



Week 4 — Pre-Season Foundation

Tags: `pre-season` `transition` `counter-attack` `counter-press` `unit-work` `full-squad-practice` `conditioning`

Weekly Overview

FIELD	DETAIL
Week number	4 of 36
Season phase	1 — Pre-Season Foundation
Core principle	Recognise the picture before playing (transition to attack)
Secondary principle	The nearest players react first (transition to defence)
Previous match review focus	Apply the three routes below to whatever the second pre-season friendly actually showed.
Weekly tactical problem	Two mirror-image problems, coached on the same night: after winning the ball, players default either to panic (an immediate, hopeful ball forward regardless of the picture) or to over-caution (always resetting, even when the picture clearly says go); after losing the ball, reactions are slow and disorganised because no player has a clearly named job in the first two or three seconds. This week gives both moments a decision framework and a named first reaction.
Formation-neutral explanation	Neither transition depends on formation. Recognising the picture before playing is a decision process — space, pressure, opponent balance, numbers, match situation — available to any player in any shirt the moment they win the ball. Reacting first to a lost ball is about proximity to the ball and to the danger, not about which position is printed on the team sheet: whoever is nearest reacts first, whoever is next protects the centre, whoever is furthest recovers.
Example structural applications	In a 4-3-3: the front three are often best placed to counter-press immediately after losing the ball high up the pitch, because they are already closest to it; in a deeper turnover, the back four's nearest defender delays while full-backs and the holding midfielder protect the centre and recover. In a 3-5-2: with five in midfield, the team often has more bodies already close to a central turnover, which can make an organised counter-press easier to sustain — but a turnover in a wide areas leaves a back three more exposed to being turned than a back four's full-back would be, since there is no like-for-like deputy as readily available wide. The decision framework and the "nearest player reacts first" rule are identical in both; who is nearest, and how exposed the team is if the reaction fails, is not.

Match Review and Weekly Adjustment

Route A — Previous performance was strong. If the second friendly showed good signs, do not simply repeat what worked — raise this week's practices to their fuller progressions (introducing genuine time pressure and larger numbers) rather than starting at the simplest version, and name the specific transition moment that produced the good result so players understand exactly what to protect.

Route B — Previous performance exposed a tactical weakness. If the friendly showed exactly this week's problem — panicked forward balls after a regain, or a slow, disorganised reaction after losing the ball — say so plainly at the start of Tuesday's session. This week's content is the direct answer; make the link explicit rather than leaving players to infer it.

Route C — Attendance, facilities or player availability are disrupted. Protect the core decision framework (the three-way choice: go, find the free player, or secure) even if numbers force smaller versions of every practice below — this is a decision-making principle, not a numbers-dependent one, and it survives scaling down better than most.

Tuesday — Session 7

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	7 of 72
Week	4
Season phase	1 — Pre-Season Foundation
Training day	Tuesday
Session theme	Transition to attack: first picture
Short summary	Teaches players to read the picture after winning the ball — space, pressure, opponent balance — and choose between going immediately, finding the free player, or securing possession, rather than defaulting to any one of the three automatically.
Tags	`transition` `counter-attack` `conditioning` `decision-making`
Primary learning objective	Players correctly identify whether a regain calls for an immediate attack, a pass to a free player, or a secured reset.
Secondary learning objective	Players avoid the two failure modes — panicked forward play and over-cautious resetting — with equal discipline.
Match connection	Directly addresses the Match Review focus above and the identity statement that "not every regain requires an immediate forward pass."
Expected tactical outcome	Fewer aimless, hopeful forward balls immediately after a regain — this week's named match-day connection.
Expected physical load	Moderate-high, building the squad's tolerance to repeated sprint efforts — transition moments are short, explosive, and repeated.
Recommended intensity	7-8 / 10 in bursts.
Equipment list	20 footballs · 28 flat markers · 20 cones (orange, for gates) · 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 they are coached as a genuine "secure" option — a goalkeeper who can be found under no pressure whenever the picture says reset rather than go.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 50 x 36 m (Practice 4).
Area layout	A gated grid for Practice 2, widening through Practices 3 and 4.
Contingency — lower attendance (10-13)	Practice 2 reduces to 3v3 + 2 gates; Practice 3 becomes 4v4; Practice 4 becomes 6v6.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 2 can run as two parallel grids; Practice 4 can extend to 9v9.
Contingency — restricted space	Compress all grids proportionally; the decision framework survives smaller spaces well, since it depends on reading a picture, not on distance covered.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:10	10 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>Scan & Go</i>	Light green
0:10–0:25	15 min	Technical practice — <i>Picture Check</i>	Club green
0:25–0:27	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:27–0:42	15 min	Skill game — <i>Transition or Reset</i>	Dark green
0:42–0:44	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:44–0:59	15 min	Conditioned match — <i>Read the Regain</i>	Black
0:59–1:00	1 min	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — SCAN & GO (ARRIVAL)

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

Tactical purpose: Raises heart rate through repeated short sprint efforts — this week's physical theme — while giving players an early, simple taste of a decision-then-react sequence.

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-called sprint reps, then paired work: one player rolls the ball to a gap on either side of their partner, who must scan (check which side is genuinely open) before accelerating onto it — a simple physical rehearsal of "read before you react."

Rules: No committing to a direction before the ball is released.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* first touch out of the feet in the direction already scanned.
- *Physical:* genuine maximal accelerations over short distances, with full recovery between reps.
- *Psychological:* a split-second of information-gathering before committing, even under time pressure.

PRACTICE 2 — PICTURE CHECK (TECHNICAL PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Makes the decision framework concrete and visible: four marked gates around a small grid, one deliberately left open at any moment. On winning the ball, the team must scan for the open gate — if one exists, go immediately; if none is open, the team must secure possession with three passes before another attempt is allowed. This turns an abstract decision rule into something players can see and feel.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 26 x 18 m
- **Players:** 8 outfield (4 v 4)
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through
- **Team sizes:** 4 v 4
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 4 gates (2 cones each, 8 total), 2 footballs
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** spare ball with the coach
- **Restart:** nearest player restarts any stoppage
- **Coach position:** grid edge, controlling which gate is "open" by standing near the others (a simple, visible way of closing three gates and leaving one genuinely clear)
- **Rotation method:** possession swaps naturally on a turnover
- **Direction of play:** none fixed — any of the four gates may be the open one at a given moment

Practice walkthrough: Four gates are marked around the grid's perimeter. At any moment, the coach positions themselves (or a marker) near three of the four gates, signalling they are "guarded"; the fourth is open. Whichever team wins or holds possession must scan for the open gate: if their dribble or pass can reach it cleanly, they should go immediately and are rewarded; if not — because the open gate has just changed, or the picture doesn't support it — the team must instead complete three passes before attempting to exploit any gate. The coach changes which gate is open every 30–45 seconds, unpredictably, forcing continuous scanning rather than memorised patterns.

Rules: A successful dribble or pass through the open gate scores a point. Any attempt on a guarded gate is turned over to the other team immediately, a deliberately sharp consequence for not reading the picture. Three completed passes "unlock" a fresh attempt if the picture wasn't there immediately.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every player is simultaneously a scanner and a potential exploiter of the open picture.
- *Unit:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Team:* the whole four-player group must agree, effectively instantly, on whether the picture is open or not — there is no time for a discussion.
- *Transition:* this practice is transition in its purest, most repeated form — every turnover is a fresh decision point.

Decision-making triggers:

- A gate is visibly unguarded → go immediately, directly, without checking with a team-mate first.
- No gate is clearly open → secure possession; three real passes, not delaying passes disguised as security.
- The open gate changes mid-possession → recognise the change and adjust the target rather than committing to a plan that's no longer valid.

Communication language used: *Time* (used here to mean "no gate is open, we have time to build"), *Travel* (carrying the ball directly at an open gate).

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Quick, positive first touch when the picture says go — hesitation costs the window.
Tactical	Scanning speed and accuracy — the entire practice is built around how quickly and correctly players read the picture.
Physical	Explosive, repeated actions the moment a gate opens — a genuine transition-specific physical stimulus.
Psychological	Discipline to secure rather than force an attempt when the picture isn't there — resisting the temptation to guess.
Communication & leadership	A shared, near-instant team read of the picture, without time for verbal discussion.

Guided discovery questions:

1. How did you know which gate was open without being told directly?
2. What happened on the attempts where the picture changed mid-action?
3. Why might a coach punish a wrong attempt more heavily than rewarding a correct one?
4. How does "three passes to unlock" change the value of patience compared to always trying immediately?
5. How would this same decision look in a real match — what's the equivalent of an "open gate"?
6. What is the risk of a team that always tries the same gate out of habit rather than reading the picture fresh each time?

Progressions:

1. Open two gates simultaneously but only briefly, raising the scanning demand.
2. Reduce the grid size, compressing decision time.
3. Add a defender whose sole job is disguising which gate is truly open, adding deception to the picture.

Regressions:

1. Announce the open gate verbally for the first few minutes before requiring visual scanning alone.
2. Enlarge the grid for more thinking time.
3. Reduce to 3v3, easing the picture's complexity.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players attempt a gate out of habit rather than reading it fresh	Old patterns are strong even in a new practice	Repeated attempts on a gate that has just closed	Let it flow with a drive-by call	"Check again — has it changed?"	Continue
Team hesitates even when a gate is clearly open	Fear of the turnover penalty overcorrecting into excessive caution	Genuine opportunities missed, ball recycled unnecessarily	Stop	Short group intervention: "an open picture is there to be used, not just seen"	Resume
"Securing" passes are slow and aimless rather than purposeful	Treating the three-pass rule as a delay tactic rather than genuine ball retention with purpose	Passes go backward repeatedly with no attempt to improve the picture	Let it flow, then natural stoppage	Question: "what should those three passes be trying to achieve?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: mostly *drive-by coaching* and *questioning*; the practice's pace does most of the teaching, so avoid over-stopping it.

Success indicators:

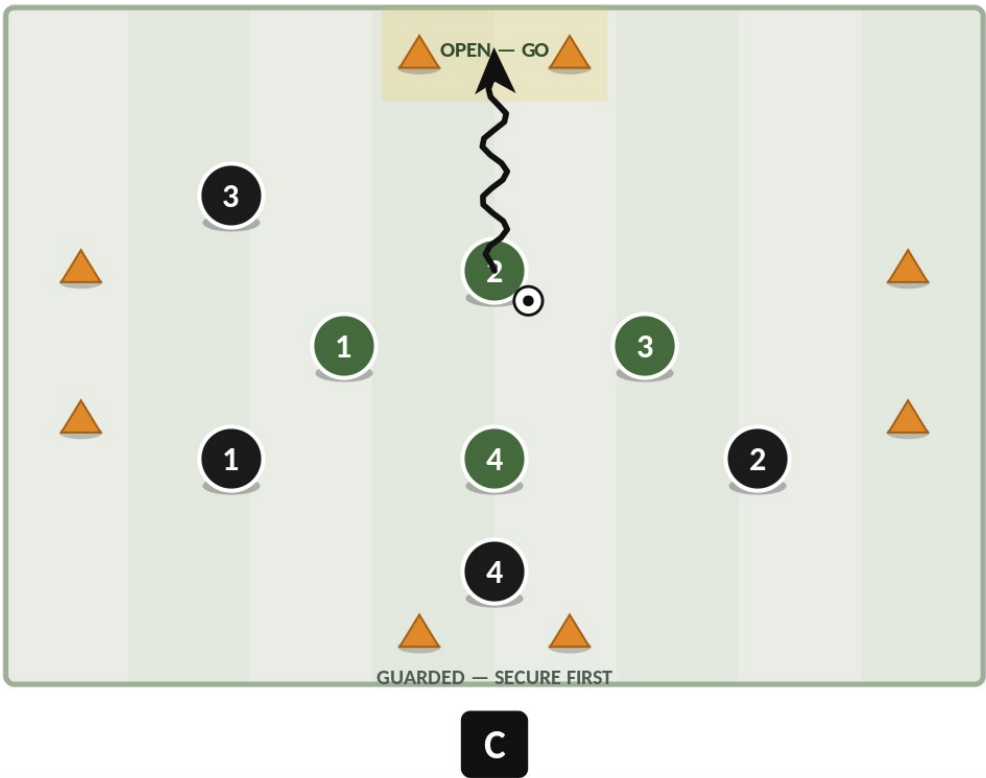
- The proportion of successful gate attempts rises across the practice.

- Turnovers from wrongly-read attempts decrease in the second half.
- The three-pass "secure" sequences look purposeful rather than aimless.

Coach's eye: watch the half-second between winning the ball and the first action — that gap is where the picture is actually read, and it should visibly shrink as players get quicker at scanning across the practice.

T4.2 PICTURE CHECK — Read Before You Play

26 x 18 m • 4v4 + 4 gates • open gate = go, guarded gate = secure • 15 minutes



- Team in possession
- Opposition
- Ball
- Counter through open gate
- Open gate (unguarded)

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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 26x18 metre grid with dimension labels and four gates (pairs of orange cones) marked at the top, bottom, left and right edges. The top gate is highlighted with light yellow shading and labelled 'OPEN — GO'; the bottom gate is labelled 'GUARDED — SECURE FIRST'. Four players in dark green bibs numbered 1–4 and four players in black bibs numbered 1–4 spread across the grid. A white football near a green player. A wavy dribble line with a solid arrowhead travelling from the ball toward the open top gate. Small dark coach icon below the grid. Title: 'PICTURE CHECK — Read Before You Play'. Subtitle: '26 x 18 m • 4v4 + 4 gates • open gate = go, guarded gate = secure • 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 small grid marked with cone gates on all four sides, a green-bibbed player driving forward with the ball toward an unguarded gate at the top of the grid, black-bibbed opponents positioned near the other three gates, coach at the grid's edge standing near the guarded gates, visibly controlling the picture.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): *"Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training in a small grid marked with cone gates on all four sides of a grass pitch. A player in a dark green bib driving forward confidently with the ball toward an unguarded gate at one end of the grid. Players in black bibs positioned near the other three gates. A coach standing near the guarded gates at the edge of the grid, one arm extended, controlling which gate is open. 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 — TRANSITION OR RESET (SKILL GAME)

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

Tactical purpose: Moves the same decision into a genuine small-sided game with a goal, and adds a sharp consequence for choosing badly in both directions — forcing the issue when it isn't there, and failing to take it when it is.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 32 x 20 m
- **Players:** 12 outfield, rotating
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through
- **Team sizes:** 6 v 6
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 mini goals, 6 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
- **Rotation method:** none required at this scale
- **Direction of play:** both directions, two goals

Practice walkthrough: A 6v6 game with two conditions layered on top of normal play. A goal scored within six seconds of winning the ball is worth double, rewarding a correctly read, immediately exploited picture. Conversely, if a team loses the ball again within five seconds of winning it — evidence of a forced, low-percentage attempt — the opponent's next goal (if it comes within the following 15 seconds) is also worth double, a deliberately sharp consequence for choosing to force the picture when it wasn't there.

Rules: As above; otherwise standard small-sided-game rules.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every player must weigh the same decision the moment possession changes.
- *Unit:* the team's shape immediately after a regain should reflect its decision — spread and advancing if going, compact and patient if securing.
- *Team:* recognising the aggregate picture (numbers, space, opponent balance), not just an individual's immediate view of it.
- *Transition:* both directions of transition are live and consequential in this practice simultaneously — a first in the season.

Decision-making triggers:

- The regain happens with the opponent still advanced and unbalanced → the picture strongly favours going immediately.
- The regain happens in a crowded, central area with the opponent already goal-side → this is a securing picture, not a going one.
- A rushed attempt has just failed → the whole team must recognise the heightened danger and react with urgency, not calm — the double-bonus consequence makes this concrete.

Communication language used: *Time, Travel, Squeeze* — used across both transition directions in the same practice.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Composure and accuracy on the immediate pass or shot when the picture is genuinely open.
Tactical	Weighing risk and reward in real time — the core skill this whole week is built around.

CORNER	POINT
Physical	Explosive actions immediately after both winning and losing the ball.
Psychological	Handling the pressure of a live, consequential decision rather than a low-jeopardy technical picture.
Communication & leadership	Organising the team's shape instantly according to the decision just made, without a verbal briefing.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What did your best "double" goal have in common with your worst forced attempt?
2. How did the five-second turnover penalty change your team's appetite for forcing a low-percentage attempt?
3. What is the cost, over a whole match, of a team that always tries to go immediately regardless of the picture?
4. What is the cost of a team that never does?
5. How does this decision change depending on the scoreline or the time remaining in a real match — even though this practice doesn't include either yet?
6. Looking back at Practice 2, how did the gated version prepare you for this less structured version?

Progressions:

1. Reduce the double-bonus window from six seconds to four, sharpening the tempo demand.
2. Add a genuine offside line.
3. Introduce a scoreline (e.g., start the practice "2-1 down") to add a light match-state layer, foreshadowing Phase 5.

Regressions:

1. Extend the bonus window to eight seconds.
2. Remove the turnover-penalty condition while the "go" decision is being learned, adding it back once that's secure.
3. Reduce to 4v4 for more individual involvement and thinking time.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Team forces the ball forward regardless of picture, chasing the bonus	The reward is more visible than the risk in the moment	Repeated rushed attempts followed immediately by turnovers	Stop	Short group intervention: "the bonus only pays off if the picture is really there"	Resume
Team becomes overly cautious after being punished once by the turnover penalty	A single bad experience overcorrects behaviour	No attempts at the double bonus at all, even when clearly available	Let it flow, then natural stoppage	Question: "was that a missed opportunity just now?"	Resume
Shape after a decision doesn't match the decision made	The decision and the physical response to it aren't yet connected	Team decides to secure but several players still push forward as if going	Stop	Short group intervention connecting the decision to the required shape	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *short group intervention* and *questioning*, since both failure modes (forcing and over-caution) need addressing individually as they appear.

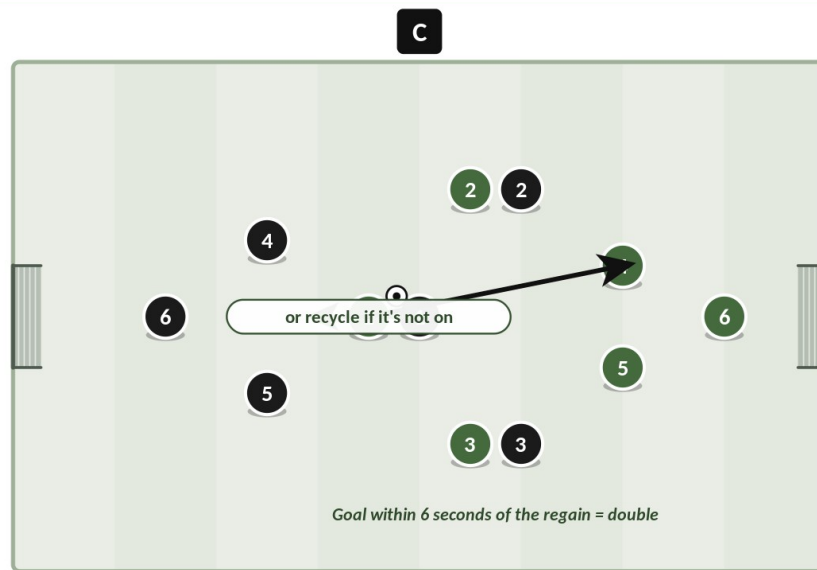
Success indicators:

- Double-bonus goals are achieved through genuinely open pictures, not forced ones.
- The turnover-penalty condition is triggered less often as the practice progresses.
- Team shape visibly reflects the decision made after each regain.

Coach's eye: watch for the *second* action after a regain, not just the first — a good first read followed by a poor supporting shape is still an incomplete picture.

T4.3 TRANSITION OR RESET — Small-Sided Game

32 x 20 m • 6v6 • goal inside 6s of a regain = double; lose it again inside 5s = opponent bonus • 15 minutes



● Team in possession ● Opposition ● Ball ➔ Counter route ➔ Recycle to reset

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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 32x20 metre pitch with a small 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. White football near a green player. A thick black solid arrow showing a direct progression pass toward goal, labelled via subtitle text. A green dashed arrow labelled 'or recycle if it's not on' showing a backward pass option. Text near the bottom reading 'Goal within 6 seconds of the regain = double'. Title: 'TRANSITION OR RESET — Small-Sided Game'. Subtitle: '32 x 20 m • 6v6 • goal inside 6s of a regain = double; lose it again inside 5s = opponent bonus • 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 game, a green-bibbed player who has just won the ball driving forward at pace into open space with team-mates supporting the counter, black-bibbed opponents scrambling to recover, both mini goals visible, coach on the touchline animated, mid-call.

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 who has just won the ball driving forward at speed into open space, two team-mates in dark green supporting the counter-attack at good angles. Players in black bibs scrambling to recover goal-side, clearly disorganised. A coach on the touchline, animated, mid-call with one arm extended forward. Late-afternoon 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 — READ THE REGAIN (CONDITIONED MATCH)

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

Tactical purpose: Confirms the week's principle at full match scale, without the artificial gates or bonus windows of the earlier practices — simply a conditioned match in which the coach's attention, and the guided discovery questions, are entirely focused on the quality of decision-making after every single regain.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 36 m (half pitch)
- **Players:** 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers play their own-goal role, explicitly available as the "secure" option whenever the picture calls for it
- **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 straightforward conditioned match. No artificial scoring bonus this time — the coaching content is entirely observational and verbal, built around a single, repeated question asked in the moment or at natural stoppages: "was that the right decision for the picture in front of you?" This is deliberately the week's least gimmicked practice, testing whether the decision-making trained in Practices 2 and 3 survives without the structure that taught it.

Rules: Standard conditioned-match rules.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every player applies the week's decision framework without any external prompt or reward system.
- *Unit:* units organise their shape according to the team's collective read of each picture.
- *Team:* the whole team's coordinated response to each regain — the ultimate test of whether this week's idea has become a shared team habit rather than an individual skill.
- *Transition:* both directions of transition are live throughout, exactly as they will be in a real match.

Decision-making triggers: as established across the week — this practice adds no new ones, deliberately.

Communication language used: the full season's language so far, used without prompting.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Execution quality under full match conditions and fatigue.
Tactical	Decision-making without artificial structure — the week's true test.
Physical	The week's peak physical demand, appropriately placed last.
Psychological	Trusting the training rather than reverting to old habits under match-realistic pressure.
Communication & leadership	Players talking each other through the decision in real time — "go" or "hold" called aloud by whoever reads the picture fastest.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Pick one regain from this practice — was it read correctly, and how do you know?
2. What is different about making this decision without the gates or bonuses that shaped the earlier practices?
3. How did fatigue affect the quality of decision-making in the second half of the practice?
4. If you were down a goal with ten minutes left in a real match, how might this decision change — even though we haven't trained that scenario yet?
5. What did the team do well this week that you want to see carried into Saturday?
6. Looking back across all four weeks so far, how does this week's principle depend on Week 3's (pressure, cover, balance)?

Progressions:

1. Introduce a genuine offside line.
2. Reduce numbers to 7v7 to increase individual decision frequency.
3. Add a light match-state condition (e.g., "the last ten minutes, protect a one-goal lead") as an early, informal preview of Phase 5.

Regressions:

1. Reintroduce the double-bonus condition from Practice 3 if decision-making has visibly regressed without it.
2. Reduce to 6v6 on a smaller area.
3. Allow the coach to ask the "right decision?" question more frequently as an ongoing teaching aid.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Decision-making regresses once the structure (gates, bonuses) is removed	The habit isn't yet fully internalised, only practised under artificial support	Old patterns — panic or over-caution — reappear	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what would Practice 2's gate have told you just then?"	Resume
Fatigue-driven poor decisions late in the practice	Genuine tiredness affecting scanning speed and judgement	Rushed or overly cautious choices increasing in the final five minutes	Let it flow	Light-touch encouragement — expected at this stage of pre-season	Continue
Players wait for the coach to judge every decision rather than trusting themselves	Early in the process of internalising a new framework	Frequent glances toward the touchline after a regain	Let it flow with a drive-by call	Step back, go quiet, let the team self-correct	Continue

Coach interventions used in this practice: primarily *questioning* at natural stoppages, with deliberately reduced live coaching to test whether the week's learning holds without support.

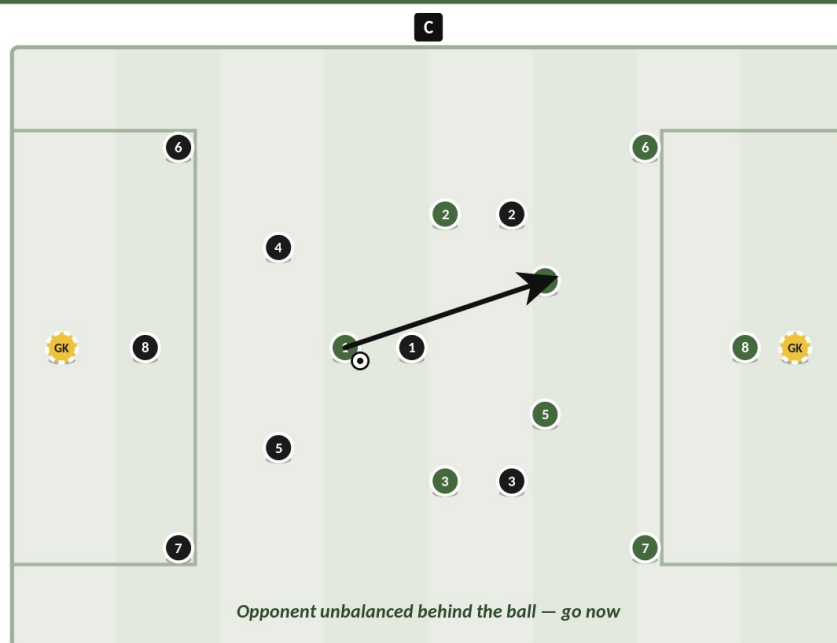
Success indicators:

- Fewer aimless, hopeful forward balls immediately after a regain than in Week 3's equivalent practice — the week's named match-day connection, made observable here.
- Players can justify their own decisions when asked, even under fatigue.
- The team's shape after a regain visibly matches the decision made, without prompting.

Coach's eye: this is the practice to judge the whole week by — everything in Practices 2 and 3 was built to produce exactly this behaviour without artificial support.

T4.4 READ THE REGAIN — Conditioned Match

50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • every regain is a decision: go, find the free player, or secure • 15 minutes



● Team in possession ● Opposition ● Goalkeeper ● Ball ➔ Progression after regain

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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 match shape, the black team visibly disorganised and stretched on one side. White football near an advanced green player. Thick black solid arrow showing a progression pass into space behind the disorganised black team. Title: 'READ THE REGAIN — Conditioned Match'. Subtitle: '50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • every regain is a decision: go, find the free player, or secure • 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 having just won the ball and immediately releasing a forward pass into space behind a visibly disorganised black-bibbed opponent, goalkeepers in yellow at each end, coach on the touchline near halfway observing closely without shouting instructions.

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, having just won the ball, releasing an immediate forward pass into open space behind a visibly stretched and disorganised group of black-bibbed opponents. A coach stands near the halfway line on the touchline, arms crossed, observing quietly and closely rather than shouting instructions. 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: "What's the difference between a brave decision and a reckless one, straight after winning the ball back?"

Thursday — Session 8

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	8 of 72
Week	4
Season phase	1 — Pre-Season Foundation
Training day	Thursday
Session theme	Transition to defence: first reaction
Short summary	Names the specific jobs of the player who loses the ball and the players nearest them, then extends into the team-wide decision between counter-pressing immediately and dropping to recover — the defensive mirror of Tuesday's session.
Tags	`transition` `counter-press` `unit-work` `set-pieces` `full-squad-practice`
Primary learning objective	The player who loses the ball and the two nearest team-mates react correctly and immediately, with named jobs.
Secondary learning objective	The team makes a collective, not individual, decision between counter-pressing and recovering.
Match connection	A faster, better-organised reaction in the seconds after losing the ball — directly protecting against the exact moment most amateur goals are conceded.
Expected tactical outcome	The three nearest players to a lost ball react inside one or two seconds, with visibly different jobs from each other.
Expected physical load	Moderate — lower than Tuesday, though the practices are physically sharp in short bursts.
Recommended intensity	6.5–7.5 / 10, in short, repeated efforts.
Equipment list	16 footballs · 24 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 includes the defending goalkeeper as the organiser of whether the team counter-presses or drops.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 44 x 30 m (Practice 3).
Area layout	A small grid for Practices 1–2, widening for Practice 3.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 3 reduces to 6v6; Practice 4 becomes 5v5.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 3 can extend to 9v9 or 10v10.
Contingency — restricted space	Compress proportionally; this week's ideas are about reaction speed and role clarity, both of which transfer well to smaller spaces.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:08	8 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>React</i>	Light green
0:08–0:23	15 min	Technical / unit practice —	Club green

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
		<i>The First Three</i>	
0:23–0:25	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:25–0:40	15 min	Unit / tactical practice — <i>Counter-Press or Recover</i>	Dark green
0:40–0:42	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:42–0:59	17 min	Small-sided game — <i>First Reaction</i>	Black
0:59–1:00	1 min → extended below	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — REACT (ARRIVAL)

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

Tactical purpose: A shorter, sharper Thursday warm-up built entirely around reaction speed — the physical and mental theme of the evening.

Organisation: 16 x 12 m grid, one ball per player for three minutes, pairs for five. No goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join fully.

Walkthrough: Individual ball work, then a paired reaction game: one player releases the ball in any direction without warning, the other must react immediately to win it back before it exits a marked small zone.

Rules: No anticipating the release — hands behind the back (or an equivalent neutral starting position) until the ball moves.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* first step quality — a fast first step matters more than raw sprint speed here.
- *Physical:* genuine reactive speed, not anticipated speed.

PRACTICE 2 — THE FIRST THREE (TECHNICAL / UNIT PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Gives the moment a team loses the ball a clear, rehearsed structure: the player who lost it has one job (delay, not a tackle), the two nearest team-mates have a second job (close the central passing lane), and everyone else has a third (recover goal-side). This is the season's first explicit naming of these three distinct jobs.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 30 x 20 m
- **Players:** 6 outfield "our team" + 1 opponent with the ball, rotating
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through
- **Team sizes:** 6 (reacting) v 1 (in possession), building to a fuller picture
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 6 flat markers, 2 footballs
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram — one player starts "in possession" having just taken the ball from a team-mate (simulating the moment of loss)
- **Ball supply:** spare ball with the coach
- **Restart:** coach feeds a new "loss" scenario every 30–45 seconds
- **Coach position:** central, able to see all six reacting players
- **Rotation method:** the player who "loses" the ball rotates every repetition
- **Direction of play:** the single attacker attacks a target line or small goal

Practice walkthrough: The coach stages the moment of loss repeatedly: a nominated player has the ball taken from them (lightly, by a team-mate acting as the instant opponent), and the remaining six players must react immediately according to three named jobs. The player who lost the ball delays — jockeying, not tackling — buying a second or two. The two nearest players close the central passing lane rather than chasing the ball directly. Everyone else sprints to recover into a position goal-side of the ball. The coach calls out which job each player should currently hold for the first few repetitions, then withdraws the prompts once the roles are being read correctly without help.

Rules: The player who lost the ball may not attempt a tackle for the first two seconds — delay only. The "attacker" scores by reaching a marked line or small goal within eight seconds of winning the ball; the defending group scores by preventing this.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* three distinct, named jobs — delayer, lane-closer, recoverer — assigned by proximity to the ball at the moment of loss, not by position on the team sheet.
- *Unit:* the two lane-closers function as a mini-unit, coordinating which passing lane each protects.
- *Team:* the recovering players' job is to reform the team's defensive shape, connecting this practice directly to Week 3's compactness and pressure-cover-balance work.
- *Transition:* this practice is the transition-to-defence half of this week's mirrored idea, in its most explicit, rehearsed form.

Decision-making triggers:

- I am the player who just lost the ball → delay, don't dive in.
- I am one of the two nearest players → close the central lane, don't chase the ball itself.
- I am further away → sprint to recover goal-side, don't jog.

Communication language used: *Delay* (first formal use this season — the player who lost the ball calling their own role aloud), *Squeeze* (the recovering players compressing back into shape).

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Jockeying technique for the delaying player — patience under real pressure to react.
Tactical	Correct job identification by proximity, applied instantly and without discussion.
Physical	Explosive first-step reactions, repeated at high frequency.
Psychological	Resisting the instinct to chase the ball individually — the delaying player's hardest psychological task.
Communication & leadership	The delaying player calling "Delay!" aloud, both to remind themselves and to inform team-mates of the picture.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What happened on the repetitions where the player who lost the ball tried to win it back immediately instead of delaying?
2. How did the two lane-closers decide which passing lane each of them was responsible for?
3. What told the recovering players where "goal-side" actually was in each repetition?
4. Why might a coach insist on naming three separate jobs rather than just saying "everybody get back"?
5. How does this connect to Week 3's pressure-cover-balance principle — are they the same idea or different ones?
6. What would change about this picture if the ball were lost in the attacking third rather than a central area?

Progressions:

1. Add a second attacker, testing whether the lane-closing job holds against a passing option, not just a dribbler.
2. Reduce the eight-second scoring window, raising urgency.
3. Move the practice into the attacking third, testing the same jobs under higher-stakes positioning.

Regressions:

1. Extend the scoring window to twelve seconds.
2. Allow the coach to call out each player's job for longer before withdrawing prompts.
3. Reduce to five reacting players against the single attacker.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The player who lost the ball immediately tries to win it back rather than delaying	Strong, old instinct to fix your own mistake immediately	Tackles attempted inside the two-second delay window	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: replay the moment, walk through the delay	Resume
Both lane-closers protect the same passing lane, leaving the other open	No coordination between the two players	One lane clearly undefended while both defenders occupy the same space	Stop	Short group intervention: assign lanes explicitly once, then withdraw the assignment	Resume
Recovering players jog rather than sprint	Underestimating the urgency of the moment	Visibly unhurried recovery runs	Let it flow with a drive-by call	"That's a sprint, not a jog — the picture needs you now"	Continue

Coach interventions used in this practice: a genuine mix of *freeze-and-correct* (early, to establish the three jobs) and *drive-by coaching* once the picture is understood.

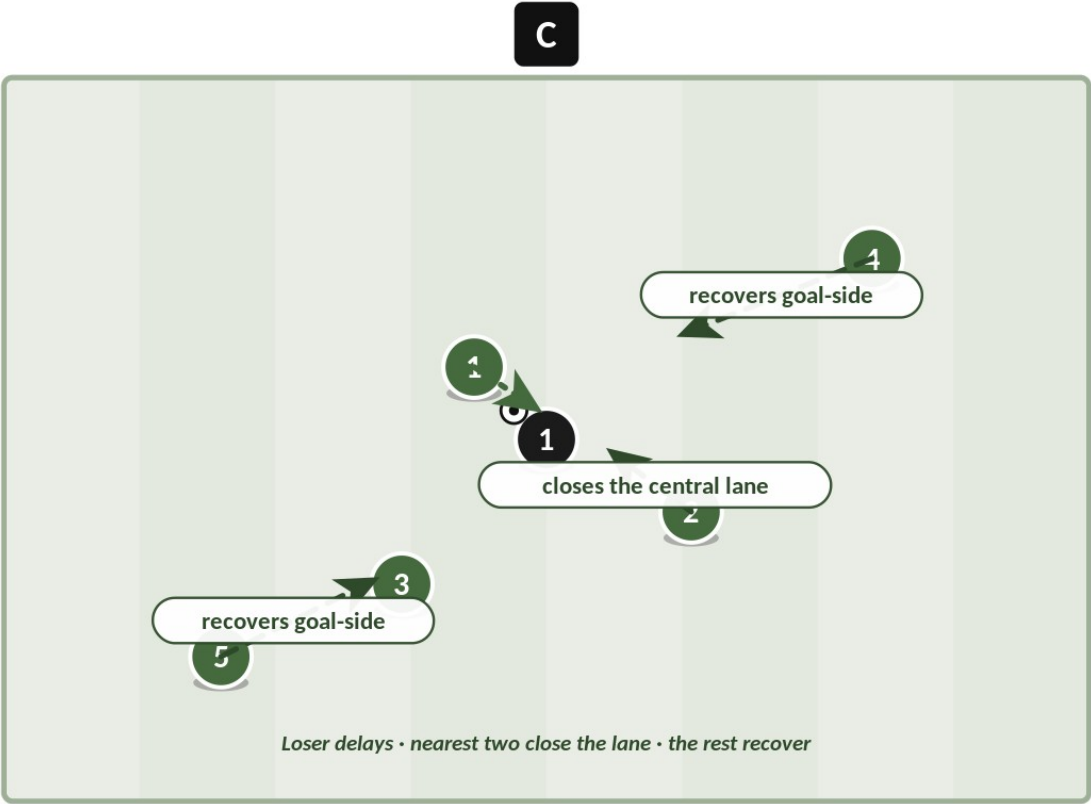
Success indicators:

- The delaying player consistently avoids tackling inside the two-second window.
- The two lane-closers protect different passing lanes without being told.
- Recovery runs are visibly sprinted, not jogged.

Coach's eye: watch all three jobs simultaneously if you can — this practice's whole value is in the coordination between them, not any single player's individual performance.

H4.2 THE FIRST THREE — Reacting to a Lost Ball

30 x 20 m • named jobs for the player who loses it + nearest two • 15 minutes



- Our team (reacting)
- Opposition (in possession)
- ⦿ Ball
- ➡ Delay (not a tackle)
- ➡ Recover goal-side

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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 grid with dimension labels. One player in black bibs numbered 1 with a white football positioned centrally. Five players in dark green bibs numbered 1-5: one directly engaging the ball shown with a short dotted red press arrow labelled implicitly as delay, two shown with green dashed arrows labelled 'closes the central lane', and two more shown with longer green dashed arrows labelled 'recovers goal-side'. Small dark coach icon below the grid. Title: 'THE FIRST THREE — Reacting to a Lost Ball'. Subtitle: '30 x 20 m • named jobs for the player who loses it + nearest two • 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 marked grid, a black- bibbed player in possession, a green-bibbed player jockeying patiently rather than tackling, two more green-bibbed players closing passing lanes centrally, two further green-bibbed players sprinting to recover into deeper positions, coach central, observing all three reactions at once.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training on a marked grid. A player in a black bib in possession of the ball. A player in a dark green bib in a patient, side-on jockeying stance rather than diving into a tackle. Two more players in dark green bibs positioned

centrally, closing off passing lanes. Two further players in dark green bibs sprinting at full effort to recover into deeper positions. A coach standing centrally, watching all three reactions at once. 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 — COUNTER-PRESS OR RECOVER (UNIT / TACTICAL PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Scales "The First Three" up to a genuine team decision: does the whole team commit to winning the ball back inside a short window (a counter-press), or does it drop and reorganise into the compact, connected shape from Week 3? This is explicitly taught as a collective decision, never a mix of one player pressing alone while the rest retreat — the exact failure mode the Season Architecture identifies as most damaging.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 44 x 30 m
- **Players:** 8 v 8, rotating roles
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** the defending team's goalkeeper organises the counter-press-or-recover call from behind the picture
- **Team sizes:** 8 v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 8 flat markers marking a "5-second window" reference zone, 4 cones
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram, ball starting with the team about to lose it (staged by the coach)
- **Ball supply:** coach feeds the staged loss
- **Restart location:** wherever the staged loss occurs
- **Coach position:** central, able to see the whole defending team's collective response
- **Rotation method:** roles swap at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** the team that wins the ball attacks either direction

Practice walkthrough: The coach stages a loss of possession in a defined area. The team that has just lost the ball has five seconds to decide, together, whether to commit to winning it back immediately (a full counter-press, with every nearby player converging with real intent) or to drop as a connected unit into the recovery shape from Week 3. The team is coached to make this decision collectively and communicate it instantly — usually via the nearest player or the goalkeeper calling "Press!" or "Drop!" — rather than defaulting to individual choices that leave the team split between both options at once, which is the worst outcome of all.

Rules: Once the call is made, every nearby player must commit to the same decision. A successful counter-press regain within the five-second window is worth a clear positive outcome (celebrated, not scored numerically); a mixed reaction — some pressing, some dropping — is stopped immediately and corrected, regardless of the practice's flow.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* every player's job is defined by the team's single, shared decision, not by individual preference.
- *Unit:* the pressing group (if "Press!" is called) uses Week 3's pressure-cover-balance shape at high speed; the recovering group (if "Drop!" is called) uses Week 3's compact-corridor shape.
- *Team:* this practice is entirely about team-level decision-making — the central tactical idea of the whole session.
- *Transition:* this is the fullest, most explicit version of the transition-to-defence principle the season has offered so far.

Decision-making triggers:

- The ball is lost with several players already close to it and the opponent not yet settled → "Press!" is very likely the right call.
- The ball is lost with the team already stretched or outnumbered near the ball → "Drop!" protects the team better than a hopeful press would.
- A mixed reaction begins to develop → whoever notices first calls the decision loudly and immediately, overriding any hesitation.

Communication language used: *Squeeze, Step, Cover, Delay* — the full defending set from Weeks 3–4 combined into a single, live team decision.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Speed and intensity of the press when "Press!" is the correct call — a half-hearted press is worse than a clean drop.
Tactical	The binary nature of the decision — commit fully to one option, never split the team between both.
Physical	Short, maximal-intensity efforts for the press option; controlled, organised movement for the drop option — genuinely different physical demands depending on the decision made.
Psychological	Trusting a teammate's call instantly, without needing to verify it individually.
Communication & leadership	The single loudest, clearest voice in the moment — often the goalkeeper, sometimes the nearest outfield player — deciding for the team.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What told the team it was a "Press!" situation rather than a "Drop!" one?
2. What happened on the repetitions where the reaction was mixed — some pressing, some dropping?
3. Who made the call most often, and was it always the same player?
4. How does this decision connect to Week 3's pressure-cover-balance shape?
5. What is the cost, physically, of choosing to press when "Drop!" was the better call?
6. How might this decision change late in a match when the team is protecting a lead — even though we haven't trained that scenario yet?

Progressions:

1. Remove the coach's staged trigger and let losses occur naturally within a small phase-of-play game, testing the decision under less structured conditions.
2. Reduce the five-second window to three, raising urgency.
3. Introduce a genuine attacking picture for the team that has won the ball, connecting this practice directly to Tuesday's session.

Regressions:

1. Allow the coach to call "Press!" or "Drop!" for the team for the first few repetitions before withdrawing the prompt.
2. Extend the decision window to eight seconds.
3. Reduce to 6v6, easing the coordination demand.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Mixed reaction — some players press, others drop	No shared decision was actually made	Visible confusion, gaps opening between pressing and dropping players	Stop	Short group intervention: identify who should have made the call, and when	Resume from a fresh staged loss
The call is made but arrives too late to be useful	Hesitation before committing to a decision	Noticeable delay between losing the ball and any organised reaction	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "who could have called that a full second earlier?"	Resume
Team defaults to pressing every time, regardless of the picture	Pressing feels more proactive and satisfying than dropping	"Drop!" is rarely or never called, even when clearly appropriate	Stop	Short group intervention on reading the picture honestly	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: heavy on *short group intervention* and *questioning* — this is a genuinely difficult, high-value team decision and deserves patient coaching.

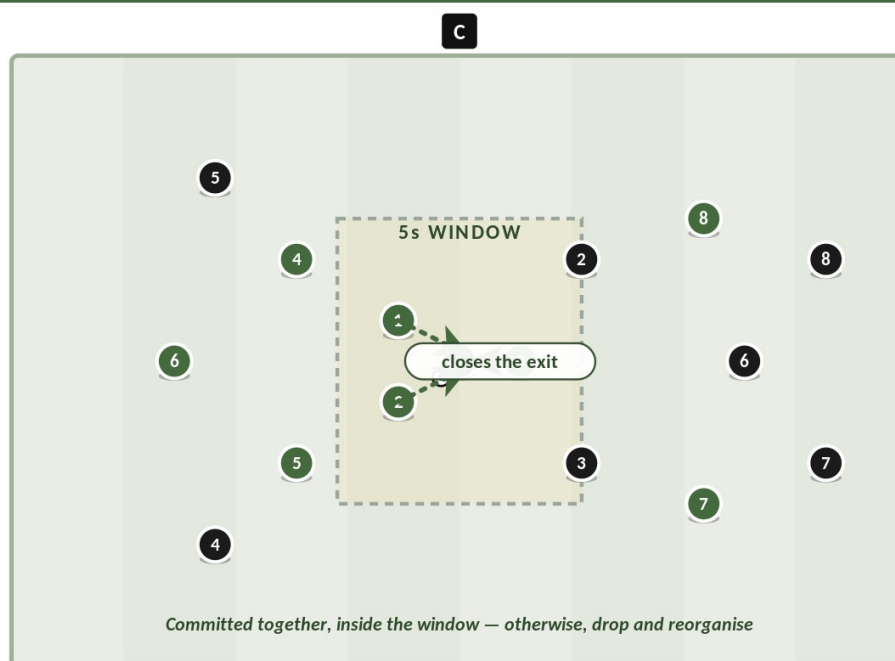
Success indicators:

- The team's reaction is binary and unified — never a visible mix of pressing and dropping.
- Both "Press!" and "Drop!" are called across the practice, evidence the team is reading the picture rather than defaulting to one option.
- The decision is made and communicated within a second or two of the loss.

Coach's eye: watch for the split-second right after a loss — a unified team either surges together or drops together; anything in between is the problem this practice exists to solve.

H4.3 COUNTER-PRESS OR RECOVER — A Team Decision

44 x 30 m • 8v8 • the team chooses together: win it back inside 5s, or drop and reorganise • 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 a 44x30 metre pitch with dimension labels and a shaded yellow zone labelled '5s WINDOW'. Three players in black bibs numbered 1–3 in possession inside the zone. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 converging with intent, two shown with short dotted red press arrows with chevron arrowheads labelled implicitly as a committed counter-press, one shown with a green dashed arrow labelled 'closes the exit'. White football near a black player. Title: 'COUNTER-PRESS OR RECOVER — A Team Decision'. Subtitle: '44 x 30 m • 8v8 • the team chooses together: win it back inside 5s, or drop and reorganise • 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 green-bibbed team converging with real intent and urgency around a black-bibbed opponent who has just received the ball, several green-bibbed players closing down simultaneously and with clear commitment, the defending goalkeeper visible in the distance calling the picture, coach centrally positioned watching the collective reaction.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. Several players in dark green bibs converging with visible urgency and full commitment around

a player in a black bib who has just received the ball, closing down simultaneously from multiple angles. The green team's goalkeeper visible in the background, gesturing and calling instructions. A coach stands centrally on the pitch, closely watching the team's collective reaction. 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 REACTION (SMALL-SIDED GAME)

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

Tactical purpose: Closes the week with a confidence-building game rewarding fast, correct reactions to losing the ball, sending players into the weekend sharp and prepared, per 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: winning the ball back within five seconds of losing it is worth an immediate point, separate from goals, tallied alongside the normal score. This keeps the week's defensive-reaction focus alive inside an otherwise open, enjoyable game.

Rules: Standard small-sided-game rules; reaction-point bonus as described.

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	Clean, decisive challenges when winning the ball back quickly — not rushed or reckless.
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.
Communication & leadership	Players organising and encouraging each other with reduced coach input.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What did your team's fastest reactions to losing the ball have in common?
2. How does tonight's idea — reacting fast — connect to Tuesday's — reading the picture before playing?
3. What is one thing from this week you want to see on Saturday?
4. Looking back across the first four weeks, how do all four principles trained so far work together as one connected idea about the moments just after the ball changes hands?

Progressions:

1. Increase the reaction-point window's value if a regain also leads to a goal within the following ten seconds, tying the week's two sessions together.
2. Reduce the grid slightly to raise tempo for the closing minutes.
3. Add a golden-goal condition in the final two minutes.

Regressions:

1. Widen the grid for a gentler close to the week.
2. Remove the bonus condition in the closing minutes for open, unconditioned play.
3. 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 reaction speed in the final minutes	Four weeks of rising pre-season load now behind the group	Slower recoveries and presses 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	Let it flow	None needed	Continue

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

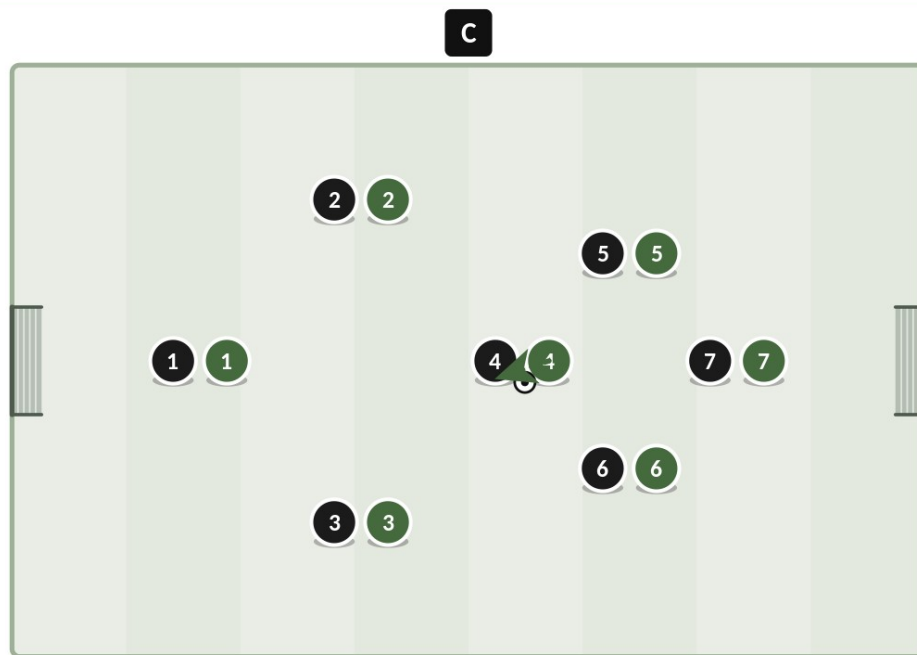
Success indicators:

- Multiple reaction-point bonuses earned across the practice.
- High energy and communication maintained into the closing minutes.
- Visible enjoyment and organisation from the players themselves.

Coach's eye: as in previous weeks, read the group's mood as closely as their shape.

H4.4 FIRST REACTION — Confidence Game

34 x 22 m • 7v7 • bonus for winning the ball back inside 5 seconds of losing it • 17 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball → Immediate reaction

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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 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 contested area. A short dotted red press arrow with a chevron arrowhead showing an immediate reaction to a loose ball. Title: 'FIRST REACTION — Confidence Game'. Subtitle: '34 x 22 m • 7v7 • bonus for winning the ball back inside 5 seconds of losing it • 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 reacting explosively to win back a loose ball a moment after losing it, team-mates converging in support, both goals visible with nets, coach on the touchline animated 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 reacting explosively to win back a loose ball moments after losing it, two team-mates in dark green converging in immediate support. Warm, low evening sunlight, long shadows, genuine energy among players. A coach in training kit stands animated on the touchline, clearly pleased with the reaction. 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 — the final reflection of Phase 1's opening block before Week 5's four-week review.

Questions put to the group:

1. What are the three named jobs after losing the ball, and can everyone in the group state them without looking them up?
2. How does "Press!" or "Drop!" get decided in a real match, when there's no coach standing there to help?

3. Looking back across four weeks, what is this squad's biggest improvement, and what is still the biggest opportunity?

Coach's closing input: name two or three specific, positive examples from across the week, and tell the group plainly that Week 5 closes out Phase 1 with a review of everything trained so far — attendance, technical evidence, tactical evidence, physical readiness, communication, and leadership — before Phase 2 begins.

Match-Day Objectives — Week 4

Three team objectives:

1. Fewer aimless forward balls immediately after winning possession.
2. A visibly faster, more organised reaction in the first two seconds after losing possession.
3. The team's counter-press-or-recover decision is unified, never mixed.

Three unit objectives:

- *Defensive unit*: the nearest defender to a lost ball delays rather than dives in.
- *Midfield unit*: the two nearest midfielders to a turnover close the central passing lane immediately.
- *Attacking unit*: forward players correctly judge when a regain calls for an immediate run in behind versus a securing pass.

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

- Transition runner: your first job after a regain is to read the picture, not to run automatically.
- Delayer (whoever loses the ball): jockey, don't dive in — buy the team a second.
- Lane-closer: protect the central passing lane, don't chase the ball.
- Recoverer: sprint goal-side — this is not a jog.

Measurable performance indicators:

- Qualitative count of forced, aimless forward passes immediately after a regain during Tuesday's Practice 4, compared informally against Week 3.
- Number of clearly unified (not mixed) team reactions to a lost ball during Thursday's Practice 3.
- Squad's own account, given in the closing reflection, of the season's biggest improvement and opportunity so far — recorded for the Week 5 review.

Formation Translation — Applying This Week Across Different Shapes

Principle: Recognise the picture before playing (attack) and the nearest players react first (defence).

In a 4-3-3: the front three are often the players best placed to counter-press immediately after a high turnover, since they are already closest to it; in deeper turnovers, the back four's nearest player delays while the full-backs and holding midfielder protect the centre and organise the recovery.

In a 3-5-2: the extra central midfielder often means more bodies are already close to a central turnover, which can make a sustained counter-press easier — but a turnover in a wide area leaves the back three more exposed, since there is no direct full-back deputy as readily available as in a back four.

What stays the same: the decision framework itself (go, find the free player, or secure) and the reaction sequence (delay, close the lane, recover) — both are proximity-based and formation-independent.

What changes: which players are typically nearest the ball in a given structure, and therefore which players most often carry out each job.

What must not change: the unified, collective nature of the counter-press-or-recover decision — a mixed reaction is a bigger problem than either individual choice, in any formation.

Risk in each structure: a 4-3-3 that presses with its front three but isn't supported by a timely midfield reaction can be played through centrally. A 3-5-2 that commits centrally to a counter-press can be exposed wide, where cover is thinner than in a back four.

Opposition influence: against a team that plays quickly through midfield when it wins the ball, the counter-press option is usually more valuable, denying them time to progress. Against a team that plays long and direct immediately upon winning the ball, dropping to organise a compact shape is often the safer read — a distinction the team will return to directly when Phase 5 covers defending direct play.

Coach Review — Week 4

(To be completed by the coach after both sessions have run, before Week 5's four-week review is delivered.)

- **Match result and performance (Route A/B/C applied):** record what actually happened and which route was used to shape this week.
- **Attendance:** Tuesday ____ / Thursday ____.
- **Technical/tactical evidence:** how often did the team correctly read "go" versus "secure" during Tuesday's Practice 3?
- **Transition-to-defence evidence:** how clearly were the three named jobs (delay, close the lane, recover) visible during Thursday's Practice 2?
- **Counter-press-or-recover evidence:** how often was the team's reaction unified versus mixed during Thursday's Practice 3?
- **Communication evidence:** is "Delay," "Press" and "Drop" being called clearly, and is the full season's language so far still present?
- **Physical observations:** any signs of accumulated fatigue across four weeks of rising pre-season load, heading into Week 5's review?
- **Leadership observations:** who is making the counter-press-or-recover call most often?
- **Priority for Week 5:** this is the last week before the Phase 1 review — note anything that should specifically be assessed there.

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum, Week 4 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.