



Week 8 — Early-Season Identity

Tags: `high-press` `defending` `set-pieces` `unit-work` `full-squad-practice` `conditioning`

Weekly Overview

FIELD	DETAIL
Week number	8 of 36
Season phase	2 — Early-Season Identity
Core principle	Collective pressing triggers
Secondary principle	Defend the space in behind
Previous match review focus	Apply the three routes below to the most recent fixture.
Weekly tactical problem	The team can now press with shape (Week 3) and hold a patient mid-block (Week 7), but the actual moment of engagement has still largely depended on a single player's individual read, or on a spatial trigger (the ball entering a zone). This week adds the missing piece: a small set of shared, named situational cues — a heavy touch, a backward pass, a player receiving side-on under pressure — that the whole team recognises and reacts to together, without anyone chasing the ball on instinct alone. The unavoidable cost of pressing harder and higher is more space left behind the last line; this week teaches the team to protect that space as deliberately as it teaches the press itself.
Formation-neutral explanation	A pressing trigger is a situational cue, not a formation-specific instruction — any team, in any shape, can agree that a heavy touch or a backward pass is the moment to press together. Equally, covering the space in behind is a job that can be given to a goalkeeper sweeping behind a high line, a spare centre-back, or a deep-lying midfielder dropping in — whichever the structure makes available.
Example structural applications	In a 4-3-3 pressing high: the front three read the triggers first, since they are closest to the picture, and the back four holds a high line with the goalkeeper sweeping the space in behind. In a 4-1-4-1 defensive shape: the lone striker and the two wide midfielders read the triggers, while the holding midfielder and back four provide extra central cover, meaning the space in behind can be protected slightly deeper and with less reliance on the goalkeeper alone. The triggers themselves — and the discipline of covering what the press leaves open — are identical in both.

Match Review and Weekly Adjustment

Route A — Previous performance was strong. If the previous fixture went well, use this week's practices at their fuller progressions from the start, and name the specific moment from the match where the team's press worked well — even if it wasn't yet triggered on a genuinely shared signal — to show players what this week is trying to make consistent.

Route B — Previous performance exposed a tactical weakness. If the team was exposed by a ball played in behind — either from a rushed, individual press or from a high line without cover — say so plainly at the start of Thursday's session in particular. This week's secondary principle is the direct answer.

Route C — Attendance, facilities or player availability are disrupted. Protect the core idea — a small number of named, shared triggers — even if numbers force smaller versions of every practice. Fewer players can still agree on and react to the same cue.

Tuesday — Session 15

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	15 of 72
Week	8
Season phase	2 — Early-Season Identity
Training day	Tuesday
Session theme	Collective pressing triggers
Short summary	Names a small set of shared situational cues — heavy touch, backward pass, side-on reception under pressure — and trains the whole team to press together the instant one appears, rather than relying on a spatial zone or an individual's instinct.
Tags	`high-press` `defending` `conditioning` `decision-making`
Primary learning objective	The team presses collectively within a second of a named trigger appearing, not before and not late.
Secondary learning objective	Players can name the specific trigger that started a given press, after the fact.
Match connection	The week's named match-day connection: the press starts on a shared signal, not a chase.
Expected tactical outcome	Presses look sudden, simultaneous and collective, rather than staggered and individual.
Expected physical load	Repeated high-intensity press actions — short, explosive, and frequent.
Recommended intensity	8–9 / 10 in bursts, with genuine recovery between them.
Equipment list	20 footballs · 24 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 specifically as the player who often has the clearest view of a developing trigger and can call it early.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 50 x 36 m (Practice 4).
Area layout	A small defending unit grid for Practice 2, widening through Practices 3 and 4.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 2 reduces to 4v2; Practice 3 becomes 5v5; Practice 4 becomes 6v6.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 4 can extend to 9v9.
Contingency — restricted space	Compress all grids proportionally; a shared trigger is recognisable at any scale.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:10	10 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>Spot the Signal</i>	Light green

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:10-0:25	15 min	Technical practice — <i>Read the Trigger</i>	Club green
0:25-0:27	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:27-0:42	15 min	Skill game — <i>Triggered</i>	Dark green
0:42-0:44	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:44-0:59	15 min	Conditioned match — <i>Press on the Signal</i>	Black
0:59-1:00	1 min	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — SPOT THE SIGNAL (ARRIVAL)

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

Tactical purpose: Raises heart rate through repeated reaction efforts while sharpening players' visual recognition of specific cues — the whole session's central skill — before any tactical content is layered on.

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, then paired passing in which the coach calls "heavy touch" or "backward pass" and both players must immediately sprint to a marker — a simple, physical rehearsal of instant, shared reaction to a named cue.

Rules: No movement before the cue is called; both players must react, not just one.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* clean touches between reaction bursts.
- *Physical:* genuine, repeated maximal reactions.
- *Psychological:* processing a specific cue and reacting instantly, rather than reacting generally to the ball.

PRACTICE 2 — READ THE TRIGGER (TECHNICAL PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Names three specific triggers — a heavy touch, a backward pass, a player receiving side-on under pressure — and isolates the skill of the whole defending unit reacting to them together, in a small enough picture that everyone can see and feel the difference between an individual chase and a collective press.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 28 x 20 m
- **Players:** 6 defending outfield vs 4 attackers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through the defending unit
- **Team sizes:** 6 v 4
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 6 flat markers, 2 footballs
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** attackers restart from the coach on any stoppage
- **Coach position:** central, able to see the whole defending unit and call out (or quietly note) each trigger as it appears
- **Rotation method:** attackers rotate with tired defenders every few minutes
- **Direction of play:** attackers work to retain possession against the press

Practice walkthrough: Four attackers try to keep the ball against six defenders. Three named triggers are introduced one at a time: first a heavy touch (the defending unit presses together the instant an attacker's touch takes the ball more than a set distance from their feet), then a backward pass (the unit presses the instant the ball travels backward), then a side-on reception under pressure (the unit presses when a receiving attacker is caught facing across the pitch rather than able to turn). Each trigger is drilled in isolation before the three are combined.

Rules: The defending unit may only engage when a genuine trigger has occurred — engaging without one is marked as a shape failure, exactly as early engagement was in Week 7's mid-block work. A regain within three seconds of a genuine trigger is a clear success.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* whoever spots the trigger first calls it, but every defender reacts simultaneously, not just the nearest one.
- *Unit:* the six-player group functions as a single reacting body, echoing Week 3's press-cover-balance shape.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* a regain following a genuine trigger should feel clean and immediate — an early rehearsal of Week 4's transition-to-attack content.

Decision-making triggers:

- An attacker's touch travels more than roughly a stride away from their feet → heavy touch, press.
- The ball is played backward → backward pass, press.
- An attacker receives facing sideways or with their back partially to goal → side-on reception, press.
- None of the three has occurred → hold shape, do not engage.

Communication language used: *Squeeze, Step* — now specifically reserved for a genuine, named trigger, exactly as "Step" was reserved for Week 7's trigger zone.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Explosive first steps the instant a trigger is recognised.

CORNER	POINT
Tactical	Distinguishing a genuine trigger from a false one — the practice's entire content.
Physical	Repeated, short, maximal-intensity actions.
Psychological	Discipline not to engage without a genuine cue, exactly mirroring Week 7's mid-block discipline.
Communication & leadership	Calling the trigger aloud and specifically ("Touch!", "Back!") rather than a generic shout.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Which of the three triggers was easiest to spot, and which was hardest?
2. What happened when the unit pressed without a genuine trigger present?
3. How does naming the trigger aloud change the team's reaction compared to a generic shout?
4. Why might a coach want three specific triggers rather than one general instruction to "press when you can"?
5. How does this connect to Week 7's mid-block trigger zone — are they the same idea or different ones?

Progressions:

1. Combine all three triggers simultaneously, requiring players to recognise whichever appears.
2. Add a fourth trigger — a pass played across the width of the pitch under pressure — extending the list.
3. Reduce the practice area, compressing reaction time further.

Regressions:

1. Isolate a single trigger for longer before combining any others.
2. Allow the coach to call the trigger aloud for the first several repetitions before withdrawing the prompt.
3. Widen the practice area for more thinking time.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players press on the ball generally, not on the specific named trigger	Old habit of reacting to the ball rather than reading the cue	Presses happen at inconsistent, unpredictable moments unrelated to the named triggers	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: identify exactly what should have triggered the press, and what didn't	Resume
Only the nearest player reacts, others lag behind	The trigger is recognised individually rather than shared	A ragged, staggered press rather than a simultaneous one	Stop	Short group intervention: everyone reacts to the same cue, together	Resume
False triggers are pressed (e.g. a touch that wasn't actually heavy)	Overcorrection — eagerness to press leads to misreading the cue	Presses on technically clean touches or forward passes	Let it flow with a drive-by call	"Was that touch really heavy, or did it just look busy?"	Continue

Coach interventions used in this practice: heavy on *freeze-and-correct* and *short group intervention* early, since precise recognition is the entire point and is worth stopping for repeatedly at this stage.

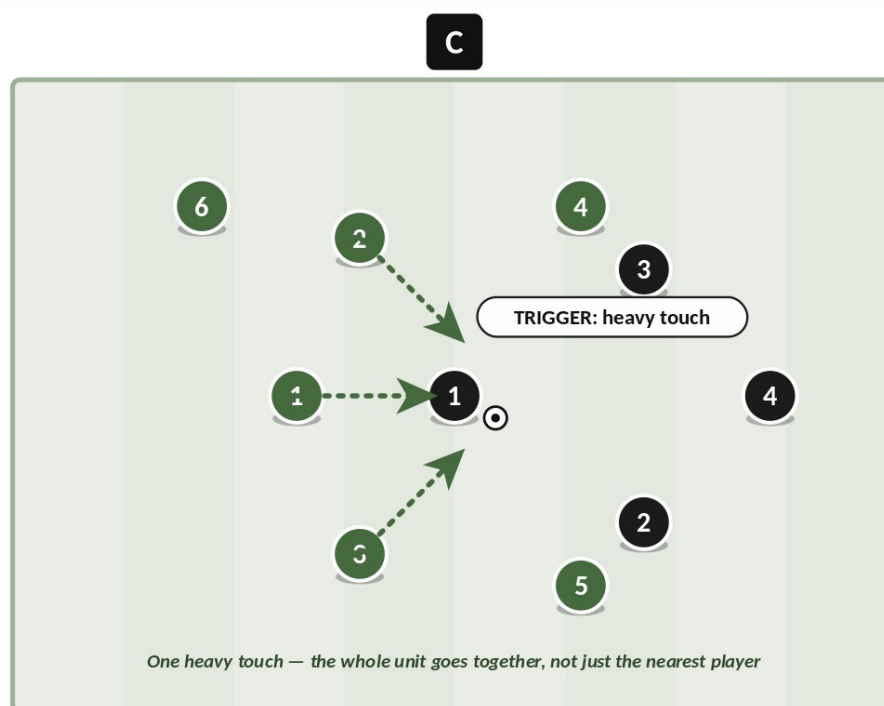
Success indicators:

- Presses become visibly simultaneous rather than staggered.
- Players can name the trigger that started a given press when asked.
- False triggers (pressing without a genuine cue) decrease across the practice.

Coach's eye: listen as much as watch — a clearly, specifically called trigger ("Touch!") followed by an immediate, collective press is exactly what this practice is built to produce.

T8.2 READ THE TRIGGER — Pressing on a Shared Signal

28 x 20 m • 6v4 • the whole unit presses together on a named cue, not a chase • 15 minutes



● Defending team ● Opposition ● Ball ➔ Collective press

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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 28x20 metre grid with dimension labels. One player in black bibs numbered 1 with a football shown slightly away from their feet, and a speech-bubble style callout reading 'TRIGGER: heavy touch' nearby. A second player in black bibs numbered 2. Six players in dark green bibs numbered 1–6, three shown converging with short dotted red press arrows with chevron arrowheads toward the ball. Small dark coach icon below the grid. Title: 'READ THE TRIGGER — Pressing on a Shared Signal'. Subtitle: '28 x 20 m • 6v4 • the whole unit presses together on a named cue, not a chase • 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 training grid, a black-bibbed player's touch clearly taking the ball away from their feet, three green-bibbed defenders converging simultaneously and explosively from different angles, coach centrally positioned with a clear, alert expression, closely reading the moment.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. A player in a black bib whose touch has clearly taken the football away from their feet. Three players in dark green bibs converging explosively and simultaneously from different angles toward the loose ball. A coach standing centrally, alert and closely watching the moment unfold. 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 — TRIGGERED (SKILL GAME)

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

Tactical purpose: Moves the trigger recognition into a genuine small-sided game, rewarding a fast, collective regain that follows immediately after a genuine trigger.

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 in which a regain achieved within three seconds of a genuine, named trigger (backward pass, heavy touch, or side-on reception) is worth double if it leads to a goal. The coach's role is to note, without necessarily announcing, which triggers appear and whether the team reacts to them collectively.

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

Tactical roles: the full trigger-recognition set from Practice 2, now inside live, directional play with a genuine attacking consequence.

Decision-making triggers: as established in Practice 2.

Communication language used: *Squeeze, Step, Time, Travel.*

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Clean, decisive challenges the instant a trigger appears.
Tactical	Recognising genuine triggers inside a live, less structured picture than Practice 2.
Physical	Repeated high-intensity actions against real opposition.
Psychological	Confidence to commit fully and immediately once a trigger is read correctly.
Communication & leadership	Naming the trigger aloud in the moment, under game pressure.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What was your team's clearest example of a genuinely triggered press tonight?
2. How did the bonus condition change your team's alertness to the three named cues?
3. What happened when the team pressed without a real trigger present?
4. How does this connect to Week 4's transition-to-attack content — what should happen immediately after a triggered regain?

Progressions:

1. Add a fourth trigger (a pass played across the pitch under pressure).

2. Reduce the three-second window to two, sharpening reaction speed.
3. Add a genuine offside line.

Regressions:

1. Extend the window to five seconds.
2. Reduce to two named triggers rather than three.
3. Reduce to 4v4 for more individual involvement.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Team presses on the ball generally, chasing the bonus without a real trigger	The reward is more visible than the discipline	Frequent presses unrelated to the three named cues	Stop	Short group intervention: "the bonus only counts if it's a real trigger"	Resume
Team hesitates even when a genuine trigger is clearly present	Overcorrection toward caution	Missed opportunities where a trigger was obvious but unpressed	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "was that a trigger we should have gone on?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *short group intervention* and *questioning*.

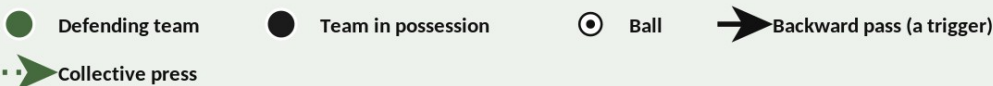
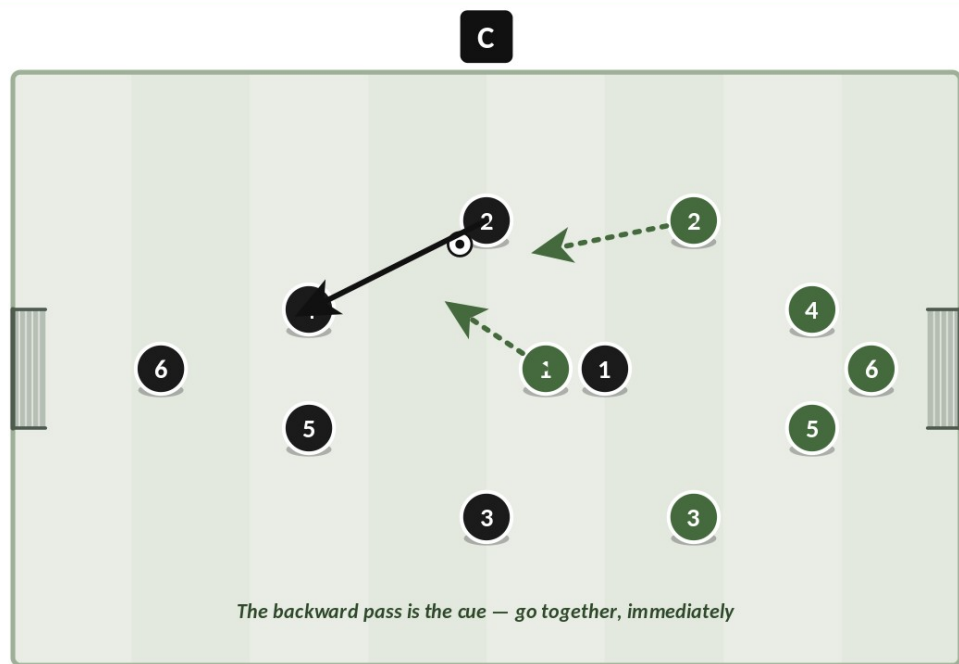
Success indicators:

- Bonus-condition regains increase across the practice.
- False presses (no genuine trigger) decrease.
- Players can identify, when asked, which trigger produced a specific regain.

Coach's eye: watch for the specific cue, not just the outcome — a regain that happens to occur is less valuable to this practice's teaching than one that visibly followed a named trigger.

T8.3 TRIGGERED — Small-Sided Game

32 x 20 m • 6v6 • a regain within 3 seconds of a named trigger is worth double • 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 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 black player. A black solid arrow showing a backward pass, with two short dotted red press arrows with chevron arrowheads converging on the receiver. Title: 'TRIGGERED — Small-Sided Game'. Subtitle: '32 x 20 m • 6v6 • a regain within 3 seconds of a named trigger is worth double • 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 black-bibbed player receiving a backward pass under immediate, converging pressure from two green-bibbed defenders, both mini goals visible, coach on the touchline alert and closely tracking the moment.

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 black bib receiving a backward pass under immediate, converging pressure from two players in dark green bibs. Late-afternoon light, realistic grass pitch and shadows, amateur adult players of varied build. A coach on the touchline, alert, closely tracking the moment. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 4 — PRESS ON THE SIGNAL (CONDITIONED MATCH)

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

Tactical purpose: Confirms the week's principle at full match scale, giving the defending team a genuine choice between Week 7's patient mid-block and a higher, Week 3-style press — but requiring that either choice is triggered by a shared, recognised signal rather than an individual decision, and that the space in behind is protected whichever is chosen.

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 sweeps behind a high line when the team commits to pressing

- **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 the defending team is free to choose between a mid-block and a higher press, but every engagement — in either picture — must follow a genuine, named trigger, called aloud. The moment the team commits to pressing, at least one player (often the goalkeeper, sometimes a spare centre-back) must be positioned to cover the space that opens up behind the last line — this is coached with the same firmness as Week 5's rest defence and Week 6's out-ball rule.

Rules: Standard conditioned-match rules; the coach notes (without necessarily stopping play) whether presses follow genuine triggers and whether the space in behind is covered.

Tactical roles: the full trigger-recognition and space-covering role sets, combined for the first time at full match scale.

Decision-making triggers: the full set from Practices 2–3, plus the team-level decision of which defensive picture (mid-block or high press) to hold.

Communication language used: the full season's language so far.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Execution under full match pressure and fatigue.
Tactical	Genuine trigger recognition combined with covering the space it creates.
Physical	The week's peak physical demand — repeated collective press actions.
Psychological	Composure to commit fully to a triggered press without panic about the space it opens.
Communication & leadership	The goalkeeper and back line organising both the trigger recognition and the covering job simultaneously.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What was the clearest example of a genuinely triggered, collective press tonight?

2. Who covered the space in behind when the team committed to pressing, and were they in the right position before the press happened or after?
3. How did the team decide between a mid-block and a higher press during the practice?
4. What is the cost of pressing without covering the space it creates?

Progressions:

1. Add a genuine offside line, sharpening the timing of both the press and the cover.
2. Reduce numbers to 7v7.
3. Add a scoreline context, foreshadowing Phase 5.

Regressions:

1. Instruct the defending team to favour the mid-block over the higher press while the trigger discipline is being consolidated.
2. Reduce to 6v6 on a smaller area.
3. Reintroduce Practice 2's isolated trigger drilling briefly if recognition has regressed under full match conditions.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Team presses without covering the space in behind	Focus on the trigger itself crowds out the covering job	A clean ball in behind exploits an uncovered space immediately after a press	Stop	Short group intervention connecting this week's two principles explicitly	Resume
Presses remain individual rather than collective under full match pressure	Old habits reassert themselves under fatigue and real opposition	A single player presses while team-mates are slow to join	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "was that a shared trigger, or one player's decision?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *short group intervention* and *questioning*, reserving deeper correction for the reflection immediately after.

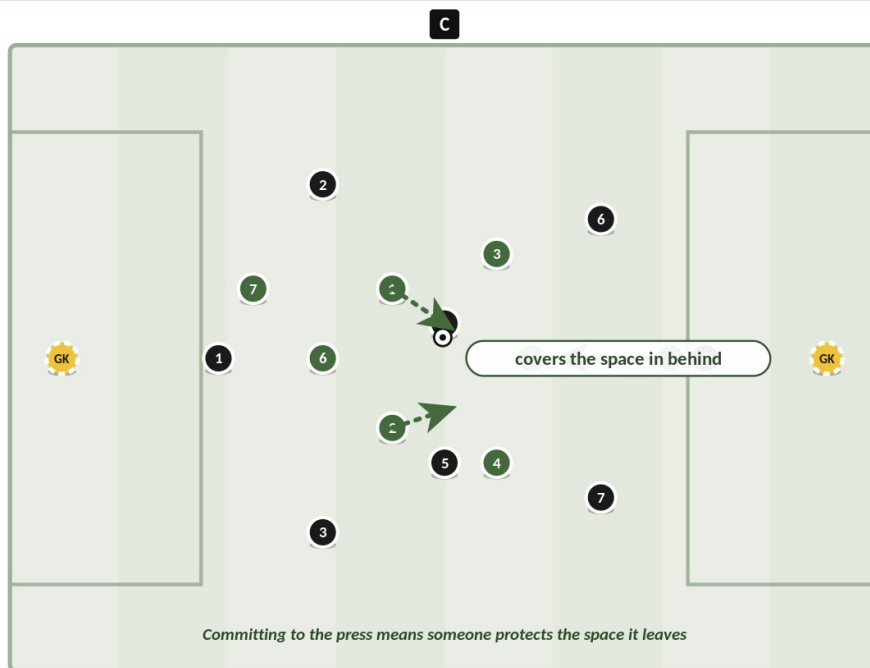
Success indicators:

- Presses are visibly collective and simultaneous, not staggered.
- The space in behind is consistently covered when the team commits to pressing.
- The team can articulate, after the practice, which pictures (mid-block or high press) it used and why.

Coach's eye: this practice is the week's clearest test of whether Tuesday's teaching has transferred — judge it specifically against the two secondary risks: a lone presser, or an uncovered space behind.

T8.4 PRESS ON THE SIGNAL — Conditioned Match

50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • choose mid-block or high press, but always on a shared cue • 15 minutes



● Defending team ● Building team ● Goalkeeper ● Ball → Collective press
→ Covers the space in behind

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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, two green players shown converging with short dotted red press arrows with chevron arrowheads. A green dashed arrow labelled 'covers the space in behind' showing a defender or goalkeeper sweeping behind the line. White football near a central black player. Title: 'PRESS ON THE SIGNAL — Conditioned Match'. Subtitle: '50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • choose mid-block or high press, but always on a shared cue • 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, two green-bibbed players converging explosively on a black-bibbed player receiving under pressure, a third green-bibbed player and the goalkeeper in yellow both visible sweeping the space behind a high defensive line, coach on the touchline near halfway tracking the whole picture.

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. Two players in dark green bibs converging explosively on an opponent in a black bib receiving the ball under pressure. A third green-bibbed defender and the green team's goalkeeper both visibly positioned to cover the space behind a high defensive line. A coach stands near the halfway line on the touchline, closely tracking the whole picture. 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: "Name one trigger we pressed on tonight, and who covered the space it left behind."

Thursday — Session 16

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	16 of 72
Week	8
Season phase	2 — Early-Season Identity
Training day	Thursday
Session theme	Defensive set pieces — the free-kick wall — and protecting the space in behind
Short summary	Installs the team's first organised defensive free-kick structure — a four-player wall backed by zonal marking and a spare covering player — then carries Tuesday's secondary principle into a full phase-of-play practice, closing with a confidence game that rewards both together.
Tags	`set-pieces` `defending` `unit-work` `full-squad-practice`
Primary learning objective	The team organises a disciplined wall and zonal shape at a defensive free-kick within a matter of seconds, without needing the coach to place every player.
Secondary learning objective	When the defensive line or press commits, a covering player consistently protects the space in behind — the same discipline as Tuesday, now under different circumstances.
Match connection	The week's named match-day connection, extended to dead balls: fewer clear-cut chances conceded from a free-kick or a ball in behind.
Expected tactical outcome	A free-kick wall and zonal shape forms quickly and correctly without prompting; the space in behind is covered in open play as reliably as it was on Tuesday.
Expected physical load	Moderate, with a sharp physical peak in the closing game — set-piece organisation is a positional, low-running demand, but the confidence game restores intensity before the weekend.
Recommended intensity	6.5–7.5 / 10, rising in the closing game.
Equipment list	16 footballs · 20 flat markers · 14 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 2 the defending goalkeeper organises the wall and covers the far post; in Practice 3 the same goalkeeper is coached to sweep behind a high line, exactly as on Tuesday.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 46 x 32 m (Practice 3).
Area layout	A dead-ball practice area with a marked penalty box and wall zone for Practice 2, opening into a full deep zone for Practice 3.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 2 reduces to a 3-player wall plus 2 zonal markers v a taker + 3; Practice 3 becomes 6v6; Practice 4 becomes 5v5.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 3 can extend to a fuller 9v9.
Contingency — restricted space	Compress all grids proportionally; wall organisation and zonal discipline are positional habits, not scale-dependent.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:08	8 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>Wall Up</i>	Light green
0:08–0:23	15 min	Set-piece practice — <i>The Wall</i>	Club green
0:23–0:25	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:25–0:40	15 min	Unit / tactical practice — <i>Cover the Space Behind</i>	Dark green
0:40–0:42	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:42–0:59	17 min	Confidence game — <i>Press and Protect</i>	Black
0:59–1:00	1 min → extended below	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — WALL UP (ARRIVAL)

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

Tactical purpose: A short, sharp warm-up that rehearses the literal physical skill a defensive wall requires — organising into a straight, evenly spaced line together, fast, on a single call — before any tactical detail is added.

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

Walkthrough: Individual ball work, then on the coach's call of "Wall!", every player sprints to link up arm's length apart in a numbered line facing the coach — repeated with the starting positions scattered differently each time.

Rules: No single player organises the line alone; the group must self-organise the spacing and order together, and hold the line until released.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* clean touches between organisation bursts.
- *Physical:* genuine, repeated sprints to a shared point.
- *Psychological:* organising as a unit under time pressure — exactly the discipline Practice 2 will ask for at a real free-kick.

PRACTICE 2 — THE WALL (DEFENSIVE SET-PIECE PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Installs the team's first named defensive free-kick structure: a four-player wall covering the direct, near angle to goal, backed by zonal markers on each post and across the six-yard box, with one spare player dropped deeper to cover the space in behind — directly extending Tuesday's secondary principle into a dead-ball picture.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 40 x 28 m
- **Players:** 8 defending outfield + goalkeeper vs a taker + 4 attacking runners
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** organises the wall's positioning relative to the near post, then covers the far side of the goal personally
- **Team sizes:** 8+GK v 5
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 10 flat markers marking the box and wall position, 1 football
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram — a free kick 20 m out, central-to-wide
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** reset to the same free-kick position after each delivery
- **Coach position:** behind the wall, able to see the whole defensive picture and the goalkeeper's angle
- **Rotation method:** wall and zonal roles rotate every four deliveries
- **Direction of play:** attacking team delivers or plays short toward goal

Practice walkthrough: A free kick is awarded 20 m out, central-to-wide. Four defenders form a wall covering the direct angle to goal, organised by the goalkeeper. Four further defenders hold zonal positions: one on each post, one across the middle of the six-yard box, and one — the spare — positioned deeper than the rest, specifically covering the space in behind the last line in case of a flick-on, knockdown, or direct run in behind following the delivery. The attacking team has a taker plus four runners, who can deliver directly, play short to a runner, or attack the second ball.

Rules: The wall and zonal markers must be set within a count of five from the free kick being awarded — a slow, disorganised wall is marked as a shape failure regardless of the outcome. A clean claim, block, or clearance by the defending team scores a point; a shot on target or a clean run in behind for the attacking team scores theirs.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* the wall's discipline not to jump or break early; the spare player's discipline to stay deeper than feels natural.
- *Unit:* the wall and the zonal markers function as one connected shape, echoing the pressure-cover-balance principle from Week 3.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* a clean clearance should be followed immediately by an outlet pass, a light preview of Week 4's transition-to-attack content.

Decision-making triggers:

- The free kick is awarded → the goalkeeper calls the wall's number and position immediately, before the attacking team can settle.
- The delivery is played → zonal markers attack the ball in their zone; the spare stays deeper, watching for the second contact.
- The ball is cleared → the nearest defender looks for an immediate outlet, not a hurried, unforced clearance further upfield.

Communication language used: *Wall, Post, Zone, Spare* — new, set-piece-specific calls, led by the goalkeeper.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Wall players jump only when the ball is struck, not before.
Tactical	The spare player's positioning — deeper than instinct suggests — is the practice's central lesson.
Physical	Short, explosive actions at the moment of delivery, minimal running otherwise.
Psychological	Discipline to hold an organised shape under the pressure of a live dead ball.
Communication & leadership	The goalkeeper's voice organises the entire structure — wall, posts, zone, and spare — before the kick is taken.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Who organised the wall fastest tonight, and how did they do it?
2. What was the spare player protecting against, specifically?
3. What happened on the reps where the wall was slow to organise?
4. How does this connect to Week 5's attacking corner work — what does defending a dead ball share with attacking one?
5. Why might a team choose a spare, deeper player rather than committing everyone to the wall and the box?

Progressions:

1. Add a short passing option for the taker, testing whether the wall and zonal markers react correctly to a non-direct delivery.
2. Move the free kick wider, changing the wall's angle and the goalkeeper's near-post responsibility.
3. Add a live second-phase contest for every delivery, rewarding a converted clearance.

Regressions:

1. Allow the coach to call the wall's positioning aloud for the first several reps before withdrawing the prompt.
2. Reduce the wall to three players with an extra zonal marker while the organisation habit beds in.
3. Slow the restart, giving more organisation time before each delivery.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The wall is slow to organise, still moving as the kick is taken	New, unfamiliar structure; nobody has clearly claimed the organising role	Delivery beats a wall that is still shuffling into position	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: reset, name who calls the wall	Resume
The spare player drifts up level with the zonal markers	The role feels passive compared to the ball-side actions	No cover remains for a ball played in behind the last line	Stop	Short group intervention reconnecting to Tuesday's covering principle	Resume
Wall players jump early, anticipating the strike	Eagerness, or a false read of the taker's approach	Wall airborne or off-balance before the ball is struck	Let it flow with a drive-by call	"Watch the ball, not the run-up"	Continue

Coach interventions used in this practice: heavy on *freeze-and-correct* early, since organising the structure fast and correctly is the entire point and is worth stopping for repeatedly at this stage.

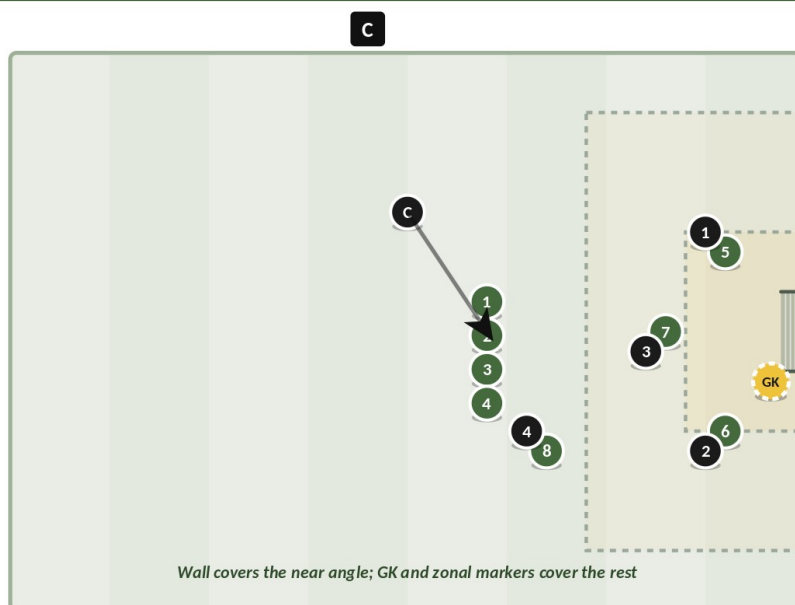
Success indicators:

- The wall and zonal shape organise within a count of five, consistently, by the end of the practice.
- The spare player's positioning stays visibly deeper than the rest of the defending group.
- Clean claims and clearances increase across the practice.

Coach's eye: watch the goalkeeper as closely as the wall — a set piece defended well almost always starts with a clear, early organising call from behind.

H8.2 THE WALL — Defensive Free-Kick Organisation

Free kick 20m out, central-to-wide · 4-player wall, zonal marking, 1 spare covering the space behind · 15 minutes



● Defending team ● Attacking team ● Goalkeeper ● Ball ■ Penalty area

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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 40x28 metre area with a penalty box and a full-size goal with a goalkeeper in yellow. A player in a black bib labelled 'C' positioned 20 metres out, central-to-wide, with a football. Four players in dark green bibs numbered 1-4 forming a straight wall between the ball and goal. Four further players in dark green bibs numbered 5-8 positioned at each post, across the six-yard box, and one dropped deeper as a spare covering the space behind. Four players in black bibs numbered 1-4 spread as attacking runners. A black solid arrow showing the free-kick delivery. Title: 'THE WALL — Defensive Free-Kick Organisation'. Subtitle: 'Free kick 20m out, central-to-wide · 4-player wall, zonal marking, 1 spare covering the space behind · 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 free-kick 20 m out, four defenders in dark green forming a tight, organised wall, the goalkeeper in yellow shouting instructions and covering the far post, zonal markers positioned at each post and across the six-yard box, one spare defender clearly deeper than the rest, black-bibbed attackers spread around the box.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training — a defensive free-kick 20 metres out, central-to-wide. Four players in dark green bibs forming a tight, organised defensive wall. A goalkeeper in yellow shouting instructions while covering the far post. Further green-bibbed defenders positioned at each goal post and across the six-yard box, with one clearly positioned deeper than the rest as a spare covering the space behind. Players in black bibs spread around the edge of the penalty box as attacking runners. Overcast evening light, realistic grass pitch and markings, 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 — COVER THE SPACE BEHIND (UNIT / TACTICAL PRACTICE)

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

Tactical purpose: Scales Tuesday's secondary principle up to a full phase-of-play practice: whenever the defending team commits to a press or holds a high line, a covering player must already be positioned to deal with the ball played in behind — tested here in open play rather than from a dead ball.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 46 x 32 m
- **Players:** 16 outfield, rotating
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** not required at this scale — the practice isolates the outfield press-and-cover picture
- **Team sizes:** 8 v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 8 flat markers marking the space-behind zone, 4 cones
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** nearest sideline
- **Coach position:** sideline, able to see both the press and the space it leaves behind
- **Rotation method:** roles swap at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** attacking team looks to play in behind the moment the press commits

Practice walkthrough: Eight defenders press collectively when the ball enters range, exactly as trained on Tuesday, while eight attackers look specifically to exploit the space that opens up behind the engaging press — either with a direct run or a played ball in behind. One defender is coached to recognise the moment the press commits and drop to cover that space *before* the ball is played there, not after.

Rules: A press that commits without a covering player already in place is marked as a shape failure by the coach, regardless of outcome. A clean run in behind that beats an uncovered space scores the attacking team a point; a regain, or a covered run that forces the attacker backward, scores the defending team's.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* the covering player's specific job — reading the moment of commitment, not reacting after the ball is already played.
- *Unit:* the pressing group and the covering player function as one connected shape, exactly as the wall and spare did in Practice 2.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* a regain from a covered run in behind is an ideal moment for Week 4's fast transition principle.

Decision-making triggers:

- The press is about to commit → a covering player must already be in position, not moving into position.
- The ball is played in behind a covered space → the covering player deals with it calmly, having already anticipated it.
- The ball is played in behind an uncovered space → this is the shape failure the practice is built to eliminate.

Communication language used: *Squeeze, Step, Cover* — with "Cover" now specifically meaning the space behind the press, not a nearby defender.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Clean, early recognition of the moment the press commits.
Tactical	Covering the space <i>before</i> it is needed, not scrambling to reach it afterward.

CORNER	POINT
Physical	A mix of explosive press actions and controlled, anticipatory covering runs.
Psychological	Trust that a team-mate is covering behind, allowing the press itself to be fully committed rather than half-hearted.
Communication & leadership	The covering player (often the goalkeeper in a match, here any rotating defender) calling their own position clearly so the press can commit with confidence.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Who covered the space in behind most consistently tonight, and how did they know when to drop?
2. What happened on the reps where nobody covered the space before the press committed?
3. How does this connect to Tuesday's conditioned match — is the covering job any different in open play than it was there?
4. Why does covering the space *before* the ball is played matter more than reacting quickly once it is?

Progressions:

1. Add a genuine offside line, sharpening the timing of both the press and the cover.
2. Reduce the practice area, compressing the reaction and recovery time.
3. Allow the attacking team to disguise a short option before the ball in behind, testing whether the cover holds regardless.

Regressions:

1. Allow the coach to call "cover!" as a live prompt for the first several reps.
2. Reduce numbers to 6v6 for a simpler picture.
3. Widen the practice area, giving the covering player more time to react.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The press commits with no covering player in place	The whole unit is drawn toward the ball, as in early press-training weeks	A clean run in behind exploits an empty space immediately after a press	Stop	Short group intervention connecting back to Tuesday's principle explicitly	Resume
The covering player reacts only after the ball is played, not before	Anticipation habit not yet established	Covering player is always a stride behind the play rather than ahead of it	Stop	Freeze-and-correct: rehearse reading the moment of commitment	Resume
The team over-corrects and never presses at all, for fear of leaving space	Caution following earlier failures	Passive, unpressed defending throughout	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what's the cost of never pressing at all?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *short group intervention* and *freeze-and-correct*, reserving lighter *questioning* for the over-cautious pattern if it appears.

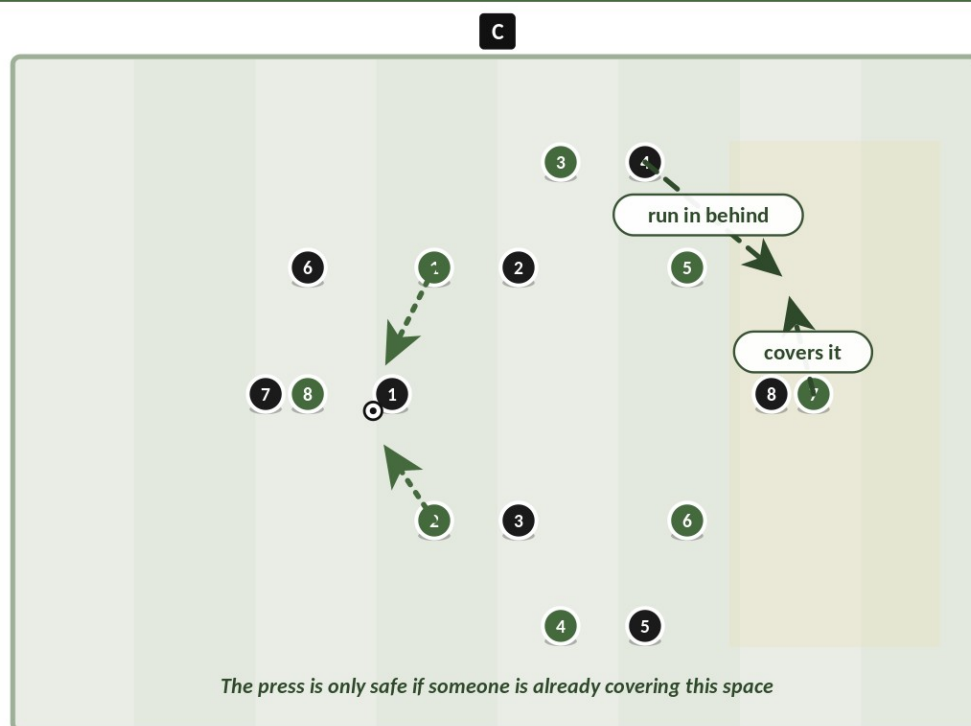
Success indicators:

- A covering player is in position before the press commits, consistently, by the end of the practice.
- Clean runs in behind decrease across the practice.
- The press itself remains fully committed, not tentative, because the cover behind it is trusted.

Coach's eye: watch the moment the press starts, not the moment the ball is played in behind — the covering player's position should already be set by then.

H8.3 COVER THE SPACE BEHIND — Protecting the High Line

46 x 32 m • 8v8 • when the press commits, someone must cover the run in behind • 15 minutes



● Defending team ● Attacking team ⊙ Ball → Collective press
→ Attacking run in behind ■ Space behind the line

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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 46x32 metre area with dimension labels and a shaded yellow zone on one side labelled 'SPACE BEHIND THE LINE'. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8, two shown converging with short dotted red press arrows with chevron arrowheads. Eight players in black bibs numbered 1–8 spread across the area, one making a green dashed run labelled 'run in behind' toward the shaded zone, met by a second green dashed arrow labelled 'covers it'. White football near a central green player. Title: 'COVER THE SPACE BEHIND — Protecting the High Line'. Subtitle: '46 x 32 m • 8v8 • when the press commits, someone must cover the run in behind • 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 wide view of an 8v8 phase-of-play practice, two green-bibbed players pressing explosively and collectively, a black-bibbed attacker sprinting into the space behind the committed press, a third green-bibbed defender already positioned to intercept the run, coach on the sideline closely tracking the moment of commitment.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training — an 8v8 phase-of-play practice on a grass pitch. Two players in dark green bibs pressing explosively and collectively toward the ball. A player in a black bib sprinting into open space behind the committed press. A third player in a dark green bib already positioned to intercept the run, clearly anticipating rather than reacting. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build. A coach on the sideline, closely tracking the moment. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 4 — PRESS AND PROTECT (CONFIDENCE GAME)

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

Tactical purpose: Closes the week with an open, enjoyable game that rewards both of the week's principles together — a triggered, collective press with the space behind it covered — sending players into the weekend with both ideas fresh and connected.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 34 x 22 m
- **Players:** 14 outfield
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** none required — both teams defend their own goal, as in the season's other confidence games
- **Team sizes:** 7 v 7
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 6 flat markers, 4 cones
- **Starting positions:** even split, as shown in the diagram
- **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: a regain won from a genuinely triggered, collective press — with the space behind it visibly covered at the moment of the win — is worth double. This keeps both of the week's principles alive together inside an otherwise open, high-energy game.

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 shifts to recognition and encouragement rather than new instruction.

Decision-making triggers: as established across the week — a named trigger to press, and a covering player already in place before the press commits.

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

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Clean, decisive engagement at the moment of a genuine trigger.
Tactical	Recognising and rewarding both principles together, in full flow.
Physical	The week's highest load, appropriately placed at the end.
Psychological	Finishing the week on a genuine high, having mastered two connected, difficult disciplines.
Communication & leadership	Players organising and encouraging each other, with reduced coach input.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What did your team's best example tonight — a triggered press with the space covered — actually look like?
2. How does this week connect Tuesday's trigger work to Thursday's set-piece and open-play covering work?
3. What's one thing from this week you want to see on Saturday, from a dead ball or from open play?
4. Looking back across eight weeks now, how many different ways can this team now organise its defending?

Progressions:

1. Increase the bonus if the covered press also leads to a goal within ten seconds, tying this week's content to Week 4's transition work.
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 reduces discipline in the final minutes	A demanding week of new tactical content now behind the group	Presses become individual again, or the cover disappears late in the practice	Let it flow	Light-touch encouragement only	Continue
Players chase the bonus with a press that isn't genuinely triggered or covered	The reward is more visible than the discipline	Frequent presses without a real trigger, or without a covering player in place	Stop	Short group intervention: "only if it's real — trigger and cover, both"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: minimal — mostly encouragement and recognition of good examples, with occasional correction if the bonus condition is being chased without the underlying discipline.

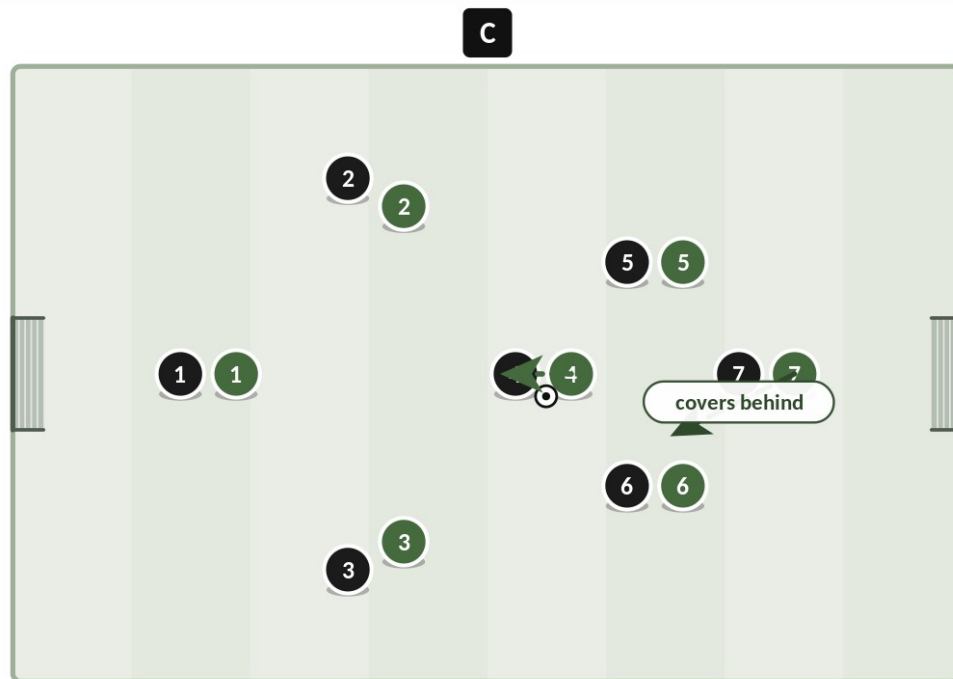
Success indicators:

- Multiple bonus points earned through genuinely triggered, covered presses.
- High energy and communication maintained into the closing minutes.
- Visible enjoyment and organisation from the players themselves.

Coach's eye: as in every Thursday session, read the group's mood as closely as their shape — this game should feel like a reward for the week's harder, more disciplined content, not an extension of it.

H8.4 PRESS AND PROTECT — Confidence Game

34 x 22 m • 7v7 • bonus for a triggered press with the space behind covered • 17 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball → Collective press → Covers the space behind

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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 seven players in black bibs numbered 1–7 spread across the pitch. Two short dotted red press arrows with chevron arrowheads converging centrally, and a green dashed arrow labelled 'covers behind' showing a defender dropping to cover the space left by the press. Title: 'PRESS AND PROTECT — Confidence Game'. Subtitle: '34 x 22 m • 7v7 • bonus for a triggered press with the space behind covered • 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, two green-bibbed players pressing collectively and explosively, a third green-bibbed player already dropped to cover the space behind them, both goals visible with nets, 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 on a grass pitch with two full-size goals visible. Two players in dark green bibs pressing collectively and explosively toward the ball. A third player in dark green already dropped into a covering position behind them. Warm, low evening sunlight, long shadows, genuine energy 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 a defensive wall for, in your own words, and what is the spare player's job within it?
2. What was the hardest part of tonight's discipline, and did you get better at it across the session?

3. What's one thing you want this team to do differently at the next dead ball we face — for or against us?

Coach's closing input: name two or three specific, positive examples from across the week, and confirm that the team now has a genuine, organised answer to a defensive free-kick, plus a habit of covering the space behind a committed press in open play — both worth naming plainly to the group before the weekend.

Match-Day Objectives — Week 8

Three team objectives:

1. The team organises a wall and zonal shape at every defensive free-kick within a count of five.
2. A covering player is in position before the press or high line commits, every time — not after.
3. A clean clearance or regain is followed by an immediate outlet, not a hurried, unforced ball forward.

Three unit objectives:

- *Defensive unit*: the wall and zonal markers hold a connected shape at every dead ball, exactly as the pressing block has held shape in open play since Week 3.
- *Goalkeeping unit*: organises both the wall (dead ball) and the high line (open play) with an early, clear voice.
- *Attacking unit*: recognises and exploits an uncovered space in behind immediately if the opposition fails to cover it.

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

- Wall player: hold your position and jump only when the ball is struck, not before.
- Spare / covering player: your position should already be set before the danger arrives, not after.
- Goalkeeper: your voice organises the structure before either the free kick or the press is contested.
- Any presser: commit fully — the space behind you is somebody else's job, trust it.

Measurable performance indicators:

- Time taken (in seconds) for the wall and zonal shape to organise at each defensive free-kick during Practice 2, expected to trend toward the five-second target.
- Number of shape failures (an uncovered space behind a committed press) during Practice 3, expected to trend toward zero across the week.
- Squad's own account, given in the closing reflection, of the team's growing defensive organisation — recorded for the Week 11 review.

Formation Translation — Applying This Week Across Different Shapes

Principle: The defensive free-kick wall; protecting the space in behind.

In a 4-3-3: the back four typically supplies the wall and near-post cover, while a holding midfielder or the far winger tracks back to provide the spare, deeper covering player. In open play, the same holding midfielder or a covering centre-back is usually best placed to protect the space behind a high defensive line.

In a 3-4-3 or back-three system: a back three usually has one extra central body available for zonal marking without needing to pull a midfielder back, but its wing-backs must recover quickly to help form the wall or cover wide zones, since they are naturally higher up the pitch than a back four's full-backs. In open play, the covering job in behind often falls to the free centre-back in the back three rather than a withdrawn midfielder.

What stays the same: the wall's discipline against jumping early, the spare player's deeper positioning, and the principle that a covering player must be set *before* the danger arrives — all formation-independent.

What changes: which specific player supplies the wall, the zonal markers, and the spare or covering role, depending on who the structure makes available in each moment.

What must not change: the goalkeeper's organising voice, and the non-negotiable rule that a press or high line is never committed to without a covering player already in place — both are the week's central coaching points, regardless of formation.

Risk in each structure: a 4-3-3 that pulls its holding midfielder too far back to cover risks losing central control in open play; a 3-4-3 whose wing-backs are caught too high up the pitch at a defensive free-kick may struggle to form a complete wall in time.

Opposition influence: against a team with a genuinely dangerous set-piece delivery, the spare covering player's role may need reinforcing with an additional zonal marker, even at the cost of committing fewer players to a potential quick counter-attack — a judgement call worth naming explicitly to the group before matches against set-piece-strong opponents.

Coach Review — Week 8

(To be completed by the coach after both sessions have run, before Week 9 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 quickly did the wall and zonal shape organise by the end of Thursday's Practice 2?
- **Covering evidence:** how often was the space in behind left uncovered during Tuesday's Practice 4 and Thursday's Practice 3, and did the number fall across the week?
- **Communication evidence:** is the goalkeeper's organising voice clear and early enough at both the wall and the high line?
- **Physical observations:** how did the squad handle a week combining explosive, repeated press actions with the more positional demands of set-piece organisation?
- **Leadership observations:** who organised the wall, and who covered the space behind, most reliably?
- **Priority for Week 9:** based on the above, does Week 9 (switching the point of attack) need any adjustment to its planned emphasis?

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum, Week 8 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.