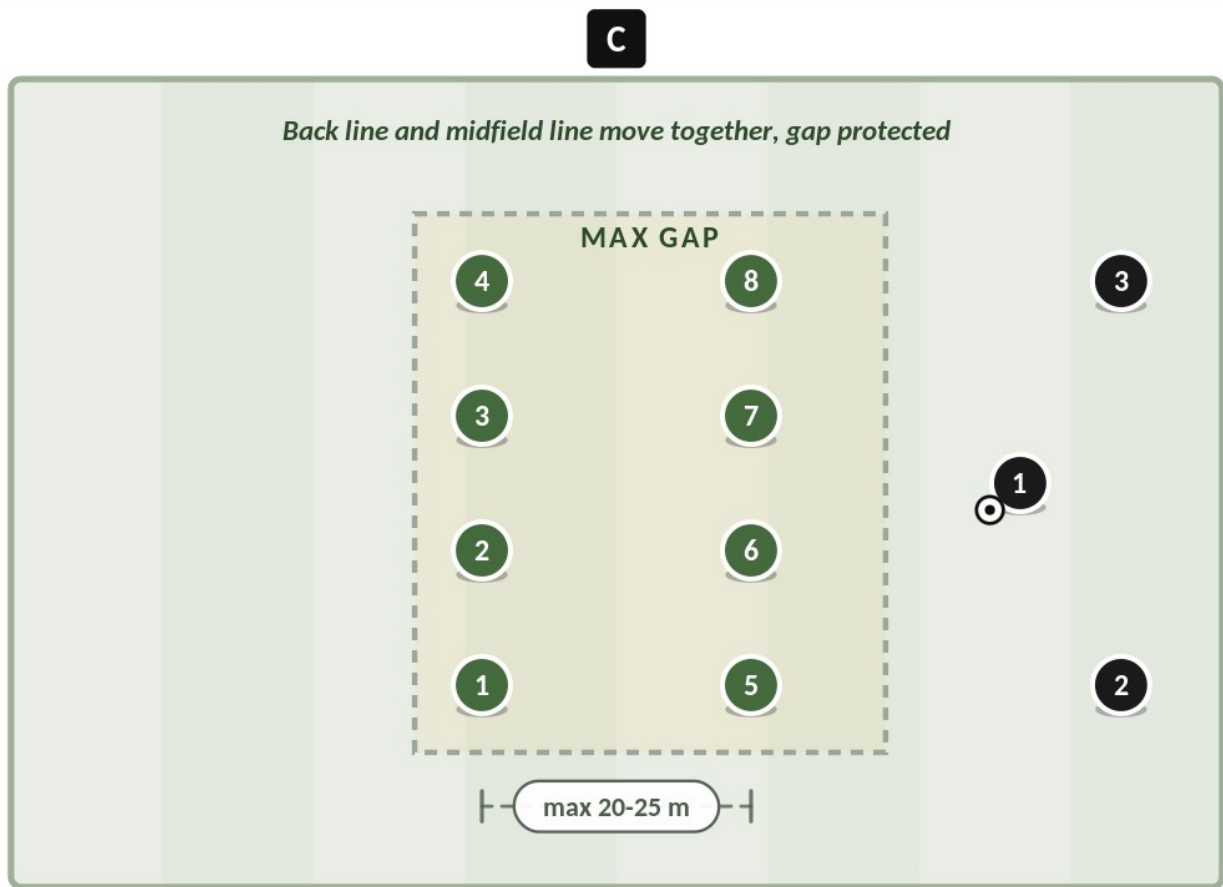
Success indicators:

- The marked corridor is breached noticeably less often in the second half of the practice than the first.
- Player-initiated "Squeeze" calls happen before the coach's whistle, not after.
- Both banks visibly move as connected units rather than as eight individuals.

Coach's eye: stand where you can see both banks and the gap between them at once — resist the temptation to focus on the ball or the attackers; this practice's whole value is in watching your own team's shape.

H3.2 THE COMPACT LINE — Managing the Gap

36 x 24 m • two banks of 4 hold a marked corridor • 15 minutes



Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Week 3 • 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 36x24 metre area with dimension labels. A shaded yellow corridor zone labelled 'MAX GAP' with a dimension arrow reading 'max 20-25 m'. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1-8 organised into two banks of four (a back line and a midfield line) inside the corridor. Three players in black bibs numbered 1-3 positioned as passive attackers. White football near a black player. Title: 'THE COMPACT LINE — Managing the Gap'. Subtitle: '36 x 24 m • two banks of 4 hold a marked corridor • 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 view of two clearly connected banks of green-bibbed players inside a marked corridor on a grass pitch, three black-bibbed players walking through the picture without live pressure, a coach standing behind the defending shape with a clear view of the gap between both lines, cones marking the corridor's depth.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. Eight players in dark green bibs organised into two clearly connected banks of four (a back line and a midfield line) inside a corridor marked by flat orange cones on a grass pitch. Three players in black bibs walking

through the picture at a controlled pace, without live pressure. A coach stands directly behind the defending shape, gesturing toward the gap between the two lines. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 3 — PRESS, COVER, BALANCE VS BUILD-UP (UNIT / TACTICAL PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Brings Tuesday's pressing shape and this evening's compactness together against a genuinely building opponent, directly recalling Week 1's "Build From the Restart" practice — this is the season's first phase-of-play practice that asks the defending team to apply everything taught so far against a live, thinking attacking picture rather than a passive or semi-passive one.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 34 m
- **Players:** 8+GK building vs 8 defending, rotating roles at the midpoint
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** the building team's goalkeeper restarts every sequence, as in Week 1; the defending team's goalkeeper organises the pressing and compactness picture
- **Team sizes:** 8+GK v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 10 flat markers, 4 cones
- **Starting positions:** building team in a back-four-plus-midfield shape as in Week 1; defending team organised in two banks, applying this week's compact-corridor idea
- **Ball supply:** goalkeeper restarts from hands or a goal kick
- **Restart location:** goal kick position
- **Coach position:** central, able to see both the defending shape and the building team's picture
- **Rotation method:** roles swap at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** building team always attacks the same direction

Practice walkthrough: The building team restarts as in Week 1's "Build From the Restart," splitting to create angles around the goalkeeper. This time, the defending team is live rather than passive: the first presser engages according to a genuine trigger (the goalkeeper's pass leaving their foot, or a defender receiving side-on rather than facing goal), the cover player fills in behind, the balance player and the rest of the team shift, and both defending banks hold the compact corridor from Practice 2. The building team's job is to find the picture that beats this — exactly the picture Week 1 taught them to look for, now met by real, organised resistance for the first time this season.

Rules: Pressers may engage as soon as the ball leaves the goalkeeper's hands or foot. A clean progression by the building team past the defending team's first line scores a point for the building team; a regain (organised or not, though the coach notes which) scores a point for the defending team.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every functional role from Weeks 1–3 is live simultaneously — first-line build-up player, central progression player, first presser, cover defender, balance player.
- *Unit:* both teams' units are tested against each other directly for the first time this season.
- *Team:* recognising, as a defending team, when the press is winning the picture and when it needs to reset into a deeper, more patient block instead.
- *Transition:* the building team's reaction to losing the ball in this zone, and the defending team's reaction to winning it, are both live and consequential.

Decision-making triggers:

- The goalkeeper's pass is under pressure or poorly weighted → this is the presser's trigger to engage immediately.
- The defending team's press is being played through repeatedly → this is the team's cue to drop the whole shape a few metres and defend a bit deeper, more patiently, rather than continuing to press from the same height.
- The building team finds their central progression player between the lines → the defending team's nearest cover player must react immediately, since this is the picture most likely to break the defending shape.

Communication language used: the full set — *Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze, Step, Cover, Travel* — used together for the first time this season.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Passing and receiving under genuine, live pressure — the technical demand of Weeks 1-2 now meets the defensive demand of Week 3 directly.
Tactical	Recognising when a pressing plan is working and when it needs to change — the team's first taste of in-the-moment tactical adjustment.
Physical	Repeated high-intensity actions for the defending team, controlled build-up movements for the building team — two different physical pictures inside one practice.
Psychological	Both teams under genuine pressure to execute what they've been taught, rather than in a low-jeopardy technical practice.
Communication & leadership	Both goalkeepers organising their respective pictures simultaneously — a genuinely demanding, realistic scenario.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What changed for the building team once the press became live rather than passive?
2. When did the defending team's press work best — and what triggered it?
3. What told the defending team it was time to drop off and defend deeper rather than continuing to press?
4. If the building team were set up in a back three tonight, how would the defending press need to adjust?
5. What is the relationship between this practice and everything trained across the first three weeks of the season?
6. Looking at both teams together, which picture — building out, or defending the press — do you think is currently stronger, and why?

Progressions:

1. Add a genuine consequence for the defending team failing to win the ball inside 20 seconds — they must reset into a deeper block, adding a live decision to the practice.
2. Reduce the building team's time on the ball before pressure must be applied.
3. Allow the defending team to choose, as a team, between pressing high and dropping into a mid-block from the start of each phase — the first explicit "press or delay" decision of the season.

Regressions:

1. Return the defending team to semi-passive pressure for a few repetitions to rebuild confidence before going fully live again.
2. Widen the practice area to ease the pressure on the building team.
3. Reduce the defending team to 6, giving the building team a numbers advantage while both pictures are consolidated.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Defending team presses with real intent but loses its compact corridor doing so	The two ideas (press and compactness) haven't yet been fully connected in players' minds	Press wins the ball but leaves large gaps a sharper build-up team would exploit	Stop	Short group intervention linking Practice 2's corridor directly to the pressing picture	Resume
Building team reverts to panicked long balls under live pressure	Genuine pressure is harder to solve calmly than passive pressure	Frequent long, aimless clearances rather than the patient picture from Week 1	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what did Week 1 teach you about this exact picture?"	Resume
Both teams' goalkeepers	Organisational voice	Noticeably less	Let it flow	Direct individual encouragement	Continue

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
stay quiet under the increased pressure of a live practice	is the first thing to go when concentration is taxed	communication than in Practice 2 or earlier sessions	with a drive-by call	to both goalkeepers	

Coach interventions used in this practice: a genuine mix of *short group intervention*, *questioning*, and *natural stoppages* — this is the most cognitively demanding practice of the week and warrants patient, careful coaching rather than being rushed.

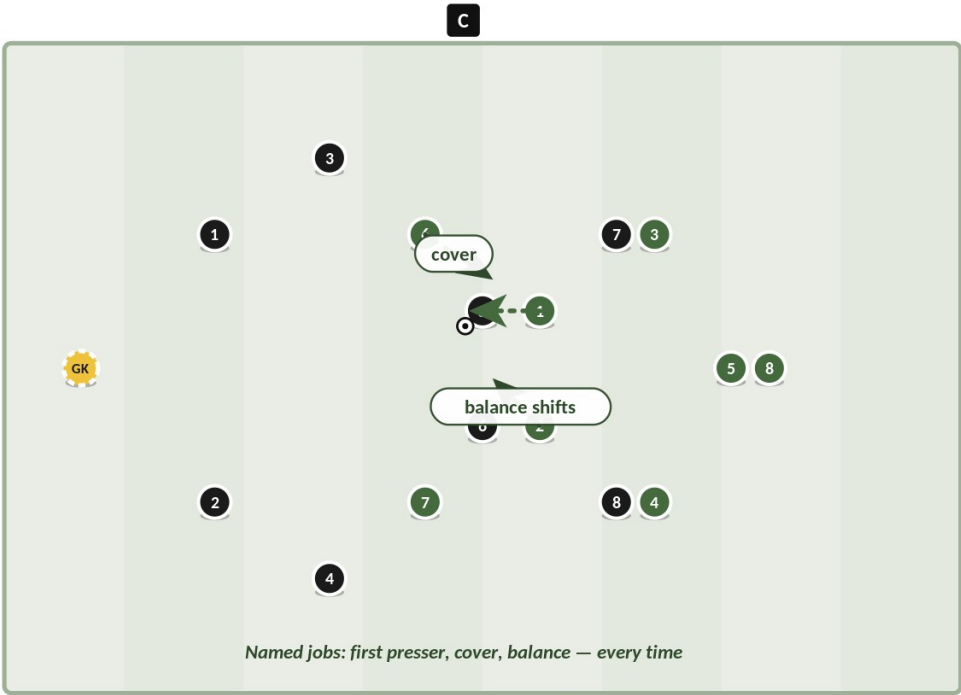
Success indicators:

- The defending team's press and its compact corridor are visibly connected rather than one undermining the other.
- The building team completes at least some clean progressions using Week 1's picture, even against live pressure.
- Both goalkeepers are heard organising their respective teams by the end of the practice.

Coach's eye: this practice rewards watching the whole picture rather than the ball — try, for a few phases at a time, to watch only the defending team's shape, then only the building team's picture, rather than following the ball throughout.

H3.3 PRESS, COVER, BALANCE vs BUILD-UP — Phase of Play

50 x 34 m · 8+GK building vs 8 organised defenders (press, cover, balance + compact lines) · 15 minutes



Building team

Goalkeeper

Defending team

Ball

First press

Cover / balance

Castlewellan Town FC · Senior Coaching Curriculum · Week 3 · 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 50x34 metre pitch with dimension labels. A goalkeeper in yellow positioned in the defensive third. Eight players in black bibs numbered 1–8 organised in a build-up shape (back line and dropping midfielder) around the goalkeeper. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 organised in a pressing shape with a short dotted red press arrow toward the ball, a green dashed arrow labelled 'cover', and a second green dashed arrow labelled 'balance shifts'. White football near a black player. Title: 'PRESS, COVER, BALANCE vs BUILD-UP — Phase of Play'. Subtitle: '50 x 34 m · 8+GK building vs 8 organised defenders (press, cover, balance + compact lines) · 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 phase-of-play practice, black-bibbed team building from their goalkeeper against an organised green-bibbed pressing shape, one green-bibbed player pressing the ball-carrier, another covering behind, the defending banks visibly connected and compact, both goalkeepers visible and vocal, coach positioned centrally taking in the whole picture.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): *"Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training — a phase-of-play practice. A team in black bibs building from their goalkeeper, splitting their back line to create passing angles. A team in dark green bibs organised in a connected, compact pressing shape, one player pressing the ball-carrier and a second covering the pass behind. Both goalkeepers, one in each colour, visibly engaged and calling out organisation. A coach stands centrally on the pitch, taking in the whole picture. Overcast evening light, realistic grass pitch 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 — COMPACT & CONFIDENT (SMALL-SIDED GAME)

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

Tactical purpose: Closes the week with a possession- and defending-balanced, confidence-building game rewarding organised regains, sending players into the weekend sharp, clear and ready to compete — the stated purpose of every Thursday session.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 34 x 22 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
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** fast, small-sided-game restarts
- **Coach position:** touchline, mobile
- **Rotation method:** none required
- **Direction of play:** standard

Practice walkthrough: A 7v7 game with a bonus: any regain judged organised (presser, cover, and at least one balance player identifiable) that leads to a goal within 15 seconds is worth two goals. Otherwise the game is played with minimal interruption, closing the week on high-volume, enjoyable, successful play.

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

Tactical roles: every principle and role named across the week is available; coaching focus is recognition and encouragement.

Decision-making triggers: as established across the week.

Communication language used: the full set introduced so far this season.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Composure in front of goal after winning the ball — converting a good defensive moment into a clean finish.
Tactical	Recognising and rewarding the week's principle in full flow.
Physical	The week's second-highest load, appropriately placed at the end.
Psychological	Finishing the week on a genuine high, heading into the weekend's next fixture.
Communication & leadership	Players organising and encouraging each other with reduced coach input.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What did this week's two ideas — pressing shape and compactness — have in common by the time you reached this final game?
2. Which of the week's calls (Step, Cover, Squeeze) did you hear used most naturally tonight?
3. How does it feel to win the ball as an organised team compared to winning it individually?
4. What is one thing from this week you want to see carried into Saturday's match?

- Looking back at Weeks 1 through 3 together, how does defending well set up everything the team has learned about attacking?

Progressions:

- Increase the bonus to triple for an organised regain finished with a first-time shot.
- Reduce the grid slightly to raise tempo for the closing minutes.
- Add a golden-goal condition in the final two minutes.

Regressions:

- Widen the grid for a gentler close to the week.
- Remove the bonus condition in the closing minutes for open, unconditioned play.
- Reduce to 5v5 if fatigue is visible.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Fatigue reducing defensive organisation in the final minutes	Three weeks of rising pre-season load now behind the group	Presses becoming individual and scrappy late in the practice	Let it flow	Light-touch encouragement only	Continue
Game becomes stretched and transitional	Natural end-of-session tempo rise	More end-to-end play, fewer sustained defensive sequences	Let it flow	None needed	Continue

Coach interventions used in this practice: minimal — encouragement and recognition of good examples.

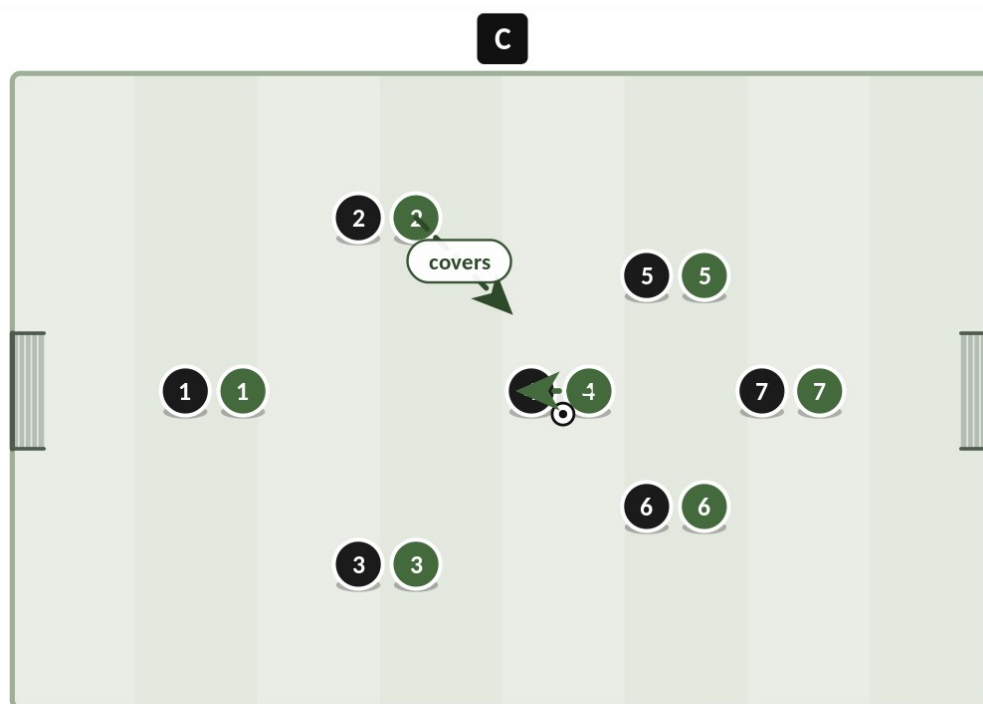
Success indicators:

- Multiple bonus goals scored from genuinely organised regains.
- High energy and communication maintained into the closing minutes.
- Visible enjoyment and organisation from the players themselves.

Coach's eye: as in Weeks 1 and 2, read the group's mood as closely as their shape.

H3.4 COMPACT & CONFIDENT — Confidence Game

34 x 22 m • 7v7 • bonus for a regain won with the defending shape intact • 17 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball → Press → Cover

Castlewellan Town FC • Senior Coaching Curriculum • Week 3 • 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 34x22 metre pitch with a goal at each end. Seven players in dark green bibs numbered 1–7 and six players in black bibs numbered 1–6 spread across the pitch. White football near a central green player. A short dotted red press arrow with a chevron arrowhead toward the ball, a green dashed arrow labelled 'covers'. Title: 'COMPACT & CONFIDENT — Confidence Game'. Subtitle: '34 x 22 m • 7v7 • bonus for a regain won with the defending shape intact • 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, a green-bibbed player winning the ball cleanly with a covering team-mate close behind, both goals visible with nets, players communicating with energy, coach on the touchline relaxed and pleased.

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 winning the ball cleanly from an opponent, a team-mate in dark green positioned close behind having covered the challenge. Warm, low evening sunlight, long shadows, genuine energy and communication among players. A coach in training kit stands relaxed on the touchline, visibly pleased. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

REFLECTION (FINAL 3–4 MINUTES, SEATED)

Seated as a group, captain(s) present.

Questions put to the group:

1. What is the difference between defending hard and defending well organised — and which did the team do more of tonight?

2. How does this week's principle connect to the standards the group set for itself in Week 1?

3. What do we want Saturday's match to show about how this team defends together?

Coach's closing input: name two or three specific, positive examples from across the week, and confirm what the group wants Saturday to show — a concrete, self-set expectation the following week's genuine match review can be measured against.

Match-Day Objectives — Week 3

Three team objectives:

1. No isolated presses — every pressing action has a visible covering player.
2. The gap between the back line and midfield line stays inside a coachable distance for sustained spells.
3. Regains inside the team's own half are converted into quick, purposeful attacks rather than aimless clearances.

Three unit objectives:

- *Defensive unit*: the back line moves as a connected unit with the line in front of it, not independently.
- *Midfield unit*: the nearest midfielder to the ball recognises the cover job immediately when a team-mate presses.
- *Attacking unit*: forward players understand their role as the first presser and apply patient jockeying rather than diving in.

Individual role reminders *(assign according to the shape the coach selects)*:

- First presser: force a direction, don't chase the ball — the team is coached to deal with what happens next.
- Cover defender: your position is defined by the presser's position, not fixed in advance.
- Balance player: stay connected to the shape even when the ball is far away.
- Goalkeeper: organise the shape in front of you — this is your job as much as shot-stopping.

Measurable performance indicators:

- Proportion of regains during Tuesday's Practice 3/4 judged "organised" versus "scrambled."
- Number of sustained periods the defending shape holds a coachable gap during Thursday's Practice 2.
- Squad's own account, given in the closing reflection, of what they want Saturday to show — recorded for the Week 5 review.

Formation Translation — Applying This Week Across Different Shapes

Principle: Pressure, cover, balance.

In a 4-4-2 mid-block: the first presser is usually a striker or a wide midfielder; the nearest central or wide midfielder provides cover; the back four plus the remaining midfielders balance across the pitch, shifting as a connected block.

In a 5-3-2 mid-block: a striker still presses first, but the cover job more often falls to one of the three central midfielders, and the extra central defender in the back five gives the balance picture a naturally deeper, wider foundation than a back four provides — there is more spare cover available before the shape is genuinely stretched.

What stays the same: the triangle itself, and the sequence — press, then cover, then balance — regardless of which shirt numbers are filling each role.

What changes: how much "spare" cover the shape naturally has (more in a back five than a back four), and which unit (midfield three versus midfield four) typically supplies the covering player.

What must not change: the discipline of never pressing without cover already moving into place — the single behaviour this week exists to install, in any formation.

Risk in each structure: a 4-4-2 with a disorganised midfield can leave the back four badly exposed, since there is less natural spare cover than a back five provides. A 5-3-2 that commits both wing-backs high risks a genuinely narrow, three-man defensive picture if the press is beaten centrally — a risk the team will examine directly when Phase 4 compares back-four and back-three structures properly (Week 21 onward).

Opposition influence: against a team that builds patiently and rarely rushes, pressing with real intent (as coached this week) is usually productive. Against a team that plays long and direct, the same principle applies to winning second balls rather than the first pass — a connection the team will make explicitly in Phase 5's work on defending direct play.

Coach Review — Week 3

(To be completed by the coach after both sessions have run, before Week 4 is delivered.)

- **Match result and performance (Route A/B/C applied):** record what actually happened in the pre-season friendly and which route was used to shape this week.
- **Attendance:** Tuesday ____ / Thursday ____.
- **Technical/tactical evidence:** how often was an organised (two-point) regain achieved by the end of Tuesday's Practice 3?
- **Compactness evidence:** how well did the team hold the marked corridor in Thursday's Practice 2 — first real data point for whether the principle is landing.
- **Communication evidence:** are Step, Cover and Squeeze being used accurately, and is the earlier language (Time, Turn, Hold, Drop) still present alongside them?
- **Physical observations:** any signs of accumulated fatigue across three weeks of rising pre-season load?
- **Leadership observations:** who is organising defensively, and is it the goalkeeper, a back-line player, or someone else?
- **Priority for Week 4:** based on the above, does Week 4 (transition to attack and transition to defence) need any adjustment to its planned emphasis?

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum, Week 3 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.